

Organization of Interpersonal Experience and Organization of Interpersonal Action-Related Thought: A *Décalage* in the Adolescent's Interpersonal Development

Joaquim Luís Coimbra and Bártoło Paiva Campos

Porto State University, Portugal

According to Shantz (1983), social-cognitive development as a field of study brings up three fundamental research questions: (a) the way people conceptualize and reason about their social world; (b) the nature of the developmental changes in those conceptions and reasoning; (c) the relation between social-cognitive functioning and social action. As an answer to these questions, one of the most productive approaches, in theoretical and empirical terms, is the one that has been developed by Selman and collaborators (1974, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987).

The present study, based on Selman's approach, focusses on the relations between social perspective-taking — a subject's personal activity of meaning-making of interpersonal reality — and interpersonal negotiation strategies — the subject's cognitive organization in order to engage in social action. Integration of interpersonal experience indeed refers to the process of making a personal meaning of reality, of differentiating and integrating aspects of social relationships, *i.e.*, knowing what "things" are, building himself/herself and the world as reality in the sense used by social constructionist authors (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Campos, 1977). In the 60ies and 70ies, this approach has been favored over the alternative approach of studying cognitive processes and structures which describe how the subject organizes himself/herself in order to engage in social action,

i.e., the "things" one can do. More recently, some studies focussed on the relation between social cognition and overt social action (Rest, 1983; Yeates & Selman, 1989). The present study analyses the *relations between social perspective-taking and interpersonal action-related thought* both assessed from hypothetical dilemmas.

The cognitive-structural stream of research has identified structures and described their development in terms of levels or stages. Social perspective-taking (SPT) is one of those structures of interpersonal understanding. Considered by several authors as the true deep unifying structure of the social-cognitive processes (Keller & Reuss, 1984), social perspective-taking refers to the progressive ability of the subject to differentiate, coordinate and integrate different social perspectives about an interpersonal situation and determines the patterns of organizing social reasoning and thought. More specifically, Selman (1980) describes four structural levels of social perspective-taking: impulsive (level 0); unilateral (level 1); reciprocal (level 2); mutual (level 3), and societal (level 4).

Recently, Selman and his collaborators (Selman, 1985; Selman, Beardslee, Schultz, Krupa, & Podorefsky, 1986; Beardslee, Schultz, & Selman, 1987; Yeates & Selman, 1989) have been interested in a set of different issues, marking a shift from their former work. Drawing from conceptions and theories of interpersonal reality (and the underlying social-cognitive structure), they have launched a new research trend by investigating how children and adolescents think about interpersonal situations requiring to be resolved. This shift corresponds to the emergence of the interpersonal negotiation strategies (INS) model in which a structural component referring to the level of cognitive complexity is combined with functional (Shure & Spivack, 1982) and information-processing (Rose-Krasnor, 1985) approaches.

The concept of INS is related to the cognitive processes of the subject's organization to solve situations of interpersonal disequilibrium, that is, "the methods individuals use to obtain consciously wished-for services or goods through interaction with whom there is an established interpersonal relationship" (Selman, Schultz, Krupa, Beardslee, & Podorefsky, 1986). Specifically, the study of interpersonal negotiation strategies is concerned with structural levels of the different information-processing steps: definition of the problem, action taken, justification and consequences of the strategy, and complexity of feelings expressed. The four levels of interpersonal negotiation strategies are described by Schultz and Selman in Chapter 2 of this volume (p. 26).

According to the second author, *social perspective-taking* (SPT) can be conceptualized as a cognitive structure individuals "use" to organize *interpersonal experience* so as to construct implicit beliefs and explicit conceptions about themselves, others and interactions, that is, a *structure of being*. *Interpersonal negotiation strategies* (INS) can be understood as a cognitive structure underlying the organization and planning processes of the subject's interpersonal or social action. They are associated with the cognitive aspect of dealing with and solving problems in interpersonal situations, and can be faced as a *structure of acting*.

