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978-0-521-02989-6 - Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny

Edited by Stein Braten

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Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny

The concept of 'intersubjectivity', explicit or implicit, has emerged as a common denominator in approaches to interpersonal engagements in early infancy and children's understanding of others' thought and emotion. This book brings together for the first time some of the most senior international figures in psychology, psychopathology, sociology, primatology and neuroethology to address the key question of the role of intersubjectivity in early ontogeny. Together, they offer a new understanding of child development, learning and communication and important comparisons with processes in autism and in infant ape development. Theory and findings are integrated in the following domains: intersubjective attunement in human infancy; companionship and emotional responsiveness in early childhood; imitation, emotion and understanding in primate communication; and intersubjective attunement and emotion in language learning and language use. The book is an invaluable resource for researchers in emotion and communication across the social and behavioural sciences.

Stein Bråten is Professor of Sociology at the University of Oslo and Chairman of the Theory Forum on the Foundations of Intersubjective Communication, Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme
Paris

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

With Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme

54 Boulevard Raspail, 75270 Paris Cedex 06, France

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521622578

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First published 1998

This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Intersubjective communication and emotion in early ontogeny / edited by Stein Bråten.

p. cm. – (Studies in emotion and social interaction. Second series)

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0 521 62257 3 (hardcover)

1. Interpersonal communication in infants. 2. Interpersonal communication in children. 3. Emotions in infants. 4. Emotions in children. 5. Autism in children. 6. Psychology, comparative.

I. Bråten, Stein. II. Series.

BF720.C65I92 1998

155.4'18–dc21 97–47525 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-62257-8 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-62257-3 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02989-6 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02989-9 paperback

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Contributors

Nameera Akhtar, University of California, Santa Cruz, Psychology Department

Kim A. Bard, Emory University, Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center

Patrick Bateson, University of Cambridge, Sub-Department of Animal Behaviour

Julie D. Brown, University of Kent at Canterbury, The Tizard Centre

Stein Bråten, University of Oslo, Department of Sociology and Human Geography

Richard W. Byrne, University of St Andrews, Scottish Primate Research Group, School of Psychology

Judy Dunn, University of London, Institute of Psychiatry

Carolyn Pope Edwards, University of Nebraska, Department of Family Studies

Juan Carlos Gómez, University of St Andrews, Scottish Primate Research Group, School of Psychology

Paul L. Harris, University of Oxford, Department of Experimental Psychology

Mikael Heimann, University of Gothenburg, Department of Psychology and Department of Special Education

R. Peter Hobson, The Tavistock Clinic, Developmental Psychopathology Research Unit

Giannis Kugiumutzakis, University of Crete, Department of Psychology

Patricia K. Kuhl, University of Washington, Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences

Andrew N. Meltzoff, University of Washington, Department of Psychology

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xiv *List of contributors*

M. Keith Moore, University of Washington, Department of Psychology

Lynne Murray, University of Reading, Department of Psychology

Ragnar Rommetveit, University of Oslo, Department of Psychology

Ross A. Thompson, University of Nebraska, Department of Psychology

Michael Tomasello, Emory University, Department of Psychology

Colwyn Trevarthen, University of Edinburgh, Department of Psychology

Andrew Whiten, University of St Andrews, Scottish Primate Research Group, School of Psychology

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Preface

This is a source book in virtue of two characteristics. First, the authors are themselves sources of findings and conceptions challenging traditional theories of child development and certain comparative distinctions. Second, taking stock of their findings from complementary positions and proposing testable explanatory principles attuned to these new empirical grounds, they invite new directions for research and theoretical studies for which this book can serve as a cross-disciplinary source of references.

Thanks to the authors' unfailing support of this project from the very beginning, this book can now be offered as a foundation and framework for further research on intersubjective attunement and understanding in early child development and pertinent comparative domains. The project crystallized when some of us (Patrick Bateson, Judy Dunn, Andrew Meltzoff, Andrew Whiten and I) were invited to a King's College Research Centre Workshop on the Perception of Subjects and Objects, in Cambridge, September 1992. There, they asked Andrew Meltzoff and me to open by dialogue the general discussion on intersubjectivity. I realized then that the time was ripe for a source book integrating theory and findings from complementary perspectives.

The invited authors met – many of them for the first time – in August 1994, in a preparatory symposium in the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, Oslo. Some of them (Carolyn Edwards, Mikael Heimann, Ragnar Rommetveit and Colwyn Trevarthen) followed up by joining my group in the Academy's Centre for Advanced Study in the academic year 1996–7, and some others (Paul Harris, Patricia Kuhl and Andrew Meltzoff) by joining us for workshops or a briefer stay in that period.

Among the authors, I owe special thanks to Colwyn Trevarthen for many lively conversations and disputes. We first met in August 1987 at a workshop on Intersubjective Communication, Department of Cognitive Psychology, University of Bergen, which I organized (with Tordis Dallan Evans) upon my arrival there as invited professor of cognitive science. We were both delighted, I think, to discover the fit

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between his findings on infant intersubjectivity and my dialogical systems postulate of an inborn virtual other. Only much later did we realize our disagreement on whether or not there is a higher-order level of mental simulation of other minds, which I had proposed in the seventies. Our fruitful disputes in this respect have sharpened my intention with this book: to invite dialogue between conflicting positions, examining whether in the end they may reveal themselves to be complementary. That pertains, for example, to the gap between the social-emotional *communicative* perspective and the social-cognitive *mindreading* perspective. This book purports to bridge some of that gap by providing for the first time a comprehensive examination from *both* these perspectives of the nature, nurture and perturbation of intersubjective attunement and understanding in early child development and pertinent comparative domains.

Through all the stages of preparation and finalizing of this book I have had unfailing support, including finance, from these institutions with which I am associated: the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, and the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oslo; the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and its Centre for Advanced Study, Oslo. In addition, I gratefully acknowledge financial support of the preparatory symposium from the Norwegian Research Council Program for Youth Research (UNGFORSK). In organizing that meeting I would also like to thank my colleagues at the University of Oslo and fellow members of the Theory Forum network's organizing and reference group: Jon Roar Björkqvold, Rolv Blakar, Dagfinn Føllesdal, Signe Howell, Karsten Hundeide, Inge Lønning and Ragnar Rommetveit.

I am also grateful to Susan Powers, University of Oslo, for her dedicated efforts in administrative help and in language polishing and printing preparation of the symposium pre-proceedings, and to Rune Engebretsen who, while at the Centre for Advanced Study, found time to assist me in the language polishing of chapter 5 of this book, teaching me in the process to appreciate the music in the English language. I would like to thank the Cambridge University Press commissioning editor, Catherine Max, as well as the publisher's series editors and evaluators, for valuable advice, including desiderata on volume size, which has been a challenge in view of the rich source material contained herein. I also thank my research assistant, Anders Nöklestad, for dedicating himself – between our efforts at connectionist explorations of egocentric and altercentric perception – to splendid assistance in the preparation of the book in electronic form.

Stein Bråten

Centre for Advanced Study, Oslo, August 1997