

Children's understanding of others' social preferences based on various dimensions of shared similarities



Introduction

The relationship between similarity and preference is one of the most firmly established phenomena in social psychology (e.g., Aron, Steele, Kashdan, Perez, 2006; Sunnafrank, 1983).

Children prefer individuals who share similarities with them and make inferences about others' social interactions based on those similarities.

Language:

- Infants display preference for speakers of their native language around 4 months old (Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007).
- Nine-month-olds can utilize language to make inferences about third-party social affiliation and familiarity (Lieberman et al., 2017).

Preference:

- Eleven-month-olds preferred an agent who expressed a similar preference to their own than one with a different preference (Mahajan & Wynn, 2012).
- Two-years-olds can notice other people's preferences use this information to guide their social choices (Fawcett & Markson, 2010).

Imitation:

- Fourteen-month-olds can create expectations of instrumental actions based upon third-party communicative gestures. (Thorgrimmsson et al., 2014).
- Kindergarteners can infer affiliative relationships based on imitation (Over & Carpenter, 2014).

Research Question

Q: Do children form expectations about the social interactions of others based on similar attributes, and if so, which similarity cues are important?

Method

Participants:

- Participants were 56 4- to 7-year-old children ($M_{age} = 5$ years, 11 months, 26 days; 23 male, 33 female), and they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: *Language* ($N=16$), *Preference* ($N=21$), and *Behavior* ($N=19$).

Stimulus and Procedure:

- Children saw four familiarization-event videos which displayed the behaviors of three actors: a Target actor, Similar-actor, and Dissimilar-actor.
- Children were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: Language, Preference, and Behavior.
 - In the Language condition, the Similar-Actor spoke the same foreign language as the Target-Actor.
 - In the Preference condition, the Similar-Actor preferred the same toy as the Target-Actor.
 - In the Behavior condition, the Similar-Actor made the same physical motion as the Target-Actor.
- The role of Similar-Actor and Different-Actor, and shared language, preference, and motion was counterbalanced.
- Following the videos, children were asked two test questions: an interaction question and a comprehension question
 - After the interaction question, children were asked to rate the Target-actor's level of social liking.



Fig. 1. Photographs of test events shown in Language, Preference, and Behavior conditions.

Interaction question: "Between the woman in the purple shirt and the woman in the orange shirt, who do you think the woman in the blue shirt likes to play with?"

Comprehension question: "Between the woman in the purple shirt and the woman in the orange shirt, who do you spoke the same/liked the same toy/moved the same as the woman in the blue shirt?"

Likert Scale:



"Really want to"



"Want to"



"Little want to"

