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Articles

FOREWORD

With this volume the *Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics* marks its first decade of publication. The editors are bringing out Volume 10 in two numbers, the first of which is devoted to theoretical issues, general linguistics, and old-world-language topics. Volume 10, number 2 is the fourth in the *Studies in Native American Languages* series.

Volume 10, number 1 is comprised of papers on topics as diverse as the theory of the sign, the comparison of language-specific entailment systems, and motherese in modern Greek. Much of the work represented here is quite original, and has seen little discussion before (Greek motherese, Igbo proverb and Idiom).

The editors wish to thank all the contributors, both those whose papers appear in Volume 10, number 1, and those whose papers we did not include. We wish also to thank the faculty of the Linguistics Department of the University of Kansas for their support and encouragement for the *KWPL* throughout the year.

RWL

ONE-WAY TALKING: MY GREEK MOTHERESE

Cornelia Pareskevas-Shepard

1. Introduction

This paper is not the product of rigorous, lengthy research into the language that Greek mothers use while talking to their infants; rather, it is a personal account of the motherese I use while talking to my 6-month-old infant.

The majority of the experts on motherese examine the interaction between adult caretakers and children that already talk. Only in passing do they mention that adults use motherese to talk to their pre-verbal infants. However, one study indicates[1] that the motherese used for pre-verbal infants (8-month-old) does not differ significantly from the motherese used for children that already speak (18-month-old). Perhaps, then, the general characteristics of motherese remain the same regardless of whether the infant can verbally respond or not.

The data available for this paper were limited and one-sided: Greek motherese has not been thoroughly described, and I do not know any Greek parents with infants; the only data comes from recordings that I have been making for the past three months of the motherese I use while interacting with my infant. In order to decide whether other Greek speakers would use similar forms in their motherese, I checked my data with those Greek speakers who already are parents. As expected, they recalled that they did use some of the forms when their children were young. These forms are 'standard' baby talk forms, in the sense that they appear in children's stories and/or lullabies. Besides these standard forms, the following forms have served as an input to my motherese:

-affectionate words I used towards my parents
-lovers' words[2]
-adult speech words phonologically altered
-adult speech words with diminutive suffix(es)
-affectionate words I have heard used by members
    of my family or friends
-non-standard baby talk forms that my 8-year-old
    nephew used in his baby talk

-English words appropriately adapted to Greek
        phonology/morphology

The most predominant characteristics of motherese,
as they appear in the writings of various experts, can
be summarized as follows:

-rising intonation
-high pitch (which marks speech directed to
        younger children)
-simplification of consonant clusters
-presence of sounds not available to adult speech,
        anchored to particular items
-short sentences
-avoidance of first or second personal pronouns
-use of diminutives which better serve the
        expressive function of motherese
-limited lexicon
-use of onomatopoetic words
-high frequency of questions
-repetition of lexical items/ sentences

These characteristics are not to be considered
universals since they are, for the most part, based on
English motherese. Some of them seem to be universals,
such as the rising intonation and the high pitch, since
they occur in vaious examples of motherese.

The description of the motherese I use is divided
into four parts: Phonology, Morphology, Syntax and
Semantics. The phonetic properties (rising intonation
and high pitch) will not be discussed, since they are
thoroughly discussed in the literature.

2. Phonology

2.1. Simplification of consonant clusters-
     the first consonant is deleted.

sp---->p	spíti	píti	'house'
	spurɣíti	purɣíti	'sparrow'
sk---->k	sk^{y}íuros	k^{y}íuros	'squirrel'
zɣ---->ɣ	zɣúra	ɣúra	'curly'
ks--->s^y / __ V $\begin{smallmatrix}-ba\\+hi\end{smallmatrix}$	ksípnises	s^{y}ípnises	'you awoke'

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ps---->s^y	psixúla	s^{y}ihúla	'little soul'
	psomí	s^{y}omí	'bread'
ts---->s^y	pitsiríkos	pis^{y}iríkos	'little guy'
dz---->z^y	tzitzíki	z^{y}iz^{y}íki	'cicada'
kt---->t^y	kt^{y}ípises	t^{y}ípises	'are you hurt?'
	októ	ot^{y}ó	'eight'

