The rhythms of speech are innate

Even a premature infant can share a conversation. A video of Naseera, who was born 3 months premature, was made by Saskia van Rees in an ICU in Amsterdam. She makes videos of birth, neonatal care, communication with infants and children with special needs. See her website: Saskia van Rees

Stichtinglichaamstaal (Body Language Foundation)


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Infants are much cleverer than we had thought at discriminating musical rhythms and tones of human sounds. They hear the musicality of mother’s talk and learn simple melodies before birth. A two-month-old can be a skilled performer in an improvised vocal duet or protoconversation, a shared story over tens of seconds. And movement time is between the senses.
WHEN THE RHYTHM OF VITALITY IS NOT SHARED, JOYFUL INTIMACY BECOMES DISTRESS. Babies detect when the rhythm is wrong. Then they express their sadness at loss of ‘contingency’ -- when ‘out of touch’ in the dance.

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Research of Prof. Lynne Murray at Reading University, and Dr. Maya Gratier in Paris, has explored how the mother-infant dyad is affected when interpersonal timing is disturbed, experimentally, or by illness.

A Swedish Mother Sings “Mors lilla Olle” to Her Blind 5-Month-Old Daughter

This five-month old blind baby girl conducts her mother’s songs with her left hand. Her hand moves 1/3 second before the melody of her mother’s voice, making graceful gestures, telling a story she knows well.

The Rhythms and Tones of the Story Give a Lesson in Rhyming Swedish vowels.

Mors lilla Olle

When the rhythm of vitality is not shared, joyful intimacy becomes distress. Babies detect when the rhythm is wrong. Then they express their sadness at loss of ‘contingency’ -- when ‘out of touch’ in the dance.

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“Swedish has 9 vowels that make up 17 phonemes” Wikipedia
DEPRESSED MOTHERS
LOSE MUSICALITY -- THEY CANNOT
SHARE MOTIVES AND FEELINGS

When they talk with their infants, taking
part in adventures of action and of thought
is more difficult for both.

The baby may become depressed, too.
Then she gets a fright when the microphones start squealing.

What’s that noise?  Oh! That’s horrible!

Shona’s mother immediately shows a ‘sympathetic’ emotion.

Oh dear, I don’t want to see a pouty face!

The noise is corrected and she sees her mother.

There you are!

“That’s better!”

What a funny mother!

What’s going on in your head?
What I have to say.

Silly, billy girl!

You make me laugh!

A happy baby in contact after one minute of play

(No comment)

The happy minute of Shona’s mother is replayed
She is out of touch, withdrawn, sad
when mother is just a recording

The same moment in the mother’s TV behaviour
(Television does not communicate – it informs)

Live and in communication. Replay. Avoidant.
The happy minute of Shona’s mother is replayed. Shona is out of touch, withdrawn, sad when mother is just a recording.

GAMES & RITUALS, WITH PEOPLE AND WITH THINGS

Person-Person, with a performer’s pretence then Person-Person-Object with ‘toys’.

DEVELOPMENT OF GAMES WITH PEOPLE & WITH THINGS

Infants first become attracted to Person-Person games, and show a performer’s pretence.

Then, as their bodies become stronger, and they start exploring with their hands, they are attracted to Person-Person-Object games with ‘toys’.

After 3 months, a baby quickly becomes stronger, more curious, eager to look at surroundings, and to grasp and manipulate things.

There is a growing tension between doing something for oneself, or with others -- and this makes for self-consciousness, teasing and fun, and invention of games. (This is why the infant begins to find mirrors interesting -- they tease expectations of communication)
A mother and all the family become more lively. They start playing rhythmic body games, and enjoy music, songs and dancing which become part of the fun of their life together. They are sharing their special rituals and dramas, feeling them intimately in their bodies and minds, and remembering them in a ‘proto-culture’.

They negotiate the invented life of meaning.

Leanne, 4 months: Enjoying a song. Reaching for a ball.

Looking about. Ignoring mother “If it’s your foot you want, here!”

Jack, 4 Months, learns to say, “AAH BOO”, and when he does it, his mother says, “You get a kiss for that”, and she kisses him on the forehead.

