PARENTAL INDUCTIVE DISCIPLINE AND THEORY OF MIND IN FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

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Background and aims: Inductive discipline that contains reasoning about consequences of child’s behavior including how it can affect the mental states of others promotes theory of mind development (ToM) in children. However, empirical evidence relate to so-called ‘first-order ToM’. There is no data on the relationship of induction in disciplinary context and advanced ToM, i.e. more complex social skills such as understanding of ambiguity or higher order false belief understanding (Miller, 2012). On the basis of the role played by parent’s induction in development of first-order ToM in children, we investigated if this role still remains important according to more advanced ToM skills.

Methods: We tested 120 5-year-olds (M = 67.75, SD = 1.21 months, 59 girls) and their parents (95 mothers). The children participated in five advanced ToM tasks: three ambiguity tasks (Carpendale & Chandler, 1996; Tafreshi & Racine, 2016) and two second-order false belief tasks (Sullivan, Zaitchik & Tager-Flusberg, 1994). The parents gave an interview in which they were asked to describe their behavior in six disciplinary situations (i.e. child calls somebody names). Responses were transcribing and coding according to power assertion-induction dimension provided by Hart and colleagues (1999), which allows to obtain one sum score reflecting the level of induction used by parent.

Results: Positive correlation occurred between the level of parent’s induction and the ambiguity sum score in children (r = .19, p < .05). We also find positive association between induction and the sum score obtained by children in two second-order false belief tasks (r = .21, p < .05).

Conclusions: The results indicate that higher levels of induction used by parents in disciplinary context promotes development of more complex ToM skills in children. We discuss these results in the light of theories that point out the role of social interactions in ToM development.