

**THE ACQUISITION OF MORPHOLOGY BY CHILDREN
ACQUIRING SHONA AS A FIRST LANGUAGE**

BY

CATHRINE RUVIMBO SIBANDA

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
LINGUISTICS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE IN
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN LINGUISTICS**

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

2006

The process through which children learn their first language has fascinated people for centuries. Campbell and Grieve (1982) write about several gruesome historical episodes in which unethical members of royalty from different cultures around the world exploited their power in vain in attempts to discover the origins of language in children. As unethical and (unscientific) as these studies were, they do bear witness to the enormous desire people have felt to study children's language development as a way to discover and illuminate human nature.

Daniel Kies (1995)

ABSTRACT

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Linguistics Department of the University of Zimbabwe in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Linguistics.

THE ACQUISITION OF MORPHOLOGY BY CHILDREN ACQUIRING SHONA AS A FIRST LANGUAGE

BY

CATHRINE RUVIMBO SIBANDA

SUPERVISOR: MR MKANGANWI

This thesis explores children's acquisition of Shona morphology, in particular the acquisition of grammatical morphemes. The thesis describes how the morphology of Shona-speaking children develops. Of key interest is how they acquire inflections and the strategies they adopt. Slobin's Operating Principles (henceforth OPs) are used as the framework for data analysis. The hypotheses that are used in this thesis generate from Slobin's OPs. The data is analysed using morphological analysis and hypotheses derived from Slobin's OPs. The findings of this study show that nouns and verbs are first produced in the form of content words without the grammatical morphemes (GMs) then they occur with a vowel that is part of the target GM. The final stage of the development of GMs is when children produce words that are similar to adult words. The strategies that are used by the children conform to the hypotheses that are derived from Slobin's OPs. There is evidence of overgeneralisation of the plural morpheme (ma-). This study also reveals the order of acquisition of some GMs. A noteworthy feature of the three children's speech is the sheer number of productive GMs that they could handle. The findings of this study contribute to the areas of morphology and child language acquisition of Bantu languages in general and of Shona in particular. The data that are gathered for this study could also be used in studies of other aspects of the acquisition of Shona such as that of syntax.

DEDICATION

To BRK.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I thank God for allowing this study to take place. I would like to thank my supervisor Chief Mkanganwi for his constructive comments, guidance, advice and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr J.Thondhlana for the assistance she gave me when I was working on my proposal and Mr C. Mudzingwa for the numerous literature that he made available to me and for being there from the start of this study. I also want to thank all members of the Department of Linguistics, especially Esther Chivero for remembering me when I was far, Dr P.R. Mabugu I benefited from her insightful comments, Dr J. Kangira for always encouraging me by saying “chimbizikai vasikana.” Mrs A. Masuwa for her efficiency in typing the drafts and my colleagues Ms S. Dube, Mr E. Jakaza, Mr I. Mhute, Mr V. Mugari, Mr L. Mukaro and Mr M.Kadenge. I am deeply indebted to the three lovely girls Tatenda, AnnaLois and Tafadzwa who provided the data for this study and also their families for allowing me to work with the girls. I would also want to thank mbuya and sekuru Tafangombe for grooming me into the person I am today, may God richly bless you. To mum you have been a source of inspiration to me especially academically. I appreciate what you have done to me, you are the best. I am also obliged to express my appreciation and thankfulness to my husband BRK for love, support, understanding and inspiration. Last but not least I wish to thank all those who had direct or indirect influence on this study, but who, I did not mention.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
Abstract	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Abbreviations and Symbols.....	viii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0	Area of investigation.....	1
1.1	Significance of the study.....	4
1.2	Methodology.....	6
1.2.1	The children.....	6
1.2.2	Data gathering.....	8
1.2.3	Audio-recording.....	8
1.2.4	Method of analysis.....	9
1.3	Organisation of study.....	10

