A conversational intervention procedure as a tool for improving and evaluating narrative skills: A study of 5-to-8 years old French children.

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To cite this version:

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Measures of Narrative Content

1. Overall coherence score for a story of misunderstanding
   A score of 0 to 20 points was attributed for: narrative structure (max. 3 pts), explanation of key events (max. 2×4=8 pts), expression of False Belief and of its rectification (max. 4×3=12 pts) and expression of all the main elements (max. 2 pts).

2. Causal explanation of the key events: pushing, pushing back, showing the stone, picking up the partner (Examples of causal explanation (translated from French): 1) pushing: He has stumbled on a stone and has pushed the other one. 2) pushing back: He puts push back because he thought he had pushed him on purpose. 3) showing the stone: He shows the stone to say that it wasn’t his fault. 4) picking up the partner: He explains to him and the child then helps him to get up.

3. References to the characters’ intentional and epistemic states: intentional: does/doesn’t do it on purpose; epistemic: believe, know...

4. False belief expression (FB score: from 0 to 4): For the higher scores (3 and 4), children - express the unintentional and/or physical cause of the first push: if a subject say: “I have pushed someone” AND attribute to one of the characters the belief that the push was intentional: “l’autre croit qu’il l’a fait exprès ‘the other one believes he did it on purpose’”

5. Rectification of the false belief expression (RBC score: from 0 to 6): For the higher scores, children - have P1 explain the physical cause of the first push AND - have P2 understand and clear the misunderstanding: et il disait que c’est à cause de ce caillou que je t’ai poussé... ‘and he said that is because of this stone that I pushed you’

RESULTS

For all measures and in all groups, a major effect of causal-oriented conversation is found on all subsequent narratives. Post-hoc comparisons showed that second, stability and generalization narratives have a higher score than the first narrative, and, for the most part, are not statistically different among themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The findings of earlier studies are validated. A causal-oriented conversation has a major effect on the content of all children’s subsequent narratives: Increase in overall score of coherence, explanation of events, expression of epistemic states, false belief and rectification of misunderstanding. The effect is stronger for children older than 5 to 6 yrs. 2. This effect persists one week later (stability narrative) and 3. Is generalizable for all measures (excepted epistemic states and RBF in 5 to 6 year olds). 4. Children who express the FB in at least one of the four narratives tend to be those who have good mastery of ToM FB tasks. Results confirm the importance of the conversational procedure for improving young children’s narrative functioning and its usefulness in the assessment of children’s narrative competencies. 5. The stone story (Fusaro 1980, Veneziano & Hudelot 2006)