A FAVOURITE ACTION SONG

Round and round the gar-den,
•  •  •  •  •  •  •
Ran a ted-dy bear,
•  •  •  •  •
One step, two step,
•  •  •  •  •  •
Tic-kl-y un-der there.
•  •  •  •  •  •
Megan, “Round and round the garden”

“-- and a tickly under there!”

A POPULAR SCOTTISH CLAPPING STORY

Clappa, clappa handies,

Mommy’s at the well,

Daddy’s away to Hamilton,

To buy wee Megan a bell.

Megan, 5 months, “Clappa-clappa-handies”

Research on songs for infants in many languages shows how we share story-telling beyond the spoken word - in body impulses.

Songs and action games, chants and poems are quickly learned and remembered.

They become favourite messages of friendship, emblems of the infant’s identity or membership of a group, a source of pride to be shared with admirers.
Emma, 6 months: Looking at self, touching Mother’s tongue.
Her pride is marked by the circles.

Clapping hands with shared joy; imitating, watching own tongue.

Emma, 6 months: “Clap Handies!” (She is left-handed).

Emma, 6 months, On father’s knee.
Her mother says, “Clap handies!”
Emma ‘shows’ or ‘performs’ to the camera, with intent look and a proud grin.

(Photos © John and Penelope Hubley, 1979)

But, With a Stranger she is worried and ‘Ashamed’
-- He does not “get it”.

Even a nice stranger is hard for a 10-month-old to bear.
DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATING IN TASKS

Beginning to share the endless game of cultural meanings, tools and jobs to do.

“Master Baby” by Sir William Orchardson, Scottish National Gallery. A one-year-old with her mother. Person-Person-Object Game.

Secondary Intersubjectivity, Sharing Tasks

In Friendship = ‘Cultural Learning’

At about 9 months a change in the infant’s motives and interests begins cooperative practical learning.

The baby’s curiosity about what other people are doing, and the things they use, leads to following directives, trying to make conventional messages and trying to use objects -- as tools -- doing things in the proper way.

This is vital preparation for learning language to name meanings. Language is built in shared action.

TWO SEPARATE ATTENTIONS

“Put the man in the truck!”

Object

Emma, 7 months

Is bright, but she doesn’t get her mother’s message. She is too young to share the purpose of a task.

Person

“Don’t chew it. Put it in there!”

We and Leonardo observed infants intent on knowing and doing, while mothers watch, with a smile.

27 weeks, Games with Objects
For Basilie, 12 months, it is easy and amusing.

**OK, If that’s what you want me to do.**

“Here, put this one in the truck!”

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No problem!

---

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Basilie pointed and vocalised a ‘protolanguage’ request for the magazine. Her mother said, “Oh, she recognizes the National Geographic by its yellow cover, and likes to look at the pictures.”

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**Sharing meaningful things**

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Adegbenro, Lagos, like to play his piano with his mother.

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Adegbenro, Lagos, like to play his piano with his mother.

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Adegbenro, Lagos, like to play his piano with his mother.
Mother and uncle in Adegbenro’s Zone of Proximal Development

But Adegbenro is a capable and proud performer on his own.

Adegbenro asks for his favourite rattle. His mother gives it to him.

“Look what I’ve got!” Mother smiles.

THE PRESCHOOL WORLD IS ONE OF THE RICHEST TIMES OF LEARNING

Toddlers seek friendships with parents, peers -- people of all ages -- and want to show the serious fun of what companions know and understand.

“My aim is to show, although this is not generally attended to, that the roots of all sciences and arts in every instance arise as early as in the tender age, and that on these foundations it is neither impossible nor difficult for the whole superstructure to be laid; *provided always that we act reasonably as with a reasonable creature.*”

John Amos Comenius (1592-1671)
*The School of Infancy.*
Knowing The Names For Cup Spoon Fork Knife Saucer

Imaginary hot tea and cake. It is the ritual that matters

Caring for doll, having sympathy, mostly.

Weaving Generations Together Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas

How little girls in Mexico learn to weave. (They call school ‘paper learning’)

Emma 27 Months. Reading, Counting & Having Tea

Leanne 3 years.
Three-year-old Rusy Xukubre beats down a warp thread, leaning into her backstrap - a real loom.

Aunt, 15y., makes headdress for Rusy. Others are involved, too.