The present study examines the relations between structural levels of social

perspective-taking and interpersonal negotiation strategies. Do both concepts develop simultaneously or in *décalage*? If such a *décalage* exists, which of the two concepts develops earlier? Eventual answers to these questions will help clarify the issue of structure/action relationships in the sense that this gap might be mediated, among other factors, by gaps between cognitive structures of different nature (*i.e.*, SPT and INS). In fact, if it is reasonable to accept that ontological knowledge about the nature of reality (SPT) plays a role in concrete action, one can expect that the quality of specific interpersonal behavior is, on the other side, also influenced by specific action-oriented knowledge (INS). Given that no previous studies seem to have focussed on this issue, no precise predictions were made.

With the purpose of trying to understand adolescents' interpersonal development in light of these questions, an exploratory study was conducted within a wider research program on the relationships between cognition and action.

Method

Two cognitive-developmental interviews — the Interpersonal Understanding Interview (Selman *et al.*, 1979) tapping social perspective-taking (SPT), and the Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies (INS) Interview (Selman *et al.*, 1986) — were used in a randomly selected sample of twelve year-old adolescents (14 boys and 14 girls) attending the 6th grade in an urban Portuguese school.

In the *Interpersonal Understanding Interview*, two interpersonal hypothetical dilemmas were presented. One concerned friendship relations, the other peer-group relations. For friendship relations, questions were asked for six issues (formation, intimacy, trust, jealousy, conflict resolution, and termination); for peer-group relations, seven issues were concerned (formation, cohesion, conformity, rules, decision-making, leadership, and termination). Initial questions were followed by probe questions.

In the *Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies Interview*, eight interpersonal hypothetical dilemmas referring to situations of disequilibrium, necessities, wishes or interest conflicts between the protagonist and significant others were presented. In each dilemma, the level of functional problem-solving skills was assessed for each of four problem-solving steps or issues: definition of the problem, action taken, justification and consequences of the strategy, and complexity of feelings expressed.

Interviews were tape recorded. The following excerpts *illustrate* some of the levels of social-perspective taking:

- *Why are friends important?*
It is important because... They are my friends. (level 0)
- *Which is the best way to decide which rules a group (or a club) should have?*
I don't know.
Well, how do the rules appear in a group?
The group must have rules... the leader says which rules are and so we know. (level 1)

- *Do you think that trust is important for a good friendship? Why?*
It's because when we have a real friend we can tell him secrets and he will not tell anyone. (level 2)

The following excerpts illustrate some of the levels of interpersonal negotiation strategies:

- *What is the problem here?*
John is upset. (level 0)
- *How will it be a good way for Susan to solve the problem?*
Tell him that she doesn't want to stay with him anymore. (level 1)
- *Why is that a good way to solve the problem?*
Rosário and her mother they can talk, tell each other what they think, and so she hasn't to go to the pic-nic. (level 2)

In order to make possible the comparison of the structural levels of SPT and INS, instructions for coders based on Selman *et al.*'s (1986) coding manual were standardized across the two interviews. For both, an overall mean level was assessed as a continuous variable and an overall clinical level as a discrete variable. For the *Interpersonal Understanding Interview*, the overall mean level was calculated from the six friendship issues and the seven peer-group issues and was rounded to the centesimus; the SPT overall clinical level corresponded to the qualitative analysis of each interview. The coders were instructed not to assess major/minor scores. The overall clinical level was assessed from the highest level of the two interviews.

For the *INS Interview* scoring, the overall mean score was assessed from the 32 partial scores obtained from the combination of the eight dilemmas and the four problem-solving issues. The coding manual (Coimbra, 1988) presents a finer operationalization of the categories than Selman *et al.*'s (1986) original manual. These refinements greatly improved intercoder agreement. With regard to the interpersonal understanding interview, interrater reliability in scoring was measured through agreement on the mean scores of the 13 issues for the continuous variable and averaged 75%; for the discrete variable (the clinical level), the percentage of agreement between the two coders averaged 93.8%. With regard to interpersonal negotiation strategies, the interrater reliability on levels of scoring in each one of the four issues averaged 66.1% and the percentage of agreement averaged 82.1% for the overall clinical level.

Results

The results obtained (Table 1) show that, for the *continuous variables*, the means of social perspective-taking levels are higher than those of the interpersonal negotiation strategies, both for boys and girls. A two-way 2 (type of interview) x 2 (sex) ANOVA, with SPT and INS considered as a repeated measures factor showed that these differences are statistically significant: $F(1,26) = 120.3 p < .001$. For sex $F(1,26) = 0.79 p < 1$, n.s..

