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PRODUCTS OF PERSPECTIVE-TAKING PROCESS IN VERBAL COMMUNICATION: SUCCESS AND ACCEPTABILITY

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Abstract. This article investigates the perspective-taking process (PTP) not merely as a social or developmental phenomenon, but as an individual cognitive operation with discrete internal products. Moving beyond the conventional focus on shared outcomes or consequences of perspective-taking, the paper delineates two key agent-level products: (1) the success of PTP, defined as the accuracy and comprehensiveness in representing another's mental state and (2) the acceptability of the other's perspective, which is distinguished from agreement. Drawing on dual-process models of cognition and integrating insights from psycholinguistics and Theory of Mind, the study develops a four-scenario model based on the interplay of acceptance and agreement. These two products, success and acceptability, are positioned as necessary precursors to broader interpersonal or communicative consequences, and should thus be integrated into theoretical models of perspective-taking. As a result, a PTP model for verbal communication is proposed, grounded in the alternation of these two products: (1) the other person's perspective is accepted and agreed with by the agent (++); (2) the perspective is accepted but not agreed with (+-); (3) the perspective is neither accepted nor agreed with (--); and (4) the perspective is not accepted, yet the agent expresses agreement (-+).

Keywords: psycholinguistics, perspective-taking, outcomes of perspective-taking, success in perspective-taking.

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РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ ПРОЦЕССА ПРИНЯТИЯ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ В РЕЧЕВОМ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИИ: УСПЕШНОСТЬ И ПРИНЯТИЕ

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Аннотация. В данной статье процесс принятия перспективы (РТР) рассматривается не только как социальное или онтогенетическое явление, но прежде всего как индивидуальная когнитивная операция с чётко определёнными внутренними продуктами. В отличие от традиционного акцента на разделяемых результатах или последствиях принятия перспективы, в работе выделяются два ключевых продукта на уровне агента: (1) успешность РТР, понимаемая как точность и полнота воссоздания ментального состояния другого, и (2) принятие перспективы другого, при этом она отчётливо разграничивается с согласием. Основываясь на модели двухсистемного мышления и опираясь на психолингвистику и теорию разума (Theory of Mind), автор разрабатывает четырёхсценарную модель, отражающую взаимодействие между принятием и согласием. Эти два продукта: успешность и принятие, представлены как необходимые предварительные условия для возникновения более широких межличностных или коммуникативных последствий и, следовательно, должны быть интегрированы в теоретические модели принятия перспективы. В результате предлагается модель в вербальной коммуникации, основанная на чередовании этих двух продуктов: (1) перспектива другого человека принята и разделяется агентом (++) ; (2) перспектива принята, но не разделяется (+-) ; (3) перспектива не принята и не разделяется (--) ; (4) перспектива не принята, но агент выражает согласие (-+).

Ключевые слова: психолингвистика, процесс принятия перспективы, результаты принятия перспективы, успешность в восприятии чужой точки зрения.

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1 Introduction

1.2 Starting point, goal, and organisation of the paper.

Perspective-taking process (PTP) plays a fundamental role in human interactions. This paper discusses PTP in the light of verbal communication, bringing insights from contemporary psychology and the Theory of Mind.

PTP has traditionally been examined from a broad, outcome-oriented perspective, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages experienced collectively by all parties in an interaction. In contrast, this paper adopts a more granular approach, conceptualizing PTP as an individual cognitive process. It seeks to explore the specific internal products that emerge from this process and to situate them within a wider theoretical framework.

PTP is a phenomenon which hard to analyse due to its tenuous and subtle nature. Section 1.2 sheds light on multiple approaches to understanding this multifaceted concept.

It has been noted that perspective-taking is sometimes discerned differently: as a process, as a faculty, and as a personal trait. Section 2 gives an account of the processual nature of PTP and summarises some intricate points from other literature in this regard.

Since every process resulted in some ends, PTP also completes with the outcomes. However, Section 3 elucidates, that the outcomes are more general and touch on all parties involved in the verbal communication. Contrarily, I consider PTP from the bluntly technical point of view — as a purely individual process resulting in the particular products.

