

**Production-comprehension
asymmetry in child Tamil- the study
of aspect markers**

Introduction

The aspect hypothesis

- n past/perfective inflections → telic verb types
- n present/imperfective inflections → atelic/durative verb types

(Anderson & Shirai, 1994)

The distributional bias hypothesis

- n “native speakers in normal interaction with other native speakers tend to use each verb morpheme with a specific class of verbs, also following the aspect hypothesis”.

(Anderson & Shirai, 1994: 137-139).

Lexical aspect

Temporal features:

- n telic
- n durative
- n dynamic

(Vendler 1967)

Verb Types

Situations	Telic	Durative	Dynamic
States	-	+	-
Activity	-	+	+
Accomplishment	+	+	+
Achievement	+	-	+

NB: Posture verbs can be categorized under stative verbs in Tamil

Grammatical aspect

- n Imperfective
- n Perfective

In some languages (Mandarin Chinese, Tamil) the *perfective* form of statives gives an inceptive reading.

The full aspectual meaning of a sentence is thus derived from the interaction between the situation and the “viewpoint” taken of that situation. (Smith, 1997)

Tamil



- n SOV (head-final) language
- n transparent agglutinating morphology (inflections are marked with suffixes attached to the verb stem)
- n both tense and aspect are grammaticized
- n tense is obligatorily marked, aspect is optionally marked
- n aspect markers are denoted by auxiliaries that are attached to the finite verb stem.

Verb stem + Aspect + Tense + PNG

Aspectual auxiliaries

- n 'kondiru' - marks *imperfective* aspect irrespective of the verb type it is associated with. It is one of the most morphologically complex aspectual auxiliaries (Lehmann, 1993: 207).
- n 'vidu' – expresses the *perfective* aspect when associated with all non-stative verb types.
- n 'vidu' also expresses *inceptive* aspect when associated with stative verb types/posture verb types

Study - Methodology

Subjects

- n 8 Adults (20 – 27 years – M: 23;6 years)-
Control group
- n 20 children- older (3; 7 – 4; 8 - M: 4; 1 years)-
Lower Kindergarten
- n 16 children- younger (2; 4 – 3; 6 - M: 3; 0 years)-
Creche (part of the school)
- n Equal number of males and females

