

The Acquisition of Verbs by Amharic Speaking Children



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ABSTRACT: The study describes the acquisition of verb by typically developing Amharic-speaking children. It also recruited a cross-sectional research design to gather the speeches' data from thirty-two children using picture description, spontaneous elicitation, and story-telling tasks. The data were audio-recorded, transcribed using IPA, and analyzed. The result showed that most of Amharic speaking children's verbs appeared as single utterances. Verbs such as progressive, past and imperfective were predominantly frequent in such a way; especially past and imperfective verbs served being a meaningful simple sentence without overt subject and object. Similarly, auxiliary verbs, as a linking or helping verb, they had a consistent occurrence and most of the children's simple SOV sentences were guided by these verbs. Moreover, the perfective, imperatives, and gerund verbs had a significant representation. However, passives were the least and they were not even detected in some children's speeches. The result also confirmed that progressive, past and auxiliary verbs had a leading place followed by imperfective. Children also varied in their choice of verbs while describing things, expressing ideas, and narrating events. Some children used a certain verbs monotonously but others were more selective and straightforward to the point. In this regard, older age (4; 5 and 5; 0 years) girls had better performance. The distribution of verbs, in type and frequency also portrayed that how some verbs more salient than others. In sum, the progressive and past verbs were likely acquired earlier than others. However, verbs like passives seemingly need time. This implies that the order of verb acquisition differs cross linguistically due to the nature of derivational and inflectional morphology that children are able to acquire first.

KEYWORDS: Language acquisition, lexical development, acquisition of verbs and order of verb acquisition in Amharic

1. INTRODUCTION

First language acquisition is a process by which children attain the capacity to perceive and understand sound systems, as well as develop different lexicons and sentences to communicate. It is one of the typical human characteristics, because other animals do not acquire and communicate using sophisticated means that is comparable to human language (Ferguson, 1964). As studies have shown, different classes of lexicon also develop through communication. Children naturally acquire a large number of words in an orderly manner in sentences while interacting with their surroundings (Ingram, 1989; Lust, 2006; Tomasello, 2003). They start to communicate in a language by uttering single words and systematically their language develops into grammatically correct and complex sentences. According to Ferguson (1996), reasonably early utterances of children may not be regarded as 'normal' adult language; but it is appropriate for them to communicate with their surroundings. Most little children adapt their own words by substituting or deleting the difficult phonemes to communicate comfortably. Another study has also shown that children's language has its own brand like short utterances with low semantic complexity, repetition, and imitation. However, they are able to learn quickly if adults help them to speak freely (Bloomfield, 1978). Language acquisition process has a natural path in which children develop their speech ability starting from uttering the first words to complex sentences. Through this process, children's lexicon develops rapidly and comprises different classes.

2. A BRIEF REVIEW OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORIES

The underlying principles how human languages are acquired has instigated researches' interest for centuries. Studying the acquisition of different languages is one of the tracking ways to understand and describe how languages develop, how and why they change, and how little children can learn them. It is true that, children, under normal conditions, are able to acquire any target language they are experienced to. Although it is perplexing phenomenon how the acquisition process occurs, a number of studies have approved those children, cross-linguistically, acquire their first language very quickly, and reach grammatically sophisticated adult-like communication within a few years. Understanding how this happens, what biological trigger determines and what is learned from the environment may have a major impact on identifying and comprehending the underlying principles that govern all human languages.

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In this regard, there are two major schools of thoughts within the field of first language acquisition: generativists and constructivists. Constructivists believe that language is learned by experience only and that all abstract grammatical knowledge triggered by the input children gets from the environment (Ambridge & Liven, 2011). Such a basic assumption of constructivists leads to say that there is no especial requirement for any specific Language Faculty in the human brain, which is associated only with language acquisition process. Language is acquired through the same cognitive processes as any other type of knowledge. However, the process of acquiring a language is complex which requires children's perceptual, cognitive, social-communicative, and learning skills" (Bates & Tomasello, 2001).

In an attempt to explain the uniformity of the acquisition process across languages, Bates & Tomasello (2001) have showed the constructivists claim that practically children's early linguistic competence is item based and that children are not using any abstract rules or categories in their early language production. Furthermore, when patterns in speech production emerge, children are not able to expand their rules beyond specific items which are rote-learned; they take from the input they exposed (Tomasello, 2001). However, it is undeniable fact that children eventually manage to create abstract rules and categories, which can be expanded across their entire language system. Constructivists argued that children require attaining the complex system, which includes general cognitive and social-cognitive skills (Tomasello, 2001). In addition, children in order to reach an adult-like grammar of their language, they must build the abstract categories of the language based on the patterns they hear around themselves. Children across the world experience similar communicative needs in their daily life. The acquisition process primarily starts by a number of unstructured word combinations. However, human language cannot be developed because of the amount of input children only get from the environment, they need to have a natural ability of storing, analyzing and extracting meaning of the world.

Opposing the constructivists' claim, generativists propose that language comprises formal rules and operations, which work on abstract linguistic categories that refer to acquisition of language is innate. Under the generativist approaches, the speakers are believed to attain a system of abstract rules that can generate novel utterances (Ambridge & Leaven, 2011; Gasohol, 2013). These rules discuss the syntactic categories like determiner, noun, verb, and phrases: noun phrase, verb phrases not to concrete items. The general issue of this system of the rules and the lexicon is referred to as the competence of the speaker, as opposed to the performance the actual production of utterances. Generative grammar is supposed to describe this abstract system explicitly, irrespective of the particular performance of the speakers- listener (Gasohol, 2013). According to generativists' view, even if young children produce only a limited number of structures, these are not just rote-learned chunks, but generated by an underlying system of grammatical rules.

