

# Preschool children's irony comprehension and the impact of the family environment on its quality

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My PhD research capitalizes on preschool children's irony comprehension. In general, children appear to have difficulties with the comprehension of irony. There are many open questions about the development of irony understanding, including the steps, cognitive background and central mechanisms of the process.

My small-scale pilot-study aimed to assess the impact of parents' attitudes towards irony on the quality of children's irony comprehension. Regarding the participants, the full sample included 19 families from Hungary, which meant 20 children (fraternal twins in one case), 19 mothers and 19 fathers. The children's mean age was 4 yrs 6 months. All the participants were monolingual, Hungarian-speaking.

The instruments employed in the experiment were devised based on the ones used in the studies by Banasik (2020) and Schnell (2021). The tests were performed in the children's homes. While the parents were completing an Attitude Toward Irony self-report questionnaire measuring their attitude towards irony, the experimenter conducted an Irony Comprehension Test with the child.

The Irony Comprehension Test included 8 stories within a day of a preschool child named Máté. Four stories ended with an ironic and four with a non-ironic statement uttered by an adult. The stories were recited to the children by the experimenter together with virtual stimuli (2 drawings specifically designed for this experiment) presented on a tablet. Following each story, two follow-up questions about the final (ironic/non-ironic in a random order) utterance had to be answered by the children. They had to guess what the speaker meant by the utterance, i.e. they were expected to realize that in the case of the ironic utterances the intended meaning was the opposite.

The Attitude Toward Irony self-report questionnaire completed by the parents involved 11 questions. The first four questions each presented the same situations as the stories ending with an ironic comment in the children's questionnaire, and were aimed at finding out if the parents would make such comments. The rest of the questions was designed to learn the following about the parents: whether they liked using irony at home, how often they did it, what they used it for, if they considered irony a good thing, as well as gathering their assumptions on their child: concerning their level of irony comprehension, if they understood what it was used for, how often they used it.

Data showed that the age factor affected preschool children's irony interpretation. The findings reinforced Banasik (2013)'s results, namely, with age, children became more proficient in irony comprehension and even 4-year-old children understood irony. In line with previous research (see Banasik- Jemielniak et al., 2020), the results indicated moderate positive associations between children's levels of irony comprehension and the levels of mothers' irony use.

Keywords: preschool, children, irony, comprehension, parental

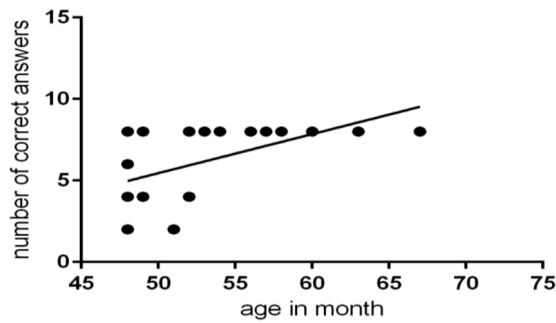
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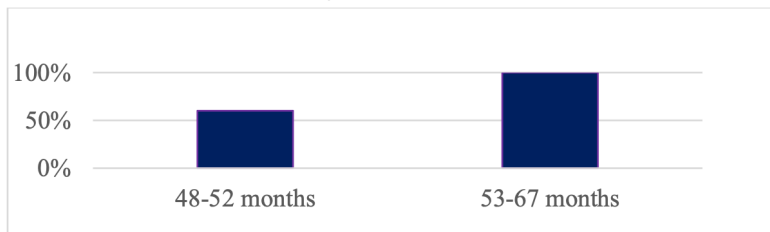
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DOI: 10.34103/ARGUMENTUM/2021/26

**Results: influence of age**

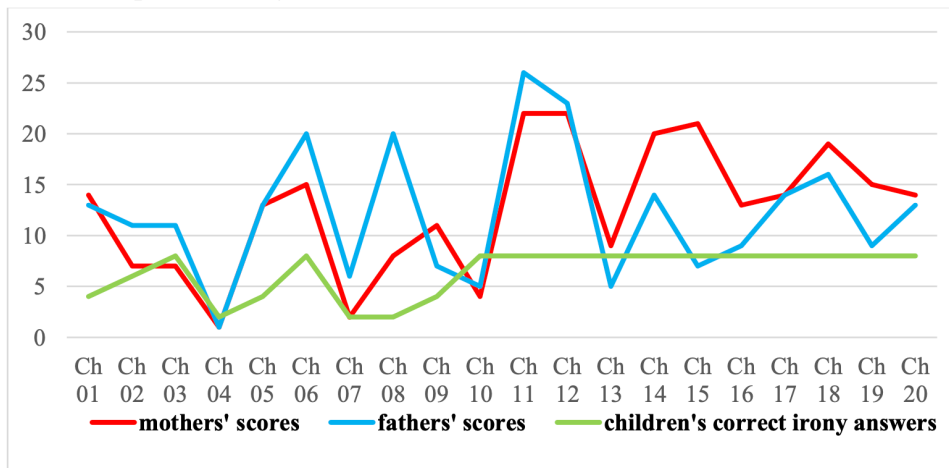


moderate positive correlation bw. children's age and their correct irony answers  
(Pearson:  $r = .544$ ,  $p < .05$ )

**Results: children's accuracy in ICT**



**Results: impact of family**



moderate positive correlation bw. mothers' ATI scores - children's correct irony answers  
(Pearson:  $r = .5818$ ,  $p < .05$ )