The minds of others are not directly accessible which can cause faults in the PTP accuracy. Thus, in Section 3.1, I consider the success of PTP as the inevitable first product of individual PTP. After a successful attempt to take the perspective of others the future development of verbal communication depends on whether a taker accepts or does not accept the other person's perspective as well as whether the taker agrees or disagrees with it. Therefore, in Section 3.2, I will give details on the second product of PTP: Acceptance/non-acceptance and agreement/disagreement with another perspective.

Section 4 brings corollary remarks on the place of the deduced individual products of PTP in the psychological theoretical framework but with a propensity to verbal communication aspect.

1.2 Multifaceted nature of perspective-taking

Broadly construed, perspective-taking can be defined as a process to understand the feelings and thoughts of others, their point of view, and how the target perceives the situation [19, p. 8]. Perspective-taking is a multifaceted phenomenon in terms of its various aspects. For instance, from the functional viewpoint, perspective-taking is divided into the following counterparts: cognitive and affective. The cognitive side of the given phenomenon stands for comprehending the thoughts and beliefs of other people; the latter deals with inference about the emotions and feelings of others. Additionally, researchers segregate perceptual perspective-taking into a separate domain, that is, comprehending what the other person experiences in terms of visual, auditory, or other perceptual aspects [10; 15; 24; 34].

Besides, some intricacy exists concerning the conceptual nature of the perspective-taking construct. Despite the relatively long history of the scrutiny on perspective-taking, scholars still conceptualise it disparately. Some scholars define perspective-taking as a process, others as a cognitive faculty, and the third group as a personality trait. Gasiorek and Hubbard [18] discerned this confusing point, analysed 15 articles on the basis of which they summarised discrepancies in the different notions and proposed an integrative definition of perspective-taking [18, p. 98]:

“a situated process of forming ideas about the content of another person's mental state, supported by an underlying (1) social cognitive ability with a developmental trajec-

tory and (2) general tendency for spontaneous engagement, which varies as an individual difference.”

Thus, Gasiorek and Hubbard highlighted the multifaceted nature of perspective-taking, defining the notion of it as a process which encompasses both cognitive ability and personal tendency.

Also, perspective-taking can be performed in two frequently confused forms regarding its focus: self-directed and other-person-directed. For example, you can infer what the others' internal state is by imagining how these others see and perceive the situation, that is, an imagine-other perspective. Second, you can imagine how you personally would feel in the situation were you in the place of the other person – an imagine-self perspective [3].

Schober [46] argued that there are four kinds of perspectives in a conversation. The first one is connected with the deictic expressions referring to the speaker's time, place, and identity. For example, in direct speech, deictic expressions like I and you represent that the origin of the utterance is in the face of the current speaker. The deictic expressions of time (today, yesterday, next year, etc.) point to the period of time from which the speaker reports. And, consequently, spatial deictic expressions (here, there, that, come, go) identify the location and spatial peculiarities of the current speaker.

The second kind of perspective in the conversation is called a conventional conceptualisation, that is [46, p. 148]:

“The way the speaker characterises the topic under discussion for the moment, as conventionally indicated by the linguistic form”.

In other words, the speaker chooses linguistic means (words, propositions, and other discourse forms) to express themselves relatively to a situation, location, object, etc. For instance, the expressions “the morning star” and “the evening star” can refer to the same object but have a different sense or, in terms of Schober, conventional conceptualisation.

The third form of perspective is the conversational agenda that bounds all the utterances in the discussion. For example, interlocutors can comprehend the conversation differently: either as serious or as small talk. Thus, the interpretation of the question “How are you?” might vary according to the interlocutors' perception of the conversation. Another case of the conversational agenda representation can be “following the script in a standardised survey interview”.

The three aforementioned types of perspectives reflect subtle and ephemeral stances people take, unlike the last, the fourth type – knowledge, which is a relatively permanent state of a person. It comprises all pieces of a person's knowledge, beliefs, world views, opinions, values, attitudes, and the like.

