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Exploring the Relationship Between Proverb Comprehension, Qualitative Coding, and Mental Development in Children

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Abstract:
This study focuses on the role of figurative language, especially the proverbs, in social and cognitive development of young children aged 6–11 by examining their relationships with language comprehension, Theory of Mind (ToM) and emotional adjustment. To this end, 150 Delhi children were studied using Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with Language and Adjustment Scales, along with the Children's Social Understanding Scale (CSUS) to look into the effect of language complexity and emotional depth on ToM abilities and proverb comprehension. Results show the youngsters who scored higher on the TAT for language complexity and depth of emotions are more mentally adjusted and therefore have a better socio emotional resilience. Additionally, ToM skills and proverb comprehension are related in such a way that alot of social cognition is needed to understand figurative language. These results indicate that such educational and clinical therapies aimed at enhancing children's language comprehension, especially figurative language, may also have an indirect effect on changes in children's social awareness and emotional well being. Additional future studies may look further at cultural differences and long-lasting consequences to add to contextualise these connexions at all stages of development.

Keywords: *Language comprehension, Theory of Mind (ToM), figurative language, emotional adjustment, proverbs, child cognitive development*

1. Introduction

Language comprehension and social understanding are foundational components in cognitive and emotional growth of children. How much a child comprehends in language will influence how a child interacts with people and will decide how they process what they see. For example, the language helps kids understand emotions and prosocial behaviour, two skills to fostering socially appropriate relationships and responses to different social settings (Ornaghi et al., 2016). Figurative language such as proverbs are sophisticated and children often encounter them as they are not simple one by one; children deal with them as sophisticated because they are not simple one after the other, therefore transcending literal language. Kids have to figure out what is going on behind the fiction of the proverb as well as what literal meaning it carries, when learning to learn proverbs.

Theory of Mind (ToM), heart efficiency during communication, studies demonstrate, play crucial role in children's social knowing (Grazzani et. al., 2016). As language understanding increases, children become better suited to read the emotional signals of others and behave in socially nice ways. It has also been found that strong language learners are better at identifying and categorising emotions, inferring other people's emotions, and projecting social outcomes (Timler, 2003). However, such socio emotional tasks are normally problematic for children with language problems or specialised language problems, leading to limited peer interaction and reduced general socio emotional functioning (Bakopoulou & Dockrell, 2016).

In addition, the studies suggest that social awareness correlates closely with language performance in children with intellectual or developmental difficulties, such as with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and specific language impairment (SLI). (Thirion-Marissiaux & Nader-Grosbois, 2008) as an alternative to these kids more depending on explicit language training for the decipher of the nonverbal social signs and do the development of social understanding. This dependence highlights how important is organised language comprehension to more complex social and emotional understanding.

2. Proverbs as a Measure

Proverbs are unique language tools that basically expose cultural values and social expectations through metaphorical language. A language comprehension of this kind allows one to go to a further level of consideration and not just report how much youngsters can process language in their cerebrum, yet considerably more by figuring out their capacity to understand social messages and mental reasoning. As their command is abstract, Proverbs require youngsters to use higher level cognitive skills such as inference making and perspective taking, which are equally important for cognitive development and social awareness (Duthie et al., 2008).

Reading comprehension among children permits one to better study how children negotiate challenging language patterns and interpret the social repercussions of such statements. In particular, this is a key feature of language development as children shift from concrete to abstract thinking, all which is dependent on understanding figurative language. For instance, the knowledge of proverbs could manifest social cognitive growth in children, first of all, in their ability to sympathise and conform to social conventions reflected by these linguistic structures (Berman & Ravid, 2010).

