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Word Formation in Tamil Baby Talk

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This research is aimed at discovering the nature of the words used by Tamil children at the early stage of their language acquisition. Language is acquired by humans during the early part of their life. While acquiring a language they also try to communicate with people around them using either signs or words. These words may not be the same as the words used by adults in the language concerned. The adults who participate in conversation with children also imitate these words or use words specific to child language. Thus the words used in baby talks are somewhat different from those in the adult talk. The children in Tamil community are not an exception in this regard. In Tamil baby talks, children also employ specific words. They are called "koiy" and show different word formation patterns. Therefore, it is useful to study the nature of the formation of these words. Data was collected from different parts of Sri Lanka with the help of mothers and caretakers of children. The sample consists of children who belong to the age group year one to year four. Data was also collected through direct observation and participation. Collected data was analysed structurally on the basis of the structural linguistic method. The research indicates that words in baby talks are formed using several processes such as deletion, shortening, assimilation and substitution.

Key words: baby talk, child communication, first language acquisition, maLalay, word formation in Tamil