https://doi.org/10.23925/2176-2724.2025v37i4e72342

The Interaction of Two Young Children with Down Syndrome and Their Mothers

A interação de duas crianças pequenas com Síndrome de Down e suas mães

La Interacción de Dos Niños Pequeños con Síndrome de Down y sus Madres

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Abstract

Introduction: The therapeutic choices of speech-language pathologists depend on the conception of language they adopt, especially when this includes the child's subjectivity. From this perspective, the study addresses the importance of the child's insertion into enunciative chains and the impact of this insertion on language acquisition. **Objective**: This study aims to describe the interactions between two young children with Down Syndrome and their mothers. **Method**: This is a qualitative study, approved by the Ethics Committee (CAAE 6.857.321), conducted through the filming of playful interactions between mothers and children, subsequently transcribed and analyzed according to the Signs of Language Acquisition Protocol (SEAL), which allows observing the child's insertion into enunciative chains, the germinal field of language. **Results**: Both children presented enunciative signs below what is expected for their age, with interactions that dissolved quickly. It was observed that mothers did not sustain the enunciative play, failing to recognize and give meaning to the children's verbal and non-verbal manifestations. Maternal discourse tends to occupy a pedagogical position, focused on naming and teaching words, with little openness to listening. The analysis suggests that impasses in language development are not solely due to the children's limited linguistic resources but also to fragile maternal enunciative support. **Conclusion**: Enunciative analyses contribute to a broader understanding of language delays in children with Down Syndrome, highlighting the importance of the other's role in the constitution of the speaking subject.

Keywords: Mother-Child Interaction; Language; Down Syndrome.

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Authors' contributions:
APBB:study conception, data collection; analysis of the results and writing of the article.
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Received: 02/07/2025
Accepted: 12/10/2025

Resumo

Introdução: As escolhas terapêuticas do fonoaudiólogo dependem da concepção de linguagem adotada, especialmente quando esta inclui a subjetividade da criança. A partir dessa perspectiva, o estudo aborda a importância da inserção da criança nas cadeias enunciativas e o impacto dessa inserção na aquisição da linguagem. **Objetivo:** Este estudo tem como objetivo descrever as interações entre duas crianças pequenas com Síndrome de Down e suas mães. **Método:** Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética (CAAE 6.857.321), realizada por meio da filmagem de interações lúdicas entre mães e crianças, posteriormente transcritas e analisadas segundo o protocolo de Sinais Enunciativos de Aquisição da Linguagem (SEAL), que permite observar a inserção da criança nas cadeias enunciativas, campo de brotamento da linguagem. **Resultado:** Ambas as crianças apresentaram sinais enunciativos aquém do esperado para a idade, com interações que se desfazem rapidamente. Observou-se que as mães não sustentam o jogo enunciativo, deixando de reconhecer e significar as manifestações verbais e não verbais das crianças. O discurso materno tende a ocupar um lugar pedagógico, centrado na nomeação e ensino de palavras, com pouca abertura à escuta. A análise sugere que os impasses no desenvolvimento da linguagem não se devem apenas aos poucos recursos linguísticos das crianças, mas também à frágil sustentação enunciativa materna. **Conclusão:** Conclui-se que análises enunciativas contribuem para ampliar a compreensão dos atrasos de linguagem em crianças com Síndrome de Down, evidenciando a importância do lugar do outro na constituição do sujeito falante.

