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# 'Where does a wug go?' How pre-schoolers use sentence context to infer the taxonomic categories of novel nouns

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## USING VERB SELECTIONAL RESTRICTIONS TO INFER NOVEL NOUN MEANINGS

### Prior studies.....

- ❑ Only examined inferred semantic categories at very broad level.
  - e.g. animate vs. inanimate.
- ❑ Only required identification of object appearance.
- ❑ Novel object appearance logically connected to verb selectional restrictions.
  - 'the veps is crying' → only 1 obj has eyes.
- ❑ In many studies, learning could have occurred in test phase itself.

### METHOD

#### TRAINING:

- 36 4-yr-olds, all exposed to 1 novel food AND 1 novel clothing
- Objects shapes did not indicate category
- Story-book context
- Each frame had a target AND a foil.

#### DESIGN: (between-subjects)

1. Verb selectional restrictions
  - a) Food: cook X; eat X; spill X; feed baby X
  - b) Clothes: iron Y; wear Y; put on Y; take off Y
2. Label-only: 'is with X; 'X is there'; there is the X'

#### TEST:

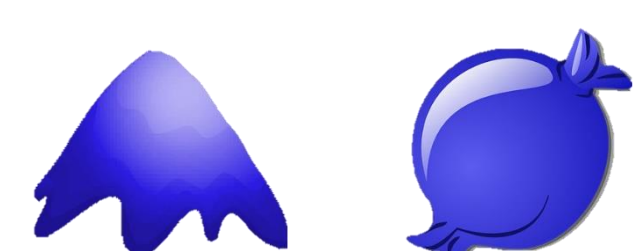
1. Taxonomic categorisation

'Where does a wug go?'