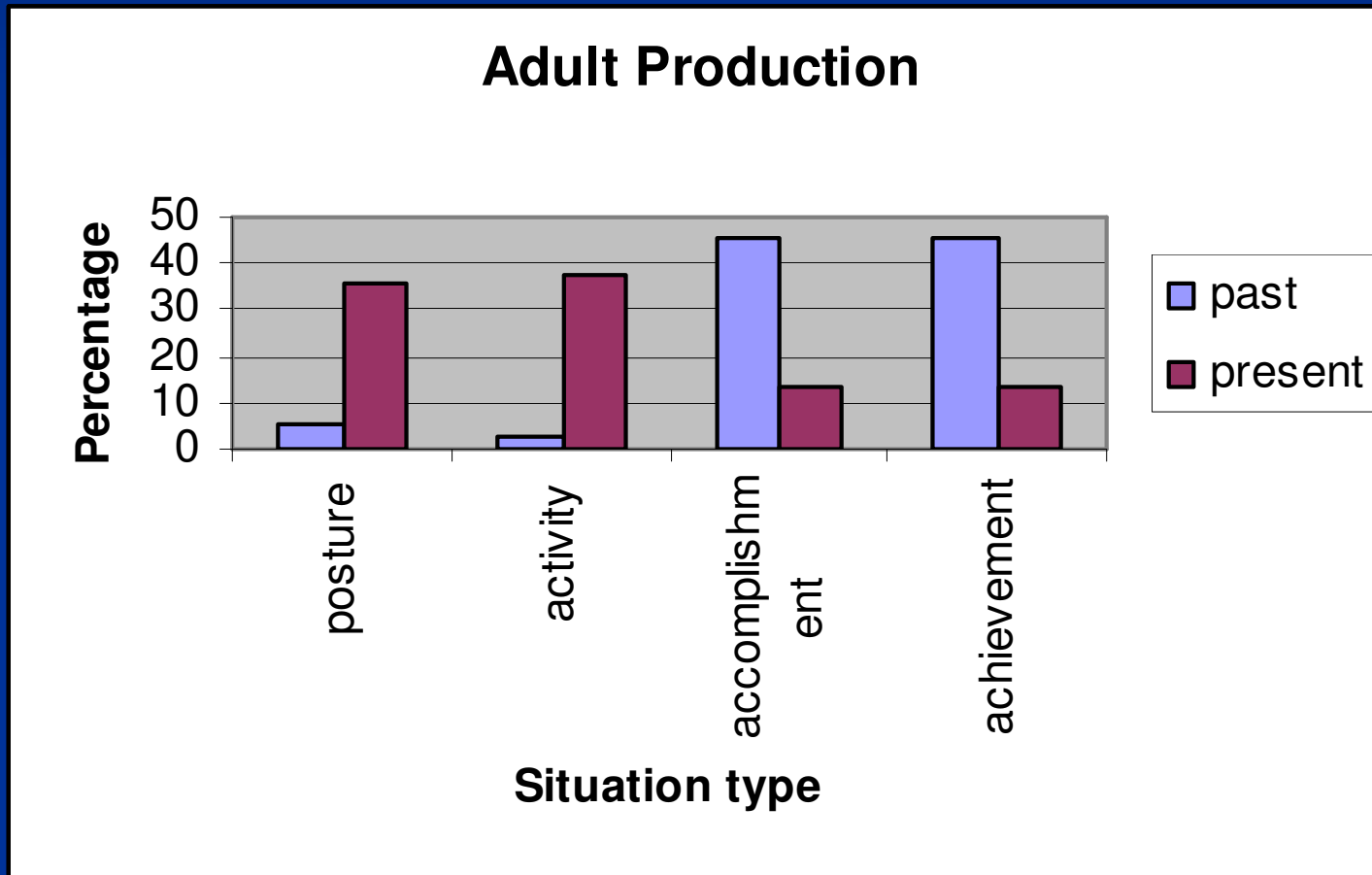
Production Task

To test how subjects used temporal inflections to mark grammatical aspect:

- n situations using toys were enacted
- n no prompt was given
- n 3 trials
- n 12 situations: 3 for each situation type
- n posture, activity, accomplishment, achievement

