

# The Relationship Between Parents and Children's Adjectives Acquisition

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## ABSTRACT

This work discusses how parents' roles differ in educating children in an aspect of children's adjective acquisition. Existed literature has concentrated mainly on the learning of nouns and children's vocabulary in a general basis, and little attention has given to adjective as a specific field of study. However, the acquisition of adjectives has a considerable impact on children's future development, from perspectives of children's ability of understanding and learning new skills at schools, speaking skills and networking skills within interpersonal relationships, and their abilities of storytelling, differentiating, and explaining. In a group of children of the same age, children with stronger adjective acquisition ability will have more developmental potential and competitiveness than other children. This work will examine children's adjective vocabulary with Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) during a 14-day experiment, which indicates the increased number of new adjectives children learn when they are with their fathers and mothers respectively. Hypothesis on this study is that children who spend time with mother would have a better acquisition of adjectives due to the finding that said the more sensitive and responsive caregiving is associated with better cognitive and language outcomes. However, in addition to the hypothesis as one of the possible outcomes, all other possible results and limitations will be discussed in the study.

**Keywords:** *Language acquisition; Adjective learning; Single parents' family; Parents education*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

To effectively communicate, children have to understand adjectives and other forms of descriptive language (e.g., adverbs). Adjectives are explicitly taught in school as a tool for children to improve their storytelling abilities and linguistic complexity [1,2]. Adjectives are vital for describing and distinguishing, and they increase vocabulary, which is strongly predictive of children's later accomplishment at school and the society; children with good language skills have better opportunities in school, more access to further education, and better economic skills in adulthood. [3] In this way, education of adjective acquisition should be a key factor for children's learning process and an important topic that deserves educators and linguists' attention to explore. However, researchers have traditionally concentrated on other open word classes, such as nouns and verbs.[4] Adjectives have historically gotten little explicit attention in the acquisition literature, despite their obvious

relevance and relatively late mastery in children's repertoires. Due to the gaps in this field of study regarding children's language learning, this paper wants to explore the area of adjective acquisition from the perspective of parental language education. More specifically, do fathers and mothers differ in the number of adjectives they teach their children? Existed studies on parents' speech to children have shown that there are differences between mothers' and fathers' speech, appearing in their vocabulary and specific functional and conversational aspects of their speech.[5] For example, Ratner (1988) has found that fathers' language is more difficult to understand than mothers' because fathers tend to use more rare and complex nouns (such as "focus knob" and "ratchet") when describing a toy. [6] However, mothers are more likely to avoid using too difficult nouns or labeling the difficult words in an easy way, such as jeopardy as kitty-cat. [7] By understanding whether father and mothers' adjective educations are different and which one of the parents might have a better performance at teaching adjectives to children, a better adjective teaching

plan would be conducted to help children describe, distinguish and explain.

**2. PROPOSED STUDY**

The proposed study would determine whether the number of infants' adjectives learning is related to parents. One alternative answer is that the number of infants' adjectives acquisition is influenced by parents as 1. infants reared only by mothers would learn more adjectives than infants reared only by fathers or 2. infants reared only by fathers would learn more adjectives than infants reared only by mothers, while infants have been taught the same adjectives. Also, there might be no correlation between the number of infants' adjectives acquisition and parents' rearing. The above results would contribute to our understanding of parents rearing impacts on infants' adjectives acquisition.

**3. METHOD**

**3.1 Participants**

The data comes from 100 children (all only-child at single - parent families, so one part of parents would be their primary caregivers), from 2-3 years old. There would be 50 children from single mother families, and 50 children from single father families. The proportion of boys and girls in these two kinds of single families would be 50% boys and 50% girls. All the children in the experiment have average intelligences and have normal speaking abilities and have not yet gone to school to preclude the effect of indirect speech from school and the outside environment. The 100 families are all middle-class and own a high school degree or above. All parents are Anglophones, and they only speak English to their children. On average, fathers were 35 and mothers were 33 years old.

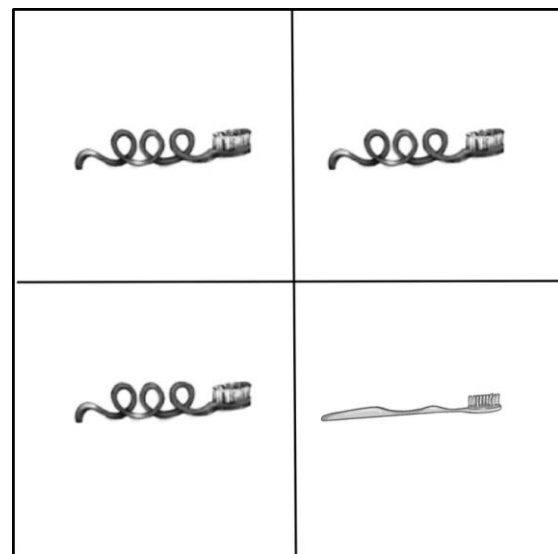
**3.2 Material**

The whole vocabulary test is referred to Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. There are 28 black - and - white separate pages, each with 4 pictures, one of which matches the meaning of an adjective, and a camera would be set to record the whole process of the experiment which includes the daily vocabulary teaching process between kids and one part of their parents and the vocabulary test.

