

Representations of Prenatal Experiencing Across Languages: An Integrated Analysis Using Bayesian Hierarchical Modeling and Random-Effects Meta-Analysis

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Developmental theory typically begins at birth, but evidence of prenatal learning and sensorimotor organization does not establish whether fetal experience is structured as meaning. This study examined how authored picture-book narratives represent prenatal experiencing. Segment-level ratings from a published Japanese study were reanalyzed alongside new English-, French-, and Italian-origin corpora, yielding 23 books, 509 eligible segments, and 1,988 ratings on the 1–7 Experiencing Scale. A harmonized criterion classified a segment as Level 4 or higher when its median rating was at least 4. A book-level Bayesian beta-binomial model estimated mean book probabilities ranging from 32.240% in the French corpus to 59.079% in the Japanese corpus; every credible interval was wide, and every pairwise risk-difference interval included zero. A random-effects synthesis of within-book correlations between Experiencing level and narrative position yielded a positive association, $\rho = .258$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [.036, .455], $p = .025$. However, the trajectory differed by corpus, $F(3, 19) = 3.640$, $p = .031$. It was clear in the English corpus, $\rho = .610$, CI [.435, .740], $p = .001$; positive but uncertain in the Japanese and Italian corpora; and near zero in the French corpus. Recurrence and trajectory must be kept apart. Recurrence was cross-linguistic: all four corpora portrayed prenatal life as bodily felt meaning. Trajectory was not: only in the English books did that meaning visibly build toward birth. These findings concern authored representations rather than fetal mental states.

Keywords: prenatal psychology, experiencing theory, felt sense, Experiencing Scale, cross-linguistic comparison

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In prenatal and perinatal practice, the unborn child is routinely addressed as someone. Parents are encouraged to speak to the baby. Practitioners ask what the baby might be taking in. Whole shelves of commercially published picture books narrate pregnancy in the unborn child's own voice, and expectant parents read them aloud long before anyone can be certain what, if anything, is received. Narratives of this kind are how the field's central premise, that the prenatal period is relationally significant, reaches families. Their contents have never been examined systematically. The present study asks a question that evidence can answer: when authors write from the unborn child's perspective, do they portray prenatal life as bodily felt meaning, and does that portrayal take the same form across languages?

Canonical developmental theory offers no framework against which such narratives can be read. Freud's (1905/1953) psychosexual theory and Piaget's (1937/1955) account of how the child constructs reality have shaped childrearing, education, and clinical practice, yet both take the newborn as their point of departure. Rank (1924/1929) treated birth itself as formative, but that proposal concerns the event of birth rather than the organization of mental life preceding it. A theory that takes birth as its starting point cannot account for the processes that may persist across the transition from prenatal to postnatal life, a continuity long recognized in prenatal and perinatal psychology (Chamberlain, 1988; Verny & Kelly, 1981).

Empirical research has established that the prenatal organism responds to patterned stimulation. Newborns prefer their mother's voice (DeCasper & Fifer, 1980), fetuses retain auditory patterns (Hepper, 1991), prenatal exposure leaves cardiac and neural traces after birth (Granier-Deferre et al., 2011; Partanen et al., 2013), and language heard in utero shapes early speech perception (Mariani et al., 2023; Moon et al., 2013). Embodied accounts add that movement-generated sensory regularities scaffold cortical learning (Craighero, 2024; Yamada et al., 2016), and recent work asks how prereflective awareness might be studied without importing adult criteria (Delafield-Butt & Ciaunica, 2024; Frohlich et al., 2023). These findings establish discrimination, learning, and continuity across birth. They do not show whether prenatal experience has the structure of meaning, whether what is undergone is felt as being about something.

Gendlin's (1961, 1962) experiencing theory offers a vocabulary for this preverbal and preconceptual domain. A felt sense is a bodily felt, initially implicit whole of meaning; when a fitting symbol is found, some of that implicit meaning becomes explicit, and the experiential process moves forward. The Experiencing Scale (Klein et al., 1969) orders this movement across seven levels. Levels 1–3 remain external, behavioral, or affective without sustained reference to an inner felt referent; Level 4 marks the symbolization of bodily felt meaning; and Levels 5–7 describe its exploration, development, and sustained use as an explicit source of meaning. Because meaning need not begin as language in this framework, experiencing theory applies to accounts of early mental life.

