

## **Conjunctions, Comparatives, Quotatives and Conditional Clauses in Malayalam Speaking Children with Intellectual Disability**

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### **Introduction**

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) in 2009 defines Intellectual disability (ID) as a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) in 2012 supported the change from “Mental Retardation” to “Intellectual Disability.” ASHA recommended the elimination of classification by IQ and severity level and recommended to use of the AAIDD definition of Intellectual Disability. ASHA strongly urges the use of the term Intellectual Disability in the DSM-V, which would be consistent with the AAIDD definition.

Unlike Typically Developing (TD) children, the development of language does not occur as expected in Children with Intellectual Disability (CWID). It is generally accepted that in CWID, speech and language development is delayed when compared to TD children. This delay hypothesis suggests that developmental sequence of speech and language is similar and the factors underlying are similar. It is observed that CWID have lower ceiling of speech and language as compared to TD children. Subbarao (1995) has confirmed the delay hypothesis, and reported certain syntactic deviance as compared to TD children. Short sentence length, deficits in verb

types, tense limitations and absent syntactic structures in conjunctions/predicate types etc. were also noted in that study. Language delays are evident in both areas of comprehension and expression. He has further noted that there is a set of bigger deficits in syntactic area, as compared to phonological and semantic aspects.

Syntax has an important role in reading, writing and conversation. The parameters of syntax include i. Morphophonemic-structures, ii. Plurals, iii. Tenses, iv. PNG markers, v. Case markers, vi. Transitives, Intransitives and causatives, vii. Sentence Types, viii Conjunctions, Comparatives and Quotatives, ix. Conditional Clauses and x. Participle Constructions. The present study assesses acquisition of selected syntactic structures in CWID, enabling the speech language pathologist (SLP) for a focused engagement in accurate language assessment, goal setting for intervention and monitoring therapy progress.

### **Aim of the Study**

The present study focused primarily on obtaining selected syntactic structures/parameters in spontaneous language samples of CWID following the previous research of Subbarao (1995) and using an adapted form of Language Assessment, Remediation and Screening Procedure [LARSP] (Crystal, et al., 1976 and 1989) in Malayalam speaking children with CWID in the MA ranges of 4 - 5 and 5 - 6 years with the objectives of:

Analyzing their expression data on:

1. Conjunctions, Comparatives, Quotatives and
2. Conditional clauses.

### **Participants in the Study With Inclusive and Exclusive Criteria**

Participants included 60 CWID in the age range of 4-6 years Mental age, subdivided as group I (4-5 years MA) and group II (5-6 years MA) who were attending special schools in Kerala. All the children used Malayalam as their major communication medium. A few English words and code mixing were common in these children. All the children selected for the study had no further handicap or illness and were able to participate in play and conversation with others. Standardized language tests were not yet available to assess the language age in children in addition to MA. Gender comparison, percentage and severity of the deficits were excluded.

### **Stimuli Used**

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Dr. Vini Abhijith Gupta, Ph.D. and Dr. T. A. Subbarao, Ph.D.

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Selected conjunctions, Comparatives, Quotatives and Conditional clauses were taken from Malayalam – descriptive grammar ( Asher & Kumari; 2013), Grammar of Malayalam (Nair 2012)

### Data Collection and Analysis

The focus of this study was an analysis of their syntax structures, namely Conjunctions, Comparatives, Quotatives and Conditional Clauses. The general guidelines provided by the LARSP (Crystal et al., 1976 and 1989) were used for transcription of the sample and analysis of the response patterns. LARSP was developed as a single procedure integrating the clinical operations of screening, assessment, and remediation in the area of grammar. It is based on a description of English grammar. Modifications and adaptations of these guidelines followed those of Subbarao (1995) who has studied Kannada speaking children. Children interacted during play for about 25 to 30 minutes. Toys and play materials, common objects, topic of conversation and list of pictures were used to elicit the responses. The presence of the parameter was marked as 1 and the absence /inappropriate usage was marked as 0. The entire session was audio /video recorded using a Hewlett-Packard (HP) tablet, model - 7 voice tab.

### Results and Discussion

#### 1. Conjunctions, Comparatives & Quotatives

##### CWID

The within group comparison shown in table 1 indicates that about 50-60% of children in both groups of lower and higher MA use conjunctions. On using quotatives /-ennu/, higher MA Group II (5-6 years) children show increased usage. However, the differences are not statistically significant. Comparatives were not used by CWID.

