This paper presents material that I have collected on East Cree baby talk, comparing the phonological and lexical inventories to a theoretical universal baby talk which has been suggested by the work of Charles Ferguson (1964, 1975). Furthermore, since many people have expressed an interest in understanding how Cree children can learn the highly complex inflectional system of their language and pick out the basic lexical items, I also briefly examine the use of inflections at this early stage of language development. All analyses presented here are preliminary and more complete and conclusive results will be available in my upcoming dissertation.

First, it is necessary to define the term “baby talk”. Baby talk refers to a register spoken by adults and older children when addressing a young child who is just learning to speak or who may be prelinguistic. If one discards, as I do, the extreme innatist view of Chomsky (1965:58; 1982:7), one must present an alternative theory of language acquisition. I believe that baby talk is the initial stage of a teaching-learning process that begins with simple utterances — simple in their phonological, grammatical and semantic content — and proceeds to complex forms. The data I have collected from Cree support this idea.

The data presented here were elicited from a bilingual and bicultural informant who spent the first eight years of her life in a fairly traditional setting — wintering in the bush and spending summers in a community. She was sent to a residential school after this but returned to her community (Waswanipi) every summer where she was exposed to the upbringing of her many younger siblings and
cousins. This informant presently lives and works in the south but keeps in touch with her family and makes periodic trips home. The data were cross-checked with a resident of Rupert House who has a similar background but remained in the community after leaving school and raised her children there. Although there are many regional or perhaps familial variations, much of the data is the same. For the purpose of consistent analysis, I present only the Waswanipi data in this paper.

Waswanipi Cree Baby Talk Lexicon

A. Body Parts and Functions
sleep — meme, bebe
bottle, breastfeed — fufu
drink (from a cup) — gogo
eat (or food) — næx
eat with a spoon (or soup or porridge) — bæbu
urinate (or urine) — šiši
defecate (or feces) — mishi
penis — dulu

B. Basic Qualities
sick, hurt — gigi
dirty — bubu, ja
(a) little — -š
pretty, nice — dafji

C. Kin Terms, Nicknames
father — babu
mother — muma
grandmother — gugu
grandfather — jumšum

D. Familiar Objects and Creatures
baby, doll — jiši
shoe — gægun
cat — minusš, pušiš
stranger — ælo
boogeyman — \( \text{\textalpha du\textupsilon} \)
noxious creature — \( \text{\textgimel k\textupsilon} \)

E. Familiar Actions
come here — \( \text{\textepsilon f\textupsilon m} \)
bring — \( \text{\textbeop d\textupsilon e\textupsilon} \)
give — \( \text{\textm i} \)
go away — \( \text{\textepsilon w\textupsilon a\textupsilon} \)
go out — \( \text{\textw w\textupsilon i} \)
go ahead — \( \text{\textemph{m\textupsilon j\textupsilon}} \)

F. Exclamations
watch out — \( \text{\textOmega go\textupsilon} \)
well done — \( \text{\textomicron da\textupsilon ej\textupsilon yu\textupsilon} \)
be quiet — \( \text{\textomicron \textepsilon \textepsilon \textepsilon \textepsilon \textepsilon} \)
no, don't — \( \text{\textomicron o} \)
noise to scare — \( \text{\textomicron b\textupsilon} \)

G. Noises
object falling into water — \( \text{\textd e\textupsilon m\textupsilon u\textupsilon k} \)
something scary — \( \text{\textupsilon u: \textupsilon u:} \)

The lexical items listed above represent the body of East Cree baby talk. Although some words are derived from or are the same as adult forms, I include them here since they comprise part of the child’s initial vocabulary.

On examining material from a number of languages, Ferguson (1964) suggested the categories “body”, “nursery games and animals”, “kin terms and nicknames”, and “qualities”. If we analyze the Cree data in this way, we end up with 16 words (43%) that must be put in a miscellaneous category. On returning to the primary sources used by Ferguson we find many words that do not fit his classification and that have not been included in his article. If the classification is revised to include body parts and functions, basic qualities, kin terms and nicknames, familiar objects, familiar creatures, familiar actions, exclamations, and noises, there is no difficulty in analyzing the Cree material accordingly. Furthermore, the primary sources referred to by Ferguson (e.g., Austerlitz 1956; Casagrande 1948; Kelkar 1964) and other available data on baby talk (e.g., Stoel-Gammon 1976;
Meegaskumbura 1980) are also classifiable according to these categories without a miscellaneous group.

