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Parent comparison and contrast speech is affected by variation of present visual display and child language comprehension

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Abstract

Sometimes parents use comparison in speech to children and sometimes they do not. Comparison has been shown to have multiple benefits for learning. This study investigates what types of situations afford and engender parent comparison talk to 12 children 20 to 24 months of age in a free form picture book context. Each page contained three pictures that varied on color and/or object. Parent speech was analyzed for color, object, question/statement use, and comparison/contrast use. Childrens color comprehension and MCDI score were also measured. The results indicated a quadratic relationship where parents used comparison and contrast more often when their children knew few or many color words. Parents also used comparison more when the page had one dimension held constant across pictures. The results of this study inform existing understanding of comparison and demonstrate how this speech correlates with childrens understanding of language, and specifically color words.