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of SPT and INS Levels (continuous variables)

		TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS
SPT	M	1.83	1.79	1.87
	SD	(.28)	(.33)	(.24)
INS	M	1.21	1.24	1.19
	SD	(.25)	(.18)	(.32)

Table 2
Frequencies of Subjects in the Categories Formed from the Combination of SPT and INS Levels (discrete variables)

		INS			
		0	1	2	
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	1	0	1
	2	1	18	8	27
		1	19	8	28
BOYS		0	1	2	
SPT	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	1	0	1
	2	0	9	4	13
		0	10	4	14
GIRLS		0	1	2	
SPT	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	0	0	0
	2	1	9	4	14
		1	9	4	14

If *discrete variables* are considered (Table 2), it appears that most subjects are located at levels 1 and 2. No subject is located at level 3 for either of the interviews.

In what concerns the frequency distribution by levels of both SPT and INS, 27 out of 28 subjects are at level 2 of social perspective-taking while in the interpersonal negotiation strategies most of the subjects (67.9%) are placed at level 1. It further appears that most of the subjects (18) are simultaneously at SPT level 2 and INS level 1. Only 8 subjects are at the same level 2 and one subject is at the same level 1 for both measures. No subject scored higher on INS than on SPT. The distribution is very similar when gender is considered.

In sum, the results show a massive *décalage*: SPT develops earlier than INS.

The concordance between the overall clinical level and the overall mean scores calculated from the subscores is high: INS = 85.7% and SPT = 89.3%.

Discussion

Comparison of results with previous studies as to age and gender

Some of our results may be compared with former studies. The concentration of twelve-year-old subjects at *social perspective-taking* level 2 is compatible with the results found in previous studies (Selman, 1980; Cooney & Selman, 1980). In this respect, most of the subjects are at the self-reflective or reciprocal perspective-taking level (Selman & Byrne, 1974; Selman, 1976; Selman *et al.*, 1979; Selman, 1980; Gurucharri & Selman, 1982; Gurucharri, Phelps & Selman, 1984) which is mostly characterized by the ability to assume the other's point of view (2nd person) and by the understanding that the other also has that ability. However, the context and the relationship story are not yet considered, and in spite of having the awareness of a new reciprocity, that of thoughts and feelings rather than of action, mutuality does not yet exist. Another consistent finding with former research is the absence of gender-related differences.

In what concerns the *interpersonal negotiation strategies*, nearly all subjects are located at level 1. Level 1 strategies indicate the recognition of differences between one's own and another's interests and necessities, but these are not considered simultaneously: there is differentiation but not coordination and consequently the strategies are one-way commands, assertions, or a simple accommodation to the understanding of the other's necessities or interests (Selman, Beardslee, Schultz, Krupa, & Podorefsky, 1986; Selman, Schultz, Krupa, Beardslee, & Podorefsky, 1986). As a consequence of the recency of the INS construct, information that confirms the level 1 predominance at this age is not yet available. The absence of gender-related differences is in accordance with previous research (Beardslee, Schultz, & Selman, 1987; Selman, Beardslee, Schultz, Krupa, & Podorefsky, 1986).

Relations between SPT and INS

Results show that for the continuous variables, scores are higher for SPT than for INS. Moreover, the analysis of relations between SPT and INS showed that for the

discrete variables, SPT is "mastered" before INS. At this time, we are not aware of the existence of studies which aimed at comparing developmental levels of social perspective-taking and of interpersonal negotiation strategies on the same group of subjects. The *décalage* found in the present study (level 2 at SPT and level 1 at INS) is a massive one. If the hypothesis is considered that SPT is "mastered" prior to INS, results show that not a single subject shows a pattern contrary to this prediction. Although a certain amount of caution is necessary in view of the exploratory nature of this study, the small sample and the lack of other empirical data, assessment deficiencies may plausibly be discarded. Indeed, improvements for assessment and scoring have been made, especially in the case of the INS interview, and intercoder reliability is satisfactory.

