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Ikemachenll Communacative Style in a Japanese Mother-Infant
Interaction

IKEMACHEN!!

COMMUNICATIVE STYLE IN A JAPANESE MOTHER-INFANT INTERACTION¹

Ruth A. Kanagy

Introduction

In recent years, language acquisition researchers have provided many studies of the special modified "register" of caregiver-child speech in order to answer the question of how a child acquires language and, in the process, is also socialized as a member of society. Some researchers have focused on the syntactic features of "simplified" input ("Motherese"), which may have a teaching function for the child (Newport, Gleitman, and Gleitman 1977). Others such as Snow (1977) focus on language features which train the child in the social skills of conversational turn-taking. Another study summarizes literature on baby talk (BT) in many different languages, providing a useful basis for cross-cultural comparison of BT features and functions (Ferguson 1977).

The purpose of the present study is to analyze features of the baby talk register of one Japanese caregiver, as well as her speech to an adult. The data and results of the study are compared to previous findings of language acquisition researchers listed above and contrasted with a study of Japanese caregiver speech focusing on communicative style by Clancy (1986).

The Setting

Observation of caregiver-child interaction was done in a naturalistic setting and the speech recorded and transcribed (approximately 20 minutes of data). The S. family is middle class and from the Osaka region of Japan. They came to the United States in September of 1985. The mother is college-educated and is a homemaker at present. The father (not present for the study) is a professional and presently studying English at a nearby college. Both parents speak the Osaka dialect (Kansai-ben) with intonation patterns and some lexicon distinct from the standard (Tokyo) dialect. They have two daughters, K (3:6) and C (0:8), who were part of the study.

The setting of the recording session was the living room of the home. The mother (age 30) and baby C were sitting on the floor in the middle of the room. The older daughter, K, and the researcher's daughter, E (3:1), were playing at a table at one side of the room. The researcher alternated between sitting on the floor with the mother and baby and supervising the two girls at the dining table.

During the course of the taping, the mother began changing the baby's diaper and dressing her, interrupted by conversations with the researcher and children. She then fed her a bottle while holding her on her lap.

Description of Baby Talk Register

For the purposes of this study a total of 179 utterances directed from the mother to C and 52 utterances addressed by the mother to the researcher were noted and analyzed.

The baby talk register was characterized by many of the processes described by Ferguson (1977): simplifying process, clarifying process and attention getting devices, as opposed to the normal adult speech standard. One area of simplification was observed in the semantic content, which focused exclusively on the here-and-now in the mother's speech to the baby. The three main topics were: to get changed, to stay away from the

researcher's tape recorder and to drink a bottle. Such topical constraints are also pointed out in Newport, Gleitman and Gleitman's study (1977). In contrast, the topics addressed between the mother and researcher were at both concrete and abstract levels: Play Dough activity, the baby's speech development, and feeding practices in Japan and the United States, among others.

Syntactic simplification was notable in terms of the length of utterances. Whereas the adult-directed speech contained anywhere from one to 14 words in one utterance, speech addressed to the baby was extremely short, from many single word utterances to five words at most. A feature of the structure of Japanese subject-object deletion, when the subject or object can be understood by context, seemed even more marked in the mother's short phrases to her baby than to the researcher. Newport, Gleitman and Gleitman (1977) have pointed out that while deletions of underlying elements from a sentence may seem to increase syntactic complexity (since deletion makes the sentence less explicit), it contributes to "processing simplicity" by keeping utterances short. This seemed to be true in many of the mother's utterances to the baby, especially when telling the baby what activity was to take place next:

(L. 38)² Mother→C: *Chie-chan, papappa*
'Chie-dim, change (BT)'

(L. 138) Mother→C: *Mamma, hai*
'Food (BT), here'

Although the verb (and subject embedded) *-shiyoo* ('Let's do-') is omitted, it is clear from the context what the mother's expectations are.

Also apparent from the above examples is simplification in the area of phonology: that is, the use of Baby Talk (BT) lexicon in the place of Adult Speech (AS) words. Over 13% of the mother's utterances to the baby contained BT words. These are listed in Table 1 with an analysis of phonological changes (cf. Ferguson 1977).