Overall, the purpose of this paragraph was to review some existing concepts of such a complex phenomenon as perspective-taking in the conversation. It allows us to glance at perspective-taking from disparate slants. So, to continue the salient line on the multifurcations of perspective-taking, let us further discern the phenomenon from another angle, where new facets of it can be identified. Namely, perspective-taking can be considered as a process and a product.

2 Perspective-taking as a process

The term “process” in a broad sense is defined as a set of actions directed to achieve a particular end [36]. Many cognitive activities are considered processes: thinking, learning, remembering, and many more, including perspective-taking.

The processual aspect of perspective-taking evokes no wonder since this phenomenon is dynamic in time [8] and accuracy [26; 37] and involves the constant operation of the responsible parts of the brain throughout the perspective-taking processing [24; 46]. Additionally, the majority of scholars determine perspective-taking as a cognitive process [6; 18; 22; 24; 39; 43].

Perceiving perspective-taking as a process, we inevitably arrive at the intentionality dilemma. Nowadays, there are two confronting groups regarding the issue of whether the process of perspective-taking is deliberate, conscious, and automatic [4]. The partisans of the first group argue that PTP is launched from the very beginning of the comprehension process, analysing the availability of the common ground for the interlocutor. Meanwhile, the second group adheres to the claim that PTP occurs later, during the effortful phase of communication.

Gehlbach&Mu [20] discern the PTP in the light of Kahneman's dual model of thinking elucidated in "Thinking Fast and Slow" [28]. According to this model, humans possess two types of thinking: System 1 and System 2. The system of the first rank is fast, automatic, subconscious, intuitive, stereotypic, and unintentional. Presumably, System 1 has evolved in order to jump to conclusions under restricted circumstances, mainly to survive. It answers questions such as "Should I approach or avoid?", "Is everything normal?", "Friend or foe?" and the like. And contrarily, System 2 is slow, effortful, conscious, deliberate, and analytical. It can be evoked in case of the need to override/amend/elaborate the impulsive conclusions of System 1. Also, it is vital to make a reservation that, in most cases, both systems process complementarily in tandem and not act alternately as it may seem at first glance.

Also, the process of perspective-taking can be implemented by multiple strategies [19]. There are several approaches of PTP attempted by the agents that have been identified: inferential strategies (analogy; compare/contrast; consider present context; draw on background information; projection, anchoring, and adjustment; reflection; stereotyping) and information cultivation strategies (attention regulation; emotion regulation; increasing modalities; information extraction). These listed strategies have been described as the mechanisms to enhance the accuracy of inferences about other people.

In the next parts, I will discuss what ends are resulted in the perspective-taking process.

3 Products of perspective-taking process

It has been previously mentioned that every process leads to particular completions, so, in a similar vein, PTP results in some outcomes. Nonetheless, in this study, it is useful to distinguish between the terms product and outcomes/consequences of perspective-taking in order to delineate a proper theoretical scope and avoid baffling conceptions.

When scholars talk about outcomes, they typically mean advantages/disadvantages for all interactants after PTP attempts. For example, it has been presented that perspective-taking faculty has a positive impact on the social collaborative sides of human beings: business and workplace [23; 30; 38], healthcare [25; 48], moral and cognitive development [27; 41], negotiations and disputes [9; 16], education [21; 33], close relationships [14] and many more. In other words, outcomes of PTP are a matter of mutuality, something that is to some extent shared by all parties involved.

As to the term consequences, e.g., Ku et al. [30] also utilised it as a synonym for outcomes or, as they call them, – effects of PTP. The scholars summarised these effects and indicated their direction with (+/-). If (+) then PTP increases an effect, if (-) – vice versa.

Contrarily to the term consequences, which refers to mutual, collaborative outcomes, let us discern the product of PTP from the pure technical vantage point, exclusively from the intrinsic position of an agent as an inevitable and logical result of his/her individual process of taking another perspective, which subsequently segues into the outcomes/consequences mentioned in Fig. 1.

