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REGULATIONS ON USE

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Background

The field manuals were originally intended as working documents for internal use only. They were supplemented by verbal instructions and additional guidelines in many cases. If you have questions about using the materials, or comments on the viability in various field situations, feel free to get in touch with the authors.

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SOCIALISATION OF PRELINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION

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Project	Communication before Language
Tasks	1) Short observation and documentation of infants' interaction with their social environment and of parental beliefs; 2) Contribution to the "decorated room" task
Goal of Project	To document the nature and emergence of caregiver-infant interaction/communication in different cultures

Background

Social interaction has been suggested to play a pivotal role in infants' development of social cognition and communication (e.g., Carpendale & Lewis, 2004). However, little is known about cultural differences in interactional practices with infants. In particular, it is unclear whether differences in interactional practices already affect prelinguistic infants' social interactions, specifically around the infants' first birthday, when skills for shared intentionality and referential communication have been documented to emerge in western cultures (Tomasello et al., 2005; 2007).

In our studies we observe infants' interactions with their social environment in their natural daily lives. We look for similarities and differences in infants' interaction styles and in the input they receive. We further investigate whether the pointing gesture – an index of infants' prelinguistic referential communication – emerges around the same ages across different cultures in production and comprehension. We do this by natural observation as well as through elicitation tasks.

However, the first step in our studies is to identify cultures that might be of interest to us with respect to our research questions, for example cultures in which reduced or increased or simply very different caregiver-infant interactions have been suggested. Information on infant social interaction in other cultures is still scarce. Therefore, we wish to encourage field researchers to provide information about the culture(s) they work in which will allow us to get a more systematic overview across cultures and which will provide a basis for future studies.

There are two tasks: Task 1 – a brief documentation about the culture under investigation with respect to infant-caregiver interaction and parental beliefs. Task 2 – a repeated call for a contribution to the "decorated room", a task designed to elicit infant and caregiver pointing (see Field Manual 2007).

Task 1

a) Infant-caregiver interaction

Field researchers are asked to provide information by observing infant-caregiver interaction and by answering the following guiding questions. In our experience it has

sometimes proven to be difficult to obtain the information post-hoc, after the field stay. We therefore encourage you to write down your observations during your field stay. The questions are meant to guide your observations and are open-ended.

1. How many people usually live together in one house? Core family/extended family?
2. Is child care institutionalised (e.g., kindergardens)?
3. Is there a mother-centered style of child care or are there multiple caregivers? If older siblings take care of infants, at what age does this start?
4. At what child age do caregivers start talking to their infants?
5. What is your impression on parental style towards infants? Is it e.g., authoritarian/directive/Western pedagogical/minimally intervening?
6. Did you encounter child rearing practices that are strikingly different from our Western culture?
7. During your field stay, did you see mothers or other persons/children point for their infants? Yes/routinely/a lot/sometimes/rarely/never? If so, what was the age of the infants?
8. Did you see infants pointing for others? Yes/routinely/a lot/sometimes/rarely/never? If so, what was the age of the infants?

b) Parental beliefs

Field researchers are asked to obtain information on parental beliefs by asking parents the following questions (or, alternatively, by asking an informant):

1. What is important for the well-being of your child?
2. From what age on do children understand when you talk to them?
3. When do children start to talk?
4. How do children learn to talk?
5. When do children start to communicate with other people? And about what?

Task 2

The “decorated room” task has been very successful and has turned into a large-scale study to which field researchers have contributed data from Bali, India, Mexico, Peru, Canada, Rossel Island, and Japan so far.

The method involves a room decorated with objects that are worthy of pointing at, and having caregivers and infants walk through it to see whether and how they would point (see Field Manual 2007 for detailed instructions). We supply a standardised kit containing 19 different stimuli which serve as potential referents. We aim for 12-month-olds, but if the community is small, infants could fall within the age range of 8 to 12 months. The more infants the better – statistical comparisons do not work well on a small number (<6). 10+ would be good.

Please contact us if you intend to participate in this project.