Prenatal subjectivity cannot be observed directly, and the fetus has no external language, so interview and self-report are unavailable. One response is to analyze what a culture has already articulated. Freud (1907/1959) regarded creative writers as valuable allies whose testimony should be taken seriously, and Kitayama (1999–2002) operationalized a related premise by classifying

mother–infant figures in visual art and comparing relational motifs across settings. Picture books written from the unborn child’s perspective extend this resource to the prenatal period. They provide no evidence about an actual fetus; they provide analyzable cultural models of what prenatal experience can mean, and their first-person narratives make an otherwise inaccessible interiority explicit enough to be rated.

Oshioka and Ozaki (2020) provided the initial evidence from Japanese picture books. Three raters applied the Experiencing Scale to 48 eligible segments from five books based on narrated prenatal or birth memories. Under their stringent criterion—all three raters assigning Level 4 or higher—25 segments (52.083%) met the threshold, and every book contained qualifying material. That study did not test the relation between Experiencing level and narrative position, nor did it establish whether the Japanese pattern recurred elsewhere. The availability of the original Japanese ratings now permits a unified reanalysis in which a median criterion can be applied across panels of different sizes, and all 23 books can contribute to the same models.

The study had three aims. First, it tested whether Level 4 or higher material recurred across Japanese-, English-, French-, and Italian-origin books under a harmonized threshold. Second, it estimated corpus differences while treating books, rather than segments, as independent realizations. Third, it tested the directional hypothesis that Experiencing level increases as chronologically ordered narratives approach birth; in experiencing theory, such a trajectory would be compatible with carrying forward, in which implicit bodily meaning becomes progressively differentiated in symbolization. Whether that narrative form was shared across corpora remained an empirical question. For prenatal and perinatal scholarship, the payoff is methodological as much as substantive: it offers a way to study the field’s foundational claim without waiting for access to the fetus. What a culture writes about prenatal life is observable now, and it can be measured. Throughout, the object of inference was authored representation, not the unobservable mental state of an actual fetus.

Method

The corpus comprised 23 commercially published picture books in which the narrative was set in the womb, proceeded chronologically from intrauterine development toward birth, and adopted the unborn child as narrator or focal character. Five Japanese books were drawn from the archived data of Oshioka and Ozaki (2020), and the new corpus comprised five English-origin, seven French-origin, and six Italian-origin books. Selection was purposive rather than population-based, and all books and their editions are identified in the reference list. The Japanese dataset contained 48 eligible segments. The English, French, and Italian datasets contained 197, 187, and 77 segments, respectively, for a total of 509. For each book, the rows were arranged in narrative order after rating.

Japanese Rendering and Segmentation

The Japanese books were rated in their original language. Because the raters for the new corpora were native Japanese speakers, the English-, French-, and Italian-origin texts were rendered into Japanese with ChatGPT-4o (OpenAI, 2024) before rating. No human translator or

back-translation procedure was used. Texts were segmented sentence by sentence. Only the focal unborn child's own immediate or retrospective experience was retained for analysis. This rule matched the eligible viewpoints in the published Japanese study and the corresponding procedure for the new corpora.

Experiencing Scale Ratings

Three raters produced the Japanese data, and four raters produced the new data. The author, a Certified Focusing Professional, was the only person common to both panels. Raters independently scored each eligible segment using the Japanese Experiencing Scale manual (Ikemi et al., 1986), which operationalizes the scale developed by Klein et al. (1969). The rating range was 1–7. Segments were shuffled within books before distribution, preventing raters from reconstructing narrative order; after rating, rows were restored to story order.

The primary threshold was a median Experiencing level of 4 or higher. In the observed data, this corresponded to at least two of three Japanese raters and at least three of four new-panel raters assigning Level 4 or higher. Unanimous classification was examined as a sensitivity analysis, recognizing that unanimity is more stringent with four raters than with three.

