

Decontextualized talk in caregivers' input to 12-month-old children during structured interaction

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Decontextualized Talk

- Linguistic input beyond the here-and-now [1,2] that refers to invisible entities, abstract ideas, to past or future personal experiences [1-4]

Relation to language development

- predictor for later linguistic skills [1,2]
- more complex vocabulary and syntax than contextualized talk [2] → linguistic and associative capabilities are necessary rather than the immediate context to understand decontextualized talk

Children's age

- It is assumed to be used only rarely with children younger than 30 months of age [1,2].
- However, in structured interactions it was observed in input towards younger children [4,5].

Methods

Participants

- 59 monolingual German infants (29 girls, 30 boys); 12 months old (SD = 11 days)



Decorated room: Semi-naturalistic setting to elicit spontaneous communicative behavior, in which a caregiver and an infant look at and communicate about objects and pictures for 6 min. [6]

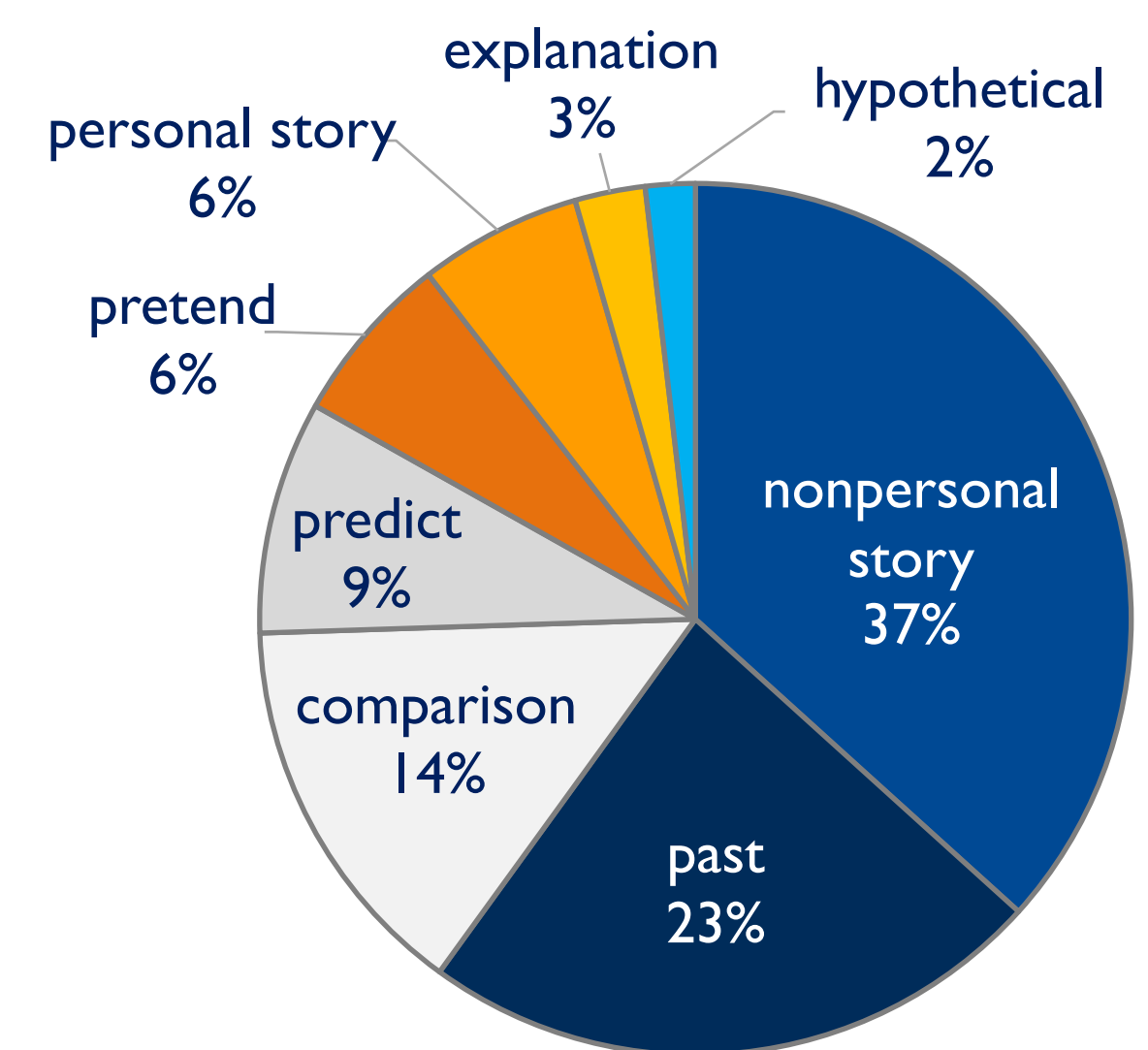
Results

Table showing the total number and percentage of contextualized and decontextualized utterances.

Language Input	M (SD)	M (SD)
	Total number of utterances	% of all utterances
contextualized	83.05 (22.63)	84.13 (7.55)
decontextualized	15.72 (8.58)	15.86 (7.55)

Almost 16% of all parental utterances were decontextualized, with individual variation from 3% – 33%.

Different categories of decontextualized speech



Operationalization

Decontextualization of language from

- spatial context (the “here”)
 - temporal context (the “now”)
 - personal context (the “I”, “we”)
- (see Bühler [7])

Earlier forms of decontextualized talk are characterized by being decontextualized only on some dimensions (e.g., time), while being grounded in the immediate context on another dimension (e.g., space), i.e. the immediate context is utilized to a certain degree. Hereby, parents may scaffold understanding of talk about the there-and-then from early on.

Category		Decontextualized from	Examples
bring-in [4,8]	personal story	spatial / temporal context	<i>What does Mommy have in her cup all the time?</i> (picture of cup)
	nonpersonal story	temporal / personal context	<i>Music can be made with it.</i> (picture of drum)
	comparison	temporal / (personal) context	<i>This is like a lamp.</i> (disco ball) <i>You have that at home.</i>
	pretend	spatial context	<i>Do you want to pet the cat?</i> (picture of a cat)
explanation		temporal / personal context	<i>If the soap bubbles come, I will blow them.</i> <i>We need this [umbrella], because it is raining outside.</i>
temporal displacement [3]	future	temporal / personal context	<i>This will go on again soon.</i>
	past	temporal / (personal) context	<i>This just turned around.</i> <i>We just missed it.</i>
hypothetical [9]		spatial / temporal / (personal) context	<i>A Bobby-Car like that would be great to have.</i>

Discussion

Decontextualized input is present from early on, at least in structured interactions.

→ Operationalization: different dimensions [7], and classification in a more fine grained way, e.g. distinguish between personal and non-personal stories [8]

The most frequent types—*non-personal story*, *temporally displaced talk about the past*, and *comparisons*—are all grounded in spatial context, but decontextualized from temporal, and often personal context.

➡ “here-and-then” before “there-and-then”

→ scaffolding function: easier accessible to the child?

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