The significant part of human language cannot be developed at all because the important information attained from the environment; neither in the input nor in the context not alone help children to acquire their language because of learnability problem (Merisel, 1995). To solve this problem, generativists propose that an innate system of genetically endowed principles is valid for every human language and a set of parameters despite variation across languages. According to Radford (2004), all children, irrespective of their language background, they go through similar phases of development starting with single word and continue to primary level of two- and three-word utterances; later, they use grammatically correct sentences. Their language development is commonly very rapid, after the first word occurrence by the age of ten -thirty months. They apparently acquire most of morphologically developed nouns, verbs and other functional lexicons (Radford, 2004; Garshol, 2013). Generally, no matter how there are two views of language acquisition process generativists' innateness and constructivists' input or context, both school of thoughts are complementary which shape child's language development and acquisition theories.

2.1 The nature of Lexicon in children's language development

Child's lexical development has a great tie to phonological and morphological acquisition. In the course of acquiring different lexicon, children go through the process of learning the word form and relating the form to the concept over a period of time (Bloom, 2000; Justice et al 2005). Once word groups have been identified from the speech stream, it is possible to compare the existing words in the lexicon. There is some evidence that children's ability to access stored word representations. This was highly dependent on the sound match between the stored word and currently heard one (Houston & Jusczyk, 2003). One topic of the current debate in child's lexical development is whether children slowly become more and more capable of accessing stored word forms (Swingley & Aslin, 2002), or whether there is a gap in lexical representation that occurs when children begin to associate words forms with referents (Werker et al, 2002; Stole-Gammon, 2006).

Study by Benedict (1979) has also indicated the age at which each child acquires predetermined numbers of words for comprehension and production. The advanced development of comprehension is quite remarkable. During the normal course of lexical acquisition, a child's lexicon is composed of a bulk of nominal and action words, however, fewer modifiers, personal and social worlds are also observed and through time, children acquire different classes of words, despite their frequency differences (Stolt, 2009). In this regard, scholars have had different standpoints about the type of words children comprehend and produce in their lexical acquisition process. In what order this acquisition occurs, how human beings organize the world into semantic concepts and how children acquire this parsing are central issues. One of the central arguments associated with these questions is

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the hypothesis put forth by Gentner (1982) that children universally acquire more nouns than verbs. This noun bias hypothesis was proposed based on the comparisons between the relative frequency of nouns and verbs. Studies on the acquisition of English, Japanese, German, and Kabuli, Chinese and Turkish languages have also indicated that nouns establish the largest word sphere and verb take the second position in the acquisition of the lexicon (Gentner & Boroditsky, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2000).

Moreover, children appear to be differing in the types of words they focus on, especially, in the early stages of language acquisition. Some children have a relatively high proportion of nouns by age two, whereas, others show a much lower percentage. They make up their vocabulary by different class of words having larger numbers of verbs than nouns (O'Grady, 2006; Miller, 1986; Miller & Gideon, 1987). Similarly, Korean and Mandarin language researchers (Choi & Gopnik, 1995; Tardif, 1996) have challenged Gentner's original Noun-bias-hypothesis. In addition, Tardif (1999) reported that children acquiring Mandarin used more verbs than nouns in their spontaneous speech. However, the nature of input a child gets from their families and surroundings can make a difference in early lexical acquisition (Tardif, 1999). As studies indicated, children acquire different categories of verbs next to nouns despite the target languages' lexical domains is similar or different. The acquisition seems more comparable although the target language-specific morphosyntactic matters influence the early development of lexical categories in the general acquisition of verbs in particular.

2.2 Acquisition of verbs

In the course of language acquisition process, the nature and development of different verbs require serious attention. As studies have indicated (Garshol, 2013; Lorusso, 2017) the occurrence of verbs take the second position in many languages. According to Lorusso (2017), most of the children around the age of two years, begin to combine words and then produce their first verbs. Different categories of verbs occur later than nouns and they give relational concepts in the world. They are represented in syntax through argument structure. Verbs involve structural and distinctive meaning while structural meaning is derived from the few syntactic frames (the number and feature of the arguments) in which a verb can appear; idiosyncratic meaning is given through the relationships in the world that each verbal root denotes. The lexical category of verbs determines the representation of null subjects or choice of subjects in the sentences. Verb categories are also taken to be at work in the choice. The occurrence of the auxiliaries and their proper selection depending on the lexical-syntactic information encoded in the VP-layer. After the first verbs occurrence, children are simultaneously learning the syntactic derivations and inflections (Lorusso, 2017).

