

The acquisition of Dutch verbal and adjectival inflection

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Focus of this talk

Learning inflectional
rules in Dutch.

Attributive adjectives are marked by **-e**.

DP	Example
[-def; +common; -plur]	Een rode appel 'a red apple'
[+def; +common; -plur]	De rode appel 'the red apple'
[+def; -common; -plur]	Het rode huis 'the red house'
[-def; +plur]	Rode appels/huizen 'red apples/houses'
[+def; +plur]	De rode appels/huizen 'the red apples/houses'

BUT

the attributive adjective is bare if the
DP is

[-definite; -common; -plural]

EEN ROOD HUIS/*RODE HUIS

'a red house'

Salient vs non-salient

- ◆ **Salient**: features have an overt morpho-phonological, morpho-syntactic or semantic marking in the input, e.g. Number in Dutch.
- ◆ **Non-salient**: features have no overt morpho-phonological, morpho-syntactic or semantic marking in the input, e.g. Gender in Dutch.

(cf. Pinker, 1984; Slobin, 1977; Karmiloff-Smith, 1979)

Observation (verbal inflection)

Inflection in languages with the most saliently organized verb systems (e.g. Finnish or Russian) is detected and (re)constructed earlier than inflection in languages with less saliently organized verb systems (e.g. Dutch, German or English).

(Bittner, Dressler & Kilani-Schoch, 2003, xxvi)

Claim

Salient characteristics of the input influence the speed of the acquisition of inflection rules.

Linguistic comparison

◆ Verbal paradigm

- Number [±plural] *salient*
- Person [±speaker] *salient*

◆ Adjectival paradigm

- Number [±plural] *salient*
- Definiteness [±definite] *salient*
- Gender [±common] *non-salient*

Dutch children/overview

Age range (yrs; mos)	N subjects in verbal task	N subjects in adjectival task
3;3 – 3;11	12	7
4;1 – 4;11	12	17
5;3 – 5;11	12	15
6;0 – 6;8	10	11
7;0 – 7;11	not tested	14

Paradigm/regular lexical verbs *drinken* 'to drink'

Condition	Example	Stem + suffix
1sg	drink	stem + Ø
2sg	drinkt	stem + t
3sg	drinkt	stem + t
1pl	drinken	stem + en
2pl	drinken	stem + en
3pl	drinken	stem + en

Verbs/Test material and tasks

- ◆ 2 existing and 2 nonsense verbs
- ◆ Elicitation tasks
- ◆ Sentence completion task (3sg, 3pl)
- ◆ Situation description (1sg, 2sg)

Nonsense verbs/accuracy in 3sg/3pl

suffix	-t	-en
context	[-plur; -speaker]	[+plur; -speaker]
	3sg	3pl
3 yrs	100% 12/12	92% 11/12
4 yrs	100% 19/19	95% 20/21
5 yrs	100% 21/21	100% 21/21
6 yrs	100% 18/18	100% 16/16

Nonsense verbs/accuracy in 1sg and 2sg

suffix	-t	-∅
context	[-plur; -speaker]	[-plur; +speaker]
	2sg	1sg
3 yrs	100% 15/15	69% 11/16
4 yrs	100% 21/21	94% 16/17
5 yrs	91% 20/22	100% 22/22
6 yrs	100% 18/18	100% 16/16

Two competing systems

SYSTEM 1

(non-target)

Singular	Plural
-t	-en

SYSTEM 2

(target)

Singular		Plural
1	-∅	-en
2/3	-t	

Summary results/verbs

- ◆ 90% acquisition criterium is reached in all groups for all conditions except for 1sg in 3-year-olds.
- ◆ Some of the 3-yr-olds slightly lag behind in the acquisition of the feature [\pm speaker].
- ◆ Claim confirmed: saliency facilitates the accurate use of rules for verbal inflection from early on.

Adjectives/Test material and tasks

- ◆ 5 common and 5 neuter root nouns
- ◆ 5 diminutives (neuter gender/morpho-phonological cue, i.e. suffix *-tje*)
- ◆ 2 pairs of contrastive adjectives
- ◆ Elicitation task/sentence completion

Results adjectives/accuracy

suffix	-e		-e	
DP	[+def; -plur; -com]		[+def; -plur; +com]	
3 yrs	100%	14/14	100%	6/6
4 yrs	98%	43/44	100%	48/48
5 yrs	100%	42/42	100%	44/44
6 yrs	96%	44/46	100%	43/43
7 yrs	100%	52/52	98%	53/54

Results adjectives/accuracy

suffix	-e	
DP	[+plural; ±definite]	
3 yrs	100%	18/18
4 yrs	100%	50/50
5 yrs	100%	45/45
6 yrs	94%	49/52
7 yrs	100%	60/60

Results adjectives/accuracy

suffix	-∅		-e	
DP	[-def; -plur; -com]		[-def; -plur; +com]	
3 yrs	16%	3/19	100%	16/16
4 yrs	46%	18/39	100%	49/49
5 yrs	70%	31/44	100%	45/45
6 yrs	64%	34/53	100%	49/49
7 yrs	75%	45/60	100%	62/62

