

Longitudinal Relations Between Social Competence and White Lie-telling in Pre-schoolers

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INTRODUCTION

- Rationale:**
- To effectively navigate the social world children have to learn how to deal with a number of social rules.
 - For instance, participating in interaction, interlocutors strive to maintain each other's face. Protective manoeuvres include polite behaviour towards the addressee (Goffman, 1967), and white lies may be treated as a manifestation of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Talwar et al., 2007).
 - Concurrently, protecting face in interaction is based on mutual knowledge (Brown & Levinson, 1987) which itself is a form of theory of mind.
- Aims:**
- The study aims to assess stability of prosocial lie-telling and changes in the rate of prosocial lie-tellers over the period between 5.5 to 6.5 years of age.
 - The longitudinal relations between white-lie telling and social competence, controlling for the advanced theory of mind (aToM) are explored.

METHOD

- Participants:**
- 134 children (64 girls)**
- Time 1 (T1) – 5.5 years**
M = 5.66, SD = .1
- Time 2 (T2) – 6 years**
M = 6.08, SD = .12
- Time 3 (T3) – 6.5 years**
M = 6.65, SD = .16
- aToM**
- **Modified Faux Pas Test** (Baron-Cohen, et al., 1999)
 - **Second Order False Belief Tasks** (Sullivan et al., 1994)
 - **White lie-telling task** (Warneken & Orlins, 2015)
 - **Peer Social Maturity Scale (PSMAT)** (Peterson et al., 2016)
 - **White lie-telling task** (Warneken & Orlins, 2015)

PSMAT items	
1	Skills for appropriately standing up for own opinions, needs and rights with peers
2	Skills for joining new groups of peers, or welcoming a new child into the group
3	Child's leadership skills with peers
4	Skills for coping with peers who frustrate or interfere with the group's goals and activities
5	Skills for understanding the needs and interests of peers who differ from the group norm
6	Maturity of the child's everyday modes of playing with peers
7	The overall maturity of the child's social skills

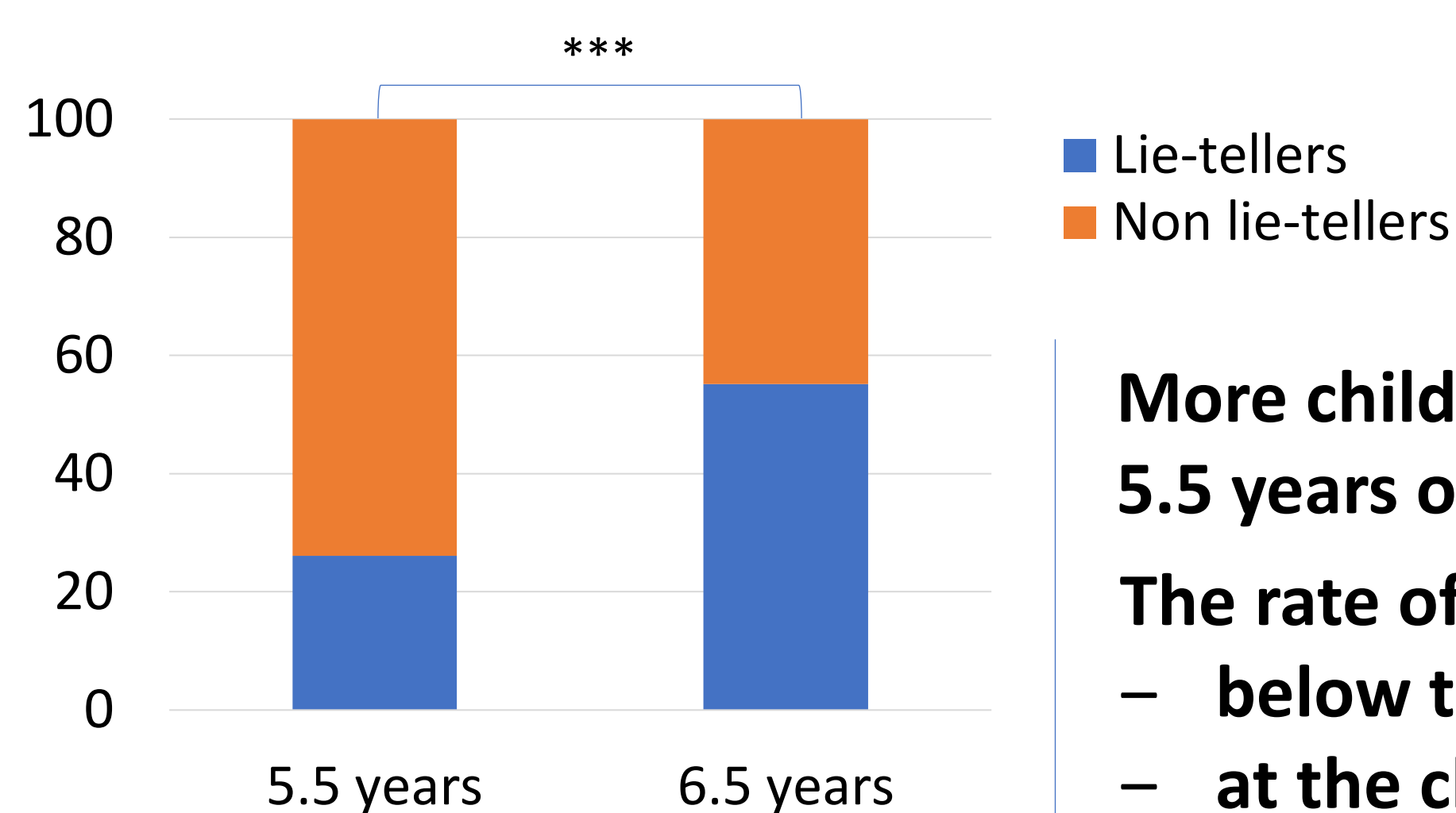
1 = very far behind the average child this age
4 = about average for children this age
7 = very far ahead of the average child this age