According to Lorusso (2017) explanation, noun is one of the lexical groups that include words designated to people, places, things, ideas, or concepts. Noun are chosen by the predicates of the sentences and in inflectional languages may agree in number and/or gender with the verbs, While nouns directly stand to refer objects (or an abstract entities) in the world, verbs serve to express action or the event-types which have been undergone by one or more of the objects in the world. These smallest semantic features of verbs are plotted onto syntax in different ways. Verbs can describe or express the actions or events in which a given object or entity in the world. Concerning the acquisition at first, verbs does not have any functional categories, it also lacks tense, and case features. However, Radford (2004) basically claimed that at age of 1; 6-2; 0 English speaking children begin to use different lexicon but not functional categories. In other words, they start using, progressive *-ing*, and to some extent perfective *-n* (both Verb inflections), but they do not use *I*-inflection such as 3rd person singular *-s* or past tense *-d*. On the other hand, Pierce (1992) confirmed that children use a certain inflected non-lexical verbs at the age of two. She specifically explains the use of auxiliary *be* and modals *can* and *could*. Children use these verbs both in declarative and interrogative structures. Like Radford and Pierce analysis, some of the occurrences are rote-learned chunks, but she also finds clearly productive uses of the above-mentioned verbs. According to Radford (1990), the grammar of a child in English lacks the IP-layer altogether. This entails the child equivalents of the adult sentences are simple VPs. Radford provides examples of many structures which are seemingly lack the IP-layer. Children omit both the infinitival *to* and modals in the obligatory contexts. Lack of infinitival *to* both with overt and covert subjects, as well as the lack of modal both in spontaneous and imitative speech is sign that children do not acquire such verbs earlier (Radford, 2004).

As Radford (1990) explanation, little children who are acquiring English, continuously omit tense and agreement affixes from main verbs such as the 3rd person suffix *-s* and the past tense suffix *-ed*. The agreement and tense features are carried by the head of IP, are not acquired yet. However, Swedish, German and Norwegian are verb second (V2) languages, and children acquired V2 verbs earlier than others. They also acquire infinitival verbs in the first position (Westergaard, 2005) and but the order of different verbs and the acquisition is determined by the amount of input children are able to get from the environment and the ability to express action during their speeches (Westergaard, 2009).

3. THE CURRENT STUDY

Language is an essential part of young children's development; it plays a crucial role in literacy acquisition. It is also a way of communicating and building relationships with others as well as enables children to make sense of the world around them. Children, to achieve these language uses, they need to develop different linguistic elements of the target language, especially, the development of children's sound system and lexicons are considerably significant. As result, researchers consistently raise

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different questions to understand and describe how children acquire words and what challenges they encounter during the acquisition process. Most of the researches on children's lexical development have described the acquisition of names of concrete objects, place, and people's names (Tomesolle & Marriman,1995). In spite of the fact that verbs play a significant part in children's language development, it seems that studies on the acquisition of verbs have not given much more attention like nouns. Even if studies have been conducted on verbs, most of them have been found in European and Asian languages (Bittner et al.,2003; Natalia, 2003; Wine *et al.*,2005 ;Garson, 2013; Lorusso, 2017;Westergaard, 2005). Similarly, from African language, Demuth et al (2010) have reported the acquisition of Seseato passives. However, except some studies on phonological acquisition of different local languages (Ababayehu, 2008&2013; Ababayehu and Demeke ,2017; Tariku, 2019) and the nature of baby talk by Ebenezer (2013), no research report has been registered which describe the acquisition of verbs in Ethiopia languages. In order to fill this research gap, this study was intended to examine the acquisition of verbs by Amharic speaking children and the following research questions were set.

Research questions

1. Which category of verbs are acquired by 3;0 and 5;0 years old children ?
2. Which verbs are more frequent in children's speeches?
3. What does the order of verbs' acquisition look like?

4. METHODOLOGY

The current study was used a cross-sectional study design. A cross-sectional study design is defined as a type of observational research that analyzes data collected at once in a given point of time across a sample of population or a predefined subset (Zoltan ,2007). Cross-sectional research design is helpful to include a large representative sample and less demanding to recruit respondents. This allows researchers to gather a large size of data within a short period and helps to see individual ability of producing various lexical entities. It enables to establish relationship between variables. According to Zoltan (2007) explanation, cross-sectional data collection method is less exposed to detrimental factors like unexpected external events that are beyond the researcher control (e.g. children illness , drop out and other).Taking in to consideration, the researcher recruited this designed although it had common method of variance bias which result from children's tendencies: including both temporal feeling (moods) and personalities. For example, some children show emotional temperament to produce the required speech data in a consistent manner but to reduce the mentioned weaknesses, the researcher studied individual child's behavior, feeling and ability of speaking during the introduction period; and trial recordings were made to choose children who were involved as a participants and if unexpected feeling(tiredness and lack interest to speak) occurred during the recording session , the recordings were stopped and repeated. Moreover, the different data collection tasks were administered independently and repeatedly to pick the best recording samples.

4.1 Participants

Thirty-two preschool children, balanced for gender, were drawn from a kindergarten using purposive sampling. They were between 3; 0to 5;0 years. Children who participated in this study and their parents do not speak other local languages except Amharic at home.

Table 1. Demographic data on the twelve children selected for the study

Code	Name	Sex	Age	Code	Name	Sex	Age
Group 1				Group 3			
C1	TSN	F	3;1;16	C17	BTHY	F	4;5;0
C2	HLN	F	3;2;5	C18	HNA	F	4;5;12
C3	AMN	F	3; 2;23	C19	IDY	F	4;5;19
C4	MKLT	F	3;2;14	C20	FKR	F	4;5;2
C5	NTN	M	3;3;15	C21	AMN2	M	4;6;7
C6	ELS	M	3;3;6	C22	KAL	M	4;5;21
C7	HRY	M	3;2;26	C23	EBN	M	4;6;9
C8	EYB 1	M	3;3; 8	C24	EPR	M	4;5;0
Group 2				Group 4			
C9	BLN	F	3;9;23	C25	SOL.M	F	4;11;10
C10	SOL.G	F	3;10;2	C26	SMR	F	4;11;6
C11	DGM	F	3;11;28	C27	RDT 2	F	4;11;20
C12	RDT.B	F	3;10	C28	LDY	F	4;11;26
C13	EYB2	M	3;10;17	C29	ELNT	M	4;11;23
C14	AMN 1	M	3;9;24	C30	AMR	M	4;11;12
C15	MKYS	M	4;0;5	C31	NOD	M	4;11;21
C16	BRK	M	3;10;7	C32	EYB.G	M	4;11;2

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4.2 Data collection and process

The data were collected using picture description, and spontaneous elicitation and storytelling tasks. The speech data were audio recorded and transcribed using IPA and Ext IPA. The transcription was done in ELAN linguistic annotator tools as it was easy to search the frequency of part of speeches (POS) segmentation and was helpful to display the different lexical categories.

