Motherese in Omani Arabic

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ABSTRACT: *Motherese, alternatively known as parentese, infant directed speech, or baby talk, is the spontaneous emotive manner in which mothers converse with their newborns and young children to establish mother-child communication. The occurrence of motherese in mother-child communication is attested cross-linguistically with variant extent and frequency in languages and cultures of the globe. Due to its distinct linguistic features that tease it out from adult directed speech, it is believed to have a positive role in facilitating and accelerating children's acquisition of their mother tongue. Prominent linguistic features that characterize motherese are often the use of simplified constructions, specific lexical items intentionally meant for children, higher pitch, slower tempo, and prolonged pronunciation, among several other ones. The role these features play in enhancing children's exposure to and comprehension of their mother tongue as well as the establishment of a compassionate mother-child relationship stand as the driving force behind its use by mothers from different walks of life cross-culturally. The Arab culture is not an exception to this tendency since motherese is attested in several varieties of Arabic. Omani Arabic as one member of these varieties does have motherese in its daily use; yet, it is not brought to light. In an attempt to sightsee such untraversed area and bring it to light, this paper is, thus, a humble endeavor to investigate the practice of using motherese among Omani mothers and children to establish mother-child communication. Results show that several features characterize Omani Arabic motherese, those that may conform to or differ from features that characterize baby talk in other languages and cultures.*

KEY WORDS: motherese, baby talk, infant directed speech, Arabic, Omani Arabic, Oman

INTRODUCTION

A key distinguishing feature of humans over other species is their possession of 'linguistic competence' that entitles them the use and comprehension of an unlimited number of innovative sentences, ideas and thoughts. Although it is assumed that some animals can provide some evidence for 'linguistic competence', such communicative system does not equal 'language' as

used by humans (Singh et al, 2009; Song et. al, 2010). Communication among animals is rather used to suit and attend to their limited natural needs rather than expressing innovative notions as humans do. Such instinctive needs along with the diverse forms to attend to them are inherited nonstop by offspring from their parents throughout all generations. In addition to its complicated from, human's communication, on the other hand, is subject to other factors most important of which is exposure to linguistic data, which in turn stands behind the type of language each individual speaks. Humans' innate ability to understand and comprehend utterances, remarkably, can be complemented via means of scaffolding that facilitates children's comprehension and production of language. As human infants depend more on their mothers to fulfil their basic needs, mothers have more influence on children's communicative skills and interaction than any other individuals (Matusda et. al, 2011). Mothers tend to facilitate their children's learning of language via forming a simplified way of communicative system known as 'motherese' or 'baby talk'. Since such form of speech is specifically meant for children, it could involve other individuals such as fathers, siblings, and caregivers. Hence, other terms such as parentese, caregiver speech, infant directed speech, child directed speech, nursery language, caretaker speech are also used to refer to such form of speech (Saxton, 2008; Schachner & Hannon, 2010).

The use of motherese is found to be a universal practice used by mothers cross linguistically with general trends such as short utterances, simplified vocabulary, prolonged speech and longer pauses. Yet, it is mediated by several linguistic and cultural factors such as infants' presence and engagement, their actual preferences and vocalizations, and mothers' perception of the abilities and needs of their children, which make such forms of communication diverge in several aspects (Smith & Trainor, 2008; Singh et al, 2009; Song et. al, 2010). Generally, mothers use motherese to facilitate communication with their children and to help them comprehend and use language easily, starting with non-linguistic means such as jerking, kicking, cooing, gurgling, and gradually moving towards establishing some form of communication via linguistic means (Niwano & Sugai, 2003; Saxton, 2008; Lee et. al, 2009). In addition to its communicative function, motherese is said to establish an emotional connection between mothers and their children because such form of speech has certain melodies that stimulate children's emotions and thus their response to such speech (Singh et. al, 2002; Saxton, 2008; Lee et. al, 2009; Schachner & Hannon, 2010).

It is noteworthy to mention, however, that as much as motherese is widely viewed as a useful tool to facilitate communication with children and enhancing their language growth, it is also seen by some individuals as hindering children' learning of their mother tongues. Opponents of using motherese assert that it does not expose children to the real language as used by its adult speakers, which prolongs the amount of time needed to master the language (Schachner & Hannon, 2010). Such view in fact may leave space for dispute and debate concerning its effectiveness as opposed to its bad effect on children's language growth. Despite such opposing views on the usefulness of motherese, mothers cross linguistically are found to use motherese in their speech with their babies, even in its slightest form, over a certain period of their childhood (Smith & Trainor, 2008;

Singh et al, 2009; Song et. al, 2010). It seems that mothers are prone to use motherese with their children since it is one form of showing affection, love and protectiveness to their children, especially at their very months after birth. Likewise, the effectiveness and duration of motherese is subject to individual and gender differences. It is said to take longer with male children than female children who tend to be faster language learners compared to their male counterparts who generally need longer durations of using motherese (Schachner & Hannon, 2010). Still its effectiveness is subject to other factors such as age, amount of exposure to language, number of young siblings an infant has, and infants' attitude towards the use of motherese (Singh et. al, 2002; Saxton, 2008).

Motherese is attested to start at birth, having its peak at the age of four to six months, and to decrease slowly until the age of two or three (Senju & Csibra, 2008; McRoberts et. al, 2009). Irrespective of their background, infants are found to respond positively to such form of communication, preferring to be addressed by motherese rather than normal speech as it makes them feel that better attention and more affection are shown to them (Lui et. al, 2010). Kaplan et al (2010) found that when motherese and normal speech are alternated in addressing infants, infants tend to be more responsive to motherese. Children also show more head-turns to their mothers' voices than to other voices, which probably occurred to the type of speech (motherese) rather than their mothers' voices per se. Likewise, their responses were stronger to normal speech that is preceded by motherese whereas their responses were weaker to motherese preceded by normal speech. Equally, infants are found to remember and look longer at individuals who address them with motherese than those who address them with normal speech. It is just like an adult responding more to a language that s/he understands than to a language s/he partially understands. When young children start to have a better grasp of normal speech, the use of motherese decreases slowly and eventually stops at a certain age, namely when they can easily use and comprehend normal speech (Schachner & Hannon, 2010).

 The fact that mothers have their own print in the creation of motherese cannot be denied. Infants as a vital party involved in such form of communication, however, do not play a completely passive role, for they have their own influence and contribution to motherese. Although it is true that mothers have a great role in the creation of its structure and lexicons, mothers also make use of the lexical items and sounds made by their infants to shape and facilitate communication with them (Singh et. al, 2009; Matusda et. al, 2011). Likewise, mothers tend to adopt their speech based on different factors such as infants' age and need, their cognitive abilities, linguistic level as well as infants' reactivity and preferences. Such modification helps in making such speech grasp infants' attention by singling out a type of speech that is meant intentionally to address them (Senju & Csibra, 2008; McRoberts et. al, 2009).

Motherese, as a special speech register, is vigorously present in Omani Arabic; mothers from different proximities, walks of life, and social backgrounds tend to streamline their speech with

their infants so that mother-child interaction is made easier and full of affection and care. Infants, on their part, are responsive to such form of communication since it walks them gradually through the path of learning their mother tongue until they reach an adult-like proficiency. Yet, no descriptive study, to my knowledge, is geared towards exploring the features and characteristics that portrait the type of speech Omanis, mothers in particular, use in addressing their children. Exploring this speech register in the daily use of Omani Arabic is, thus, a sine qua non. Considering that, this paper is meant to shed light on Omani Arabic Motherese [henceforth OAM] in an attempt to explore its features and to provide background for further research on this area.

Motherese: Features and Advantages
Motherese has several linguistic, cultural, psychological, physiological, and cognitive features that have been widely studied. The effect of motherese on the growth and language development of children has attracted an increasing interest of researchers from different fields (Soderstrom, et al, 2008; Kaplan et. al, 2010). A look into the increasing body of literature in motherese shows that variation in the form and manner in which mothers communicate with their children is undeniably normal depending on the language and culture beforehand. Yet, such form of speech has common characteristics shared by all mothers in all cultures, making such form of communication different from normal speech used among adults. Very prominent and distinguishing is its prosodic features such as exaggerated tone, longer intonation, pitch contour and use of longer vowels employed to add vocal function to such speech. Such features are said to aid children's ability to recognize the intention the speaker wants to communicate and thus to make speech more informative and comprehensible to them (Smith & Trainor, 2008; Singh et. al, 2009).

