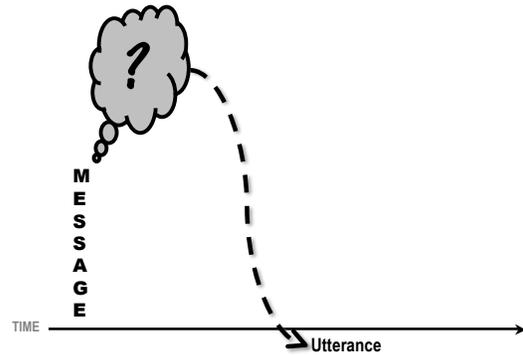


Jacobs, C. L., & Griffin, Z. M. (2010, Dec.). *When Do Mothers Address Their Children By Name? A Corpus Analysis*. Talk presented at the Vocative! Workshop, Bamberg, Germany.

## When Do Mothers Address Their Children By Name? A Corpus Analysis

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Vocative! Workshop  
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Features	Values
Nationality	<i>American</i>
Profession	<i>Actor</i>
Appearance	<i>Handsome</i>
Gender	<i>Male</i>



“Brad Pitt”

**5% of adults reported that a parent accidentally called them by the name of a pet**



Griffin & Wangerman (2008, in preparation)

- 🔑 Shared features
  - Mammal
  - Sex?
- 🔑 Shared roles
  - Member of family
  - Dependent of/on speaker
- 🔑 Other cues
  - Informal register
  - Speaker affect
  - Addressee behavior
  - Communicative intent**



**What are the discourse functions associated with vocative name production?**

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## Previous Corpus Studies of Vocatives

- Leech (1999)
  - Longman Corpus of Spoken and Written English
  - Reported position frequencies
  - Proposed discourse functions for vocatives
    - summoning attention
    - identification of addressee
    - maintaining social relationships
  - No quantitative analysis of the distribution of discourse functions with vocatives

## Previous Corpus Studies of Vocatives

- McCarthy & O'Keeffe (2003)
  - Radio conversations and CANCODE
  - Identified differences in discourse functions between strangers and in casual conversation which used vocative functions
  - Relationship between conversation partners affects discourse functions used for vocatives
  - However, we don't know the general prevalence of these discourse contexts and functions

## Data Selection: Criteria for Inclusion

- Middle class, monolingual American English-speaking mothers and children from CHILDES (N=7)
- Mother-child dyads as indicated in the summary of the corpus
- Child's name had to actually occur in the corpus
- Mother speaking to the child
- Two lines before and after each utterance used to establish discourse function

(Brown, 1973; Demetras, 1989ab; Higginson, 1985; Sachs, 1983; Weist & Zevenbergen, 2008; Weist et al., 2009)

## Data Selection: Comparisons

- Randomly selected utterances from the same conversations
- Approximately equal numbers of utterances containing names and non-names

	Name vocatives	Non-vocatives	Total
N	1671	1709	3380
%	49.4	50.6	100%

- Used to establish baseline frequency of discourse functions in these conversations

## Discourse Functions

- Based upon discourse contexts identified in Ninio & Wheeler (1984ab)
- Designed for classifying mother-infant interactions
- Several hundred individual categories needed to be condensed for informativity at this scale

## Discourse Functions

- Attention and Negotiations
- Reprimands, Text Editing, and Negative Evaluations
- Positive evaluations
- Rituals or Markings
- Questions seeking an answer
- Other

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## Reliability

- Three coders coded subset of utterances to determine the validity of the coding system
- Two coders split non-name utterances and name utterances

## Reliability

- Overlap done for reliability determined that two coders agreed on definitions
- Acceptable levels of agreement within and between coders of the corpus

## Attention-Orientation and Negotiation

- Determination of the next activity to be done or the initiation of a new activity.
  - “Ah look, Nomi, a coloring book.”
- Attention-orienting should predict the use of a vocative even after controlling for gender and other factors

## “Ah look, Nomi, a coloring book.”

- Attention-orientation was a significant ( $p < .001$ ) positive predictor of vocative use

	Name vocatives	Non-vocatives	Total
N	644	437	1081
%	60	40	100%

## Reprimands

- Correction of an action, either by explicitly or implicitly scolding or correcting the child's actions
  - “Nomi, don't touch, please.”
- Predict mothers should be more likely to use a vocative with a reprimand.

## “Nomi, don't touch, please.”

- Reprimands were a significant ( $p < .001$ ) positive predictor of vocative use

	Name vocatives	Non-vocatives	Total
N	502	427	929
%	54	46	100%

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## Reprimands and Name Form

- Anecdotally, everyone says full or multiple names are more severe – is this true?
- Elliot (Ellie Belly, EI, Elliot Partin, etc.) and Sarah (Sarah Barnes, Sarah Marie Ann Barnes)
  - Only children with multiple, name alternations
  - More formal names not more likely to be used with a reprimand
  - With additional data or different mother-child dyads, pattern could emerge

## Evaluations

- Positive evaluations and praise are confirmation that an action was completed successfully, or acknowledgement or agreement
  - “That’s very good, June.”
- Evaluations predicted to occur more often with vocatives than without.

## “That’s very good, June.”

- Evaluations were significant negative predictors ( $p < .01$ ) of vocative usage

	Name vocatives	Non-vocatives	Total
N	87	247	334
%	26	74	100%

## Rituals & Questions

- Rituals are fixed phrases used to mark events.
  - “Thank you, Oliver.”
- Questions are non-suggesting utterances seeking an answer that the parent does not necessarily know the answer to
  - “Okay, what’d you get, Matty?”
- Not predictors of vocative use.

## Endearments

- 72 in total
- “Don’t put it near your face like that, honey.”
- Play a more social role
- Discourse functions may be different for terms of endearment like “sweetie” and “honey”

## Endearments

- 👉 Significantly more likely to use these kinds of vocatives in reprimands or positive evaluations than use names
- 👉 Less often used to get child’s attention
- 👉 Do these play more of a social role? How does this fit with previous studies of vocatives (Leech, 1999)?

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## Non-Vocative Names

- Names used as grammatical subjects where the child may still be addressed (265 in total)
  - “Nomi is drawing.”
- Less likely to use in attention-negotiation and reprimand categories than utterances with vocative names
- More likely to be used with rituals and less easily categorized (“other”) utterances

## Overall Results

Discourse Function	Non-vocatives	Vocative Names	vocatives		
			Vocative Names	Endearments	Subjects
Attention	.	+	.	-	-
Reprimands	.	+	.	+	-
Evaluations	.	-	.	+	NS

names

## Thanks to

- 👉 CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000)
- 👉 Contributors to the database: Brown, 1973; Demetras, 1989ab; Higginson, 1985; Sachs, 1983; Weist & Zevenbergen, 2008; Weist et al., 2009
- 👉 Third coder: Michael Falcon

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