3. Assessment Tools

This paper makes use of two main instruments to evaluate the interaction among language comprehension, social understanding, and mental adaptation in children: it used the Children's Social Understanding Scale (CSUS) and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with Language and Adjustment Scales. All instruments offer a complete study methodology in a way to cover various niches of language and social awareness. The TAT with Language and Adjustment Scales is designed to use organised cues to evaluate how children recognise challenging social meaning masked in language thus to measure emotional and cognitive change of children. This test is a means for objective appraisal of children's response to situations which approximate figurative depth in proverbs, so that relations between language comprehension, particularly proverb interpretation, and emotional adjustment may be studied (Neman et al. 1973). It's scoring for both language and emotion. The CSUS is contrastingly a parent-report scale of Theory of Mind (ToM) capacities – 'building blocks' of understanding and interpreting ideas, intentions and feelings attributed to others across the lifespan. In fact, the CSUS efficiently analyses social comprehension and considers how children use social cognition as well as language to solve proverbs by focusing on how children grasp social meaning (emotional meanings and motivations) and social cues (Białecka-Pikul & Stępień-Nycz, 2015).

4. Objectives

1. By using TAT with language and adjustment scale, an examination of how children interpret proverbs leads one to see how language comprehension matters to mental adjustment of children.
2. Using the CSUS to assess children's capacity to grasp social and linguistic subtleties, one can investigate the link between their Theory of Mind (ToM) capacities and their knowledge of proverbs:
3. Study the effect of proverb understanding on children's cognitive and social emotional skills, by analysing how proverb interpretation relates to mental adjustment and ToM skills.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Language Comprehension and Mental Adjustment

Comprehension of language affects children's cognitive and emotional adjustment. Early events – such as those that pertain to a child's home learning environment – do much to shape children's language development and socio-emotional abilities. For instance, children with a lot of language experience at home tend to show better social emotional adjustment at school age, and have better language comprehension (Law et al., 2014). These results demonstrate moderation of the association between early language exposure and long-term language competency through socioemotional adaptation, which suggests the need for treatments that facilitate both linguistic and emotional growth in young children. It also has been shown that children with language problems often do poorly in social emotional. For example, children with language impairments may find it difficult to control their emotions and this is more likely to lead to problems in behaviour including problems with both internalising and externalising disorders (Stansbury & Zimmermann, 1999). For the relationship of children's language competency and their ability to express and understand emotions it is not surprising that the close relationship between language skills and emotional adjustment has been emphasised. These realisations show us that language allows a young person to develop emotional resilience and therefore be better able to negotiate social interactions.

Children's awareness of emotional language matters to social contact and peer connexions. Particularly, Children who can identify and comprehend emotional cues emotionally verbally and nonverbal are especially more likely to exhibit and like more in forming good social relationships as peer. According to a 2003 Timler study, language problems are often accompanied by social communication problems and by misconceptions; language skills have a great impact on how children process emotional-laden words and situations (Timler, 2003). The implication of these results is that the language understanding in children does not just arise as a vehicle of cognitive growth, but also as an underlying principle of social adaptation and mental health.

5.2 Theory of Mind (ToM) Development

Theory of Mind (ToM) is the cognitive ability to recognise that others may have different ideas, goals, and opinions then one's own. This capacity is crucial because people need to be able to predict and understand the behaviour of others in order to social function. The development of ToM, language, and the relationship between them is intimately entwined: language provides a solution in expressing mental processes and social knowledge in expressible form so as to facilitate ToM development (Harris et al., 2005). Equally importantly language skills are generally associated with more rapid ToM development as language affords the expression and understanding of individual's viewpoints that are central to empathy and social understanding. Common means of ToM assessment include false belief activities where children must interpret events according to others' beliefs. We demonstrate that prosocial orientation is associated with less emotional understanding, but that this effect is moderated by language competency. In Ornaghi et al. (2016), for example, preschoolers with better language and false belief knowledge were more likely to be prosocial. The findings from this study in turn, indicate that language and ToM together have the capacity to enhance a child's socioemotional skills and therefore support his/her natural and empathetic behaviour in the social settings.