Table 1. Baby Talk Lexicon Used by Mother (13% of utterances)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Adult Speech</u>	<u>Phon. change</u>	<u>Baby Talk</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
body	<i>te</i>	(repeat CV)	<i>otete</i>	hand
	<i>oshiri</i>	($\int \rightarrow t\int$)	<i>ochiri</i>	bottom
activity	<i>kigaeru</i>	(dialect?)	<i>papappa</i>	change clothes
	<i>osuwari</i>	(s- \int , +ko)	<i>otchanko</i>	sit
	<i>ikemassen</i>	(s---- \int)	<i>ikemassen</i>	no good (won't do)
	<i>dame</i>	(repeat CV)	<i>memme</i>	no good
food	<i>tabemono</i>	(repeat CV?)	<i>mamma</i>	food
quality	<i>oishii</i>	(s---- \int)	<i>oichii</i>	delicious

Table 2. Repetition Features by Mother (70% of utterances)

<u>Most frequent</u>	<u>Number of times used</u>
<i>hai</i> (OK, yes, here)	26 times
<i>kore</i> (this, hey)	17 times
<i>ynisho</i> (sound of exertion)	11 times
personal name:	31 times
<i>Chieko-chan</i> (name + diminutive)	1 time
<i>Chie-chan</i> (abbreviated name + diminutive)	17 times
<i>Chie</i> (abbreviated name)	13 times
<i>Doo shita(n) da/no?</i> (What's wrong?)	11 times

Eight different BT words were used a total of 24 times, most used in the context of performing a daily routine, i.e., changing diapers and clothes (body and activity words) and feeding (body, food and quality categories). The remaining two words, *dame* ('No good') and *ikemachen* ('That won't do') were used several times in prohibitive statements (these two words and other terms used in prohibition will be discussed further in the section on use of directives).

Another aspect of BT register is in the manner of speaking by the caregiver--with exaggerated intonation contours and a wide pitch range (see Ferguson on 'Clarifying Processes' 1977). The mother's speech was marked by many examples of contour, pitch, and speed variation:

(L. 101) M→C: (fast) *Akan, mamma sena akan yotte, kigaete.*
'No, no, (I) said you must drink (it) after changing.'

This statement was begun in low pitch; there was then a switch to high pitch and finally back to low. Rather than being in "lento speech", however, it was spoken very rapidly. In fact, there seemed to be more examples of rapid than slow utterances in the mother's speech to her baby. Perhaps this was a matter of individual style, as her adult speech also seemed fast in tempo.

The most striking feature related to clarifying processes was the extremely high incidence of repetitions. Of the total 179 utterances directed to the baby, only 53 were new utterances and the rest were repetitions in whole or part of previous maternal utterances. This was a rate of over 70% (see Table 2, which lists the most frequent word repetitions). Many words were repeated in a duple rhythm: *oishii, oishii* ('delicious, delicious') and *memme, memme* ('no good, no good'). Sometimes a single word such as *hai* ('ok', 'yes') was repeated as many as 11 times in a row, as in Lines 133-135 (see Appendix) where the mother was trying to pacify the baby, who saw her bottle and was yelling louder and louder for it. This was pronounced in a sing-song, almost chanting rhythm to the baby's cries.

The most frequently repeated word was the baby's name, repeated in three variations: *Chieko-chan*, *Chie-chan* or *Chie* ('chan' is the affectionate diminutive of the adult title '-san', used with children up through adolescence). Many sequences of utterances were punctuated with *Chie-chan* at the beginning, middle and end, particularly when the mother was trying to get the baby's attention and the baby was looking away or moving towards the tape recorder. Since the Japanese avoid the use of personal pronouns such as 'I', 'you', etc., frequent use of the name in direct address is not unusual; however, such a high incidence of repetitions seems to be a feature of the BT register³ (In the mother's speech to the researcher, the personal name was never used during conversation.)

This leads us to the third area of BT register--the use of expressive and identifying features. Affectionate tone was shown in the use of the diminutive of the baby's name as well as in the BT lexicon mentioned previously. Attention-getting devices such as higher pitch level, rising intonation, and tag questions have been pointed out by many researchers as common features of BT (Snow 1977). Some of these were also noted for the mother in the study. At least 11% of the utterances were in rising intonation or in high pitch level. There were also occurrences of breathy voice (L. 38: *Chie-chan, papappa*; 'Chie, change'), whispering (L. 128: *Kore kore kore, kashite kore*; 'Here here here, give (it) here'), "creaky voice", as in the forced L. 72 (*Ikemachen, ikemachen*; 'Mustn't, mustn't'), and laughing tone of voice (See L. 119 in Appendix.)

