



PARENTESE

Is There a Method to the Madness?



Inspiration and starting my assignment

- IV-course: Language and Cognition
- Finding sources
 - *Ethical issues*
 - *Limited sources*
- Structuring my assignment

My thesis statement

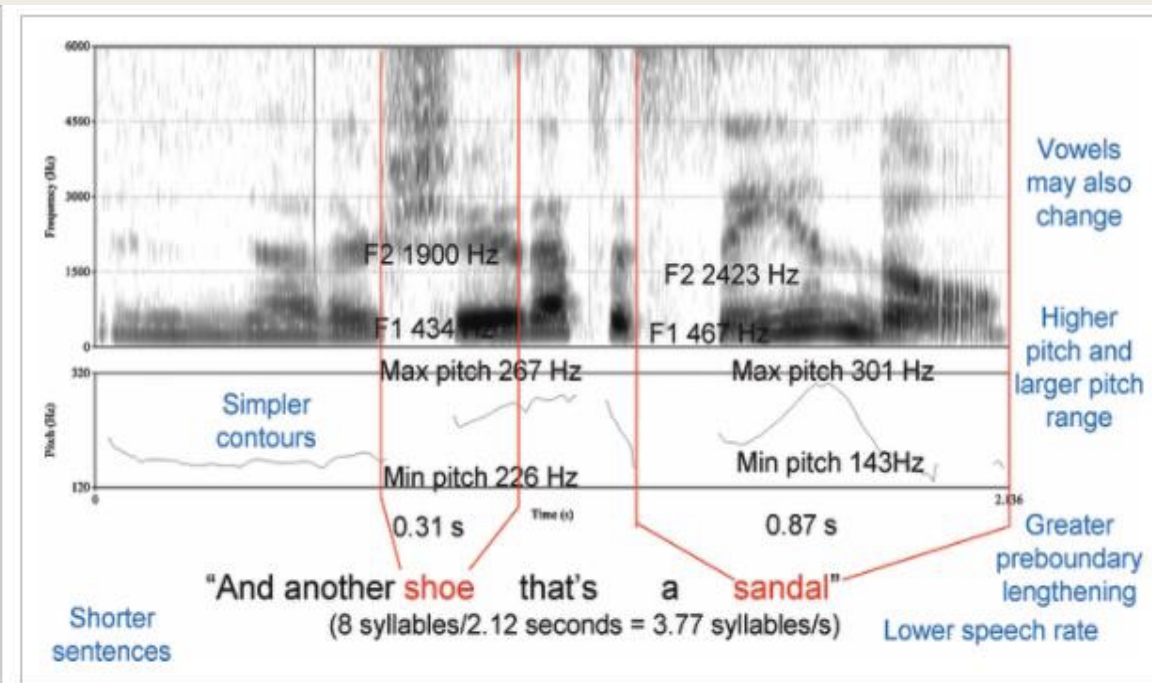
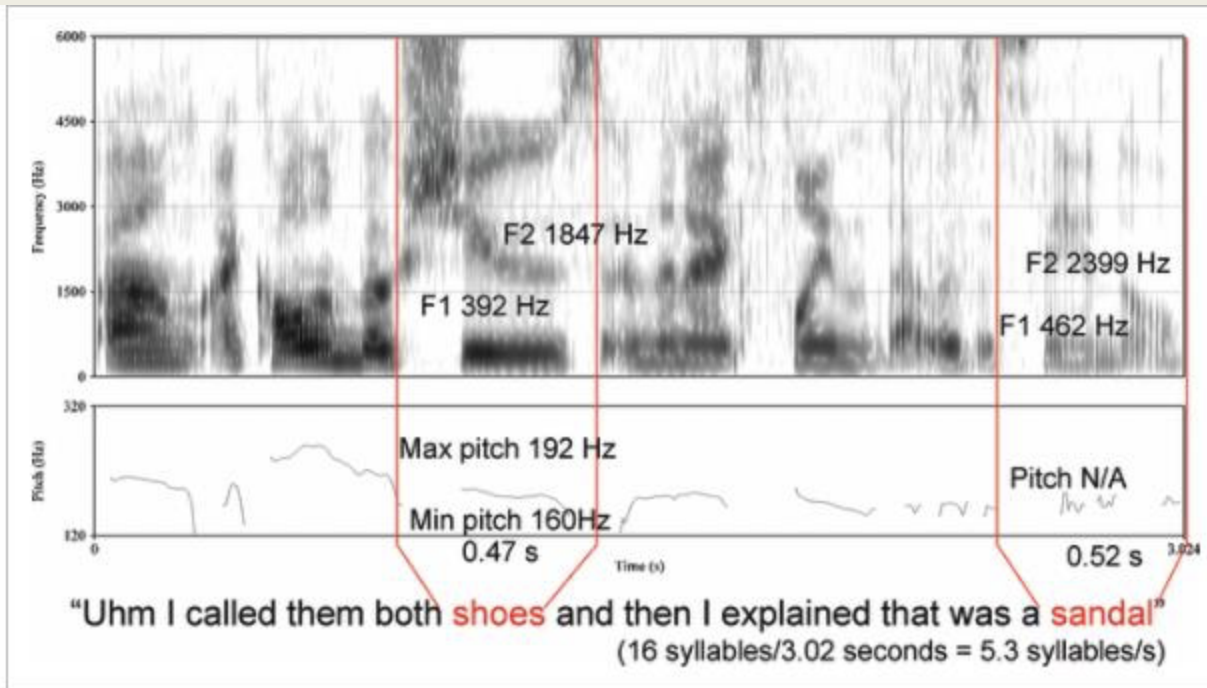
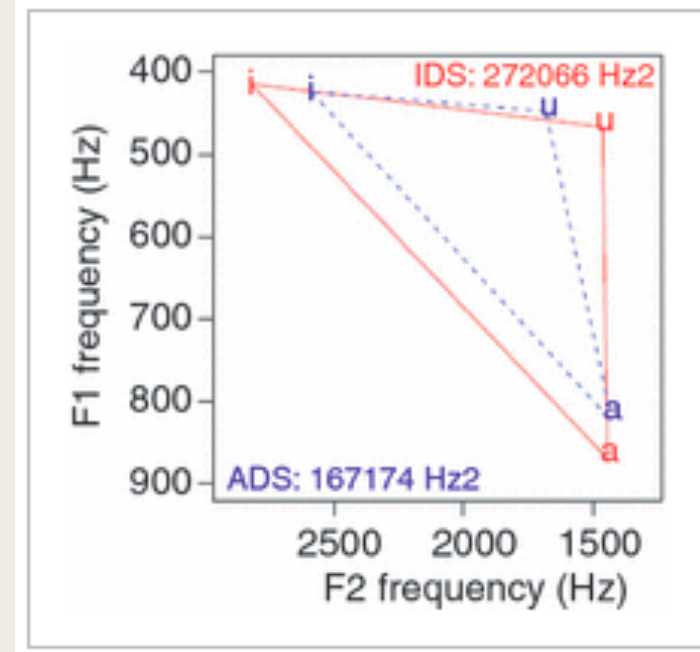
- “I will explore the characteristics, functions, and universality of parentese. I will investigate the advantages and disadvantages of this type of speech and argue for the fact that this particular language has beneficial functions and there is a reason that many of us use it”.

