

Siblings' Construction of Shared Meanings during Pretend Play



**JAMIE LEACH¹, RYAN PERSRAM¹, JOANNA
ROSCISZEWSKA¹, NINA HOWE¹, & GANIE DEHART²**

**¹DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY,
MONTREAL, QUEBEC, ²DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, GENESEO, NEW YORK**

Introduction



- **Shared Meanings**

- Attaining a *shared understanding* among the participants of an activity is a central issue in social-cognitive development (Carpendale & Lewis, 2006; Göncü, 1993)
- *Interactions* with others help children to construct an understanding of their *social world* (Vygotsky 1966; 1976)

- **Social Pretend Play**

- Collaborative activity shared between two or more individuals
- Co-construction of shared meanings between players may ensure the *advancement* of the *play scenario* (Verba, 1993)

Introduction



- **Play Partners and Pretense**
 - Children begin pretense with a *shared focus* moving to *negotiation strategies* in order to *maintain* and *expand* their pretend play scenario (Brown, Donelan-McCall, & Dunn, 1996)
- **Sibling Relationship**
 - Consists of intimate *knowledge*, a shared co-constructed *history*, and a great deal of *time* is spent together (Dunn, 1988)
 - These characteristics may facilitate the *negotiation* and *collaboration* skills used to construct shared meanings during play (Howe et al., 2005)

Introduction



- **Siblings' Social Interactions**

- Tend to be *complementary* due to natural *age differences* (DeHart, 1999; Hartup, 1989)
 - ✦ Asymmetry of power, can in turn lead to dynamics of both *cooperation* and *conflict* (Howe et al., 2011)
- *Older siblings* have an important role in being more experienced social partners, which may provide *guidance* for *younger siblings* who are less experienced (Bruner, 1977)



The Present Study



- **Purpose**

- To examine sibling dyads' establishment of shared meanings through the use of semantic tying strategies (e.g., extension, building on, explanation) during pretense and associations with birth order.

- **Research Questions**

- Which semantic tying strategies occur more frequently during sibling dyads' pretend play?
- Are semantic tying strategies associated with birth order?

Participants



- **Sibling dyads**

- 65 Focal child; $M = 4.7$ years (one child per dyad)
 - ✦ 37 First-born siblings; $M = 6.25$ years
 - ✦ 28 Second-born siblings; $M = 2.9$ years

- **Gender**

- ✦ 16 Female-female dyads
- ✦ 14 Female-male dyads
- ✦ 18 Male-male dyads
- ✦ 17 Male-female dyads



Procedure



- **Materials**
 - Wooden farm set, train set, or village set to promote pretend play
- **Videotaped play sessions**
 - Transcribed and parsed into subject/verb phrases
- **Coding Scheme**
 - *Semantic Tying* is one of seven categories from a larger coding scheme (Howe et al., 2005)