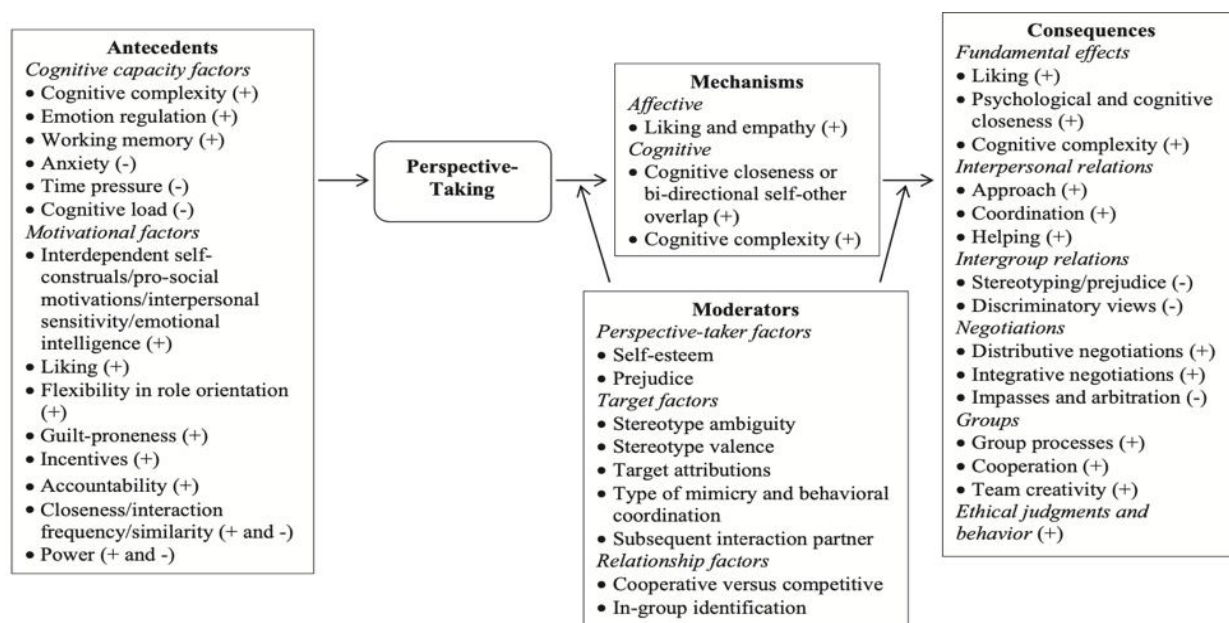


Figure 1. Organizing framework for the antecedents, consequences, mechanisms, and moderators of perspective-taking (Ku et al., 2015: 80)

The next sections of this study discuss the two types of immediate products resulting from the PTP, which I call the success of PTP and the acceptability of the other person's perspective by an agent.

3.1 Success of perspective-taking

To acquire the perspective of others, an agent has two options: either to infer it (which is exactly PTP) or to get it. Getting someone's perspective has been reported to be more precise since it comprises direct questioning [12] that certainly will assist in emerging a more holistic image of the other person's perspective. After an agent attempts to engage with the perspective of the others in the conversation by whatever means s/he has chosen, the verisimilitude of the taken perspective will be challenged during the rest of the discussion. Consequently, it might happen that the agent failed to comprehend others' perspective due to some circumstances that will be discussed further in this section. For that reason, Parker et al. [39, p. 6] coined the term effective perspective-taking¹, which is defined as a level of accuracy and comprehensiveness in identifying the thoughts and/or feelings of others as well as the reasons why they experience them. Thereby, effective perspective-taking is an inseparable companion to the active perspective-taking process, pointing at the success of the performed perspective-taking process.

Since the minds of others are not directly accessible, there might be incidents where a taker attempts to engage in another point of view without doing it accurately or effectively [39].

There are various accounts of the unsuccessful attempts of perspective-taking which can be divided into two generalised groups: health-related and non-health-related. For instance, in the first group, we can include atypical development and/or psychopathology reasons for the perspective-taking failures [29]. In particular, people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia have been found to have an impairment of perspective-taking capacity [31; 32; 45]. Also, people with autism spectrum disorder are known to have difficulties in performing Theory of Mind tests) [5; 40] which is explained by the inability to infer other mental states [2].

