On the Acquisition of Formal Pronouns in Bangla

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Contenido

Background

- Context: Person A and B are a couple who work together.

  (1) **At work**

    apni ki kalke   kaaje   ashben
    3SG.L3 QP tomorrow work-LOC come.FUT.L3

    'Will you come to work tomorrow?'

  (2) **At home**

    tumi ki kalke   kaaje   ashbe
    3SG.L2 QP tomorrow work-LOC come.FUT.L2

    'Will you come to work tomorrow?'

- Context: Person A and Person B are talking about Person A's grandfather, who is Person B's father.

<div align="center">

dadu ✓
Polite pronoun ✗

</div>

Why? Persons A and B do not share a formal relationship with each other OR with the referent

(3)   a.   Person B:

      dadu   kæmon   achhen
      grandfather   how   be.INDF.PRD.L2
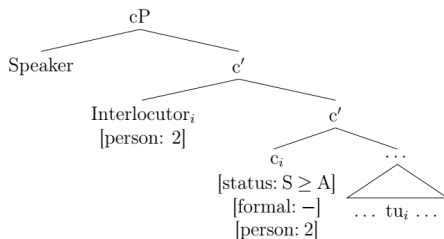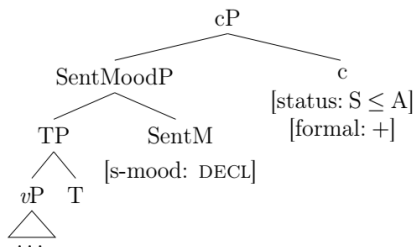
      'How is Grandfather?'

   b.   Person A:

      dadu   /#**uni**   bhalo-i   achhe(#n)
      grandfather   /3.SG.L3   good-I   be.INDF.PRS.L2

      'Grandfather is well.'

Politeness

- The socio-pragmatic relationship between conversational players, including the people they talk about (referents) manifests morphologically in many languages. Bangla is one such language.

  Politeness is morpho-pragmatic

- Pragmatic or context-layers have been proposed for the clausal periphery (Speas & Tenny, 2003; Haegeman & Hill, 2013; Zu, 2018; Wiltschko, 2021) and the nominal periphery (Ritter & Wiltschko, 2019; Portner, Pak, & Zanuttini, 2019)

Left tree:

cP
- SentMoodP
  - TP
    - vP
      - ...
    - T
  - SentM
    - [s-mood: DECL]
- c
  - [status: $S \leq A$]
  - [formal: +]

Right tree:

cP
- Speaker
- c'
  - Interlocutor$_i$
    - [person: 2]
  - c'
    - c$_i$
      - [status: $S \geq A$]
      - [formal: $-$]
      - [person: 2]
    - ...
      - ... tu$_i$ ...

The Duality of Person Hypothesis

- **Duality of Person Hypothesis** (Ritter & Wiltschko, 2018)
  Two distinct types of person features, which occupy different structural positions.
    - The first consists of speech act roles — pragmatic features (Nominal speech act structure)
    - The second consists of binary grammatical person features — grammatical features (DP/NP layer)
- Variation in pronominal systems arises from
    - grammatical features that build pronouns and are thus heads in the DP/NP structure
    - whether the pronouns spell out the speech act roles, or the grammatical features, or both

Bangla has a Mixed Person Paradigm

Table: Tests for Grammatical person

	Grammatical Person
3rd person [-1, -2]	✓
Grammatical gender	✗
Grammatical number	✓ [+/- plural] (additive)

Table: Tests for Pragmatic Person

	Pragmatic Person
1st person inclusive pronoun	✗
Natural gender	✗
Formality distinctions [L1, L2, L3]	✓

- There is also evidence from the literature on Bangla evidentiality (Bhadra, 2017) and allocutive markering (Bhattacharjee & Roy, 2022) as proof of an elaborate spinal periphery in the language.

Interim Summary

- Politeness is morpho-pragmatic.
- Bangla pronominal morphology manifests politeness.
- Pragmatic/contextual layers are present at the periphery of syntactic spines.
- A pragmatic or mixed person paradigm is evidence of a nominal periphery.
- Bangla has a mixed person pradigm and therefore a nominal periphery.