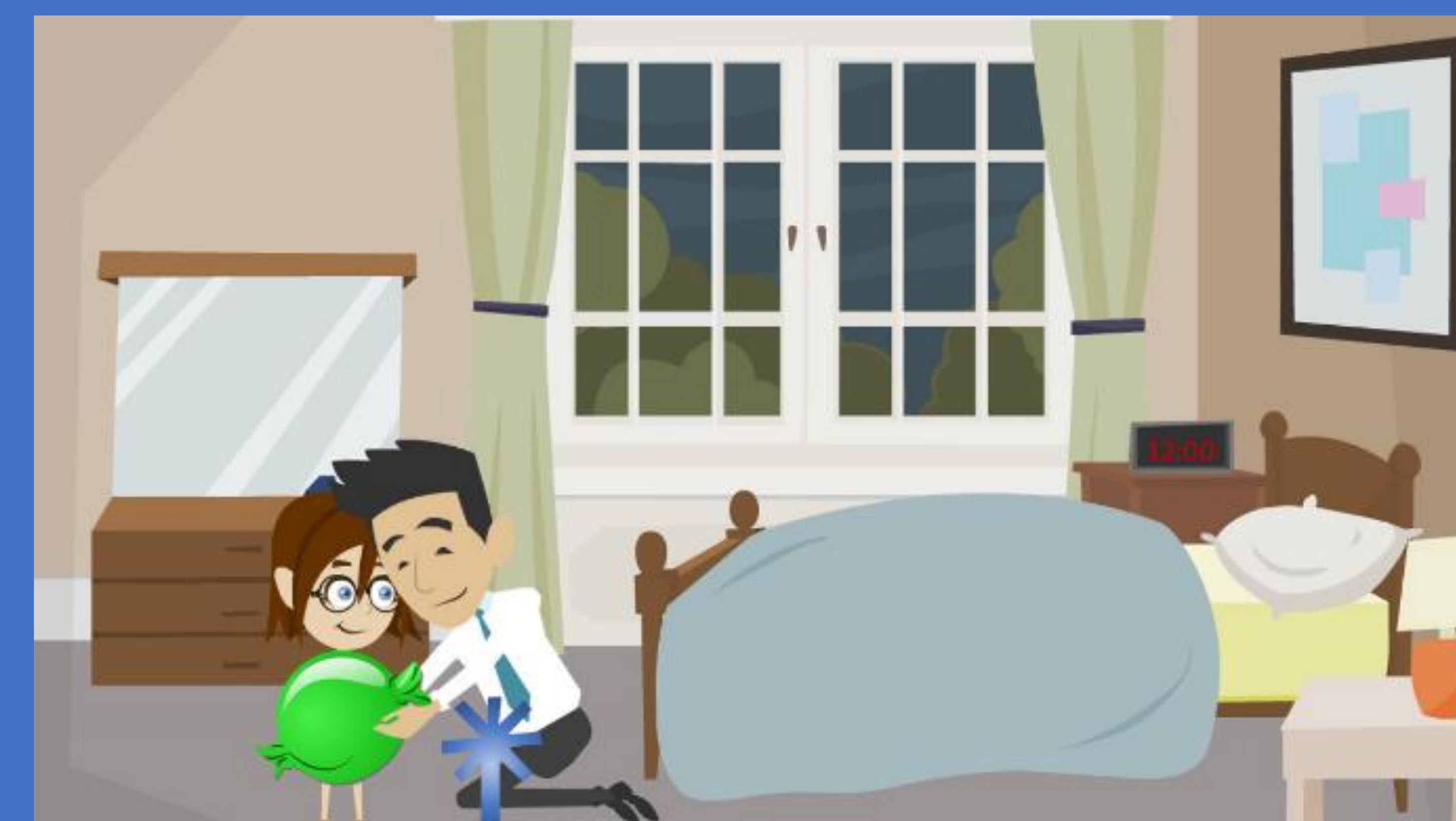
2. Object-label mapping

'Show me the wug!'



# Preschoolers can infer object function from sentential context alone

'Where does a wug go?'