Palavras-chave: Interação Mãe-Criança; Linguagem; Síndrome de Down**.**

Resumen

Introducción: Las elecciones terapéuticas del fonoaudiólogo dependen de la concepción de lenguaje adoptada, especialmente cuando esta incluye la subjetividad del niño. Desde esta perspectiva, el estudio aborda la importancia de la inserción del niño en las cadenas enunciativas y el impacto de esta inserción en la adquisición del lenguaje.**Objetivo:** Este estudio tiene como objetivo describir las interacciones entre dos niños pequeños con síndrome de Down y sus madres. **Método**: Se trata de una investigación cualitativa, aprobada por el Comité de Ética en Investigación (CAAE 6.857.321), realizada a través de la filmación de interacciones lúdicas entre madres y niños, posteriormente transcritas y analizadas según el protocolo de Señales Enunciativas de Adquisición del Lenguaje (SEAL), que permite observar la inserción del niño en las cadenas enunciativas, campo de surgimiento del lenguaje. **Resultados:** Ambos niños presentaron señales enunciativas por debajo de lo esperado para su edad, con interacciones que se desvanecen rápidamente. Se observó que las madres no sostienen el juego enunciativo, dejando de reconocer y significar las manifestaciones verbales y no verbales de los niños. El discurso materno tiende a ocupar un lugar pedagógico, centrado en la nominación y enseñanza de palabras, con poca apertura a la escucha. El análisis sugiere que los obstáculos en el desarrollo del lenguaje no se deben solo a los escasos recursos lingüísticos de los niños, sino también al frágil sostén enunciativo materno. **Conclusión:** Se concluye que los análisis enunciativos contribuyen a ampliar la comprensión de los retrasos del lenguaje en niños con síndrome de Down, evidenciando la importancia del lugar del otro en la constitución del sujeto hablante.

Palabras clave: Interacción Madre-NInõ; Interacción; Lenguaje; Síndrome de Down.

Introduction

The therapeutic choices and decisions of speech-language pathologists in cases of children with language delays or disorders are fundamentally determined by the conception of language that the clinician adopts, with a key factor being whether the child's subjective constitution is included in these reflections. When the adopted conception of language includes the subject, as in the present study, it becomes important to observe the ways in which the subject operates within language. In other words, in the acquisition process, the aim is to observe what space of speech or position the child can occupy in interactions with the adult and how the child can do so [1].

Based on the propositions of Benveniste[2], a theorist of Enunciation whose notion of language implies the subject, Silva[3] points out two principles for the constitution of the speaking subject: intersubjectivity as constitutive of language, and the construction of linguistic knowledge in the discursive dimension.

Benveniste[2] presents intersubjectivity as a "condition of human experience inherent to language," a notion that functions as a kind of "a priori of his theory" (PLG I, p. 152). It represents the space and time in which the speaker puts language into use, moving within the discursive structure, so that their manifestation always refers to the other. Benveniste[2] conceives speech as a way for the subject to exist in language, an axiom of his theory. Subjectivity, in this sense, is the "speaker's capacity to propose themselves as a 'subject'" (PLG I, p. 286) and, as such, always enunciates, meaning it refers to the other and calls them to present themselves as a subject.

Silva[3] describes three operations in the language acquisition process: the conjunction I-you (child's dependence on the other's discourse) and the disjunction I-you (child-other separation), a movement in which the child has the opportunity to perform their subjective inscription in language, moving from being summoned by the other to summoning the other. This first operation seems to constitute a condition for the others. Its logic involves occupying a position in the enunciative structure, a space in which the child is constituted while simultaneously constituting themselves within discourse. The child needs to occupy a position in the enunciation structure to be able to speak.

The second operation is the constitution of reference in the child's discourse or the conversion of language into discourse, performed through two enunciative logics: the adult recognizes any child manifestation as an enunciation, anticipating what Jerusalinsky[4] also states—that the child's verbal and non-verbal acts are discoursivized and given meaning; and the adult interrogates the child in their manifestation, taking up and integrating the child's production, emerging as a co-author in the enunciative structure, in a dual appropriation of both language and the child's prior discourse, thereby authorizing the child's enunciation as part of the language structure[3].

In a third operation, the child assumes the "I" position in terms of reversibility, moving to the "you" position, and in this successive reversal, transits through enunciative chains via language. The child is thus established as a subject within language-discourse.

Therefore, it is in the intertwining between child and adult, sustained by an enunciative-discursive structure, that each, and especially the child, is assured a position and the possibility of circulation within this structure, the germinal space of speech[5].

Enunciative circulation can identify, even at initial stages, impasses in adult-child interaction, i.e., it identifies the interplay between the emergence of child speech and the child's subjective position, the point at which language acquisition occurs[6]. In discussions of language acquisition, including functional signs of mother-child dialogue is important, as it goes beyond the investigation of merely the child's linguistic productions, granting analytical value also to enunciative circulation.