4.3 Data analysis

The research used qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. First, the audio-recorded files were transcribed in ELAN annotator tools and saved in eaf for searching frequency of different lexicon (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.). After searching was completed, ELAN displayed the following search results; the number of utterances, key words, and part of speeches (POS) (frequency of nouns, verbs, adjectives and other words). The results found in this way were registered in excel format and were put into order. Each child's data was registered to SPSS. Then, the analysis was made using descriptive, (mean frequency) analysis.

5. FINDINGS

Verbs were one of the main parts of speech, which appeared in different functional categories in Amharic speaking children's speeches. They described actions, state, or condition. Verbs, in Amharic, have very complex morphological features. They appeared

with various prefixes and suffixes. They are inflected for subject, object, tense, person, gender and number. Morphologically developed verbs like in Amharic language can stand for a meaningful complete idea. Generally, verbs were detected with different information in children's speeches due to their derivational and inflectional morphology of the language. This article tried to describe the nature these verbs and their order of acquisition.

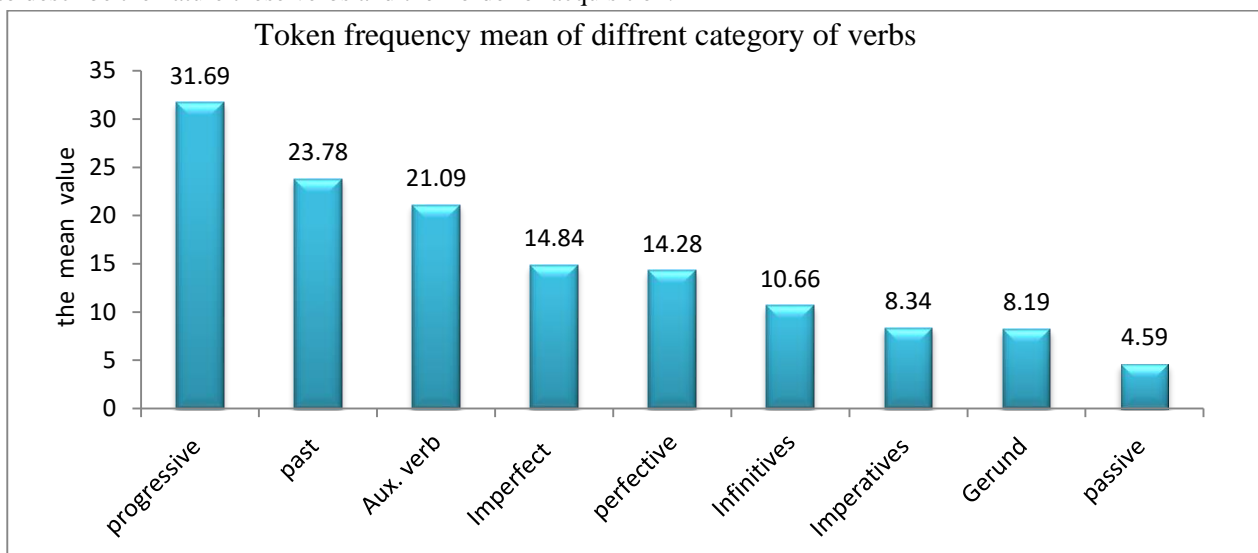


Figure 1 The mean value of different categories of verbs

As shown in the above graph, progressive, auxiliary, past, imperfect, perfective, infinitive, jussive (imperative), gerund, and passive were found in children's speeches but these verbs had a different frequency. Their frequency also varied from one child to others and across age groups.

Progressive: from the total size of verbs, progressives took the largest share, these verbs had 39.69 frequency mean and the maximum verb count was 53 and a minimum 15 words. Within this range of frequency, some of the progressive verbs were commonly detected in each child's speech. The commonly detected progressives are listed in the following table.

Table 2. Common progressive verbs detected in children's speeches

Progressive	Gloss	Progressive	Gloss
ijə-hedu	(They)going	ijə-bət'əsətʃ	(she) cutting
ijə-tətʃawətətʃ	(she)Playing	ijə-wənu	(they) Swimming
ijəbələtʃ	(she) eating	ijə-bərəru	(they) flying
ija-jətʃw	(She)watching(him	ijə-ʃəran	(we) doing
ijərot'u	(They) running	ija-t'əbətʃ	(she)washing
ijə-lək'ak'əmu	(They)stripping	ijə-t'at'atʃ	(She)Drinking
ijə-worədu	Getting down	ijə-məta(drum)	(he) Playing
ija-stəməartʃ	(she) teaching	ijə-zələlətʃ	(she)jumping

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As shown in the above table, progressive verbs appeared with different inflections which indicate subject, object, person, gender, and number. Despite they would not be complete without the auxiliary verbs, children used progressives as single word utterances, in a VP phrases and different sentences during children's talks as presented in the following example.

