

9

CDS and the Qaqet lexicon

9.1 Previous research on special babytalk words

A special CDS-vocabulary has been documented for many languages. For example, Ferguson (1964) reported reduplicated lexemes for use with babies in the lexicons of Syrian Arabic, Marathi, Comanche, Gilyak, American English and Spanish. He hypothesises that this ‘can probably be regarded as a feature of baby talk throughout the world’ (Ferguson 1964: 109). Richards and Gallaway (1994) analyse baby talk words as an imitation of children’s early productions. These are used by adults possibly in order to facilitate comprehension for children. Sarvasy (2019/01/25), for instance, reports the mimicking of phonetic features of babies’ speech in Nungon, a language of Papua New Guinea. For the Baining language Mali, Stebbins reports a set of baby talk words with a mostly CV(C) syllable structure. Among the 15 baby talk words she presents, eight have the reduplicated form CVC-CVC, for example, [kak\$kak] ‘maternal uncle’ instead of the adult word [kau] (Stebbins 2011: 29).

For convenience, I briefly recall adults’ comments on baby talk reported in Chapter 2. While Qaqet adults confirm that they know baby talk words, the use of them is stigmatised, and considered to provide children with a bad example. Baby talk is considered an imitation of the imperfect child language, but several interviewees admit that it might be used for facilitative or instructional purposes. There are only few words people mention, the most frequent among them being *tata* ‘delicious food, meat’. The Tok Pisin form *susu* ‘breastfeed’ is frequently used towards small children in the form *tutu*. Similarly, the Qaqet word *sup* ‘drink’ is realised

as *tup* when used in child-directed imperatives. Among these examples, the latter two are especially relevant in communication with infants who are still being breastfed, mostly as a way to soothe the child. Their form is typical for the kind of baby talk described by Ferguson (1964): *tata* and *tutu* consist of a single reduplicated syllable. For *tutu* and *tup* the baby talk form differs from the adult form in the realisation of fricatives as plosives.

9.2 Babytalk words in the CDS-pear stories

In the data from the pear stories, there are few specific lexical forms. Sets of baby talk words are often found for semantic domains that are typical for infants' everyday life (Ferguson 1964). Nevertheless, there are some words the transcribers identified as baby talk in one pear story told by ARL to his son XAT (34m) while AMS, the mother, was sitting close by.

Example (80) shows how XAT reacts with an imitative polar question to ARL's utterance *saiqeqiuaik*, but instead of producing *qiuaik* 'run' in the continuous form like his father, he uses a reduplicated version of the noncontinuous form *uaik* [waik]. He repeats the consonant [w] plus the diphthong [ai], and the coda [k] finishes the word. So from a C1V1C2 word, he creates a C1V1C1V1C2 word.

- (80) a. ARL: *saiqeqiuaik*
 saqi=ke=qiuaik
 again/also=3SG.M.SBJ.NPST=run
 'He runs again'
- b. XAT: *saiqauaiuaik?*
 saqi=ka=uaiuaik
 again/also=3SG.M.SBJ=run:REDUPL
 'He runs again?' (PearARLP 132-133)

Several turns later, see (81), XAT signals that he has not understood an utterance produced by AMS, asking two times *ah?* 'what?'. AMS does not repeat the verb *tit* 'go' she used before, but instead uses the reduplicated form she heard before in (80) from XAT. The transcribers commented the form *uaiuaik* 'run:redupl' was a form used by and with babies to improve understanding.

- (81) a. AMS: *saiqatit*
 saqi=ka=tit
 again/also=3 SG.M.SBJ=go
 ‘He goes, too’
- b. XAT: *ah?*
 ah
 what
 ‘What?’
- c. ARL: *iva..*
 ip-a
 CONJ-DIST
 ‘Afterwards..’
- d. XAT: *ah?*
 ah
 what
 ‘What?’
- c. AMS: *kauaiuaik* ka=uaiuaik
 3 SG.M.SBJ=run:REDUPL
 ‘He runs’ (PearARLP 157)

Several turns later in the same session (see 82), XAT again signals that he has not understood a verb used by ARL, namely *ual* ‘whistle’. ARL then repeats his utterance (82c) and XAT imitates it successfully (82d), which is confirmed by ARL.

- (82) a. ARL: *saiakaua*
 saqi=ia-ka=ual
 again/also=other-3 SG.M=whistle
 ‘The other one whistles’
- b. XAT: *ah?*
 ah
 what
 ‘What?’
- c. ARL: *saiak kelua*
 saqi=ia-ka=lual
 again/also=other-3 SG.M=whistle
 ‘The other one whistles’
- d. XAT: *kaua?*
 ka=ual
 3sg.m.sbj=whistle
 ‘He whistles?’

- e. ARL: *ee*
ee
 yes
 'Yes' (PearARLP 134-137)

Later yet in the same session, XAT demonstrates his newly acquired vocabulary. He reduplicates the verb *ual* 'whistle', (see (83)), producing *ualual* 'whistle:REDUPL'. His mother takes this up and repeats it whispering, possibly addressing his father who seems irritated by his son's comments. However, as XAT continues to repeat his utterance, his mother tells him to be quiet.

- (83) a. AMS: *akauualual*
 ia-ka=ualual
 other-3SG.M.SBJ=whistle:redupl
 'The other whistles'
 b. XAT: *akauualual*
 ia-ka=ualual
 other-3SG.M.SBJ=whistle:redupl
 'The other whistles'
 c. (something happens)
 d. AMS: *XAT, sung nanyi denyinarli!*
 sung ne-nyi
 quiet from/with-2SG
 de=nyi=narli
 CONJ=2SG.SBJ.NPST=hear/feel
 'XAT, be quiet and listen' (PearARLP 215-223)

The examples from this single story suggest that reduplication is a typical baby talk form in at least one family in Raunsepna. XAT is able to use the technique of reduplication productively, and his mother imitates him when he signals that he does not know a word used by his father. However, the phenomenon might indeed be family specific. There are no similar occurrences in the other pear stories.

9.3 Summary

There are only three examples that people refer to as typical for baby talk and they consider them to imitate young babies' productions. These involve reduplication and the realisation of fricatives as plosives. The former is mentioned, among others, by Ferguson (1964) as a typical feature of baby talk. Likewise, fricatives are difficult to produce; therefore, their realisation as plosives possibly makes it easier for children to pronounce them. Reduplication is also used by AMS towards her son XAT, probably in an attempt to facilitate his comprehension. However, the marked absence of those forms in the other pear stories could be a result of adults' negative view of those forms. Likewise, the child participants could be too old for nursery vocabulary. The controlled content makes it even less likely to find these words in the pear corpus. Yet, the presence of a few instances gives rise to the hypothesis that there might be more such forms, possibly even differing between individual families. The amount of variation between individuals and families is one of the issues I discuss in the following conclusion.

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