

Early language acquisition in infants born preterm

About 10% of children are born preterm, and there is evidence of language impairments or delays in some preterm children. What is the origin of these delays in infancy ? What factors modulate these delays ? Previous studies have shown that the early acquisition of some linguistic levels is more affected than others. This is the case of the early processing/acquisition of prosodic and vocalic information, while the early processing/acquisition of consonantal information seems less affected. This differential impact of prematurity has been linked to the fact that preterm birth affects in utero access to and experience with prosodic and vocalic information, but not consonantal information. Hence, asynchrony in access to information in preterms compared to fullterms might be one source of potential difficulties in acquisition. Since some fundamental aspects of lexical acquisition only start after birth, we tested this hypothesis by investigating the early acquisition of the lexical level during the first year of life, focusing on wordform segmentation and wordform recognition. Results will highlight some early lexically-related abilities in preterm infants, but also some differences compared to language acquisition in fullterms. Lastly, we will present the results of a new language acquisition interactive and self-administered test, TICOALA, evaluating lexical and syntactic acquisition, as well as the ability to learn new words.