The use of simplified vocabularies is noticeably present in such form of speech. Monosyllabic and disyllabic words are in frequent use alongside slower tempo and rhythm, allowing children to better process such utterances and thus enhance their understanding. Mothers appear to use not only simplified words but also appealing and familiar ones to their children, which gives space for motherese to have different aspects and forms with different individual mothers (Soderstrom, et al, 2008). The use of onomatopoeia adds to the simplification of words used with children; such words can be more comprehensible due to the auditory element they have, which makes comprehension much easier to infants at their early age. Mothers tend to make use of onomatopoeic words when they communicate with children to provide better comprehension of their speech. Likewise, they also tend to change their voices when they read or narrate a story to their children, and to impersonate the characteristics of the characters, even those of animals, so that comprehension is made easier to children (Saxton, 2008).

In addition to its prosodic features and simplified words, motherese could involve visual and tactile elements; the use of gestures and visual aids play a major role in helping mothers to deliver their messages to their children as well as to express their emotions. (McRoberts et. al, 2009; Matusda et. al, 2011). Compared to gestures used in normal speech, motherese's gestures are found to be

more frequent, simpler and less abstract. Gesturing is employed to highlight certain utterances or to attract children's attention towards certain objects in their surrounding environments. Other features that characterize motherese are the use of redundant utterances, isolated words/phrases, frequent use of proper names, more repetition, longer pauses, and putting emphasis in some words (Singh et. al, 2002; Soderstrom, et al, 2008; Kaplan et. al, 2010; Song et. al, 2010) which collectively make words more comprehensible and memorable for children. The extent of these features may differ from one language to another, and among individual mothers who tend to tune and adjust their speech to suit the styles and needs of their individual children.

The distinctive linguistic features of motherese have witnessed a growing interest and concern among linguists due to their effective role in making children more responsive to such form of speech compared to adult speech, and thus enhancing the speed and efficiency of their mother tongue acquisition (Soderstrom, et al, 2008; Liu et. al, 2009; Kaplan et. al, 2010; Matusda et. al, 2011). In addition to facilitating communication with children and establishing emotional connections between them and their mothers, motherese is proved to play a great role in providing gradual and facilitated stages of children's acquisition of different linguistic features. Primarily, the use of simple constructions, exaggerated pitch contours, phonetic modification, shorter utterances, use of diminutives and repetition played a major role in facilitating vowel discrimination, speech segmentation and word recognition which facilitates language comprehension and production (Soderstrom, et al, 2008; Schachner & Hannon, 2010).

Likewise, motherese is found to have an effect on infants' acquisition of morphology (Matusda et. al, 2011). For instance, mothers' use of lengthened vowels in content and function words in final position as well as exaggerated pitch and lengthened final syllables helped in increasing the amount of recognized and acquired vocabulary (Smith & Trainor, 2008; Schachner & Hannon, 2010). In languages whose nouns are classified into gender classes or case marking like Finnish, Spanish, Lithuanian and Russian, the use of diminutives in motherese is shown to be used to mark and ease the learning of gender and case (Soderstrom et. al, 2008). The use of diminutive served to increase the transparency of the gender marking to infants because the diminutives' transparent suffixes that attach to the modified nouns make it easy to recognize their gender. Although motherese gives no major attention to syntactic aspects, it proved to be effective in enabling children to learn some syntactic elements. It was attested that children were able to recognize boundaries between words and phrases by using prosodic features such as intonation, stress and vowel lengthening to demarcate lexical units and utterance boundaries (Singh et al. 2002; Niwano & Sugai, 2003). Likewise, the use of simple short sentences that puts more emphasis on delivering the massage rather than sentence structure [i.e. syntactic aspects] plays a great role in enhancing children's comprehension and use of language (Song et. al, 2010). It offers infants a gradual grasp of the syntax of their mother tongue starting with simple sentence structures until they attain a firm command of advanced structures with all of their intricacies.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study beforehand was obtained via interviews made with thirty-seven Omani mothers of male and female newborns and children at their first, second, third and fourth year of age. Mother participants come from different regions of Oman with different educational and professional backgrounds. Some are housewives who take full care of their infants without the assistance of other individuals. Other interviewees hold jobs in different fields and thus have other individuals aiding them with their children such as housemaids, caretakers and close relatives. Participants' age ranged from twenty-three to fifty-four years with different numbers of children ranging from one to seven children. Data collection also involved observation of several male and female newborns and children with focus geared towards their use of speech when they communicate with their mothers and other individuals such as fathers, siblings and peers. Data was analyzed to underscore trends and commonalities among mothers and children in their use of mother-child communication.

DISCUSSION

Mother subjects participating in the study collectively reported their constant use of motherese in their interaction with newborns and young children. It is unanimously indicated that the use of motherese offers them the opportunity to express their emotions, feelings and care towards their children at an early age of their life. It is a reflection of love and protectiveness manifested in the use of a very simple language that is meant to attract children's attention to focus on and react to their mothers' speech. Although it seems that it requires an artificial effort to use such type of speech with infants at the very first days after their birth, such form of speech happens unconsciously and becomes a daily routine in the course of time, especially when infants start to respond to such speech by non-linguistic features such as cooing, crying and smiling. It appears to be the secret language mothers have to use if communication is meant to be made with these infants, who tend to have a gradual impact in this form of communication as they grow older. Infants, on their part, are very responsive to such speech especially when used by their mothers as opposed to a father, a sibling or any other family member. They show more interest in being addressed by motherese than by adult directed speech since it makes them prima donna compared to their siblings. Generally speaking, addressing infants with such form of speech starts from day one and comes to a halt at around the age of three. However, it could push its way longer with some children who might not master the language as quick as others do. Fascinatingly, children find the use of motherese with them offensive when they reach an age at which they can confidently use and comprehend adult directed speech. They show feelings of embarrassment when addressed with motherese even with mere words, especially in front of strangers and non-family members. Anecdotally, older children tend to use motherese too with their younger siblings, as they believe that it gives them a better chance to communicate with them than using adult

directed speech. When they themselves are addressed with this type of speech, however, they express embarrassment and annoyance since it identifies and categorizes them with such circle.

As a matter of faculty, the form of speech used in mother-child communication is partially a form of an idiolect to which individual mothers and infants have their own contribution. Both parties contribute consciously or unconsciously to this form of speech until it solidifies itself into its final form, which can be subject to further modification and amendment to suit the needs of the child and the purpose it is meant for. Anecdotally, a good number of mothers involved in the study tend to use motherese with other individuals coming into contact with their newborns. Assuming that these newborns (not their mothers) talk to those individuals via the use of motherese, mothers tend to change the rhythm of their voices when talking to those individuals while using the same type of speech they use with their newborns. The addressed individuals, on the other hand, may respond via using motherese, adult directed speech or mere laughter at such form of speech. Though it seems humorous and weird, such behavior is not meant to amuse other individuals per se, but to show them that these infants, even in their very early age, are able to communicate and interact with others via using their own unique form of speech.

A closer inspection of the obtained data shows that mother-child speech in Omani Arabic is characterized by several common features used by all mothers across the board although the fact that mothers' speech with their infants may exhibit different features depending on several factors like geography, educational background and age cannot be utterly overlooked. These common features give OAM a general character that may differ from or resemble motherese in other languages and cultures, especially those of other varieties of Arabic language. These features are discussed underneath.