Characteristics of parentese/infant-directed speech (IDS)

- The speech is performed in shorter and simpler sentences. Simple words are isolated, and the speech is slower, higher in pitch, and performed with a wider pitch range than ADS (adult-directed speech).
- 'IDS shows more consistent cues to focus, such that focused words are placed at the end of sentences and marked with exaggerated pitch peaks much more frequently than in ADS (...). Thus, in comparison with ADS, IDS cues convey more clearly the talker's emotional state and communicative intent. In addition, large prosodic units and information structure are signalled more clearly in IDS' (Cristia 2013, 160).

The Phonetics of Parentese

Alejandria Cristia (2013) recorded changes between IDS and ADS.



Parentese and Language Acquisition

- Research into prosodic cues, specifically pauses in IDS in comparison to ADS by Nelson et. al. (2013).

| Coincident segmentation | Non-coincident segmentation |
|---|--|
| | Motherese |
| Cinderella lived in a great big house / but it was sort of dark / because she had this mean, mean, mean step-mother. / And, oh, she had two stepsisters / that were so ugly. / They were mean, too. | ... in a great big house but it was / sort of dark because she had / this mean, mean, mean, step-mother. And, oh, she / had two stepsisters that were so / ugly. They were mean, / too. They were... |
| | Adult-directed speech |
| In fact, I was just looking for something like that. / Julie's birthday's coming up in November / and I was looking for one of those dolls / that's similar to that, / where they have buttons and zippers, / and you tie the shoelaces and things like that... | ... was just looking for something like that. Julie's birthday's / coming up in November and I was / looking for one of those dolls that's similar to / that, where they have / buttons and zippers, and you tie / the shoelaces and things like that, because they... |

