

Baby Talk

- Owens (2008) pp. 132-136
- Aka Motherese
- Aka Child-directed Speech (CDS)
- CDS is a special form of language which the community/culture considers to be primarily for talking to children but not for talking to adults
- Ferguson (1964) studied the CDS of 6 languages/cultures: Arabic, Marathi (major literate Asian), Comanche, Gilyak, (small nonliterate communities) English, and Spanish

Crosslinguistic Features of CDS: Prosody

- Raised pitch
- Specific intonation contours
- English CDS -
 - raised pitch
 - exaggerated intonation
 - slowed rate
 - increased pauses and pause time

Crosslinguistic CDS: Phonology

- Cluster reduction
 - 1 sound for 2
 - "tummy" for stomach
- Liquid simplification
 - substitutions for r and l
 - "wittle wabbit"
- Reduplication
 - repetition of sounds and syllables
 - "mama" "dada" "night-night" "bye-bye"

Crosslinguistic CDS: Vocabulary

- special words for family members
- special words for body parts
- diminutives
 - horsie, dolly
- words associated with infant games
 - peek-a-boo

Crosslinguistic CDS: Syntax

- specific affixes (e.g., diminutives)
- decreased use of inflections or function morphemes
 - “telegraphic speech”
- CDS in English
 - shorter sentences (decreased mean length of utterance MLU)
 - simpler sentences
 - use of active voice, not passive
 - fewer embedded clauses

CDS: Discourse

- English CDS:
 - increased use of questions
 - decreased pronoun use
 - “Oh Mommy likes carrots” not “I like carrots”
 - increased focus on nouns and objects
 - increased repetition

Does CDS serve a purpose?

Possible Explanations:

- (1) Adults are “teaching” children - making speech/language easier and clearer for children
- (2) Adults are matching their speech and language to child’s level or preference
- (3) CDS gains the attention of children, making features of language more salient
- (4) CDS conveys the emotion of relationship

Research supporting role of CDS

- Expanded vowel triangle or exaggerated vowel productions /i, a, u/ in 3 languages
- Infant studies that show infant preference for CDS
- CDS provides cues to word and utterance boundaries making speech stream segmentation easier
- Mothers appear to vary CDS at different stages of child’s development

A CDS Exception

- Quiche (Mayan)
- exhibit only 5 of 14 characteristics identified by Ferguson
- CDS pitch is the same as ADS or decreased
 - cultural reason - pitch changes represent status, raised pitch = high status
- Characteristics of Quiche CDS:
 - some whispers used
 - drop initial unstressed syllables (e.g., “raffe” for giraffe)
