

Stability of Core Language Skill from Infancy to Adolescence in Typical and Atypical Development

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Abstract

Individual differences are a central characteristic of child language, and a conceptual issue in language and developmental science is stability. Language was evaluated at 6 months and annually through 15 years in 5167 (50.2% girls) white, monolingual singletons: 4111 typically developing children; 435 moderate-late and 51 very preterm children; 322 children with dyslexia; 89 children with autism; and 221 children who had mild and/or moderate hearing impairment. Structural equation modelling showed both typical and atypically developing childrens language skills had medium to large average stabilities between successive waves over the span of 15 years, even accounting for child nonverbal intelligence and sociability and maternal age and education. The strong stability of child language skill from early in development across typical and at-risk groups points to a highly conserved and robust individual-differences characteristic and underscores the importance of identifying lagging language skills and promoting childrens language environment well before formal schooling.