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# ACQUISITION OF ADJECTIVES IN CHILD-ADULT INTERACTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DLD



Marine Le Mené Guigourès, Université du Québec à Montréal, CRBLM & ISC  
 Loïc Liégeois, Université Paris Cité, UMR 7110 LLF & EA 3967 CLILLAC - ARP  
 Christine da Silva-Genest, Université de Lorraine, UR 3450 DevAH & UMR 7114 MoDyCo  
 Caroline Masson, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, EA 7345 CLESTHIA  
 Christophe Benzitoun, Université de Lorraine, UMR 7118 ATILF



## What do we know about the acquisition of adjectives?

→ Barely described lexical category, compared to nouns and verbs

**We still need to better understand ...**

	Typical development (TD)	Developmental language disorder (DLD)
<b>French</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gradual acquisition (first highly lexically-specified forms), depending on various factors (i.a. morphology, semantic class)</li> <li>Correlation to parents' speech                      Royle &amp; Valois, 2010; Kilani-Schoch &amp; Xanthos, 2013; Fox, 2012</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DLD children are more likely to do gender agreement errors                      Royle &amp; Reising, 2019</li> </ul>
<b>Other languages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar adjective lexicons among languages</li> <li>After 3 y.o., children's interpretation of [Adj+Noun] combinations are similar to adults's                      Tribushinina et al, 2014; Tribushinina, 2018, Redolfi, 2022</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's difficulties with morphosyntax, semantics or lexicon may affect their acquisition and uses of adjectives</li> <li>When taught novel adjectives, DLD children do not perform differently than TD on recall tests                      Leonard et al, 2019; Davies, 2022</li> </ul>

### How adjectives are used by DLD children, compared to TD children, in spontaneous conversations

- Do we observe any differences between the two populations?
- If some differences do exist, do they vary across group ages?
- Which criteria could be used to find that the category is acquired?

### How adjectives are used by parents of DLD and TD children

- Do we find some similarities in parents' uses and in children's uses of adjectives?
- Do we observe any differences between the two populations of parents?
- If some differences do exist, do they vary according to children's age?

## Data

### Population

- 56 children: 14 children with DLD and 42 TD children
- DLD diagnoses were made before children's participation to the project ; no evidence of other developmental disorders
- All of the DLD children are involved in a speech therapy process
- French as a first language for all children

### Situation

- Mother and child interactions
- Freeplay activity
- 15 minutes



### Trancription

- Data aligned with CLAN and transcribed in the CHAT format (MacWhinney, 2000)
- Transcripts revised by at least two members of the project

	Age group (years)	N	Age (years; months)	Gender
<b>DLD children</b>	5	3	4;9 - 5;2	2F/1M
	6	5	5;7 - 6;3	1F/4M
	7	2	6;8 - 7;3	2M
	8+	4	7;8 - 8;7	2F/2M
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4;9 - 8;7</b>	<b>5F/9M</b>
<b>TD children</b>	5	14	4;6 - 5;5	4F/10M
	6	14	5;6 - 6;5	6F/8M
	7	14	6;6 - 7;5	6F/8M
	<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>4;6 - 7;5</b>	<b>16F/26M</b>

## Focus on the adjectives used in [Adj+Noun] constructions

### Rate of overlap (ratio for adjectives with more than 1 [Adj+Noun] occurrence)

- DLD children: **0.65**
  - petite fille (little girl), petit chat (small cat), bonne nuit (good night)*
- TD children: **0.65**
  - petite fille (little girl), petit chat (small cat), petit bébé (little baby)*
- Parents of DLD children: **0.45**; Parents of TD children: **0.55**
  - petite fille (little girl), petit chat (small cat), bonne nuit (good night)*

• Same ratio for DLD and TD children but more diversity of [Adj+Noun] combinations in the speech of TD children's parents  
 • Very little variation in the 3 most produced combinations, both between children and parents, and between the two groups of children/parents

