

## **Investigation of Acquisition of Oromo Inflectional Morphology in Typically Developing Children**



**Alemayehu Tafese**

Department of Linguistics, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

**ABSTRACT:** This research is aimed at investigating patterns of acquisition of Oromo inflectional morphology in typically developing children. The study specifically tries to look into the acquisition of some verbal inflections (tense and aspect) and nominal inflections (number and case). Although linguistic descriptions on various aspects of the Oromo language have extensively been done, there were no research available on the child language acquisition in Oromo in general and inflectional morphology acquisition in particular. The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from thirty children age range 3;0-7;11 years. The study employed primarily elicited production through picture naming method. The speech samples were transcribed first Oromo script and then phonetically transcribed using the IPA symbols. The results showed that some morphological processes attested in children's productions. In this process, the children employed substitution, and overextension strategy in naming the pictures. In addition, majority of the children omitted noun inflectional morphemes, even at the age 6 through 7. Furthermore, the omission of some inflectional morphemes on the locative case and progressive aspect morpheme were observed, but the lexical morphemes are retained for the latter two items. As to the two past and future tenses, almost all participants performed well. This implies the children acquired these tenses even before the age of 3;3. Evaluating the children's performance based on sex at the same age, the study revealed an insignificant difference among both sexes.

**KEYWORDS:** Acquisition, child language acquisition, inflectional morphology, Oromo

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The issue of Language acquisition is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development. It refers to the process by which children learn their language. Any of the world's languages are equally acquirable, but children need to be exposed to a language to learn that language (Lust, 2006). For over a century, people have been studying child language acquisition for various reasons, in various ways and at varying length. The fact that children acquire language without adults formally teaching them has been a mysterious matter for many scholars. Hence, this special endowment of nature poses a lot of questions that researchers have to address. In line with this idea, Lust (2006, p.3), for example, noted that, "Our developmental survey of language acquisition allows us to address several questions regarding language development, which researchers in many laboratories are actively pursuing".

The study of how children acquire language has its historical development. In this regard, Ingram (1989) says, "the field of child language acquisition is one that has gone through several changes over the years in both the methods and the theoretical orientation used" (P.7).

There have been various questions regarding language development that are pursued by different researchers. Lust (2006), for example, posed several questions, such as the following: what is it about the human mind that makes it possible to acquire language? Which aspects of the language program are biologically programmed? What specifically linguistic knowledge is evident at early periods? What underlies apparent differences between language acquisition in children and adults? How do children 'project' from the finite data to which they are exposed out to the knowledge of the grammar? Are there universal specific stages in the acquisition of sounds and structures of language? What determines the change in children's linguistic knowledge as they develop?

These questions have been investigated by researchers in different corners of the world on children from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, these topics are investigated in psycholinguistics as well as in other related scientific disciplines such as developmental psychology (Tatsumi, 2017). One of the most investigated topics in this area is the acquisition of inflectional morphology, i.e., focusing on how children learn various inflectional categories and individual inflected words differ substantially (Tatsumi, 2017). In this regard, Penke (2012, p.2) notes, "the acquisition of inflectional morphology has been a central topic in language acquisition research since the seminal works of Berko (1958), Cazden (1968), and Brown (1973) on the acquisition of English". Penke (2012), in support of this, stated that a lot of researches have been studying the acquisition of inflectional

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morphology in languages all over the world in the last 30 years. Nevertheless, as most of these studies have been conducted on European languages, little is known about children acquiring non-European languages (Lust, 2006).

On the other hand, there are different theories of language acquisition proposed over the years. In relation to this, some (for example, Akande, 2003) says that it is difficult to give a comprehensive overview of language acquisition theory and research because many scholars that have worked on it have taken different approaches and methodologies. Nonetheless, it is important to discuss some theories of language acquisition.

Over the past fifty years, three main theoretical positions have been advanced to explain language acquisition: Behaviourist, Nativist, and social-interactionist perspectives.

Behaviourism theory was dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, most closely associated with Skinner, originally known with Pavlov's well-known classical conditioning experiments with dogs (Tavakoli, 2012). Skinner argued that children are conditioned by their environment to respond to certain stimuli with language. According to Skinner, language is also shaped through operant conditioning or reinforcement. For example, when we respond to a baby's babbling with a smile or some vocalization of our own, babies babble even more. The theory disregards the existence of any internal processes that might be responsible for these changes and the child is viewed only as a passive object receiving input (Zahradníková, 2011).

