

It's not all about income: Similarities and differences in children's early language environments predict vocabulary development

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INTRODUCTION

Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2015) suggests that quality of parent-child interactions account for children's language outcomes better than quantity for low income children?

Does this relationship hold across the economic spectrum?

Differences in language environment by SES

- *Quantity* – often defined as number of words child hears¹⁻²
- *Quality* – defined many ways
 - High-quality language input^{1,3-4}
 - Parent-child interaction⁵⁻⁷

Defining Quality: Communication Foundation⁷⁻⁸

- *Symbol-Infused Joint Engagement (JE)* – shared attention with language or gestures
- *Routines & Rituals* - scripted, coordinated activities
- *Fluency & Connectedness* - smooth, balanced communication

Is this true across SES strata?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Across **language-equated income groups**:

1. Does the amount of talk vary?
2. Does the quality of the communication foundation vary?
3. Does the communication foundation relate to language development?

SAMPLE

- 180 children: NICHD-Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development
- **Three income groups matched on expressive language at age 3**

METHODS

24-months: coded for quantity and quality of language interaction during play session (3-box task)

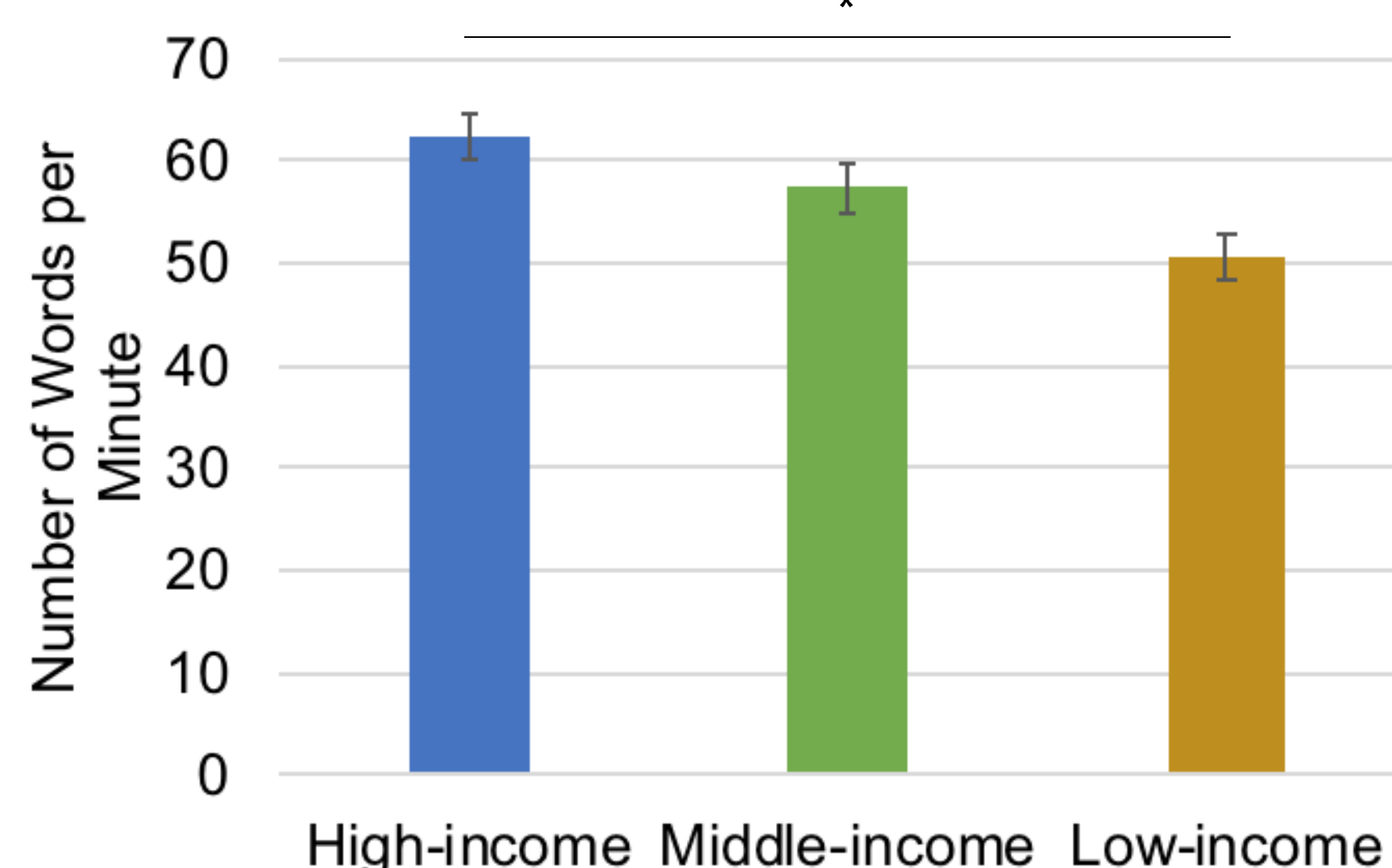
- *Quantity*: maternal words per minute
- *Quality*: The communication foundation⁸: Symbol-Infused JE, Routines & Rituals, Fluency & Connectedness

