

Humor Development in Children

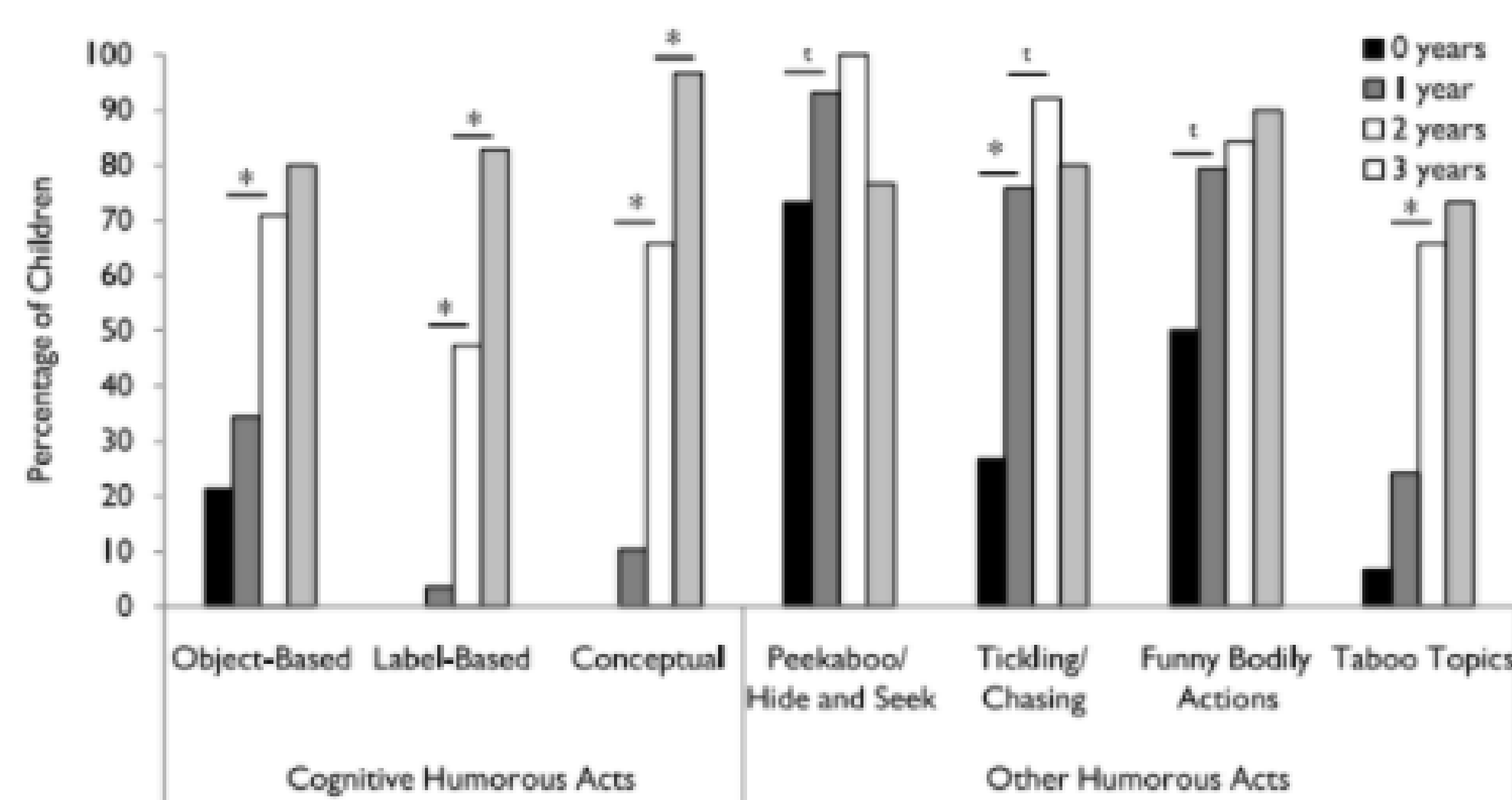
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Background

The purpose of this research was to study humor development in children. This study is an replication and extension of the Hoicka and Akhtar paper from 2012. Hoicka and Akhtar (2012) suggested that humor was a socio-cognitive phenomenon and were curious to know if toddlers could produce novel humor, or if it all consists of copied humor patterns from their parents. They found that even children under 12 months of age "produce" humor through hide-and-seek and peekaboo games, and that many children begin to produce novel verbal and conceptual jokes around 2 years of age. Also referenced in this study is McGhee's premise of the congruity principle stating that something is funnier when it goes against something we know or in violation of how it is actually supposed to be. In young children they must understand the task and why it is incongruent in order to find it funny.

