# MAIDESE VERSUS MOTHERESE – IS THE LANGUAGE INPUT OF CHILD AND ADULT CAREGIVERS SIMILAR?

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This paper considers whether there is any difference in the amount and characteristics of language addressed to infants by their primary caregivers, the maid and the mother, in a society where multiple caregiving is commonplace. It also considers any possible effect on motherese of the mothers' belief in reincarnation. The language of 16 mothers and their 16 maids with 12-month old infants, was analyzed. There were significant differences in the amount of language and types of utterances, but few differences in the functions of the utterances or topics introduced.

*Keywords:* motherese, caregiver language, Igbo, maternal speech

## INTRODUCTION

There have been many studies and discussions of variations in the interaction and care given by different types of substitute mothers, childminders and multiple caregivers (Bowlby, 1953; Maccoby and Feldman, 1972; Leiderman and Leiderman, 1974; Rutter, 1972). How the linguistic input a child receives may affect language development, has also been rather tentatively considered (Kavanaugh and Jirkovsky, 1982; Lieven, 1982; Nelson, Denninger, Bonvillian, Kaplan and Baker, 1984). Whilst there has been some research comparing mothers' and fathers' speech input to infants (Golinkoff and Ames, 1979; McLaughlin, White, McDevitt and Raskin, 1983) and children to infants (Anderson and Johnson, 1973; Dunn and Kendrick, 1982), as Harkness (1977) has pointed out, "we cannot yet conclude that the language environment provided by adults is qualitatively superior in all respects to that provided by other slightly older children." Similarly, summaries of previous cross-cultural investigations of maternal vocalizations (Blount, 1977, 1982; Schiefflin, 1979; Schiefflin and Eisenberg, 1984; Snow, de Blauw and Van Roosmalen, 1979) have shown that still relatively little is known about cultural

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differences in the structure and organization of caregiver-child speech.

Cross-cultural studies have also focussed almost entirely on the use of sibling caretakers in developing societies (Edwards, 1986; Martini and Kirkpatrick, 1981; Weisner, 1982; Weisner and Gallimore, 1977). In this kind of setting the mother or another adult is often not far away to advise or give instructions (Weisner, 1982, p. 309) and the relationship between sibling and infant may be closer than that of a non-relative. Previous observations of the language of sibling caregivers suggest that parental personality characteristics are sometimes perpetuated in a form of "overmimicry" (Weisner, 1982). There are also two typical forms of caregiving – overindulgence so that the infant is not upset and attracts adult concern, or more commonly, dominance by the older child in the form of harassment, teasing, tyrannizing or neglect.

Although the literature on the actual language of the child caregiver in interacting with an infant is negligible, Mead (1961) noted the stream of verbal commands which Samoan child caregivers used as perpetual admonitions within the conversation, almost as a habit whether they were really needed or not. Edwards (1986) cited similar material from Snipper's (1978) study in Mexico, where a nine-year-old girl pushed a two-year-old around in a toy car using only a stream of short commands and brief complaints as conversation. Lack of elaboration, use of commands, lack of affect and concern with concrete rules (Edwards, 1986) are typical features of child language to infants.

This paper offers a unique ethnolinguistic study of Nigerian (Igbo) non-sibling 8–12-year-old caregivers who joined a family as baby-nurses taking on considerable responsibility in the day-time, during the mother's absence at the farm or business and when other children were away in school. The study looked at the speech of the two kinds of caregivers, mothers and their maids to the same infants. The maids' role in relation to the infant was very similar to that of the mother. The maid was also concerned with the baby's feeding, physical comfort and activities. The basic difference, therefore, was one of age and the cognitive-perceptual contrast that this implies.

It was anticipated that some of the features of sibling language to infants might also be found in the child caregivers, thus emphasizing the developmental difference between mother-infant interaction and child-infant interaction. If, however, no differences were found, then this would suggest that a pre-adolescent child can fulfil the same sociolinguistic role as the mother, toward the infant.

A brief description of the socio-cultural background is appropriate here. The basic processes of child care, which certainly differ from that of Western society, have only been subject to a few changes in the rural areas in the past 50 years (Basden, 1966a, b; Leiber, 1971; Uchendu, 1965). The main characteristics are described in Mundy-Castle's (1980) detailed study, as protracted breast-feeding, demand feeding and sleeping, extensive and frequent communication with the extended family and others, frequent body contact, instant caregiving in response to stress, and frequent involvement in rhythm, dance, music and singing. The infant is constantly shifted from one physical position to another, from being tied on the back, if walking a long distance or the caregiver wishes both hands free, carried informally on the hip, or seated on the knee or at her feet. Weaning is usually about the age of two. The baby sleeps on the same bed as the mother until this age or until she has another child. Much of the day is spent in the

care of persons other than the mother. In Igbo society, one or two maids usually between ages 8 and 12, who may be distant relatives or unrelated, assist the mother in caring for the child, especially while she goes to her place of work such as the office, farm or market. U.P.E. (Universal Primary Education) policy has disrupted this pattern of child-care to some extent in that it may be necessary to have two maids (one attending morning and one afternoon school) or find one who has completed primary school.

The place of maids is still an integral and essential part of any child's upbringing. It is an aspect of the culture that goes back a long way. Okafor-Omali (1965), who was born in 1927, wrote a novel about his father's childhood and in it he describes how:

> Nweke was only four months old when his mother entrusted him completely to the care of a baby-nurse. Baby nurses were generally children of about eight to ten years. It was their duty to take care of the child and keep him playing while the mother was busy in the compound or at the farm or market. Every time the child expressed his feelings of hunger by crying, the nurse poured sips of water into his mouth. This gave him some satisfaction and it was repeated until the mother was back home to give the breast. This work was usually done by members of the child's family or extended family, or by a close relation of the mother with good personal qualifications. It was a matter of pride for children to have such an assignment and they were happy to be relieved, to some extent, from domestic work. (p. 51).

