Infants' perception of linguistic information in songs

Laura E. Hahn	Tineke M. Snijders	Titia Benders	Paula Fikkert
Radboud University	*Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics*	*Macquarie University*	*Radboud University*
l.hahn@let.ru.nl	Tineke.Snijders@mpi.nl	titia.benders@mq.edu.au	p.fikkert@let.ru.nl

Various situations of infants' daily lives are accompanied by songs. So far, infant-directed singing is mainly seen as serving infant mood regulation (e.g. Trehub, 2017). However, songs can also be considered a rich source of linguistic knowledge for preverbal infants. In this talk, we present a series of studies on infants' perception of phrase and rhyme structure in songs. First, evidence from a headturn preference and an eeg experiment are combined to provide evidence that infants between nine and eleven months old already are sensitive to the phrase-final rhyme in song. This result extends earlier studies which indicated that infants only recognize rhymes after extensive training (Jusczyk et al., 1999 & Hayes et al., 2000). Second, another headturn preference study will be presented, targeting at six-month-olds' recognition of sequences in speech and song. Infants recognized a well-formed sequence of song embedded within a larger passage, but failed to do so in speech. This result is surprising, given that a number of earlier studies prove infants' recognition of well-formed sequences in speech (e.g. Nazzi et al., 2000). Our results provide novel evidence for infants' domain general ability to segment acoustic information into smaller phrases, while we fail to replicate infants' ability to segment speech. Taken together, we illustrate that songs are an accessible source of linguistic information for young infants.

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