36-months: *Expressive Language* - Reynell Developmental Language Scales⁹

RESULTS

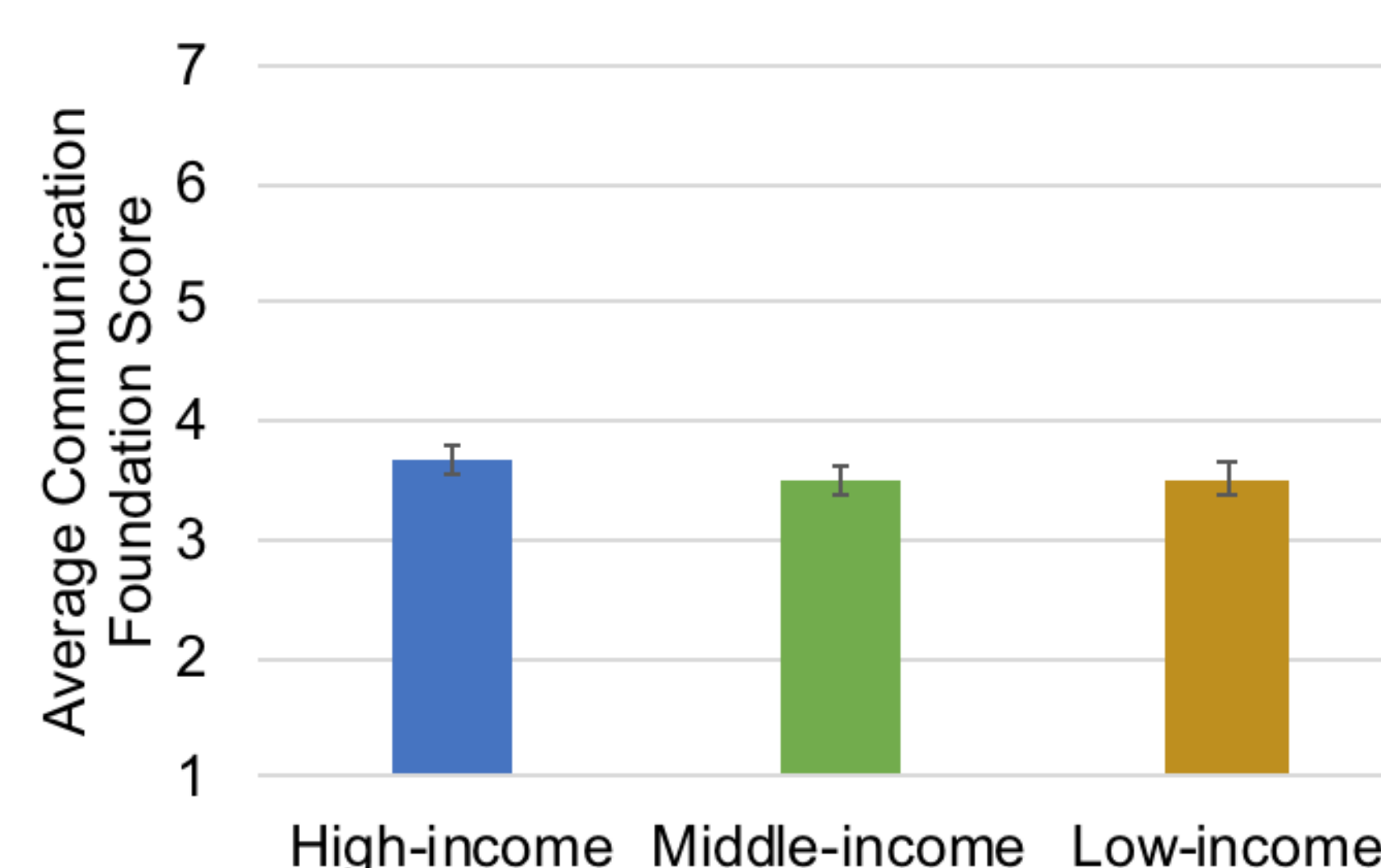
Does the amount of talk vary by income group?