The mother's speech to the baby showed a wide variation in voice tones, one after the other, which is illustrated in the excerpt below (Lines 68-71):

M->C: (whisper) *Yoisho* (sound of exertion)

(slow) *Are wa akan no*, (laugh) *Chie*
'That's no good, Chie.'

(low) *Kore! Akan to*
'Hey! No good (I) said.'

(high) *Are wa akan te, Chie*
'That's no good (I) said, Chie!'

This kind of variation seems to be designed to catch the baby's attention so that she will listen to the mother, who is conveying meaning through words, tone and gestures. Some variation in pitch, loudness or speed was observed in almost all cases of repetitions, which served to reinforce, for example, warnings and prohibitions (high-- low in Appendix, Lines 87, 88)

In contrast to the BT register, the mother's adult register to the researcher lacked most of the marked clarifying and expressive features. There were few repetitions (once when the researcher hadn't heard the question) and a normal pitch range. One other example of repetition, in the process of refusal, illustrates a common communicative feature of Japanese. In Lines 25 to 37 (see Appendix for the entire exchange) there is a lengthy exchange where the researcher tries to give some Play Dough to the mother for her daughter to keep. The mother follows the expected pattern of refusing a gift three times before accepting, as follows, each time varying the expression of refusal:

- (L. 27) M-->R: *Iya, ii desu yo, sono*
'No, it's ok, those...'
- (L. 29) *Iya, ii desu yo.*
'No, it's ok.'
- (L. 31) *Aa, iya, demo waruiwa*
'Well, no, but (I) feel bad.'
- (L. 35) *Honto?*
'Really?'

After the last utterance, 'Really?', which is a roundabout way of accepting the gift, the exchange is completed. (Further studies might show examples of exactly how caregivers train children in the art of polite refusal of gifts.)

Other differences between the BT register and adult speech used by the mother have been noted earlier, namely, difference in length of utterances (1-5 words for BT, 1-14 words for adult). There was just one example of BT lexicon in addressing the adult, however, this was immediately followed by the adult equivalent, by way of explaining the

meaning. (L. 2: M→R: *Papappa* (BT) *shimasu. Kigaemasu* (AS). '(I'll) change (her) Will change (her).')

Communicative Style as Seen in Directive Strategies

A major part of the interaction between mother and baby consisted of the mother constraining the child from crawling over to the researcher's bright red tape recorder, and this provided a rich source of data on the use of directives, or imperative forms. 27% of the mother's utterances were directives, with varying degrees of force and indirectness contained in these forms. I will attempt to analyze the directive strategies used by the mother with her 8-month-old and compare them to a study by Clancy (1986) on three Japanese mothers' verbal interaction with their two-year-olds.

The purpose of Clancy's study was to discover to what extent young children in Japan are exposed to indirect imperatives, which would presumably train them in the indirect and intuitive communicative style of their culture. She categorized the mothers' speech in decreasing order of directness, which roughly corresponds to less imperative force and degree of explicitness. Her results showed that the most common directives were also the most explicit and forceful (allowing little "psychological space") and made up 60% of utterances with imperative intent toward the children. In the second level, about 14% of the imperatives were less forceful, leaving the child some leeway in compliance with the request. The remaining 25% of directives were of the indirect type, consisting of hints, desire and feeling statements which placed the interpretation of desired behavior up to the child.

My data on imperative utterances have been organized according to the same three levels and syntactic categories that Clancy uses:

Table 3. Directive strategies used by mother (27% of utterances)

