

# SELF-FEEDING AND INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION DURING THE MEAL IN 12-MONTH-OLD INFANTS

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## INTRODUCTION

- **Complementary feeding** (between 6-12 months)
- Eating independently: more opportunities to develop **fine-motor skills**<sup>1</sup>
- Transition to **triadic joint object** involvement<sup>2</sup>
- Use of **deictic** and **referential gestures, vocalizations** (between 12-15 months)<sup>3,4</sup>
- **Child-directed speech**: predictor of children's language development<sup>5</sup>

## Aims

1. Relation between **self-feeding and gestural and vocal communication** (both concurrently, and longitudinally, at 18 and 24 months of age)?
2. Relation between **infant-directed speech and infant communication**?

## METHOD

N=182 infants (93 boys), 12 mo (M=12.33, SD=.51)

Measures at 12 months of age:

- Observation of a meal
- Socio-demographic questionnaire
- *MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (MCDI): Words and Gestures*<sup>6</sup> (language development)
- *Developmental Profile 3*<sup>7</sup> (fine-motor skill score)

N=174 at 18 mo (M=18.28, SD=.55), N=173 at 24 mo (M=24.4, SD=.74)

Measure at 18 and 24 months of age:

- *MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (MCDI): Words and Sentences*<sup>7</sup> (language development)

## MEAL OBSERVATION

Coding scheme to assess infants' communicative abilities<sup>5,8</sup>:

- 30 gestures (6 deictic, 24 referential)
- 4 vocalizations (simple voc., proto-words, words, word combinations)



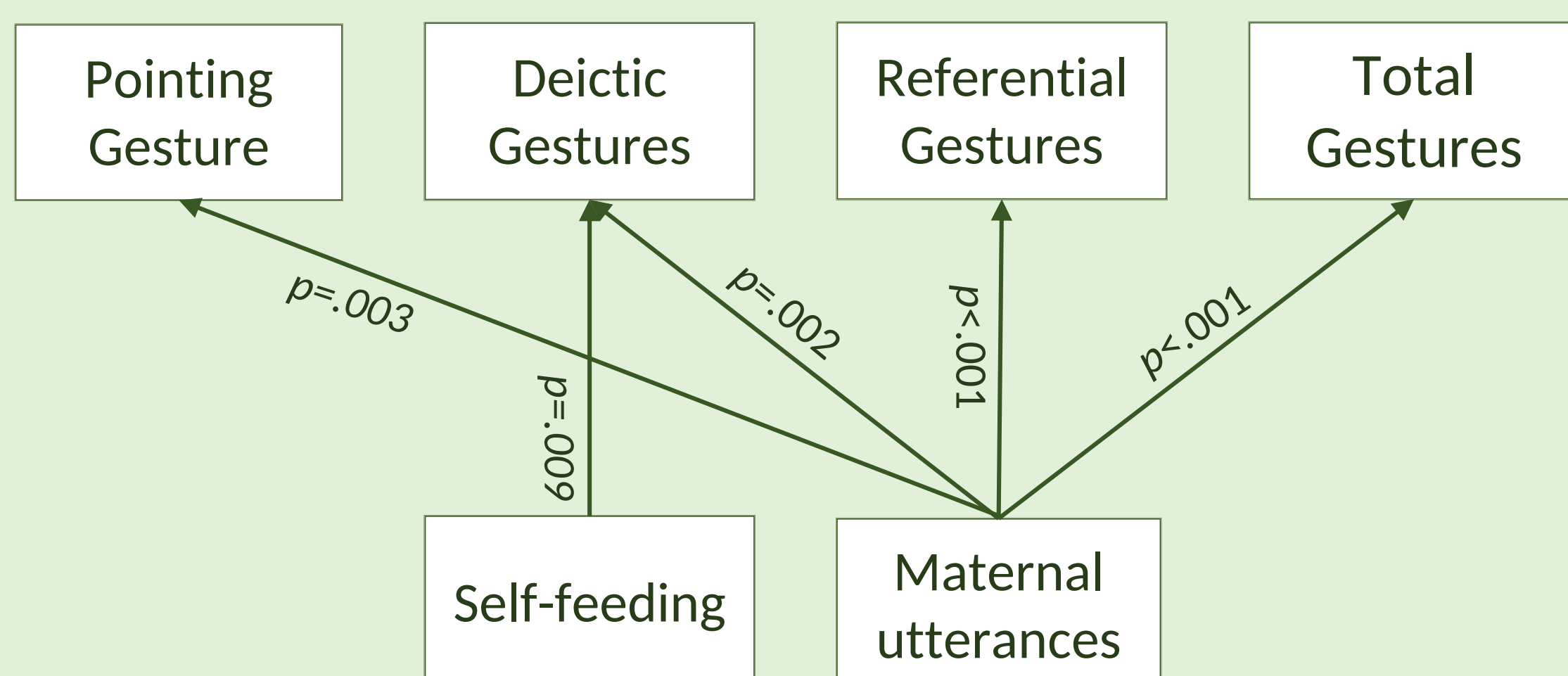
Variables:

- Proportions of infants' **deictic** and **referential gestures**, and **vocalizations**
- Proportion of **mothers' utterances**
- Proportion of **self-feeding**