Testing the aspect and distributional bias hypotheses

Chart 1



Child Production

Chart 2

Older CHI Production

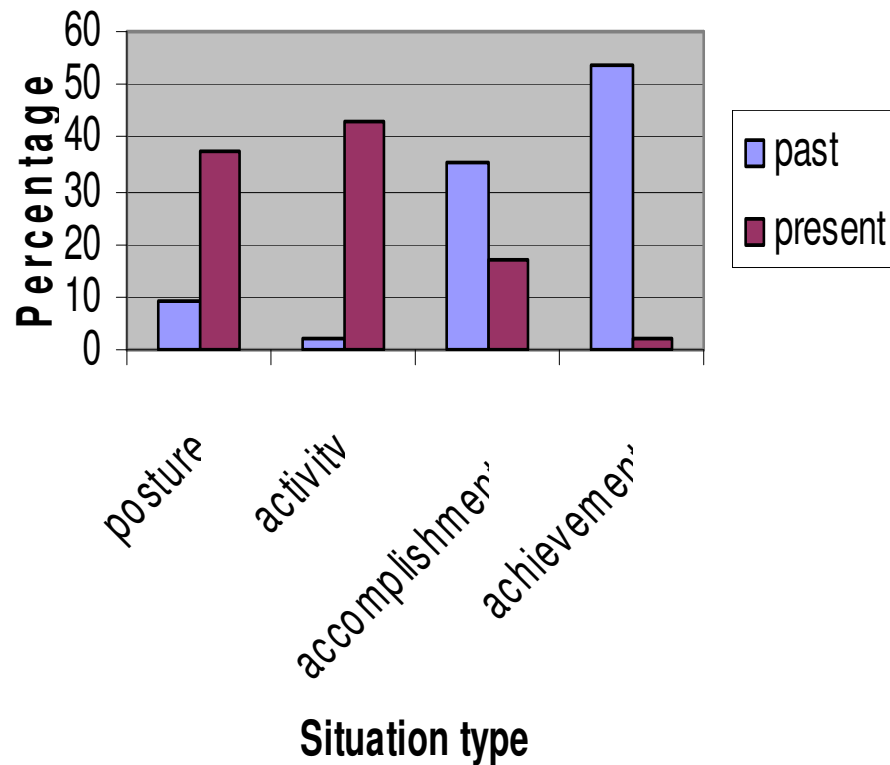
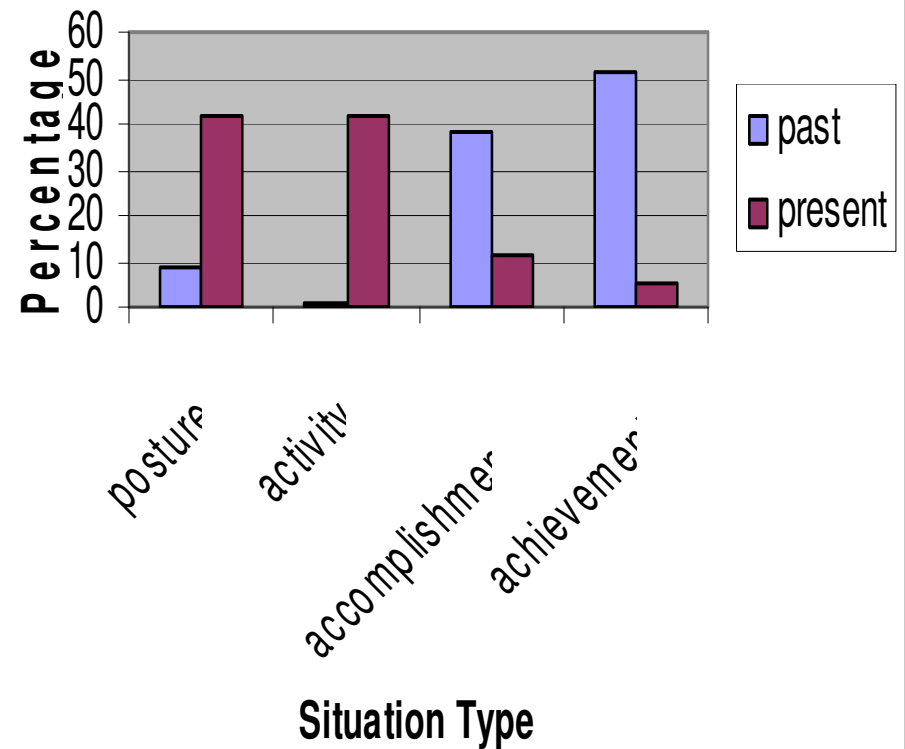


