

## **Deception in a conflict situation in early childhood.**

**Ryoichi Watanabe (Kyoto University)**

Deception develops dramatically in childhood (Talwar & Lee, 2008). Previous research has shown that four-year-old children can deceive others intentionally (Sodian, Taylor, Harris, & Perner, 1991). Hayashi (2018) showed that when an enemy directly asked about where the protagonist hiding from the enemy was located, almost all of the six-year-old children successfully deceived the enemy (the individual condition).

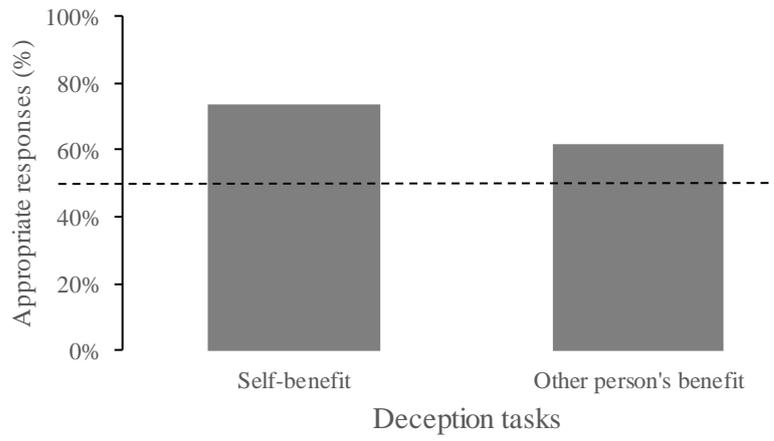
However, when a friend of the protagonist asked children while the enemy hid from the said friend and eavesdropped, they could not deceive the enemy (the conflict condition).

In the conflict condition, they were required to inhibit from telling the truth because the enemy could overhear them. However, it is not clear when and in what situations children can deceive in the conflict condition. This study aimed to investigate whether 1) seven- and eight-year-old children can deceive the enemy in the conflict condition, 2) deceptive motivation (deception for themselves vs. another person) affected children's deception, and 3) the ability to compute the second-order theory of mind (ToM2) was related to children's deception.

Children ( $N = 34$ , range = [6; 7–8; 5]) participated in this study. Children participated in two deception tasks (the self-benefit task and the other person's benefit task), followed by the ToM2 task. Children were made to watch a puppet show with three puppets – a friend, an enemy, and a protagonist. In the individual condition of the self-benefit deception task, Children hid their own stickers in one of two boxes. The enemy puppet then appeared and asked Children where the sticker was hidden. If

Children told the enemy where the sticker was, the enemy took it away. Therefore, Children should not tell the enemy the truth. In the conflict condition, Children again hid the sticker in one box. The enemy puppet appeared, then hid and eavesdropped. Subsequently, the friend puppet appeared and asked Children where the sticker was. If Children revealed to the friend puppet where the sticker was located, the enemy, who was eavesdropping, would take it away. The other person's benefit task was almost the same as the self-benefit task, except that it was a protagonist puppet that was hidden in one of two boxes. If Children disclosed where the protagonist was hiding, the enemy would find the protagonist and tease him. Children also took the Ice cream story task as the ToM2 (Perner & Wimmer, 1985).

Binomial tests were conducted to assess whether the performances in the deception tasks were above or near chance. The results showed that the self-benefit task was above chance (50%),  $p < .001$ , while the other person's benefit task was near chance,  $p = .23$  (Figure 1). Fisher's exact tests were then conducted to examine associations between the deception task and the ToM2 task performance. There was no significant relationship between the two. These findings suggest that seven- and eight-year-old children can deceive for self-benefit in the conflict condition but not for another person's benefit. The second-order theory of mind was not related to deception in this specific task.



**Figure 1. Appropriate responses in the deception tasks**