Some languages have many more words in one section than in another. For example, Cree has 2 familiar objects and 4 familiar creatures whereas Brazilian Portuguese baby talk (Stoel-Gammon 1976: 23) has 4 familiar objects and 7 familiar creatures, and Gilyak (Austerlitz 1956:264) has 13 familiar objects and 7 familiar creatures. On the other hand, Cree has more exclamations than any of these (Cree — 5, Brazilian Portuguese — 2, Gilyak — 1). Further analysis of a wide range of languages will undoubtedly reveal a variable emphasis on categories with some classes being absolute universals and others universal trends.

East Cree Baby Talk Phonology

**Reduced Phonological Inventory**: A common feature of baby talk registers is a reduced phonological inventory. East Cree fits this pattern since there are features of adult language that do not occur in the baby talk register. For example, voiceless stops do not occur (with the exception of $k$ in *dumuk* and *gikš*, although in standard adult speech voiced and voiceless stops are allophones of each other. Furthermore, round, palatized and aspirated sounds, frequent in adult forms, are almost non-existent in the baby talk inventory (an exception is the palatal phoneme $j$ in *o dafyun*).

**Reduplication**: Most languages exhibit a high degree of reduplication in baby talk whether the words are derived from adult speech or are suppletive forms. The Cree data provide 14 words with a reduplicated syllable, 5 with a reduplicated vowel and 1 with a reduplicated consonant, making a total of 20 out of 37 words with some form of reduplication (54%).

**Repetition**: Repetition of whole words is also commonly noted in the baby talk register as a means of reinforcing key words and/or encouraging certain actions (Meegaskumbura 1980:302; Ferguson 1956:127). This holds true for East Cree baby talk. For example, one might say *afun nənə, nənə* ‘come here, eat, eat’ to emphasize what is being offered or to encourage a child to eat.

**Simple Canonical Form**: CVCV and CVC are common canonical forms in baby talk registers although one form usually predominates in each language. In East Cree baby talk over half the words (20
out of 37, or 54%) exhibit the form CVCV. In the remaining words, a variation of this pattern (CV, VV or VCV) occurs. Only 5 words end in a consonant or contain an intermediate syllable ending in a consonant, and only one of these has a consonant cluster. Thus, the universal pattern of one predominant and simple canonical form is in agreement with the Cree data.

**Diminutive and Hypocoristic Affixes:** A diminutive affix is attached to a word to comment on size or quantity, while the hypocoristic affix signals that a word is part of a baby talk register. In some languages the two forms are the same. In Brazilian Portuguese, -inho may be suffixed to a word as a diminutive to mean 'small', but it is frequently attached to baby talk words such as those meaning 'bath' and 'nice' for hypocoristic effect. In other languages there is a distinction between the two: English has the infrequently used diminutive -et(te) as in kitchenette, piglet, and ringlet, appropriate in adult speech, and also the hypocoristic -y(ie) found in such forms as doggy, dolly, and Susie. The Cree suffix -š is largely used to denote small size or quantity but it may occasionally take on a connotation of affection, commonly associated with the hypocoristic, when attached to first names. For example, one might say gogoš, 'drink a little', or jijíš 'a little baby', in baby talk which have counterparts in the adult speech using the same suffix -š. However, the form meliš, 'little Mary' is only used in adult speech to demonstrate familiarity and affection, although it is the common form for addressing a child named Mary.