Until recently boy maids were always kept to look after male babies and female maids for female babies, but this division of sex is not always adhered to in modern times. Another gradual change, is that while previously, the maid could only give the child sips of water by hand or cup when the mother was absent and had to comfort the child somehow, however hungry, she is now often left with milk or food to give him. Unless it is raining heavily, the infant will spend the day out-of-doors around the compound (yard by the house), the nearby bush, or follow the maid to the *mbara-ama* (a part of the village where children meet to play and where at certain times adults also hold their meetings, often in a village hall). In towns, the infants will play in the streets, backyards, or even be constrained indoors.

There is sufficient evidence to show that Nigerian babies use protolanguage and engage in dialogic activities with their caregivers in the same way that American or British babies do (Mundy-Castle, 1980). Although it is understood that the caregiver language is often prompted by the infant's participation in communication (Newson, 1979; Penman, Cross, Milgram-Friedman and Meares, 1983), this study is principally concerned with that part of the "dialogue" which consists of the language input to the infant.

It has been thoroughly documented that parents use a modified speech register when addressing young children (Dunn and Kendrick, 1982; Golinkoff and Ames, 1979; Kaye, 1980; Snow, 1977, 1979). This has sometimes been called "motherese" (Cross, 1978) and is characterized by short, simple sentences, repetitiveness, paraphrasing of utterances, frequency of interrogatives and imperatives (Snow, 1977; Phillips, 1973). Also noticeable are prosodic features such as high pitch and exaggerated intonation contours, and much gestural expression (Blount, 1982, 1984; Josse and Monique, 1981). However, this special register is not only used by parents. Children aged 4–5 when addressing 16–36 month olds (Anderson and Johnson, 1973; Sachs and Devin, 1976) and children aged 2–3 years

when addressing babies (Dunn and Kendrick, 1982) have also been found to speak this way rather than the way they speak to peers or adults. It is again characteristic of all adults when speaking to children or to other adults who are new learners of the language. It could, therefore, be assumed that infants who have substitute mothering, and frequent interaction with older siblings, will have access to a type of "motherese" from these persons as well as their parents.

The initial aim of this research was to find out whether the maids' speech to infants (maidese) was qualitatively and/or quantitatively different from that of sibling caregivers as reported in the literature, and from that of the mothers (motherese) by analyzing both the structural and pragmatic features of each. Secondly, such an analysis should reveal any effect on the mothers' speech of a belief in reincarnation. This is common throughout West Africa. A spirit of a deceased person, often a relative, is thought to reincarnate in one or several persons, although the relationship between "the spiritual entity reincarnating the child and the child itself is not well defined" (Grindal, 1972). However, the infant's present life is said to be ruled and guided by the circumstances of the spirit's life in his or her previous world existence (Emecheta, 1980; Nwoga, 1984). In Igbo traditional religion, a person's spirit may reincarnate seven times (Achebe, 1986). Although the influence of Christianity has produced dramatic changes in religious worship, parents or grandparents still seek information from the *dibia-afa* (superior native-doctor) immediately after the child's birth. He will tell them whether the child is, for example, a reincarnation of a great-grandfather or an uncle, and whether the ancestral spirit needs to be appeased for any unfortunate incident in the previous life that would affect the infant's health and future (Duru, 1980).

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Sixteen families were selected from Anambra State, Nigeria. Ten families lived in Onitsha and six lived in Ihiàla. Four of the families in Onitsha spoke a dialect other than the Onitsha dialect. There were 32 caregivers, 16 mothers and their infants and 16 maids. The infants were all aged 12 months ± three weeks. Half of the families were from a rural area and half from an urban area, but this was not always reflected in educational and occupational background. Details of the mothers and their families can be seen in Table 1. Mothers 1, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 were still breastfeeding.

Ten of the maids were female and six were male. They all attended morning or afternoon primary (grade) school, in classes two to four. Several families, therefore, had two maids (one attending school a.m. and one attending school p.m.), or the mother simply managed until the maid returned from school by 1 p.m.

### *Procedure*

In order to keep the situation as natural as possible, the observer informed the mother/maid that she wanted to watch the child and remained for over an hour seated quietly in one corner. Several previous visits were made so that the observer was familiar with

TABLE 1

Family background of subjects

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mean age of maids: | 10.6 years | Range: 8–12 years |
| Mean age of mothers: | 28.5 years | Range: 24–32 years |
| Mean no. of children in family: | 3.1 | Range: 1–5 |
| Sex of maids: | 6 male, 10 female | |
| Sex of infants: | 10 male, 6 female | |

| *Maternal occupations* | | *Paternal occupations* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trading: | 4 | Trading: | 5 |
| Housewife: | 4 | Teaching: | 5 |
| Teaching: | 3 | Civil Service: | 2 |
| Farming: | 3 | Farming: | 2 |
| Student: | 1 | Bicycle repairing: | 1 |
| Dressmaker: | 1 | (Deceased: | 1) |

the family. The verbal interaction was tape recorded using a Uher 1000-Report-L portable tape recorder, and accompanying observational notes were made for exactly one hour. When interruptions occurred, such as a major domestic problem or the child's falling asleep, the visit was repeated a few days later so that a complete hour's recording could be obtained. Each recording included feeding lasting 5 to 15 minutes. In the case of the mothers, this was usually breastfeeding.

*Analysis*

The language addressed to the infants was divided into utterances using Brown's (1973) rules. One-word utterances were included, but not unintelligible utterances. The definition of an utterance used was "a unit of speech directed to the baby containing at least one (Igbo or English) word or nonsense word and no inaudible words" (Kaye, 1980).