Example 1

1. /ijə-bəl-a/= (as single utterance)
PRO.3rd.SIG.M.V(ijə-bəll-a) *eating*
Gloss: (he) EATING
2. /t'otitua kətʃnewotʃun ija-jə-tʃ nəw/
DEF.3rd.P.SIG.F.SUBJ(t'ot'-it-ua)the ape+DEF.3rdPL.OBJ (kətʃ'ne-wotʃu) *the giraffes* Acc(-n)
+Prg.3rdsig.F.V(ija-jə-tʃ) *watching* +Present AuxV(nəw) *is*
Gloss: *The ape is watching the giraffes* .(SOV)
3. /wofotʃu t'irat'ire ijəlkəmu nəw/
DEF.3rdPL.SUBJ.(wofotʃu)the birds+PL.OBJ.(t'irat'ire)cereals+PRGO.3rd.PLV(ijə-ləkəmu-u)
eating/picking +Present Aux.V(nəw) *is*.
Gloss: *The birds are eating cereals*.(SOV)
4. /kəbəro ijəmət-a /= (he) playing drums.(VP)
OBJ(kəbəro) drum+Pro.3rd.F.Subj.V(ijə-mət-a)
Gloss:(he)playing drum(VP)

Although the occurrence of progressive verbs as single utterances cannot show a complete idea, children had common tendency of using them like (1), especially, in turn taking conversation during elicitation and picture narration tasks, children frequently used progressives as independent utterances but when children were encouraged to answer questions like 'who is doing this?' or, 'What is X doing?', they were able to use the progressives in sentences, which had overt subject, and object like sentences (2 & 3). Moreover, despite not frequent, progressive appeared in VP phrase like (4). In deed, progressive verbs were seemingly frequent in all children's speeches like the above extracts indicated. For example, progressive verb /ijəhed-/ which was apparent in all children's speeches, is derived from singular male subject indicator V₂ verb /hedə/ 'he went' occurred with different inflectional markers like /ijə-hed-ə/ '(he)going' or, /ijə-hed-u/ meaning '(they) going', /ijəhed-ə-tʃ/, '(she) going' or /ijəhed-n/, '(we) going' and the same patterns of inflection was also observed in other progressive verbs too. This implies that aged between 3;0 and 5;0 years children can produce well inflected progressive verbs. Moreover, as the speech data taken from thirty-two children revealed, progressives were the first active verbs in children speeches.

Past verbs: These categories of verbs had 23.78 mean coverage and the maximum count was 39 and the minimum 12. The common past verbs detected in children speeches were presented as follows.

Table 3. Verbs that demonstrate past action in children's speeches

Past verbs	Gloss	Past verbs	Gloss	Past verb	Gloss
mət'atʃ	She came	sət'ətʃat	She gave	aʃənəfu	They won
ajətʃ	She saw	dənəgət'tʃ	She was panicked	korəʃəmat	He crashed
wot'atʃ	She climbed	agəjətʃ	She found	korət'ə	He cut
asərətʃ	She tied	hedu	They went	tədəbək'ə	He hide
wafətʃw	She(it)lied to him	bəlluat	They ate her	təjɲa	He slept
wodəkətʃ	She fell down	t'ət'u	They drunk	wosədat	He took her
tədəbək'ətʃ	She hid	abarəruat	They chased her	ask'əmət'ə	He put
motətʃ	She died	t'əjək'at	He asked her		

Originally, a 3rd person male indicator past action verbs are the first dictionary words in Amharic language and the other category are derived from such root verbs. Due to this reason, these verbs had frequently manifestation in all children's speeches because children started learning with these verbs and they are the first input verbs in children perceptual lexicon. With the connection of this truth, next to progressives, past verbs had dominant occurrence. Children used these verbs as single utterances as they convey information about the subject, object, person, number, gender, and tense at the same time. For instance, the past verb /abarər-u-at/, was commonly found in each child's speech. when children tried to describe a picture 'what three cats did to catch a rat'. Some children used this verb as a single utterance like /abarər-u-at/ 'they chased her(it)' and others with over object like /ajt'ituan abarər-u-at/ 'they chased the rat' whereas, the remaining children used overt subject and object like /sotsu dimətʃ ajt'ituan abarər-u-at/ 'the three cats chased the rat'. Generally, these potentially inflected verbs were detected meaningfully in

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complete sentences without overt subject and object or they manifested commonly in SOV structured sentences. In sum, these verbs had the second leading position. The following extracts also illustrate how the other past verbs occurrence look like in children's speeches.

Example 2

1. /wot'a-tf/ (a verb serves as complete idea without over subject and object)
3rd.SIG.F PAST V(wot'a-tf) climbed /went out
Gloss: she (it) climbed / went out.
2. /zaf laj wot'atf/ (a past verb with complement stands as sentence)
N(zaf) tree +PP(laj)on+3rd.SIG.F.V(wot'a-tf) climbed/went out
Gloss: she (it) climbed up a tree.
3. /t'ot'awa zaf laj wot'atf/ (past verb with overt subject and complement)
DEF.3rd SIG.F.N.SUBJ(t'ot'a-wa)+ N(zaf) tree+PP(laj) on+3rd .SIG.F.PASTV(wot'atf)climbed
Gloss: The ape climbed a tree.
5. /t'ot'awa zaf laj wot'atf na muz bəllatf/(overt subject with compound past verbs and complements)
DEF.3rdSIG.F.N(t'ot'a-wa) the ape+N (zaf)tree+PP (laj)on+3rd.SIG.F.V(wot'atf)climbed /went out+
CONJ(na)and + OBJ (muz) banana+3RDSIG.F.V(bəlla-tf) ate .
Gloss: The ape climbed on a tree and ate banana.