Aims

On the acquisition of contextual information

- Studying Bangla formality from an empirical perspective can reveal more about the pragmatic layer and its interaction with the predicational layer.
- Studies on the acquisition of politeness (Nippold, Leonard, & Anastopoulos, 1982; Clancy, 1985; Nakamura, 2001), word order (Leela, 2016), and coreference (Chien & Wexler, 1990), suggest that children struggle with discourse.

Theoretical and experimental objectives

- WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE NOMINAL PERIPHERY IN THE SYNTAX?
  1. Do Bangla speaking children have knowledge of formal pronouns?
  2. If yes, at what age is the acquisition path of formal pronouns complete?
  3. Does the syntactic position of pronouns (case-marking) play a role in children's acquisition of formal pronouns?

Experimental Design

A Description of Bangla politeness

- A combination of two features [FORMAL] and (Portner et al., 2019)'s STATUS.
- Three levels of Bangla politeness Bhattacharjee and Roy (2022, p. 2-3)

(4)   a. L(evel)1: $[\text{S} \geq \text{A}]$, 0
      b. L(evel)2: $[\text{S} \leq \text{A}]$, 1
      c. L(evel)3: $[\text{S} \leq \text{A}]$, 2

Design

Table: 2x3 experimental design

		Syntactic Position	
		Object	Possessive
	Refl	*nije-ke* 'oneself'	*nije-r* 'one self's'
Pronominal Type	Pron (L2)	*o-ke* 'her/him'	*o-r* 'her/his'
	Pron (L3)	*o-na-ke* 'her/him'	*o-na-r* 'her/his'

Experimental Setup

- Participants
  - Children: 19 (Aged 2;8 to 6;11)
  - Adult controls: 10 (Aged 27 to 88)
- Three tasks designed and executed on the interactive whiteboard Explain Everything.

Predicates Selected

(5) Object Task (Task 1)

    a. to tickle A

    b. to draw A

    c. to give x a kiss

(6) Inalienable Possession Task (Task 2)

    a. pour water on A's body

    b. scrub A's feet

    c. comb A's hair

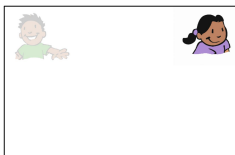   d. massage A's head

(7) Alienable Possession Task (Task 3)

    a. pack A's bag

    b. wear A's shoes

    c. give A's book to B

    d. hold A's balloon

    e. keep A's hat on the table

    f. hold A's C's hand

(i)   Frame 1: eʈa ækʈa tʃʰele 'this is a boy'

(ii)   Frame 2: eʈa or bon 'this is his sister'

(iii) Frame 3: or bon ki kortʃʰe? 'what is his sister doing?'
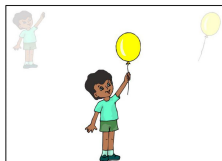
(i)   eʈa ækʈa tʃʰele 'This is a boy'

(ii)   eta tʃʰele-ʈa-ɾ belun 'this is the boy's balloon'

(iii)   tʃʰele-ʈa ekʰane ki kortʃʰe? 'what is the boy doing here?'

Results

Data coding

- STRICT VALID RESPONSE — response matched the target exactly.
- OTHER VALID RESPONSE — response did not match the target utterance but was still a grammatical and felicitous response in the given context.
  - If the participant dropped the subject/possessor and produced L2 verbal agreement, the response was still considered an "other valid response" since it was not known if the participant had dropped a nominal phrase like 'the grandpa' or an L2 pronoun. In case it was the former, the response would be felicitous.
- INVALID RESPONSE — response was ungrammatical or infelicitous i.e., unacceptable under the given context.
- Categories of VALID and INVALID responses — Reflexive, Pronoun, Pron-Refl (Pronoun followed by Reflexive structures), Proper noun, PropN-Refl (Proper Noun followed by Reflexive structures), Bare nouns, Pronoun-Classifier, Noun-Classifier, Noun-(Clf)-Accusative, Proximal personal pronoun, Dem N (Demonstrative followed by Noun-(Classifier)), Demonstrative pronoun