The first 50 utterances from each caregiver were used as sample data. Three main types of analyses were made:

i) **Structural.** The number of declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives (WH), and interrogatives (*yes/no*) were compared.

ii) **Functional.** Eighteen categories were used (Appendix 1) which were shown by reliability checks to be sufficiently mutually exclusive. They were based on

TABLE 2

Structural characteristics of speech to infants

| | Mothers (n = 16) | | Maids (n = 16) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | *S.D.* | Mean | *S.D.* | *df* | *t* | *p* |
| No. of utterances per hour | 88.81 | 18.24 | 75.63 | 12.36 | 30 | 2.40 | 0.02* |
| Mean length of utterance (in words) | 4.09 | 0.88 | 3.39 | 0.59 | 30 | 2.64 | 0.01* |
| Declaratives | 20.81 | 6.00 | 15.12 | 4.59 | 30 | 3.01 | 0.006* |
| Imperatives | 17.56 | 5.60 | 24.44 | 4.21 | 30 | –3.93 | 0.0005*** |
| WH-Interrogatives | 5.13 | 2.45 | 8.00 | 2.25 | 30 | –3.45 | 0.002** |
| Yes/No Interrogatives | 6.50 | 3.31 | 2.50 | 2.42 | 30 | 3.90 | 0.006* |

* Significant at $p < 0.05$
** Significant at $p < 0.005$
*** Significant at $p < 0.0005$

Haslett's (1983) categories for assessing the compliance-gaining behavior of preschoolers which she developed from Brenneis and Lein's (1977) socio-linguistic analysis of arguments. The categories used in this paper have been further modified from recent attempts at categorizing features of maternal speech by Penman, Cross, Milgram-Friedman and Meares (1983) and Della Corte, Benedict and Klein (1983).

iii) **Topical.** Eleven categories were used to assess the main areas of topics in the language of the caregivers. These were created on the basis of the kinds of topics found in the data.

All 50 utterances were used to calculate the M.L.U. (mean length of utterance) for each person and the means for each group were then compared (Table 2). The method of tone-marking the Igbo utterances is given in Appendix 2.

*Reliability*

The recordings were transcribed by two native speakers with an inter-judge reliability of 84% on half of the texts. The utterance categorization was cross-checked for reliability by having a sample of four maidese and four motherese transcriptions categorized by the same two native speakers who were linguists with a minimum of four years training. There was an inter-judge reliability on the structural analysis of 100%, topic analysis 94% and functional 91%.

## RESULTS

*Structural*

There was a significant difference in all the linguistic characteristics of the maids' and the mothers' speech to the infants (Table 2). The mothers produced slightly more utterances within one-hour samples, although there was considerable individual variation among the caregivers. The highest number of utterances was 115 (Mother 9) and the lowest 52 (Mother 7). The mean M.L.U. was also significantly higher for the mothers (4.09 words) than the maids (3.39 words). The mothers produced some utterances that were much longer than those produced by the maids. For example,

Mother 6: Àkwàà ị́ yìrì n'ụ́nọ̀ ọ̀gwụ̀ ụ́bọ́sị̀ ámùrụ̀ ghị̀ (9 words)
'You wore this cloth in the hospital when you were born.'

Mother 14: Kà m̀ márá mà áfọ́ ghī ọ́ hàgwélé étú ọ́ nà-àhà (12 words)
'Let me know if your stomach is as big as it used to be.'

The number of declaratives used by the mothers was significantly higher than the maids, who used significantly more imperatives than the mothers. The mothers were more likely to carry on a longer commentary about the here-and-now situation, and also, unlike the maids, talked about hypothetical events and events far displaced in time. This often related to her aspirations for the child's future.

Mother 9: Ị́ gà échírì m̀ fádá
'You are going to be ordained a priest for me,
Ị́ gà-àzụ́kwárá ḿ mótò
and you are going to buy a car for me.'

Mother 13: Ị́ jà-àbú doktor
'You are going to be a medical doctor.'
Èhì ńné ghị́ ńwụ̀ọ́rọ́ ọ́ nà-àdà ná ńné dóktór ánwụ̀ọ́ nà
'The day I die it will be declared that the doctor's mother is dead.'

Mother 12: Kà ị́ jà-àdí ótù mgbá áhọ̀ nà ízù ụ́kà ịtọ̀
'You are going to be one year old in three weeks time.'

For the structural analysis, all sentences with *let* as in 'Let me clean your face' and 'Let's go and pick oranges,' were included as imperatives. In the functional analysis (Table 3), however, such constructions were classified as "desire" and "suggestion" respectively rather than command. The maids used more imperatives than the mothers, but in the functional analysis, when negative commands concerning prohibition and warnings are also excluded, there is no significant difference between the positive commands of the maids and the mothers.

With the interrogative sentences, the mothers used more yes-no interrogatives such as "Échèzọ̀nà, ì chọ̀rọ́ íbè ákwà?" 'Echezona, do you want to cry?' (Mother 8), than WH-interrogatives, such as "Oǹyé nà-èmé ghi?" 'Who is upsetting you?' (Mother 5). Many of the WH-interrogatives used by the maids consisted simply of "Ọ̀ wù gínị́?" 'What's the matter?' or literally, 'It is what?', often abbreviated to "Ò gíní?" For example, Maid 2 said:

Àdáòrà írékwálá ḿ àhú ọ́kú
'Adaora, do not disturb me.'
Ọ̀ gínị́?
'What's the matter?'
Ó dì kà ḭ́ ná-ákpóká
'You are always calling me.'
Ḭ́ kpọ́zílá ḿ
'Don't call me.'
Ọ̀ gínị́?
'What's the matter.'
Ńní?
'Food?'