I. Direct Forms (83%)

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Imperative Suffixes	<p>V-<i>nasai</i> <i>fitto shite na(sai)</i> 'Be still.'</p> <p><i>Ototo hanashinasai</i> (BT) 'Let go with your hand.'</p> <p>V-<i>te</i> <i>Kashite--kora</i> 'Give it here.'</p> <p><i>Kotchi muite</i> 'Look this way.'</p> <p>X <i>tte</i> \emptyset</p>	<p>Negative X <i>tte</i> <i>Are wa akan tte</i> 'That's no good (I said).'</p>
Obligation/Prohibition	<p>V-<i>sema</i> (dialect form) <i>mama sema akan ya</i> (BT) 'Not feeding you won't do.'</p>	<p>V-<i>tara akan</i> (dialect form) <i>Kore, sawattara akan na</i> 'Hey, touching it won't do.'</p>
	<p><u>Lexical</u> <i>Kore, kore, kora</i> 'Here, here, here.'</p> <p><i>Otachanka</i> (BT) 'Sit down.'</p>	<p><u>Negative Lexical</u> <i>Ikemachen</i> (BT) 'No good!'</p> <p><i>Mouma, mouma</i> (BT) 'No, no.'</p>
Instructions	<p>V-<i>u/-ru</i> <i>Papappa suru na</i> (BT) '(You) will get changed.'</p>	
Generalizations	\emptyset	

II. Less Direct Forms (4%)

Permission/Preference	\emptyset
Suggestions	<p>V-<i>oo</i> <i>Ochiri kawakasa</i> (BT) 'Let's dry your bottom.'</p>
Questions (Positive)	\emptyset

III. Indirect Forms (12%)

Desire/Needs/Problems

∅

Rhetorical Questions:

Doo shitā

'What's wrong?' (-Stop it)

Doko itta

'Where are you going?'

(-Come back)

Attributed/Feelings

∅

Rationales/
Warnings

Obachan na
'It's here.'

Kakushichau kara..

'(I'll) hide it, so...' (stop touching it)

Although the data base is very small, at least in the case of one mother addressing her 8-month old, the results show some interesting differences from Clancy's data on slightly older addressees. An overwhelming majority of imperatives in my study were in Level 1, most direct and explicit (83%, to Clancy's 60%). These consisted of similar types of verbals with imperative suffixes, but no examples of *X itte* type ('Say X'), presumably because the baby is too young yet to repeat a polite utterance as directed.⁴ Statements of obligation/prohibition were also similar, except that the largest categories were lexical forms of prohibitions, especially the use of the term *skaa*, which is Osada dialect for 'No good,' used both in adult and BT register prominently. There were as many as 13 variations of the 'no good' utterances, used a total of 29 times (Lines 65-75, 89, 111, 121-124), excerpted here (from Lines 65-75):

M->C. *Chie, Chie, sore akan no. Are akan no.*
 'Chie, Chie, that's no good. That over there's no good'

Are wa akan no, Chie! Kora
 'That over there's no good, Chie! Hey!'

Kora! Chie-chan, akan.
 'Chie, no good'

Are wa akan no, Chie!
 'That over there's no good, Chie!'

Kora! Akan te.
 'Hey! No good (I) said.'

Are wa akan te, Chie!
 'That over there's no good (I) said, Chie!'

Mamma sena akan yo, mamma ne, Chie.'
 'Have to feed (you), feed (you), Chie.'

Chie! Kore wa akan te.
 'Chie! This is no good (I) said.'

Ikemachen, ikemachen.
 '(You) mustn't, mustn't.'

The entire sequence here shows use of the most direct forms only, in three syntactic patterns (imperative suffix, lexical prohibitions, and obligation suffix). This is a striking example of paraphrase in repetition, as each utterance is slightly changed from the one before. This was also confirmed in Clancy's study (1986) where she pointed out that "directives frequently occurred in a series of repetitive utterances, with the same content being expressed several times, often in different grammatical form, either within or across speech turns." In the above case, there was no verbal response or 'turn-taking' by the baby other than repeatedly crawling away as the mother grabbed her foot and pulled her back.

In Level II, explicit but less forceful directives, I found only two examples in the "suggestion" category (4% of the imperatives, compared to Clancy's 14%). There were no

examples of the mother's giving permission/preference type directives, presumably because the child is too young to make or understand a choice.

There was also a significant difference in frequency of utterances of the indirect type, Level III. While Clancy found 25% of the imperatives to belong here, there were only 12% in my case, mostly of the rhetorical question type. Again, it seems that training in comprehending indirect imperatives by themselves would not be meaningful until the child is more verbally proficient, closer to two years old. The rhetorical questions such as *Doo shitan da?* ('What's wrong?' - stop doing it) and *Doko itta?* ('Where did you go?' - come back here) were always preceded or followed by more explicit imperatives.

