COBRE
Investigators

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Title of project: Identifying Visible Non-Verbal Cues for Verb Learning

Summary:

Verbs tend to be more difficult for infants to learn than nouns, but they are still present in the early vocabulary. This begs the question, if verbs are so difficult, how do we learn them? Better understanding of the verb learning process is especially important given that verbs are particularly problematic for special populations such as second language learners and children with developmental disorders.

Gillette et al. (1999) developed a procedure for putting adults in the shoes of infants in word learning tasks called the *human simulation paradigm* (henceforth HSP). In this procedure, adults watch muted videos of mothers interacting with toddlers, and a tone is played when the mother says a target word. The adult research participant must then use the visual cues in the muted scene to guess the target word. Using the HSP, Snedeker, Li, and Yuan (2003) found that both English- and Chinese-speaking adults are more successful at identifying verb referents when the videos show Chinese mother-infant dyads than when they show American mother-infant dyads. These findings imply that the non-verbal cues in mother-infant interactions varies between English- and Chinese-speaking dyads, and that some of these cues are more helpful than others for verb learning. My project works toward identifying the types of non-verbal cues that facilitate verb learning.