Reliability

Reliability was evaluated separately by corpus. For the fixed panels, ICC(3,1) describes a single rating and ICC(3, k) the panel aggregate, with $k = 3$ for Japanese and $k = 4$ for the new corpora (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). Krippendorff's alpha with ordinal distance assessed agreement across the ordered scale (Krippendorff, 2019). Fleiss' kappa and mean pairwise agreement assessed the Level 4 boundary. Coefficients were interpreted numerically rather than assigned labels developed for other statistics.

Statistical Analysis

For each book, the primary prevalence analysis counted the segments whose median Experiencing level reached 4 and divided by the eligible total. A Bayesian beta-binomial model then assigned each corpus a mean probability, μ_1 , and a shared precision, ϕ . The purpose of this specification was to keep the book, rather than the segment, as the unit of evidence. A long book should not count as many short ones. Priors were weakly informative: $\text{logit}(\mu_1) \sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.500)$ and $\text{log}(\phi) \sim \text{Normal}(\text{log } 4, 1.500)$. Adaptive importance sampling used 80,000 multivariate- t proposal draws; the effective sample size was 44,569.751, and the largest normalized weight was less than .001. Reported quantities are posterior means with equal-tailed 95% credible intervals, prediction intervals for a future book chosen under the same purposive criteria, and pairwise risk differences.

Narrative position was standardized from 0 at the beginning of each book to 1 at the end. Every narrative moved chronologically toward birth, so a later position meant greater proximity to birth within the authored timeline. Within each book, Spearman's rank-order correlation related median Experiencing level to position. Correlations were transformed with Fisher's z and pooled by restricted maximum likelihood. Because only five to seven books contributed to each corpus, Hartung–Knapp intervals and t -tests were used rather than normal approximations. Mixed-effects

meta-regression tested corpus as a moderator, prediction intervals summarized expected variation across books, and leave-one-book-out analyses assessed the influence of individual titles.

Sensitivity analyses replaced the segment median with its mean, the proportion of raters assigning Level 4 or higher, the binary median-threshold outcome, and unanimity. A Bayesian cumulative-logit mixed model also retained the 1–7 ratings and included book intercepts, corpus-specific position slopes, rater location effects, and a segment random intercept. Four adaptive random-walk chains yielded 16,000 posterior draws. Sampling diagnostics were adequate for the four corpus-specific position slopes, the only quantities interpreted from this model; several nuisance parameters mixed slowly and are therefore not reported. For that reason, this model was used only to assess whether the position slopes agreed with the primary analysis. All analyses were conducted in Python 3.12.13 (Python Software Foundation, 2026), using NumPy 2.3.5 (Harris et al., 2020), pandas 2.2.3 (McKinney, 2010), and SciPy 1.17.0 (Virtanen et al., 2020). Figures were generated using Matplotlib 3.10.8 (Hunter, 2007). Statistical results are reported to three decimal places. The anonymized data, complete code, environment record, audit trail, and machine-readable outputs are included in the reproducibility package.

Ethical Considerations

The primary materials were commercially published texts. Five collaborators provided scale ratings as members of the research team, not as study participants, and no personal data were collected. Accordingly, institutional review board approval was not sought. No copyrighted illustrations or source passages are reproduced. The analysis is neither clinical nor diagnostic and makes no claims about any individual pregnancy or fetus. Copyrighted source passages and their Japanese renderings cannot be distributed publicly. An anonymized reproducibility package containing segment identifiers, narrative positions, ratings, derived variables, analysis scripts, numerical outputs, and figures is available from the author upon reasonable scholarly request. Source passages may be inspected under copyright-compliant conditions.

Results

The numbers below are of three kinds. Observed proportions describe the rated segments. Model estimates describe a typical book in a corpus, with every book counting equally regardless of length. Intervals describe what the data leave unsettled: a narrow one means the next comparable book would probably fall close to the estimate; a wide one means it could fall almost anywhere in the range.