After having eliminated deficiencies in methodology and given credit to these data, it is possible to propose some interpretative hypotheses. If subjects in our sample are more advanced in their organization of interpersonal experience (SPT) than in their interpersonal negotiation strategies (INS), this means that they are more reflective on what concerns their interpersonal experience than on the organization and planning of their action in which they tend to be more "impulsive" and simplistic. These results are in accordance with the fact (Selman, 1980) that a subject may be at a high developmental level for interpersonal understanding and still perform interpersonal actions not matching what would be expected if the action was only determined by this cognitive-structural factor. Research has also evidenced the coexistence of high levels of interpersonal and moral reasoning with a low level of moral or social action (for example, aggressive, shy, etc.). It must be remembered however that, contrary to studies which evaluate relations between reasoning assessed according to cognitive-developmental theory and observable action, the present study focusses on social perspective-taking and interpersonal negotiation strategies both assessed from hypothetical dilemmas. Action tapped in this study is action-related thought.

Different factors affecting performance — namely affective-emotional, situational, contextual and cognitive of different kinds (cognitive style) — may be differentially related to INS and SPT. Disentangling these relations may shed some light on the problem of the SPT-INS *décalage*. With respect to the more general *décalage* issue at the structure/action level, it should be noticed that a novel hypothesis may make sense: that *décalage* might also be mediated by other processes of cognitive-structural nature as is the present case of INS, which might well be a mediator in the relationship between SPT and social behavior. In fact, one can speculate that the discrepancy between structure and action corresponds — at least partially — to the *décalage* between ontological knowledge structures and action knowledge structures. Counseling and educational intervention programs centered on the enhancement of cognitive structures related to interpersonal action and on functional skills of interpersonal problem-solving development may be particularly helpful in this respect: manipulating not only cognitive structures related to personal experience and social action-related thought but also associated factors could help to clarify this question of *décalage*.

Enlargement of the conceptual framework for future studies

Since social action consists largely in the ability of conceptualizing the social action and specifically in skills of: (a) thinking about alternative ways of solving problems, (b) anticipating the other's answer at each alternative, and (c) using means-ends problem-solving (Shure & Spivack, 1982), we consider that Selman's INS model which articulates structural and functional components in the same theoretical framework represents significant qualitative progress in the identification, description, and understanding of interpersonal developmental processes and structures. These structures correspond, from our point of view, (a) to the concept of interpersonal action-related cognitive structures (INS), which we think to be different from (b) structures of knowing interpersonal reality as a world of beings and relations (SPT). This theoretical position is based on the contrast between contemplative/ontological knowledge and transformational/action-related knowledge. The assumption of two types of interpersonal cognitive-structures can be justified from a knowledge-domain-specificity perspective (Turiel & Davidson, 1986). Within this framework, SPT and INS would be conceptualized as structures of different sub-domains making part of what we could call the interpersonal knowledge domain. Additionally, the interpersonal domain is a component of the larger social realm. This conceptualization stresses, however, that domains and subdomains of knowledge — allowing the identification of specific cognitive structures (although in different levels of organization of the cognitive system) — are defined by cognitive operations, abilities, and skills, and by self-regulation processes rather than by content nature. Content has not been a valid criterion even for differentiating social from non-social cognition. The two sub-domains referred to here must not have to be strictly independent from each other. Consideration of independence of these domains raises the issue of the problem of development of inter-domain coordination. We plan to test these considerations by more sophisticated analyses in further steps of our research program.

In the future, research can take advantage of the *integration of other developmental approaches: the ecological-systemic analysis* (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983) allowing the understanding of the developmental processes, connecting them with the kinds of organization of life contexts and displacing the unit of analysis from an almost exclusive concentration on intrapsychic cognitive structures to the consideration of a new unit: the interaction levels between subjects and contexts in which they develop. The enlargement of the theoretical model could also benefit from the integration of other functional approaches besides problem-solving. *Action theory* (Keller & Reuss, 1984; Keller, Chapter 4 of this volume; Silbereisen, 1985) may prove to be an adequate approach to the direct study of human action through a theoretical framework comprehending its several dimensions: the personal meaning of interpersonal action, the intentionality, and the regulating role of affective-emotional components. This approach may represent an adequate answer to the complexity of the relationships between thought and action and to the multiplicity of factors responsible for its mediation. Also worth referring to is the consideration that, in an action-theoretical perspective, the object of interaction in the interpersonal context is a subject with his/

her intentions, goals, motivations and expectancies related to action, which inevitably leads to the idea that the experience of intersubjectivity is a coproduction.

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