As the examples indicated above , past verb appeared as single utterances like (1) and with complete (pp. Phrase like (2) and with overt subject in (3) and with a combination of two verbs (4). However , younger age (3;0-3;0) children used most of past verbs as single utterances, but the others used alternatively depending the point the wanted address.

Auxiliary verbs:-, such verbs had 21.09 mean coverage and the maximum count was 40 and the minimum 8. They were the third most prevalent verbs. Auxiliaries such as /nəw/, '(he)is', /nat/ '(she) is 'or /nətf/ '(she)is', /natəw/ '(they) are' and the past auxiliary form like /nəbər/ '(they) were', /nəbərə/ '(he)was' and /nəbərətf/ '(she)was' and modal auxiliary like /itʃlāləhu/ '(I) can' /titʃlālətf/ '(she) can 'were more salient types . Like adults, children were able to use these verbs as a linking or helping verbs as the example below illustrates

Example 3

- 1./and t'ot'j it nəbərətf/ (Auxiliary 'be' as a linking verb)
Number MOD.ADJ (and)one+DEF.3rd SIG.F.SUBJ (t'ot'j)it the ape +3rd SIG.F. AUX.V(nəbərə-tf) was.
Gloss:There was one ape. (From storytelling task)
- 2./sidəwol missa ijəbəllan nəbər/
3rd Sig M.GRD.V (sidəwol) while ringing+ OBJ (misa) lunch+1stPl.PRG.V (ijə-bəlla-n) eating+3rd
Sig.M.AUX (nəbər) was .
Gloss: While the bell ringing, we were eating (from elicitation)
- 3./ məs'əf itʃillaləhu /
INF.V(məs'əf) to write+1st SIG SUBJ.AUX.V.(i-tʃillalə-hu) I can
Gloss: I can write.(From elicitation)
- 4./wuha wust' nəw/
N.(wuha) water +PP(wust') inside+ AUX (nəw)is.
Gloss: It (he) is in the water (taken from picture description task)

As illustrated, children used auxiliary verbs as the rule of the language allows them. They used these verbs as a helping verb like sentence (2) and (3) and as a linking verb like (1) and (4). Moreover, when children were unable to remember the right expressive /descriptive words, they frequently preferred to use auxiliaries with demonstratives like / jɪtʃi nat/'this is (female)' /jɪhe nəw/ 'this is (male) and /inəzih nəbər/ 'here they were'. As a whole, auxiliary verbs had significant representation in each child's speech and most of the children's complete sentences were guided by these verbs.

Imperfective: as it was presented in above graph, imperfective verbs had 14.84 mean frequency and the maximum was 33 and the minimum 4 verbs. Most of the imperfect verbs were detected from children's elicitation mode tasks . During this session, the children were talking about what kind of activities they perform every day, at school and home and to express these events, they frequently used imperfective verbs as presented in the following table.

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Table 4. Imperfective verbs taken from children's speeches

Imperfective	Gloss	Imperfective	Gloss	Imperfective	Gloss
i-hedalləhu	I go to	at'naləhu	I study	ta-t'iballətʃ	She washes
i-sət'alləhu	I give	in-təjjalən	We sleep	ti-hedalətʃ	She goes
ji-tʃawətallu	They play	in-rot'alən	We run	ti-tʃ'ohalətʃ	She shouts
i-səralhu	I do	in-at'ənalən	We study	ti-k'ərs'ijjalətʃ	She sharpens
in-s'fallən	We write	in-tʃawətalən	We play	in-bəllalən	We eat
in-zəmrələn	We sing	t-astəmrələtʃ	She teaches	in-maralən	We learn
awolkaləhu	I put off	in-awəralən	We talk	ti-k'ot'anallətʃ	She angry at us

In addition, children used most of these verbs as a single word utterances as the following speech extracts taken from Child SMR shows.

Example 4

Sample extract

Teacher: /ibet sithedʒ min tisərialəʃ?/

N(bet) home+2nd SIG.F.V(sithedʒ) go +PRO (min) what+2nd SIG.IMPF.V (ti-sərialə-ʃ)

Gloss: What do you do when you go to the home?

SMR: /itʃ'awətaləhu/

1st.SIG IMPF. V(i-tʃ'awətal-əhu) play

Gloss: I play.

Teacher: /lella min tisərialəʃ?/

ADJ (lella) + PRO (min) what +2nd SIG.I IMPF.V (ti-sərialə-ʃ)

Gloss: What other things do you do?

SMR: /itəjjaləhu/

1stSIG.F. IMPF.V(i-təjjal-əhu) sleep

Gloss: I sleep.

Teacher: /lella minm atisərim?/

ADJ (lella)+ PRO.NEG (minm) + Neg.2ndSIG.IMPF.V(ati-sərim) not do.

Gloss: you do not do other things?

SMR: / at'ənaləhu/

1st Sig IMPF.V(a-(a-t'əna -ləhu) study

Gloss: I study.

Most of the imperfective verbs are derived from the root verbs by adding the derivational prefix /i-/ for 1st sig, /ji-/ for 2nd pl and 3rd sig. male /ti-/ 3rd Sig.Female and /in-/ 1st Plular person. However the common imperfectives, in most of the children's speeches, were the first person Sig, types. These verbs also manifested as single utterances as the above example indicated. Like other verbs, imperfectives are inflected for subject, object person, number, gender and tense. For example, the imperfect verb /ti-k'ərs'ijjalətʃ/ 'she sharpens it for me' was detected in most of the children's speeches and children tried to tell us what their teacher does when their pencils are broken. They all used a one verb utterance for more information about 3rd sig subject 'she', sig object 'pencil', and the 1st person prepositional object 'for me'. This designates that like adults, this age circle children were able to use morphologically developed imperfect verbs to express their idea or feeling.

