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A Longitudinal Study of Parent and Child Language During Play

Children's early language skills are related to numerous outcomes later in life, including socioeconomic status, unemployment, education level, and health outcomes. Language can be most easily learned between the ages of zero and three, and due to these major life implications it is important that we continue to research and understand language development during this time. Therefore, we conducted research to investigate children's early language skills and how this may be influenced based on parent-child interactions. Through this research 249 videos were collected and both children's and parents' language was transcribed to capture their back and forth spoken interactions during free play. We worked with a total of 78 families when children were 12, 18, 24, and 30 months of age. Through these videos we are investigating how children's and parents' use of language changes over time. Our investigation and findings focus on the total number of words used by parents and children at each age, as well as the unique number of vocabulary words, also known as richness of language, used by parents and children. We found that parents' total number of words used and the richness of their increased when their children were between 12 and 24 months of age, and then began to decrease at 30 months of age. We also found that children's total number of words used and the richness of their language also followed these same patterns between 12 and 24 months of age with increases over time, but they experienced a steeper pattern of growth between 24 and 30 months of age. It is possible that these trends demonstrate parents' sensitivity to their children's growing language skills, and when those skills begin to most rapidly increase, parents respond by talking less and listening more.

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