**3.3 Procedure**

At the beginning of the experiment, the participants would be tested through Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) to test their primary vocabulary as the original date. Then 28 adjectives would be picked up from the PPVT which children had never learned before through the test and assign the 28 adjectives to each

family as the learning material. The whole experiment would last for 14 days. During the 14 days, a camera would be used to record the whole process of how fathers or mothers teach their children to learn these 28 adjectives every day. Fathers and mothers were requested to teach two same adjectives per day at the same time, but with their own ways and methods. Other controlled elements are that the teaching process would be held in a suitable environment for children's learning, such as children's living room or study room. After 14 days, there will be the second PPTV adjective vocabulary test that measures how many of the 28 assigned adjectives have children learned during the experiment. The adjectives test would be held for 10 to 15 minutes with one professional and well-trained tester. There will be 28 cards in this trial, and each card has four black- and - white photos (same size, same difficulty, and same content complexity), one of which matches the meaning of the assigned adjective. For example, if the tested adjective is "straight", there would be a paper includes four same objects with different characteristics and one of the objects shows the feature of straight (as shown in Figure 1). Children will sit on their parents' lap which is 6 feet away with the tester. Parents were required to close their eyes through the entire experiment in order to prevent them from influencing their children's behaviors by eye contacts. A camera would be set to make sure the whole procedure is under well control. During the vocabulary test, kids should point out the picture that best describes the meaning of the adjective spoken by the tester. Children get one point when they point correctly, then the tester would count each child's score and compare the mean score (excluded the highest score and lowest score) in group one (mother-rearing) and group two (father-rearing). Then, by comparing the average score of two groups, this work can conclude which side in parents has better impact on children's adjective acquisition.



**Figure 1** Example of a Black- And-White Photo

## 4. RESULTS

Data from this experiment are how parents interact with their infants, the number of adjectives infants have learned before the experiment, and the final score for each child. Then through comparing the mean score in the first group (mother-rearing) and the second group (father-rearing). One possible outcome would be that the mean score in the first group (mother-rearing) is more than three points higher (which is nearly ten percent of 28 (full marks)) than the second group (father-rearing), which demonstrated that children reared only by mothers have better adjectives learning abilities. However, if the result shows an opposite way, that is, the mean score in group two (father-rearing) is more than three points higher than group one (mother-rearing), then this paper could conduct that child reared by father do better in learning adjectives. The last possible result could be that there is no conspicuous disparity between the mean scores in the first group (mother-rearing) and the second group (father-rearing) or the difference is within 3 points ( $\leq 3$ ). In this way, this work can conclude that there is no apparent adjective acquisition difference between father rearing and mother rearing.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This experiment aims to examine both parents' impacts on children's adjective learning respectively. There are 28 adjectives that children have never learned assigned to each participated family, and parents are allowed to teach their children based on their own methodologies. This paper calculated the numbers of children increased known adjectives from each group and contrast the mean numbers from both mother-rearing group and father-rearing group to figure out which group shows a better performance on educating children regarding their adjective acquisitions. By understanding the difference on children's adjective learning ability with their parents, this work can predict the learning levels and speaking skills of children from single parent families. If the experiment shows that children who reared in a single mother family background has a better ability on learning adjectives than those reared in single father families, which is compatible with the hypothesis at the beginning, then this work could also conduct the finding that the more sensitive and responsive caregiver is associated with a better adjective learning outcome. By knowing this, educator could come up with better language teaching plans from the perspective of caregivers' sensitivity and responsibility to help children learn language and perform better in their future communications. However, if the experiment does not meet the hypothesis, future research could be done in the area of study to further determining the factors that impact children and parent's correlation in the aspect of learning adjectives.

The data set conducted from the experiment would not process in an ideal pattern as demonstrated, since there are still multiple ambiguities and limitations generated from the methodology and the physical experiments that are unlikely to fully eliminate.

First, the sample families this paper focuses are all single parent families in order to avoid possible confounding factors that might affect the study outcome. However, it also limited the area that our finding could apply to. The result of our experiment can only be valid in single parent families. Otherwise, different family compositions, parents' time distributions, and family atmosphere can all lead to a biased outcome in two parents' families. Secondly, children's behaving might be misleading based on their different personalities, which affects the accuracy of the result. For example, during the process of testing children the 28 adjectives, some children might not point the correct picture even though they know what the meaning of the word is. On the contrary, some kids might just point to the picture correctly by accident without knowing the true meaning of the word. Since the sample population size and vocabulary size of our experiment are not large enough, this paper cannot fully avoid the statistical bias happened during the calculation of our experiment results. Other than these, since this experiment offers highly flexible teaching styles of parents during the 14 days, this experiment inevitably meets some ambiguities regarding parents' ways of teaching adjectives. There might be parents pay no attention to children's learning at all, and just simply say the adjective once or twice to accomplish the tasks; and also, some parents who make sure their children fully remember the adjectives no matter how long and how much effort it would takes them to teach. This could also lead to big bias in the outcome on our experiment. Finally, because this work will inform them the content, the start and end dates of the experiment, parents may behave differently than they do in their daily lives, which would make the result of the outcome not accurate enough. Hopefully, similar studies in the future will take these limitations into consideration.

In the aspect of children's language learning, multiple elements are relevant, such as their siblings, school, friends. Moreover, the culture, ethic, wealth, education and age of parents could also make a difference on children's adjectives learning. The result of this experiment would be a great support for further studies that laid eyes on children's language learning.

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