Do infants process other’s actions differently based on language group?

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Introduction

Social preference for native language speakers emerge early in development. Infants prefer to look at, imitate, and adapt the conventions demonstrated by people who speak their native language rather than an unfamiliar language (Liberman, Woodward & Kinzler, 2017).

An open question is what underlies this preference: Is this preference due to a selective attention and greater encoding of others’ behaviors, greater mirroring and facilitations familiar people’s actions, or a selective retrieval or use of the information provided by speakers of different languages.

Curret Study

The aim of the current study is to explore whether infants are more likely to encode the actions of native speakers over the actions of foreign-speakers.

Experiment 1 (Behavior): Do 9-month-old infants prefer to attend to the actions of native-language speakers over the actions of foreign-language speakers?

Experiment 2 (Behavior & EEG): What are the neural correlates of infants’ visual preferences toward native-language speakers?

• Mu-ERD: Mirror activity (Fox et al., 2016)
• Theta-ERS: Attention, Memory, and readiness to learn (Begus & Southgate, 2016; Begus & Bonawitz, 2020)

References


Conclusions

Nine-month-olds prefer to track the goal-directed actions of those who speak their native language.

Pilot data indicates a potential modulation of mu-ERD and Theta-ERS in response to others’ actions depending on the agent’s linguistic group, which would suggest a selective encoding of social input.