

The observation of giving induces infants to track individuals

Denis Tatone

Central European University, Vienna, Austria

Gergely Csibra

Central European University, Vienna, Austria

Jun Yin

Ningbo University, Ningbo, China

Abstract

Recent evidence suggests that infants interpret giving as indicative of a relationship based on reciprocal exchange. Monitoring such a relationship requires tracking its participants irrespective of the role they occupy in a given interaction, as these are assumed to alternate over time. We explored this hypothesis in a label-mapping paradigm by testing whether 14-month-olds interpreted a trained label as referring to the features of an agent pointed at (a stable identity-tagging information) or to the action role it carried out (a temporary information). Across four eye-tracking experiments, infants consistently mapped the trained label onto the agent's features, when the agent gave a resource to someone. Superficial similar actions not resulting in social transfer (i.e., disposing of an object) did not induce such mapping. These findings suggest that the observation of giving highlighted identity-preserving information over transitory action roles, possibly due to the relational assumptions this action engendered.