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Theory of Mind and Language in Developmental Contexts

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Abstrak

Contextual perspectives on cognitive development have recently declared the importance of the socio-cultural dimension in theory of mind (ToM) development, so for this reason that it is now crucial to study the relation between ToM and language. In this book it is discussed from a developmental perspective (early infancy to adulthood), and attention is paid both to typical and atypical situations, focusing in particular on sociocultural factors. On the one hand, studies on typical development describe a chronological path that helps to find ?prototypical? ways of understanding, as well as delays and deviances, on the other, studies on atypical development help to highlight aspects of normal development. A more detailed analysis of the theme is given below. The chapters by Antonietti, Liverta-Sempio, Marchetti and Astington (?Mental language and understanding of epistemic and emotional mental states: contextual aspects?) and Olson, Antonietti, Liverta-Sempio and Marchetti (?Mental verbs in different conceptual domains and different cultures?) examine the relationship between ToM and language by studying the comprehension of mental verbs. The first study analyses the developmental trend of such understanding, in the first years of school, and its relation to standard linguistic tests and theory of mind. The second examines the later phase in the development of mental verb understanding, as such, up to the university years, in order to show how it may be linked to conceptual domains (folk psychology, history, mathematics) and countries (Canada, Italy, Serbia, Tanzania). Two main finding emerge from these studies: the first shows that mental verb understanding is a lengthy process that may still not be entirely consolidated even during university years: the cultural plausibility of standard theory of mind tasks should be questioned. In fact, performances showed interpretable trends in Euro-American cultural contexts, whereas they were more or less random in African contexts.