Segmental Approximation
The phonemic inventory of Arabic contains certain sounds that tend to pose some difficulty to infants at the very early months of language acquisition, which require longer periods of time to master compared to easier ones. Such issue is usually circumvented by having these sounds approximated to similar ones that share some phonetic features like place and manner of articulation. Segmental approximation appears to take place unconsciously via the use of easier sounds compared to their harder counterparts. Such approximation, in fact, tends be used by most mothers too, either done on purpose or unintentionally to make communication much easier to infants. Approximation done by mothers usually tends to resemble that of their infants because mothers are inclined to mimic these sounds to establish better communication with infants. Segmental approximation, however, is not viewed unanimously as an effective device in accelerating infants' acquisition of sounds and lexical items. While some mothers view it as a helpful device in making children acquire the intended sound/word, other mothers have a contrary viewpoint. It has a counterproductive effect because it prolongs the duration in which children master the proper pronunciation. It is argued that children do have the aptitude to learn their mother

tongue with all of its intricacies and details including difficult sounds, a fact that makes mother-made sound approximation unnecessary. It is worth mentioning here, however, that mothers in favor of the use of segmental approximation in mother-child communication significantly outnumber those who are against it. Mothers who opt for approximation emphasize that it is important to replace difficult sounds with easier ones so that infants can communicate easily with those around them on the very threshold of their life, highlighting that infants will definitely pick the right pronunciation of sounds and words gradually when they are ready to do that. Sound approximation is just employed as a means to push children to get to that stage gradually with ease and comfort. It is highlighted that if words used in adult speech are replaced with other ones (real and non-sense words) or adjusted one way or another in motherese, then sounds can definitely be replaced and adjusted too since motherese is meant to facilitate communication with children. In spite of having two opposing views on the effective role of speech sound approximation in acquiring language, going through such stage seems to be inevitable, even with infants whose mothers are not in favor with the use of speech sound approximation with children. All children of the mother subjects were reported to have used sound approximation, even in its slightest form, until they mastered the correct forms at a certain point in their life. It is the in-between gap in which children's production of these sounds does not go in line with their perception of these sounds what makes them prone to go through such stage. Once sounds production corresponds to sound perception, no child is reported to fluctuate between right and wrong forms, for the right forms of sounds/words override the wrong ones. The following table shows the common speech sounds that tend to be approximated in children's speech with example words. It is noteworthy that children may not approximate these sounds in the same manner and stage in their life. Likewise, the time needed for production to match perception is subject to individual differences and other factors such as age, gender, and amount of exposure provided by parents and elder siblings.

Table 1. Examples of approximated speech sounds in OAM

Sound	Example	Gloss
x → ħ	**x**ʊbzah → **ħ**ʊbzah	a piece of bread
ɣ → ʕ	**ɣ**aɪrʊh → **ʕ**aɪrʊh	I want more (of it).
ʕ → ʔ	**ʕ**a<u>t</u>i da:da: → **ʔ**a<u>t</u>i da:da:	Give (it to) the kid!
z → ð	**z**aɪn → **ð**aɪn	good
ʃ → s	**ʃ**a:hi → **s**a:hi	tea
<u>t</u> → t	**<u>t</u>**ali barra → **t**ali barra	Go outside!
<u>ð</u> → d	baɪ**<u>ð</u>**ah → baɪ**d**ah	egg
θ → s	**θ**ninah → **s**ninah	two
ð → d	**ð**ba:bah → **d**ba:bah	a fly
<u>s</u> → s	**<u>s</u>**alli → **s**alli	Pray!
ħ → h	**ħ**ɪlu → **h**ɪlu	nice/sweet
z → d	xu**z** → ħu**d**	Get out of my way!

Interestingly, infants and toddlers can distinguish between the correct and violated forms of pronunciation even if they cannot really produce them. They are able to perceive and distinguish the correct forms from the wrong ones at a very early stage, though they may not be able to master the right pronunciation at that same stage. In a little experiment made by one subject mother with her baby girl, the toddler demonstrated her ability to distinguish between right and wrong forms. When she was asked about whether she wants 'a piece of bread' (pronounced correctly) or 'a piece of bread' 'mispronounced', the toddler was able to see the difference between the two forms although she was not able to produce the right pronunciation. The mother literally held two identical pieces of bread in her hands, one in the right hand and another in the left hand. Then she asked her baby which piece of bread she wanted using proper pronunciation of the word 'xʊbzah' 'a piece of bread' when referring to the one in the right hand, and approximated pronunciation of the same word 'ħʊbzah' when referring to the one in the left hand. Pointing to her choice, the toddler chose the piece of bread in the right hand because it was pronounced correctly although she failed to produce the right pronunciation. Swapping the proper pronunciation with the approximated one to verify the choice of the toddler, the mother asked her baby the same question using the proper pronunciation with the piece of bread in the left hand and the approximated one with the piece of bread in the right hand. The toddler remarkably pointed to the piece of bread in the left hand this time although she again failed to produce the proper pronunciation. Repeating the question to the toddler for the third time to verify her choice again, she chose the hand that matched the proper pronunciation. The following table exemplifies this little experiment in elucidating steps.

Table. 2 Mother-toddler conversation showing children's ability to distinguish correct forms from wrong ones

Conversation	Gloss
Mother raising her right hand and left hand respectively: [ba 'xʊbzah' (proper pronunciation) walla 'ħʊbzah' (approximated pronunciation)?]	[Do you want a piece of bread (proper pronunciation) or a piece of bread (approximated pronunciation)?]
Toddler pointing to the right hand : [ba 'ħʊbzah' (approximated pronunciation)]	[I want a piece of bread. (approximated pronunciation)]
Mother swapping the two forms of pronunciation while raising her right hand and left hand respectively: [ba 'ħʊbzah' (approximated pronunciation) walla 'xʊbzah' (proper pronunciation)]	[Do you want a piece of bread (approximated pronunciation) or a piece of bread (proper pronunciation)?]
Toddler pointing to the left hand: [ba 'ħʊbzah' (approximated pronunciation)]	[I want a piece of bread. (approximated pronunciation)]

Mother raising her right and left hand respectively: [ba ha:ði walla ha:ði?]	[Do you want this one (in the right hand) or that one (in the left hand)?]
Toddler pointing to the left hand: [ba ha:di]	[I want this one.]

The above little experiment shows beyond doubt that infants are able to recognize when parents use approximation/wrong forms and when they use the otherwise, despite the fact that they fail to produce the proper forms. Their perception of the correct forms is remarkable although they may fail in the production part. It is noteworthy that children prefer to be addressed with the correct forms rather than the approximated ones when they are able to master the right sounds. They tend to show feelings of embarrassment and resentment when their parents use the approximated forms instead of the correct ones once they are confident enough to use the correct forms, especially as they grow older. Such practice is more frown upon among children when used in the presence of strangers, non-family members in particular. Showing dislike and resentment, some may draw their mothers' attention that they are using the wrong forms and should rather opt for the correct ones. As far as gender differences are concerned, it is reported that baby girls are usually more competent than baby boys in replacing the approximated sounds with the real ones. They proved to be more efficient in mastering adult speech, which makes the duration of using motherese with baby girls to be relatively shorter than that used with baby boys. Yet, this trend is ungeneralizable across the board since individual differences, even within the same gender, do exist.

Intonation
The use of intonation is one distinctive characteristic of mother-child speech in Omani Arabic. Children are so attentive to perceive the intonation in their mothers' speech; they make an association that such intonation in this type of speech is purposefully meant to them even in the presence of other individuals, which makes children feel more special compared to their siblings. Request making and asking questions are the two main noticeable forms in which intonation is marked in mother-child talk. This is reflected in the use of enormous number of requests made by children to attend to their needs as well as the use of questions, whether yes/no questions or informative/content ones, to inquire about the world around them.

Requests are usually marked by a plea-full tone that attracts mothers' attention and make them inclined to attend to these request promptly. Questions, on the other hand, are marked via the use of exaggerated rising tone, which may be complemented by the use of sound elongation. Unlike consonants, vowels are more likely to be prolonged, even in the speech of mothers who tend to employ it to serve different functions. The use of yes/no question appears at a very early age whereas informative/content questions are subsequent since they require a higher linguistic skill that reflects the child's mastery of certain lexicon. Yes/no questions are usually responded to via

verbatim repeating of the exact wording of the question albeit with a monotonous tone employed to signify an answer. Response could also involve non-linguistic forms such as a node, headshake, laughter, cry, or mere silence. Unlike yes no questions, informative questions tend to push children one step further to make a response either linguistically or via other means such as the use of non-comprehended sounds or pointing to the referent addressed in the question. The following are examples that show the use of intonation in yes/no and informative questions used by mothers to address their babies, along with their answers.

