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“Gesture effect” points to head start for toddlers

Mark Henderson, Science Editor, in Chicago

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Parents who use gestures give their children a head-start

Parents who point and use other gestures with their toddlers can give them a head start with learning language, scientists have discovered.

New research in the United States has revealed that young children who pick up gestures from their parents at 14 months have larger and more complex vocabularies when they start school.

As well-educated parents from higher income brackets use more gestures with their babies, the findings help to explain why children from these families develop speech more quickly than those born into lower socio-economic groups.

The gesture effect may also have a lasting influence on children’s intellectual development,

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