The other theory Nativist theory /approach/ is one of the principal theories of children's acquisition. It is originated as a direct antipode to behaviorism in the late 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and dominated the field until the last decade (Mashhadi, 2012). It is associated with Noam Chomsky who developed the theory that all humans are born with an innate capacity and a knowledge system specifically designed for language and language acquisition (Tavakoli, 2012; Cruz, 2015). According to this theory, children rely on certain innate structures and mechanisms to acquire language (Clark, 2009). The theory proposes that speakers have a universal grammar (UG) of their language (Cruz, 2015), which is an innate linguistic knowledge that constrains the shape of the particular language system being acquired.

Still there is another theory termed as interactionism, interactionist position, social-interactionist theory, and developmental perspective. The theory is an explanation of language development emphasizing the role of social interaction between the developing child and adults. It is based on Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, and made prominent in the Western world by Bruner, who is the other influential researcher who elaborated and revised the details of the theory over a number of years and also introduced the term 'Language Acquisition Support System' (LASS), (Buckley, 2003). The theory proposes that the child's biological readiness to learn language interacts with the child's experiences with language in the environment to bring about the child's language development. Sibanda (2014, P.73) also explicates, "Despite the child being biologically designed to acquire language, constraints determine the linguistic aspects that develop at any given period that are at play in child language acquisition come from the mental capacity, physical maturity and input from the environment".

From this suggestion, it can be discerned that the interactionist theory incorporates aspects of both behaviourism and Nativism. Furthermore, there was a theory known as cognitive theory developed at the beginning of the 1920s by Jean Piaget, who is famous for his four stages of cognitive development for children, which included the development of language. According to Piaget, language is both a social and a cognitive phenomenon which implies that language acquisition is thus dependent upon cognitive development. For cognitivists, there are no special places in the mind for language, math, or any other knowledge system. This view ignores the interaction of the child and the environment, which are crucial in the process of language acquisition.

In the process of language acquisition some morphological processes are occurred. Morphological process is whereby grammatical or lexical information is added to a stem to create new pertinent form. A speaker of any language has the ability to use words and build an infinite number of phrases when communicating with others which is one of the most remarkable accomplishments that children develop (Jackendoff, 2006). In this regard, Morales (2014) noted typically developing children successfully acquire their L1 and achieve adult-like mastery relatively easily naturally from the input they receive from their parents and the community where the child is raised. But, this journey and speed to reach this level may vary from children to children.

Previous studies on child language acquisition, have reported that there is variability in children's acquisition rate and routes but the developmental steps of these children coincide and the children apply similar strategies (Anne, 2015). Ann further elaborated that children were found to pass through a similar acquisition process and produce the same systematic errors, based on overgeneralizations or structure simplifications. Sultana (2015) supports this position when he says, "young typically developing children's productions of verbal inflections is characterized by omission of obligatory tense markers on verbs, failure to mark agreement on verbs correctly, or substitution of incorrect verb forms for target verb forms" (p.2). Generally, in the process of language acquisition some morphological processes such as substitution, deletion, overgeneralization, etc takes place. Substitution is an error in which the child replaces one item by another at a particular place in a structure (Crystal, 2008). Omission is one of the morphological processes whereby the absence of an element that its presence is necessary for the grammaticality of the structure (Al-Saidat, 2012). Overgeneralization can be termed as the extension of a rule or linguistic form to domains where it is not

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appropriate (VanPatten & Benati, 2010; Al-Baldawi, 2011). The earliest overgeneralization errors occur when a child extends a particular word to other referents that share some visual or conceptual similarity (Ambridge et al., 2012).

### 2. THE CURRENT STUDY

There is a consensus among scholars that there is a range of differences in terms of approach and focus among the studies already conducted on child language acquisition. Despite this fact, language acquisition research is important because both second language research and second language teaching have been influenced by changes in our understanding of how children acquire their first language. To show the importance of this issue, in Ethiopia, only few studies are available in the field of language acquisition. These are a study on Amharic-speaking children by Abebayehu (2013); a PhD dissertation on the Acquisition of Oromo Phonology by Tariku (2019) and an MA thesis on Sidamu Afoo by Demeke (2015). Apart from these attempts, to the best of author's knowledge, no other work on the acquisition of Ethiopian languages could be found<sup>1</sup> on any of Ethiopian languages, including Oromo. This calls for studies on acquisition of various aspects of some Ethiopian languages. Along the same line, it is important to study how children learning Oromo as first language acquire various aspects of the language. This study therefore aimed to describe and document patterns of the acquisition of inflectional morphology by children learning Oromo.

