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Do caregivers' communicative adjustments enhance 4- and 5-year-olds' word learning? Testing the generalizability of the fine-tuning hypothesis to naturalistic shared reading interactions

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Abstract

Recent work has suggested that caregivers adjust their speech to their child's individual lexical knowledge when playing a reference game. Whether caregivers display similar scaffolding during shared reading interactions remains unexplored. We hypothesized that similar adjustments may characterize caregivers' communication during shared reading interactions and support children's word learning. Caregivers and their 4- and 5-year-olds engaged in shared reading with two custom storybooks with embedded low-frequency words. Immediately before the session, caregivers were asked whether their child understood or produced those words via a vocabulary checklist. The shared reading interactions were video-recorded and transcribed. Caregivers' communication was coded offline for repetitions, questions, comments, and gestures in relation to target words. Children's word learning outcomes were measured after the shared reading episodes. Results will clarify whether and how caregivers adjust their communication to their perceived child's individual lexical knowledge, and whether this adjustment enhances word learning in naturalistic settings.