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Do gender/sex stereotypes shape early social interactions and development?

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Abstract

Language acquisition starts within the earliest interactions, with specific timings and dynamics. Caregivers may unconsciously reflect gender/sex stereotypes in their communication style, which results in children being infused with expectations about their societal and gender roles ever since.

In an exploratory study on 48 3-min recordings of free play of 12 Polish mother-infant dyads (5 girls, 7 boys), collected at 2, 3, 8 and 12 months, we asked if such differences are already present in infant-directed speech and in the dynamics of interactive behavior depending on child's gender.

We propose a novel analysis, combining semantics, vocabulary content, and vocalizations dynamics (via Recurrence Quantification Analysis). The results suggest potential differences in utilization of infant's name - data show opposite trends over time, decreasing in the female group and increasing in the male. Similarly, diagonal RQA profiles show minor differences in mother-child interaction dynamics.