

Developmental Psycholinguistic Approach To Conversational Skills - A Continuum Of The Sensitivity To Gricean Maxims

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Abstract : Background: the experimental pragmatic study confirms a basic tenet in the Relevance theoretical views in language philosophy. It draws up a developmental trajectory of the maxims, revealing the cognitive difficulty of their interpretation, their relative place to each other, and the order they may follow in development. A central claim of the present research is that social-cognitive skills play a significant role in inferential meaning construction. Children passing the False Belief Test are significantly more successful in tasks measuring the recognition of the infringement of conversational maxims. Aims and method: Preschoolers' conversational skills and pragmatic competence is examined in view of their mentalization skills. In doing so it use a measure of linguistic tasks, containing 5 short scenarios for each Gricean maxim. it measure preschoolers' ToM performance with a first- and a second order ToM task and compare participants' ability to recognize the infringement of the Gricean maxims in view of their social cognitive skills. Results: Findings suggest that Theory of Mind has a predictive force of 75% concerning the ability to follow Gricean maxims efficiently. ToM proved to be a significant factor in predicting the group's performance and success rates in 3 out of 4 maxim infringement recognition tasks: in the Quantity, Relevance and Manner conditions, but not in the Quality trial. Conclusions: the results confirm that children's communicative competence in social contexts requires the development of higher-order social-cognitive reasoning, and reveal the cognitive effort needed for the recognition of the infringement of each maxim, yielding a continuum of their cognitive difficulty and trajectory of development.

Keywords : maxim infringement recognition, social cognition, Gricean maxims, developmental pragmatics

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