

Study: Baby talk is universally understood

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U.S. researchers found that people in a remote village in Ecuador can understand key features of English by focusing on non-verbal aspects of the language.

Greg Bryant, Clark Barrett and colleagues at the University of California-Los Angeles said their research demonstrates that pitch, loudness, rate of speech and other such non-verbal language effectively communicate intentions, regardless of the language spoken.

The researchers recorded native English-speaking mothers conveying four categories of messages -- approval, attention, comfort and prohibition. The mothers were recorded while they directed such messages to infants and adults, separately.

When residents of a Shuar village in Ecuador listened to the recordings, they correctly distinguished between infant-directed and adult-directed speech in 73 percent of the recordings. They were also able to correctly identify the category of messages but they made that type of distinction more accurately with the infant-directed speech than with the adult-directed speech, the researchers said.

"These results also provide support for the notion that vocal emotional communication manifests itself in similar ways across disparate cultures," said Bryant.

The study appears in the journal *Psychological Science*.

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