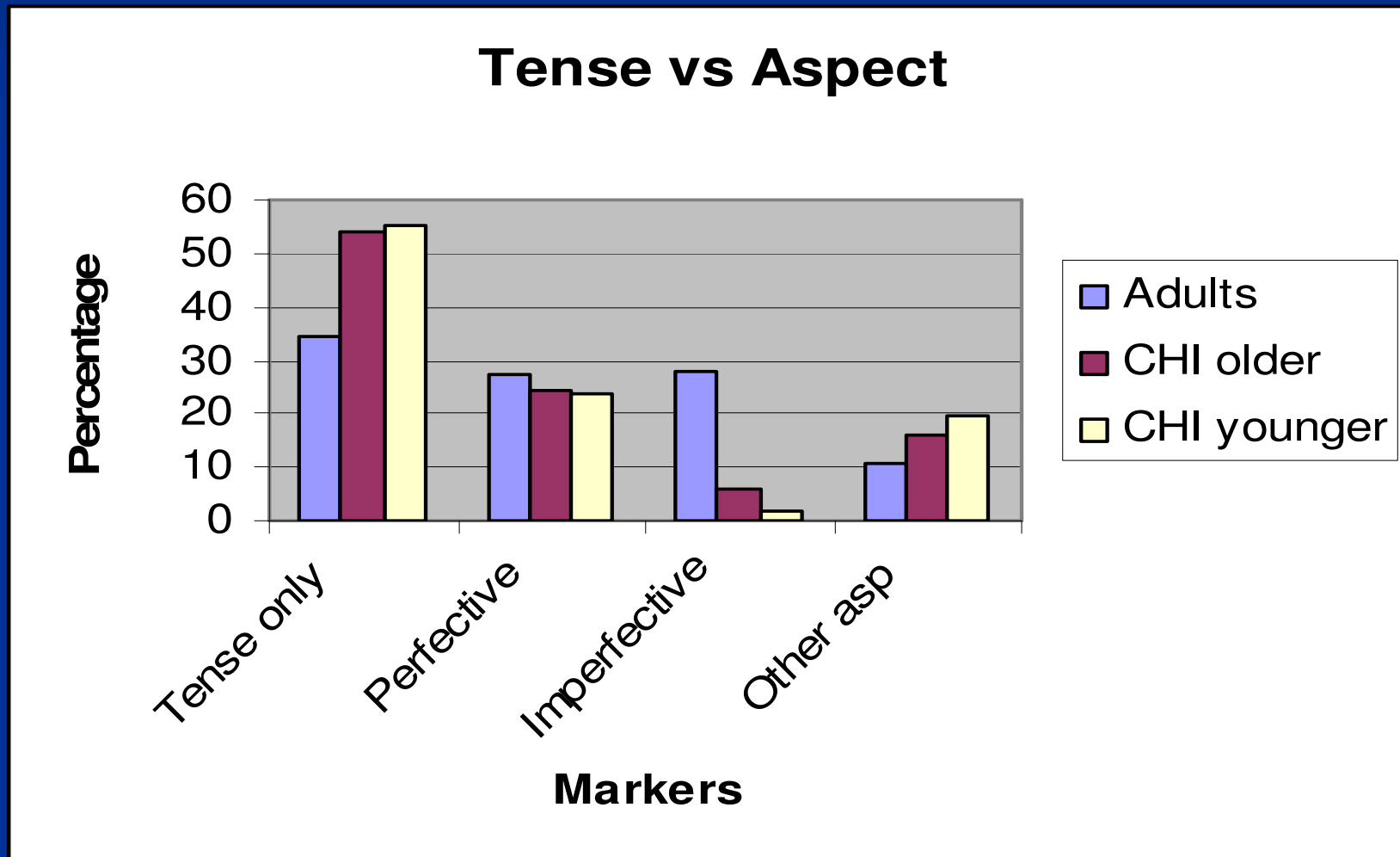
Chart 3

Younger CHI Production



Tense vs Aspect

Chart 4



Production Task - Results

- n Support for the aspect and distributional bias hypotheses. Highly significant main effect of verb type, $F(3, 123) = 153.96, p < 0.001$
 - n Adults tended to use aspectual inflections to mark aspectual contours, children tended to use tense inflections. Interaction between subject group and verb type was significant, $F(6, 123) = 2.47, p < 0.05$
- i.e. adults used the imperfective marker ‘kondiru’ to describe atelic situations (posture and activity) significantly more times than the children. The children preferred to use the simple present tense marker.