## RESULTS

Fig.1. Post-test Performance Across Groups

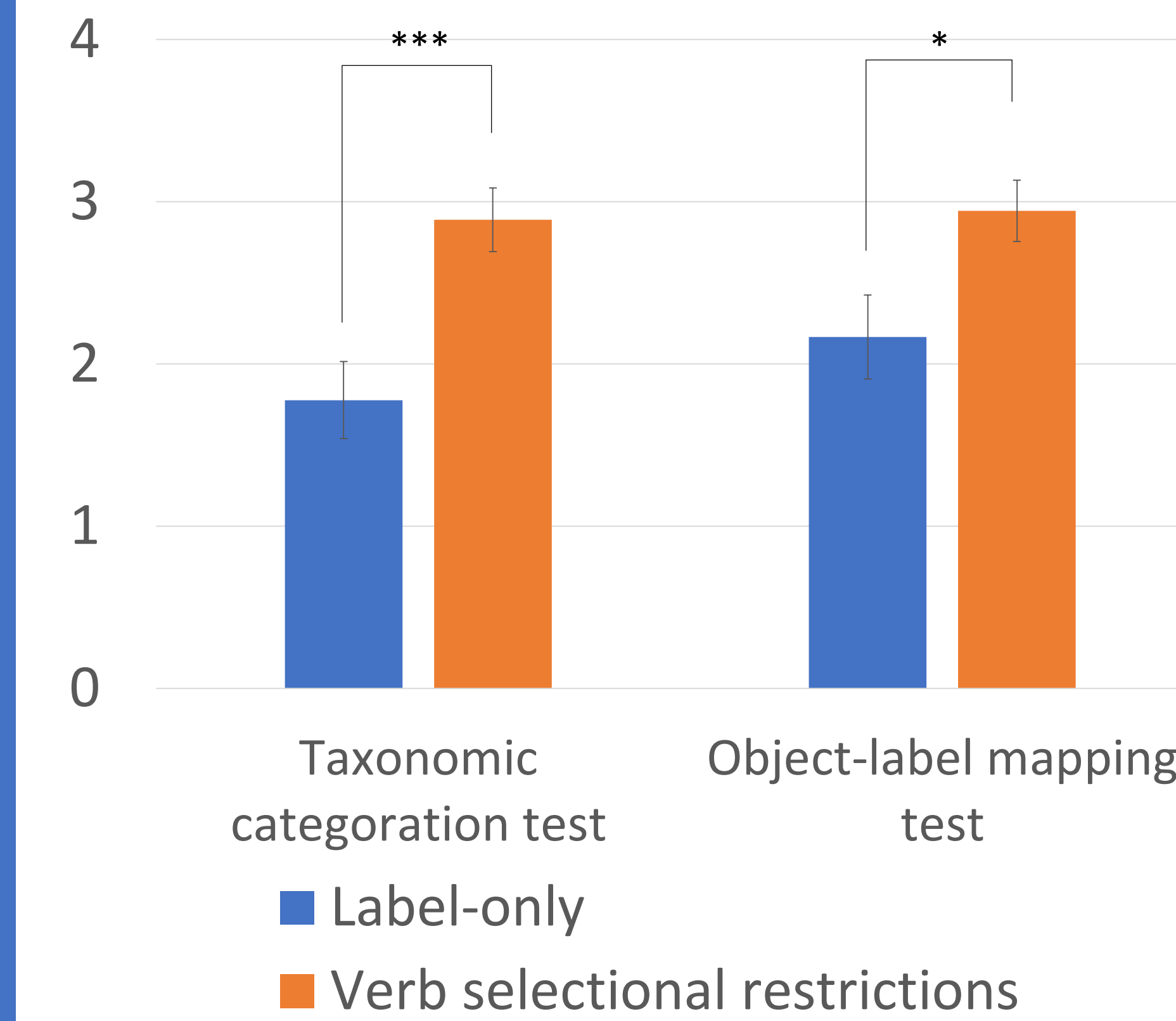
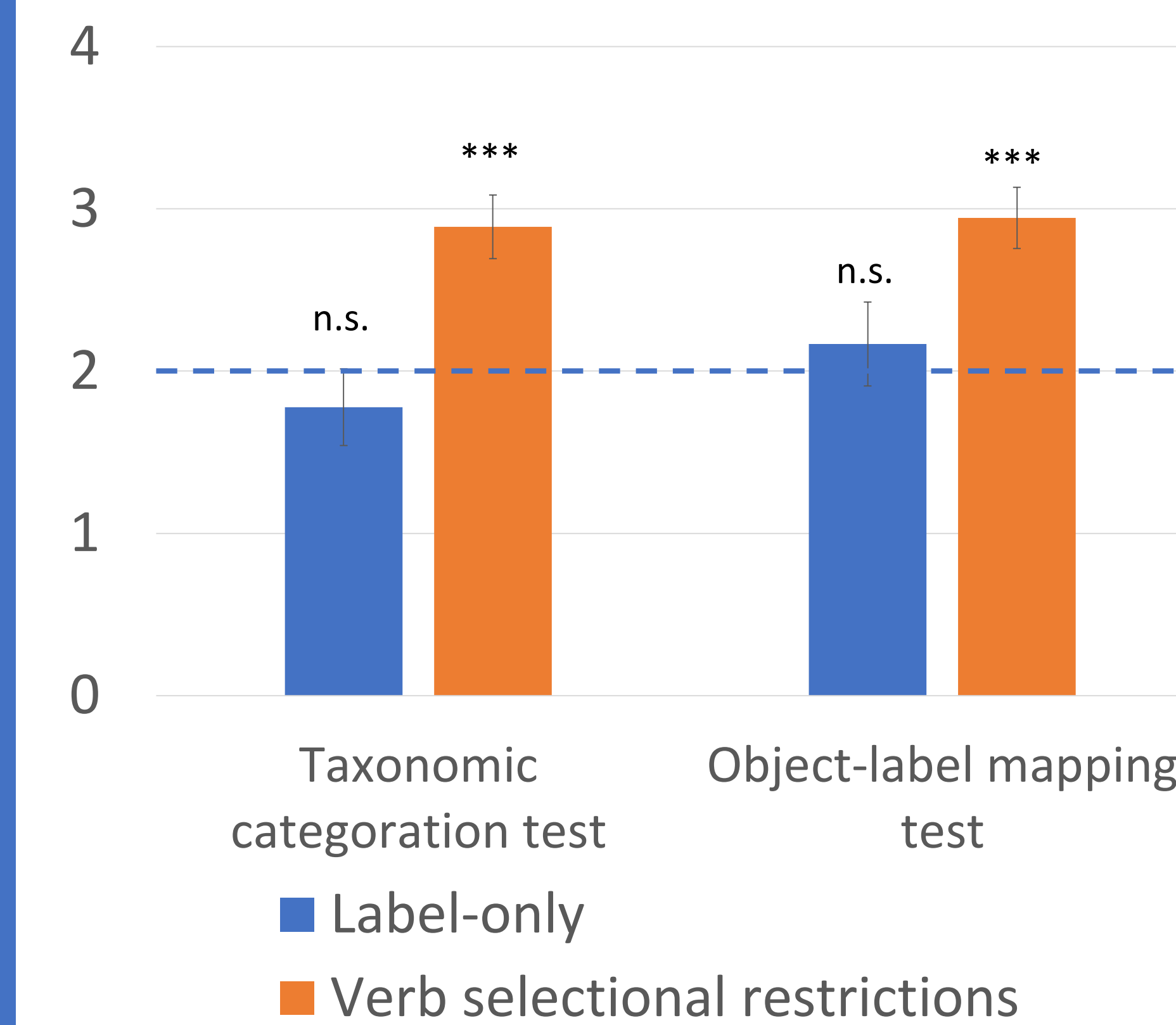


Fig.2. Post-test Performance Against Chance



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