CULTURAL-SPECIFIC OR CROSS-CULTURAL ? THE SEQUENCE OF THEORY-OF-MIND IN TAIWANESE CHILDREN

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Abstract –

Problem Statement
The theory of mind (ToM) is an important foundation of interpersonal and communication skill, referring to the ability to predict thoughts, feelings, needs, and beliefs. Prior research demonstrates that understanding of theory of mind develops at different paces in children raised in different culture. The question remains that are theory-of-mind understanding a cross-cultural sequence, or are they culture-specific?

Methods
We addressed the question by comparing 53 Taiwanese children's performance with prior study of 140 Chinese-speaking children in Beijing and 135 English-speaking children in the United States and Australia conducted by Wellman et al. (2006).Utilizing a theory-of-mind scale developed by Wellman & Liu (2004),captures sequences of difficulty among the ToM scales for Taiwanese children.

Results
For Taiwanese students, ToM understandings from the easiest to most difficult were 1st) knowledge-ignorance,2nd) diverse desires (people can have different desires for the same thing),3rd) diverse beliefs (people can have different beliefs about the same situation), 4th) false belief (something can be true, but someone might believe something different), and 5th) hidden emotion (someone can feel one way but display a different emotion). The sequence we found is mostly compatible with Chinese-speaking children in Beijing, and English-speaking children in the States. The most difficult task for children in all three areas is hidden emotions, followed by false beliefs. However, children in different countries result in different sequence for the easier tasks: knowledge-ignorance, diverse desires, and diverse belief.

Conclusion
In conclusion, results reveal a common sequence of understanding, as well as sociocultural differences in children's developing theories of mind, which will be discussed in the article.

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