Data Quality and Reliability

The integrated dataset contained 23 books, 509 segments, 1,988 ratings, and six anonymized raters. No rating was missing, duplicated, or outside the declared range of 1–7; observed ratings ranged from 1 to 6. Reliability was consistently higher for panel aggregates than for single ratings (Table 1). ICC(3,1) ranged from .747 to .830, whereas ICC(3,*k*) ranged from .922 to .946. Krippendorff's ordinal alpha ranged from .672 to .823. At the Level 4 boundary, Fleiss' kappa ranged from .520 to .828 and mean pairwise agreement from .768 to .917. The Japanese panel

showed the strongest boundary agreement, but all corpora showed enough disagreement to favor hierarchical modeling over treating classifications as error-free.

Table 1
Interrater Reliability by Corpus

Corpus	Books	<i>n</i>	<i>k</i>	ICC(3,1) [95% CI]	ICC(3, <i>k</i>) [95% CI]	Ordinal α	κ	Agreement
Japanese	5	48	3	.830 [.744, .894]	.936 [.897, .962]	.823	.828	.917
English	5	197	4	.814 [.776, .849]	.946 [.933, .957]	.718	.520	.768
French	7	187	4	.795 [.753, .834]	.940 [.924, .953]	.729	.537	.776
Italian	6	77	4	.747 [.667, .817]	.922 [.889, .947]	.672	.546	.775

Note. *n* = segments; *k* = raters. ICC(3,*k*) uses *k* = 3 for Japanese and *k* = 4 for the new corpora. α is Krippendorff’s alpha with ordinal distance; κ is Fleiss’ kappa at the Level 4 boundary.

Cross-Linguistic Recurrence and Prevalence

Median-defined Level 4 or higher material occurred in every corpus and in 22 of 23 individual books. Observed proportions ranged from 32.995% in the English corpus to 60.417% in the Japanese corpus (Table 2). The descriptive pooled percentages weight segments; the inferential model estimates the mean probability across books.

The beta-binomial model estimated mean book probabilities ranging from 32.240% in the French corpus to 59.079% in the Japanese corpus (Table 2; Figure 1). Every credible interval was wide, and prediction intervals for a future comparably selected book were wider still, indicating substantial between-book heterogeneity. The two intervals answer different questions. A credible interval asks where the corpus average lies. A prediction interval asks where a single new book would land, and because it must absorb the variation between books, it is always the wider of the two. The practical reading is straightforward. Books portraying prenatal experience at Level 4 or higher were present in every corpus, and in a typical book roughly a third to three-fifths of the eligible segments met the threshold. The intervals are wide for an obvious reason: each corpus rests on five to seven books.

All pairwise risk-difference intervals included zero. Relative to Japanese, the estimated differences were -24.151 percentage points for English, 95% CrI [-52.944, 6.517]; -26.839 for French [-53.135, 1.555]; and -14.135 for Italian [-42.724, 16.423]. French minus English was -2.688 [-27.864, 22.464], Italian minus English was 10.015 [-17.873, 37.437], and Italian minus French was 12.704 [-12.647, 37.604]. The within-book correlation induced by beta-binomial heterogeneity was .188, 95% CrI [.094, .318]. With this many books, the four corpora simply cannot be told apart. The data are consistent with substantial differences in either direction, and equally consistent with none. Recurrence is supported; equal prevalence is not established, and corpus differences are not resolved.