Also included in the catgory of WH-interrogatives were "how" questions but these were rare and consisted only of "kedu" 'How are you?,' seven times in the mothers' speech and four times in the maids'. Exact repetitions were rare in the mothers' speech and occurred occasionally when greeting the child as if expecting a response. There were also a few partial repetitions, but these were also not common. For example, when her child wanted to take some coins, Mother 7 declared,

Égó?
'Money?'
Ì nà ébì égó?
'Do you mint money?'

*Functional*

Both maids and mothers showed the characteristics of caregiver speech described in previous studies. There were some features that were unique to the language being used.

For instance, there was no example of the use of "bíkó" 'please' which might be expected in desire, suggest, persuade, command or request, as this word is used much less frequently in such a context than in English. Also, whereas in English polite suggestions can be made by such constructions as *shall* or *will* (for example, "Shall I comb your hair?"), there is no equivalent in the Igbo language and, as mentioned earlier, the construction that occurs with great frequency is "kà m̀" 'let me ....' In English this is used to mean 'allow me,' but in Igbo it can imply, for example, 'I want to ...,' 'Can I ...,' 'Shall I ....' To make the construction more polite, it is adjoined by the words for 'come' or 'wait.'

| | |
|---|---|
| Chéré, kà m̀ ... | 'Wait, let me (feed you)' |
| Bịá, kà m̀ ... | 'Come, let me (comb your hair)' |

The latter implies that some physical distance exists between the two persons. Sometimes ellipsis occurs and "ka" is omitted. For example, in the data, Maid 2 says:

Bịà ányí jéé nụ̀ò tí
'Come us go drink tea.'

Thus, in the functional categories used, "desire" (on the part of the caregiver) is expressed mainly by "kà m̀" 'let me' rather than "á chọ́rọ́ m̄" 'I want,' and suggest ("kà ányí" 'let us') rather than 'we could' or 'shall we.'

Another semantic feature of Igbo is the frequent use of "ǹdó" 'sorry' as a reassurance and expression of sympathy rather than apology. In Appendix 2, it can be seen that Maid 3 and Maid 10 both use this expression when the child starts fretting or crying.

A comparison of the maids and the mothers on the functions of their utterances does not reveal the highly significant differences found linguistically. The only differences were on tease, prohibit, warn and describe and two of these only reached a low level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Teasing usually involved some humor and was sometimes accompanied by smiling or laughter. One kind of teasing only found in the mothers' speech was that of affectionate naming. Examples of this include:

| | |
|---|---|
| M1 | ágádí nwóké 'old man' |
| M3 | ísí éjù 'snail head (i.e., nothing in it)' |
| M5 | ísí éhí 'cow's head' |
| M7 | ísí ódó 'head like mortar' |
| M8 | íké m̀kpùtù 'rough bottom' |
| M10 | ónyé árá ńkwógbè 'mad man' |
| M11 | ágádí nwáànyì 'old woman' |
| M12 | órí ńní 'eater' |
| M14 | sùpíawá ímí 'flat nose' |
| M16 | m̀bòrímbò 'bush man' |

TABLE 3

Mean relative frequencies of the functional categories in the speech of the caregivers

| Category | Mothers (n = 16) | | Maids (n = 16) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive Affect | Mean | *S.D.* | Mean | *S.D.* | *df* | *t* | *p* |
| Desire | 0.63 | 0.72 | 1.13 | 1.15 | 30 | –1.48 | 0.15 |
| Suggest | 0.81 | 0.91 | 1.12 | 1.03 | 30 | –0.91 | 0.37 |
| Persuade | 1.38 | 1.41 | 0.69 | 0.95 | 30 | 1.62 | 0.14 |
| Command | 13.50 | 5.72 | 14.50 | 4.26 | 30 | –0.56 | 0.58 |
| Praise | 1.06 | 1.53 | 0.44 | 0.73 | 30 | 1.48 | 0.15 |
| Tease | 3.06 | 2.44 | 1.13 | 1.36 | 30 | 2.78 | 0.01** |
| Reassure | 2.50 | 3.16 | 2.38 | 2.36 | 30 | 0.13 | 0.90 |
| Negative Affect | | | | | | | |
| Threaten | 0.69 | 1.01 | 0.63 | 0.81 | 30 | 0.19 | 0.85 |
| Prohibit | 1.00 | 1.09 | 3.06 | 3.35 | 30 | –2.34 | 0.03* |
| Warn | 1.06 | 1.77 | 2.31 | 1.54 | 30 | –2.31 | 0.04* |
| Chastize | 3.81 | 3.78 | 6.19 | 4.09 | 30 | –1.71 | 0.09 |
| Neutral Affect | | | | | | | |
| Truth Statement/ Request | 0.75 | 1.29 | 0.25 | 0.58 | 30 | 1.41 | 0.17 |
| Opinion Request | 1.19 | 1.42 | 0.75 | 0.85 | 30 | 1.05 | 0.30 |
| Inform. Request (ext.) | 2.63 | 2.09 | 1.31 | 1.07 | 30 | 2.23 | 0.03 |

| | Mean | *S.D.* | Mean | *S.D.* | *df* | *t* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inform. Request (infant) | 4.06 | 2.21 | 4.25 | 2.41 | 30 | –0.23 | 0.82 |
| Label | 3.44 | 2.68 | 4.44 | 2.76 | 30 | –1.04 | 0.31 |
| Describe | 7.13 | 4.32 | 2.69 | 2.06 | 30 | 3.71 | 0.001*** |
| Other | 1.37 | 1.45 | 2.00 | 1.59 | 30 | –1.16 | 0.26 |

* Significant at $p < 0.05$
** Significant at $p < 0.01$
*** Significant at $p < 0.001$

Some teasing was part of playfulness, as when Mother 1 dressed her child's head with a headtie and then announced,

Ọ̀kwá ị́ búkwàdì Sístér Ámàkà!
'You are Sister Amaka, aren't you?'

