

Predicting Childhood Vocabulary from Infant Word Segmentation Abilities

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Before they can begin to relate sound to meaning, infants in the first year of life must be able to segment words out of fluent speech. While the capacity for word segmentation is a prerequisite to vocabulary development, the extent to which word segmentation predicts later word learning has yet to be determined. In a prospective, longitudinal study, 40 infants were tracked from 7.5 to 36 months. Infants were tested at 7.5, 9, and 10.5 months on different word segmentation tasks. At 36 months, children received a summative assessment of vocabulary skills using the EVT, the PPVT and free speech measures. Analyses at 36 months yielded several outcome measures that were effectively predicted by infant word segmentation skills. Furthermore, infant word segmentation skills predicted aspects of syntactic as well as lexical development. In sum, these studies provide evidence for the predictive validity of infant word segmentation tasks, suggesting continuity in the development of word knowledge in infancy and childhood.