

Infants can learn words, study finds

10-month-olds can map objects to words

By CURTIS L. TAYLOR
Special to amNewYork

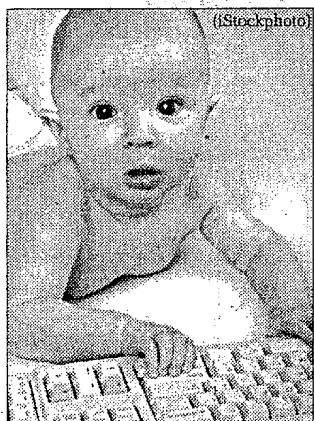
Infants might not talk, but they seem to understand language and learn words faster when parents look at and name objects they already find interesting, according to new research.

Doctors say that a core task in all language acquisition is the mapping of words to objects, actions and events. Researchers looked at whether 10-month-olds used perceptual and social cues to learn words.

Infants were shown two separate objects chosen by researchers, including a blue sparkle wand and a white cabinet latch. The infants then played with the objects and looked at them placed side by side on a board. The babies were then asked for a new word for one of the objects, and almost always, chose what researchers had initially thought would be the interesting object, researchers said. One object was then labeled with a new word.

"No matter what we labeled, whether it was boring

or interesting, the babies almost always assumed that the new word went with the object they found interesting," said Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek, director of the Temple University Infant Lab and



Infants appear to learn words faster when they're associated with interesting objects.

the study co-investigator.

Researchers found that at 10 months, before infants said much of anything, they could learn two new words in a single session, according to the study published in this month's *Journal of Child Development*.

The research assessed only comprehension, not

whether the baby could say the word.

Shannon Pruden, the study's lead author and a doctoral candidate in psychology at Temple University, said that "perhaps this is why children learn words faster when parents look at and name the objects that infants already find interesting."

Hirsh-Pasek said the findings had significant implications because they suggest that babies are listening to conversations and trying to learn words well before they can say them.

"A simple list of words and talking at them is not going to do the trick," said Hirsh-Pasek, the co-author of "How Babies Talk." "Language is learned in the context of conversation, which is especially true for the little guys."

Dr. Adam Aponte, medical director for the North General Diagnostic and Treatment Center in Manhattan, downplayed the results, saying the work would have more impact on research than upon everyday parenting.

Curtis L. Taylor is a Newsday staff writer.

HEALTHDIGEST

CHINA BANS SALES OF HUMAN ORGANS

SHANGHAI China's Health Ministry has explicitly banned sales of human organs in an apparent attempt to clean up the country's lucrative but laxly regulated transplant business. New regulations viewed on the Health Ministry's Web site yesterday forbid the buying and selling of organs and require that donors give written permission for their organs to be transplanted. (AP)

DENMARK JUMPS ON NO SMOKING BANDWAGON

COPENHAGEN The Danish government said yesterday it wants to prohibit smoking in public places but stopped short of a total ban on lighting up in restaurants and bars. The measure, which would take effect April 1, 2007, if approved by its parliament, would add Denmark to the growing list of European countries cracking down on smokers. (AP)

SURGEONS REMOVE 2 FETUSES FROM INFANT

ISLAMABAD Surgeons operated on a 2-month-old Pakistani girl yesterday to remove two fetuses that had grown inside her while she was still in her mother's womb, the chief doctor who performed the operation said. The infant, who doctors identified only as Nazia, is in a critical condition following the two-hour operation at The Children's Hospital at Pakistan Institute of Medical Science in the capital, Islamabad, said Prof. Zaheer Abbasi, head of pediatric surgery at the hospital. (AP)

GREECE TO TIGHTEN HIV BLOOD SCREENING

ATHENS Greece will tighten screening procedures for blood donors after two patients were infected with the HIV virus through transfusions, the Health Ministry announced yesterday. The patients were identified as a 17-year-old girl with anemia who requires regular transfusions and a 76-year-old man with heart problems. Both received the infected blood last year in the city of Thessaloniki, the ministry said. (AP)

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