The study in effect will fill the knowledge gap that exists on the topic, particularly in Ethiopia context. This would also be a contribution to cross-linguistic analysis of patterns of language acquisitions. To this end, the study devoted to the following research questions:

- What strategies do the children employ when they learn morphemes difficult to master at their age?
- What are the children's percentages of correct morphemes productions at different ages?
- What language patterns are observed in the acquisition of inflectional morphology in these children in age and gender?

### 3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

#### 3.1. Research design

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional research design to document and describe the status of morphological acquisition of the thirty Oromo-speaking children, aged between 3; 0 and 7; 11. By taking a cross-sectional design, the study aimed at comparing findings across the group at a single point in time and examining how much the children differ in acquiring various morphemes. The data used in this study have been collected in two phases (phase I and II)<sup>2</sup>.

#### 3.2. Setting and participants

The children were all from East Wollega Zone, Guto Gida Woreda (Nekemte and its surrounding). These children were attending Gadisa Mati and Ask Kindergartens and reached at their homes. All of them live with both parents. This study used a purposive sampling method to select the participants of the study. This technique was used with an assumption of it allows the researcher obtain the required data to be used for the study. Accordingly, the speech samples were obtained from an equal number of male and female subjects; 30 children (15 males and 15 females) aged between 3; 0 and 7; 11 years.

#### 3.3. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study primarily employed elicitation, using picture naming tasks and different elicitation questions. In this method the child is shown a picture and asked to name and describe it which is useful for eliciting individual words to determine a child's grammatical knowledge (Ingram, 1989). This implies that the researcher has to devise any suitable method to collect the required data. Following this some tasks have been designed to elicit children's productive language performance. These include structured interviews intending (for example, Ma:l arga:ɔjirta?/ 'What do you see in the picture?'). For the elicitation purposes, picture naming tasks, using familiar objects (such as mule and mules, student and students, etc) were used in order to examine if the required inflections (such as singular and plural marking morphemes) are used by the children at various ages. Similarly, in order to generate present progressive marker morpheme, children were shown some familiar pictures such as 'going', 'giving', 'reading' etc., and the children were asked what those characters were doing in the pictures.

The researcher also designed another elicitation tasks used to ask the participants to describe some of their daily routines. Day-to-day activities such as /hinrafe/ 'he slept' and /hinpa:te/ 'he ate' for past tense and /hinrafa/ 'he will sleep' and hinpa:ta 'he will eat' for future tense. This task was aimed at checking whether past and future tenses marker morphemes were acquired or not at various ages.

The process of data collection was carried out using audio and video recordings. After the utterances have been recorded, the researcher transcribed the recordings first orthographically (using Oromo script); and then using International Phonetic Alphabet

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<sup>1</sup> However, various linguistic studies have been conducted on Oromo, describing different aspects (phonology, morphology, and grammar, etc) of the language.

<sup>2</sup> The second phase data collection was done based on examiners comment before the oral defense.

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(IPA). Having collected and transcribed the data, the next important stage was data analysis. To analyze the collected data, a descriptive method was used. Based on this, the study compared the responses of children of different ages and of both genders of the same age under investigation. The analysis of the collected data was done by breaking down children's words in order to separate morphemes, because the morpheme is the focus of this study. For this purpose, language technology software packages Audacity and ELAN have utilized to filter out, edit, annotate, translate, and transcribe the utterances of the children. The analysis employed examination of each child's production separately, followed by relational analysis, which reflects how closely a child's production matches the target adult language. The analysis of the data was first done by identifying differences of realizations, from the target productions, i.e., assessing whether a child's production matched a target adult model or not. Then, percentages of target-like and non-target-like responses (correct and incorrect responses) were calculated. Moreover, descriptions of errors types (e.g., overextension and omissions) were made.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, an attempt was made to identify the acquisition of Oromo inflectional morphology in typically developing children. To do this, two lexical categories; nominal and verb inflection were the target of this research.

#### a. Inflection of nominals for number (pluralization)

At first, the acquisition of plural noun was examined based on the data produced by the children of this study. This was based on picture naming and description tasks. Accordingly, some familiar pictures such as /nama/ 'man', /barata:/ 'student', /ga:nge:/ 'mule', /sare:/ 'dog', /sa'a/ 'cow', /dʒabbi:/ 'calf', and /harre:/ 'donkey' and their plural counterparts /namo:ta/ 'men', /baratto:ta/ 'students', /ga:ngoli:-ota/ 'mules', /saro:ta/ 'dogs', /sa:wwan/ 'cows', /dʒabbi:le:-o:ta/ 'calves', and /harro:ta/ 'donkeys' have been used. Table1 below presents summary of the results of the children's productions in this case.