**Onomatopoeia:** Onomatopoeia is a common method of forming suppletive nursery forms. For example, in English there is choo-choo for 'train'; bow-wow for 'dog' and tick-tock for 'clock'. In Cree, however, this method of forming baby talk words does not occur in my data. It is easy to explain why there are not a great deal of onomatopoeic words since in baby talk they frequently refer to mechanical items such as clocks, bells, vehicles, etc. Yet, when we take into consideration the sound metaphors of Cree narrative and the obvious onomatopoeic formation of such adult words as pipičaw 'robin' and šišikun 'rattle', it seems strange that the East Cree baby talk register does not make use of this method of word creation.

**Derivation:** Baby words may be suppletive (unrelated to the adult form) or derived, and there are universal patterns for deriving baby talk forms. East Cree presents evidence of cluster simpli-
lication, syllable deletion and reduplication, although none are used extensively. The consonant cluster \( \text{\textit{št}} \) is reduced to \( \text{\textit{ʃ}} \) when the adult form, \( \text{\textit{ěštum}} \) ‘come here’ becomes \( \text{\textit{ěʃum}} \) in baby talk. Syllable deletion is evidenced when \( \text{\textit{emisit}} \) ‘to defecate’ and \( \text{\textit{eši}} \) ‘to urinate’ become \( \text{\textit{mi}} \) and \( \text{\textit{ši}} \) respectively. Furthermore, \( \text{\textit{ši}} \) undergoes reduplication after syllable deletion ( \( \text{\textit{eši}} \rightarrow \text{\textit{ši}} \rightarrow \text{\textit{šiši}} \)).

**East Cree Baby Talk Grammatical Inflection**

The list of words in the East Cree baby talk lexicon above are uninflected and represent the earliest stage of baby talk. They are words that can change their part of speech; for example, \( \text{\textit{nænæ}} \) may be the verb ‘eat’ or the noun ‘food’ and \( \text{\textit{gigi}} \) may be the verb ‘hurt’, the noun ‘a sore’ or the adjective ‘sick’. Since they are uninflected for person, number, obviation etc., baby talk utterances may be ambiguous: \( \text{\textit{mi baba gægun}} \) literally translates ‘give daddy shoes’ and could derive from the adult \( \text{\textit{nedumi čuhtawi umæʃjun}} \) ‘give your father his shoes’ or \( \text{\textit{beʃmi čuhtawi umæʃjun}} \) ‘give me your father’s shoes’.

When inflections do occur, it is the baby words that are inflected. For example \( \text{\textit{meme}}, \) ‘sleep’, can be inflected to form \( \text{\textit{memen}}, \) ‘do you want to sleep?’, \( \text{\textit{memeo}}, \) ‘he is sleeping’ and \( \text{\textit{memedaw}}, \) ‘let’s sleep’. This is not as complex as adult inflection which transforms the root \( \text{\textit{næϕ}}, \) ‘sleep’, to the question \( \text{\textit{čahwinebæn}} \) ? ‘do you want to sleep’ by means of the inflections \( \text{\textit{wi}}, \) question marker, and \( \text{\textit{ča}} \) and \( \text{\textit{n}}, \) ‘you’. It is after the child has begun to use the simply inflected forms correctly that the adult will introduce the more complex inflectional patterns. However, there is also an intermediate stage that consists of adult roots and the simple inflections. For example \( \text{\textit{wabmaw baba}} \) ? ‘do you see daddy?’, replaces the adult form \( \text{\textit{čawabmaw čuhtawi}}, \) and, \( \text{\textit{baba wabmuk}}, \) ‘daddy sees you’ is simplified from the standard adult \( \text{\textit{čuhtawi čawabmuk}}. \)

In East Cree inflection there are 4 distinct but overlapping levels: 1) uninflected baby words, 2) simply inflected baby words, 3) simply inflected adult roots, and 4) normally inflected adult forms. The child is not presented with the Chomskian undecipherable string (1965:58) but with a form suitable to his or her level of comprehension, and in this way is taught the complex inflectional system of the language.

To summarize, East Cree baby talk fits nicely into a universal pattern of simplified speech — simplified phonology, semantics and
grammar. The material presented here reinforces the claim that language is taught as well as learned, and demonstrates that highly inflected languages have baby talk similar to that of the uninflected languages.

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