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It Starts at Home: The Role of Parental Socialization on the Development of Gendered Speech

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Abstract

Past studies have shown that adult listeners can classify gender from children's speech – long before anatomical differences between the sexes emerge. This suggests that gender differences in speaking style are learned early in life through socialization. Yet, no study to date has asked whether children also perceive gender cues in child speech. In Study 1, we found that 3.5- to 6-year-olds were able to detect gender from their age-matched peers' speech, and that their performance was moderated by parents' gender attitudes. In Study 2, we examine whether the effect of parental socialization is mirrored in children's production. We predicted that how easy children's gender can be perceived from their speech is moderated by parents' gender attitudes. Our findings support our prediction. Taken together, our results demonstrate that sensitivity to gender cues emerges early in life, and that parental socialization contributes to the development of both gendered speech perception and production.