1.   Mother: ba ħawa:a:a:wah?   [elongated vowel with rising tone]
 "Do you want some candy?"
Infant: ba ħawa:wah   [falling tone]
 "[yes] I want candy".

2.   Mother: waɪn   ma:ma:aaaa?   [elongated vowel with rising tone]
 "Where is mommy?"
Infant responded by pointing to her mother with a little cackle.

3.   Mother: waɪn baluuuħ?   [elongated vowel with rising tone]
 "Where do you want to go?"
Infant: baluuuh lolooooh   [elongated vowel with falling tone]
"I want to go to bed."

4.   Mother: ba nammi?   [rising tone]
"Do you want to eat?"
Infant: nammi   [falling tone]
"[Yes] I want to eat."

Newborns and infants prove to be very vigilant to the type of intonation associated with the speech of their mothers. They can easily tease out the different meant forms in mothers' speech whether requests to carry out an action, orders to refrain from an action, questions employed to inquire about the child's status and welfare or even a casual chit chat made with babies to express affection and love.

Syllabic/Segmental Reduction
Since motherese is meant to simplify communication with children, mothers tend to simplify it by the use of several techniques, one of which is the reduction of syllables, namely those that seem to cause articulatory issues to their babies. Mothers produce syllabically-reduced forms on purpose based on their views on how pronunciation is to be simplified. Unlike those made by mothers, infants and toddlers reduce syllables spontaneously when these syllables pose difficulties to them in mastering the proper pronunciation. Noteworthy, mothers are also prone to catch reductions

made by their babies and use them verbatim in their speech so that better communication is established between them. Noticeably, word initial syllables are more susceptible to reduction compared to those at word final positions. Such general tendency is probably based on the fact that word final syllables are easier to perceive and grasp compared to syllables in other positions, especially word initial ones. Likewise, word medial syllables appear to be the most susceptible to reduction compared to word initial and final ones. It seems that children pay more attention to the syllables/sounds in the two extremes, especially those at the end, and pay little attention to those in the middle, which tend to be dropped accordingly. This trend, however, is not across the board as syllables in other positions, including word final syllables, can be reduced too. Likewise, the same exact words could be produced differently by different children, with reduction occurring at different syllables. It is noteworthy that reduction does not always target full syllables since sounds that do not seem to from one full syllable are also susceptible to deletion in some cases. The following two tables give examples of both syllabic and segmental reduction occurring word medially and word initially respectively.

Table 3. Syllabic and segmental reduction occurring word medially in OAM

Normal form in Omani Arabic	Reduced form in baby talk	Gloss
saj.ja.rah	sa.lah	car
ta.la.fon	ta.fon	telephone
qa.lam	qam	pen
ʃɪk.leɪt	ʃɪ.keɪt	chocolate
qah.wah	qa.wah	coffee
dra.buh	da.buh	They beat him!
taʔ.ban	ta.ban	{I am} tired.
mɪf.ta:ħ	mɪ.ta:ħ	key
ma.la.bis	ma.bis	clothes
fɪl.fɪl	fɪ.fɪl	pepper
ka.ra.si	ka.si	chairs
mak.na.sah	ma.ka.sah	vacuum cleaner
ʔaṣ.fur	ʔa.ful	bird
dri. ʃah	di.ʃah	window
war.dah	wa.dah	flower

Table 4. Syllabic and segmental reduction occurring word initially in OAM

Normal form in Omani Arabic	Reduced form in baby talk	Gloss
ʕa.t̪i.ni	ti.ni	Give me!
ba.t̪a:. t̪ɪs	ta:.tɪʃ	chips
mɪf.ta:ħ	ta:ħ	key
raw.waħ	aw.waħ	He is gone.
ʃaɣ.ɣa:.lah	ɣa:.lah	housemaid
wa.t̪i.ti	ti.ti	my shoes
kta:b	ta:b	book
nað. ða:.rah	da:.lah	eye glasses
mqas̱	qas̱	scissors
dɪʃ.da.ʃah	da.ʃah	gown (worn by male Omanis)
dɪ.ka:n	ka:n	shop
tɪ.lɪ.fɪz.jon	fɪz.jon	television
t̪ab.ba:.xah	ba:.xah	cooker
mar. ða.ʔah	da:.ʔah	milk bottle
rʊ.sum	sum	cartoons
nɪf.fa:.xah	fa:.xah	balloon

Compared to other positions, dropping word final syllables is very rare. Such occurrence is attested with very few infants in very few examples of their speech. Such incidence is more of an idiolect that occurs in the speech of certain infants rather than a general trend that could be generalized. Infants producing words of this sort were reported to have unlearned such forms of pronunciation rapidly either by replacing them with other forms of reduction or the proper pronunciation. The following are examples of words that have syllabic reduction in word final positions.

Table 5. Syllabic reduction occurring word finally in OAM

Normal form in Omani Arabic	Reduced form in baby talk	Gloss
t̪aj.ja.rah	t̪aj.ja	plane
san.nu.rah	san.nu	a female cat
qam.mu.rah	qam.mu	moon [proper noun in the diminutive form]
ba.qa. rah	baq.qa	a female cow
gal.lu.sah	gal.lu	walker

It is noteworthy that syllabic/segmental reduction exhibited in the speech of both mothers and children does not occur in a manner that deforms the word structure beyond recognition, except in very rare cases in which babies have real difficulty in making even a near-proper pronunciation. Even in such extreme cases, mothers still can guess the meanings of such words in the speech of

their children as they contextualize them and put them as part of their parent-child vocabulary. Some mothers memorize these words and use them verbatim with the exact meanings their children associate them with. Alternatively, other mothers tend to give more attention to words changed beyond recognition via making extra effort to make the pronunciation of their babies align with that of adults, or at least be closer to a recognizable one. The following table provides examples of less likely and more likely forms of syllabic/segmental reductions since the former make grasping their meaning quite difficult, if not impossible, to parents compared to the latter that tend to make the meaning more comprehensible.

Table 6. Examples of less likely and more likely syllabically/segmentally reduced forms in OAM

Normal forms in Omani Arabic	Less likely reduced forms	More likely reduced forms	Gloss
ʃɪk.leɪt	ʃɪ.eɪt / ʃɪk.leɪ	ʃɪ.keɪt/ ʃɪ.leɪt	chocolate
mɪf.ta:ħ	ɪf.ta: /mɪf.ta:/ mɪ.fa: /mɪ.ta:	mɪ.ta:ħ/ mɪ.fa:ħ/ ta:ħ	key
nað. ða:.rah	na:.lah/na.da:h/ na.da:l	da.:lah	eye glasses
taʕ.ban	ta.ʔan/ta.ba/ taʔ.ba	ta.ban	tired
ba:.ṯa:. ṯɪs	ba:.tɪ / ba:ta	ta:.tɪʃ /a.ta:.tɪʃ /ba:t tɪʃ	chips
ta.la.fon	ta.laf/ta.lon/	ta.fon/la.fon	telephone
mqam.ʃah	mam.ʃah/mqa.mah/qa.mah	mqa.ʃah/qam.ʃah/ qa.ʃah	spoon
fɪl.fɪl	fɪ.fɪ/fɪlf	fɪ.fɪl	pepper
ʃaɣ.ɣa:.lah	ʃaɣ. ɣa:h/ ʃa:.lah	ɣa:.lah	housemaid
kleɪ.nɪx	leɪ.nɪ/ keɪ.nɪ	keɪ.nɪks/leɪ.nɪx	tissue

Segmental reduction in mother-child speech is also witnessed in consonant clusters occurring in word-initial positions. Arabic language, in its standard form, never allows two adjacent consonants as an onset. Some speakers of Omani Arabic, as well as speakers of some other varieties of Arabic, contrarily allow the occurrence of two consonants in an onset position. Children, especially those growing up speaking subdialects that allow onset consonant clusters, tend to find difficulty in pronouncing such clusters (two adjacent consonants) and thus resort to reducing them by deleting one of the adjacent consonants. Theoretically, such consonant clusters occurring syllabic-initially can be broken by inserting a vowel that separates the adjacent consonants and thus creating a new syllable, just like the original form in standard Arabic. This option, however, makes pronunciation even harder, which defeats the purpose of motherese. Rather than making words longer by creating new syllables, children opt for deleting the first or second consonant to lessen the difficulty posed by such clusters. Cases also exist of consonant deletion that targets both sounds in the same word, giving several possible ways of saying these words. The following table gives examples of words containing onset consonant clusters whereby deletion targets one or both consonants that make up the cluster.

