MATERNAL AND PATERNAL INFANT-DIRECTED SPEECH IN THE FAMILY CULTURE OF FIRST- AND SECOND-BORN INFANTS

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Background and aim: Speculations on parental expressive behaviors (including parental infant-directed speech) as a function of infant birth order may be informed by the following literature: a) behavioral data coming from family interactions very shortly after birth; b) neurophysiological evidence related to adult brain areas involved in infant-directed speech processing; and c) infant and parental neuroendocrinology of sex hormones and oxytocin concentrations prior to, at, or after birth. Regarding behavioral data coming from family interactions, a restricted number of within-family and in-between family research compared maternal and paternal behavior as a function of infant birth order at a single age point. In connection to this, in the framework of the theory of intersubjectivity, we compared the structure and the content of mothers’ and fathers’ infant-directed speech as a function of infant birth order longitudinally from the 2nd to the 6th month after birth. This is important because it may extend our understanding of the early developmental path that underlines the uniqueness of infants’ early interactive experiences in micro-environments of intra-familial culture, with implications on cultivating sensitive child-responsive care and education, both important for the well-being and development of the young mind.

Method: Seven first-born and four second-born infants were video-recorded during their natural dyadic interactions with their mothers and fathers at home from the second to the sixth month after birth at 15-day intervals.

Results: Microanalysis of parental speech according to infant birth order revealed structural variations, qualitative and quantitative differences that indicate patterns of complementarity and, stability with mother and father.

Conclusion: These results are discussed in relation to the psychobiological theory of intersubjectivity and of the complementary, intimate and trusted company and care both parents give to the developing personality of infants.