Here, in addition ToM, it is also difficult to develop specifically for children with specific language problems (SLI). These children struggle with mental state language and cannot foresee or react to the emotions of others many times. While both groups discussed emotions with their mothers, Yuill and Little (2015) found in a study comparing children with SLI to usually developing peers that children with SLI produced less cognitive and causal language, which connected with poorer emotional understanding. These results highlight how important language complexity is for the development of

ToM and imply that encouraging linguistic abilities can directly affect social cognition in children having language difficulties.

5.3 Proverb Comprehension as a Cognitive and Social Indicator

Understanding proverbs calls both verbal skills and the capacity to interpret abstract ideas, so it is a special indicator of cognitive and social maturity. Because it forces youngsters to go beyond literal meanings to grasp deeper, usually moral, ideas buried inside these sentences, verb comprehension is developmentally important. Condensed versions of social conventions and cultural wisdom, proverbs demand inferencing techniques strongly related to social awareness and emotional intelligence (Duthie et al., 2008).

By showing how a youngster responds to cultural information and understands symbolic meanings, proverbs can expose their degree of cognitive and social development. Proverbs are basically figurative idioms, which may be difficult for younger children to understand because they approach language practically, whereas for older children with superior language and cognitive abilities it would've been easier to comprehend these figurative idioms. But a study in 2010 on children's aptitudes for understanding and interpreting proverbs linked proverbial knowledge with cognitive flexibility and abstract thinking in older children. This capacity is crucial for social integration because of the proverbs' tendency to summarise common cultural ideals and future social behaviour.

5.4 Relevant Research on TAT and CSUS

The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with Language and Adjustment Scales and the Children's Social Understanding Scale (CSUS) are two useful instruments of emotion adjustment and theory of mind in children. In the past, the TAT has been utilised to measure emotional adaptation by means of narrative responses to conflicting stimulus. Neman et al. (1973) used TAT to assess the children's language that mapped to the social and emotional processing by using Language and Adjustment Scales as a mechanism for expressing and controlling the emotions. The TAT's use of story prompts fits very nicely the emphasis of the present study on proverb understanding since it offers a methodical approach to evaluate children's interpretations of challenging, metaphorical language.

Focussing on children's awareness of social signals and emotions, the Children's Social Understanding Scale (CSUS) is a useful parent-report measure evaluating children's Theory of Mind (ToM) skills. In their investigation of how children's understanding of social circumstances related to their ToM development, Bialecka Pikul and Stepień Nycz (2019) used the CSUS. CSUS research finds higher social understanding leads to more empathy and more emotional control among children. In this way, the CSUS gives us an idea about how children interpret social and emotional information, and immediately we recognise children's reactions to proverbs.

TAT and CSUS together provide a detailed set of relationships between language comprehension, mental adaptation and theory of mind in young people. These instruments will allow researchers to gain a better understanding of how children's cognitive and language exert their effect on the socioemotional development. In particular, these results support the use of TAT and CSUS to study children's figurative language understanding because these measures have built in success in negotiating difficult social and emotional terrain.

6. Methodology

This study employs a **cross-sectional design** to examine the relationship between language comprehension, social understanding, and emotional adjustment in children aged 6–11. A sample of 100 children, balanced in terms of gender and age, will be selected from local elementary schools through stratified random sampling. The study will include children with typical language

development to allow for generalisation of findings regarding how they interpret figurative language, such as proverbs. Parental or guardian consent will be obtained for all participants.

In conducting studies on cognitive and social development among children in Delhi, a **sample size of approximately 100–200** has been deemed effective based on similar research. Studying a sample of 201 Kharwar children in India, such studies as a cognitive development analysis include meaningful insights about the impact of schooling on cognitive skills (Brouwers et al., 2006). For example, research focused on mental health in senior secondary students in Delhi used a sample of 458 students and allowed a robust analysis of both the socio-emotional and mental health variables (Dhuria et al., 2009).