Table 7. Examples of segmental deletion occurring in word initial consonant clusters in OAM

Standard Arabic	Colloquial Omani Arabic	Child-made consonant cluster reduction	Gloss
mad.ra.sah	mdar.sah	dal.sah/ dal.ʃah	school
ħa.la.wah	ħla.wah	la.wah/ ħa.wah/a.wah	candy
ṣa.lah	slah	lah	prayer
maṯ.ra.qah	mṯar.qah	tar.kah	hammer
fɪ.ra:ʃ	fra:ʃ	fa:ʃ/a:ʃ	matters
laħm	lħam	ħam/am	meat
---	mqam.ʃah	qam.ʃah/kam.ʃah	spoon
kɪ.ta:b	kta:b	ta:b	book
--	mnaz	naz	cradle
mɪ.qaṣ	mqaṣ	qaṣ	scissors

Contrary to onset consonants cluster, Arabic in its standard form does allow two consonants to occur as coda. Clusters in such position are treated differently in adult speech of Omani Arabic. Some tend to be broken via vocalic insertion while others are kept intact without any change. Some speakers even change the syllabic structure of such words via means of insertion and deletion with in the same word. Coda consonant clusters, in fact, do not seem to pose articulatory issues to infants whether their parents break them via vocalic insertion, restructure the syllabic form or keep them intact. The underneath table gives example words with coda consonant clusters whereby they are treated differently in adult speech of Omani Arabic, making no articulatory issues to young speakers of Omani Arabic.

Table 8. Coda consonant clusters in OAM

Standard Arabic	Colloquial Omani Arabic	Child pronunciation	Gloss
ħabl	ħabɪl	habɪl	rope
qalb	qalb	kalb	heart
qʊfl	qfɪl	kfɪl	lock
baħr	baħar/bħar	bahal/bhal /baħal/bħal	sea
ʃaʕr	ʃaʕar	ʃaʔal	hair
laħm	laħam/lħam	laham/lahm laħam/laħm	meat
ṣaħn	sahan/sħan	sahan/shan saħan/sħan	plate
darb	darb	darb	path
xʊbz	xʊbz/kʊbɪz/xɪbz	ħʊbz/ħʊbɪz/ħɪbz	bread

Simple and Familiar Vocabulary
One unique manifestation of simplicity in mother-child communication is seen in mothers' use of very simple words that are familiar and favorable to their children. This includes words children have already picked via their interaction with their parents, or those children themselves have

created out of scratch to establish communication with their mothers. Since use of facile language is given first priority in motherese, words used at the early phase of infants' speech are usually characterized by the use of disyllabic or monosyllabic words with open syllables. Shorter words with open syllables tend to be easier to grasp and use by infants compared to longer words with closed syllables. The table underneath gives several examples of the most common words used at a very early phase of OAM, which tend to be short and to end with open syllables.

Table. 9 Sample of common words used at an early stage of OAM

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
da:da:	child	wa:wo	cat
nini/nanna	milk	titi	goat
tutu	go away	susu	bird
ta:ta:	walk	ma:ma:	mammy
mbu	water	mammi	food
waħħi	danger	ba:ba:	daddy
kuku	chicken	labi	toy
taħħi	beat	dudu	insect/worm/danger
nunu	fire	fufu	balloon

It is noteworthy that words acquired at the very early stage of children's learning path tend to be overgeneralized semantically to have several referents with distinct related meanings, probably due to the scanty amount of lexicons available within children's disposal. A child may use a word like /taʕ/ 'donkey' to refer to an array of animals of several sizes and types including horses, goats and dogs, in addition to donkeys. By the same token, an infant may use the word /da:da:/ 'kid' to refer to different individuals other than parents irrespective of their age and gender including siblings, relatives and strangers. One child, for instance, uses the word 'da:ʃah' 'Omani gown-like dress worn by males' to refer to any type of dress irrespective of its type and the gender of its wearer including his own dress. These examples give evidence that children tend to analyze individuals/objects around them into categories based on some perceived similarities, and thus classify them accordingly. Their familiarity with certain objects/bodies that seem to fit one category (i.e. animals, individuals, food, birds…etc.) results in having multiple referents associated with certain words. A child may use the word /mammi/ 'food/to eat' to mean 'to bite' and 'to drink', for all three actions require the use of the same body organ. Having stated that, an infant saying 'da:da: bagi mammi' to mean 'The kid wants to eat.', could also be interpreted as 'The kid wants to drink' or 'The kid wants to bite me.'. Likewise, some children use the phrase 'Bagi titi' [I want my shoes.] to mean 'I want to go with you.' as they got to know that wearing shoes is associated with going out somewhere. By the same token, a child may use the phrase 'ali soot' [turn up the volume] to mean 'turn on the TV/video clip' since volume is associated with turning a TV or a video clip on. Realizing the scanty number of words available within their babies' lexicons, parents on their part tend to overgeneralize the referents of some words to facilitate

communication with their children. The word /dudu/ 'worm/insect', for instance, is used to refer to any moving creature that could pose danger to children like lizards, worms, flies, bees, snakes…etc. Similarly, the word 'nunu'[fire] is used to draw infants' attention to anything around them that may jeopardize their safety or to make them refrain from doing ill-behaved acts.

A closer scrutiny of the type of words used in OAM reveals two possible categorizations: words that appear to be created from scratch either by children and/or mothers, and those created from real adult-speech words with slight modification to suit the purpose motherese is made for. The former do not seem to originate from real words used in adult speech; they are, however, so common that most of them are used by mothers from different regional and educational backgrounds. The inability to recognize these words as real ones does not necessarily prove that they were created from scratch, nor does it prove the otherwise. In fact, the spread of these words among mothers from different proximities, ages and educational backgrounds poses the possibility of having these words derived from real words but with constant modification that pushed them beyond recognition. Mothers taking part in the study beforehand reported that the majority of these words are literally the same exact words used with them when they were talking motherese in their childhood. These words seem to have an ongoing inter-generational transfer from one generation into another even though they do not seem to be traced back to real original words in the language, since recognizing them as real words is hard if not impossible. The following table gives several examples of these words.

Table 10. Examples of words used in OAM irrelevant to those used in adult speech.

Word	Gloss
mbu	water
nini/nanna	milk-milk bottle
na:na:ħ/da:da:ħ/ta:ta:ħ	sleep
loloh	
da:da:	baby
nunu	fire/danger
babaʕ	again, another one
kikih, kakaʕ, ħiħim	toilet
ta:teɪh	walk, come on
mimiħ- mamaħ	beautiful, nice
deɪhid	moon
mba:x	It is over. / Nothing!
taʕ	donkey, horse
duh	hit
ʃejutu	sweets
ufah/uff	Feel better!
uu:p	jump
taħih	Hit him!
qaqaʕ	snack
kaka:ħ	It finished. /It is over.
kuʃuʃu	playing

The second category comprises words that correspond to real ones used in adult speech albeit with different types of segmental and/or structural modification- an expected natural result since simplification of language triggers the need for modification. Change these words undergo is made either by children themselves because they cannot master the real correct pronunciation or by mothers who tend to modify the pronunciation of words, difficult ones in particular, to better suit their children in the best way they deem it possible. Contrary to the words shown in the above table, the underneath table gives examples of words whose source can be traced back to adult speech.