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF SELECTED WORKS

2.0	Introduction.....	11
2.1	A historical review of the methodological approaches used in CLA.....	12
2.2	Review of stages of CLA.....	17
2.3	An Overview of the Theories of Morphological Acquisition...	21
2.3.1	MacWhinney's dialectic model.....	22
2.3.2	Pinker's model for acquisition of morphology.....	27
2.3.3	Slobin's operating principles.....	28
2.4	Review of Literature on the Acquisition of Morphology.....	36
2.5	Summary	55

CHAPTER 3: AN OVERVIEW OF SHONA GRAMMATICAL MORPHEMES

3.0	Introduction.....	56
3.1	The Grammatical Morpheme.....	58
3.2	Shona Grammatical Morphemes.....	61
3.2.1	Grammatical Morphemes Attached to Nouns.....	62
3.2.2	Grammatical Morphemes Attached to Verbs.....	71
3.2.3	Controllers and Agreement Markers	81
3.3	Summary.....	85

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION , ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0	Introduction.....	86
4.1	Categories in the data.....	87
4.1.1	Category 1: No GM (lexical morphemes).....	89
4.1.2	Category 2: Partial GM.....	101
4.2	Locative-Copulative before Class Morpheme.....	108
4.3	Zero Morph Substantives.....	112
4.4	The Overgeneralised GM.....	113
4.5	The Development of the GMs Attached to the Verb.....	117
4.5.1	The Subject	118
4.5.2	The Object	121
4.5.3	Tense.....	122
4.5.4	Aspect.....	124
4.5.5	Negation	126
4.5.6	The Infinitive (ku-).....	128
4.6	Synopsis of findings on the development of the GM.....	129
4.6.1	GMs attached to the noun and other substantives.....	129
4.6.2	GMs attached to the verb.....	129
4.6.3	Order of acquisition.....	130
4.6.4	Overgeneralisations.....	131
4.6.5	The OPs and hypothesis in the study.....	132
4.7	Summary.....	133
CHAPTER 5 : Conclusion.....		135
References.....		139
Appendix 1: Tatenda 2;4-2;10.....		147
Appendix 2: AnnaLois 2;6-3;1.....		154
Appendix 3: Tafadzwa 2;9-3;3.....		161
Appendix 4: Nouns, verbs analysed in this study.....		167
Appendix 5: OPs for the construction of language.....		178

LIST OF TABLES	PAGE
TABLE 1: Summary of the background of the children in the study.....	8
TABLE 2: The singular/plural pairs of Shona nouns.....	64
TABLE 3: The number GMs of Shona.....	65
TABLE 4: Agreement Markers.....	66
TABLE 5: Subject prefixes	72
TABLE 6: The Tense morphemes of Shona.....	74
TABLE 7: Children's words with omitted GMs.....	93
TABLE 8: Children's production of class 1a, 5 and 9 words	94
TABLE 9: Omitted consonants	103
TABLE 10.1: Consonant omission in number morphemes.....	104
TABLE 10.2: Consonant omission in honorific morphemes.....	105
TABLE 10.3: Consonant omission in free morphemes.....	105

LIST OF FIGURES	PAGE
FIGURE 1: Cyclic order of application, correction and acquisition....	22
FIGURE 2: The position of a GM in a Shona word.....	91
FIGURE 3: Frequency of the LM in Shona words.....	96

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ADJ	Adjective
AGR	Agreement
APP	Applied extension
ASP	Aspect
AUX	Auxillary
CLA	Child Language Acquisition HON
CI	Class Honorific
CV	Consonant Vowel
DM	Diminutive
ENCL	Enclitic
FUT	Future
GMs	Grammatical morphemes
HORT	Hortative
INF	Infinitive
LMC	Language Making Capacity
LM	Lexical morpheme
LOC	Locative
MLU	Mean Length of Utterance
NEG	Negative
Neu	Neuter
OM	Object marker
OPs	Operating principles
PART	Participle
PASS	Passive
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive
PRES	Present
PST	Past tense
SG	Singular
SM	Subject marker
TV	Terminal vowel
V	Vowel
-	indicates an omitted GM