Baby Talk in Malayalam

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Abstract
Baby talk is a specialized speech style used by the adults to children. It is a special form of speech and it has particular roles in language acquisition, cultural transmission and language development. This study attempts to examine the phonological, lexical and syntactic features of Malayalam baby Talk.

Introduction
How children so quickly and magically acquire the language and it was a interested subject for thousands of years. Psammeticus, an Egyptian Pharoah during the 7th century BC believed that language was in-born and the children isolated from birth from any linguistic influence would develop the language they had been born with. Akbar, the Mughal emperor of India, he desired to learn whether language was innate or acquired through exposure to the speech of adults. He believed that language was learned by listening to each other and a child could not develop language alone. So, he conducted an experiment. He ordered a house built for two infants and stationed a mute nurse to care for them. The children do not acquire speech. It seemed to prove Akbar's hypothesis that language is acquired from the environment. In this context Baby Talk has a very important role in language acquisition.

Language acquisition is typical human capacity. It takes place automatically. Language is not genetically transmitted, and it is acquired from the environment. A child acquires his language by the interaction of parents and surroundings. Baby Talk has been defined by various scholars. Snow & Ferguson defines Baby Talk "it is a special language and it refers to a set of speech modifications commonly found in the language used by the adults to address young children". Bhat referred Baby Talk "as the style of speech used by the adults as an analogue of child speech that serves as the model'. Charles Ferguson defined Baby Talk "any special form of language which is regarded by speech community as being primarily appropriate for talking to young children. According to Roman Jakobson Baby Talk as "a kind of pidgin a typical mixed language, where the addressers try to adjust themselves to the verbal habits of their addresses and to establish a common code suitable for both interloctors in a child- adult dialogue. From these definitions we can understand that baby Talk is simplified speech style and it is a speech register that has been more extensively used by mothers. This simplified register helps the child to acquire and familiarize the language. *Motherese, parentese, child-directed speech*, etc. are the synonyms terms used to refer the concept.

The psychological and cultural implications of Baby Talk are interesting. It reveals the attitude of the society and culture towards the child. When the child is born, Baby Talk begins, and it continues until the child is above 4 or 5 years old. Generally Baby Talk is used for referring to goods, food items, animals, body parts, toys, put the child to sleep, play, and urinate and so on. As the baby coos and gurgles, the family members talk to him. All the family members have their own name for the baby and it is a distinct form of address depending on their relationship.

Lexical features of Baby Talk

Baby Talk has distinctive lexical items. It may be derived from the adult structure or it may only be used in Baby Talk. Every speech community seems to have a small lexicon of words primarily with young children. The lexical items mainly included words concerned with basic day today routine activities. These activities belong to playing, eating, names of animals etc. These words employed by the parent in talking to children that have been modified for the children's benefit. The name of the mythical character which is used to frighten children can be added to these categories. Ferguson has examined these items in Arabic, English, Greek, Marathi and Spanish.

Baby Talk	Adult speech	Meaning
/ink/	/paal /	milk
/paappam/	/appam /	food items
/immimi/	/ meen /	fish
/imba /	/ pasu/	cow
/soomi/	/daivam/	god
/maamuṇṇuka/	/ cooruuṇṇka/	eat the cooked food
/uvvaava/	/asukam/	disease
/vaava/	/ kunju/	child
/uucci/	/ iicca/	fly

Baby Talk phonology

Phonology of Baby Talk included higher pitch, exaggerated pitch changes, elongated vowels and long pause between phonemes. Rhythm is also heavily emphasized in this practice and it is used closely with the emphasis of various syllables. Vowel space is expanded in Baby Talk allowing for accurate phoneme discrimination. Researchers have noted that Baby Talk makes use of fewer sounds and admissible sound sequences than the corresponding adult speech and it can be regarded as a derived form. According to Ferguson, the linguistic process used for the purpose naturally being of a reducing or a simplifying nature. These processes have been identified as those of reduplication, simplification, substitution and some other process. The structure of the words also follows some definite canonical forms. He also identified CVC, CVCV and CVCCV as the canonical forms using simple and more basic kinds of consonants and a comparatively small selection of vowels. He also noted that stops and nasals are the major consonants used in this register.

There are five short vowels and their corresponding long vowels are present in Malayalam. All these vowels are present in this language form. But long vowels are being prominently used.

The rounded vowels seen in this data are /u/ and /o/. The other unrounded vowels are /a/, /i/, and /e/. Almost all of the words used in Baby Talk end in vowels. The vowel endings seem to be the most basic vowels: /a/, /u/ and /i/. Malayalam has 36 consonants. But my data contains only 22 consonants. It includes stops, nasals, flaps, fricatives and continuants. But major consonants are stops and nasals. Some words of adult speech starting with a consonant lose their consonants in Baby Talk and it starts with a vowel or a bilabial consonant. For e.g.

Adult speech	Baby Talk	Meaning
/meen/	/immimmi/	fish
/cooR/	/paappam/	cooked rice
/paal/	/ink/	milk

Reduplication is a linguistic process in which root or stem of a word or part of it is repeated exactly or with slight change. Reduplication is very common feature in a lot of languages. This feature is also present in Baby Talk. It is a common phenomenon in Malayalam language. It is more extensively used in Baby Talk. All the terms for animals and vehicles in Baby Talk are reduplicated forms. For e.g.