Fig 2. Photograph of the Likert-Type scale used to rate social liking

Results

Interaction Q

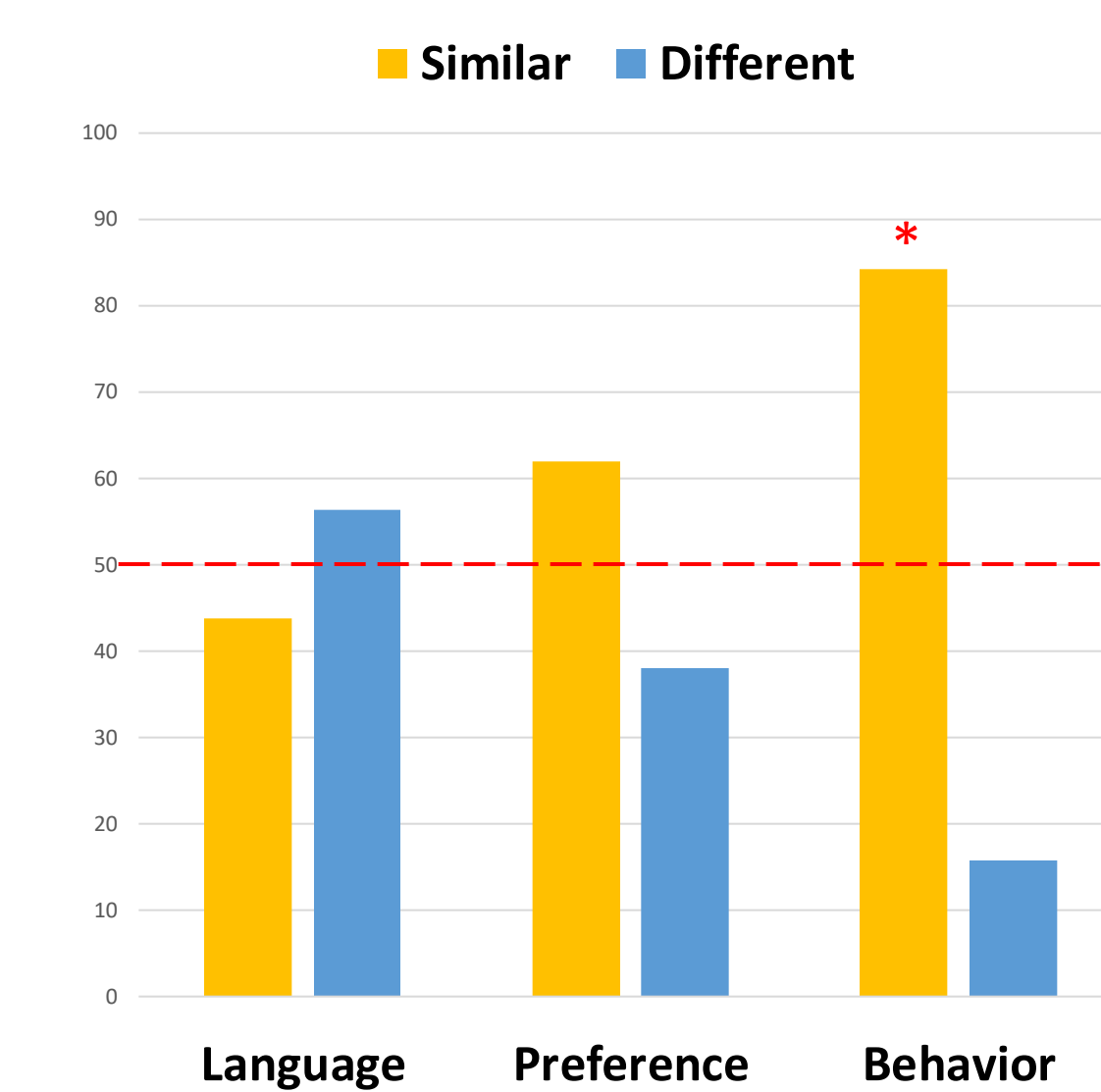


Fig. 3. Percentage of Interaction Question answers in Language, Preference, and Behavior conditions.

- In the **Language** condition, a similar number of children indicated social preference for both actors, regardless of if they shared a common trait with the Target. These choices were not significantly different than chance, $t(15) = .49, p > .250$.
- In the **Preference** condition, more children (62%) indicated social preference for the actor shared a common trait with the target. These choices were not statistically different from chance, $t(20) = 1.10, p > .250$.
- In the **Behavior** condition, more children (84%) indicated social preference for the actor shared a common trait with the target and these choices were significantly different from chance, $t(18) = 3.98, p < .001$.

