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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Communicative development of Portuguese infants aged between 8 and 15 months

Carla Silva<sup>a</sup>, Irene Cadime<sup>a,\*</sup>, Iolanda Ribeiro<sup>b</sup>, Victor Acosta<sup>c</sup>, Rosa Lima<sup>d</sup>,  
Fernanda Leopoldina Viana<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Research Centre on Child Studies, University of Minho, Portugal*

<sup>b</sup> School of Psychology, University of Minho, Portugal

<sup>c</sup> Department of Educational Research Didactics, University of La Laguna, Spain

<sup>d</sup> Higher School of Education Paula Frassinetti, Portugal

<sup>e</sup> *Institute of Education, University of Minho, Portugal*

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## KEYWORDS

Gender differences;  
Gestures;  
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and production

**Abstract** The main aim of this study was to investigate the development of gesture and language acquisition in European Portuguese infants. These were assessed using the European Portuguese MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory: words and gestures. The parents' reports of gestures and lexical competence of 1314 children, aged between 8 and 15 months, were collected. As expected, the results indicated that word comprehension, word production, and the use of gestures increased with age. A main gender effect was found for total gestures, with girls obtaining higher scores than boys, but the effect size was small. No differences were found between girls and boys for word comprehension, word production, and phrases understood. All lexical and gesture measurements were positively correlated, even after controlling for age and gender effects. These findings are discussed in terms of their consistency with those obtained for other languages.

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\* Corresponding author.

*E-mail address:* [irenecadime@ie.uminho.pt](mailto:irenecadime@ie.uminho.pt) (I. Cadime).

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Diferencias de género;  
Gestos;  
MacArthur-Bates  
Inventario de Desarrollo  
Comunicativo:  
palabras y gestos;  
Comprensión y  
producción de  
palabras

## Desarrollo comunicativo de los niños portugueses con edades comprendidas entre los 8 y los 15 meses

**Resumen** El objetivo principal de este estudio fue investigar el desarrollo de gestos y la adquisición del lenguaje en niños hablantes de portugués europeo. Los gestos y los conocimientos lingüísticos de los niños se evaluaron utilizando la versión en Portugués Europeo del Inventario de Desarrollo Comunicativo MacArthur-Bates: palabras y gestos. Se recogieron los informes paternos de los gestos y competencia léxica de 1,314 niños, con edades comprendidas entre los 8 y los 15 meses. Como era esperable, los resultados indican que la comprensión de palabras, la producción de palabras y el uso de gestos aumentan con la edad. Se encontró también un efecto principal del género para el total de gestos, obteniendo las niñas puntuaciones más altas que los niños, pero el tamaño del efecto es pequeño. No se encontraron diferencias entre niños y niñas para la comprensión y producción de palabras y para frases entendidas. Todas las medidas de léxico y gestos están correlacionadas positivamente, incluso después de controlar los efectos de la edad y del género. Estos resultados se discuten en términos de su consistencia con los obtenidos para otros idiomas.

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In the last decades, research has shown the importance of oral language development, not only as a facilitator of learning, but also as fundamental to social integration (Locke, Ginsborg, & Peers, 2002; Neaum, 2012). Moreover, a developmental relationship between gestures and oral language exists: the production of first words is preceded by the use of gestures, especially deictic ones, and gestures and words coexist in children's early communicative repertoires, forming an integrated system (Bavin et al., 2008; Capirci, Montanari, & Volterra, 1998; Caselli, Rinaldi, Stefanini, & Volterra, 2012; Hall, Rumney, Holler, & Kidd, 2013; Olson & Masur, 2015; Sansavini et al., 2010; Kraljević, Cepanec, & Šimleša, 2014).

Early assessment of the communicative development allows the detection of difficulties or problems that children present in this area, leading to an effective intervention and to better clinical and educational practices (Andrade, 2008; Mariscal et al., 2007; Puyuelo, 2003; Westerlund, Berglund, & Eriksson, 2006). Three main approaches are used in the assessment of communicative development: standardized tests, analysis of language samples and parental reports (Law & Roy, 2008). The use of standardized tests is a formal method that provides information that allows to compare children with their peers (Paul, 2007), but requires trained professionals and the children's collaboration (Fenson et al., 2007), as the testing situation is always artificial. The use of this method is difficult with children under 3 years old, because of the emotional lability and the high sensibility and reactivity they present in formal contexts of assessment (Fenson et al., 2007; Mariscal et al., 2007).

Language samples' analysis is often used in research, allowing a precise description of children's language and a detailed analysis of the different dimensions and processes of language (Acosta, Moreno, Ramos, Quintana, & Espino, 2006; Condouris, Tager-Flusberg, & Meyer, 2003). Is a methodology that allows to know in detail the linguistic characteristics of children in its various components,

especially at morphosyntactic level, highlighting the richness of information obtained and the capability of analysis of different aspects of language (Acosta et al., 2006; Triadó & Forns, 1989; Vázquez & Alonso, 2007). Nonetheless, the language samples need to be large enough to be representative of the children's skills, and in order to pick up different contexts, and this aspect is more critical with young children and with children with delays. For this reason, this is a very laborious and expensive method (Acosta et al., 2006; Fenson et al., 2007; Triadó & Forns, 1989).

Parental reports are an alternative to the previous procedures. Several studies have shown that the use of parental reports is a valid method for collecting information about linguistic development (Feldman et al., 2000; Fenson et al., 2007; Jackson-Maldonado, Thal, Marchman, Bates, & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 1993; Thal, Jackson-Maldonado, & Acosta, 2000). Many instruments employed in clinical practice use questions addressed to parents, or other relatives, about the child development because it is assumed that parents can observe and have access to a wide range of daily situations where children use their communicative skills, whereas the possibilities of observation of these skills by the professionals are much more limited. This method provides more representative data than the previous ones, namely if this measures has well defined psychometric properties (Paul, 2007). Especially in early stages of development, parental reports are a cost-efficient procedure that allows collecting the necessary data for establishing population-based norms (Fenson et al., 2007; Mariscal et al., 2007; Simonsen, Kristoffersen, Bleses, Wehberg, & Jorgensen, 2014). The main concern with this method is the risk that parents might over or under report their children's communicative skills. Although, if the recognition format is used and only current and emergent behaviors are assessed, parental reports seem to be a reliable indicator (Fenson et al., 2007).

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