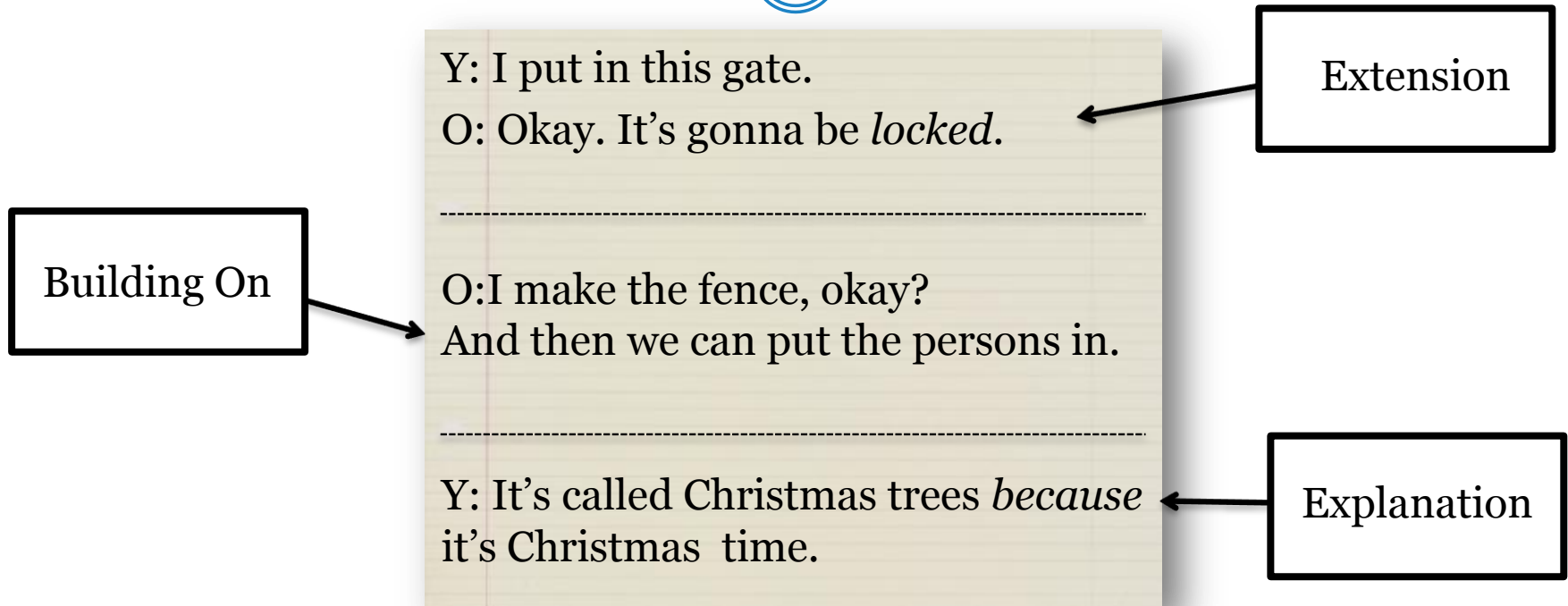
Coding: Shared Meaning



Semantic Tying Strategies

Extension	Building On	Explanation
Adding new information to partners' idea in the preceding turn	Adding new information to one's previously expressed idea	Justifying or explaining play actions

