

Discourse-pragmatic factors in the false belief task

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Preschooler's understanding of their own and others' belief is often tested with false belief tasks such as the Sally-Anne and Smarties tasks. With some exceptions, children below the age of 4 1/2 years typically fail. Other studies show that language development overall plays a role in the development of a theory of mind. Hansen and colleagues (e.g., Hansen, 2010) has proposed a discourse-pragmatic account based on the theories of Grice, Austin, Martin and Stalnaker. On this account, there is an ambiguity in the use of mental state references, which may in part explain young children's failure on standard false belief tasks. The presentation discusses evidence from adult and child speakers.