

Characteristic Features Of Child-Directed Speech In Uzbek And English

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Abstract

The paper analyses the specific features of child-directed speech (CDS) the special register adults use when talking to young children in English and Uzbek. Prosodic, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic features are compared. Both languages share universal prosodic traits such as higher pitch, exaggerated intonation, slow tempo and frequent repetition. The differences reflect language structure and culture: English CDS relies on special baby-talk words, questions and expansions of the child's utterances, whereas Uzbek CDS conveys affection mainly through diminutive and endearing suffixes and focuses strongly on teaching kinship terms and politeness formulas.

Keywords: child-directed speech, motherese, baby talk, language acquisition, diminutives, prosody, English, Uzbek.

Introduction

Adults rarely speak to infants and toddlers in the same way they speak to other adults. This simplified, emotionally coloured register is known as *child-directed speech*, *motherese* or *parentese*. Ferguson (1964) first described "baby talk" as a conventional register found in many languages, and Snow (1972) showed that mothers systematically adjust their speech to the child's age and level. CDS is thought to attract the child's attention, express emotion and make linguistic structure easier to perceive (Fernald, 1989). Most research, however, concerns English. The aim of this paper is to compare the main features of CDS in English and Uzbek. The role of CDS in acquisition has been debated. Nativist approaches argued that input is too poor to explain grammar and that CDS is not necessary for learning (Newport, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1977). Usage-based approaches, in contrast, stress that the frequent, repetitive frames of CDS give children ready-made patterns from which grammar is built (Tomasello, 2003). Empirical studies show that the amount and richness of speech addressed to a child predict vocabulary growth (Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff, 2003). Therefore, describing CDS in less studied languages such as Uzbek is important both for theory and for practice.

Child-directed speech in English

Prosody. English-speaking caregivers use higher pitch, a wider pitch range, slower tempo and long pauses. Vowels are hyperarticulated, which makes sound categories clearer (Kuhl et al., 1997).

Vocabulary. English has a rich set of special baby-talk words: *doggie*, *kitty*, *tummy*, *nappy*, *choo-choo*, *bye-bye*, *night-night*. Many are formed with the diminutive suffix *-ie/-y* or by reduplication.

Grammar. Utterances are short and grammatically simple, with many questions, imperatives and repeated sentence frames: *Where's the ball? There's the ball! Look at the ball* (Cameron-Faulkner et al., 2003). Adults often speak of themselves in the third person (*Mummy's coming*) and use "we" instead of "you" (*Shall we eat now?*).

Interaction. English CDS is strongly child-centred: adults treat the child as a conversational partner, follow the child's focus of attention, and expand or recast the child's utterances (Child: *Doggie run.* – Adult: *Yes, the doggie is running!*).

Child-directed speech in Uzbek

Prosody. Uzbek caregivers show the same universal prosodic traits: raised pitch, melodic intonation, a slower rate and repetition. Prosodic features are also supported by folk genres of speech addressed to children, such as lullabies (*alla*) and endearing rhymes (*erkalama*).

Diminutive and endearing suffixes. As an agglutinative language, Uzbek expresses affection mainly through morphology rather than through separate baby-talk words: *-cha* (*kuchukcha* 'little puppy', *qo'g'irchoqcha*), *-choq* (*qo'zichoq* 'little lamb'), *-jon* (*bolajon*, *o'g'iljon*) and *-gina* (*kichkinagina* 'tiny'). Possessive forms are added to make terms of endearment: *bolam* 'my child', *qizim* 'my daughter', *jonim* 'my soul', *qo'zim* 'my lamb', *asalim* 'my honey'.

Onomatopoeia and baby-talk words. Animals and objects are often named by imitative words: *vov-vov* (dog), *miyov* (cat), *bi-bip* (car). These coexist with ordinary words and are gradually replaced by them.

Grammar and particles. Imperatives are softened with particles such as *-chi* and *-da*: *Kel-chi!* 'Come on!', *Ye-chi*, *bolam* 'Do eat, my child'. As in English, parents frequently refer to themselves in the third person: *Oyisi keldi* 'Mummy has come', *Dadasi olib beradi* 'Daddy will buy it'.

Pragmatics and culture. Uzbek CDS pays special attention to social relations. Adults constantly teach kinship terms (*buvi*, *bobo*, *amma*, *xola*, *amaki*) and politeness formulas, often through prompting: *Buvingga salom ber* 'Say hello to grandma', *"Rahmat" de* 'Say "thank you"'. Many relatives, not only parents, address the child, so the child is exposed to a variety of speakers from the earliest age.

Comparative analysis

Similarities. In both languages CDS is characterized by high pitch, exaggerated intonation, slow tempo, short utterances, frequent repetition, third-person self-reference by parents and the use of onomatopoeic words for animals and vehicles. These shared features support the view that the basic prosodic and simplifying functions of CDS are universal and are linked to the child's perceptual and cognitive needs.

Differences in form. The main formal difference lies in how affection and "smallness" are expressed. English, an analytic language with limited inflection, uses a closed set of baby-talk words (*doggie*, *tummy*) and a single productive diminutive *-ie/-y*. Uzbek, an agglutinative language, uses several productive suffixes (*-cha*, *-choq*, *-jon*, *-gina*) that can be attached to almost any noun or adjective and combined with possessive endings (*bolajonim*). As a result, the Uzbek-speaking child hears many morphologically complex forms from the very beginning, which may draw attention to the suffix system.

Differences in function. English CDS is oriented towards conversation and information: questions, labelling and expansions dominate. Uzbek CDS, in addition to these, has a strong socializing function: adults model greetings, thanks and kinship terms and expect the child to repeat them. This reflects the importance of respect for elders and of the extended family in Uzbek culture.

Conclusion

The prosodic core of CDS is universal, while its lexical-morphological form and social functions are shaped by the structure and culture of each language. Knowing these features can help parents, preschool teachers and speech therapists to support children's language development in a way that fits each language and culture. Systematic recorded studies of Uzbek CDS remain an important task for future research.

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