The only example of use of a rationale to explain the reason for the negative command was Line 125 in the following sequence:

- (L. 124) M→C: *Memme, memme.*
'No-no, no-no.'
- (L. 125) *Obachan no, obachan no.*
'(It's) auntie's, auntie's.' (i.e., the researcher's tape recorded)
- (L. 127) *Chie-chan, doko itta?*
'Chie, where did you go?' (- Come back)
- (L. 128) *Kore kore kore, kashite kore.*
'Here here here, give (it) here.'

We can see that the rationale, which is considered an indirect form of guidance, is embedded in a sequence of more direct and explicit imperatives (prohibitive statement→rationale→rhetorical question→direct imperative). The fact of even this single occurrence of appealing to a rationale seems to imply the view of a young child as a rational being: that the mother wants her to understand the needs of others (Clancy 1986). Training in this indirect communicative style seems to have made a small beginning even at 8 months of age. However, other categories of indirectness such as stating desires, needs, problems or appealing to the feelings of others and attributing a cause to a third party (which Clancy found) are perhaps too abstract at this stage of development.

In summary, analysis of directive strategies used by the mother showed the same range from direct to indirect, both with much more use of direct imperatives and fewer indirect forms as compared to Clancy's data on caregivers addressing two year olds.

Socialization Features

A final area to examine is the way in which the mother sees the baby as an interactive (or non-interactive) participant, as seen in the mother's language use.

The mother was observed to attend to the majority of her baby's utterances and motions, except when involved in a lengthy conversation with the researcher. The baby had only about 13 vocalizations (to the mother's 179), mostly fussing sounds, burps, coos and crying for the bottle. There was one instance in which the mother actively tried to get the baby to "display" her language skills, when questioned about the baby's verbalizations (Lines 91-96). She directs the baby, *Chie-chan aah? Aah?* ('Chie, (say) Aah, Aah') and explains the baby's lack of response by saying that she is distracted by the bright tape recorder. The assumption is that encouraging the baby to display towards others is a positive value in socialization.

The mother also anticipated and guessed the baby's feelings and wishes, and even spoke for the baby in Line 141: *Mm, hoshii* ('Uh-huh, (I) want (it), want (it)')--about the bottle. In adult speech the form *hoshii* would only be used in reference to one's own wish, and *hoshigatte iru* ('seems to want') in reference to others. Although anticipating others' unspoken wishes is valued in Japan, it would be considered presumptuous to verbalize another person's desire directly. So, here the mother may be modeling for her child how to verbalize a wish. (The researcher also performed the same kind of role in Line 137, saying for the baby, *Ara ureshii, ureshii* ('Oh, (I'm) happy, happy')--responding for the baby when the mother offered the bottle.)

During feeding, the baby was held on the mother's lap partially toward the mother, but also able to look around the room. While being dressed the baby was trying to move

away from the mother and face outward. Other researchers have noted in the past that the caregiver (in middle class United States) tends not to talk to the baby during feeding. This seemed also true for the Japanese mother, except when the baby stopped sucking and started looking around. Then the mother repeatedly asked *Doo shita?* ('What's wrong?') to get the baby's attention back.

Newport et. al. have reported that mothers reinforce babies' utterances by imitation, expansion and repetition. In my data there was only one sequence of imitation, but with no attempt to expand on the baby's utterance (Lines 115-118): the baby makes a sound like *Aau!*, the mother repeats twice; the baby says *Mmmm!* twice and the mother imitates exactly. The exchange ends when the baby begins to go for the tape recorder again, and the mother switches to a prohibition: *Akan no* ('No good.'), but still in a playful manner. Because of the limited data, no conclusions can be made as to whether the mother would normally tend to expand and elaborate on the baby's speech as a means of "teaching" language.

Likewise, it is difficult to analyze whether this caregiver views her baby as a conversational partner, based on the turn-taking model proposed by Snow (1977). If a "turn" can also consist of non-verbal behavior such as crawling away, this occurred many times during numerous sequences of directives and prohibitions examined earlier. Again, more data would need to be gathered in order to discover a clearer interaction pattern.

