

The delay in Bangla polite pronoun acquisition as evidence for a nominal periphery and peripheral features

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Contenido

- ① Background
 - ② Aims and Objectives
 - ③ Experimental Design
 - ④ Results
 - ⑤ Theoretical Implications
- References34

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.

dadu ✓
 Polite pronoun ✗

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

(3) a. Person B:

dadu kəmon achhen
 grandfather how be.INDF.PR.D.L2
 'How is Grandfather?'

b. Person A:

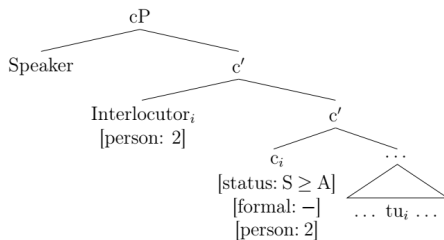
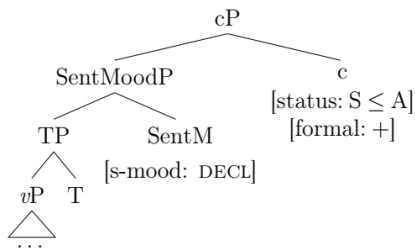
dadu /#uni bhalo-i achhe(#n)
 grandfather /3.SG.L3 good-I be.INDF.PRS.L2
 'Grandfather is well.'

- The social relationship between conversational players, including the people they talk about (referents) and the context of the conversation is represented in the morphology of many languages. Bangla is one such language that encodes politeness in its morphology.

Politeness is morpho-pragmatic

A pragmatic layer at the spinal periphery

- The need to formalise the representation of information on the context of a conversation and the participants involved has been proposed in the past (Speas & Tenny, 2003; Haegeman & Hill, 2013; Zu, 2018; Ritter & Wiltschko, 2019; Portner, Pak, & Zanuttini, 2019; Wiltschko, 2021).
- There are elaborate clausal peripheries, nominal peripheries, and both [figures below are from Portner et al. (2019)].



The Duality of Person Hypothesis

- **Duality of Person Hypothesis** (Ritter & Wiltschko, 2018)

There are 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

We check for which of the two types of features Bangla attests

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]	✓

- Evidence for an elaborate clausal periphery in the language:
 - Evidentiality markers, such as *naki* (Bhadra, 2017)
 - Allocutive markers, such as *go* and *re* (Bhattacharjee & Roy, 2022)

- Bangla pronominal morphology manifests politeness.
- Pragmatic/contextual layers are argued to be present at the periphery of syntactic spines.
- A pragmatic or mixed person paradigm is evidence of a nominal periphery.
- Apart from evidence for a clausal periphery, Bangla has a mixed person paradigm, and consequently a nominal periphery.

Aims

On the acquisition of contextual information

- Studying Bangla politeness from an empirical perspective can reveal more about the pragmatic layer and its interaction with the predication 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.

- WHAT IS THE BANGLA NOMINAL PERIPHERY LIKE?
 - ① Do young Bangla speaking children have knowledge of formal pronouns?
 - ② At roughly 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 (Roy, 2020, 2022; Bhattacharjee & Roy, 2022)

- (4)
- a. L(evel)1: $[s \geq A], 0$
 - b. L(evel)2: $[s \leq A], 1$
 - c. L(evel)3: $[s \leq A], 2$

Table: 2x3 experimental design

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

(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

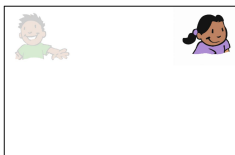
(7) Alienable Possession Task (Task 3)

- 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

Task 1: The Object Task



(i) Frame 1: eṭa ækʃa tʃʰele 'this is a boy'



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



(iii) Frame 3: or bon ki kortʃʰe? 'what is his sister doing'

Tasks 2: The Inalienable Possession Task



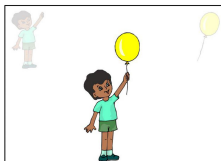
Tasks 3: The Alienable Possession Task



(i) eṭa ækṭa tʃʰele 'This is a boy'



(ii) eṭa tʃʰele-ṭa-r belun 'this is the boy's balloon'



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

Results

Table: Bangla formal pronoun production of adults and children

	n	Strict Responses	Valid Responses	Invalid responses	Re-	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

Children replacing L3 with L2

- (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: hæ 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) Ol: pointer on woman in BCP1-3

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

Her! Her!

- (9) a. *Pictorial context: an old man with a balloon in his hand* (Alienable Possession Task, bch09: 5;9)
- hã ... 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_j 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. This is consistent with what is known about the timeline of politeness acquisition (Bates & Silvern, 1977; Nippold et al., 1982; Clancy, 1985; Nakamura, 2001)
- ③ The syntactic position of pronouns has no effect on children's knowledge formal pronouns.

Theoretical Implications

- (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.

Consequences of PAH1 (The lack of a pragmatic layer)

- 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.
As Nakamura puts it:

Only when children leave the protective environments of school and home for new roles in society are they able to increase their proficiency in keigo, through trial and error, as well as correction, in new social contexts.” (p. 106)
 - **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.
- Whether PAH1 is indeed untenable can be confirmed by studying the acquisition of evidentiality marking *naki* and allocutive marking *go* and *re*.
- Based on the descriptions of L1, L2 and L3, children's replacement of L3 using L2 can be explained by their lack of knowledge of the value [2] of the FORMAL feature.
- If the c-head has the value [1] instead of [2] in a child Bangla nominal periphery, it would lead to the replacement of L3 pronouns by L2.
- Which exact values of the STATUS and FORMAL features children lack can be confirmed by studying if children have acquired the distinction between L1 and L2. Anecdotal evidence suggests they have not.

Appendix I

- 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

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