Speech addressed by mothers to their own or others' two-year-old children was significantly simpler and more redundant than speech addressed by the same women to 10-year-olds. The effects were much smaller if the child-addressee was not present in the room with the speaker, but some adjustments were made even by adults unfamiliar with children in the absent-addressee condition. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this paper has been cited in over 250 publications since 1972.]

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"Graduate students in psychology at McGill University in the 1960s had few formal course requirements, and they organized student-run seminars as a way of educating themselves more widely while decreasing the anxiety generated by the lack of structure in their lives. I participated in the 'human' (rather than the 'physiological') seminar, and in the fall of 1967 was dragged into doing a session about child language—a then newly emerging research area. I remember vividly the difficulty in obtaining copies of the papers that would be the basis for my presentation—almost all were unpublished, available only as mimeograph copies. The only book available was the collection of papers by Smith and Miller,1 and the entire literature of the field of language acquisition fit into a few file folders.

"The literature on which I based my presentation was strongly nativist in conviction, echoing Chomsky's2,3 claims that children come equipped with an innate knowledge of linguistic universals. A major plank in that argument was the 'degeneracy' of the linguistic data available to the child. The presumption of degeneracy was based in turn on the assumption that speech addressed to children was not different in any significant way from speech addressed to adults."