Another group of impediments to the success of perspective-taking attempts is unified by reasons which are not connected with any health problems and encompasses other

prerequisites like the dominance of stereotypes [1; 17], increased egocentrism [13; 44], lack of motivation [7; 11; 20; 22]. Besides, the success of the taken perspective might be false if the taker is exposed to the so-called “false consensus effect” [42]. This can happen to a person who unduly considers others’ beliefs and feelings as common and ubiquitous and ignores individual differences and circumstances. For instance, a student can say what other students feel at a conference because they have similar experience; nevertheless, it does not mean that the student is accurate in attributing emotional state to others, since individual differences and situations are not taken into account.

Thus, the passage of this section is that the success of PTP is the first immediate product of an attempt by the agent to engage in another perspective. There are a variety of factors which impact the effectiveness of PTP and thus define whether the attempt to take another perspective is eventually successful or fails. The significance of the success of PTP is determined by the surmise that it subsequently heavily affects the general outcomes or, in terms of Ku et al. [30], the consequences of the PTP.

3.2 Acceptance/non-acceptance and agreement/disagreement with the other person’s perspective

If we discern the success of PTP as a first-stage product coming after the individual process of taking another perspective, we thus arrive at the reasonable question of what is the next stage. Let us suppose that the agent made a success in taking another perspective, in other words, the agent’s process of taking another perspective ended up with a successful comprehension of another perspective. Now the agent has representations about the internal mental states (beliefs, feelings, etc.) of another person, and it is plausible to suggest that the plot of the next argumentative moves in the discussion will rely on whether the agent accepts this other person’s perspective. And here we arrive at the point where we should define the term acceptability of another perspective by the agent. Someone might confuse the acceptability of another perspective with agreement with it. For instance, McPherson [35, p. 34] in his experiments noted:

“...that respondents could support a perspective without agreeing with it: Many people noted that they did not necessarily agree, but understood why the person felt a certain way”.

So basically, to accept someone’s perspective does not necessarily mean to agree with it. One can accept another perspective, meaning the legitimisation of the internal states of another person, comprehension of why another person feels, behaves, reasons the way s/he does, and at the same time deprecate the contents of the taken perspective. Thus, the acceptability of another perspective and agreement are closely related, entangled concepts and considered in this study as the stages of one product.

Keeping in mind the difference between the acceptability of another perspective and agreeing with one, we suppose that they can alternate. Thus, there are three possible scenarios in the discussion: 1) the other person’s perspective was accepted by the agent and the agent agrees with this perspective (+ +); 2) a perspective was accepted, but the agent does not agree with it (+ –); 3) a perspective was not accepted, and the agent does not agree with it (– –). The fourth scenario (– +) seems to be controversial and might not exist in a real, reasonable discussion. Agreeing with the perspective which was not accepted (meaning a refusal to comprehend reasons standing behind the internal mental states of another person) evokes a question: How is it possible to agree with something that you cannot rationalise? We can fantasise about a scenario where the agent agreed with the perspective which had not been accepted, but as long as either this agreement is disingenuous, or the discussion is not reasonable. For example, the agent can agree with another perspective (which has not been accepted) in order to merely leave out or hush up a particular part of the discussion. And another case – is when a discussion is rather facetious and frivolous than really aimed to resolve the difference of opinions.

In other words, acceptance of another's perspective refers to the legitimisation of that person's internal states – essentially an acknowledgement that the perspective is a valid representation of that person's cognitive and emotional framework. For example, consider a discussion about climate change. Agent A believes that climate change is largely human-induced, while Agent B is sceptical. If Agent A can acknowledge that Agent B's scepticism might arise from a lack of trust in scientific institutions, that would constitute acceptance of Agent B's perspective, even if Agent A does not agree with it.

On the other hand, agreement, or disagreement with the other person's perspective refers to the concordance or discordance between the agent's own internal states and those of the other. Using the same climate change example, if Agent A not only understands Agent B's scepticism but also starts to share it, then Agent A both accepts and agrees with Agent B's perspective.