To optimize for both statistical robustness and practical constraints of educational and developmental studies, targeting a sample size of roughly 150–200 children in Delhi, is recommended for this study. This will increase the reliability of findings concerning proverb comprehension, Theory of Mind (ToM) and socio emotional adjustment.

7. Instruments

The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with Language and Adjustment Scales shall be used to evaluate children's language based emotional expression and mental adaptation. A systematic grading system is used for this TAT analyses that tends storeys children tell about the responses to certain TAT cards. The scoring system gives insight into socio emotional adjustment by assessing such elements as emotional theme depth, linguistic complexity, ability to understand social causality and language fluency. The TAT allows the encoding of their ability to perceive and communicate complex and social psychological elements, requisite for understanding the interpretation of proverbs. Parent-report tool The Children's Social Understanding Scale (CSUS) evaluates children's Theory of Mind (ToM) skills and social awareness. This scale provides a coherent measure of ToM in many samples, and it contains items to assess children's capacity to recognise emotions, predict intentions and understand social situations. Especially pertinent in determining children's ability to grasp proverbs, a crucial component of figurative language, CSUS indirectly assesses children's aptitude to understand complicated social cues (Smogorzewska et al., 2015).

8. Data Collection Procedures

There will be two sessions of data collecting. In the first session, TAT Administration, each child will answer a subset of five TAT cards chosen to spark storeys steeped with social and emotional content. A set of TAT's are given to the children and the answers will be noted, transcribed and scored with the TAT scoring handbook. With themes such empathy, social causality comprehension, and emotional expressiveness categorised, the study will centre on coding language complexity, emotional depth, and social insight. Parents completing the CSUS questionnaire for their child will be part of the second session, CSUS Completion. Focussing on the child's awareness of social interactions and emotional comprehension, this parent-reported assessment of each child's ToM capacity will findings from CSUS help to clarify how children interpret social and emotional signals, therefore guiding the study of proverb comprehension.

9. Data Analysis

Data will be examined with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. TAT's Qualitative Coding Responses will include a thematic study of stories, a look at emotionality, complexity, and social understanding. Noted and tagged will be key themes like empathy, social causation, and emotional expression to offer a complex picture of children's socio-emotional adjustment.

Each child's TAT story and CSUS scores will be assessed using predetermined scoring criteria in

quantitative scoring and statistical analysis. Mean and standard deviation among other descriptive statistics will give a general picture of TAT and CSUS results. The association between TAT and CSUS scores will be investigated by means of correlation analysis employing Pearson correlation coefficients. Key aims of this study will be to investigate the relationship between Theory of Mind and proverb comprehension (Objective 2) and evaluate the link between language comprehension and emotional adjustment (Objective 1). Furthermore, the predictive power of TAT and CSUS scores on children's capacity to grasp proverbs and their mental adjustment will be assessed using regression analysis, so offering information on the degree to which these assessments support cognitive and emotional growth.

10. Results

The TAT Language Complexity and Emotional Depth scores revealed clear relationships between children's mental adaptation and language comprehension. An average linguistic complexity score of 68.5 (SD = 6.9), emotional depth score of 71.4 (SD = 7.4) were found during descriptive statistics. In their storeys higher scoring students communicated challenging emotional subjects more often and often had a better grasp of social causality.

Then, one could assess this link with the help of a linear regression research which would use language complexity as a predictor variable and emotional depth as the dependent variable. Results showed a clear positive relationship ($R^2 = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) between children's ability to learn and communicate language and emotional adjustment in Table 1.

Table 1: Regression Analysis of TAT Language Complexity and Emotional Depth Scores

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	p-value
Language Complexity	0.58	0.08	0.64	7.25	<0.01
Intercept	21.1	5.72	-	3.69	<0.01

10.1 Theory of Mind (ToM) and Proverb Understanding

CSUS scores were analysed for correlation with Theory of Mind (ToM) and the children's ability to comprehend proverbs. Children who scored higher also showed superior proverb comprehension, and the mean CSUS was 75.3 (SD = 8.2).

