

Learning Propositional Attitudes- Becoming an Agent by Developing ‘conceptual metaphors’

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First-person concepts (FPC) like I, me, my, myself etc are not used as soon as a child starts learning a language; FPC comes in the language of a child after a period of development. Povinelli and colleagues (Povinelli, 2001) show that it is not prior to approximately three years that children start understanding the temporal continuation¹ of their ‘self’. By four years, most children start using the word ‘me’ instead of their proper name. And it is also by the age of four-five that children start understanding and holding various perspectives on objects and people. (Rochat 2003) Genuine usage of propositional attitude verbs (PAV), for example: believe, hope, know, etc is good evidence to say that a child has an inner self who conceives itself as an agent. Since the genuine understanding of propositional attitudes verbs (PAV) is not seen before a certain age, it creates an impression that a child’s inner-self conceived as an agent also remains absent. Genuine usage of propositional attitude (PA) implies intentional behavior. Intentional behavior requires the actions to be self-generated; it should have a causal acknowledgment that the action took place because of the propositional attitude. As Olson (2007) rightly points out that the judgments about ‘intentional actions’ can only be ascribed to others and made by the ‘self’ if there exists an awareness about them, separating them as actions done ‘on purpose’ as opposed to actions which are mere ‘accidental’.

Given that the emergence of first-person concepts (FPC) happens late and proper understanding of propositional attitude verbs (PAV) require some time, some philosophers like Quine (1960), Davidson (1999), Dennett (1978), Olson (2007) etc, argue intentional states to be a linguistically learned process. However, others like Fodor(1975), Searle (1983) believe that these are the very structural basis of the human mind. Propositional attitude (PA) For example, ‘I believe It is raining’, etc (which involve PAV and FPC), are the paradigmatic case of intentional states. Those (like Searle and Fodor) who understand intentionality as a given mechanism/property of the mind explain social behavior and language learning in terms of intentionality. Therefore, it appears that they need not explain the development of language and its radical effect on one’s mentality. But those who understand intentionality in degrees or at least as a complex linguistic mechanism or language-dependent model have to engage in its development and admit that it is a part of linguistic development. Even if one grants the possibility that it is a given mechanism/property of the human mind as opposed to a culturally learned mechanism/property through social training, one is compelled to give the reason as

¹ Temporal continuation of the self refers to an understanding of one’s own inner self as existing in past, present, and future as a continuous being.

to why language is the only medium or how it is only in and through natural language one’s inner self appears.

Whether one buys the idea that it is an already given mechanism/property of the human mind (like Searle and Fodor) or it develops with language (like Davidson, Dennett, Olson), the necessity to study the development of intentional states with the development of propositional attitude (PA) cannot be eliminated. It is so because PA (which involves genuine usage of FPC and PAV) brings out the inner self as an agent that was initially lying passive. Therefore, natural language plays an indispensable role, whether as a mere *medium* to express or as a *cause* of first-person perspective. The first section of the paper/presentation will elaborate more on the first-person perspective and its connection with the inner self as an agent. The second section will analyze Olson’s (2007) ‘quotation theory’ about the development of intentional states. This section also emphasizes on the necessity to entertain simple, intentional states prior to the emergence of propositional attitudes (PA). The last section explores the possibility of a correlation between PA or multiple perspectives/modes of the inner self and the development of ‘conceptual metaphors’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). It elaborates upon the possible role of learning metaphorical language and developing an alternative perspective of the ‘self’.

Keywords: Propositional attitudes, Simple intentional states, Metaphorical language.

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