Based on these propositions, Crestani[6] proposed the Signs of Language Acquisition Protocol (SEAL), aimed at analyzing enunciative circulation between child and adult. The instrument is intended for children up to two years old, validated for the first year of life by Crestani et al.[7] and for the second year by Fattore et al.[8] SEAL redirects the clinician's attention, focusing on the linguistic categories used by the child and the consequent adult responses, with the arrangements and rearrangements performed by the dyad within the enunciative chain.

Fattore, Moraes, and Crestani[8] explain the tracking nature of the protocol, stating that "the identified signs are taken as clues or indications of the process." They further clarify that "the presence of signs indicates that the acquisition process is oc-

curring as expected for the age group, considering the logical processes of enunciative mechanism emergence. Their absence indicates that the process may be at risk for a delayed language acquisition outcome, from the perspective of the emergence of a speaking subject."

The literature points out that children diagnosed with Down Syndrome exhibit significant delays in language acquisition, with consequent difficulties in engaging in communicative cycles, often explained by weaknesses in language use. However, a study by Balbo[9] shows that these impasses in mother-child interaction in DS are not solely due to linguistic fragility on the child's part and consequent adult missteps, notably in the pragmatic aspect of child speech, as traditionally postulated, but also and especially due to the child's lack of insertion or weak insertion into enunciative chains.

The present study aims to describe the interactions between two young children diagnosed with Down Syndrome and their mothers, using the SEAL protocol.

Method

This is a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory study, presented here as a multiple case study, approved by the Ethics Committee of the University where the study was conducted, under protocol number 6.857.321, following the mandatory ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects (Resolution 196/96 of the National Health Council - CNS), with the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE) signed by participants and the children's guardians, as well as the Consent Form of the institution where the data were collected.

The subjects of this study were two children (H. and M.), around two years of age, diagnosed with Down Syndrome, and their mothers.

H. is the first and only child, born from an uncomplicated pregnancy, with a diagnosis of Down Syndrome at 12 weeks gestation. At birth, a congenital heart defect was diagnosed, with favorable evolution, and no other comorbidities. H. initially experienced feeding difficulties, using a feeding tube. After a 36-day hospitalization due to respiratory issues, bottle feeding was introduced, although the child faced challenges with sucking, resulting in slow feeds. Solid foods were introduced at eight months, with gradual acceptance. In terms of motor development, significant delays were observed, with walking acquired only at two years of age. At the time of this study, the child was not yet toilet-trained and had limited functional autonomy. H. had no speech, with isolated vocalizations. Play was very primitive, with disorganized actions, object throwing, and no indications of symbolic or functional play. The mother is 45 years old, has incomplete elementary education, and is a homemaker.

M. is the first daughter, born at 35 weeks from a pregnancy monitored through routine examinations. The diagnosis of Down Syndrome was made after birth, causing significant parental impact. In addition to the syndrome, a congenital heart defect was diagnosed, requiring medical follow-up, with no other comorbidities. Since birth, M. exhibited difficulties with signs characteristic of gastroesophageal reflux, causing significant concerns regarding feeding. She experienced choking, intense reflux, including hospitalization, and currently presents mild dysphagia, with controlled feeding to prevent adverse reactions. In motor development, M. had difficulties crawling and only began walking around two years of age. She is not yet toilet-trained and lacks autonomy for self-feeding, only able to hold the bottle. M. has no speech, with limited communication abilities, constant inattention, and incipient play. The mother is 38 years old, holds a university degree, and works as a senior HR assistant.

Data collection was conducted through the filming of 30-minute playful interactions between the children and their mothers, in a space equipped with a variety of toys representing everyday objects. The toys were medium-sized, made of plastic, and free of sharp edges and toxic paint, ensuring safety during play. Available toys included kitchen sets, school and hospital playsets, plastic pots and dishes, fruits, vegetables, and food packaging, dolls representing characters in daily activities, toy tools such as hammers, saws, and screwdrivers, and medical instruments including stethoscopes, charts, and syringes. These toys were carefully organized in a large plastic box, accessible to participants to open and play freely.