Table: Bangla formal pronoun production of adults and children

	n	Strict Valid Responses		Invalid Responses		OVRs
		Formal pronoun	Reflexive /o-set pronoun	G(rammat-icality)-errors	F(elicity)-errors	
Adult	130	10 (7.7%)	20 (15.4%)	1 (0.8%)	9 (6.9%)	90 (69.2%)
Child	241	14 (5.8%)	27 (11.2%)	11 (4.6%)	111 (46.1%)	78 (32.4%)

- Both adults and children produced very few formal pronouns.

What is the difference?

- Adults produced felicitous alternatives to L3 pronouns, children replaced them with L2 counterparts

(8) *Pictorial context: A little girl tickling her mother.* (Object Task, bch24: 2;8)

RE: shurshuri dichchhe   dækho   to
     tickles   give.PROG.PRS.3.L2 see.IMP.2.L2 TO

     Is she tickling (someone)? Have a look!

CH: hæ̃ shurshuri dichchhe
     yes tickles   give.PROG.PRS.3.L2

     Yes, she is tickling (someone)

RE: kake dichchhe   shurshuri
     whom give.PROG.PRS.3.L2 tickles

     Whom is she tickling?

CH: **o-ke dichchhe**
     3SG.L2-DAT   give.PROG.PRS.3.L2

     She is giving her (tickles) OI: pointer on woman in BCP1-3

CH: **o-ke o-ke**
     3SG.L2-DAT 3SG.L2-DAT

     Her! Her!

Co-existence of L2 and L3

(9) a. *Pictorial context: an old man with a balloon in his hand* (Alienable Possession Task, bch09: 5;9)

hɛ̃ ... ota **ona-r-i** belun
yes ... that 3.SG.L3-GEN-I balloon

'Yes ... that is indeed his balloon.'

b. *Pictorial context: an old man washing his foot* (Inalienable Possession Task BCET2, bch09: 5;9)

o dadu-ta **o-r** pa wash korchhe
o grandpa-CLF 3.SG.L2-GEN foot wash do.PROG.PRS.3.L2

'The Grandpa$_i$ is washing his$_i$ foot.'

1. Children do not have (complete) knowledge of formal pronouns
2. The acquisition path of formal pronouns is incomplete till at least age 6;11.
3. The syntactic position of pronouns has no effect on children's knowledge formal pronouns.

Theoretical Implications

Politeness Acquisition Hypotheses

(10) PAH1: The reason for children not producing formal pronouns is that the pragmatic person layer over the DP/NP, and the projections it is comprised of, are absent in their grammar i.e. children lack the speech-act layer.

(11) PAH2: While the speech act layer is present over the DP/NP in children's grammar, children have not acquired the feature values associated with politeness.

1. Languages differ in the order in which the 1st, 2nd and/or 3rd persons are acquired Harley and Ritter (2002, p. 499). Given that the Speech Act Structure is responsible for licensing the 1st and 2nd persons an initially missing Speech Act layer should mean:

   - A deficiency in the acquisition of 1st or 2nd persons (late acquisition), along with problems with politeness acquisition. **No data to suggest this.**
   - L2 third person pronouns should not be licensed either. **Data suggests the contrary.**

Consequences of PAH2 (The lack of feature values)

- PAH2 stems from the following:
  - **Environment:** Unless the child encounters speech that includes linguistic items that represent a bundle of politeness features with the appropriate feature values, the acquisition process will not be triggered.
  - **Restricted systems harder to acquire:** The highest politeness level, L3, is restricted to the 2nd and 3rd person pronominal paradigm, and the corresponding verbal domain (unlike, say, Person and Plurality features of Nominals)
- Children only have at most two levels of politeness (L1 and L2) in their system i.e. they lack a demarcation between the three levels.

- PAH2 is more plausible.
- Which exact values of the STATUS and FORMAL features they lack can only be determined by studying if children have acquired the distinction between L1 and L2. Anecdotal evidence suggests they have not.

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