Perfect verbs: the other category of verbs were perfective despite their limited occurrence, they were also seen in different children's speeches. The average size of these verbs was 14.24; the maximum count was 27, and the minimum 4 verbs. Perfective verbs, such as /t'əftual/ 'has gone out/switched off, /təjjatual/ 'he has slept' and /hedallətʃ/ 'she has gone' were detected from children's verbs inventory. In addition, /k'oməwual/ 'they have stood', /gəzitolatal/ 'he has bought her', /billual/ 'he has said' /jizual/ 'he has held', /wət't'allətʃ/ 'she has been out' were the other group of perfect verbs which were detected in some children speeches. Moreover, the perfect verbs like /tat'ibual/ 'it has been washed', /təsət'tual/ 'it has been hung out' and /adrigəwal/ 'they have done' were the recurrent verb types. Children's perfect verbs appeared like in sentence, /wufaw təjjatual/ 'The dog has slept', /ʃəmizotʃu tat'ibəwal/ 'The shirts has been washed' and /səwujəw k'oməwal/ 'The man has stood'. To sum up, perfectives were detected across age groups but they were not as frequent as past and progressive verbs and they were not also visible in some children's utterances.

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Infinitives: like /in-didərk'u./ 'to be dried', /ɪnt-diləbəsə/ 'to be dressed', /lə-tməzələ/ 'to jump' /li-tmot/ 'to die', /ligəddiləw/ 'to kill him', /lə-məmar/ 'to learn', /lə-məs'af/ 'to write' /lit-wodk/ 'to fail down (for female)' /litwot'a/ 'to climb' /li-k'əmmaw/ 'to snatch him', /lit-ak'ərəb/ 'to bring/serve', /lit-ak'fat/ 'to hug her' were samples infinitives taken from children's utterances. These verbs had a 10.66 average share, the maximum was 24, and the minimum was 3 words. The following sample sentences illustrates how the nature of infinitive verb in children's speeches.

Example 5

1. /tot'awa zaf laj li-twot'afəligga/
DEF.3rdSIG.N (tot'awa)+N(zaf) tree+PP (laj)+3rd SIG.INF.V(li-twot'a) to climb+ 3rd SIG.MAIN.V(fəligga) wants
Gloss: The ape wants to climb a tree.
2. /innatua li-takifat sitti wodəkətf/
3rdSIG.POSS.SUBJ.N (innat-ua) her mother + 3rd SIG.SUBJ & 3rdSIG. OBJ.V (li-takif-at)+3rd SIG GRD(si-ttil)+3rdsig.pas.V(wodəkə-tf) fell down.
Gloss: When her mother wants to hug, she fell down.
3. /jəlidzətuən lidət li-jakəbru nəbər/
DEF.3rd SIG.POSS.OBJ (jə-lidz-tua-n) the girl's + OBJ.N (lidət) birthday+ 3rd Pl. INF.V (li-jakəbr-u)
Gloss: They were to celebrate her birthday.

As the examples above indicated, the infinitives did not appear as single utterance in children's speeches; they were detected with the combination of different words in a complete sentences. Despite not frequent, infinitive forms were manifested in all children speeches and children were able to use in grammatically correct sentence types like the verbs observed in sentences 1,2,&3.

Imperatives:- These verbs had 8.34 average coverage from the total verb size, and their occurrence ranges from 17 words to 0. Some of the imperative verbs were listed as follows.

Table 5. Words, which represent imperative verbs

Imperative	Gloss	Imperatives	Gloss
amit't'a	bring	wusədzilɲ	take it from me
billa	eat	tənəsu	wake up/ stand up
sit't'at	give her	asajɲ	show me
tək'əmət'	sit down	tətʃ'awotu	play
təɲna	sleep	hidu	go
li-bbəs	get dressed	zimbəllu	keep quiet
Ask'əmmi't'	put it down	abisu	clean
rəffi	stop	məllisu	Turn back
atrəbbiʃ	don't disturb	s'afu	write

The imperative were mainly manifested when children were talking about their family and their teachers and the verbs were detected in children's connected speech like in the following sample sentences.

Example 6

Extracts

- 1./at'ina' sibbal 'at'ənaləhu'/
2nd SIG.M.IMPER(at'ina) study +1stSIG.GRND(si-bbal)+1st SIG.IMP(at'ənaləhu)
Gloss: When I am ordered to study, I study.
- 2./t'ərəten məlisu afen bədabo abbisu/
1st SIG.POSS.N(t'ərəten) my story+2nd PL IMPER (məlis-u) turn back+ 1stSIG .OBJ.N (afen) my mouth+ 3rd sig pp.N (bə-dabo) with bread +3rd PL.SUBJ.IMPER.V(abbis-u) clean(give)
Gloss: favored my story and bestow me something(all children)
- 3./Sinnrəbj Miss "zi-mmibəllu"tələnallətʃ/
1st PL.GRND.(sinnirəb-ʃ)disturb+(Miss) the teacher+2ndPL.IMPER.V(zi-mmibəllu) keep quiet+SIG.SUBJ.IMP (tələnallətʃ) says
Gloss: when we disturb Miss says ' keep quiet.