Interactions were recorded using an iPhone 13 Pro Max, positioned on a tripod at a maximum distance of one meter from the child, ensuring good capture of movements and expressions during activities. Filming was performed in high definition

(4K at 60 fps), allowing precise recording of the child's and mother's reactions. The recordings were subsequently digitized for analysis. To ensure data collection accuracy, the first five minutes and the last ten minutes of each recording were excluded. This was done to avoid possible data distortions due to lack of familiarity with the environment at the beginning and fatigue at the end of the session, which could influence the child's participation and compromise result interpretation.

Analysis procedures included transcription of the recordings, verification, and application of the Signs of Language Acquisition Protocol (SEAL) to analyze mother-child interaction in terms of enunciative play.

This instrument involves observing the child's language, registering the presence or absence of the established signs for each developmental stage. SEAL scoring follows a binary criterion, where each sign is marked as present or absent. Analysis is not restricted to marking the signs but includes a qualitative evaluation of the child's enunciative organization. The protocol is divided into two parts, each with two phases, comprising a variable number of items, with phases referring to the operations described by Silva [2]: Part I - Phase 1 (2 to 6 months) with eight items and Phase 2 (7 to 12 months) with four items; Part II - Phase 3 (13 to 17 months) with seven items and Phase 4 (18 to 24 months) with five items.

The obtained data were analyzed considering the number of absent signs and their implications for the child's language development. The presence of multiple absences or the absence of critical signs is used as na indicator of developmental impasses.

Results

Table 1. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (18 to 24 months and 29 days) – Case M.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
20. The child requests objects and/or asks the adult interlocutor for clarification, marking their position as a speaker.	Absent		0
21. The child uses distinct phonemic forms to convey different meanings in their enunciation (at least two articulatory points – labial and alveolar – and two distinct consonant sound classes – at least nasals and plosives).	Absent		0
22. The child uses distinct forms (words) to convey different meanings in their enunciation.	Absent		0
23. The child combines words, directly or inversely, to convey different meanings.	Absent		0
24. When the child produces verbal forms different from adult speech, the adult interlocutor responds by making a neutral repair request (e.g., "what") or repeating the child's speech correctly, or offering a lexical item compatible with the baby's communicative intention.	Absent		0
Total	0		0

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 2. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (13 to 17 months and 29 days) – Case M.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
13. The child spontaneously and intelligibly names objects absent from the context to the adult interlocutor..	Absent		0
14. The child spontaneously names objects absent from the context, but unintelligibly, seeking through prosody a way to be understood.	Absent		0
15. The child spontaneously and intelligibly names objects, people, actions present in the enunciative context.	Absent		0
16. The child uses gestures to try to be understood when the adult interlocutor does not understand them.	Absent		0
17. The child repeats the adult interlocutor's speech as a way of organizing or reorganizing their enunciation, e.g., improving syntactic, phonological form, lexical choice, or accentuating a prosodic item.	Absent		0
18. The child converses with different adult interlocutors (father, mother, examiner).	Absent		0
19. The adult interlocutor attributes a possible meaning to the child's verbal productions in a tuned manner.	Absent		0
Total			0

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 3. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (7 to 12 months and 29 days) – Case M.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
9. The child fills their place in the interaction (utterance) with verbal sounds (syllables with varied vowels and consonants – at least two points and two manners of consonant articulation).	Absent	The child produces isolated or repetitive vowel sounds without clear consonant-vowel variations, thus not filling their place with varied verbal sounds.	0
10. The child sketches the production of protowords by mirroring the mother's speech (or substitute).	Absent	The child shows no attempts to imitate adult speech during interaction; no vocal productions indicate mirroring or protoword sketches.	0
11. The child spontaneously sketches protoword production.	Absent	No spontaneous protoword production observed; the child emitted sounds without clear signs of autonomous meaning intention.	0
12. When the mother (or substitute) is called to enunciate by the child, she reproduces the child's utterance and waits for a response.	Absent	The mother does not respond in a tuned manner to the child's manifestations, often asking questions or giving commands without considering the child's utterances, hindering communicative exchange.	0
Total			0