**Table 1: Results of the children's productions in picture naming and pluralization tasks.**

s/no.	Number	Target		Correctly produced	%	Incorrectly produced	%
		Item asked	Gloss				
Result of Phase I data							
1.	SG	/ga:nge:/	'mule'	0	0	20	100
2.	PL	/ga:ngoli:-ota/	'mules'	0	0	20	100
3.	SG	/nama/	'man'	16	80	4	20
4.	PL	/namo:ta/	'men'	4	20	16	80
Result of Phase II data							
7.	SG	/sa'a/	cow	3	30	7	70
8.	PL	/sa:wwan/	cows	6	60	4	40
9.	SG	/dʒabbi:/	calf	7	70	3	30
10.	PL	/dʒabbi:le:-o:ta/	calves	2	20	8	80
11.	SG	/sare: /	dog	10	100	0	0
12.	PL	/saro:ta /	dogs	6	60	4	40
13.	SG	/harre: /	donkey	10	100	0	0
14.	PL	/harro:ta /	donkeys	5	50	5	50
15.	SG	/barata:/	student	10	100	0	0
16.	PL	/baratto:ta /	students	8	80	2	20

The results obtained from phase I data revealed that, all of the children (20) responded incorrect naming (/farda/ 'horse' instead of /ga:nge:/, 'mule'). In this process, the children employed overgeneralization or overextension strategy in naming the picture. This, according to (Ambridge, *et al.*, 2013), is one of the earliest errors that occur when a child extends a particular word to other referents (e.g., doggie to all animals) that share some visual or conceptual similarity. In other option, had it been the substitution of 'horse' instead of 'mules' acceptable, the plural form of /farda/ 'horse', should have been /farde:n/, 'horses', but the children produced /farda/, a singular form of the noun without pluralizer morpheme /-e:n/.

Moreover, four children produced an unrelated answer (har:e:, 'donkey' and re:tti:, 'goat') for similar picture. This type of realization could be the result of problem of cognitive development in children. Which means, the use of /ga:nge:/or ga:ngoli:/ depends on the children's understanding of the concepts they represent. In this particular task, all children omitted the pluralizer morpheme /-oli:/ required. Here, the children employed omission strategy, which is one of the morphological processes seen in child language acquisition. In this regard, (Sibanda, 2006:26) noted 'a child may wish to say 'cats', but only has 'cat' in her vocabulary. If the child hears 'cats', s/he will identify it as a single form that expresses the plural of 'cat' and is stored as such'. Similarly, Ingram

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(1989) points out that there are semantic mismatches in production in English speaking child; where the child expresses an incomplete meaning, e.g. saying ‘dog’ to mean ‘dogs’. This type of semantic mismatch in children’s production is overextension strategy, which is also the other morphological process observed in child language acquisition.

On the other hand, when asked to name the picture of /nama/, ‘man’ ,SG, and add the pluralizer morpheme /-o:ta/ and change to /namo:ta/ ‘men’, only four children labeled correctly and supplied the pluralizer morpheme /-o:ta/ for the other pictures /barata:/ ‘student’ and changed to /baratto:ta/, ‘students’. On the other hand, 12 children (60%) labeled correctly the picture, but omitted the pluralizer morpheme /-o:ta/. In this regard, some previous researches (e.g., Brown, 1973; Radford, 1990) also shown that in the early stages of child language acquisition, children frequently omit nominal inflection in their production. Here the children acquired the concept but did not supply the required pluralizer morpheme. In relation to this, Brown (1973) provides supporting evidence that grammatical morphemes could not be acquired before content words. Depending on the result of this study, the present researcher predicts that, content words are acquired before any other morpheme. Still four children could not label anything; they kept silent. What is observed in these children’s production could be the result of problem of concept formation.

