

HUMAN INFANTS USE POINTING GESTURES TO PROVOKE RESPONSES FROM CAREGIVERS

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When human caregivers (Homo sapiens) communicate with preverbal infants, they often look at the objects the infants are looking at and comment on them. Do infants passively wait until caregivers comment on these objects? I report studies that investigated whether infants use pointing gestures to provoke comments from their caregivers. Thirteen 18-month-old infants were observed during free playtime in a nursery classroom in Japan. Four female caregivers were present during the study period. From 4160 minutes of observation, 283 post-pointing and matched-control data units were compiled. The results showed that the utterances addressed to the infants by the caregivers were made significantly earlier in the post-pointing sequences than in the matched-control ones. Further, most utterances by the caregivers after the infants' pointing were related to the objects being pointed by the infants. These results suggest that the infants' pointing gestures provoke comments from caregivers about the objects pointed out. While pointing, the infants were located near the caregivers more frequently than in the control. Furthermore, in the post-pointing sequence, the infants pointed repeatedly at the same objects with vocalization more frequently when caregivers failed to comment. These results suggest that infants use pointing gestures, anticipating that they would provoke comments from the caregivers. Although captive chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) point at distant food items to indicate a human to fetch it (Leavens et al., 2005), the usage of pointing gestures to provoke comments from caregivers would be unique to human infants.

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