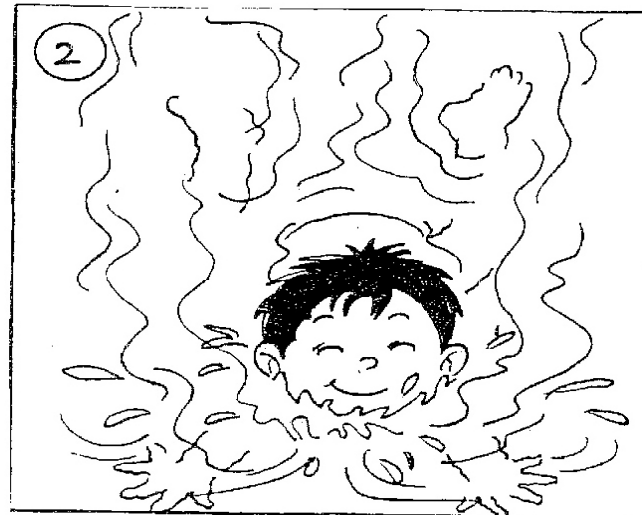
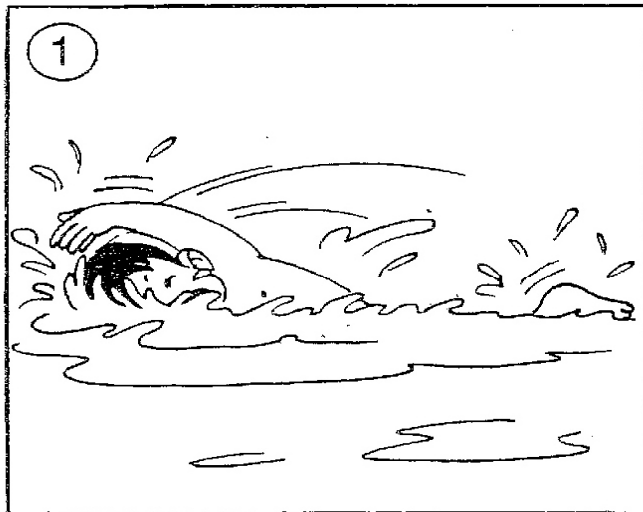
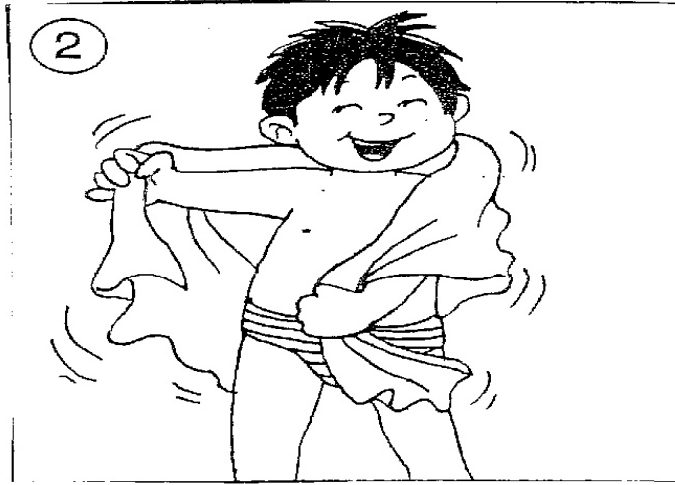
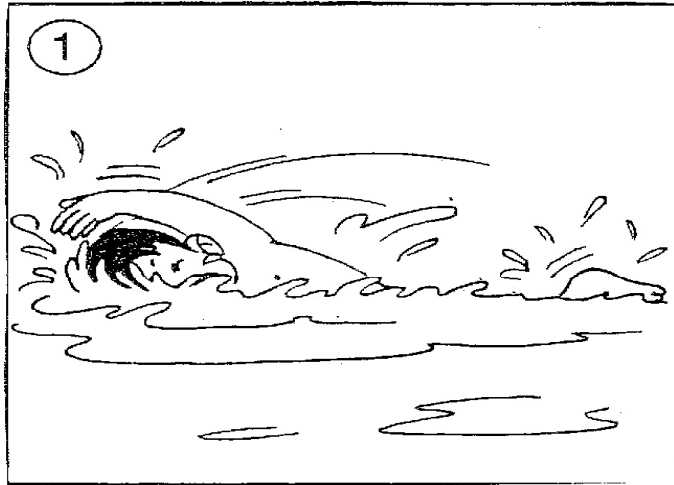
Finding: Children are in the process of acquiring ‘kondiru’;
‘vidu’ has already been acquired to an almost adult level.