Comprehension Q

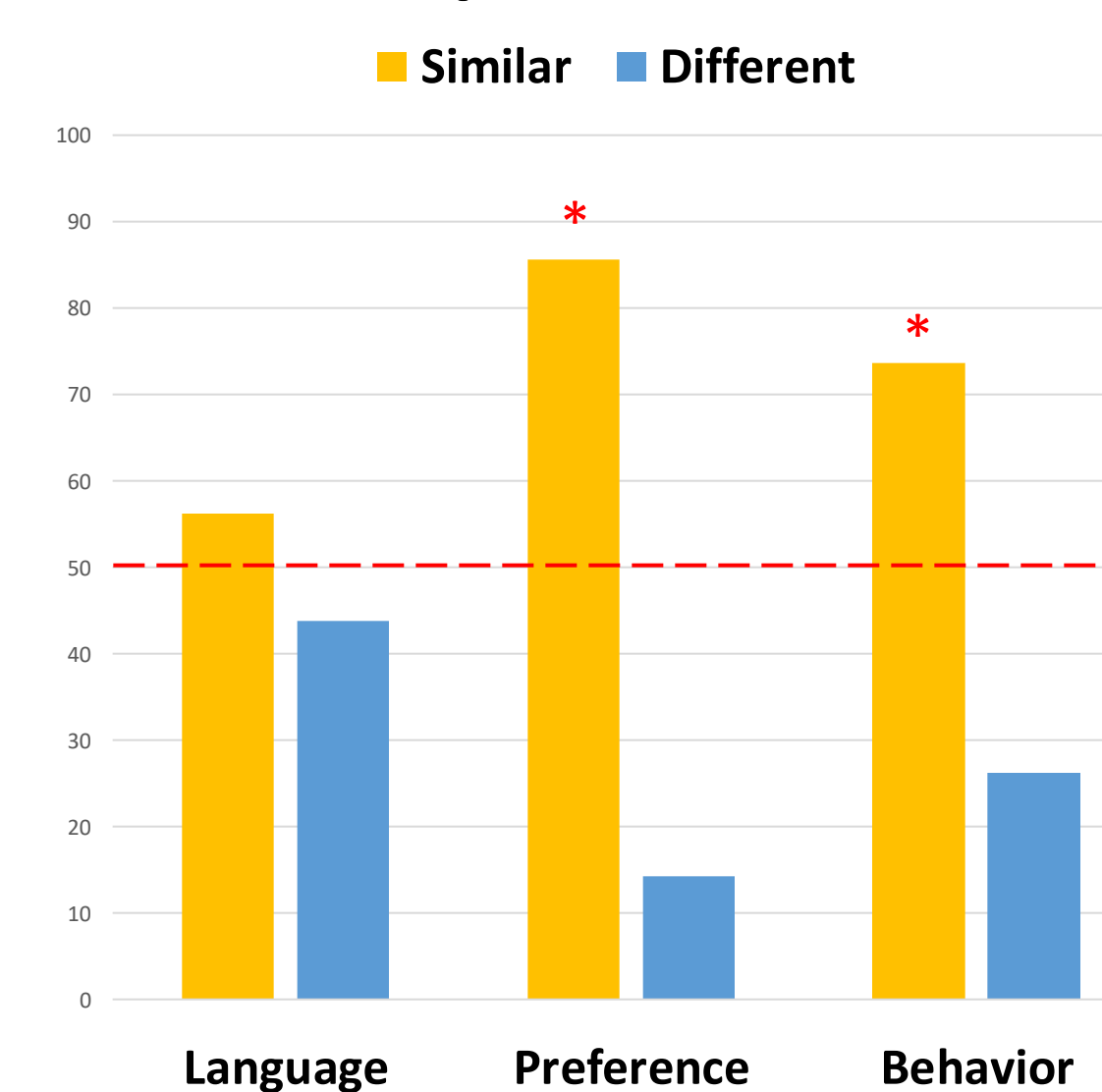


Fig. 4. Percentage of Comprehension Question answers in Language, Preference, and Behavior conditions.

- In the **Language** condition, a similar number of children chose both agents, regardless of if they shared a common trait with the Target. These choices were not significantly different than chance, $t(15) = .49, p > .250$.
- In the **Preference** condition, more children (82%) chose the actor that shared a common trait with the Target, and their choices were significantly different from chance, $t(20) = 4.60, p > .250$.
- In the **Behavior** condition, more children (74%) chose the actor that shared a common trait with the Target, and their choices were significantly different from chance, $t(18) = 2.28, p < .05$.

Discussion

- Among the three similarity cues examined, children demonstrated proficiency in encoding and utilizing behavioral cues to infer positive social interactions between others.
- While children were able to identify which actors shared toy preference, they did not always link this similarity with the idea of positive social interaction.
- In contrast to previous studies, children in this study not only failed to remember who shared language with whom, but also failed to use that information to infer the social interactions of others. The completed results will provide critical insights into the extent to which different similarity cues can infer social interactions with others, and how the ability to use these cues develops.

References

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