Note: Cronbach's alpha = .88, Inter-item correlations ranging from $r = .30$ to $r = .75$, all $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

RESULTS

Percentages of white lie-tellers at 5.5 and 6.5 years of age



More children told a white lie at 6.5 than 5.5 years of age

- The rate of lie-tellers is:
- below the chance level at 5.5
 - at the chance level at 6.5

Note: McNemar test, *** $p < .001$, $\phi = .47$, $p < .001$

Predicting social competence at the age 6

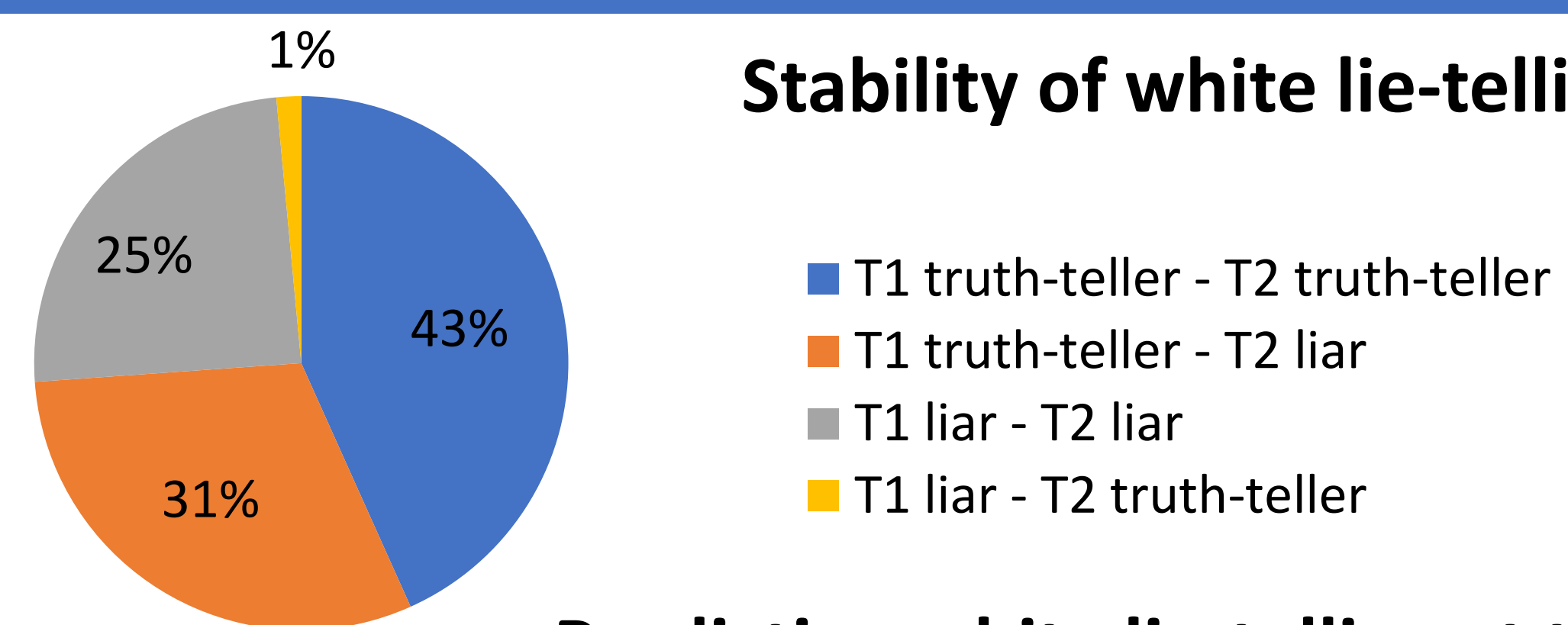
Block	Variables	β	ΔR^2
Block 1:	T2 Age	.01	.00
Block 2:	T2 Age T1 Faux Pas T1 Second-order False Belief	.04 .14 .04	.02
Block 3:	T2 Age T1 Faux Pas T1 Second-order False Belief T1 White Lie-telling	.02 .16 .00 .26**	.07**

Note: ** $p < .01$

White lie-telling at the age 5.5 is the only significant predictor of social competence at the age 6

Total $R^2 = .09$, $p < .05$

Stability of white lie-telling



Predicting white lie-telling at the age 6.5

Block	Variables	R^2	χ^2	B (SE)	OR
Block 1:	Constant T3 Age	.00	.15	2.99 (7.31) -.42 (1.1)	.69
Block 2:	Constant T3 Age T1 White Lie-telling	.31	35.83***	8.92 (1.07) -1.4 (1.3) 3.23 (.77)***	.25 25.3
Block 3:	Constant T3 Age T1 White Lie-telling T1 Faux Pas T1 Second-order False Belief T2 Social Competence	.32	36.10***	9.81 (8.9) -1.5 (1.32) 3.26 (.78)*** -.03 (.13) .07 (.22) -.01 (.04)	.22 25.94 .97 1.08 .99

Note: R^2 - Nagelkerke, *** $p < .001$

White lie-telling at the age 5.5 is the only significant predictor of white lie-telling at the age 6.5

DISCUSSION

Over the period between 5.5 to 6.5 years, **white lie-telling is developmentally stable** - majority of children who told a white lie at 5.5 lied also at 6.5. Simultaneously, the **overall rate of white lie-telling increases**. Children who told a white lies in the politeness setting at 5.5, half year later were rated by their teachers as more socially competent than those children who tell the blunt truth. Thus, **white lie-telling is a socially desirable behaviour which has an impact on the global perception of the child as a social agent**. Since, any aToM ability at 5.5 predict white lie-telling at the age 6.5 it could be argued that at least some types of white lies do not require a deep insight into mental states of the deceived (cf. Talwar et al., 2019; Warneken & Orlins, 2015). **Children's growing tendency to tell white lies in a politeness setting may be related to the decrease in the negative moral evaluations of this kind of lies with ages** (Lee et al., 1997; Cheung et al., 2015).

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