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

TABLE OF CONTENTS   **PAGE**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF SELECTED WORKS

CHAPTER 3: AN OVERVIEW OF SHONA GRAMMATICAL MORPHEMES

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION , ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

LIST OF TABLES   **PAGE**

LIST OF FIGURES   **PAGE**

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ADJ	Adjective
AGR	Agreement
APP	Applied extension
ASP	Aspect
AUX	Auxillary
CLA	Child Language Acquisition HON
Cl	Class Honorific
CV	Consonant Vowel
DM	Dimunitive
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