

A Comparative Study of Words in Tamil Baby Talk

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Introduction

Baby talk (BT) is the language used by babies who are below five or six years, for the purpose of communicating with each other or with their parents or care takers. Dil (1971:13, as given in Meegaskumbura 1980:289) uses it "to refer to the adult talk to the baby". Kelkar (1964:40) identifies it as a "fond concession". That is to say that adults use baby talk for fondling. Accordingly, they use it to develop intimacy and to show affection. BT encourages children to engage in the conversation lively. Ferguson (1964:103) defines it as "any special form of language which is regarded by speech community as being primarily appropriate for talking to young children and which is generally regarded as not the normal adult use of language". This indicates that BT is a special, 'not normal' language variety. Thus, it is called "abnormal type" (Sapier, 1949:179), "simplified version" (Bloomfield, 1933:472), "marginal system" Ferguson (ibid), "devient style" (Bell, 1976:158). BT is also referred to as caretaker speech, Infant-Directed Speech (IDS), Child-Directed Speech (CDS) or motherese. Child-Directed Speech (CDS) is the use of intonation, pitch, repetition and the simplification of syntax that adults use to address infants (Chang, 2010). For Example: Phrases like "do you want miiiiiiiilk"? "You want *bikka*"? These are referred as "motherese" or "parentese". It is the spontaneous way of talking in which mothers, fathers, and caretakers do speak with infants and young children.