On the other hand, in the second phase of data collection, recruiting different children, and using different tasks presented to those children, the result obtained differs greatly. Accordingly, three types of pluralizer morphemes /-wwan/, -le: and -o:ta/ have been tested. Consequently, of the total 10 children participated, 6 children (60%) correctly labeled the pictures and supplied correctly the pluralizer morpheme /-wwan/, 40% of them correctly labeled the pictures, but did not supply the morpheme correctly. In the case of /-le:/ morpheme only 2 (20%) of the children supplied the morpheme correctly, while 8 (80%) of them did not supply this morpheme /-le:/ correctly. With regards to morpheme /-o:ta/ supplience, 63.4% of the children supplied the morpheme correctly, whilst 36% of them did not supply this morpheme. Of the three morphemes (-wwan, -le: and -o:ta), morpheme /-le:/ seems problematic, for 80% of the children did not supply this morpheme. The second morpheme not supplied correctly by these children was /-o:ta/. The combined result of the two phases in the acquisition of nominal for number, majority of the children (above 50%) did not supply the pluralizer morphemes used to mark plural number for nominals.

In sum, in this specific study, a high percentage of omission error was observed in the acquisition of inflection of noun for number (plural), even for older children, of age 7. This shows that the pluralizing morphemes are late-acquired in Oromoo-speaking children. This goes with the constructivist approach to language acquisition, which assumes children attain adult-like competence much later, and only gradually. This indicates that the child has to be matured beyond this age in order to supply the plural marker morphemes (suffixes) properly where required. Argus (2007) provides supporting evidence that “the child does not acquire the entire inflectional morphological system at once, but it begins with the core and acquires first and foremost the most frequent and important forms” (p.22).

### b. Acquisition of locative case

In Oromo, locative case is marked by the preposition /gara/ and suffix /-tti/ and /irra/. Based on this, the result of productions of the children in the two phases data is summarized in the next table.

**Table 2:** Summary of children’s acquisition of locative case (phase I and II data)

s/no	Target		Correctly produced	%	incorrectly produced	%
	Item asked	Gloss				
Result of Phase I data						
1	gara mana:tti	Towards home	6	30	14	70
Result of Phase II data						
2	waraqatarra	On the paper	8	80	2	20

The result of the first phase data revealed that, out of the total of the 20 children, only 6 (30%) of them supplied the correct morpheme (-tti), while 14 (70%) of them did not supply this morpheme. Though further investigation is needed, the morpheme is late-acquired in increasing in age after 7. In contrast, different realization is observed in the second phase data. That is, of the total of 10 children, majority of them 8 (80%) supplied the morpheme /-rra/³ correctly, while only 2 (20%) of the children did not supply the morpheme correctly. This indicates that morpheme /-rra/, is easier and could be acquired around 3; 0 years of the age.

### c. Acquisition of progressive aspect

Under this sub-section, the results of the realizations of progressive aspect have been presented for each child. In Oromo progressive aspect is marked by the preposition /-a:/. For this purpose, some verbs (such as, /tap’atfa:/ ‘playing’, /ta:’a:/ ‘sitting’/ba:tftja:/

³ /-i-/ was deleted from /irra/ by the processes of vowel deletion rule of Oromo in word boundary.

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carrying, /k'aba:/ 'catching' or 'carrying', /de:ma:/ 'going', /dubbisa:/ 'reading', /ja:tfa:/ 'eating', /wal dubbisa:/ 'greeting each other', /gala:/ 'going', /ken:a:/ 'giving', /?o:f-a:/ 'driving'). For this effect, some pictures have been used. Accordingly, the summary of children's productions has been presented in the next table 3.

**Table 3:** Summary of children's acquisition of progressive aspect (phase I and II data)

s/no	# of correct productions	%	# of incorrectly productions	%
Result of Phase I data				
1	44	73.3	16	26.6
Result of Phase II data				
2	20	100	0	0

As can be seen from this table 3, the results of this study (phase I) revealed that the majority of the children (including the younger ones, of age 3; 8, 3; 9), 44 (73.3%) supplied the present progressive morpheme /-a:/ correctly in all instances. Contrary to this, three children did not supply the progressive marker morpheme for the words presented to them. These children substituted simple present tense or future tense morpheme {-u} of Oromo, instead of the required morpheme {-a:}. Here, the children applied substitution strategy, which is one of the morphological processes, which could be attested in the process of child language acquisition. Yet two children realized partly correct and partly incorrect. This means that there is inconsistency in supplying the correct progressive aspect marker morpheme. The case of this inconsistency could be the problem of concept formation in these children. On the other hand, the result of the second phase data reveals all children supplied the required progressive aspect marker /-a: / in all instances. Generally, though detailed and further investigation is needed, the acquisition of progressive is not this much problematic for acquisition and could be acquired around the age of 4 years.

### d. Acquisition of past tense

To see the status of realization of past tense, two verbs /ja:t-/ 'ate' and /barre:ss-/ 'wrote' were utilized. Hence, in the next table, the result of productions of conjugations of these verbs for 1SG, 3SGM, and 3SGF by each child have been indicated. These verbs are selected for they are representative of children's real-life daily activities and language use.