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 4. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (2 to 6 months and 29 days) – Case M.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
1. The child reacts to "manhês" through vocalizations, body movements, or gaze.	Absent	The mother does not use manhês.	0
2. The child fills their place in interaction with verbal sounds such as vowels and/or consonants.	Present	During play with the mother, produced sounds: Ee, nam, um, papa, bum, meme, na mã.	1
3. The child fills their place in interaction with non-verbal sounds tuned to the enunciative context (smile, scream, cry, cough, murmur).	Present	During play with the doll and mother, shakes the doll and smiles with sound, showing engagement.	1
4. The child fills their place silently with body movements and glances tuned to the enunciative context.	Present	The child fills their place silently with body movements and glances tuned to the context.	1
5. The child initiates conversation or protoconversation.	Present	The child gives the book to the mother and observes silently, demonstrating interaction initiative; then is distracted by the fallen lid.	1
6. The child and mother (or substitute) exchange glances during interaction.	Present	Glance exchanges occur in several scenes, especially during object handovers, imitation, and play.	1
7. The mother (or substitute) attributes meaning to the baby's verbal and non-verbal manifestations and sustains protoconversation when initiated by the baby.	Absent	The mother does not interpret the child's manifestations and responds with successive questions, not sustaining the context.	0
8. The mother (or substitute) uses manhês with the child, tuned to the context and awaiting responses from the baby.	Absent	The mother speaks to the child with adult-like voice and rhythm, without melodic intonation or pauses for responses.	0
Total			5

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 5. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (18 to 24 months and 29 days) – Case H.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
20. The child requests objects and/or asks the adult interlocutor for clarification, marking their position as a speaker.	Absent		0
21. The child uses distinct phonemic forms to convey different meanings in their enunciation (at least two articulatory points – labial and alveolar – and two distinct consonant sound classes – at least nasals and plosives).	Absent		0
22. The child uses distinct forms (words) to convey different meanings in their enunciation.	Absent		0
23. The child combines words, directly or inversely, to convey different meanings.	Absent		0
24. When the child produces verbal forms different from adult speech, the adult interlocutor responds by making a neutral repair request (e.g., "what") or repeating the child's speech correctly, or offering a lexical item compatible with the baby's communicative intention.	Absent		0
Total			0

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 6. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (13 to 17 months and 29 days) – Case H.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
13. The child spontaneously and intelligibly names objects absent from the context to the adult interlocutor..	Absent		0
14. The child spontaneously names objects absent from the context, but unintelligibly, seeking through prosody a way to be understood.	Absent		0
15. The child spontaneously and intelligibly names objects, people, actions present in the enunciative context.	Absent		0
16. The child uses gestures to try to be understood when the adult interlocutor does not understand them.	Absent		0
17. The child repeats the adult interlocutor's speech as a way of organizing or reorganizing their enunciation, e.g., improving syntactic, phonological form, lexical choice, or accentuating a prosodic item.	Absent		0
18. The child converses with different adult interlocutors (father, mother, examiner).	Absent		0
19. The adult interlocutor attributes a possible meaning to the child's verbal productions in a tuned manner.	Absent		0
Total			0

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 7. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (7 to 12 months and 29 days) – Case H.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
9. The child fills their place in the interaction (utterance) with verbal sounds (syllables with varied vowels and consonants – at least two points and two manners of consonant articulation).	Absent	The child produces isolated or repetitive vowel sounds without clear consonant-vowel variations, thus not filling their place with varied verbal sounds.	0
10. The child sketches the production of protowords by mirroring the mother's speech (or substitute).	Absent	The child shows no attempts to imitate adult speech during interaction; no vocal productions indicate mirroring or protoword sketches.	0
11. The child spontaneously sketches protoword production.	Absent	No spontaneous protoword production observed; the child emitted sounds without clear signs of autonomous meaning intention.	0
12. When the mother (or substitute) is called to enunciate by the child, she reproduces the child's utterance and waits for a response.	Absent	The mother does not respond in a tuned manner to the child's manifestations, often asking questions or giving commands without considering the child's utterances, hindering communicative exchange.	0
Total			0

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

Table 8. Results of enunciative signs of language acquisition: (2 to 6 months and 29 days) – Case H.

