

SPEECH ACTS ADDRESSED AT HADZA INFANTS IN TANZANIA

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1. Introduction

Language socialization is known to differ between different human societies (e. g. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). “Western” societies foster cognitive skills (e.g., language), but in many sub-Sahara African, rural societies (communal) action autonomy is considered more important (Keller, 2011). Different parental beliefs appear related to the speech acts addressed to children: Western, middle class caregivers tend to use more declaratives and questions when addressing their infants, whereas in many non-Western, rural communities caregivers tend to use relatively more imperatives (Rabain Jamin & Sabeau-Jouannet, 1997; Vogt, Mastin, & Schots, 2015).

Early language socialization has rarely been studied among hunter-gatherer communities. From an evolutionary point of view, studying the language socialization of hunter-gatherers could provide crucial insights into interactional settings that may have been similar for our ancestors (Marlowe, 2010). The egalitarian culture of hunter-gatherer societies (Marlowe, 2010) may influence the type of speech acts caregivers address to infants in unexpected ways. For example, it has been reported that hunter-gatherer infants receive few direct instructions, which could affect the amount of imperatives addressed to infants (Hewlett & Roulette, 2016).

The Hadza are traditionally hunter-gatherers in northern Tanzania. Recent changes in livelihood can be observed in present day Hadza camps. For example more tourists visit some of the camps bringing money to pay for tour guides and souvenirs. These changes impact the Hadzas’ lifestyle, and consequently may also influence the language socialization of their infants.

The following research questions are addressed in this study: (1) Are traditional child rearing ideals (i.e., little explicit instruction) reflected in caregivers’ speech acts? (2) Do speech acts differ with camp livelihood?

2. Methods

Twenty-five infants of 6 - 27 months were visited in their camps with different livelihoods ((almost) daily contact with tourists (n=7), occasional/indirect tourism or farming (n=13), isolated (n=5)). After familiarization, infants were video-recorded on average 113 minutes (range 33-176) during their normal daily activities such as playing and eating. All videos were transcribed and translated to English by a native speaker of *Hadzabe*. Speech acts were coded as described by (Rabain-Jamin, 2001) as “Assertives”, “Requests for Information” and “Requests for Action” and additionally “Vocatives” (Van de Weijer, 1999).

3. Results and Discussion

The results (cf. Appendix) suggest that Hadza infants experience speech acts similar to those of other infants in sub-Saharan Africa (Rabain-Jamin, 2001; Vogt et al., 2015), with very few assertives and requests for information, but frequent requests for actions. However, in isolated camps caregivers use significantly fewer requests for actions and relatively more vocatives than the less traditional camps. These findings suggest that traditional Hadza speech acts may have adhered to hunter-gatherer child rearing practices consisting of fewer imperatives than may be found in rural communities or less traditional hunter-gatherer communities, but considerably more than in Western communities. Furthermore, the low amount of assertives or requests for information indicates that the fostering of cognitive skills is not considered crucial, although this does not suggest that hunter-gatherers have no teaching strategies as is sometimes suggested (cf. Hewlett & Roulette, 2016). It could also indicate that early human speech was not assertoric, as suggested by Tomasello (2010) but may have fulfilled function such as coordination and participation (Rappaport, 1999). The relatively high frequency of vocatives suggests an early fostering of relatedness (Biber et al., 1999), which may indicate a crucial role of communicating relations between people (Fitch, 2004) or assuring infants of caregivers’ presence (Falk, 2004) during the early language evolution.

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Appendix – statistics

Differences in speech acts by camp type

Speech act	$F(2, 22)$	p	partial η^2	Tourist		Transitional		Isolated		LSD Post-hoc
				mean	SD	mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Proportions										
Request for information	1.99	.161	.15	7.14	5.39	5.38	3.85	2.20	3.38	-
Request for action	8.07	.002	.42	74.54	9.26	60.79	11.19	51.70	7.28	To > Tr = Is
Assertive	4.00	.033	.27	11.59	8.25	21.05	7.50	15.41	4.89	Tr > To
Vocative	12.75	<.001	.54	6.73	5.88	12.78	8.40	30.69	10.88	Is > Tr = To
Total number of speech acts/minute				0.80	0.52	0.75	0.47	1.28	0.49	