

A Comparative Study of Words in Tamil Baby Talk

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This research study is aimed at identifying similarities and differences of baby words in Tamil. Baby talk (BT) is the language used by infants aged below five or six years to talk to each other or to talk to parents or care givers. BT is also used with adult intimates as well as pets to show affection. Sometimes it is used with adults to show contempt. Baby talk is referred to as caretaker speech, infant-directed speech (IDS), child-directed speech (CDS), motherese or parentese. BT is found in any language, and Sinhala and Tamil are not exceptions. In Tamil it is called "koiy". BT may differ from place to place and from person to person. This phenomenon is seen in Tamil Baby Talk as well. Thus data was collected from northern part of Sri Lanka, namely Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee and Jaffna with the help of mothers and caretakers of five children. Direct observation was also carried out. Transcribed data was analyzed structurally to identify similarities and differences. It is found that BT words are not the same everywhere and have some variations depending on the place and person. In some instances the whole word is different, in other instances the phonemic shape or the morphology differed significantly.

Keywords: *caretaker speech, infant-directed speech (IDS), Child-directed speech (CDS), motheries, Tamil Baby talk, "koiy".*

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