Comprehension Task

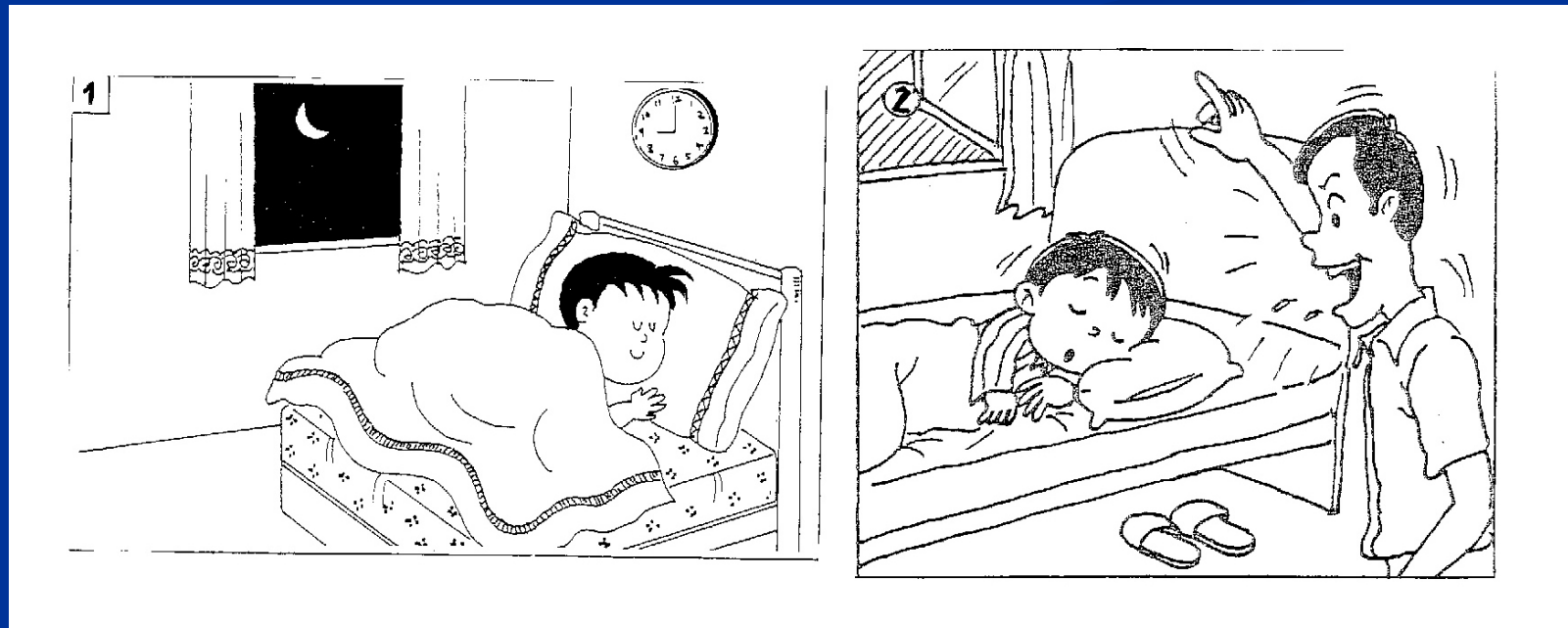
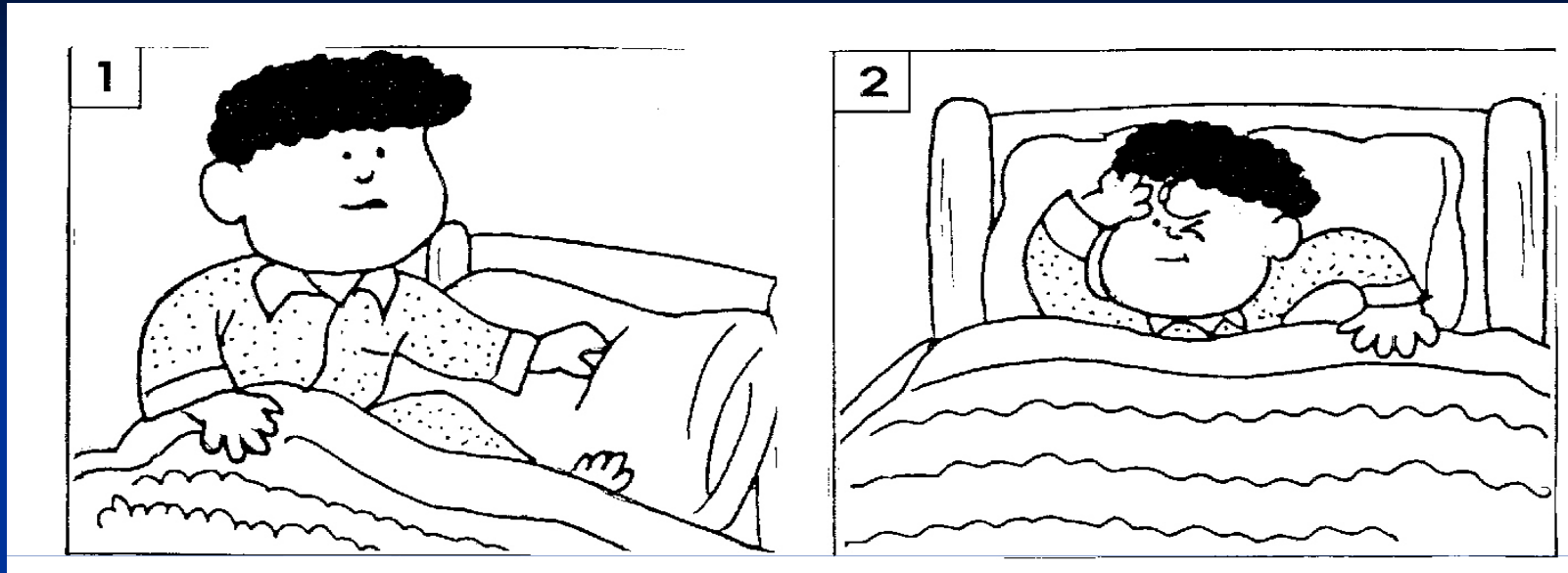
To test children's comprehension of the imperfective 'kondiru' and the perfective 'vidu'