**Table 1**

*Conjunctions, Comparatives & Quotatives present in CWID with statistical evidence.*

Conjunctions, Comparatives & Quotatives	Group I CWID 4-5 year MA	n= 30 %	Group II CWID 5-6 years MA	n = 30 %	Z Value	P	Significance
Conjunction /-um/	16	53.3%	20	66.7%	1.05	.296	NS
Comparative –	0	.0%	0	.0%	-	-	NS

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/itilum nalla/							
Comparatives/ – eerravum	0	.0%	0	.0%	-	-	NS
Quotatives /- ennu/	11	36.7%	18	60.0%	1.81	.076	NS

**HS- Highly significant, S – Significant, NS-No significance**

Kannada speaking CWID did not use Conjunctions, Comparatives and Quotatives structures except for the conjunction/-u/ (Subbarao, 1995; Kumaraswamy, 2021). The present study shows better performance on using Conjunctions and Quotatives. The reason for these differences could be that CWID are better trained by Speech Language Therapists and special educators as the data is of recent origin compared to the Kannada study by Subbarao (1995). The nature of Malayalam language could be another reason.

Findings on Hindi speaking CWID by Kaur (2019) showed that 40% of lower MA group (MA 4-5 years) and 60-80% of higher MA group (MA 5-6 years) used Conjunctions. However, comparatives and quotatives were not used by either group. These differences could be due to natural differences in these languages and require further exploration.

## 2. Conditional Clauses

### CWID

Table 2 shows that only 40% of Group I (4-5 years MA) and 63.3 % of Group II (5-6 years MA) children used the conditional clause /-aal/. Other structures were not seen in the language samples. Gupta (2023) studied the conditional clauses in Malayalam speaking TD children in the age group of 4-6 years (Group I- 4-5 years, Group II - 5- 6 years) and reported that conditional clause /-aal/ was used by all TD children in Group I and II. Clause /-eṅkil/ was used by 30% of 4-5 year olds, but it increased to 60% in Group II (5-6 years). Unfulfilled conditional clause /-eṅkil+ complex verb form/ was not seen in Group I (4-5) TD children, but unfulfilled conditional clause /-eṅkil+ complex verb form/ was used by 50% of the Group II TD children. Subbarao (1995) and Kaur (2019) both reported that conditional clauses were not observed in ID groups of 4-6 years in Kannada and Hindi languages respectively. It is possible that the use of such clauses mainly reflects written or literary expressions. It is possible that Malayalam speakers use more Literary or written forms while speaking as compared to Kannada and Hindi speakers.

### Table 2

*Conditional Clauses in CWID with statistical evidence.*

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Conditional clauses	Group I CWID 4-5 year MA	n = 30 %	Group II CWID 5-6 years MA	n = 30 %	Z Value	P	Significance
Conditional clause /-aal/	12	40.0%	19	63.3%	1.81	.076	NS
Conditional clause/- ejkil/	0	.0%	0	.0%	-	-	NS
Unfulfilled conditional clause/- ejkil + complex verb form/	0	.0%	0	.0%	-	-	NS

HS- Highly significant, S – Significant, NS-No significance

## Results and Discussion

Conjunction was used by 50-60% of children in both groups of lower and higher MA. On using quotatives /-ennu/, higher MA Group II (5-6 years) children showed increased usage. However, significant differences in performance were not seen. Comparatives were not used by any of the CWID.

Conditional clause /-aal/ was used by only 40% of Group I (4-5 years MA) and 63.3 % of Group II (5-6 years MA) children. Other conditional clause structures were not seen in the samples of both groups of children with ID.

## Conclusions

About 50-60% of children in both groups of lower and higher MA use conjunctions. Comparatives and conditional clauses were poorly displayed by CWID. Conditional clauses were rarely used by both groups of CWID .

## Limitations of the Present Study

1. Limited sample size
2. The participants were taken from the similar community. i.e., from a single dialectal population in Kerala.

## Future Implications

1. To include larger number of participants
2. To include various dialectical community in Kerala
3. Detailed research work is needed in other disordered populations.

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Dr. Vini Abhijith Gupta, Ph.D. and Dr. T. A. Subbarao, Ph.D.  
Conjunctions, Comparatives, Quotatives and Conditional Clauses in Malayalam  
Speaking Children with Intellectual Disability 68