



Motherese as a universal feature of all languages? A case study of a Polish mother's speech to her child.

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The presentation is a report on a case study of a Polish mother's speech to her 7-month-old child. The aim of the study was to find out whether Polish mothers avail of motherese – a specified register characterizing speech used by parents when they talk to their children. Although motherese may be a universal feature of all languages, not all of them have been proved to have it (Snow – Ferguson 1977). The current study involved a longitudinal observation of the language used in natural everyday conversations between the mother and her son. The collected data constitute 15 hours of recordings which contain 1265 utterances. The recordings were divided into seven groups: feeding, bathing, playing, grooming, putting to bed, going for a walk and a mix. The theory of the universality of motherese in human languages has been attested for the Polish language. The speech of Polish mother contained major lexical features (for example, canonical forms), grammatical features (like frequency of imperatives and interrogatives), phonetic features (for instance, palatalization of consonants and sharpening of vowels) and finally clarifying features (full and partial repetitions or specific paralinguistic patterns). Full repetitions, *here-and-now* vocabulary and the frequency of diminutives, interrogative and imperative sentences were the most common properties of Polish motherese. Three additional attributes, which seem to be characteristic for Polish language specifically, have also been noticed and they may be present in Polish motherese owing to the specificity of the Polish speech, abundant in clusters, /r/ trills and nasalized vowels.

References:

Snow, Catherine – Charles Albert Ferguson (eds.). 1977. *Talking to children: Language input and acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.