

## Turn-Taking and Leading Roles in Early Cognition: Interaction of Social Cognition and Language in Development

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**Abstract :** Background: Our study aims to clarify how language fosters further cognitive development and how we eventually arrive at the complex human specific skill of pragmatic competence and reveal what levels of mentalization and theory of mind are in place before language. Method: Our experimental pragmatic investigation maps the interaction of mentalization and pragmatic competence. We map the different levels of mentalization that empower different levels of pragmatic meaning construction and evaluate the results with statistical analysis (MannWhitney and ANOVA). Analyzing the comprehension of literal and non-compositional (figurative) utterances, we apply linguistic trials, among them metaphor-, irony-, irony with surface cue-, humor- and the recognition of maxim infringements trial in neurotypical (NT) preschoolers with a coherent and comparative methodology. Results: The findings reveal the relationship and direction of interaction between Language and theory of mind. On the one hand social-cognitive skills enhance, facilitate and provide a basis for language acquisition, and in return linguistic structures (DeVilliers 2000, 2007) provide a framework for further development of mentalizing skills. Conclusions: Findings confirm that this scaffolding becomes a mutually supportive system where language and social cognition develops in interaction. Certain stages in ToM development serve as a precursor of understanding grammatically complex sentences, like embedded phrases which mirror embedded mental states; which, in turn, facilitates the development of pragmatic competence, thus, the social use of language, integrating social, cognitive, linguistic and psychological factors in discourse. Future implications: Our investigation functions as a differential-diagnostic measure, with typically developing results thus serve as a baseline in further empirical research for atypical cases. This enables the study of populations where language and ToM development is disturbed, reveals how language and ToM are acquired and interact, and gives an insight into what this has to do with clinical symptoms. This in turn can reveal the causal link to the syndrome at hand, which can set directions for therapeutic development and training.

**Keywords :** theory of mind, language development, mentalization, language philosophy, experimental pragmatics

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