Coding: Example



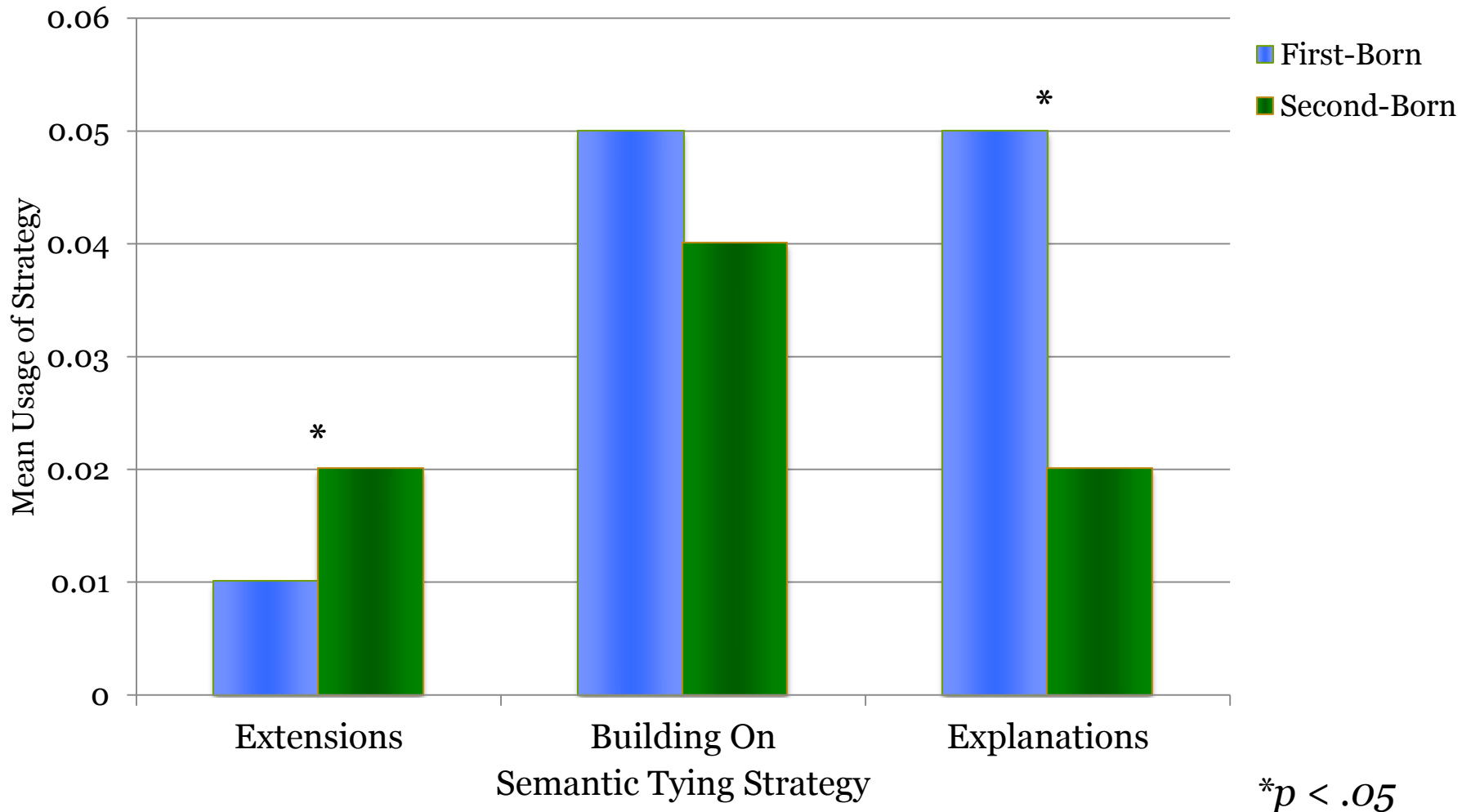
- **Proportionalized Coding:**

**Shared Meaning Strategy
(e.g., Extension)**

Number of Conversational Turns

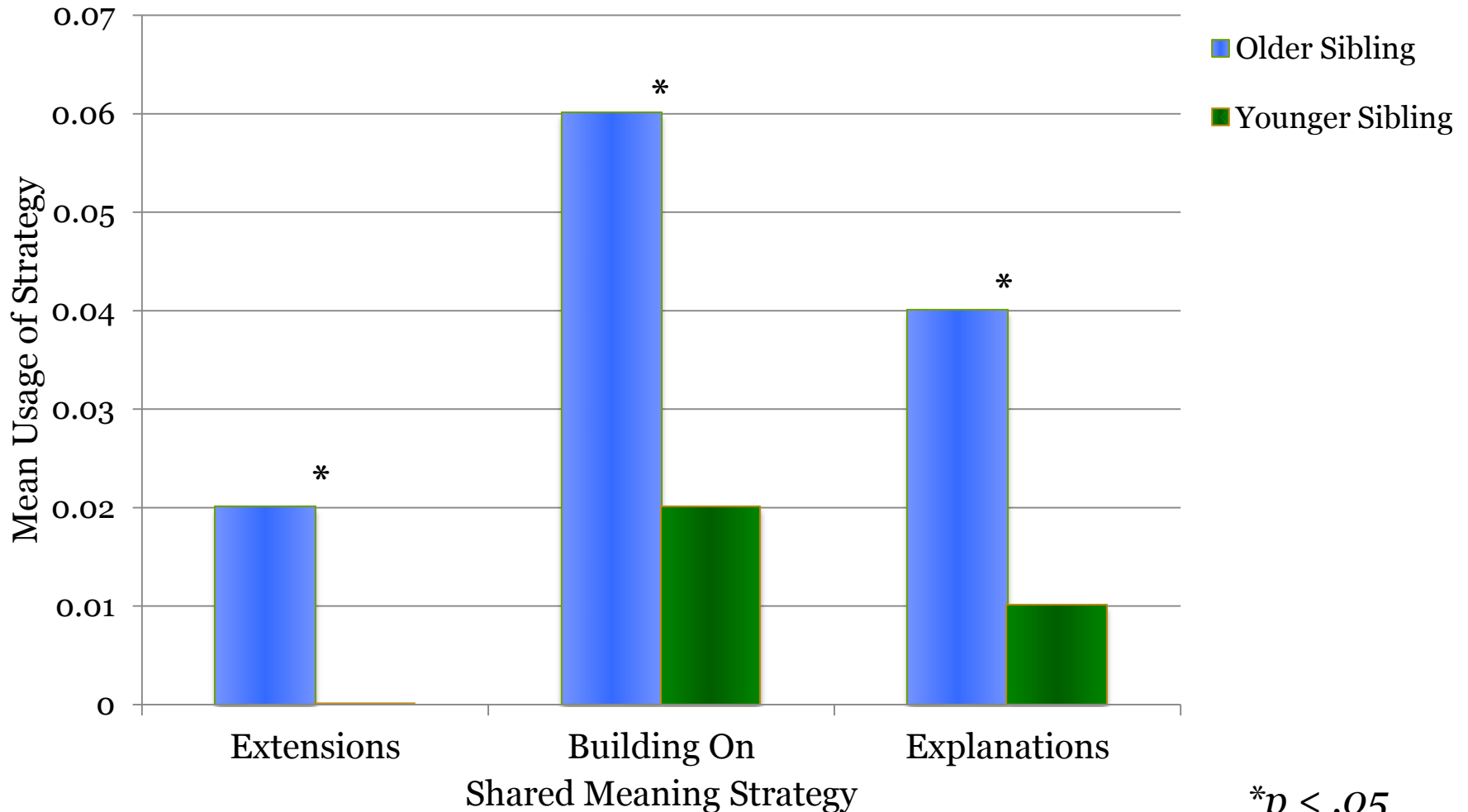
Results: One-Way ANOVAs

- Pairwise comparison for **focal children's birth order** and *shared meaning strategies* revealed:



Results: One-Way ANOVAs

- Pairwise comparison for **siblings'** *birth order* and *shared meaning strategies* revealed:



Discussion



- The sibling relationship is an *important context* for children to develop their social-cognitive understanding due to *natural developmental differences* (Dunn, 1998; Howe et al., 2005)
- Overall, siblings employed a variety of semantic tying strategies during the play sessions:
 - Semantic tying strategies were used more frequently by *the older sibling* than the focal child
 - *Extension* strategy was more frequent when the *focal child* was *younger* than the sibling
 - Explanation strategy was more frequent when the *focal child* was *older* than the sibling

Conclusion



- This study illuminates the important role of an older sibling in the *construction* of shared meanings during play, specifically in the use of semantic tying strategies.
- The findings emphasize the role of the older sibling in *facilitating* the younger sibling's social-cognitive development.

