

Pragmatic Profiling in Malayalam Speaking Typical Children's

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Abstract

Pragmatic language refers to the appropriate use of language in social contexts. It includes the ability to initiate conversations, maintain topics, interpret social cues, use gestures appropriately and respond effectively during communication. The present study aimed to profile pragmatic skills in Malayalam speaking typical children aged 4 -11 years. A total of thirty-two children participated in the study. Pragmatic abilities were assessed through structured tasks including general conversation, picture description and question answering. The pragmatic skills analysed were eye contact, smiling, gaze exchange, requesting, labeling, answering questions, negation, turn-taking, conversational repair, topic initiation, topic maintenance, comment/feedback, and adding information. The results revealed that typically developing children demonstrated good pragmatic performance across all tasks, with higher performance observed in picture description and question-answering tasks. The findings provide important baseline data on pragmatic development in Malayalam-speaking children and can serve as a useful reference for clinical evaluation and intervention.

Keyword: Pragmatics, Social Communication, Malayalam, Children, Language Development, Pragmatic Profiling, Conversation, Communication, Assessment, Typical Development.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential medium for communication and social interaction. Human communication involves the exchange of thoughts, ideas, emotions and intentions through spoken, written, and nonverbal forms. Language is generally divided into five major components: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Among the different components of language pragmatics refers to the social use of language and the appropriate use of communication in different contexts.

Pragmatics refers to the ability to use language effectively in social situations. It includes maintaining eye contact, turn-taking, topic maintenance, conversational repair, requesting, questioning and understanding listener needs. Pragmatic skills are essential for successful social communication and interpersonal relationships. Children gradually develop these pragmatic abilities through regular interactions with parents, peers, teachers and their surrounding social environment. During early childhood, children learn basic social communication behaviors such as greeting, requesting and responding. As age increases child's conversational skills become more organized and socially

appropriate. They become capable of maintaining topics, adding information, understanding indirect meanings and repairing communication breakdowns.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pragmatic language development has been widely studied in both typical and clinical populations. Levinson (1983) described pragmatics as the relationship between language and context. Owens (2020) explained that pragmatic development involves the ability to use language appropriately in social situation.

Research has shown that typically developing children gradually improve their conversational and social communication skills with age. Bates (1976) reported that children acquire pragmatic abilities through social interaction and environmental exposure. Studies by Volden and Lord (1991) suggested that normal pragmatic development includes improved topic maintenance, turn-taking, and conversational repair.

Indian studies also emphasized the importance of pragmatic assessment in children. Xavier (2015) studied pragmatic skills in Malayalam-speaking children and found improvements in eye contact, joint attention, narration, and topic management with increasing age. Bansal, Shetty and Kumaraswamy (2023) examined pragmatic abilities in Hindi-speaking typically developing children and reported that most pragmatic skills were acquired by the age of 7–8 years.

Lukács, Marshall & Snow (2020) focused on narrative and discourse pragmatics in children aged 5-11, reporting that narrative cohesion and implied meaning understanding continue to strengthen with age. The research underscores the importance of pragmatic assessments that include narrative contexts.

Bose & Purdy (2021) examined pragmatic competencies in multilingual Indian children. And found that bilingual/multilingual exposure enhances pragmatic negotiation skills, though core developmental timelines align with monolingual benchmarks. The study highlights the need for culturally and linguistically nuanced pragmatic profiling.

Gupta & Sahu (2022) examined pragmatic skills in Hindi-speaking typically developing children aged 5–10 years. The study reported significant age-related gains in conversation initiation, turn-taking, and response adequacy. It suggests that pragmatic milestones in Indian languages are consistent with global developmental trends but influenced by cultural norms.

Singh & Bhat (2023) This cross-linguistic study compared pragmatic development across several Indian languages, including Kannada, Tamil, and Hindi. The authors found similar patterns of age-related improvement in conversational skills and narrative abilities, and they emphasized the importance of developing language-specific assessment tools. Their findings support the idea that pragmatic competence is influenced by both universal developmental mechanisms and language-specific discourse norms.

Studies have explored pragmatic abilities in children with communication disorders; limited studies are available regarding pragmatic profiles in Malayalam-speaking typically developing children. Therefore, the current study attempts to provide normative information regarding pragmatic development in this population.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Pragmatic skills play an important role in successful communication and social interaction. Assessment of pragmatic abilities in typical children provides baseline data for identifying deviations in children

with communication disorders. Malayalam-speaking children may show unique pragmatic characteristics due to cultural and linguistic influences. However, limited normative data are available for this population. Therefore, the present study is important to understand the pragmatic profiles of Malayalam-speaking typically developing children aged 4-11 years. Malayalam is one of the major Dravidian languages spoken in Kerala. Cultural and linguistic differences influence the development and use of pragmatic language skills. However, there is limited information available regarding pragmatic language profiles in Malayalam-speaking typically developing children. Therefore, the present study was conducted to profile pragmatic skills in Malayalam-speaking typically developing children aged 4-11 years

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To profile pragmatic skills in Malayalam-speaking typically developing children aged 4-11 years.

Participants

Thirty-two Malayalam-speaking typically developing children aged 4-11 years participated in the study.

Inclusion Criteria

- Children with normal speech and language abilities.
- Children having normal hearing sensitivity
- Children with age-appropriate cognitive skills.
- Native Malayalam-speaking children.