Other humor was usually related to appearance such as,

Mother 7: Íhú kwàrà kà íkè ghị́ hà
'Look at how big your buttocks are.'

Mother 1: Màkà ó dì ká ị́ dì ímé
'It looks as if you are pregnant.'

Mother 14: Ị́ jòrò
'You are very ugly.'

or feeding,

Mother 2: Ò nwéré íhé ná-érí ńní n'áfọ́ ghì áhù?
'Is there anything in your stomach that shares your food with you?'

Certainly, in an utterance like this, the tone of voice and context are crucial for determining the functional category. If it had been said in anger, this could be categorized as "chastize," but in this case, mothers were not annoyed by how much the child ate, or how long he fed, but more by his activities, movements or crying.

The slightly larger number of warnings and prohibitions in the maids' speech were also mainly concerned with these three areas. For example,

Maid 4: Ńgwà kwụ̀ọ́ nkìtí
'Okay, don't cry again.'

Although mild chastizing was equally common for both maids and mothers, neither used threats very often (mean = 0.69, mothers; 0.63, maids). None of the threats were ever carried out in the observations made. Examples of such non-serious threats were, when telling her child to stop playing about with his piece of cooked yam,

Mother 9: Ḿ mà àhátùkwé ghį́
'I will soon drop you.'

and pushing away her child who wanted to be breastfed again,

Mother 15: Pùọ́ nà ị́ ná-èzúzùká
'Go away and do not be silly.'
Chèré ká ńnà gí pụ̀tá
'Just wait til your father comes.'

Common to both mothers and maids was the threat of calling a dog or evil masquerade when a child misbehaved or did not cooperate,

Mother 1: Nkîtà tàá yà!
'Dog bite him!'

when she wanted the child to hurry.

Another functional category which reflected a type of behavioral control was truth statements and requests. These were often based on cultural mores or superstitions. For instance, females are not supposed to cross their legs as this implies waywardness, or to separate them too much when seated, but this does not apply to males. Hence Mother 8 instructed her son,

Gbásáa úkwú ghị̀ ágbásaà
'Spread your legs apart.'
Nwóké ánà-èjíkọ̀ úkwù yà èjíkọ̀
'Boys don't keep their legs together.'

and later when eating,

Ọ́ọ́ kà ésì èrízí ńní?
'Is this how food is eaten?'

The child of Mother 7 often fell down, and she told a relative in the room, not to help him up, that he ate breadfruit and,

Ọ́ bụ̀ kà ńdé rìrì úkwà sị̀ ádà
'That's how those who eat breadfruit fall.'

The difference in the number of descriptions (Mothers' mean = 7.13, Maids' mean = 2.69) is reflected in the greater number of declaratives in the mothers' speech, mentioned earlier. She talked about what the child was doing, often relating it to

external events. For example, Mother 5, when encouraging her child to dance to music on the radio, said,

Ńgwá gbàwà égwú
'Okay, dance.'
Mgbe í gà-èchí ózó ánà-àhúrú gí égó yóm
'They will sing *ego yom* for you when you take your *ozo* title.' (Chieftancy title).
Àkpá
'Bag.'
Ùdí ákpà-à ká í gà-ázúrú nwúnyèghì
'This is the type of bag you will buy for your wife.'
Chúkwúdì màrà mmá
'Chukwudi is very handsome.'
Úmùnwáànyí gà-ágbásó gì
'Women will chase you.'
Í nà-été égwú
'You are dancing.'

It can be seen from the above that for seven consecutive utterances none were commands or questions, but simply statements referring to the child's personal qualities or activities and possible future.

*Topic*

A surprisingly large number of utterances were concerned with the child's movements. There was little difference in the time spent on similar topics in the speech of the mothers or the maids except that the maids spent significantly more time talking about crying and related behavior. Whereas many of the mothers offered breastfeeding to quieten a child who may have been hungry, thirsty, tired or just fretful, the maid had to try to calm the child down by chastizing, reassuring, or trying to find out what was wrong, as shown in the example of Maid 2 (p. 220).

Although there was no significant difference in the number of utterances concerning the child's appearance between the mothers and the maids, there was a complete difference in their preoccupations. Whereas the maids were concerned about keeping clothes clean and hair combed, for example, the mothers were concerned about physical attributes and particularly the teeth. Mother 3 in Appendix 2 mentioned this and the importance of the chewing stick to keep the teeth clean and white. Traditionally, also, the mothers may even use charcoal if the child's teeth are not white enough: Mother 1 asked her child,

Chàgódí ézé ghí
'Show me your teeth.'

TABLE 4

Mean relative frequencies of the topics of each sentence

| | Mothers (n = 16) | | Maids (n = 16) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | *S.D.* | Mean | *S.D.* | *df* | *t* | *p* |
| Food (and Drink) | 6.75 | 5.15 | 7.12 | 3.28 | 30 | −0.25 | 0.81 |
| Safety | 1.56 | 2.16 | 1.81 | 2.72 | 30 | −0.29 | 0.78 |
| Emotion and Behavior | 5.63 | 2.39 | 8.25 | 3.36 | 30 | −2.55 | 0.02* |
| Movement | 12.38 | 4.6 | 14.0 | 4.93 | 30 | −0.96 | 0.34 |
| Appearance | 5.81 | 2.51 | 4.25 | 2.61 | 30 | 1.74 | 0.09 |
| Naming (calling child by name and nicknames | 4.88 | 2.83 | 3.44 | 1.46 | 30 | 1.81 | 0.08 |
| Helping (offering assistance) | 0.44 | 1.09 | 1.13 | 1.54 | 30 | −1.45 | 0.16 |
| Objects | 2.69 | 2.47 | 3.0 | 2.31 | 30 | −0.37 | 0.71 |
| Persons | 2.06 | 2.30 | 1.75 | 1.81 | 30 | 0.42 | 0.67 |
| Speech (apologizing, greeting, prompting infant to speak) | 5.13 | 2.63 | 4.25 | 2.05 | 30 | 1.05 | 0.30 |
| Elaboration (detailed comments on topics not listed above) | 2.69 | 2.98 | 0.56 | 0.96 | 30 | 2.71 | 0.01** |

