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The shape of language experience in two traditional communities

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Abstract

This study sketches the language environments of children ages 0;03;0 growing up in two traditional, indigenous communities: one Tseltal (Mayan) and the other YI (Papuan). Past ethnographic work has suggested that caregivers' ideas about talking to young children differ greatly between these two communities. However, the present daylong recording analyses suggest that, in fact, children are rarely directly addressed in both places, with no age-related increase and with most child-directed speech coming from adults. Children's manual activities also suggest that child-carrying practices and cultural context moderate the extent to which children might use co-occurrence between held objects and ambient language to learn words.