Adult speech	Baby Talk	Meaning
/pa ṭṭi/	/bau:bau/	dog
/puucca/	/miyavu:miyavu/	cat
/visil/	/pii:pii/	vizil
/bas/	/poo:poo/	bus

Baby Talk Prosody

The sounds used in Baby Talk are very different from adult directed speech (ADS). When we compare the audio recordings of adult- child conversations and adult-adult conversations, we found that adult's raise their pitch and produce exaggerated intonation contours when they speak to infants. They also use louder voice; lengthen the phonemes and slower speech rate. It is to identify the communicative intentions behind specific intonation patterns in baby Talk than in adult directed speech. And also, infants have the capacity to differentiate Baby Talk and ADS from 6 months of age. The exaggerated prosody of Baby Talk can facilitate segmented words at a very early age. When the exaggerated prosody is absent, learning may be impaired from this it is clear that exaggerated prosody of Baby Talk provide statistical and associative learning by capturing infant's attention.

Another feature of Baby Talk words is that they are supposed to represent the sounds that various things. These words are called onomatopoeic words. In Malayalam 'bau-bau' is apparently stimulations of the barking dogs and 'pii-pii' is supposed to be the sounds produced by vehicles. From these it is clear that the main sound structure of such words tends to be dominated by a consonant+vowel syllable unit that is often repeated. It is also seen in English and other languages. Thus, the sounds structure of Baby Talk words is common to languages around the world.

Onomatopoeic Words in Malayalam

kaa:kaa	crow

bau:bau	dog
miyaavu:miyaavu	cat
poo:poo	vehicles
ni:ni	for bells

Baby Talk Syntax

According to Ferguson (1977) utterances addressed to young children are shorter and grammatically simpler than adult directed speech. Baby Talk is characterized by repetitions and reduplications. In Baby Talk care givers produce more single word utterances when speaking to children. In Baby Talk mothers and care givers use special vocabulary i.e. diminutives to express endearment. It always tends to be rich in emotional expression. Diminutives convey smallness, child – centeredness, affection, and intimacy. Mothers often use a diminutive form interchangeably with the corresponding simplex form of the same word in the same conversational episode with their child. Caregiver's word play with diminutives may serve to illustrate the morphological structure of the language for the child by emphasizing that the first part of the word conveys referential meaning, whereas the suffix at the end has a grammatical function. When caregivers use grammatical form, it provides their child with information about linguistic structure. When parents use their utterances, it is similar to those in the infant's telegraphic stage of speech production, with the focus being on word order.

The conversation between a mother and child in Malayalam.

Mother: amma moonu paapam taram
Mother   will give food to baby

In this example proper syntactic order is naan ninakku aaharam taram. In this sentence 'amma ' and 'moon' have been subsituted for personal pronoun naan and nii. Substituting proper names for personal pronouns is a peculiar feature of Baby Talk. The advantage of this is proper names are easier for the young child to understand the relationship between speaker and listener. Simple sentences are commonly used in Baby Talk. Simple sentences are classified in to seven types. They are transitive, intransitive, causative, imperative, optative, negative and interrogative. But this register only contains imperative negative and interrogative sentences. In imperative negative sentence negation is achieved, either by adding a negative marker to the verb stem. Here the negative marker is -allee.

Mother: vaave aŋŋḷoottu poovalle
        daughter don't go there.

Mother: mooḷe   atine   piṭikallee
    Daughter   that   catch not
     Daughter, don't catch that.

Interrogation is the process in which a sentence or fragment of a sentence is converted in to an interrogative one. There are two types of interrogative sentences have been seen in Malayalam. They are yes or no questions and wh- questions (e- questions). These two types of sentences are seen in Malayalam Baby Talk.

a.   Yes/ No question
        Yes/ No questions are interrogations of declarative sentences which normally elicit an affirmative or a negative answer.
Mother: moonu paapam veeṇo?
         son, do you want food?

b.   Wh- question (e-questions)
        These types of questions are formed by an interrogative word. These interrogative words in Malayalam often begin with e-, ee-, aa-, etc. Most of them beginning with e- . For convenience they are termed as e- questions.

Mother: moon   eviṭe   pooyi?
     Son   where   go (past)
     Son, where are you go?

Grandfather: moone   accan   eviṭe?
          Son-accu father   where
          Son, where is your father?

Importance of Baby Talk
        Baby Talk is more effective than regular speech. Studies have shown that infants actually prefer to listen to this type of speech. Three types of modifications are found in Baby Talk. The first one is the linguistic modifications, second is the modifications to attention getting strategies and the last is in the interactions between parents and infants. Linguistic modifications include simplification of speech units as well as emphasis on various phonemes. In second modifications care givers use visual movements of the face to more effectively gain and maintain the attention of their infants. In third modification parents use Baby Talk not only to promote language development, but to create a bond and positive relationship between parents and their infants.

        The purpose and benefits of Baby Talk speech are numerous. It included positive effects on the early developments of infants and aid in the ability of infants to bond with their care givers. Besides, infants begin the process of speech and language acquisition and developments. Also, it may contribute to the modulation of infant attention, assist infants in determining relevant syntactic qualities, phonetic boundaries and convey positive emotions to infants. The more expressive Baby Talk speech is, the more infants are to respond to this method of communication by adults.

        Baby Talk is a powerful tool in providing a base for language acquisition. Children are able to apply principles of this practice to larger words and sentences as they learn to process language. It also influences character moulding, personality development and language development in child.

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