Siblings' Construction of Shared Meanings during Pretend Play

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Introduction

- **Shared Meanings**
  - Attaining a *shared understanding* among the participants of an activity is a central issue in social-cognitive development (Carpendale & Lewis, 2006; Göncü, 1993)
  - *Interactions* with others help children to construct an understanding of their *social world* (Vygotsky 1966; 1976)

- **Social Pretend Play**
  - Collaborative activity shared between two or more individuals
  - Co-construction of shared meanings between players may ensure the *advancement* of the *play scenario* (Verba, 1993)
Introduction

- **Play Partners and Pretense**
  - Children begin pretense with a *shared focus* moving to *negotiation strategies* in order to *maintain* and *expand* their pretend play scenario (Brown, Donelan-McCall, & Dunn, 1996)

- **Sibling Relationship**
  - Consists of intimate *knowledge*, a shared co-constructed *history*, and a great deal of *time* is spent together (Dunn, 1988)
  - These characteristics may facilitate the *negotiation* and *collaboration* skills used to construct shared meanings during play (Howe et al., 2005)
Introduction

- **Siblings’ Social Interactions**
  - Tend to be *complementary* due to natural *age differences* (DeHart, 1999; Hartup, 1989)
    - Asymmetry of power, can in turn lead to dynamics of both *cooperation* and *conflict* (Howe et al., 2011)
  - *Older siblings* have an important role in being more experienced social partners, which may provide *guidance* for *younger siblings* who are less experienced (Bruner, 1977)
The Present Study

• **Purpose**
  ○ To examine sibling dyads’ establishment of shared meanings through the use of semantic tying strategies (e.g., extension, building on, explanation) during pretense and associations with birth order.

• **Research Questions**
  ○ Which semantic tying strategies occur more frequently during sibling dyads' pretend play?
  ○ Are semantic tying strategies associated with birth order?
Participants

- **Sibling dyads**
  - 65 Focal child; $M = 4.7$ years (one child per dyad)
    - 37 First-born siblings; $M = 6.25$ years
    - 28 Second-born siblings; $M = 2.9$ years

- **Gender**
  - 16 Female-female dyads
  - 14 Female-male dyads
  - 18 Male-male dyads
  - 17 Male-female dyads
Procedure

• Materials
  ○ Wooden farm set, train set, or village set to promote pretend play

• Videotaped play sessions
  ○ Transcribed and parsed into subject/verb phrases

• Coding Scheme
  ○ *Semantic Tying* is one of seven categories from a larger coding scheme (Howe et al., 2005)
Coding: Shared Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic Tying Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding new information to <strong>partners’ idea</strong> in the preceding turn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding: Example

Y: I put in this gate.
O: Okay. It’s gonna be *locked*.

O: I make the fence, okay?
And then we can put the persons in.

Y: It’s called Christmas trees *because*
it’s Christmas time.

**Proportionalized Coding:**

*Building On*

*Extension*

*Explanation*

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**Shared Meaning Strategy**
*(e.g., Extension)*

**Number of Conversational Turns**
Results: One-Way ANOVAs

- Pairwise comparison for **focal children’s birth order** and **shared meaning strategies** revealed:

![Bar chart showing mean usage of strategy for first-born and second-born children.](image)

* *p < .05
Results: One-Way ANOVAs

- Pairwise comparison for siblings’ birth order and shared meaning strategies revealed:

![Bar chart showing mean usage of strategies for older and younger siblings.](chart.png)

*<p < .05
The sibling relationship is an *important context* for children to develop their social-cognitive understanding due to *natural developmental differences* (Dunn, 1998; Howe et al., 2005)

Overall, siblings employed a variety of semantic tying strategies during the play sessions:
- Semantic tying strategies were used more frequently by *the older sibling* than the focal child
- *Extension* strategy was more frequent when the *focal child* was *younger* than the sibling
- Explanation strategy was more frequent when the *focal child* was *older* than the sibling
Conclusion

- This study illuminates the important role of an older sibling in the *construction* of shared meanings during play, specifically in the use of semantic tying strategies.

- The findings emphasize the role of the older sibling in *facilitating* the younger sibling’s social-cognitive development.