* Significant at $p < 0.05$
** Significant at $p < 0.01$

Ézé ghị̀ nà-ésì ísìsì
'Your teeth smell.'

and Mother 13:

Átụ́ jà-àgbábà ghì n'àkpịrị́
'You are going to injure yourself with that chewing stick.'
Ńgwà bìá kà m̀ táá ghị́ átụ́
'Okay, come let me clean your teeth for you.'

Another area important to mothers is tongue protrusion (tongue thrust) which traditionally is prevented by using a thorn, from a specific bush, on the child's tongue whenever it protrudes. Mother 2 was particularly concerned about this and often reminded the child, "Wèkpúo íré" 'Take in your tongue' or "íré ghị́ à" 'This your tongue.'

There was also a clear difference in naming between the mothers and the maids. The maids used the child's real name only, but the mothers also used the terms "nńa" 'father' for a boy and "nńe" 'mother' for a girl, as well as affectionate naming that has already been discussed. Some evidence of reincarnation beliefs was occasionally found in types of address. A child would be called 'my husband's father,' for example, if this was appropriate.

The category of "speech" included attempts to get the child to say something such as greeting visitors or saying goodbye, as well as apologizing or greeting the child by the mother or maid. Only the mothers and not the maids were found urging the child to speak. For example,

Mother 6: Sì ńnà ghị́ óchè ńnọ́
'Say welcome to your uncle.'

and
Mother 12: Jèé kà Ìfý sáá ghị́ íhú
'Go and tell Ify to wash your face for you.'

Mother 3 said: Nèé sìstá. Kpọ̀ọ́ sìstá. Sì yà bìá
'See your sister. Call sister. Tell her to come.'

This "communication-promotion" could be seen as the speech equivalent of "loco-promotion" described by Agiobu-Kemmer (1984) in the motor stimulation of Nigerian babies by their mothers, not found in her sample of British mothers.

Examples of elaboration were significantly more common in the mothers. This was the same as the function of "describe," but included utterances that could not be classified under other topics and contained general information or instructions. One example is when Mother 1 wanted her child to say grace before eating:

Ńgwà k'ànyí kpèè ékpéré
'Let us say grace.'

N'áfà ńná nà nwá nà mụ̀ọ́ ńsọ̄
'In the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Ghost . . .'

and Mother 2,

Ị́ sáá́ áhù kà ányị́ jéé́ áhià
'We shall go to the market together when you have taken your bath.'

Mothers started to give their children elaborated directives early as a training for them to learn to perform tasks and errands, even if they hardly did it well. For example, as children of this age often wear tops, but no diaper, Mother 2, insisted:

Jèé́ chìtá́ ákwà kà ị́ bìá́ fíchá́a màmírí gí
'Go and get a rag and clean up your urine.'

and later, as oiling the skin was a daily procedure especially in the dry season,

Ì téela údé́?
'Have you put cream on your body?'
Ńgwa jèé́ wètà údé́ kà ítée
'Go and get your cream.'

There were no instances of "baby-talk" lexicon described by Ferguson (1964, 1978) such as "woof-woof" 'dog' and "choo-choo" 'train,' but he does say that the size of such a lexicon varies from one language to another. Although mothers confirmed that baby-names were given for a few "taboo" words, especially natural functions, these tended to be created by individual families and were not general.

## DISCUSSION

It can be seen that the mean M.L.U. (mean length of utterance) of the mothers compares favorably with that found in other studies (Phillips, 1973 – 4.3 words; Della Corte *et al.*, 1983 – 4.3/4.03). The Igbo mothers observed, therefore, used utterances similar in length to mothers in other cultures when addressing young children. The maids, however, had a mean M.L.U. significantly less (3.39 words). Another quantitative difference was in the number of utterances per hour, although it should be noted that the mean number of utterances (75.63) was only 11 words less than the mothers' (88.81) for one hour. Bates, Bretherton, Beeghly-Smith and McNew (1982) have summarized most of the studies of attempts to investigate the effect or non-effect of talk to children. They do show that there are some significant, positive findings of the effect of "motherese" on language, but few of the studies are correlational and many have results which are difficult to interpret. Their overall conclusion is that quantitatively, the relationship is clear, "more language input from adults is related to more and better language in children" (p. 48). The findings of Bates (1975) also suggest that children whose language input comes more from adults than peers and older children, are at an

advantage in language learning. In this study, however, the level of significance for differences in the number of utterances per hour is really not so high ($p < 0.01$).

The significant differences in the number of declaratives, imperatives, and interrogative types may well be a reflection of an underlying difference in the knowledge and belief about the status and perception of the other person. Between the two groups of caregivers, the maid seems to view the communicative situation more as monologic than dialogic. The maid sees a caregiver role for a child this age as a dominant one and feels a need to assert that special status. Also, if anything happens to the child, the maid may be physically punished. There were, therefore, a large number of imperatives in "maidese," especially negative ones reflecting a concern with control of the child. These do not require a verbal response.