Table 2

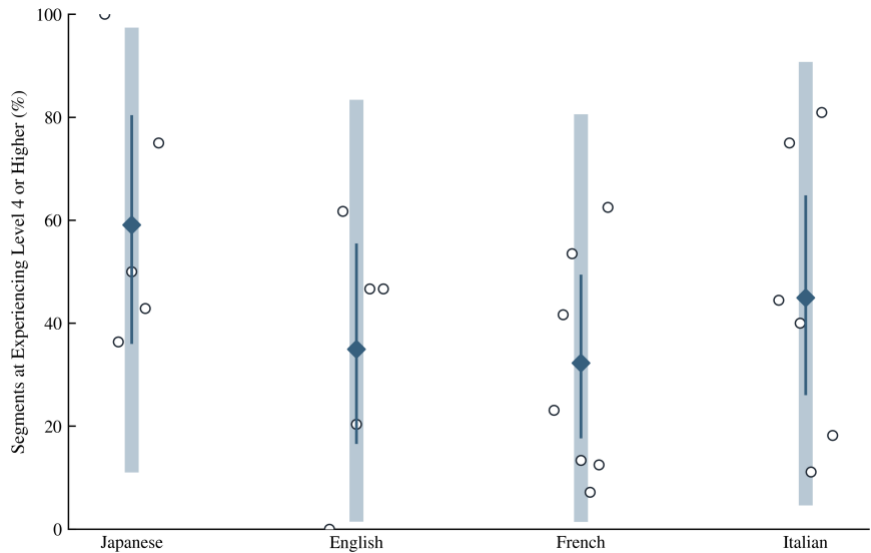
Prevalence of Segments at Experiencing Level 4 or Higher

Corpus	Books	Segments	Observed Level 4+, <i>n</i> (%)	Mean book probability, % [95% CrI]	Future book, % [95% PI]
Japanese	5	48	29 (60.417)	59.079 [36.000, 80.413]	59.025 [11.022, 97.400]
English	5	197	65 (32.995)	34.929 [16.540, 55.496]	34.892 [1.463, 83.398]
French	7	187	65 (34.759)	32.240 [17.640, 49.417]	32.152 [1.395, 80.574]
Italian	6	77	35 (45.455)	44.944 [26.025, 64.839]	44.872 [4.627, 90.736]

Note. CrI = credible interval; PI = posterior prediction interval. Observed percentages pool segments for description; model estimates treat books as independent units.

Figure 1

Prevalence of Level 4 or Higher Segments Across Books and Corpora



Note. Open circles are observed book proportions. Diamonds and thin lines are posterior means and 95% credible intervals for the mean book probability. Thick pale lines are 95% posterior prediction intervals for a future comparably selected book.

Under the panel-specific unanimity rule, observed proportions were 52.083% for Japanese, 19.797% for English, 20.321% for French, and 22.078% for Italian. The corresponding model estimates were 50.453%, 20.521%, 17.799%, and 23.892%. Because unanimity required agreement by three raters in Japanese but four in the new corpora, this sensitivity analysis was not interpreted as evidence of corpus differences.

Narrative Position

Across all 23 books, experiencing level increased with narrative position, pooled $\rho = .258$, 95% CI [.036, .455], $p = .025$, $\tau^2 = .175$, with a prediction interval from $-.559$ to $.821$. The corpus-specific estimates showed that this overall tendency was not uniform (Table 3; Figure 2). All five English books had positive correlations, and the English pooled estimate was the largest of the four and the only one whose interval excluded zero, $\rho = .610$, 95% CI [.435, .740], $p = .001$. The Japanese and Italian estimates were positive but uncertain, and the French estimate was near zero. Read across the whole set, symbolized felt meaning appeared more often late in a story than early. The English books carried that tendency almost entirely.

Corpus moderated the position association, $F(3, 19) = 3.640$, $p = .031$. The English association exceeded the French association, difference in Fisher's $z = .752$, 95% CI [.268, 1.235], $p = .004$. Its difference from the Italian association was less certain, difference = $.524$, 95% CI $[-.018, 1.066]$, $p = .057$; its difference from Japanese was uncertain, difference = $.353$, 95% CI $[-.284, .989]$, $p = .260$. Leave-one-book-out estimates for English ranged from $\rho = .531$ to $.671$, and every

