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Language: the Ultimate Mindshaper

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The standard view in social cognition considers mindreading, the capacity of attributing mental states to others, as the linchpin of social cognition. We cannot cooperate, get involved in social learning or navigates in social context without the capacity of understanding the other's mind. On the other hand, a set of developmental psychologists has defended that the acquisition of high-level social cognition is deeply intertwined with some linguistic practices such as that-clause use (Wilde and Astington, 2005). According to those findings, linguistic representations allow us to attribute *propositional attitude* to each other in order to predict and explain their behaviour. Contrary to low-level mindreading, language-based mindreading allows us to represent an agent as being in a relationship with specific mental content or proposition. Therefore, we can highlight two assumptions of the standard picture: (1) the linchpin of our social cognition is mindreading (Carruthers and Smith, 1996); (2) high-level mindreading is based on the language capacity to describe relationships between agents and mental contents.

The aim of this presentation is to argue against those two assumptions. Firstly, I will present an alternative to the standard view, known as mindshaping view (Zawidzki, 2013). According to the mindshaping view, mindreading abilities are a by-product of the capacity of human being to shape other minds. Mindreading is only possible in social context where mind have been already shaped to be interpretable and able to produce rational behaviour. From this view, we cooperate and understand each other because we have been tough to behave following social norms that make us understandable and easy to cooperate with. I will present an argument in favour of the evolutionary viability of this view.



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Secondly, I will argue that the acquisition of high-level social cognition is not based on the descriptive power of language. On the contrary, high-level social cognition appears when infants acquire the capacity of making explicit rational norms behind behaviour by using propositional attitude ascriptions. From this view, propositional attitude ascriptions do not represent relations between agents and propositions but they make explicit the commitments of agents with certain pattern of behaviour. The main reason to support this idea is that understanding propositional attitude ascription in this way can explain a wider range of uses. For instance, avowals, second-person contexts, parenthetical uses or moral judgments embedded in propositional attitude ascriptions. Moreover, descriptivist view cannot explain some empirical evidence related with the false-belief success.