Table 11. Examples of words used in OAM originating from adult speech

Word in baby talk	Gloss	Word in Adult speech	Gloss
babbaħ- bbaħ	Take a shower, swim!	jɪsbaħ- jɪtsabbaħ	to swim/ take a shower
abeɪh- aboo	shame, wrong behavior	abeɪh- aboo	Shame on you!
dudu- duduh	danger/worm/insect	dudah	worm
ʔaa:n-naa:n [onomatopoeic]	car	sajjarah	car
damih	blood	dem	blood
bibih	grandmother	bibih	grandmother
tutun	small –little child	tutun	small –little child
babaħ, bibiħ	slaughter, cow	jɪðbaħ	to slaughter
tiʃ tiʃ [onomatopoeic]	perfume	ʕɪtɪr	perfume
abb/oob	Stop doing that!	ʕeɪb	Shame
mixit	mucus	mɪxxat	mucus
salubah	Stand straight!	s̠alb-mɪs̠tɪlb	straight , well-behaved
ħama:nʔaħim	Quran, prayer	alraħma:n araħim	[Allah] the magnificent, the merciful
jaʕi-kaxi	disgusting	jaʕ -kax	disgusting
ŋa:ʕ [onomatopoeic]	newborn	tɪfɪl	Infant
babbih	Hit him!	durbah	Hit him!
ta:tɪʃ	French fries	bat̠at̠ɪs	French fries
mbaħ	meat	jɪðbaħ	To slaughter [an animal for meat.]
buʕ	quickly	buʕ	quickly
ħibiʃ	face- wash your face	jɪxbɪʃ	to wash [one's face]

It is noteworthy that children also have their own contribution to the lexicon of motherese either by twisting the pronunciation of real words based on their articulatory abilities or by making up words from scratch, which provides the ground for possible idiolects in terms of form and meaning. It is witnessed as a general trend that infants are so innovative in creating their own non-sense and out-of-scratch words, or adjusting existing words and associating them with unfamiliar meanings of their choice; this is probably done to compensate for their lack of vocabulary when they do not

have the right vocabulary within their disposal. Once these words are frequently used to refer to the same referent, infants start believing that they are real words, which latter become part of their lexicon. Mothers, on the other hand, tend to use these words, instead of real words, to facilitate communication with their babies at such sensitive stage. The fact that infants may associate some self-created words with meanings irrelevant or contradictory to our knowledge of the world makes mothers pay special attention to these words and the meanings associated with them so that communication is made easier. Latter, these words tend to be replaced with the real ones when children have the aptitude to replace their self-created words with the real ones used in adult speech.

A female kid, for instance, was reported to use her own word 'la:fi' to refer to her shoes. This word was created from scratch which she associated with this meaning. Parents used the same word to refer to 'shoes' so that communication is established with her. Latter in time when she was able to realize that another word is used to refer to 'shoes', especially among other circles other than her family, she gave up her own self-created word and replaced it with the real one. Another child was using the word 'bata:t' as a negation marker in different contexts such as negating the existence of something or negating carrying out an action. Parents, siblings and relatives were using the same word as a negation marker because the child was not ready to use the real negation marker.

Another child was using her own realization of the word 'madrasah [school]', which is 'daddaʃa', as a rubric for creating other words that seem to have the same rhyme as the word 'daddaʃa'. She used this word to refer to her nursery school, and interestingly she created other words with the same rhyme to express different meanings like 'haddaʃa [clothes]', 'baddaʃa [shoes]' and 'gaddaʃa [toy]'. Although 'daddaʃa [school]' and 'haddaʃa [clothes]' can be somewhat traced back to real words, the word 'baddaʃa [shoes]' and 'gaddaʃah [toy]' were just mere innovative words made out of scratch to rhyme with the former two words. It took the child some time to realize that these were her own created words for these referents, and thus she eventually replaced them with the real ones used by adult speakers. More examples of such words are shown in the underneath table; they are created either as newly made ones or adjusted ones. Hence, the majority of these words are family-specific words; they are restricted to those who made them and unintelligible to other individuals outside their little circle.

Table 12. Family-specific words in OAM

Word	Gloss
nunuh	kid
wa:wa:	danger
bɪsbi	soft drinks
wima	sleep
xwa:	bad person
laɪtaz	candy
wajjaz	a little bit
beba	Lovely- I like it.
hawaa:h	sit down
wabis	chips
s̠abrini	Wait for me!
la:fi	shoes
dubah	corn
njjamoos	snacks
duuh	beat
ta:ta:	plane
jɪhti	It moves.
beja	I do not want it.
mɪtbaʕðin	together

Interestingly, words created by children tend to form a secret code that seems incomprehensible to individuals outside the mother-child restricted circle, especially those that signify embarrassing meanings to them such as their need to go to the bathroom, take a shower, or suckle some milk. It should be noted here that words created by children from scratch are more likely to be unlearned and replaced by other ones than those they learn through their interaction with their mothers and siblings. The less use and exposure to these words make them susceptible to swift disappearance, especially that mothers are keen to make their babies unlearn these words and replace them with real ones so that their circle of communication is enlarged to include other individuals like fathers, siblings, friends and neighbors.

Simplified Structure
The prevalence of simple familiar words in OAM is also complemented by the use of very simple structure to better attain the purpose motherese serves. Structurally, motherese is mainly characterized by the use of telegraphic messages usually expressed by single words. The use of two-word and three-word messages is definitely not absent; they are, however, outnumbered by and subsequent to single-word messages. Largely, one-word telegraphic messages come into use at an early age of less than one year, and later may appear in other forms such as questions and negated sentences. Function-wise, these words could function as affirmative sentences or questions depending on the context and the associated intonation. Affirimativity is more frequently used by children usually in the forms of requests addressed to their mothers or other individuals to attend

to their needs whereas questions are more in use by mothers who tend to use more questions addressed to their babies to inquire about their welfare and needs.

Noteworthy, single-word sentences, so to speak, could absorb several meanings that fit several contexts. They are, hence, subject to several interpretations if decontextualized and disassociated with the emotional state of the child uttering them. Although such telegraphic messages may bear different meanings and thus difficult to interpret by the average person, mothers are expert interpreters of these messages as they decode them in light of the tone and emotional states of their children. The following tables give examples of several single word messages that could have different meanings depending on the context of their occurrence as well as the emotional state of the child interlocutor.

Table. 13 Several interpretations of the word 'nannah' in OAM

Single word message	Context/ emotional state of child	Interpretation
nannah	Child crying	I am hungry; I want some milk.
nannah	Child laughing/smiling	I am glad that I had some milk.
nannah	Said with rising intonation	Do you want to give me some milk? Is it time to have some milk?
nannah	Child shaking his/her own head	I do not want milk.
nannah	Said with assertion	Give me some milk!

Table. 14 Several interpretations of the word 'da:da:' in OAM

Single word message	Context/ emotional state of child	Interpretation
da:da:	Child crying	The kid hurt/annoyed me.
da:da:	Child surprised	I am amazed. We have a kid in here. / I saw a kid.
da:da:	Child laughing/smiling	I am glad to see this kid.
da:da:	Child annoyed and repeating the word	Pay attention to the kid!

Table. 15 Several interpretations of the word 'waħħi' in OAM

Single word message	Context/ emotional state of child	Interpretation
waħħi	Said with intonation that provokes attention	Danger, do not touch!
waħħi	Said with raising intonation	Is it dangerous?
waħħi	Child crying	I hurt myself. I got hurt.

As infants grow older, circa the age of eighteen months and plus, they start using two-word telegraphic messages to communicate with those around them. Infants around this age are also reported to be able to make three-word sentences usually, but not solely, in the forms of requests and expressive forms. Yet, these sentences are so plain that they often lack unnecessary elements

such as quantifiers, modifiers, prepositions, demonstratives, articles …etc. The appearance of such forms in fact defeats the purpose, for motherese is streamlined towards facilitating language to children not to complicate it. Child speech may also lack markers that distinguish gender, person and plurality. For instance, as mothers address their babies using 2SG pronouns, some children assume that these forms are generalizable to other individuals, and accordingly overuse them in other non-corresponding contexts such as referring to a third party or even talking about themselves. Likewise, once infants are able to associate their own names with their own beings, they start using proper names to refer to themselves, as if they are referring to different entities. The following are examples that exemplify the aforesaid features occurring in children's speech.