YES



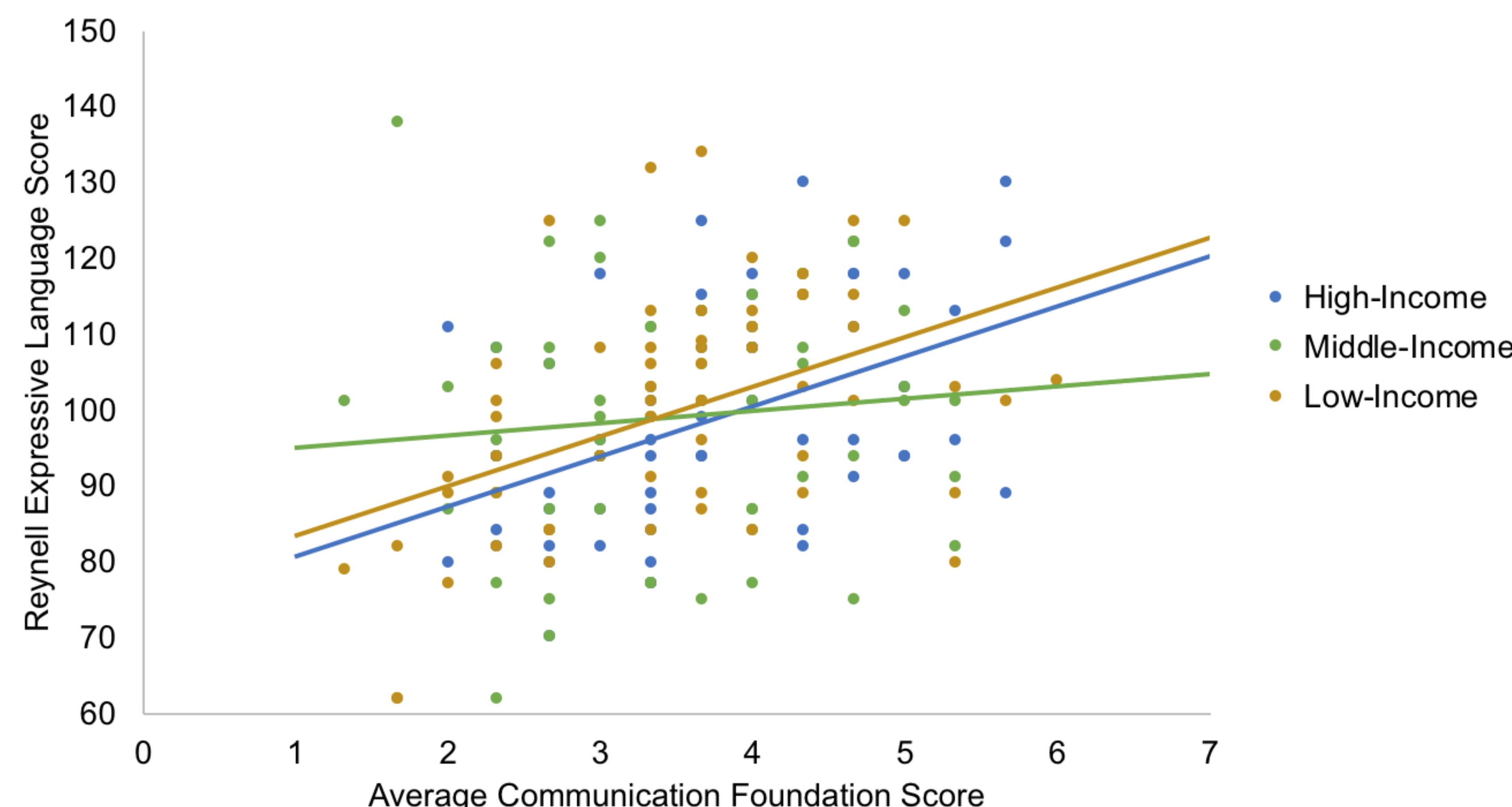
Does the quality of the communication foundation vary by income group?

NO



Is the communication foundation a mechanism for language development across groups?

YES and NO



DISCUSSION

Conclusion

When **equated for language outcomes**:

- Amount of talk by parents differs across income
- The communication foundation does not

The relationship between *the communication foundation* and language:

- Significant for the low- and high-income
- NOT significant for the middle-income
- But, groups do not differ from each other

Implications

SES-differences: Communication foundation vs. amount of talk:

- More talk isn't necessarily better
- Cultural differences result in differences in in talk?¹⁰
- High-quality interaction better target for intervention

The communication foundation as an area of intervention

- Already a part of communication in homes across SES-strata
- Strongly associated with later outcomes

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