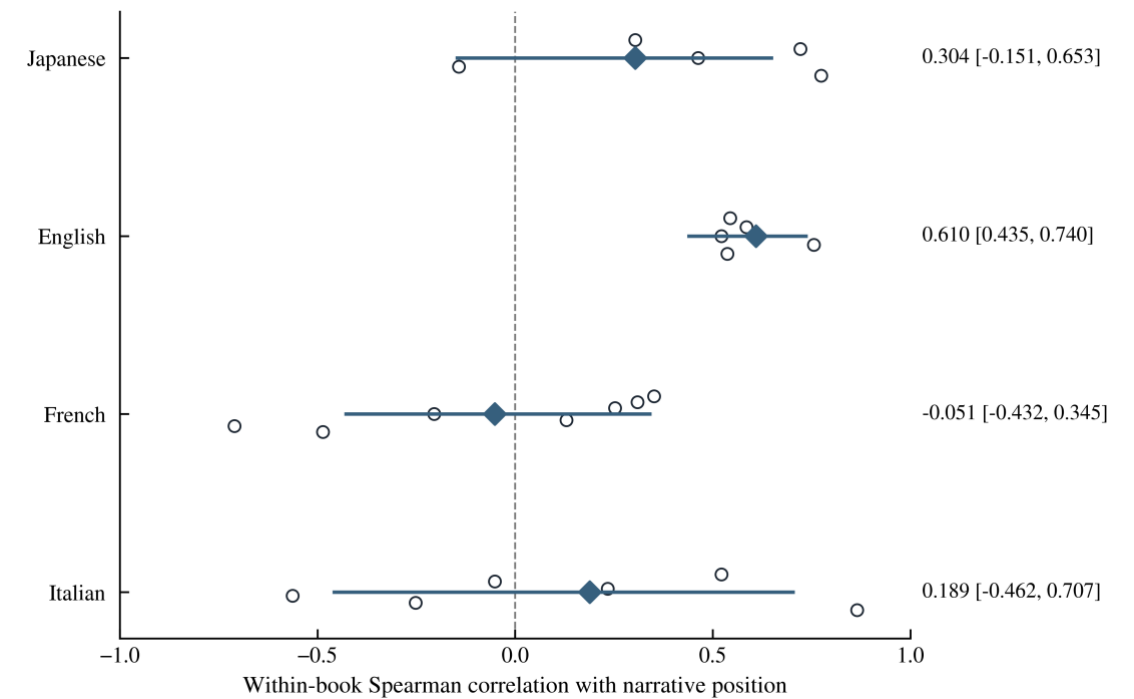
interval retained a positive lower bound. The English–French contrast is the one that holds. Comparisons with the Japanese and Italian books pointed the same way but did not settle.

Table 3
Random-Effects Synthesis of Within-Book Associations with Narrative Position

Corpus	Books	Pooled ρ	95% CI	p	τ^2	95% prediction interval
Japanese	5	.304	[−.151, .653]	.135	.000	[−.151, .653]
English	5	.610	[.435, .740]	.001	.021	[.235, .827]
French	7	−.051	[−.432, .345]	.770	.110	[−.745, .695]
Italian	6	.189	[−.462, .707]	.509	.281	[−.871, .938]

Note. Correlations were pooled by restricted maximum likelihood after Fisher’s z transformation. Confidence intervals and tests use the Hartung–Knapp adjustment.

Figure 2
Experiencing Level and Narrative Position



Note. Open circles are individual books. Diamonds and horizontal lines are random-effects pooled correlations and 95% confidence intervals.

Sensitivity analyses using alternative outcome definitions largely reproduced this pattern. Corpus moderation remained evident when mean ratings were used, $F(3, 19) = 5.695, p = .006$, and when the proportion of raters assigning Level 4 or higher was used, $F(3, 19) = 6.906, p = .002$. The binary median-threshold analysis showed no clear evidence of moderation, $F(3, 17) = 2.029, p = .148$, whereas the unanimity analysis again showed moderation, $F(3, 16) = 5.325, p = .010$.

The rater-adjusted ordinal model reproduced the pattern obtained in the primary analysis. On the latent logit scale, the English slope was 6.759, 95% CrI [5.289, 8.071], and the posterior probability of a positive slope was 1.000. Slopes were 1.295 for Japanese [-.790, 3.393], probability = .889; -1.367 for French [-2.818, .376], probability = .057; and .806 for Italian [-1.057, 3.143], probability = .753. A model that used every rating rather than the median, and that let raters differ in severity, reached the same verdict about the English books. The English trajectory is therefore not an artifact of median aggregation or of one rater’s severity.

