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**Language Ability and Theory of Mind: An Early  
Childhood Longitudinal Study**

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## LANGUAGE ABILITY AND THEORY OF MIND

**Abstract**

This longitudinal study investigated the intertwining relationship between language ability and theory of mind during early childhood development. Previous studies had been demonstrated that earlier language ability at age 3 or above predicted later false belief understanding but no conclusion was made in research for the development starting from infancy. Over a period of 32 months, 167 infants at 16 months old were recruited to have measures of language ability and/or theory of mind at four time points. The present study adopted four language measures and two theory of mind measures in Chinese scaling which were of appropriate difficulty to their respective age. Results showed that language ability could predict subsequent theory of mind performance at certain time span, after controlling initial theory of mind and later executive function. On the contrary, theory of mind could not predict subsequent language ability, after controlling initial language ability. Methodological issues concerning theory of mind paradigm were discussed. Particularly, there was lack of precise measure to reflect infants' mental states in order to confirm their theory of mind competency.

*Keywords:* theory of mind, language, interface, gazing