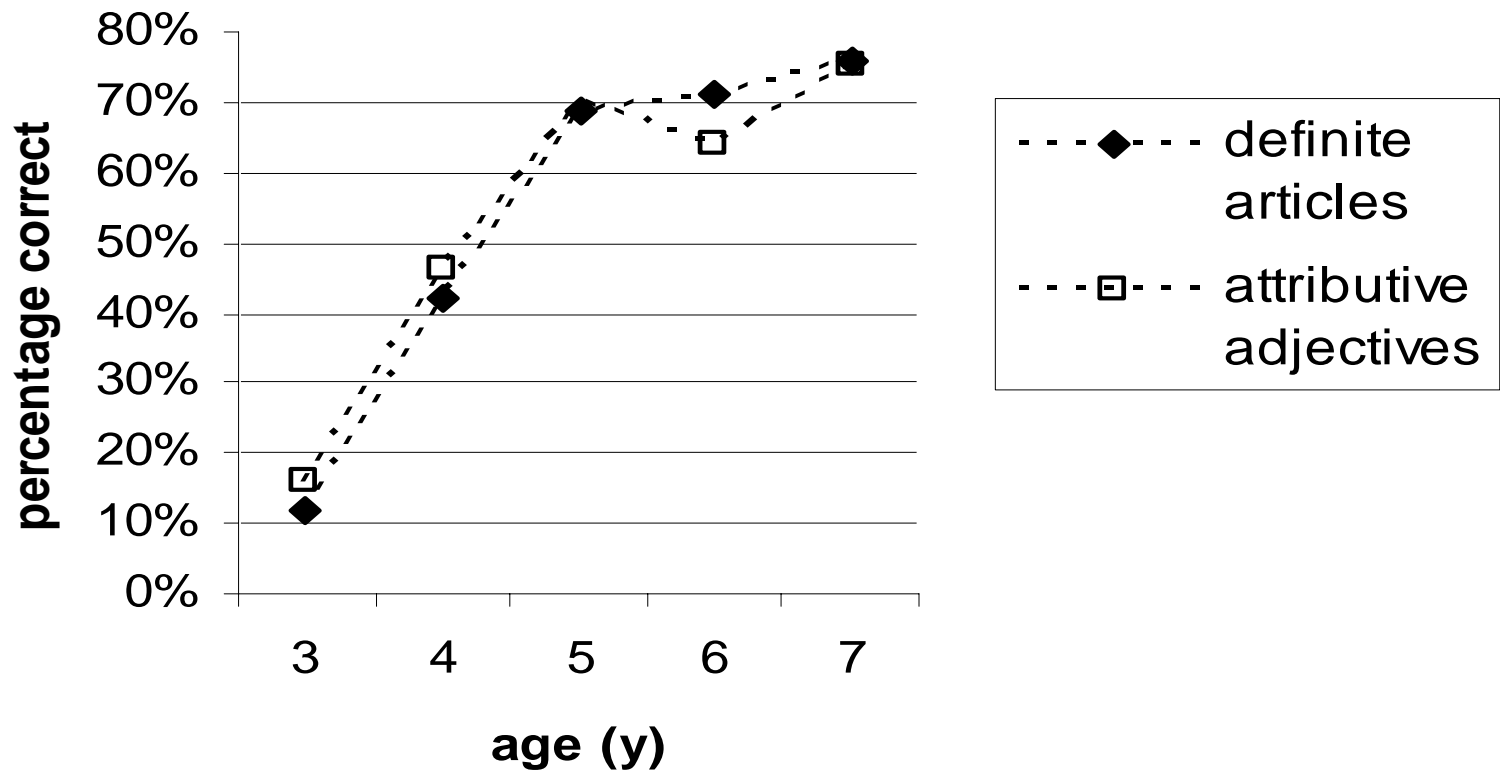
Surface forms and underlying rules

Adjectival suffix	Gender attribution by children (definite determiner test)	
	het [-common]	de [+common]
-e [+common]	inconsistent	consistent
-∅ [-common]	consistent	inconsistent

Consistency analysis

gender by children (determiner test)	-common	+common
suffix (adjectival test)	-∅ (consistent)	-e (consistent)
3 yrs	66% 4/6	93% 26/28
4 yrs	86% 24/28	97% 74/76
5 yrs	80% 32/40	100% 41/41
6 yrs	85% 45/53	100% 47/47
7 yrs	87,5% 64/73	94% 59/63

Development neuter gender monolingual children



Summary results/adjectives

- ◆ From early on, children perform target-like in conditions which require $-e$.
- ◆ In the 'exceptional' condition, children are at first sight non-target-like due to late acquisition of gender.
- ◆ Children acquire the inflectional rules early. The growth of neuter nouns is a long-lasting process.

Conclusion

- Claim not confirmed: inflectional rules are acquired early in development even if features are not morpho-phonologically, morpho-syntactically or semantically salient.

References

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Thank you!

Slides available at:
<http://home.hum.uva.nl/variflex/>

[-def]

[-common]

[-plural]



+tje

Consistency analysis/root nouns

gender by children (determiner test)	-common		+common	
suffix (adjectival test)	-∅ (consistent)		-e (consistent)	
3 yrs	0%	0/2	100%	26/26
4 yrs	81%	13/16	100%	73/73
5 yrs	71%	15/21	100%	41/41
6 yrs	82%	28/34	100%	47/47
7 yrs	84%	31/37	95%	59/62