Discussion

Two findings define the contribution. First, Level 4 or higher material recurred across Japanese-, English-, French-, and Italian-origin corpora under one harmonized rule. The Japanese raw ratings could now enter the same book-level model rather than serving only as a published

reference. Second, the way symbolized felt meaning unfolded across a story was not uniform. A marked rise appeared in every English book, whereas Japanese and Italian estimates remained positive but uncertain, and the French estimate was near zero.

The recurrence result gives a precise scope to the theoretical claim. Across 23 purposively selected books, authors working in four linguistic settings portrayed prenatal life not merely as sensation or reaction, but as bodily experience carrying implicit significance. That claim now rests on firmer ground than it would on a three-corpus analysis supplemented by a descriptively similar earlier study, because all four corpora were evaluated under a common threshold and model. It remains a claim about recurrence in the assembled books, not equal prevalence across national literatures and not a population universal.

The narrative-position result adds a developmental form to the analysis. Experiencing theory describes meaning as a process: an implicit bodily whole becomes progressively articulated rather than remaining fixed (Gendlin, 1962, 1981). In these books, narrative time moved from intrauterine development toward birth; later position therefore indexed greater represented proximity to birth. The consistent English rise is compatible with gradual elaboration of symbolized prenatal experience as birth approaches. On this reading, the narrative does not simply accumulate events; bodily meaning becomes increasingly differentiated and expressible.

This interpretation must remain at the level of representation. Narrative position is not a gestational measure, and an author's portrayal does not reveal fetal consciousness. The observed trajectory may reflect a culturally available plot form, a convention of English-language narration, translation-sensitive features, or characteristics of the selected books. The absence of a clearly estimated increase in the French and Italian corpora is therefore central rather than inconvenient: Level 4 material recurred across corpora, but progressive elaboration was corpus-specific. The Japanese estimate provides a non-machine-translated positive reference, yet its uncertainty prevents a claim that the English pattern is broadly shared.

The contrast between recurrence and trajectory suggests a distinction that prenatal and perinatal psychology can use. Experiencing theory may identify a representational possibility that appears across linguistic settings—the portrayal of prenatal life as bodily felt meaning—without requiring every literary tradition to organize that meaning along the same temporal path. Shared experiential structure and culturally variable symbolization can coexist. I take this to be the more useful formulation. Treating language and book as rival causes obscures the fact that books are the independent realizations through which corpus-level tendencies become visible.

The measurement results also clarify the role of aggregation. Aggregate ICCs were high across corpora, but single-rater reliability and boundary agreement were lower. Retaining individual ordinal ratings made it possible to distinguish stable panel-level measurement from disagreement at the Level 4 threshold. The rater-adjusted model further linked the three- and four-person panels through their one common member and reproduced the English position pattern. However, it could not fully separate rater-panel composition from corpus because only one rater bridged the panels.

Implications for Practice

These findings are directly relevant to how practitioners select narrative material. Prenatal and perinatal practice frequently uses stories to help expectant parents imagine and address the unborn child (McCarty, 2012), yet that selection has rested on availability and personal preference rather than on any description of what such books contain. The present estimates supply that description. Under a harmonized criterion, mean book probabilities of Level 4 or higher material ranged from 32.240% in the French corpus to 59.079% in the Japanese corpus, and 22 of the 23 individual books contained qualifying segments. Availability is therefore not the constraint. In each of these four linguistic settings, a practitioner can expect to find commercially published books that portray prenatal life not as sensation alone but as bodily experience carrying implicit significance and can expect roughly a third to three-fifths of the eligible text in such a book to do so.