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Gerund had 8.19 average coverage and maximum count was 26 and the minimum zero.

Table 6. Examples of gerund verbs.

Gerund	Gloss	Gerund	Gloss
si-moku	While bathing (they)	tə-dəbbək'ə	Hiding (she)
si-bəllu	while eating (they)	ak'ifo	Hugging (she)
sirot'u	While running (they)	simola	While filling (it)
siwaggu	While fighting (they)	si-səbrəw	While cutting (he)
sijagənu	While getting (they)	si-wodku	While falling (they)
si-hed	While going (she)	si-mət't'u	While coming (they)
sittj'awot	Playing (she)	si-rəbjfu	While disturbing (they)

The above lists and other gerund verbs, which were not presented here, were found from elicitation modes. As researcher observation, during transcription, children used gerund to link or connect one idea to the next while narrating a story. As illustrated in the following examples.

Example 7

1. /dʒibu hodu *si-moll* wədə bet hedə/
 3rd SIG.M.N.SUBJ(dʒibu) hyena+ 3rd SIG.N.POSS.OBJ(hod-u) his stomach+ 3rd SIG.GRND.V(*si-moll*) *whil filled* + PP (wədə)to +N(bet) house+ 3rd SIG .M.PAST V(hedə) went.
 Gloss: while having full stomach,the hyena went to its home
2. /t'ot'it muz bəllita *si-tj'ərs* (zaf laj) wot'atj/
 3rd SIG .F.N.SUBJ (t'ot'it) the ape + SIG.N (muz) banana+3rd SIG F.GRNE V(bəllita) eating + 3rd SIG.F.GRND .V (*si-tj'ərs*) while finished+ SIG.N(zaf) tree+ PP (laj) on + 3rd SIG F.PAST V(wot'atj) climbed
 Gloss: she climbed (a tree) while finished eating.
- 3./ajit'jit *sit-hed* wədəkətj/
 3rd SIG.N SUBJ (ajit'jit) the rat+ 3rd SIG.F .SUBJ.GRND.V (sit-hed) while going+3rd SIG .F SUBJ.PAST V(wədəkət) fell down
 Gloss: while going , the rat fell down.

The above three sentences were taken from three children, and similar sentences production was also observed in others too and such verbs were manifested in connection with other verbs ,like the verb /si-molla/ 'having filled' /si-tj'ərs/ 'while finishing' and /sit-hed / 'while going as presented in sentences 1,2&3 respectively .

Passives: passives were the least in their occurrence and they had 4.59 coverage; the maximum count was 13, and the minimum zero. Passives, such as, /ik'otaləhu/ 'I am scolded ', /ji-ggəzal/ 'it is bought',/ta-siralətf/ 'she has been tied' /ta-t'ibual/ 'it has been washed' were the common passives taken from different children's speeches. Moreover, passive like /tə-səbrəw/ 'was broken' /tə-gəzalat/ 'it was bought for her'(in ELNT), /tə-sət'əw/ 'he was given' /tə-k'orrət'/ 'it was cut' /alk'k'ual/ 'it was finished / consumed (SMR from the last age group), and /tə-sək'ləw/, 'they are hung', /tə-məta/ 'he was beaten'(in SOL.M) were the other group of verbs. Although passives were seen across age groups, they did not have a significant representation. A case in point, four children from the first age group did not use passives in their entire speeches. Generally, the manifestation of passive was very limited in this study.

5. CONCLUSION

Verbs ,one of the largest group of lexicon, were composed of different functional categories in children's speech production. Progressive (31.69), past (23.78), and auxiliary verbs (21.09) were prominently visible respectively. They covered the highest portion of the total verb's size. Children frequently used progressive and auxiliary verbs during the picture description, whereas , past and imperfect verbs were more noticeable in storytelling and spontaneous speeches. This brought the frequency of these verbs greater than others did. Verbs like perfective (14.28) followed by infinitive (10.66), Jussive (imperative) (8.34) and gerund (8.19) had a fair share in the growth of children's verbs. but passive (4.59) was the least and it did not even see in some children's speeches. In general, verbs such as ,progressive , past and imperfective, and jussive /imperative/ appeared in children's speeches , as single utterances ,VP phrases and in sentences ;children were well aware of how to use these verbs in their speeches.

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On the other hand, children differed in their choice of verbs while describing things, expressing ideas, and narrating events. Some children used certain verbs repetitively but others were more selective and used various types and items. In this regard, older age children (4;5-5;0) had better performance and the choice in using different functional verbs. Likewise, the existence of different categories of verbs, as well as new items, was better described in girls' speeches than boys did. Moreover, the distribution of verbs in type and frequency indicated that this age circle children's verbs development and representation.

The frequent manifestation of progressives, past and auxiliary verbs may be an indication that these verbs were acquired prior to others even earlier than age three. Moreover, the existence of imperfect, perfect imperatives, gerunds, and passives in a respective manner highlighted the order of verbs acquisition and the rapid development of these verbs in child's language acquisition process. Generally, from the discussion made above, it can be possible to describe that, despite frequency difference, all categories of verbs except passives were significantly represented in all children's speeches with complex morphological inflections. Thus, aged between 3;0 and 5;0 years children were able to express ideas, actions and events with morphologically well-developed verbs even if the type of utterances they produce differed one from the other due to their functional age and individual variability. In sum, in this study, verbs were not treated with syntactic-prefaces but the occurrence of well inflected forms were a good indication to describe the early acquisition and rapid development of different categories in Amharic speaking children's speeches.

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