Slashes indicate inserted pauses.

| | Coincident segmentation | Non-coincident segmentation |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Motherese | 15'4 | 12'2 |
| s.d. | (2'45) | (2'25) |
| Adult-directed speech | 12'5 | 11'7 |
| s.d. | (2'77) | (2'49) |

Parentese and Language Acquisition

- They argue that when infants prefer segmentation at the boundary of clauses, they must have picked up on some aspects of syntax already and will continue to learn more by being addressed in parentese. But even though there is an indication of a preferred speech and segmentation of that speech, it is not clear whether the infant is actually learning proper syntax and if parentese is a contributor to first language acquisition.

Parentese and Language Acquisition

- ‘(...) the 21-month-olds learned associations between the novel words and novel objects when they heard IDS but not when they heard ADS’ (Ma et. al. 2011, 196).
- ‘when using the ADS materials, the 27-month-olds demonstrated word learning in both test blocks, and high-vocabulary 21-month-olds also showed word learning in test block 2’ (Ma et. al. 2011, 196).

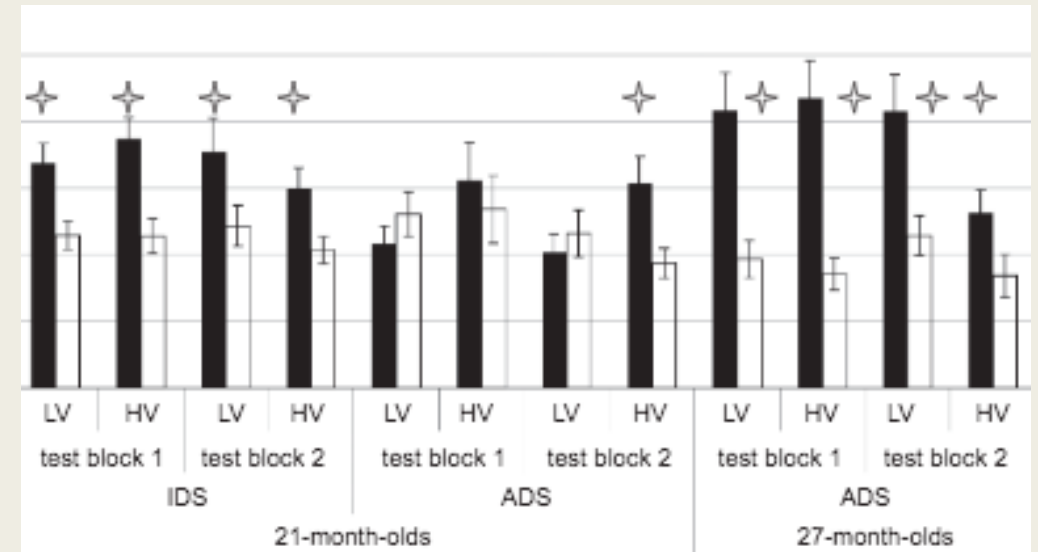


FIGURE 3 Means of single longest look at the target and non-target in test blocks 1 and 2 for 21-month-olds under IDS and ADS and under ADS for 27-month-olds by vocabulary level.

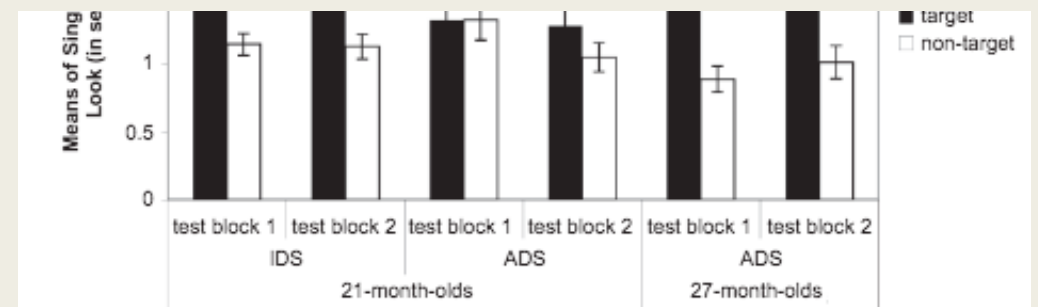


FIGURE 2 Means of single longest look at the target and non-target in test blocks 1 and 2 for 21-month-olds under IDS and ADS and under ADS for 27-month-olds.

