



# Repeating what children say positively influences their learning and motivation



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 16 June 2015

Received in revised form 27 August 2015

Accepted 31 August 2015

### Keywords:

Mimicry

Chameleon effect

Children

Motivation

Learning

Task performance

## ABSTRACT

Research reports that individuals judge more positively those who mimic them and are more likely to comply with a request made by a mimicker. We hypothesized that mimicking could also enhance one's motivation, performance and evaluation of an instructor. Nine- and ten-year-old children were either mimicked or not by an instructor at the beginning of an interaction. Here, mimicry consisted in literally repeating what the children said. Afterwards, performance in a learning task was measured and the interview ended with the evaluation of the interaction and the instructor. It was found that children in the mimicry condition spent more time on a subsequent task and that their recall performance significantly increased. A mimicked child revealed more personal information to the mimicker and indicated more pleasure and ease with performing the task, in addition to perceiving more interest and attention from the mimicker. These results suggest that mimicry influences learning, motivation and evaluation of the learning context.

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## 1. Introduction

Mimicry, also called “the chameleon effect” (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999), refers to the imitation of facial expressions, postures, and mannerisms of a counterpart, as well as the verbal content and expressions displayed by the individual. Although several forms of mimicry exist and have been studied (e.g., spontaneous mimicry, social learning by observation, active listening), in this paper, mimicry was studied as a social influence technique by examining how people reacted when someone was instructed to mimic them literally. Research on this topic has focused on how the mimicker is perceived by the person being mimicked and how mimicry influences the behavior and opinions of the mimicked individual.

## 2. Mimicry and liking

A host of previous research has consistently reported that individuals like those who mimic them. In the first experimental study on nonverbal mimicry, Maurer and Tindall (1983) asked a counselor to mimic a client's arm and leg positions; they then observed that mimicry enhanced the client's opinion of the counselor's level of empathy in contrast with a situation where the counselor did not mimic the client. Likewise, Chartrand & Bargh (1999) found that participants who were mimicked by a confederate reported liking that confederate more than those participants who were not mimicked. Similarly, but in a different context, Jacob, Guéguen, Martin and Boulbry (2011) reported that sales clerks who were instructed to mimic some of the verbal expressions and nonverbal behavior of their customers during the sales process were perceived by the

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customers as being more competent, agreeable and friendly during the sales interaction than sales clerks who did not mimic the customers. In speed-dating sessions, Guéguen (2009) observed that men evaluated mimicking women more positively. The effect of mimicry in an immersive virtual reality situation has also been reported. Bailenson and Yee (2005) conducted a study in which a virtual agent verbally presented a persuasive argument (a message advocating a campus security policy) to a participant. In half of the cases, the virtual agent mimicked the participant's head movements with a 4-s delay while for the rest of the participants, the agent mimicked the prerecorded movements of another participant. After each interaction, participants indicated whether they agreed with the message delivered by the agent and then gave their impression of the agent. It was observed that the mimicking virtual agent was more persuasive and received more positive trait ratings than the non-mimicking agent. Recently Kulesza et al. (2015) reported the same results in a situation where a confederate mimicker interacted with a participant in a computer-mediated communication situation. Again, there was greater liking for the confederate in the mimicry condition than in the non-mimicry condition.

Mimicry has been associated with a greater liking for mimickers and a greater feeling of affiliation: studies have also reported that mimicry leads the participant to help the mimicker. Van Baaren, Holland, Steenaert, and Van Knippenberg (2003) observed that mimicking the verbal behavior of customers in a restaurant by repeating the patrons' orders increased the size of tips received by a waitress. Similarly, Van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, and Van Knippenberg (2004) observed that a participant previously mimicked by a confederate helped more often when the latter "accidentally" dropped some pens on the floor. When an explicit request for help was made (i.e., asking a student participant for written feedback about a student-confederate essay or asking for directions in the street) more compliance with the request was observed when the participant had previously been mimicked by the confederate (Fischer-Lokou, Martin, Guéguen, & Lamy, 2011; Guéguen, Martin, & Meineri, 2011; Kulesza, Dolinski, Huisman, & Majewski, 2014). In a business interaction context, Jacob, Guéguen, Martin, and Boulbry (2011) reported that customers in a store complied more favorably with the sales clerk's suggestion during the sales process after being mimicked. Again, Kulesza, Szypowska, Jarman, and Dolinski (2014) reported that female customers in a cosmetics shop spent more money when a female sales clerk mimicked them. Research has also reported that behavioral mimicry can facilitate the outcome of negotiations. It has been demonstrated that mimicry facilitates a negotiator's ability to uncover underlying compatible interests and increases the likelihood of closing a deal in a negotiation where a prima facie solution was not possible (Fischer-Lokou et al., 2014; Maddux, Mullen, & Galinsky, 2008).

### 3. Mimicry, affiliation and rapport

Overall, research on mimicry has reported that mimicking a stranger is a good way for the mimicker to be perceived more positively by the individual and to increase the probability of compliance with the mimicker's request or suggestion. To explain these results, most scientists stated that mimicry created affiliation and rapport (Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, & Chartrand, 2003), which explained why we perceive the mimicker more positively and why we comply more favorably with the solicitation made by a mimicker. Yabar, Johnston, Miles, and Piles (2006) observed that participants were more likely to mimic nonverbal behavior of members of their in-group than members of their out-group. They explained their results as a consequence of the desire for affiliation and rapport with the in-group individuals. The higher this desire, the more participants used mimicry in order to be perceived more positively and to show their intent to interact with the in-group members. LaFrance (1979) conducted a longitudinal survey designed to explore the relationship between measures of non-verbal synchrony and self-reported indications of rapport in a group of college students. LaFrance found that posture sharing between the instructor and the students was positively related to rapport and concluded that postural mimicry is influential in establishing rapport. Further research reported that affiliation and rapport created by mimicry led participants to reveal more intimate information. Guéguen, Martin, Meineri, and Simon (2013)

All together, these studies seem to show that mimicry positively influences how we judge the mimicker and comply with his/her request. Research also found a link between cognitive processes and mimicry. Kouzakova (2009) reported higher scores on the Stroop effect test with mimicked participants. Research also found that mimicry interacted with emotion recognition. Stel and van Knippenberg (2008) reported that female participants who were constrained from mimicking faces with emotional expressions were slower to recognize the affective valence of the faces. However, a recent study conducted by Kulesza et al. (2015) found that participants who were instructed to mimic an actress presented on a prerecorded video were less accurate at identifying her facial displays of emotion.

### 4. Objective and hypothesis

Several objectives were pursued in this study. First we wanted to examine whether mimicry had an effect on children. It appears important to know if humans at a young age are also influenced by mimicry in social interaction. In fact, all the studies reported above used adult mimickers and adult participants. The effect of mimicry on children has never been previously examined. Second, and most importantly, if mimicry leads individuals to perceive the mimicker more positively and to create greater intimacy, affiliation, rapport and desire to help, we would expect mimicry to also increase the motivation of the individuals who are mimicked to perform a task suggested by the mimicker. Accordingly, if motivation to complete a task increases, task performance should increase. Third, in most of the studies where the perception of the mimicker was measured, the participant rated how much he/she liked the mimicker. However, it could also be hypothesized that individuals who are mimicked perceive the mimicker as someone who understands him/her.

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