Rationale and Study Goals

- Mothers with higher SES have been shown to use great quantity of language and complexity of language with their young children (Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff, 2003; 2006; Huttenlocher et al., 2010; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013) which in turn has been related to children’s early language. The SES gap has been called “the Word Gap.”
- This study focused on disentangling maternal education and race in examining maternal language input and race by collecting language data in the home during a wordless picturebook task from 6-36 months and examining child language during the transition to school in a large sample.
- This study also examined whether maternal language input was a mediator of the relationship between maternal education and later child language and if there were differences by race.

Research questions

1. Do measures of maternal language output and maternal language complexity from 6 to 36 months and measures of child language outcomes at school age differ by race within education levels? Does maternal education differentiate these maternal language input and child language measures?
2. Do measures of maternal language output and complexity from 6 to 36 months mediate the relationship between maternal education and child language at pre-K and kindergarten, and do these mediation models differ by race?

Sample and Methods

- Participants from The Family Life Project, a representative sample of every baby born to a mother who lived in one of six rural counties in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, over sampling for poverty and African American (N = 1292)

Findings for Research Question 2: Maternal language input as a mediator

- Maternal language input, number of different words, mean length of utterance and wh-questions were partial mediators between maternal education and child language
- There were no race differences in the mediation models.

Maternal Language Output as a Mediator between Maternal Education and Later Child Language

Maternal Language Complexity as a Mediator between Maternal Education and Later Child Language

Summary

- No race differences within maternal education levels on five measures of maternal language input from 6 to 36 months.
- Number of different words, mean length of utterance and number of wh-questions were partial mediators of the relationship between maternal education and later child language at school age.