3.2.1 Interplay of Acceptance and Agreement: Four Scenarios

This section will elucidate the different combinations of acceptance and agreement, namely:

1. Acceptance and Agreement (++).

In this scenario, the agent both legitimises the other person's internal states and finds them consonant with their own. For example, two individuals may both accept and agree that systemic discrimination is a problem that needs immediate attention.

2. Acceptance but No Agreement (+-).

Here, the agent accepts the validity of the other person's internal states but does not find them congruent with their own. A classic example could be a religious discussion where an atheist accepts that a believer's faith gives them comfort and a sense of purpose but does not agree with the belief in a higher power.

3. Non-Acceptance and Disagreement (--).

In this scenario, the agent neither legitimises the other person's internal states nor agrees with them. An example might include someone who neither understands nor agrees with extremist ideologies.

4. The Fourth Scenario: A Theoretical Anomaly.

The fourth scenario (-+) raises a fascinating paradox. This scenario, in which one agrees with a perspective but does not accept it, seems inherently contradictory. This situation could only arise in a discussion that is either disingenuous or not oriented toward resolving differences of opinion. This would align with theories on the performative aspects of dialogue, wherein statements are made not to convey belief but to achieve some other end.

In accordance with the above, four scenarios are possible.

Scenario 1: Acceptance and Agreement (++)

Dialogue: Discussing Environmental Protection

- Agent A: "I believe that protecting the environment should be our top priority. Climate change is real and it's urgent that we act."
- Agent B: "I couldn't agree more. It's essential for us to adopt sustainable practices immediately. Our future depends on it."

In this dialogue, both agents not only accept each other's perspectives but also agree with them. They mutually legitimise the urgency and importance of environmental issues.

Scenario 2: Acceptance but No Agreement (+-)

Dialogue: Discussing Faith and Spirituality

- Agent A: "I find solace and purpose through my religious faith."
- Agent B: "I can see how faith can be a source of comfort for you, even though I personally don't believe in a higher power."

In this case, Agent B accepts Agent A's perspective that faith can offer solace and purpose. However, Agent B does not agree with the viewpoint, maintaining their atheistic stance.

Scenario 3: Non-Acceptance and Disagreement (--)

Dialogue: Discussing Vaccine Efficacy

- Agent A: "I think vaccines are a scam. They don't protect us but make us more susceptible to diseases."
- Agent B: "I can't understand how you would think that, given the overwhelming scientific evidence supporting vaccine efficacy. I strongly disagree with you."

Here, Agent B neither accepts nor agrees with Agent A's perspective. They find it unfounded and reject it based on scientific consensus.

Scenario 4: Theoretical Anomaly (-+)

Dialogue: Discussing a Political Election

- Agent A: "I believe Candidate X is the best choice because they promise to cut taxes."
- Agent B: "Yes-yes. I agree. Just let's not touch upon politics if you don't want to have an argument!"

In this hypothetical scenario, Agent B agrees with the statement that candidate X is the best but does not accept Agent A's belief. This scenario is less common and may often occur in discussions that are not sincere or not aimed at resolution.

4 A site of the PTP products inside the arranging model and conclusion

In the previous sections, PTP has been discerned from the functional vantage point and it has been deduced that there are two products resulting from this process: the success of PTP and acceptability/agreement of/with the taken perspective. Let us now seal everything in place and arrange the discussed process-product concept into the broader theoretical framework.

The first product of the attempted process to take someone's perspective is its success. If the perspective was taken with enough precision, then the development of the conversation with all other things being equal is likely to take place. Conversely, in case the perspective was taken wrongly, the conversation is likely to fail due to a deep misunderstanding between the parties.

After the successful taking of another perspective, which is exactly to infer the internal mental states of another person, the acceptability of it by the agent steps in. If the agent accepts the perspective of another person, s/he sees the reasons behind the internal mental states constructed in the brain of the other. The agent now has another perspective "in hand" and is capable of analysing it. And within the second product, the agent can agree or disagree with the taken perspective. In the first scenario (+ +), the topic being discussed in the conversation is likely to settle down and a reasonable conclusion can be achieved smoothly. Whilst the case, where the agent disagrees with the successfully taken and accepted perspective (+-), might evolve in intricate directions depending on what parts of the perspective were refused to agree with.

