

Preschoolers' Selective Trust in Moral Promises

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Abstract : Trust is a critical foundation of social interaction and development, playing a significant role in the physical and mental well-being of children, as well as their social participation. Previous research has demonstrated that young children do not blindly trust others but make selective trust judgments based on available information. The characteristics of speakers can influence children's trust judgments. According to Mayer et al.'s model of trust, these characteristics of speakers, including ability, benevolence, and integrity, can influence children's trust judgments. While previous research has focused primarily on the effects of ability and benevolence, there has been relatively little attention paid to integrity, which refers to individuals' adherence to promises, fairness, and justice. This study focuses specifically on how keeping/breaking promises affects young children's trust judgments. The paradigm of selective trust was employed in two experiments. A sample size of 100 children was required for an effect size of $w = 0.30$, $\alpha = 0.05$, $1-\beta = 0.85$, using G*Power 3.1. This study employed a 2x2 within-subjects design to investigate the effects of moral valence of promises (within-subjects factor: moral vs. immoral promises), and fulfilment of promises (within-subjects factor: kept vs. broken promises) on children's trust judgments (divided into declarative and promising contexts). In Experiment 1 adapted binary choice paradigms, presenting 118 preschoolers (62 girls, Mean age = 4.99 years, SD = 0.78) with four conflict scenarios involving the keeping or breaking moral/immoral promises, in order to investigate children's trust judgments. Experiment 2 utilized single choice paradigms, in which 112 preschoolers (57 girls, Mean age = 4.94 years, SD = 0.80) were presented four stories to examine their level of trust. The results of Experiment 1 showed that preschoolers selectively trusted both promisors who kept moral promises and those who broke immoral promises, as well as their assertions and new promises. Additionally, the 5.5-6.5-year-old children are more likely to trust both promisors who keep moral promises and those who break immoral promises more than the 3.5- 4.5-year-old children. Moreover, preschoolers are more likely to make accurate trust judgments towards promisor who kept moral promise compared to those who broke immoral promises. The results of Experiment 2 showed significant differences of preschoolers' trust degree: kept moral promise > broke immoral promise > broke moral promise \approx kept immoral promise. This study is the first to investigate the development of trust judgement in moral promise among preschoolers aged 3.5-6.5. The results show that preschoolers can consider both valence and fulfilment of promises when making trust judgments. Furthermore, as preschoolers mature, they become more inclined to trust promisors who keep moral promises and those who break immoral promises. Additionally, the study reveals that preschoolers have the highest level of trust in promisors who kept moral promises, followed by those who broke immoral promises. Promisors who broke moral promises and those who kept immoral promises are trusted the least. These findings contribute valuable insights to our understanding of moral promises and trust judgment.

Keywords : promise, trust, moral judgement, preschoolers

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