Exclusion Criteria

- Children who are diagnosed this hearing loss
- Children diagnosed with speech or language impairments.
- Children with neurological conditions.
- Children with cognitive deficits.
- Children with developmental disorders.

Procedure

The children participated in structured interaction tasks including general conversation, picture description, and question answering in a quiet environment.

The following pragmatic parameters were evaluated:

1. Response for eye contact
2. Smiling
3. Response for gaze exchange
4. Response for requesting object and/or action
5. Response for labeling
6. Answering questions
7. Response for turn-taking
8. Response for conversational repair
9. Response for topic initiation
10. Response for topic maintenance
11. Response for comment/feedback
12. Response for adding information

Each appropriate response was scored as '1' and absence of response was scored as '0'.

Statistical Analysis

The obtained scores statistically analysis using descriptive statistics such as percentage scores and mean values were calculated to analysed pragmatic performance across tasks.

RESULT

The present study aimed to profile pragmatic skills in Malayalam-speaking typically children aged 4-11 years. The findings obtained from general conversation, picture description and question-answering tasks are presented below.

Table 1: Shows the percentage score for pragmatic skill

Pragmatic Parameter	Yes %
Eye Contact	100.0
Smiling	100.0
Gaze Exchange	90.6
Requesting	81.3
Labeling	84.4
Answering Questions	78.1
Turn Taking	62.5
Conversational Repair	84.4
Topic Initiation	81.3
Topic Maintenance	84.4
Comment/Feedback	78.1
Adding Information	59.4

The results of the general conversation task showed that typical children demonstrated good pragmatic performance in most areas. Eye contact and smiling were present in all children. Lower percentages were observed for turn-taking and adding information compared to other parameters.

Table 2: Shows the percentage score for pragmatic skill.

Pragmatic Parameter	Yes %
Eye Contact	100.0
Smiling	96.9
Gaze Exchange	90.6
Requesting	100.0
Labeling	87.5
Answering Questions	93.8
Turn Taking	96.9
Conversational Repair	93.8
Topic Initiation	96.9
Topic Maintenance	93.8
Comment/Feedback	90.6
Adding Information	87.5

In the picture description task, children demonstrated excellent pragmatic performance across most parameters. Visual support may have contributed to improved conversational engagement and topic maintenance.

Table 3: Shows the percentage score for pragmatic skill.

Pragmatic Parameter	Yes %
Eye Contact	96.9
Smiling	96.9
Gaze Exchange	90.6
Requesting	90.6
Labeling	87.5
Answering Questions	81.3
Turn Taking	87.5
Conversational Repair	87.5
Topic Initiation	93.8
Topic Maintenance	93.8
Comment/Feedback	87.5
Adding Information	100.0

During the question-answering task, children showed high performance in eye contact, smiling, topic initiation, and adding information. These findings suggest that Malayalam-speaking typically developing children possess adequate pragmatic language skills.

Table 4: Shows Mean Percentage Scores

Task	Mean (%)
General Conversation	81.49
Picture Description	93.99
Question Answering	91.35

The mean percentage scores obtained across the three tasks revealed variations in pragmatic performance among the children. The highest mean score was observed in the picture description task (93.99%), indicating that children demonstrated better pragmatic abilities when visual cues and structured contexts were provided. This was followed by the question-answering task (91.35%), where children showed good conversational participation and appropriate responses. Comparatively lower performance was observed in the general conversation task (81.49%), possibly because spontaneous conversation requires greater social interaction skills, topic management, and conversational flexibility. Overall, the findings indicate that Malayalam-speaking typically developing children possess adequate age-appropriate pragmatic language abilities across different communication tasks.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous studies on pragmatic language development in typically developing children. Earlier studies by Bates (1976) and Volden and Lord (1991) reported that pragmatic skills improve with age and social interaction. Similarly, Indian studies by Xavier (2015) and Bansal et al. (2023) also demonstrated age-related improvement in conversational and social communication skills among children. Indicate that Malayalam-speaking typically developing

children aged 4-11 years demonstrated well-developed pragmatic language skills across different communicative tasks. The highest performance was observed in picture description, followed by question answering and general conversation. Children showed strong abilities in eye contact, smiling, topic initiation, and conversational participation. General conversation demonstrated comparatively lower performance because spontaneous interactions demand greater social flexibility and conversational skills. Nevertheless, the overall findings suggest age-appropriate pragmatic development among the participants.

The findings are consistent with previous studies that reported improvements in pragmatic skills with increasing age and social interaction opportunities. The study also highlights the importance of culturally relevant pragmatic assessment tools.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Profiled pragmatic skills in Malayalam-speaking typical children aged 4-11 years. It provides a normative data of pragmatic skills for Malayalam speaking typical children. The results showed a strong pragmatic performance across conversational tasks particularly in picture description, question-answering, and general conversation. These findings may serve as a reference for identifying pragmatic language difficulties in children with communication disorders. Speech-language pathologists can use these findings during assessment and intervention planning for children with pragmatic language disorders such as autism spectrum disorder, developmental language disorder, and intellectual disability.

LIMITATION

1. The sample size was limited.
2. The assessment included only structured communication tasks
3. The study included only children from Palakkad district of Kerala.

FUTURE DIRECTION

1. Larger sample sizes
2. Studies can include children from different Malayalam dialect backgrounds to understand dialectal influences on pragmatic development.
3. Comparative studies can be conducted between typically developing children and children with communication disorders.

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