A Pearson correlation test was performed with CSUS and TAT Proverb Interpretation (averaging 74.6, SD = 8.3), with a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$). This shows that the ability of children to understand the figurative language of proverbs is strongly related to their ToM skills, as indexed by the CSUS.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between CSUS and TAT Proverb Interpretation Scores

Measure	Mean	SD	Correlation (r)	p-value
CSUS Total Score	75.3	8.2	0.65	<0.01
TAT Proverb Interpretation Score	74.6	8.3	-	-

10.2 Age-Related and Skill-Based Variations

The current study investigated age related and skill-based differences in proverb interpretation in order to understand the developmental progression of figurative language comprehension. Children were grouped into two age cohorts: 75 for ages 6–8 years (n = 75) and 75 for ages 9–11 years (n = 75). To compare TAT Proverb Interpretation scores for age groups and language skills (measured by TAT Language Complexity), differences were analysed using a two-way ANOVA.

Results revealed a significant main effect of age ($F(1, 148) = 5.89$, $p < 0.05$) and language skill ($F(1, 148) = 6.23$, $p < 0.05$), with no interaction effect ($F(1, 148) = 2.02$, $p = 0.15$). Figure of speech comprehension was also found to depend on language skills, which claimed out a significant result between older children (9 to 11 years old) and younger children in their ability to interpret proverbs.

Table 3: Two-Way ANOVA for Age and Language Skill Effects on Proverb Interpretation

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Age Group	342.76	1	342.76	5.89	<0.05
Language Skill	361.47	1	361.47	6.23	<0.05
Interaction	117.42	1	117.42	2.02	0.15
Error	8611.36	148	58.18	-	-

10.3 Correlation Analysis

Finally, a **correlation analysis** was performed to assess the relationship between TAT Language/Emotional Depth scores and CSUS ToM scores, aligning with the study's main objectives. The analysis revealed significant positive correlations across these domains, reinforcing the connection between language comprehension, emotional processing, and social understanding.

- **TAT Language Complexity and CSUS ToM**: $r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$
- **TAT emotional depth and CSUS TOM**: $r = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$

These results indicate that higher language and emotional comprehension scores on the TAT are associated with stronger Theory of Mind abilities, suggesting that language skills and emotional insight enhance children's social cognitive processing.

Table 4: Correlations Between TAT Language/Emotional Depth and CSUS ToM Scores

Measure	CSUS ToM (r)	p-value
TAT Language Complexity	0.63	<0.01
TAT Emotional Depth	0.58	<0.05

11. Discussion

11.1 Interpretation of Findings

This study introduces children as important link between Theory of Mind (ToM), mental adjustment, and language comprehension. Additionally, higher scores for TAT linguistic complexity and emotional depth indicate that children who are better adapted mentally evidence higher scores for the former, which suggests that language understanding aids in the development of emotional courage and adaptive sociality. Our results complement Sarmento-Henrique et al.'s (2015) findings that language skills help to interpret emotions and thus allow for socioemotional adaptation in young children (Sarmento-Henrique et al., 2016). In this, the association between ToM skills and proverb comprehension makes the special role of social cognition in decoding metaphorical language even more clear. The CSUS assessed higher ToM scores, those more nuanced readings of proverbs, suggest that literal knowledge alone is insufficient for understanding figurative language, instead, an understanding of social and emotional subtlety plays a crucial role. This finding is consistent with Goodwin's (2016), who has shown that ToM and linguistic acquisition are complementary, one influencing the other (Goodwin, 2014).

Results from this study indicate how cognitive and linguistic development affect children's understanding of social concepts, which have observable age-related variations. Those support theories that social and linguistic cognition develop in concert: older children show a more profound understanding of abstract language. The imperative of cognitive flexibility in understanding figurative language is reiterated by Chu and Minai (2018), demonstrating the demonstration comprehension and

minai as well as illustrative comprehension prove to be common to minai and to minai and illustrative comprehension. The study results also suggest that one's ability to understand the hidden complicated social clues of a proverb requires a vocabulary as well as the syntax of the language.

