Abstract
Näslund, Shirley, shirley.naslund@oru.se, Ph.D Student, Swedish Language, Department of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro University, Sweden: “In the beginning was the Word – speech through the unborn and the newborn at the birth clinic”. Språk och stil 22:2, 2012, pp. 185–214.

The study examines the phenomenon of speaking through others in the specific context of labor and delivery at the birth clinic. Speech through a fetus or a newborn child is analyzed as a social act, receiving its meaning from the interactional and situational context. The data are drawn from a corpus of Scandinavian television documentaries. Previous research about speech through others has highlighted its function as face-work. This study shows that speech through fetuses and newborn children also can be regarded as a form of face-work, for instance as an indirect way of exhorting a woman in labor to mobilize more strength, or as an indirect way for finding out if a mother in the after-math of bearing-down contractions is ready to hold her newborn child. However, speech through fetuses and newborns does not merely serve as face-work. Above all it performs birth work: it verbalizes the birth and highlights the human, sociable character of the child.

Keywords: speech through others, animated speech, indirectness, interaction, face-work, birth work, childbirth, Swedish.