

## Study Shows Dogs Can Selectively Imitate Actions

**Research finds dogs can imitate actions of other dogs much like human infants imitate adults.**

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There are strong similarities between dogs and people in the way they imitate the actions of others, according to a new study published today in the journal *Current Biology*.

The study by three researchers – two from the University of Vienna and one from the University of Budapest – reveals something known as “selective imitation,” which says that dogs, like human infants, don’t just copy an action they observe, but adjust the extent to which they imitate to the circumstances of the action.

In the study, dogs were faced with the task of opening a container with food by pulling a rod. Whereas dogs prefer to use the mouth for this task, a female dog was trained to open the box with her paw.

When the other dogs observed the female’s action, they imitated it in order to get the food. However, the dogs imitated selectively; they used mouths instead of their paws for manipulating the rod when they saw the female dog using her paw while holding a ball in her mouth.

But when the demonstrating dog’s mouth was free, the dogs imitated her action completely and used their paws themselves, instead of their mouths.

This meant that the way the dogs imitated in tune with the action’s goal: when the dogs perceived the demonstrator being unable to use her mouth, they chose the easier, preferred way to achieve the goal. But when female’s mouth was free, there appeared to be a reason for the demonstrating dog not to use her mouth, and so the other dogs imitated the action.

The researchers eventually came to the conclusion that dogs do imitate selectively, revealing a striking parallel between dogs and human infants in that they don’t just mimic an action, they do so only if it appears appropriate for the goal.

The research appears online in the April 26 edition of the journal *Current Biology*.