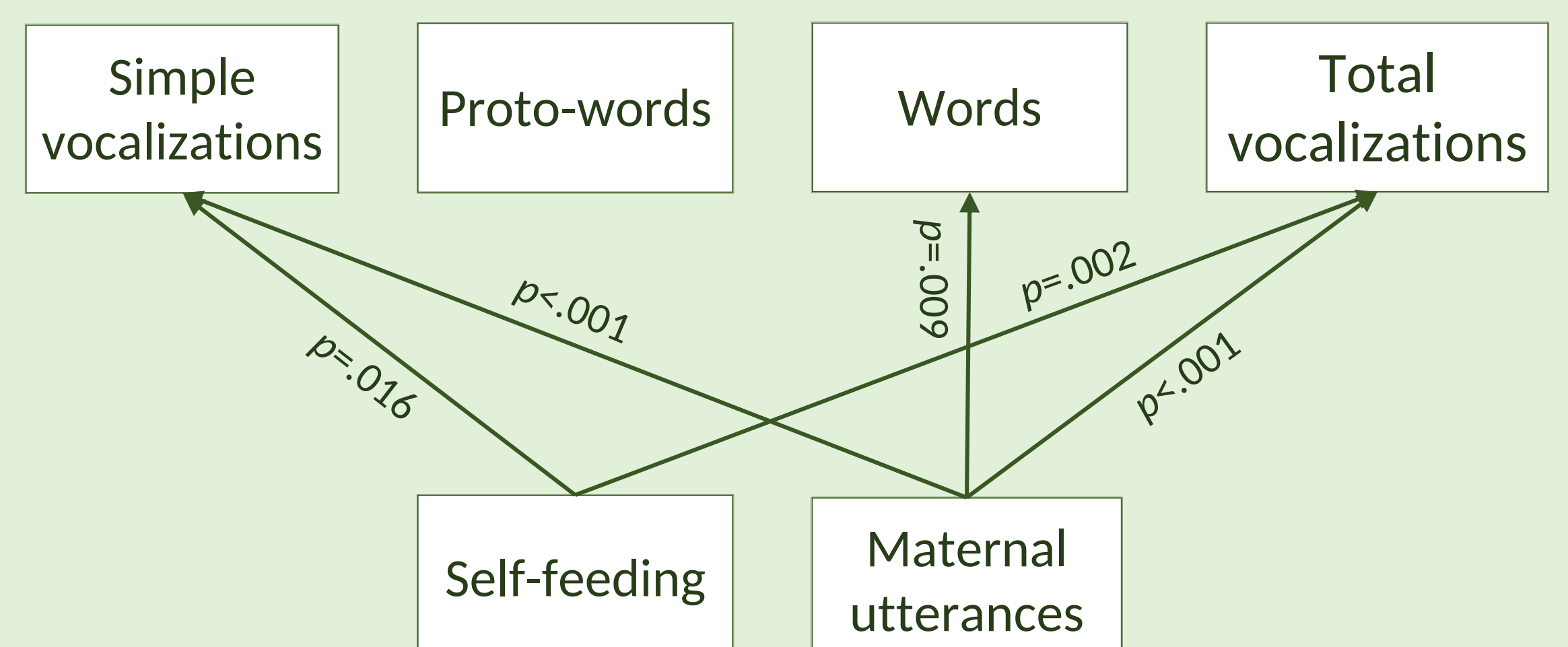


## MAIN RESULTS FROM LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSES

### Concurrent gestures



### Concurrent vocalizations

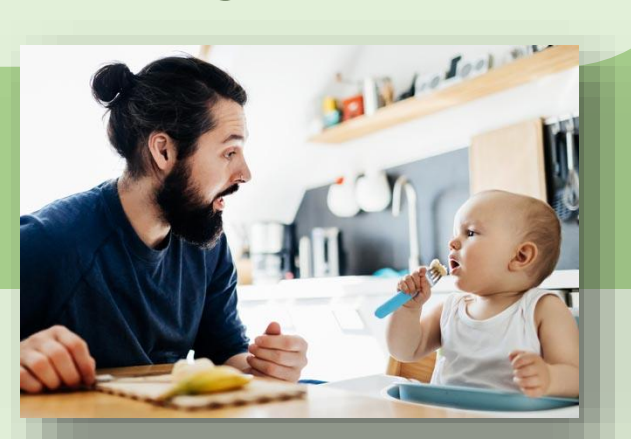


## DISCUSSION

- **Infants eating independently** for longer periods during a meal also displayed **greater communicative abilities**, as evidenced by the positive relations between self-feeding and infants' gestures and vocalizations
- This result is further strengthened by **longitudinal relations** between 1) self-feeding and sentence production at 24 mo, and 2) fine-motor skills (DP3) at 12 mo and comprehension and gestures (MCDI) at 12 mo
- Support to a widely recognized evidence: positive association between **infant-directed speech and communicative abilities**

## CONCLUSIONS

- Importance of investigating early childhood **feeding practices** for better understanding **infants' communicative development** during their first year of life, and up to 24 months
- **Exposure to language** during such crucial routines as meals also play a significant role in **infants' gestural and verbal production** at 12 mo
- Relevant **implications** for promoting the dissemination of infant feeding practices alternative to parent-led spoon-feeding



## References

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