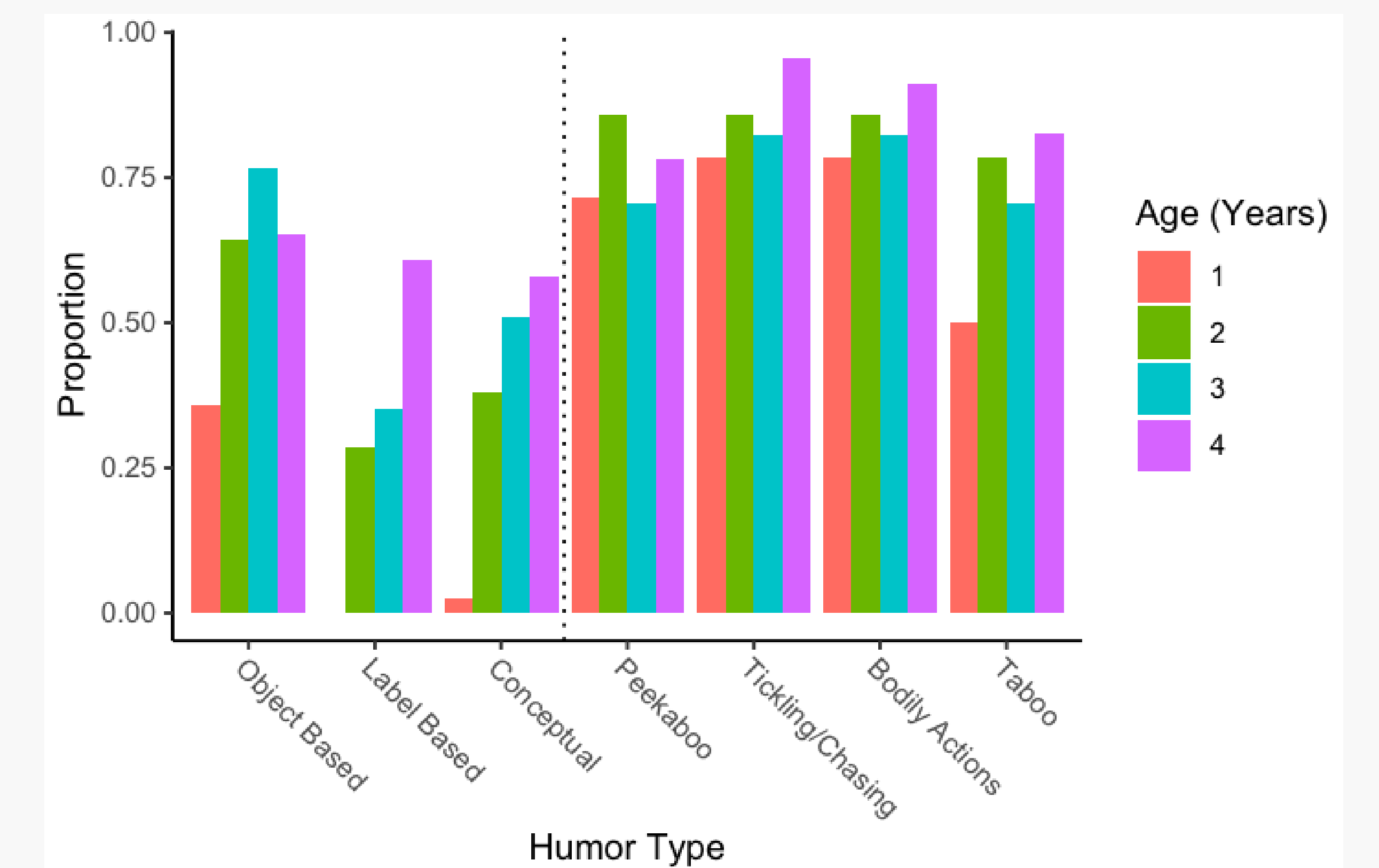
These are the findings from the study that we replicated:



Survey questions and examples

- Does your child misuse objects as a joke, for example, putting shoes on their hands or using the wrong end of a spoon?
Example: Putting mittens on feet
- Does your child mislabel objects or events as a joke, for example, calling a spoon a fork, or saying that they are running when they are hopping?
Example: She often will purposefully mix up the names of people in our household as a joke
- Does your child use nonsense language as a joke, for example, saying, "oogy boo", or rhyming real words with nonsense words, for example, "Daddy Schmaddy"?
Example: Pretending nonsense words are his own language
- Does your child make jokes involving the misattribution of characteristics such as number, colour, or shape, for example, saying that cats have five legs, that frogs are purple, or that wheels are square shaped?
Example: She held her hands up and said, "Look, I have 11 fingers, when I was practicing my magic I accidentally made another one grow!"
- Does your child make jokes describing events that do not occur, for example, saying that horses fly, that you can eat crayons, or that pigs say, "moo"?
Example: "Hotdogs dancing on your head"
- Does your child play peekaboo or hide and seek as a joke?
- Does your child play "I'm gonna get you" or tickle or chase others?
- Does your child make funny actions with their bodies as a joke, for example, pulling funny faces, kicking legs in the air?
Example: Sticking out her tongue
- Does your child make jokes involving gross things, for example, toilet humour, sneezing, smelliness, etc.?
Example: All of a sudden she says bye to her poop when she flushes

Results



The results from the replicated survey show that the most reported type(s) of humor among children at ages 1 and 2 were peekaboo, tickling/chasing, and bodily actions. Label-based humor increased at age 2, and conceptual humor increased at age 4.

Discussion

Our findings support the idea that children are producing novel jokes by 2 years of age, but conceptual humor is produced later.

Children in our sample produced less humor overall than children in the original paper. This could be due to cultural differences between the two groups, or differences in how parents interpreted the questions.

Further research would be necessary to investigate recently mastered concepts in relation to production of humor, specific to what children are currently learning in school. Research could also be extended to college students to further test the cognitive congruency principle.

