The Language Characteristics of Arabic Speakers with Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

Areej Balilah and Lisa Archibald
Western University
larchiba@uwo.ca

Introduction

- Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) unexpectedly fail to develop language.
- Examining data from children with SLI in a specific language (Arabic) can inform theoretical perspectives of this disorder.
- Several theories have been advanced to explain the observation of disproportionate deficits in grammar among English speakers of SLI.
- Consideration of the extent to which such theories are consistent with observations of SLI groups speaking languages other than English may help to identify potential universal deficits in SLI.

Purpose of the Study

This study provides a review of available data on the characteristics of Arabic speakers with SLI, and critically evaluates the findings in light of current theories of SLI.

Arabic Language

- Arabic is a Semitic language
- Root and pattern language
- Complex interaction between syntax, morphology, and phonology
- Rich bound morphology
- Intricate verb system
- Null subject properties
- Lack of an infinitival form

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Verb paradigm for r-s-m (draw)</th>
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<td>Person</td>
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Common Error Type observed in Arabic-speaking children with SLI

Tense

**Substitution:**

- **a) Tense / Imperative errors**

  - katab
    - He wrote

  - yiktub
    - I am writing

  - ?uktub
    - Write! [He]

  - ?uktubi
    - Write! [She]

  - ?uktubu
    - Write! [They]

- **b) First person singular present / Imperative errors** (homophonous forms)

  - ?aktub
    - I am writing

  - ?aktub
    - Write!

- **c) Present / past errors**

  - Hya yakul
    - He is “eating” [He]

  - Huma yakul
    - They are “eating” [They]

  - Huma yaklu
    - They are “eating” [He]

Subject-verb agreement

**a) Person agreement errors:**

- Hua yakul
  - He is “eating” [He is]
  - (3 person sing.)

- Hua ?akul
  - He is “eating” [I am]
  - (1 person. sing.)

**b) Number agreement errors: (singular for plural)**

- Huma yakul
  - They are “eating” [They are]

- Huma yaklu
  - They are “eating” [He is]

**c) Gender agreement errors**

- Hya yakul
  - She is “eating” [He]

- Hua takul
  - He is “eating” [She]

Conclusions

- SLI errors in Arabic occur in several parts of speech: verb tense and agreement, articles, prepositions
- Patterns requiring more marking are reduced to fewer and/or more frequently occurring patterns
- Grammatical complexity of pattern predicts most SLI errors in Arabic
- Error types differ from English, however, complexity of the form accounts for many errors across languages

References


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