

Baby talk is a world language

15th October, 2017



A new study has found that mothers all over the world speak to their babies in the same way. The research is from the Baby Lab at Princeton University in the USA. The researchers who did the study said "motherese" is a universal language.

They said baby talk is not just lots of cute noises and coo-coos. The words and sounds that mothers say to their babies are quite complex. They form a special form of communication that mothers use in the same way across the world. These sounds are very important in helping the language development in infants. Dr Elise Piazza, co-author of the research, said baby talk is a lot more important than we thought. She said: "It is not something to be embarrassed about at all."

The researchers recorded 24 different mothers talking to their babies. The babies were aged between seven months and one year. The mothers spoke to their children in 10 different native languages, including English, Spanish, Mandarin, Russian and Hebrew. Dr Piazza said: "We basically brought mothers into the lab and had them play with and read to their own babies, just like they would at home." She added: "We found that mothers [change the] basic quality of their voices when speaking to infants, and they do so in a [very similar] way across many diverse languages." The study didn't look at fathers' talk, but Piazza said that it is likely fathers would also speak in a similar way across the world.

Sources: the-guardian.com / news-medical.net / ctvnews.ca

Writing

There should be only one world language. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

study / mothers / baby / language / coo-coo / communication / embarrassed / researchers / native languages / lab / home / quality / diverse languages / similar

True / False

- a) Princeton University has a Baby Lab. T / F
- b) Researchers said there is a universal language called "motherese". T / F
- c) Researchers said the term "coo-coo" is not part of baby talk. T / F
- d) A researcher said baby talk is embarrassing. T / F
- e) Researchers recorded 240 different mothers. T / F
- f) The researchers observed mothers and their babies in their homes. T / F
- g) Mothers change the quality of their voices when talking to babies. T / F
- h) The researchers didn't look at how fathers talked to their babies. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. found | a. separate |
| 2. way | b. difficult |
| 3. universal | c. various |
| 4. complex | d. manner |
| 5. embarrassed | e. comparable |
| 6. different | f. discovered |
| 7. basically | g. standard |
| 8. quality | h. ashamed |
| 9. diverse | i. fundamentally |
| 10. similar | j. global |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What's the best thing to talk to babies about?
- c) Do you like talking to babies?
- d) What do you think babies talk to each other about?
- e) Should parents teach babies two or more languages?
- f) What would it be like if we could understand baby language?
- g) How do mothers and fathers talk differently to babies?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. in the same | a. sounds |
| 2. words and | b. than we thought |
| 3. language | c. into the lab |
| 4. a lot more important | d. languages |
| 5. It is not something to be embarrassed | e. development |
| 6. The researchers recorded | f. a similar way |
| 7. We basically brought mothers | g. would at home |
| 8. just like they | h. way |
| 9. many diverse | i. 24 different mothers |
| 10. fathers would also speak in | j. about at all |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think of babies?
- How do mothers talk to their babies?
- What does 'motherese' sound like in your language?
- Do you think all babies understand the same language?
- Should there be only one language in the world?
- How do babies learn languages?
- If babies could talk, what would they say?
- Is talking to babies embarrassing?

Spelling

- a narluvsie language
- babies are quite lxemcop
- a psaelci form of communication
- helping the language development in nniftas
- co-author of the racerehs
- not something to be rbaseramsde about
- The researchers ddoercer 24 different mothers
- 10 different tnevai languages
- We byallasic brought mothers into the lab
- the basic ltaqyui of their voices
- across many eridesv languages
- speak in a lmsiari way

Answers – Synonym Match

1. f	2. d	3. j	4. b	5. h
6. a	7. i	8. g	9. c	10. e

Role Play

Role A – Laughter

You think laughter is the best thing about babies. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their things. Also, tell the others which is the least fun of these (and why): sleeping, first words or play time.

Role B – Sleeping

You think sleeping is the best thing about babies. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their things. Also, tell the others which is the least fun of these (and why): laughter, first words or play time.

Role C – First Words

You think first words is the best thing about babies. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their things. Also, tell the others which is the least fun of these (and why): sleeping, laughter or play time.

Role D – Play Time

You think play time is the best thing about babies. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their things. Also, tell the others which is the least fun of these (and why): sleeping, first words or laughter.

Speaking – Babies

Rank these with your partner. Put the best things about babies at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| • first words | • their laugh |
| • when they cry | • their smile |
| • play time | • sleeping |
| • food time | • first steps |

Answers – True False

a	T	b	T	c	F	d	F	e	F	f	F	g	T	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.