

Does the effect of parental response to child gesture on vocabulary development vary by socio-economic status?

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Introduction: Children indicate objects uniquely in gesture before they produce words for them, and parents often translate these gestures into words. Children benefit from these translations, showing earlier acquisition of the words that parents translated than the ones not translated (Goldin-Meadow et al., 2007). Although children's early gestures reflect SES (Socio-Economic-Status) differences (Rowe & Goldin-Meadow, 2009), we do not know if there are SES differences in the parental translations of children's gestures.

Methods: In this study, we focus on the parent responses to the gestures produced by 7 children from low SES groups in comparison to 7 children from high SES groups. The children were observed from age 2;6 to 3;6 interacting with their parents in a 30-minute structured play context, as part of a longitudinal project on language development (Hoff, YEAR?)

Results: We found that children from low SES groups indicated more objects uniquely in gesture ($M_{low} = 16.29$, $SD = 9.30$) than children from high SES groups ($M_{high} = 7.5$, $SD = 3.56$; $t(12) = 2.33$, $p = .04$). Furthermore, parents of children with low SES translated a larger percent of their children's unique gestures into words ($M_{low} = .92$, $SD = .18$) than parents of children with high SES ($M_{high} = .62$, $SD = .32$); $t(12) = 2.18$, $p = .05$). Importantly, parental translations were beneficial for learning new words for children in both groups, showing a main effect for parental translation ($F(1,12) = 12.76$, $p = .004$) but no effect of group ($F(1,12) = 3.70$, $p = .08$) or interaction ($F(1,12) = 1.6$, $p = .23$)

Conclusion: The gestures produced by children with low SES elicited a greater amount of parent input compared children with high SES.. Despite this difference, parental translations showed to be equally important for the vocabulary development of children from both low and high SES backgrounds.

(304 words)