Item	Response	Observation	Total
1. The child reacts to "manhês" through vocalizations, body movements, or gaze.	Present		1
2. The child fills their place in interaction with verbal sounds such as vowels and/or consonants.	Present	During play with the mother, produced sounds: aãm, brum.	1
3. The child fills their place in interaction with non-verbal sounds tuned to the enunciative context (smile, scream, cry, cough, murmur).	Present	The mother shows the pots, and the child screams and throws objects.	1
4. The child fills their place silently with body movements and glances tuned to the enunciative context.	Absent	Briefly looks at the mother but does not sustain gaze or show tuning; when the mother tries to interact, he murmurs and throws toys.	0
5. The child initiates conversation or protoconversation.	Present	The child does not take initiative to interact; only manipulates and throws toys without seeking exchange.	1
6. The child and mother (or substitute) exchange glances during interaction.	Present	Glance exchanges occur in several scenes, especially during object handovers, imitation, and play.	1
7. The mother (or substitute) attributes meaning to the baby's verbal and non-verbal manifestations and sustains protoconversation when initiated by the baby.	Absent	The mother cannot interpret the child's manifestations or sustain the context.	0
8. The mother (or substitute) uses manhês with the child, tuned to the context and awaiting responses from the baby.	Absent	The mother uses melodic intonation and diminutives such as "mimi," "nana nenê," "papazinho	0
Total			5

Legend: Items from the SEAL protocol applied according to age range.
Source: Crestani et al. (2017); Fattore et al. (2022)

It should be noted that the children presented some enunciative instances only during the initial period:

1. They initiated some eye contact exchanges with their mothers, especially when objects were presented, but did not sustain the gaze, becoming distracted;
2. They vocalized with reference to an object in certain situations, but these productions appeared frozen, as they were repeated naming acts from daily routines.
   Example:

   Interaction with M:
   The mother is seated on the floor while M. stands holding a basket of toy fruits. The mother picks up a toy banana and shows it to M.:
   Mother: — "Ah, you don't know what this is. What is this?"
   — "You know, see, you already learned to say it."
   — "This here, look! What is this here? Look, a banana!"
   — "Who eats banana?"
   M.: — "Nãna."

   Interaction with H:
   They are seated on the floor. The mother takes a toy car and doll, places the doll in the car, and simulates a ride. H. follows with his gaze while the mother speaks:
   Mother: — "Put the baby in the car for a ride!"
   — "Go, Brumm."
   H.: — "Bummmm."

On the other hand, from the beginning, it is evident that the mothers did not attempt to interpret the children's manifestations, which is noteworthy, as they should sustain the enunciative circulation in the dialogue.

Interaction with M:
M. manipulates markers, showing interest in drawing. The mother invites her to a reading activity, while M. shows a marker and takes the sheet. The sequence occurs as follows:
Mother: — "Come here, let's read a story."
M. picks up a marker and shows it to her mother.
Mother: — "You don't love books?"
M. turns and begins drawing on the sheet, showing the marker to the mother.
Mother: — "Mommy will teach you the story of Pinocchio, look."
M. picks up another marker, starts vocalizing ("aaaa") and drawing.
Mother: — "Come see the story, look."

Interaction with H:
H. picks up a pencil to draw and looks at the mother, showing interest in the activity. However, the mother ignores the child's initiative and continues another task, putting away the pencil container:
Mother: — "Help mommy put the toys away."
H.: — "ammm"

Similarly, in a later phase (7 to 12 months), it is observed that the mothers did not occupy the children's position, being unable to participate, leaving the space of dialogic circulation empty, often reiterating their own utterances without sustaining the enunciative dialogue.

Interaction with M:
M. shows the banana to the mother, indicating an attempt to participate in the dialogue. However, the mother does not take the child's place nor sustain the initial utterance, diverting attention to a new question:
Mother: — "How does the monkey go?"
Mother: — "Do it for mommy?"
Mother: — "How does the monkey go?"