2.2. Consonant change resulting in the appearance of of sounds or vowel sequences not occuring in adult speech:

δ----->z	lulúδi	lulúzi	'flower'
	peδáki	pezáki	'small child'
δ----->0 /__y	póδya	póya	'feet'
θ----->s^y	kimiθúme	kimis^{y}úme	'we'll sleep'
	θélis	s^{y}élis	'you want'
ks---->ts	Aleksandríkos	Aletsandríkos	
		'little Alexander'	
r----->Ø³	xérya	xéya	'hands'
zi#--->ž	lulúzi	lulúž	'"flower"'
	akúzi	akúž	'"bear"'

The latter phonological change is tied to the two lexical items that are given as examples; thus, although pózi 'foot' is similar to these two items, for some reason it does not undergo the same change. The adult speech forms are lulúδi and arkúδi respectively.

r-deletion creates vowel sequences not occurring in adult speech within a single word, but which do occur across word boundaries:

uo (k^{y}íuos 'squirrel'), oe (oéo 'pretty'), uu (ɣuunák^{y}i 'little pig'), oa (aɣoák^{y}i 'little boy'), ua (uanós 'sky'), aa (xaá 'joy').

The only vowel change observed in my motherese is that of the mid front vowel [e], which becomes similar to the English tense high front vowel [i]. This change is tied to a limited number of lexical items.

In general, most consonants in my motherese become strongly palatalized; in addition, as a result of the phonological changes described in this section, certain sounds appear that do not occur in standard Greek adult speech, namely [sy], [ž] and [i]. Interestingly enough, some of the phonological changes described above occur in some Greek dialects:

> [r] is deleted intervocalically in certain Northern Greece dialects; stops and dentals undergo palatalization and, in certain areas, become affricates. Thus ž appears in Cretan dialects as the 'softened' equivalent of y or γ[4].

3. Morphology

The majority of the nouns used in my motherese appear with a diminutive suffix attached to them; some of these diminutive suffixes appear in adult speech, others do not; this aspect of motherese is the most creative one.

3.1. Suffixes appearing in adult speech: -aki, -itsa, -ula, -kas, -uδi.

aγóri+aki	aγoráki	'little boy'
psixí+ula	psixúla	'little soul'
mikró+uli	mikrúli	'little one'
karδyá+uli	karδúla	'little heart'
yós+kas	yókas	'little son'
triferó+uδi	triferúδi	'tender one'

The following two suffixes appear in adult speech not as diminutives but serving to form adjectives from nouns, or nouns from adjectives: -en^{y}ios and -eli.

karδúla+en^{y}ios	karδulén^{y}ios	'little heart'
karδúla+eli	karδuléli	'little heart'

More than one diminutive suffix can be attached to the noun, depending on the 'mood' for creativity.

3.2. Suffixes appearing in my motherese, but not in adult speech: -ino, -ikos, -ini, -ri, -elo, -to.

Most of the time, these suffixes will appear together with suffixes belonging to adult speech (underlined in the following examples):

aɣóri_ino	aɣoríno	'little boy'
karδúla+ikos	karδulíkos	'little heart'
yókas+ri	yokarí	'little son'
yókas+ri+ini	yokaríni	'little son'
aɣoríni+elo	aɣorinélo	'little boy'
manúla+to	manuléto	'mother'

Greek distinguishes three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. In my motherese, a lot of the feminine and neuter nouns are replaced by masculine forms which do not exist in adult speech.

i pipíla (f.)	o pipilís	'pacifier'
i karδúla (f.)	o karδulís	'little heart'
to spuryíti (n.)	o spuryítis	'sparrow'
to sínefo (n)	o sinefís	'cloud'

A number of nonsensical words appear in my motherese; some of them are, in a sense, onomatopoetic, since they are based on various sounds I make while playing with the baby:

o yákayákayákas	(y k-y k)
o pitipitipás	(p t-p t)

Others are of unexplained origin and simply express affection: to tzitzíni, to buzúni, to pisyíni, to kukuméli, o tsíkis.