- n 24 picture sets
- n Each of the 4 situation types had 6 picture sets representing it
- n Each set had 2 picture sequences representing the same situation; one picture sequence corresponded with perfectivity and the other corresponded with imperfectivity (refer to the appendix)
- n 3 picture sets of a particular situation type corresponded with a perfective sentence; the other 3 corresponded with an imperfective sentence. (NB: 'vidu' marks perfectivity and inceptive aspect)
- n The pictures were scrambled up so there was no predictable order in which they were presented.

Comprehension Pictures – Activity



Comprehension Pictures - Posture



Comprehension - Results

- n Adults chose the correct picture sequence 100%
- n Support for the aspect hypothesis. Highly significant effect when verb type interacted with the aspectual marker, $F(3, 102) = 16.54, p < 0.001$. i.e. response was better when telic verb types were correlated with 'vidu' (perfective) and when atelic/duratives were correlated with 'kondiru' (imperfective)
- n Highly significant effect of type of aspectual marker $F(1, 34) = 94.32, p < 0.001$. Children performed significantly better when they were given 'kondiru' sentences compared to when they were given 'vidu'.

Summary and Conclusions

- n Verb semantics influences the verb-predicate patterns
- n Tense markers also function as aspect markers in Tamil (refer to Production Task)
- n Comprehension precedes production.
 - 'kondiru' has one-to-one form function mapping
 - 'vidu' has two functions: perfectivity with non-states
: inceptive aspect with states

(NB: perfectivity is more salient than inceptive aspect initially)

- children can view a situation from the imperfective perspective and associate 'kondiru' with imperfectivity. They may have trouble producing it, however, because of its morphological complexity.

Thank You

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