The corpus-specific trajectory carries a caution that is easy to miss. Corpus moderated the association between Experiencing level and narrative position, $F(3, 19) = 3.640$, $p = .031$. The rise toward birth was clear in every English book, including *Around the Womb in 280 Days* (Jones, 2019) and *Through My Mommy's Bellybutton* (Lui, 2013), and near zero across the French corpus. Because narrative time in these books runs from intrauterine development toward birth, the English pattern amounts to a particular story shape, one in which meaning accumulates and becomes more explicit as birth approaches. That shape is not universal. A practitioner who works across languages, or who offers translated English material to families whose own literature is organized differently, may be introducing a narrative form that is not reflected in the family's own literary tradition. Whether that matters is an empirical question, but it should at least be a deliberate choice rather than an unnoticed one. Attending to it is consistent with the field's emphasis on the cultural shaping of communication with and about babies.

The procedure used here is not specific to picture books. Segment-level Experiencing Scale ratings, a median criterion, and book-level modeling can be applied to any corpus of prenatal narrative that a practitioner or researcher already holds—birth stories, pregnancy journals, session records—and they yield quantities that can be compared across settings. This provides an additional evidence-based measure for material the field has largely examined qualitatively. Beyond this methodological contribution lies a more consequential question tied to the field's practical aim of prevention: supporting early relationships so that difficulties surrounding birth are less likely to result in lasting harm. Whether the narrative resources available to a family influence the relational stance parents adopt during pregnancy, and whether that stance affects how birth is subsequently experienced and integrated, remains untested. The present design cannot address this question because it measured texts rather than families. Testing it would require pairing corpus-level description with prospective measurement of parents and infants. The present results make such a study specifiable.

Limitations and Future Directions

Two limitations deserve more weight than the others. The first is translation. Only the Japanese books were rated in their source language; the English-, French-, and Italian-origin books were rated after machine rendering into Japanese, with no human translator and no back-

translation. Machine translation does not distribute its errors evenly. It tends to regularize idiom, to resolve ambiguity that a source text deliberately leaves open, and to render implicit bodily reference in more explicit terms—precisely the features the Experiencing Scale is designed to detect. If that tendency is stronger for some source languages than for others, it could raise or lower ratings differentially and could in principle manufacture the corpus difference reported here. The Japanese corpus offers a partial check, since it passed through no machine at all, and its estimate was positive but imprecise. That check is reassuring rather than decisive. Until the new corpora are rated by trained source-language raters, translation remains a live rival explanation for the English trajectory.

The second is selection. The 23 books were assembled purposively, one title at a time, from what proved findable and purchasable; they were not sampled from any defined population of children's literature. The corpora also differ in how they were assembled. The five Japanese titles come from an earlier study with its own inclusion decisions, whereas the other eighteen were gathered for the present analysis. Corpus, translation status, selection route, and panel composition therefore vary together, and this design cannot separate them. A difference observed between corpora may be a difference in what happens to be available and locatable in a language rather than a difference in that language's literature.

Other constraints are more ordinary. Viewpoint eligibility was not independently replicated. The Experiencing Scale was developed for psychotherapy discourse rather than fiction, and its levels may behave differently when applied to authored narration. Only five to seven books contributed to each corpus, which is why the corpus estimates and prediction intervals are as wide as they are.

A more definitive replication should sample books systematically, use trained source-language raters, harmonize panel composition, retain independent eligibility classifications, and preregister the model and the smallest effects of interest. Represented gestational stage should be coded directly in addition to narrative position. These steps would test whether the English trajectory reflects language, translation, genre, or characteristics of the present sample and would clarify whether the positive but uncertain Japanese and Italian estimates become more precise as additional books are included.

Conclusion

Across 23 Japanese-, English-, French-, and Italian-origin picture books, representations of symbolized prenatal felt meaning recurred under a harmonized analytic rule. How that meaning developed toward birth was another matter. Progressive elaboration was clear and robust in the English books and unresolved everywhere else. Recurrence and trajectory are therefore separate findings and should not be merged. Experiencing theory offers prenatal and perinatal psychology a testable account of how preverbal meaning can be represented, and the present evidence bears on authored narratives rather than directly on fetal mental states. The study provides a reproducible procedure for extending developmental inquiry backward across birth without mistaking cultural representation for observation of the fetus.

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