

DISCRIMINATION OF LINGUISTIC AND PROSODIC INFORMATION IN  
INFANT-DIRECTED SPEECH BY SIX-MONTH-OLDS

by

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(Abstract)

The purpose of the present study was to tease apart the paralinguistic from the linguistic aspects of infants' perception of infant-directed (ID) speech. Several studies have shown that infants beginning at a few days after birth discriminate native from nonnative speech and can discriminate specific contours (rising, falling, rising-falling) in ID speech. Some studies have also indicated that infants at 4.5 months of age prefer their own name over other names but at 6 months of age, fail to prefer a sentence with their own name embedded in it. Using a discrimination procedure, the current study investigated whether 6-month-old infants could detect a change in contour and/or a change in words when listening to ID utterances. Results indicated that 6-month-old infants detected both a contour and a word change. From these results, it is argued that as has been shown in other experiments, infants are extremely sensitive to subtle changes in speech. Furthermore, ID speech appears to facilitate infants' ability to discriminate small changes in ID speech (both linguistic and paralinguistic). It is suggested that future studies investigate more discrete changes in speech samples and a replication of this research with adult-directed (AD) speech.

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