Interaction with H:
H. takes a doll and offers it to the mother, who moves it aside. The mother picks up the toy car and starts a new action:
Mother: — "Let's take the car for a ride."
H. returns to the doll, continuing to try to engage the mother.
Mother: — "Look at the car, brum, look at the car."

H.'s mother uses "manhês," an effective tool for establishing a bond with the child in most situations. However, in this case, during object and person naming, she speaks without waiting for any response from the child. She simply places the object in the scene and names it, using a singsong voice, diminutives, and simple sentences, typical of manhês, seemingly assuming this performance will please the child.

Example interaction with M:
Mother: — "Looook what fruuiit you haaaave↑" (singsong voice, vowel elongation, intonation)
— "Bananáá́á! Yum, yum, yum" (descending melody, marked rhythm, intensity)
— "Here's the breaaad↓. Do you like little breaaad↑? Yum, yum, yum" (use of diminutives, singsong voice, oscillating prosody with ascending question ending)

H. follows the speech and objects with his gaze, but there is no waiting for him to respond or participate, clearly showing that dialogic circulation is not sustained.

Discussion

Enunciation is an analytical perspective that can be applied to the investigation of mother-child interactions.[10] From this viewpoint, the child is recognized as a subject, and thus, language acquisition occurs in enunciative encounters that sustain an intersubjective fact. The data obtained in this study seem to indicate impasses in these encounters, which may partly explain the absence of speech in the children*. It is worth noting that both children presented only vocalizations and some sound productions, with very limited comprehension of the speech of others, representing a significant delay in language development, making it necessary for this study to investigate which phase of enunciative circulation they were in.

The data show that the children are inserted in the initial enunciative chains, far below what would be expected for their age, and very fragilely. There are initial sketches, represented by glances and beginnings of interactions or responses to invitations, but these links quickly dissolve; dispersion immediately disrupts cycles that are only just instantiated, as shown in the recordings. It should be noted that such disruption is due not only to the scattered behavior of the children but also to a systematic maternal withdrawal that does not attempt to sustain interaction despite the children's efforts. That is, the mothers do not respond in recognition of the children's productions, verbal or non-verbal, continuing the cycle as if irrespective of them, almost revealing a certain anxiety or depression regarding the child's performance. [11-12]

Interaction with M.:
M. takes the book and a pencil, shows them to the mother, and begins drawing.
Mother: — "What do you want, the book or to draw?"
M. points to the book and continues drawing.
The mother observes, does not respond to her daughter's gesture, and then picks up another toy, trying to draw her attention.

Interaction with H.:
H. goes to the box to get a toy car. The mother, holding the doll, says:
Mother: — "Let's listen to her heartbeat!"
H. begins taking toys out of the box and throwing them on the floor without looking at the mother.
Mother: — "Don't throw! We are playing!"
H. screams, grabs the box lid, and tries to close it while the mother insists on playing with the doll.

The data show peculiar characteristics in the performance of both mothers, in that they do not enunciatively sustain the children, and the rare instances of exchange dissolve and break. There is a slight difference between M. and H., with M. showing slightly better performance in the initial phase of the protocol, including sketches of interaction proposals. However, they equalize in later periods, with results pointing to a disruption in their insertion in enunciative chains, which seems linked to maternal performance in interactions with the daughter.

Interaction with M.:
M. picks up a pencil and hands it to her mother. The mother enters the interaction, saying:
Mother: — "I'll get the paper for drawing."
Mother: — "Let's sit then."
Mother: — "Sit with mommy!"
M. sits on the floor and begins drawing with her mother, exchanging markers.

Later phase

Interaction with M.:
M. picks up a book and shows it to the mother, signaling interest in sharing the object. The mother, however, insists on directing the interaction to another activity, proposing that M. listen to the doll's heartbeat with the toy stethoscope:
Mother: — "You know when you are sick and go to the doctor, he does this!"
The mother places the stethoscope on the doll, but M. continues to look and point to the book. Even in the child's initiative, the mother insists:
Mother: — "It's to listen to the heart."
M. looks at the mother and returns to the book, maintaining focus on the initial object, evidencing the enunciative mismatch.