Conclusion

We have examined 20 minutes of conversational interaction between a Japanese caregiver and a young child in order to look at patterns of communication between the mother and baby and the mother and researcher. The mother employed a special baby talk register, marked by simplifying processes, clarifying processes and expressive and identifying features, as opposed to her adult register. Many of the syntactic, phonological and affective features were similar to data reported by Ferguson for BT in other cultures.

In addition, directive strategies used by the mother to her eight-month-old child were compared with a study by Clancy, which showed significant use of indirect imperatives with two year olds. It was seen that a greater proportion of the interviewee's imperative forms were more direct and forceful (83%) than Clancy's (60%); there were few indirect forms. The tentative conclusion is that the use of indirection increases with the baby's developmental age.

¹ This paper was written for Bambi Schieffelin's course, "Cultural Dimensions of Language Acquisition".

² L. + number refers to the line number in the original transcript. In the interest of space we have included only excerpts from this transcript in the body of the text and, for longer passages, in the appendix.

³ 39% of the total utterances included the baby's name.

⁴ However, after the taping was finished, the mother did try to elicit "Arigatoo" (thank you) from the baby, so this is probably due to limited data.

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APPENDIX

Symbols used in the transcription excerpts:

POS- possessive marker

QUOTE-quotation particle

SUB-subject/topic marker

M→R- arrow indicates speaker to addressee

All utterances directed to baby C are indented for ease in identifying (BT) register.

Excerpts from transcription:

- Line 25 R→M: *Ara soo? Aa, kore futatsu ne, atarashii no desu kedo ne,*
Oh really? Well these two um, new ones are so um.
- 26 *sashiagemasu kara*
give (honorific) so.
- 27 M→R: *Iya, ii desu yo, sona* C: fusses
No, ok it's EMPH, those.
- 28 R→M: *Iya, Eri-chan ne, onaji no ne, uchi nimo, ano, onaji no motteru na.*
No, Eri-dim. um, same ones um, home at also, um, same ones have EMPH
- 29 M→R: *Iya, ii desu ya*
No, ok it's EMPH.
- 30 R→M: *Dakara ne, takusan aru kara..*
Therefore um, lots have so...
- 31 M→R: *Aa, iya, demo waruiwa*
Well, no, but (I) feel bad.
- 32 R→M: *Kore, ano, yattsu gurai aru kara*
These, um, eight about have so...
- 33 E→R: *Okassan*
Mommy
- 34 R→M: *Yattsu gurai aru na*
Eight about have EMPH.
- 35 M→R: *Honto?*
Really?
- 36 R→M: *Dakara ne.....Kore Kana-chan ni, jaa, tsukatte ne*
Therefore um.....these Kana-dim to, so, use (it) ok?
- 37 E→R: I wanna play Play Dough.
- Line 87 M→C: (high) *Kore, sawattara akan no, Chie*
Hey, touch musn't EMPH, Chie.

- 88 (low) *Sawattara akan no, are wa.*
Touch musn't EMPH, that SUB.
- Line 91 M→R: *Nato, "buu buu" toka ne, "Aah?" tte oya ga yuu to ne..*
Um, "buu buu" like and "Aah?" QUOTE parent SUB says, then um.
- 92 R→M: *"Aah?" tte yuu no, bikkuri shitara?*
"Aah?" QUOTE says Q, surprised when?
- 93 M→R: *...Kono ko no issho ni natte maneshite, maneshite ieru*
This child also, together with us, imitates and, imitates and can say.
- 94 R→M: *Maneshite? Mm?*
Imitates? Really?
- 95 M→R: *"Aah?" tte yuu na*
"Aah?" QUOTE says EMPH
- 96 M→C: *Chie-chan aah? Aah?* C: no response
Chie-dam, "aah? Aah?"
- Line 115 M→C: *Aau!* (imitating)
- 116 M: *Aau!* C: fusses
- 117 M: *Mmmm!* C: *Mmmm!*
- 118 M: *Mmmm! Akan no.* C: *Mmmm!*
No good.
- Line 119 M: (laughs, high) *Akan no, hai* C: (burps, crawls toward tape
No good, ok. recorder)
- Line 133 M→C: *Hai hai* C: (yells louder)
Yes, yes.
- 134 M: *Hai hai hai hai.*
Yes yes yes yes
- 135 M: *Hai hai hai hai* C: (cries and reaches for bottle)
Yes yes yes yes
.....