

# THE PHENOMENON OF JOINT ATTENTION

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If a parent is asked to report about the occurrence of first interactions with his child in which the infant actively coordinated his/her visual attention to the parent and some other object you get various answers and interpretations. The main feature for identifying these triadic interactions is the gaze alternation (between the object and adult), whether the infant shares attention to an object, follows the directions of someone's gaze or gestures, or directs adult's attention or behavior. These joint attentional activities start to happen frequently as soon as the infant begins to understand others as intentional beings, that is to communicate intentionally. Numerous studies that have been done since the seventies till nowadays settle the time of emergence of joint attention episodes between the 9 and 15 months of age. Why is so much research done in the field of joint attention? Researchers were puzzled with the fact that early signs of linguistic communication co-occur with emergence of joint attentional activities. Some findings say that the amount of time spent in joint attention activities around the first year predicts the child's vocabulary at 18 months (Tomasello & Todd, 1983). Among others, Carpenter, Nigel and Tomasello (1998) have proposed the idea that children somehow "set off" in language acquisition through joint attentional interaction.

Since the pointing gesture is shown to be the main tool for engaging in joint attentional interactions many studies focused on comprehension of pointing (when attention following) and other on production of pointing (when attention and behavior directing). Analogously, production and comprehension seem to develop independently in joint attention. This work gives an overview of the joint attention skills (ontogeny, the order of occurrence, relations to language development) and tries to find answers on questions like: What is the theoretical frame for joint attentional skills?, What is the nature of relations between different joint attentional skills?, What happens when joint attention does not emerge in the proposed period?, How is joint attentional engagement followed and analyzed?