SYNTACTIC BOOTSTRAPPING IN MARATHI

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Marathi (Indo-Aryan) is a split-ergative language: ergative-absolutive voice in the perfective; nominative-accusative in the imperfect. In this paper, we show that case marking in both voices influences frame-compliance (Naigles et al., 1993), showing that native-speaking Marathi children (and adults) actively use case information when processing interpretations of verb transitivity. Surprisingly, Marathi heritage children show case resilience and also integrate case information when determining verb transitivity, despite the fact that case is thought to be a vulnerable feature in heritage speakers (Kim et al. 2018),

Verb learning is notoriously challenging (Gleitman, 1990, a.o.), leading Naigles (1993) to propose that children are FRAME-COMPLIANT - a form of syntactic bootstrapping wherein a frame (represented by language features like number of arguments) is used to infer something about the meaning of the verb. This is a first-pass mechanism to infer transitivity. Goksun et al. (2008) find that in Turkish the presence of accusative case increases frame-compliance – a fact that comports with Polinsky's (2011) argument that accusative case is the marked/dependent case in NOM/ACC languages, allowing for the inference of transitivity. Polinsky additionally asserts that ergative is the dependent case in ERG/ABS languages from which we assume ERG to be the salient cue in the perfective for Marathi children. However, case is known to be a vulnerable feature in heritage speakers (Kim et al., 2018; Chondrogianni & Schwartz, 2020), and we therefore investigate whether heritage Marathi children make use of case to the same degree native Marathi children do.

Child participants (India data collection complete, USA heritage data collection in progress) were tested with a picture selection task and elicited verbal correction in three conditions: ERG condition (A), ACC condition (B) and a (control) bare-case condition (C). Results indicate that both groups show strong frame-compliance based on dependent case marking (ERG and ACC). We conclude that case is surprisingly resilient in heritage Marathi and serves as a key feature for syntactic bootstrapping in the language, though which dependent case marker in the two alignment systems is more salient differs between the heritage and child populations (possibly due to English influence in the heritage speakers).

Example Sentences

A. hətti-**ni**   popət   rəd-l-ə
   Elephant-**ERG** parrot   cry-PST-NEU
   Predicted Interpretation: "The elephant made the parrot cry"

B. hətti   popt-a-**la**   rəd-t-ə
   Elephant parrot-MASC-**ACC** cry-PRES-NEU
   Predicted Interpretation: "The elephant made the parrot cry"

C. hətti   popət   rəd-t-ə
   Elephant parrot   cry-PRES-NEU
   Predicted Interpretation: "The elephant and the parrot cried"

Figure 1.

| Conjoined Subject Interpretation | Causative Interpretation |