The much larger number of WH-interrogatives by the maids, reinforces this point. Cross, Johnson-Morris and Nienhuys (1980) in a study of mothers of deaf and hearing infants concluded that *yes/no* questions "permit mothers to treat many child behaviors (even non-vocal behaviors) as though they were responses" and Olsen-Fulero (1983) has found that *yes/no* questions "are more likely to be responded to than WH-questions." However, both authors point out that WH-questions require "an informative, discourse related verbal response" (Cross *et al.*, 1980, p. 180) with "the construction of a full proposition in response" (Olsen-Fulero, 1983). It is possible to disagree with this description when observing maternal speech. There are many WH-questions that do not really require an answer. They are often used, not with the anticipation of a reply, but as part of verbal control of a child. For example, "Why did you do that?" (to indicate annoyance), "And where do you think you're going?" (meaning come back here) or "What's all that noise?" (meaning stop crying). Blount (1972) found that in Samoan and Luo parental speech *yes/no* interrogatives were almost totally absent, but the speech of a Black American mother to her 26-month-old contained 28.5% *yes/no* interrogatives and only 12.2% WH interrogatives. He related this to the social status of the child, in that "asking a child to express his opinion in Luo society is a rare phenomenon, and requesting him to be a playmate with an adult is even less common."

The results show that the speech of maids and mothers to the infants on function and topic were very similar, so overall the infant does not seem to have been subjected to a grossly inadequate sociolinguistic input as a result of child caregiving. The significant differences that did exist were thus predominantly structural. This shows that the contrast between maid and mother was not so much *what* was said, but *how* is was said. The use of significantly more imperatives, especially negative ones, confirms previous observations of child caregiver speech (Edwards, 1986; Weisner, 1982), discussed earlier in this paper. Weisner (1982) has suggested that child caregivers may develop caregiving styles that are somewhat different from those of adults and that this is the effect of trying to balance two sets of demands (one from the infant and one from the parent). In the current study, as mentioned previously, a maid could be punished or chastized if the child was injured, neglected or created a disturbance, and it was therefore in his/her own interest to be somewhat overcautious and make the child conform to certain demands or restrictions.

The perception of the infant as a non-verbal partner in a monologic interaction is

probably a developmental one. The nuturant and pro-social behavior directed towards infants by children is highly similar cross-culturally (Edwards, 1986). Many of the features of this behavior and its accompanying language in interaction with the infant seem to be a reflection of children's basic ideas about infants and their care (Melson, Fogel and Toda, 1986).

In contrast to this, there is sufficient evidence to show that Igbo mothers see their child as a communicative partner. While the general topics of language are the same as that of the maids, there are three major additions that are obviously adult and reflect the mother's role. These are based on socialization, aspirations, and perception of the infant as a potential adult. The beginnings of the socialization process are culturally related and reflect African rules of etiquette, such as greeting seniors, the ability to follow directives as a later training for doing chores and going on errands, and personal hygiene and appearance. The mother is the major person involved in child socialization with the later addition of the peer group and extended family. Her aspirations for her children showed in her speech very early. In such a competitive society, the stress was on education and achievement as a route to wealth, and also on marriage and children. Finally, the mother's elaboration about what she is doing, their activities, asking him questions that could be answered, urging him to say things and perform tasks, and exchanging humor and songs, indicate that she perceived him in a different way than the maid did. Such caregiver age-related differences lend considerable support to the effects of parental beliefs on behavior found elsewhere (Sigel, 1986), particularly in predicting "distancing strategies." Sigel's research has shown that persons (parents) who viewed the child as passive and a mere recipient of knowledge tended to use low-level distancing (less psychological separation of the person from the here-and-now) as reflected in the use of, for example, more imperatives.

The concept of the child as a communicative partner does not, however, seem to include her view of him or her as an "adult" because of a possible previous life-existence. The lack of much syntactic difference between Igbo "motherese" and Western "motherese" suggests that they modify their speech in a similar way except for fewer repetitions and baby-talk lexicon. It would be necessary to analyze talk to babies younger than one year of age to see whether this trend was consistent across ages. A consciousness of her offspring as a child is shown in some of the comments made,

Mother 5, protests to her son about falling over,

É mée ì nà-èmé kà ọ́gàrányà
'But you keep behaving like an adult.'
Ná-èmékpùsị́ ónwé ghị́
'You won't behave like a small boy.'

The effect of reincarnation beliefs was shown much more in social behavior than in the use of "adult-like" speech. Unacceptable or idiosyncratic behavior was often tolerated if it reflected the personality of the previous person. The child would also be prevented from visiting certain places where any injury or even death had happened to the previous person. However, there was no direct reference to reincarnation in the

samples obtained, and this is partly probably because in the past three generations, moderate changes in such beliefs have occurred even more than in sorcery (Duru, 1980). It is only in the most interior rural villages that this would now be more frequently discussed in daily conversation.

The importance of cross-cultural research in all aspects of mother-infant interaction has been stressed (Isbell and McKee, 1980) and some specific differences found in motherese between different cultures (Blount, 1984; Schiefflin, 1979; Super and Harkness, 1982). It appears that there are also definite age-related differences in how children interact with infants regardless of whether they are siblings or not, compared with adults, that need to be investigated further.

