

The Relationship Between Mental-state Language and False-belief Understanding in Adulthood

Erin Roby

University of California Merced, Merced, California, United States

Alexandra Paxton

University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA

Rick Dale

University of California, Merced

Rose Scott

University of California Merced, Merced, CA, United States

Abstract: Research has revealed a robust relationship between preschooler's use of mental-state language (e.g. think, know) and performance on false-belief tasks (e.g. Ruffman, Slade & Crow, 2002). However, investigations of this relationship with school-aged children have shown mixed results, making it unclear whether mental-state talk continues to play a role in false-belief understanding following the preschool years (e.g. Charman & Shmueli-Goetz, 1998; Grazzini & Ornaghi, 2012). This discrepancy may result from the fact that preschooler's talk has consistently been assessed during interpersonal interactions with peers, siblings, and parents, while school-aged children's talk has been assessed via descriptions of wordless picture books or absent friends. The present study bridges this gap by exploring whether adults' use of mental-state language during interaction correlates with their false-belief performance. In doing so, we help to shed light on an important issue in theoretical accounts of the development of false-belief understanding.