

Exploring 18-month-old Infants' Communication Competence in an Interactive False Belief Task

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined 18-month-old infants' informative-communicative behaviors in a false belief task, looking at whether infants inform others to correct others' false beliefs about identity. Additionally, we explored whether those infants without siblings showed more frequent informative-communicative behaviors (e.g., Singletary, 2019). In two between-subject conditions, infants observed a female adult (E1) interacting with a target object (e.g., a stuffed teddy bear wearing a red skirt) in the presence of a distractor object in the scene (i.e., an identical teddy bear except skirt color). Either in the absence of E1 (false belief condition) or presence of E1 (true belief condition), infants observed another female adult, E2, swapping the location of both animals and of their skirts (rendering the original location and skirt color the non-target animal). We coded whether infants were more likely to communicate with E1 in the false belief condition than in the true belief condition with the aim to correct E1's false belief about the object identities in four trials. We assessed infants' communicative-informative actions, such as pointing, approaching, and identifying behaviors. We found no significant differences in the communicative-informative behaviors of infants between FB and TB conditions, which may indicate either that 18-month-olds have not yet fully developed the ability to act upon others' identity-based false beliefs or that the task demands were too complex for our age group. However, infants without siblings demonstrated significantly higher frequencies of communicative behaviors than those with siblings. Infants with siblings might have fewer opportunities to showcase their knowledge because they often rely on their siblings to handle or correct situations. These findings highlight the complexity of early social-cognitive and communicative development and suggest that both cognitive maturation and social context, such as having siblings, play important roles in shaping infants' informative and corrective behaviors.

Keywords: social cognition; communication; informative actions; false belief understanding

References

Singletary, B. (2019). What are the benefits of having a village? Effects of allomaternal care on communicative skills in early infancy. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 57, 101361.
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