A number of English-origin words appear in my motherese, properly adapted to Greek mophology and phonology:

o lúnis	(looney)
o ɣoufɣoúfis	(the Greek equivalent for the sound that dogs make is ɣav-ɣav)
o dumdúmis	(dummy)

Finally, there are a number of words 'borrowed' from my nephew's baby talk:

tilós for:	trelós	'crazy'
báno	bán^yio	'bath'
gogózis	karagiózis	'popular folk figure'

4. Syntax

Usually, but not consistently, I omit the future tense marker but keep the future tense form of the verb:

se fáo   for: θa se fáo
'I'll eat you'   (present tense form: tróo)

se páro ke su δóso   for: θa se páro keθa su δóso
'I'll take you and   (present tense: pérno-δíno)
give you

The most predominant characteristic of my motherese is the lack of second person forms used in addressing the baby; rather, I use the third person form af the verb together with an expression appropriately referring to the baby, or the third person singular pronoun (tu):

ksípnise {to móro, o yókas mu}? for: ksípnises?
'Is {the baby, my little son} awake?' 'are you awake'?

ti θa tu δósi i máma?   for: ti θa su δóso?
'What will mom give him?'   'What will I give you?'

Frequently, when referring to myself while talking to the baby, I will use i mama 'mom' instead of the first person singular pronoun, as in the example above.

Finally, very often instead of using the third person verb forms to refer to activities that the baby will perform, I use the first person plural form:

θa fáme   for: θa fas
'We'll eat'   'You'll eat'

θa kimiθúme   θa kimiθís
'We'll sleep'   'You'll sleep'

5. Semantics

According to some authors, motherese is characterized by 'everydayness;' what the child has experienced or is about to experience, what the child can see or hear[5]. In my case this is not absolutely true; I can use motherese to refer to future events while interacting with my baby. This 'futureness' is triggered by everyday events: if the baby is sitting next to me while I am studying, I will start talking about the fact that in a few years he will also be studying since he will be in school, etc.

Since my infant is in a pre-linguistic stage, much of the time I will be doing both the questioning and the answering, adding pes 'say' to my answers. The following is a sample of this one-person conversation in motherese:

Me-mother: Ti íne? θes na fas san kemás aγoinélo mu?
            'What is it? Do you want to eat like we
            do, my little boy?'

Me-baby: Pes, moé mamá, zen boó akóma- ime mikó pes.
            'Say, mom, I can't (do it) yet-
            I'm still young, say.'

Finally, some of the words or expressions that have lost their literal meaning in adult speech are used with their literal meaning in my motherese:

anθropáki   'man of inferior quality' (der.)
                'little human being' (lit.)

γókas   'mommy's boy'
                'little son'

θa se fáo   'I'll bitch at you'
                'I'll eat you'

Motherese is unusual in many respects since its development is easy and extremely rapid; in my case, I started out with some standard 'baby talk' forms, lovers' words and affectionate words that family/friends use and within a month I had constructed my motherese; the creative part was constructing new affectionate words, sometimes from already existing ones, and 'playing' with sounds. The outcome is not always more simple than my adult speech: new sounds appear, others were dropped, words can have more than one suffix- but the syntax is simpler and the lexicon limited. It is not a 'complete' language in the sense it cannot exist independently of my adult speech; still, it is a very affectionate and extremely expressive language, best suited for:

$$\begin{bmatrix} + \text{ human infant} \\ + \text{ inspiring tenderness} \\ + \text{ inspiring affection} \\ + \text{ inspiring intimacy} \\ - \text{ verbal production} \\ - \text{ cognitive competence} \end{bmatrix}^{6}$$

NOTES

1. Phillips, J. 'Syntax and Vocabulary of Mothers' Speech to Young Children.'

2. Ruke-Dravina, V. notes that baby-talk forms can be used by adults, e.g., lovers (p.217 Talking to Children); in my case, lovers' words that I have used or heard served as input to my motherese.

3. This seems to be a universal tendency according to Ferguson (1977) p. 217.

4. Snow, C. 'Mothers's speech research from input to interaction' p. 41.

5. Newton, B. 'The Generative Inerpretation of language.'

6. Brown, R. Introduction, Talking to Children (slightly modified).

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    First Year of Life' <u>Child DevelopmentPS 43:31-41. 1972.</u>

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    <u>Lingua 37:281-312. 1975.</u>