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Twelve-month-olds differentiate between typical and atypical conversational timing

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Abstract: Studies of mother-infant interaction indicate that sensitivity to interactional timing begins developing around 3–4 months, but there is currently no evidence bearing on when children start to understand conversational timing rules; how to transition from one speaker to the next. We showed twelve- and thirty-month-old children videos of conversation featuring puppets using typical (200ms inter-turn silence) and atypical (1200ms silence and 3+ syllables vocal overlap) turn-timing. We assessed children's timing preferences by then showing them the two puppets (typical and atypical) for a sustained period and then by asking them to choose one puppet to hold. Preliminary results suggest that, overall, children were more likely to discriminate between typical and atypical timing for vocal overlap than long silent gaps. This maps nicely onto findings about children's spontaneous turn-taking: they learn to minimize overlaps before gaps.