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Finding Clarity Amidst the Clutter: How Parents Name Objects

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Abstract: A core issue in the study of word learning is understanding how beginning learners cope with referential ambiguity in the clutter of natural learning environments, and how parents may help them find the referent in that clutter. Here we ask how sensitive parents are in taking advantage of optimal visual moments where a single object is visually large in view to provide linguistic labels for their infants. Using a mini-head camera, we recorded parent-child free play interactions and studied the parent naming events for 12 and 30 month old children from the infant-perspective in a context of high clutter (30 objects dumped on the floor). Despite the cluttered context, parents and infants frequently created infant-perspective scenes in which one object was visually singled out. At both age levels, parents named objects in these moments of visual clarity and almost never named objects in sub-optimal moments.