**Table 4:** Summary of children's acquisition of past tense

s/no	# of correct productions	%	# of incorrectly productions	%
Result of Phase I data				
1	54	90	6	10
Result of Phase II data				
2	20	100	0	0

As table 4 depicts, except two, all the children supplied the past tense marker morpheme correctly. This indicates that the morpheme is not problematic for the children. This could be, the researcher assumes, due to the occurrence of the past tense marker morpheme occurs in daily language use widely in many action verbs. This implies, the past tense marker morpheme could be acquired even before age 3;3.

### e. Acquisition of future tense

This section examined the future tense morpheme production of the 20 children. To see the status of production of future tense, two verb /ja:t-/ 'eat' and /raf-/ 'sleep' have been employed. These verbs are selected for they are representative of children's real-life daily activities and language use. Accordingly, the result of productions of conjugations of these verbs for 1SG, 3SGM, and 3SGF revealed that, except one child (BEOP, aged, 3; 5, substituted past tense marker for future tense marker), all the children, including participants of age 3; 0, supplied the correct future tense marker morphemes. Similar results have been observed in the phase II data, too. This indicates that, even though further investigation is required, this morphemes are easier and could be acquired before (age 3; 0).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The main objective of this research was to describe and document the acquisition of inflectional morphology, particularly for verbs and nouns, of typically developing Oromo-speaking children between the ages of 3; 0-7;11. Accordingly, acquisition of plural noun, acquisition of locative case, acquisition of progressive aspect and acquisition of past and future tense have been considered.

Consequently, the findings of phase I data collection in the acquisition of plural formation revealed that very few children correctly supplied the required morphemes. Here, the children employed one of the morphological processes known as omission strategy. In addition, the result of this study revealed that most of the children employed overextension strategy (an error where, in early

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acquisition a child denotes different things with a single label not used by adults). On the other hand, from the data gathered in phase II, majority of the children correctly supplied the targeted morphemes. Furthermore, in the acquisition of locative case, in phase I data collections, majority of the children did not correctly supply the required locative marker morpheme. In this process the children employed again omission strategy. To the contrary, the result of phase II data revealed that, all children (except one child) have correctly supplied the required morphemes. In terms of the result of the progressive aspect, different productions have been observed in phase I and phase II. Consequently, in the phase I data collection, majority of the children correctly supplied the morphemes. In phase II data collection, all the children have correctly supplied the morpheme. Regarding the tenses (future and past) the data revealed that, almost all the children from both phases I and Phase II have correctly supplied the required morphemes. Based on the data observed in this particular study, the present researcher assumed that, the children acquired these tenses before the ages of 3; 3 years.

Generally, the findings this study revealed that there are individual differences between the children and between different types of inflections. The error patterns identified in this study were errors of overextension, errors omission and errors of substitution. Based on the findings of the present study, future investigations should attempt to address the following issues. The study found out that there was a gap in the mastery of the inflectional morphemes by the children. As one of the early researches on Oromo, the present study could not include all of the important linguistic aspects of Oromo. This is to say, since the study was carried out using small number of data collected over a short period time, few aspects of language discussed and small number of children used, the study could lack comprehensiveness. This means, though the results shed light on some aspects of morphological acquisition in Oromo, the researcher has reservation that the findings of this study could be used to formulate rules of acquisition in the language. Consequently, the researcher recommends further research is needed in the future to fill this gap.

A comparative research of child language of Oromo is important because it has a potential to fill some empirical and theoretical gaps. Whereas this research focused on the acquisition of inflectional morphology in general and verb and nominal inflectional morphology in particular, future research is needed to investigate the development of other linguistic aspects such as derivational morphology, morphosyntax, morphophonology, and syntax. In addition, extensive natural and experimental data collection and analysis is recommended to enrich the body of knowledge in the field of child language acquisition in general and language acquisition in Oromo in particular.

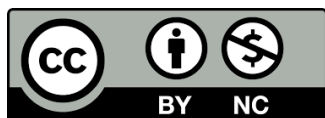
Finally, it is recommended that a large sample of children should be used in a study of this nature to allow for greater representation and accuracy of results. It is further recommended that future researchers consider widening the upper and lower age limits, because as observed in this study, some morphemes found to be acquired before age 3;3 and other were not acquired even after age 7;5. It would also be beneficial to increase the size of the speech sample of words to be investigated.

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