

Multilingual daily routines: variability in the input to infants growing up in London

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Abstract

Studies of language input in monolingual environments using daylong audio recordings revealed that variability in language input throughout the day is likely tied to daily activity patterns that children experience (Casillas et al., 2020; Soderstorm & Wittebolle, 2013). Language input in multilingual homes however remains less understood, and we are only just beginning to learn how language is structured in such homes (Orena et al., 2019). In the multilingual context, daily activities expose infants to different languages from various speakers. Examining language exposure across various times and activities will determine if exposure to multiple languages stays constant throughout the day or fluctuates based on activity and speaker presence.

The current study examines the effects of time of day and type of activity on quantitative measures of language input in 22 multilingual families raising 6-20 month-old infants in London. Families audio-recorded their home environments for two days. We annotated 60 minutes of data per family from morning until evening across a range of activities. Infants were exposed to an average of 17.47 minutes of speech per hour (Median = 16.36, Range = 9.72 - 37.38). Overall, the dominance of one language over another in the input remained stable throughout the day: morning (Language 1: Median = 10.94, Range = 4.02 - 35.67; Language 2: Median = 3.13, Range = 0.05 - 10.32), afternoon (Language 1: Median = 10.32, Range = 4.69 - 18.30; Language 2: Median = 4.35, Range = 0.16 - 27), and evening (Language 1: Median = 13.70, Range = 6.20 - 21.37; Language 2: Median = 4.24, Range = 0.06 - 15.39). However, we observed individual differences in how each language is used throughout the day and across activities. These results have implications for the ways in which we estimate exposure to different languages in multilingual contexts.