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APPENDIX 1

Summary of the categories for the analysis of caregiver speech

| | *Category* | *Definition* | *Examples from Data* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive Affect | 1. Desire | Expression of a wish or intention on the part of the caregiver only. | Come and let me clean your teeth for you.<br>Let me straighten your dress. |
| | 2. Suggest | Proposing an idea with the implication of its being optional. | Let's go and take tea.<br>Let's go and ride on the motorcycle. |
| | 3. Persuade | An attempt to elicit the desired behavior by coaxing or encouraging statement. | It is sweet.<br>We shall go to the market together if you agree to have your bath. |
| | 4. Command | An order to the child to behave according to the directive given. | Send in that your tongue.<br>Take the rag to Chuma to spread on line. |
| | 5. Praise | A favorable comment about the child or his behavior. | Good child.<br>Beautiful daughter. |
| | 6. Tease | Playfully making fun of child. | Old man who is still breastfeeding.<br>Did you drink any alcoholic drink? |
| | 7. Reassure | Consoling the child by an expression of sympathy or telling the child not to be unduly concerned. | Don't mind him.<br>Take heart. |
| Negative Affect | 8. Threaten | Expression of an intention to hurt or disappoint, often hypothetical and especially if the child does not follow instructions. | I will soon leave you.<br>Wait 'til your father comes out. |

| | *Category* | *Definition* | *Examples from Data* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 9. Prohibit | To rule against doing something, either before or during the action. | Don't injure me on the leg.<br>Don't call me. |
| | 10. Warn | Telling the child of something bad that might happen especially when playing with dangerous things. | It will harm you.<br>Ifeanyi, until you knock your head on something. |
| | 11. Chastize | To speak sternly to the child and/or to blame him for his behavior. | Have you become deaf?<br>Look at how dirty your legs are. |
| Neutral Affect | 12. Truth Request | Positive or negative rhetorical question, making an apparent request for confirmation of fact. | Does one drink without eating? Somebody who is eating does not take drugs? |
| | 13. Opinion Request | Asking about child's desire or point of view. Can take the form of an interpretation of child's needs or wishes. | It isn't what you want anymore?<br>Do you want to wear them (shoes)? |
| | 14. Information Request (external to infant) | Asks for information from child, but is often asking herself at the same time. | Where is your father?<br>Where are your pants? |
| | 15. Information Request (re: infant) | Asks the child about his actions. Can also be in the form of an interpretation. | Are you refusing to eat?<br>Why are you marching like a soldier? |
| | 16. Label | One- or two-word utterances containing no proposition giving an item a name and often drawing attention to something. | Your food.<br>Biscuits. |
| | 17. Describe | An utterance containing a proposition which gives information about something. | It looks as if you are not afraid of anything.<br>This heat has given you a rash. |

## APPENDIX 2

The Igbo language is a Benue-Congo tonal language with SVO word order. A literal translation of the texts is given below using standard orthography, but tone-marking all syllables.

/ = high tone  \ = low tone  ¯ = step down

Example 1 (Onitsha Dialect)

Extract from speech of

*Maid 3*

/ Sùó ḿ íhē̄ / Pụ̀tá / Mèé m̄ / Ì mébèe ḿ /
/ Hit me something / Come out / Do me / You have not done me /

/ Ánàm àgbá ọ́sọ̄ / Ǹdó / Ghàrá / Nwánnē̄ m̄ bị̀á /
/ I am running run / Sorry / Leave off / Sister my come /

/ Nèénú bị̀á / Hápū̀ m̄ àkà / Ó rūtēlē ēbē̄ à /
/ See come / Leave me hand / It has reached place this /

/ Chị́ọ́má bìá / oo ye ye ye ye / Ọ́ gíní? / Bị̀a ébé̀ à /
/ Chioma come/ / It what? / Come place this /

/ Lèé mótò / Gịńị́? / Nyé m̄ /
/ Look car / What? / Give me /

Extract from speech of

*Mother 3*

/ Mémé ọ́ gịńị́ mémé́? / Kèdú? / Pụ̀tá ébé́ áhụ̀ / Bị̀à /
/ It what? / How? / Bring out place body / Come /

/ Bị̀ánú / Lèé mádụ̀ ń ụ́zọ̀ / Pùtá / Tòtòtoò, rápụ̀ m̀ /
/ Come now / Look person at door / Come out / Leave me me /

/ Ká ḿ bị̀á / Méè, my dear bị̀á / Hìcháa ọ́nú gī̀ /
/ Let me come / come / Clean mouth your /

/ Hápụ̀ ákwà m̀ / Ká m̄ bị̀á / Chèré, chèré m̄ /
/ Leave cloth my / Let me come / Wait, wait me /

/ Ọ́nú gī̀ jòrọ̀ ńjọ́ / Kà ḿ fú ézē̄ gī́ /
/ Mouth your be bad bad / Let me see teeth your /

/ Bịá tàá átū / Ọ́ gíní? / Mèchíè ọ́nụ̄ /
/ Come chew chewing-stick / It what? / Close mouth /

Example 2 (Ngwa Dialect)

Extract from speech of

*Maid 10* / Gàá gbàtá mmīrī / Chíọ́má gwètá bèbí ghụ̄ /
/ Go bring water / Chioma bring baby your /

/ Chíọ́má ọ̀ bù ńgíṛī? / Ghàrá / ǹdó /
/ Chioma, it is what? / Leave off / Sorry /

Extract from speech of

*Mother 10* /Chíóḿá gwèré / Chíóḿá bịá́ébé á /
/Chioma take / Chioma come place this /

/ Gwètá móto ghú / Ǹdíì pàpá ghụ́? /
/ Bring motor your / Where father your? /

/ Nwánné ḿ ńtà hìrí ụ́rā / Hìrí ụ́rā tá
/ Sister my little sleep sleep / Sleep today that mother

ńné ghụ́ ǹlọ́ / Gbútárá ghụ̄ ọ́kpárá ńtē /
your return / Kill you cricket/

/ Ọ́kpárá ńtē n'ùzò ègbèlú /
/ Cricket in road (egbelu – no meaning: poetic function) /

/ Ńné ghụ̄ ērīghī yā / Ńné ghụ̄ ērīghī yā /
/ Mother your eats not it / Mother your eats not it /

/ Màrà ghụ̄ lààbọ̀ ǹkúkwá èrí yà / ghụ̄, ghụ̄, ghụ̄ /
/ I and you us two join eat it / you, you, you /

/ Shíí / Mèchíè ọ́nū /
/ Ssh / Close mouth /