5.   haðɪ   labɪt- ɪʃ
this   toy-2SG.F.POSS
'This is your toy'.   'Literal meaning'
'This is my toy.'   'Intended meaning'

6.   ta:b   mayam
book   Maryam
'This is Maryam's book'   'Literal meaning'
'This is my book.'   'Intended meaning'

7.   ati-kɪ   hawawah
give-you.2G.F   sweets
'Do you want [me] to give you sweets?'   'Literal meaning'
'Do you want to give me sweets?'   'Intended meaning'

8.   Ali   ba   ta:ta:ħ
Ali   want   sleeping
'Ali wants to go to bed.'   'Literal meaning'
'I [Ali] want to go to bed.'   'Intended meaning'

9.   Salah   ba   luħ
Sarah   want   go
'Sarah wants to go'   'Literal meaning'
'I [Sarah] want to go.'   'Intended meaning'

Around twenty-four months of age or so children are reported to use negative markers to negate two and three-word sentences. The use of negation can take various forms attained by the use of certain words such as ' la' 'not' 'ma' not' 'kaxi 'dirty' ' ya ʕih' 'disgusting' 'waħħi' it hurts', to name a few, or by non-linguistic means like shaking heads, waving hands, or tsking. As far as frequency is concerned, negation is used less frequently by children as opposed to mothers who

tend to give their babies instructions to refrain from carrying out activities/actions that may jeopardize their safety. The following examples exemplify the use of different forms of negation taken from mother-child conversations.

10.   ma   luħ   hnak
NEG   go   there
'Do not go there!'

11.   kaxi   mbu
dirty   water
'Water is not clean. Do not drink it!'

12.   jaʕi   mammi
disgusting   food
'Do not eat that food. It is rotten!'

13.   waħħi   bibiħ
hurting   cutting [knife]
'The knife is dangerous. Back off!'

14.   ma   ʕati   babaʕ
NEG   give.2SG   another one
'Do not give [him/her] another one.'

As far as morphology is concerned, few affixes are used to mark certain meanings. The prefix ba- functions as an interrogative marker that attaches to verbs. The same prefix is also used to express futurity depending on the context in which it is used. When ba- is accompanied with a raising tone, it functions as a question particle that renders the sentences interrogative rather than affirmative. The suffix -i, on the other hand, is used as an imperative marker attached to verbs to show the imperative mood, usually to mark requests made by children to get their needs attended to, or to mark orders addressed to children. This particle is generally used in verbs meant to address females rather than males. Some mothers, however, use them invariably to address both genders, especially at the very first months of starting baby talk. The following sentences show the use of these affixes in mother-child speech.

15.   ba-swwai   ta:ta:ħ   [falling tone- futurity]
FUT-do   sleeping
'I will go to bed.'

16.   ba-sawwi   ta:ta:ħ   [rising tone- interrogative]
Q.want-do   sleeping

'Do you want to go to bed?'

17.   namm-i   babaʕ
Eat-IMP.2SG.F   another one
'Eat one more!'

18.   ma   luħ-i   na:t
NEG   go-IMP.2SG.F   there
'Do not go there!'

Around the age of thirty months, mimicry comes to its climax; children tend to show an unprecedented obsession to mimic whatever they hear even though they do not have a firm command of the meaning, pronunciation or usage of the utterances the mimic. They are so attentive and vigilant to new vocabularies they are exposed to, especially those used by their elder siblings and peers. Subsequently, the sum of learned words augments remarkably at this age due to the process of mimicry and exposure to new lexical items. Still lacking absolute accuracy and clarity, children's speech at this stage sounds funny and even stunning because they tend to produce utterances and structures that go beyond parents' expectation. Mothers, on their part, exert their effort at this stage to enhance their children's learning of language by asking them to regurgitate certain words, phrases, and structures. Giving corrective feedback at this stage is generally significant in acquiring the right pronunciation and forms. In some cases, however, it is not effective as it is subject to several factors such as individual differences, and attention paid by children to corrective feedback.

In the course of time, children gradually have exposure to more words and structures, which are put in immediate use with mothers and other family members. Their communicative skills and lexicons build up rapidly and noticeably until they reach an adult-like proficiency. The period of time they need to reach such point is hard to pinpoint; it varies since it depends on several factors such as children's individual abilities and exposure to language. Gender-wise, female babies tend be more competent because they pick the language faster than their male counterparts. Likewise, children who have elder siblings tend to be more competent in acquiring words and structure as opposed to those who have less or no siblings at all, thanks to the extent of exposure their siblings provide them with. It should also be noted, however, that due to some individual differences, some children might take longer or shorter periods of time in mastering certain elements regardless of their age and gender. By the age of thirty six months and plus, most children tend to be good communicators with a wide range of lexical items that enable them to express themselves to parents, siblings, relatives and even strangers.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeic words, those created from the sounds associated with the objects they name, are actively present in the speech of Omani mothers to their babies. Thanks to the auditory element linked with onomatopoeic words, associating such words with their meanings happens rapidly compared to non-onomatopoeic words that seem to be less salient and noticeable to children. Onomatopoeia, in fact, eases the way for mothers to deliver certain meanings to their babies who, in turn, find it easy to contextualize such words and thus internalize them. Remarkably, onomatopoeic words do not only appear to be easily understood by infants, but also tend to be very frequent in use due to the fact that they find their way easily into their building lexicon. As infants tend to be fascinated with the sight of new objects/animals, and the sounds they produce, it is easy to associate the sounds (i.e. onomatopoeic words) with their referents (i.e. objects/animals). The use of words signifying animals like 'mjaʊ-wa:wo' [cat], 'ququʕ- kuquʕ-kuku' [chicken], 'waħ waħ-wah wah' [dog], and 'ŋooħ-banqooħ' [bull/cow] are among the most common onomatopoeic words used by infants. Onomatopoeia could also take account of objects in the surrounding environment as well as some human actions. The underneath table shows examples of onomatopoeic words commonly used in OAM alongside their meanings.

Table.16 Onomatopoeic words used in OAM

Onomatopoeic word	Gloss	Associated sound
mam/mammi/ħum/ mumum	Eat!/ food	sound of chewing/ munching something.
mba:ʕ/ba:ʕ	sheep/ goat	sheep/goat-made sound
atʃu - ʕatʃu-hatʃu	sneezing	sound of sneezing
waħ waħ-wah wah	dog	dog-made sound
mjaʊ-wa:wu	cat	cat-made sound
tiss/ waħħi	fire/ danger	sound of something hot coming in contact with a cold surface/ sound made because of painful burn
kax /jaxxi	disgusting/ throw it!	sound made in reaction to something smelly/ rotten.
ŋooħ-banqooħ	cow/bull	cow/bull-made sound
tintin	bell	sound made by a ringing bell
ʔaa:n.-naa:n	car	sound made by a moving car
ququʕ- kuquʕ-kuku	chicken	rooster-made sound
mmaħ-mmaħ	kiss	sound of giving a kiss
nam nam	delicious	sound of eating/ munching something
aaa	open (your) mouth	sound made when one's mouth is wide open.
ŋa:ʕ	newborns	crying sounds made by newborns
qaʕ	gunshot	gunshot sounds
qʕaŋ qʕaŋ	bulldozer	sound made by a moving bulldozer
luluʃ	wedding/ bride	rejoicing sounds made in wedding parties
wi wi	ambulance	sound made by ambulance siren
tɪʃ tɪʃ	perfume	sound of spraying perfume

Onomatopoeic words are also susceptible to overgeneralization to other types of animals that seem to fall within the same category. The word /ququʕ- kuquʕ-kuku/, for instance, is derived, so to speak, from the sound of roosters, and thus is mainly used to refer to signify 'chicken'. However, it is also used to refer to other types of animals that are perceived to fall within the same category such as hens, roosters, chicks, doves or any other types of birds. Likewise, the word /mba:ʕ-ba:ʕ/ 'goat-sheep' tend to be overgeneralized by some infants, especially at their first stage of learning the word, to refer to other animals like dogs, horses, cows…etc. Over-generalization associated with onomatopoeic words, however, tend to disappear faster than other generalized words; children tend to unlearn the wrong usage/meanings and replace them with the right ones swiftly due to the easiness of associating these words with their right exact referents.