These are the very first stages of PTP, only after which we can judge the outcomes/effects/consequences of PTP. The interconnection between the latter and the products is clear: 1) if the PTP is unsuccessful, there will be no positive outcomes at all. The parties will even not be able to properly establish an initial common ground; 2) if the PTP is successful, then the subsequent development of the conversation highly depends on the second product, namely, the acceptability/agreement of/with the taken perspective. And only after this chain of cognitive activities can it be clear what kind of outcomes (see Fig. 1.) they arrived at.

Furthermore, the organisational model of PTP (Fig. 1) proposed by Ku et al. [30] seems to be partial if we take into account the interconnection between products of PTP discussed above and the consequences/effects of PTP.

So, we arrived at the point where we can conclude that products of PTP (success of PTP and acceptance/agreeing of/with others' PTP) are determinative antecedents of consequences/effects of PTP from Fig. 1, and, thus, from the communication perspective, some refinements can be added to the model offered by Ku et al. [30] (see Fig. 2).

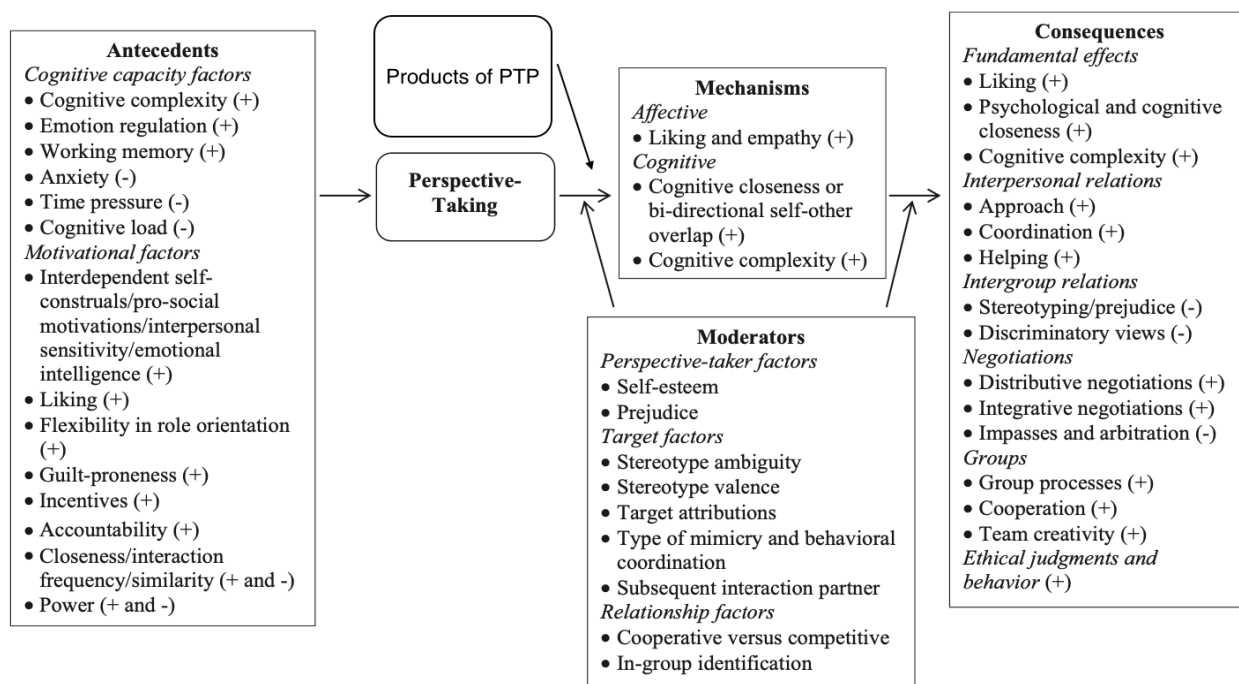


Figure 2. Modified model of PTP

Note

1. Parker [39] highlight perspective-taking as being intentional, goal-directed, and effortful by appending “active” to the accomplished and well-recognised collocation “perspective-taking process”.

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