Mental-state Talks of Mothers with 2-year-olds in Pretense/Role-play and Book Reading Contexts

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine maternal mental-state talks while mothers and their 2-year-old children interacted in two contexts which were pretense/role-play and shared book reading contexts. Thirty-six dyads of mothers and their 2-year-old children participated in this study. The results showed that the mothers made more references to mental-state in the pretense/role-play context than in the book reading context, but the ratio of using the three types of mental state talks (i.e., desire, feeling, and cognition) did not vary with the contexts. The most frequently used mental-state talk by the mothers was 'desire' in both contexts and the tendency to use the three types of mental-state talks in the two contexts was related. The results of this study suggest implications for providing useful information on the role of mothers in the development of children's theory of mind.

Keywords

mental-state talk. role of mother; pretense/role-play context; shared book reading context
References


One of the major developments of the second year of human life is the emergence of the ability to pretend. A child's knowledge of a real situation is apparently contradicted and distorted by pretense. In this article I shall deal with the significance of the emergence of pretense in terms of the infant's capacity for internal representation. To conceptualize representation, an information-processing, or cognitivist, approach is taken (Fodor, 1976; Marr, 1982). In the course of this, pretense will acquire a new theoretical definition. The resulting model has implications for both normal and abnormal development. In both functional play and error acting as if, the as-if component really only exists from the observer's point of view. From the actor's point of view, the actions are serious. This research investigated 3- to 5-year-old's understanding of the role of intentional states and action in pretense. There are two main perspectives on how children conceptualize pretense. One view is that children understand the mental aspects of pretense. The experiments in this article used a novel approach to test these two interpretations. Children were presented with two types of videotaped scenarios. In Experiment 1, children were presented with a scenario in which people wanted to be like something else (e.g., a kangaroo) and either acted like it or did not act like it. Children were asked whether the protagonists were pretending and whether they were thinking about the pretend entity.