Light Verb Constructions
One unique and intriguing innovative way to mark simplicity in mother-child communication in Omani Arabic is the use of 'light verb constructions' [LVCs] instead of direct [heavy] verbs. The term 'light verb' refers to constructions made of a nonverbal element that combines with certain verbs that have partially or totally lost their semantic content to make joined verbal constructions (Anderson, 2006). Such constructions are attested in adult speech in several languages including English. Examples of LVCs in English are 'give a presentation', 'take a walk', 'take a shower', 'pay a visit' and 'make progress', to name a few, which can be expressed with single heavy verb constructions such as present, walk, shower, visit and progress, respectively. The two elements in LVCs both form a single unit whose meaning is slightly different from the coexisting simple verb used to express the same notion. Verbs of this kind are termed 'light verbs' as opposed to 'heavy verbs' that express their full semantic power. The word 'light' suggests that these verbs do not have their full semantic content, and they are not devoid of semantic content either. Their semantic content is reduced as opposed to their semantic content when used as heavy verbs (Bowern, 2008; Family, 2011).

The formation of LVCs in OAM is attained by a verb plus noun combination (i.e. do + something), mainly by combining the verbs 'sawwi [do]' and 'ati [give]' with several nouns to construct different verbal structures, usually but not solely in the forms of instructions. Their use is invariable with babies of both genders since gender distinction is not marked in the verbal elements of these constructions. Similar to negation, their use is more prevalent in the imperative forms since they are mainly employed to give instructions to children. These light verbs, in fact, also serve a mnemonic and pedagogical function; they draw babies' attention that these are [verbal] instructions. Once they hear the use of such constructions, they realize that these are instructions that require some sort of reaction. It also enables children to formulate a rule for the use of these expressions, making the practice of such expressions much easier compared to other ones. The following tables provide some LVCs used by mothers and children along with their literal and intended meanings.

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Table.17 LVCs made with the verbal element 'sawwi [do]' in OAM

LVC	Literal meaning	Intended meaning
sawwi bxeɪr	do wellbeing	Shake hands!
sawwi babaɪ/salamah	do goodbye/farewell	Say farewell!
Sawwi tata:ħ/loloh/dada:ħ/ nana:h	do sleeping	Go to bed!
sawwi mmaħ	do a kiss	Kiss (the baby)!
sawwi ufff	do an air blow	Blow (the candle)!
sawwi ħammam	do toilet	Go to the toilet!
sawwi babaʕ	do another one	Do it again!
sawwi tateɪh	do walking	Walk!
sawwi bbaħ	do swimming	Take a shower!
sawwi laħim	do God's name [merciful]	Read/ Recite [Quran]!

Table.18 LVCs made with the verbal element 'ati [give]' in OAM

LVC	Literal meaning	Intended meaning
ati kaf	give a slap	Slap!
ati bosah	give a kiss	Kiss!
ati boks	give a fest	Punch!
ati taħ	give beating	Beat!
ati buuu	give explosion	Frighten!
ati mam	give food	Eat!
[ma] ati waħħi	[do not] give hurting/injury	Do not hurt!
ati mimiħ	give nice colors	Color!
ati ʃut	give kicking	Kick!
ati sib	give sipping	Drink!

The use of LVCs is also noticeably present in the form of questions mothers use in their speech to their babies, which are marked via the use of exaggerated rising intonation whether in LVCs or elsewhere. Such verbal-nominal format, in fact, tends to be used by infants to make new sentences of their own whether with common verbs used in LVCs or new ones. Mothers, on the other side, reinforce their babies' skills via introducing more advanced sentences via the use of these structures. The following are examples of sentences expressed via verb-noun format, some of which are utterly created by infants.

Table. 19 Verb-noun format sentences created mainly by infants to express several meanings in OAM

Verb-noun combination	Literal meaning	Intended meaning
akki salah	throw basket	Throw it in the basket!
ati da:da:	give kid	Give it to the kid!
sawwi sninah	do teeth	Go brush your teeth!
ma dhubbi Abullah	not beat Abdullah	Do not beat Abdullah!
luħi ba:ba:	go daddy	Go with daddy!
luħi na:n	go car	Get into the car!
kubbi mbu	pour water	Water/irrigate [the plants]!
sawwi mixit	do mucus	Blow your nose!
sawwi naddaf	do cleaning	Clean it!
xalli mba:x	leave nothing	Finish it all!

As children grow older, the number of vocabulary and language structures within their disposal increases noticeably resulting in gradual less use of LVCs compared to their [heavy] verb counterparts. Some children, however, may go through a certain stage in which the extent of LVCs usage may fluctuate, as both constructions may coincide with each other until heavy verbs push their way through in children's lexicon and everyday use.

Reduplication
Reduplication, both in its partial and full form, is present in Omani mothers' speech to their babies, especially newborns and infants of less than two years. It is not surprising or unusual, in fact, to find reduplicated forms present in the type of speech adult Omanis use with their babies. A closer inspection of adult speech in Omani Arabic shows that reduplication is strikingly present, mainly in verbal constructions beside other derived forms of other lexical categories like nouns and adjectives (Al Jahdhami, 2020). The presence of reduplicated forms in OAM is, hence, a byproduct of Omani Arabic adult speech whereby reduplication is employed to express repetition of an action and/or have a negative element associated with these constructions. Reduplication in mother-child speech, on the contrary, is employed as a means to attract children's attention and to make the perception of words much easier to them. A closer investigation of words acquired at the very early stage of newborns' life shows that they are largely characterized by reduplication either in its partial or full form. The repetitive element associated with these words makes them more salient and easier to use as opposed to words with no reduplicated element ; thus, they are internalized faster than those non-reduplicated ones. The following table gives example words used in mother-child talk with both partial and full reduplicated element associated with them.

Table.20 Words used in in OAM with partial and full reduplication

Word	Meaning
dada:ħ - loloh - tata:ħ - nana:h	to sleep
da:da: - da:da:h	a baby
dudu- duduh - tutu- tutuh	danger/worm/insect
ka:ka:ħ	describing something that has finished.
nunu	fire/ danger
wa:wu	cat
waħ waħ-wah wah	dog
nini/nannah	milk-milk bottle
tɪn tɪn	bell, music
tɪʃ tɪʃ	perfume
qʕaŋ qʕaŋ	bulldozer
kal kal	sewing machine
ta:ta: - ta:teɪh	walk
mummum - mammi	food/eat
tutu:n	small

It is noteworthy here that the very first few words commonly said by children involved in the study, and probably most children elsewhere, are reported to be 'mama [mother]' and 'baba [father]' due to the easy sounds involved in these words and due to the reduplicated element associated with them. Both words start with bilabial sounds (b, m) followed by a vowel, which requires the least form of efforts to pronounce. They simply require brining both lips to a complete closure followed by an immediate opening of both lips in preparation to articulate the vowel. Such combination is then reduplicated to make absorbing them even easier to infants. The saliency and simplicity of reduplicated forms probably explains why lexical items with such forms make the majority of words used with newborns and infants on the threshold of using OAM. The use of reduplicated forms diminishes gradually as infants' lexicon improves by learning non-reduplicated forms and eventually by learning adult speech words. Reduplication as a linguistic process, however, does not completely vanish when children reach an adult-like proficiency; it continues to be used albeit with a different function and frequency since its use in adult speech is different from that in baby talk.

CONCLUSION

Geared towards shedding some light on motherese in Omani Arabic, this paper has explored the common features of such form of speech register as used by Omani mothers, newborns and infants to establish mother-child communication. Several characteristics portray this type of speech such

as segmental approximation, intonation, syllabic and segmental reduction, simple and familiar vocabulary, simplified structure, onomatopoeic words, light verb constructions, and reduplication. As far as lexicon is concerned, words in OAM are two pronged. While a big substance of words are taken from adult speech with some segmental modification, other words seem to be generated from scratch, for tracing them back to real ones is unattainable, if not impossible. Cases of idiolects also exist since individual children tend to create their own lexical items that are not in use beyond their little circles that include parents and siblings. Likewise, the presence of these features in OAM may differ from one family to another or one zone to another. Further studies that build on this study to explore other aspects such as the effect of gender on OAM, the influence of social media and TV on the structure and lexicon of OAM, and the role other individuals [i.e. housemaids & caregivers] may play in OAM would provide a clearer picture of the current baby talk in Omani Arabic. Exploring the topic from other angles will surely yield remarkable outcomes.

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