* It should be noted that the interactions were filmed, allowing for the extraction of non-verbal data, such as maternal speech prosody, the rhythm of actions, gestures, and facial expressions, which were taken into account in the reflections.

Part I, Phases 1 (2-6 months) and 2 (7-12 months) of the protocol investigate aspects related precisely to maternal participation in fundamental actions for recognizing the child as a subject and, therefore, as a protagonist in enunciative cycles. The mother must bring the game of intersubjectivity to the scene, presupposing a subject in the child to refer to, attend to demands, and sustain a place of enunciation for the child. [13] Over time, disjunction occurs: the mother recognizes the child as separate from herself, as a speaker in construction. [14] However, this does not appear to happen in the studied interactions.

The recordings show the discursive structure operating in mother-child interactions, exposing two logics: on one hand, as Silva [3] points out, mothers do not respond by discoursing and giving meaning to the child's verbal and non-verbal acts; on the other hand, they stage situations in which the child is placed as a learner, obscuring the child's participation, which, although very tenuous, could have been recognized. In the alterity relationship, the mother should give voice to the child so that, together, they construct a discursive relation. In these cases, however, the mothers occupy the position of teacher, instructing words.[15]

Interaction with M.:
Mother: — "What color is this?"
— "Blue pencil."
— "Blue."
— "Blue pencil."
M. looks at the mother and walks away

Interaction with H.:
Mother: — "Here, plate."
— "Here, egg."
— "Here, grape."
— "Here, baby."

H. looks at the mother and turns to bang the container on the floor.

It is observed that H.'s mother uses "manhês" when addressing the child, an effective instrument for engagement in the initial phases of the protocol. However, she does not frame her speech with ascending prosody that opens an enunciative place for the child, using manhês only for object naming while manipulating the toys.

Interaction with H.:
Mother: — "Looook what fruuiit you haaaave↑" (singsong voice, vowel elongation, intonation)
— "Bananááá! Yum, yum, yum" (descending melody, marked rhythm, intensity)
— "Here's the breaaad↓. Do you like little breaaad↑? Yum, yum, yum" (diminutive, singsong voice, oscillating prosody with ascending question ending)

H. follows the speech and objects with his gaze, but there is no waiting for him to respond or participate, evidencing that dialogic circulation is not sustained.

It should be noted that the interaction was recorded, allowing consideration of maternal conduct beyond literal item notation. The mothers continue teaching words, and manhês may merely imprint apparent infantilization in their speech, possibly as a point of bonding. The child remains unaffected and distracted.

The mothers appear caught between two intentions: on one hand, desiring a better future for the child, implying constant stimulation and support; on the other hand, holding an idea of the child's incompetence, exemplified in attempts to train vocabulary or promote autonomy, but always with supervision, aiming for social adaptation due to delayed speech. This seems to partly explain the mothers' fixation on the speaker position, without movement in the structure, as seen in examples of pedagogical discourse. [16-17-18-19]

In short, the study data show that the children are in enunciative phases far below expected for their age. These delays may be partly explained by the type of maternal discourse during interactions, which does not enunciatively sustain the child. This choice seems to derive from contradictory, hesitant contents inhabiting the conscious and unconscious of the mothers, leading to inefficient interactive scenes regarding children's language acquisition. [4,13]

The teacher-like position appears to be a solution adopted by the mothers to cope with grief, i.e., with the dismantling of the idealized image of a child, attempting to bring their children closer to a sense of "normality." To this end, they teach words continuously, as "normal" children speak and can achieve social adaptation. However, this position obstructs enunciative circulation, freezing the children in a listener role, characteristic when exposed to pedagogical discourse framed by descending prosody, preventing them from experi-

encing the challenge of navigating the instance of words through speech.

Conclusion

Research on delays in language acquisition in children with Down Syndrome, supported by enunciative analyses, is important because it goes beyond simple linguistic description of the child's performance. It seeks to understand the discursive structure that sustains mother-child interactions, considered fundamental spaces in the process of child development.

This study represents an initial inquiry into this issue and, therefore, cannot support generalizations. However, it is significant because it highlights the need for further reflection on language acquisition delays.

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