Recent research demonstrates that social preferences for native language speakers emerge early in development, indicating that infants prefer speakers from their own society. Dialect may also be a reliable cue to group membership because it provides information about an individual's social and ethnic identity. We investigated whether infants showed social preferences toward native-dialect speakers over those with unfamiliar dialects. Infants at 9 and 12 months of age were shown videos in which two adults (a native-dialect speaker and an unfamiliar-dialect speaker) each spoke to and then offered an identical toy to the participating infants. Next, two real versions of the toys were presented to the infants in person. The 12-month-old infants preferentially reached for the toy offered by the native-dialect speaker. The 9-month-old infants also showed a preference for native-dialect speakers but this finding was not statistically significant. Our results suggest that dialects may be a reliable cue to group membership, and that infants' orientation toward members of their native community may guide their social and cultural learning.

Keywords: infants, dialect, social learning.

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