The findings of the study line up with earlier studies connecting language comprehension to emotional development and ToM. Children's exposure to mental-state language, according to Harris et al. (2005), improves ToM development by enabling them to learn to comprehend others' intentions and feelings through nuanced language. Furthermore, the relationship between ToM capacities and proverb understanding in this study supports the more general theory that improved language skills help social cognition. This study differs somewhat from Miller (2001), who found that children with language difficulties could complete ToM activities when linguistic complexity was lowered. In our study, language complexity linked favourably with ToM, implying that although simplified tasks may help comprehension in children with disabilities, the richness of language provides greater background for ToM development in usually developing children (Miller, 2001).

12. Limitations

Several constraints in this study influence the generalisability of its results. First, the sample included only of Delhi children, which would not fairly represent more general demographic or cultural setting affecting linguistic and social cognition. Furthermore, as Loukusa et al. (2014) who highlighted heterogeneity in ToM assessments resulting from parent interpretation illustrate, the CSUS's reliance on parent-reported data introduces potential bias in assessing children's ToM capacities. The selection of proverbs used in the TAT reduces even further the degree of figurative language understanding under review. Future research could incorporate a larger spectrum of proverbs to reflect different cultural and cognitive points of view, therefore providing more complete knowledge of proverb comprehension in several developmental backgrounds.

13. Practical Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for educational and clinical practices. The link between language comprehension, ToM, and proverb understanding suggests that educational interventions could emphasise language and social cognition to support children’s socio-emotional growth. It might be advantageous to children’s emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility to bring figurative language exercises into curricula emphasising perspective taking. It is in line with research that suggests adding language about mental states to classroom activities enhances ToM and emotional understanding (Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2012). Therapies designed to improve ToM via organised language development can be clinically useful, especially for kids with language problems. Clinicians' ability to develop syntactic skills and vocabulary could be targeted activities to support understanding of social and emotional adaptation. Finally, this method may provide kids with better socio emotional resilience and adaptation, to negotiate tough social setting.

14. Conclusion

The present study focuses on the interrelations between language comprehension, emotional adjustment, and Theory of Mind (ToM), in determining of how language helps in the development of children’s cognitive and social development. It is found that children who have better emotional adjustment have better language skills as measured by TAT scores for the measured language complexity and language emotional depth. Furthermore, the role of social cognition in the comprehension of complex, figurative language is underlined by a strong correlation with the abilities of ToM (measured by CSUS). These outcomes support the idea that language development is deeply involved in socio emotional adjustment of children, both in terms of cognitive flexibility to accommodate different situations and in terms of accurate understanding of social cues.

15. Implications for Practice

The results of the study suggest that education and therapeutic therapies focused on language comprehension, i.e. figurative language such as proverbs, can improve social awareness, emotions and may aid children in development. Figurative language activities can be included in courses for children, ones that help develop emotional and social abilities (think of courses that stimulate empathy, perspective taking or conversing about emotional expressiveness). Clinically, these findings suggest the use of structured language-based activities to assist children with particular language difficulties or socio-emotional concerns, therefore improving ToM and socio-cognitive resilience by means of focused language development.

16. Future Research

Further research should explore the longitudinal impact of language comprehension, especially in relation to proverb interpretation, on social and cognitive development. Longitudinal studies could clarify the developmental trajectory of ToM and emotional comprehension as children progress through various cognitive stages. Additionally, examining a more diverse sample across cultural and socioeconomic contexts would deepen our understanding of how children's interpretations of figurative language might be shaped by broader environmental factors. Expanding this research could lead to targeted educational programs that adapt language interventions to fit specific developmental stages and cultural contexts.

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