

Infants found to be more tuned into others who speak their language

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(Medical Xpress)—A trio of researchers with the University of London has found that infants focus more strongly on the people around them who speak the language they are used to hearing. In their paper

published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Katarina Begus, Teodora Gliga and Victoria Southgate describe a study they carried out with infants wired to an EEG machine and what they found.

Research on human development has revealed a lot about the ways that people learn, from before they are born right on up into their later years, but there is still much to learn as the brain is so vastly complicated. In this new effort, the researchers sought to address the development of preferences in babies—in this case, 11-month-old babies and their preferences regarding listening to someone speak to them.

Prior research has shown that [adult brains](#) emit a certain type of brain wave when they are open to learning something new—this theta activity can be captured by taping probes to the scalp and monitoring using EEG equipment. Prior research has also shown that babies are very interested in learning new things and thus grow bored or turn away from people or things that do not appear to represent a learning opportunity. With that in mind, the researchers enlisted the assistance of 45 babies (and their parents of course), each just 11 months old, to participate in some experiments. All of the babies had been raised in homes where only English was ever spoken.

The study began by setting a baseline for the infants. Each was put into an obvious learning situation while their brain waves were monitored. After doing so, the researchers were able to see that the babies all emitted the same sort of theta activity as the adults, setting the stage for the second part of the experiment. Each of the babies was coaxed into watching videos of people demonstrating how to use an object the baby had never seen before—but they introduced a twist. Sometimes, the person in the video was speaking English and sometimes they were not. The researchers found that the [infants](#) tended to show theta activity for English speakers but not when the person spoke in a different language.

The researchers suggest their results indicate that the [babies](#) were recognizing that they were not going to learn something from the non-English speakers, and thus saw no reason to be receptive.

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