The Universality of Parentese

- Reilly and Bellugi conducted a study where they investigated the presence of parentese in ASL with a special attention to whether the mothers' expression would try to convey affective information or grammatical distinctions.
- Conveying emotion through facial expressions is important for the bond between parent and child, but facial expressions are also used in American Sign Language (ASL) to convey linguistic meaning e.g., 'furrowed brows' and head tilt to signal a wh-question (Reilly and Bellugi 1996, 225). They found that parents of infants under the age of two years old performed ungrammatical sentences, possibly to avoid conveying the wrong emotion (anger), whereas the parents of infants over the age of two performed grammatical sentences with furrowed brows and head tilt (1996, 229).

American Sign Language

- The parents did not know they were being ungrammatical.
- The youngest group therefore did not receive the same level of grammar as those of hearing parents where the parentese is consistently grammatical.
- Albeit ungrammatical, this morphological simplification is consistent with the simplified language that is found in spoken parentese.
- ‘Similar to hearing parents, deaf parents modify the language they direct to their toddlers. They too, sign more slowly, use shorter sentences, use much repetition and substitute proper names for pronouns’ (1996, 235).

The Social Impact of Parentese

- Elinor Ochs (1993) conducted gender research and proposed ‘a relation between the position and image of women in society and language use in caregiver-child interaction’ (1993, 346).
- “Mother” is underrated because she does not socialize children to acknowledge her participation in accomplishments. “Mother” is ignored because through her own language behaviour, “mother” has become invisible’ (1993, 355).
 - *This is what it means to be a parent though. All the hard work, none of the credit.*

The “why not” approach

- Many parents will do whatever it takes if it means that their children learn just a bit more efficiently and thereby avoid them falling behind. This might also be why parentese is predominant in the Western World where academic competition is still on the rise.
- As long as research show that parentese *can* (not will) facilitate language, why not?

Further research

- One could investigate whether the conversion from parentese to ADS actually serves as a disadvantage, as the infant has to relearn personal pronouns (subject “me” becomes “I”) and converge baby-talk to ADS (“tummy” becomes “stomach”).
- In addition, one could compare the stages of language acquisition in age of children from parentese and non-parentese cultures, perhaps predicting that parentese children will produce faster language (in baby-talk), but that non-parentese children will produce ADS faster.

Sources

- Bruner, Jerome. 1975. "The Ontogenesis of Speech Acts." *Journal of Child Language* 2, no. 1. Cambridge University Press: 1-19. doi:10.1017/S0305000900000866. Accessed 26 May 2021.
- Corie, Jennifer S. "Motherese." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Human Communication Sciences and Disorders*, edited by Damico, Jack S., and Martin J. Ball, 1187-88. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2019. <http://dx.doi.org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk:2048/10.4135/9781483380810.n393>. Accessed 21 May 2021.
- Cristia, Alejandria. "Input to Language: The Phonetics and Perception of Infant-Directed Speech." *Language and Linguistics Compass* 7, no. 3 (March 25, 2013): 157–70. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12015>. Accessed 21 May 2021.
- Duranti, Alessandro, Charles Goodwin, and Elinor Ochs. "Indexing Gender." Essay. In *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, 346–358. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993.
- Ma, Weiyi, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Derek M. Houston, and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek. "Word Learning in Infant- and Adult-Directed Speech." *Language Learning and Development* 7, no. 3 (July 18, 2011): 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15475441.2011.579839>. Accessed 24 May 2021.
- Nelson, Deborah G. Kemler, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Peter W. Jusczyk, and Kimberly Wright Cassidy. 1989. "How the Prosodic Cues in Motherese Might Assist Language Learning." *Journal of Child Language* 16, no. 1. Cambridge University Press: 55–68. doi:10.1017/S030500090001343X. Accessed 22 May 2021.
- Oxford English Dictionary. 2021. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Accessed 26 May 2021. <https://www-oed-com.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk:12048/view/Entry/14250?redirectedFrom=baby+talk#eid30782307>
- Pinker, Steven. 2015. *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. London: Penguin Books.
- Reilly, Judy Snitzer, and Ursula Bellugi. 1996. "Competition on the Face: Affect and Language in ASL Motherese." *Journal of Child Language* 23, no. 1. Cambridge University Press: 219–239. doi:10.1017/S0305000900010163. Accessed 25 May 2021.
- "What Happens to Babies' Brains when You Speak Parentese? | Babies: Their Wonderful World | Earth Lab". Youtube Video, 4:06. "BBC Earth Lab," 10 December, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wA0KoMk3uIQ>. Accessed 21 May 2021.