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Engagement Differences for 2-year-olds Identified as Late Talkers

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Background

Late Talkers (LTs):
- Two to three year olds with < 50 words; no/few 2-word phrases
- Not secondary to other conditions (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder)
- Approximately 10-15% of 2-year-olds (Rescorla & Dale, 2013)

Two Subgroups:
- Expressive-only (EO) = Receptively intact
- Expressive-Receptive (ER) = Receptive language delay present

Engagement and Late Talking:
- Typically developing peers compared with EO LTs:
  - TD toddlers exhibited more engagement than late talkers at 18 months, but not at 30 months
  - Engagement focused on objects rather than people may be sign of development immaturity (Adamsen et al., 2004)
- When LTs (26 and 36 months) compared with 5-month younger TDs, no significant attentional differences found (Vuksanovic & Bjekic, 2013)
- EO LTs compared with ER LTs:
  - To date, no researchers have investigated potential differences in engagement between subgroups of late talkers.
  - Role of comprehension: Potential association between receptive language delay & engagement

Aim of current study
- Investigate connection between engagement in a language-rich activity & presence of early language delay

Research Questions
- When participating in a language-rich activity, is there a difference in overall engagement & in group comparing 2-year-olds, EO LTs, & ER LTs?
- When engaged in a language-rich activity, are there differences in the types of engagement behaviors observed (e.g., engagement with objects, engagement with people, onlooking) between typically developing 2-year-olds, EO LTs, & ER LTs?

Method

Participants (n = 12): Ages 2.0 months to 2.9 months (M: 2.3; SD: 2.006); TD (n = 3); EO LT (n = 5); ER LT (n = 4)
- Combined archival data set (DeVeney, 2012; DeVeney, Cress, & Reid, 2014); engagement coded in 15-second increments for all experimental sessions including baseline, intervention, & follow up sessions (M = 378.13 minutes; SD = 11.89)
- Video-recorded & transcribed independently by faculty advisor, undergraduate student author, & four additional undergraduate student reliability coders

Types of Engagement (adapted from Adamson et al., 2004):
- Unengaged: Uninvolved with any specific people, objects, or symbols
- Onlooking: Watching researcher or parent activity, but not taking part
- Person Engaged: Involved solely with researcher/parent as social partner
- Object Engaged: Playing with objects alone (e.g., toys, picture symbols)

Inter-Rater Reliability: M = 88% Agreement; Range = 83%-95% Agreement

Results

- Kruskal-Wallis H test: Nonparametric; selected to compare k independent groups

Engaged vs. Unengaged:
- Not significant, (X^2 = 1.450, p = .484)
- However, distributions not similar; increased from EO LTs (mean rank = 7.80), to ER LTs (mean rank = 6.25), to TD peers (mean rank = 4.67)

Differences in Type of Engagement: Not significant
- Onlooking: (X^2 = 6.28, p = .731); however, decreased from TD group (mean rank = 7.67) to EO LTs (mean rank = 6.60), to ER LTs (mean rank = 5.50)
- Person: (X^2 = 1.472, p = .478); however, decreased from TD group (mean rank = 4.33) to ER LT group (mean rank = 7.00), to EO LTs (mean rank = 7.40)
- Object: (X^2 = 3.364, p = .186); however, increased from TD group (mean rank = 3.33), to EO LTs (mean rank = 7.00), to ER LTs (mean rank = 8.25)

Conclusions

Consistent with previous findings for TD & EO LT groups:
- No significant engagement differences
- No significant differences in type of engagement (2-year-olds)

Engagement differences not likely to explain differences across language ability proficiencies; however, ER LTs demonstrated more object engagement than other two participant groups

Clinical Significance
- Children with different language proficiencies may present different clinical profiles, but all have potential to be actively engaged in language-rich therapeutic activities
- Unlike that ER LTs will be less engaged in therapeutic activities than EO peers, but may pay more attention to objects

Limitations and Future Directions
- Small n; allow results of one participant to potentially skew data
- Replication of the study with a larger group comparison
- Extend data coding into nuanced Adamson et al. (2004) categories

Selected References


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