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## Analyses of Parental Interaction Behaviors and Young Children's Language Skills

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# Analyses of Parental Interaction Behaviors and Young Children's Language Skills

Rachel Beeney, Evelyn Estrada, Sydney Harrington, Alondra Magallanes, Ana Perez-Senic, & Brenna Schulte  
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## INTRODUCTION

- SES has been linked to children's language development (Pungello et al., 2009).
- Parent involvement in children's learning is critical for children's success (Ortiz, 2016), specifically to their language and vocabulary development (Vallotton et al., 2017).
- Parental warmth, sensitivity, and contingent responsiveness to children's cues are positively related to children's improved short-term cognitive and language skills, and long-term academic performance (Sheridan et al., 2010; Pungello et al., 2009).
- Parental use of verbal directives have been associated with negative child language outcomes and language test scores (Smith et al., 2018; Keown et al., 2001).
- Parent-child attachment is positively and significantly associated, and parental frustration negatively associated, with children's English language skills. For Spanish-speaking children, neither parent-child relationship variable showed significant correlations with children's language skills (Oades-Sese & Li, 2011).
- Cultural backgrounds define "good parenting", so parent support their children's learning based on their cultural perspectives (Ortiz, 2016).
- European American parents engage in more verbal and nonverbal play with children than Latino American parents (Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007).

### Research Questions

1. How are parents' use of comments and directives during toy play related to their children's language skills at the start of Early Head Start?
2. How different are English- and Spanish-speaking parents in use of these behaviors?

## METHODS

Table 1. Parent and child demographics.

	Parents (n = 83)	Children (n = 87)
<b>Mean Age</b>	29 years (SD 6.88)	15 months (SD 6.17)
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	6%
	<b>Female</b>	94%
<b>Language Spoken</b>	<b>English</b>	85%
	<b>Spanish</b>	15%
<b>Education</b>	<b>Less than High School diploma</b>	25%
	<b>High School diploma</b>	19%
	<b>Some college</b>	34%
	<b>College degree</b>	22%
	<b>Race</b>	<b>White</b>
	<b>African American</b>	23%
	<b>American Indian/Alaskan</b>	13%
	<b>Multiracial</b>	7%
	<b>Other</b>	7%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	42%
	<b>Non-Hispanic</b>	58%

## RESULTS

### Question 2:

How different are English- and Spanish-speaking parents in use of these behaviors?

Table 3. Mean differences for English- and Spanish-speaking parents' use of comments and directives during toy play.

		n	Mean	Mean Difference	t-test
Parent comments	English	59	15.54 (9.03)	1.71	0.69
	Spanish	24	13.83 (12.88)		
Parent directives	English	58	17.19 (9.64)	-8.90	-3.03**
	Spanish	23	26.09 (16.37)		
Proportion of comments to directives	English	58	1.19 (1.10)	0.38	1.40
	Spanish	23	0.81 (1.10)		

Note. \*\*p < .01

**Spanish-speaking parents used statistically more directives than English-speaking parents. There were no significant mean differences between Spanish- and English-speaking parents' use of comments, or the proportion of comments to directives.**

## METHODS

### Participants:

- Children and parents from English- and Spanish-speaking homes participated.
- All children were 3 to 32 months of age, and enrolled in center-based Early Head Start programs.
- The families were participants in a longitudinal study of the *Getting Ready 0-3* intervention, an ecological parent-engagement intervention, focused on young children's school readiness.
- Data from both treatment and control families are included in this investigation.

### Procedure/Data Collection:

- Video-taped, 25-30 minute sessions of parent-child play interactions were used to observe children's speech, in 3-5 play activities, based on age (e.g. puzzles, free-play, books).
- 5-minute clips of toy play from the same video-tapes were used to observe parents' behaviors.
- Agreements of 80% for contingent and 60% for exact matches were achieved for parent behaviors; at least 80% word agreement noted for children's speech used.

### Measures:

- Rate calculated for proportion of comments to directives parents used in interactions.
- Children's transcripts were used to calculate mean length of utterance in words (MLU-w), and three longest utterances (MLU3-w), as well as words, different words and utterances per minute (WPM, DWPM, UPM).
- Preschool Language Scale Fifth Edition (PLS-5; Zimmerman, Steiner & Pond, 2011)
- Play session with parent and child was video-taped on site at their Early Head Start center.

## RESULTS

### Question 1:

How are parents' use of comments and directives during toy play related to their children's language skills at the start of Early Head Start?

Table 2. Correlations for proportions of parental comments to directives and children's language abilities.

	PLS Total Score	MLU-w	MLU3-w	UPM	WPM	DWPM
Pearson correlation for proportion of parental comments to directives	.11	.47**	.57**	.45**	.64**	.53**

Note. \*\*p < .01

**Children's language scores were found to have no significant relationship with the proportion of parental comments to directives. The proportion of parental comments to directives is however significantly and positively related to children's spontaneous speech measures of MLU-w, MLU3-w, UPM, WPM, and DWPM.**

## CONCLUSION

- The proportion of parental comments to directives were significantly and positively related to children's language skills. This supports previous findings of parental sensitivity being fundamental to children's language and vocabulary development (Vallotton et al., 2017).
- The non-significant relationship between the proportion of parental comments to directives and PLS Total Language scores may be due to the PLS data being collected in a different session and context than the interactive parent-child data sets.
- Despite a difference in use of directives, there were no statistical differences between English- and Spanish-speaking homes for the parents' overall proportions of comments to directives.
- Parental use of directives have been associated with negative child language outcomes and language test scores (Smith et al., 2018; Keown et al., 2001). From our data, Spanish-speaking parents used nearly 9 more directives within a five-minute toy task than English-speaking parents. This difference should be monitored for possible negative outcomes on future language development in children from Spanish-speaking homes.
- This research had a relatively small sample. Future research with a bigger sample could provide more information regarding differences between English- and Spanish-speaking parents. In particular, potential differences could be shown in how parents in each culture demonstrates "good parenting," with behaviors of parental warmth and sensitivity.