### 3. Expected vs. unexpected uses

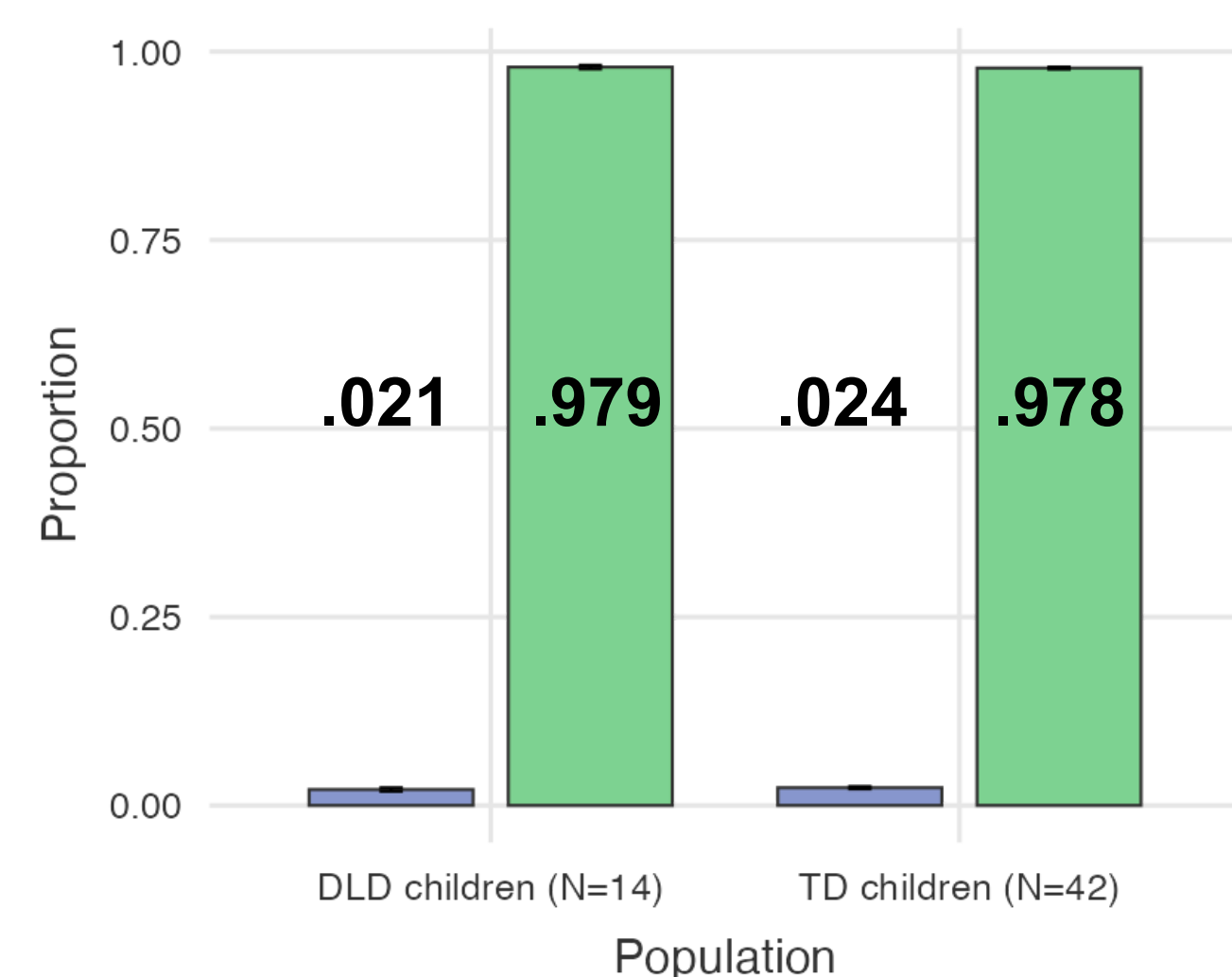
	Expected uses	Non-expected uses
<b>DLD (N=14)</b>	93.33%	6.67%
<b>TD (N=42)</b>	98.96%	1.04%

- More errors in the data of DLD children
  - Related to morphology (gender-agreement errors):
    - \*les bébés petits (\*the babies little)
  - Related to the position of the adjective
    - \*les petites bébés (\*the little babies-use of Adj-FEM instead of Adj-MAS)
- Less complex NPs in the discourse of DLD children
  - [Det+Adj+Noun] (DLD) vs [Det+Adj+Adj+Noun] (TD)
    - les pauvres petits bébés (the poor little babies)

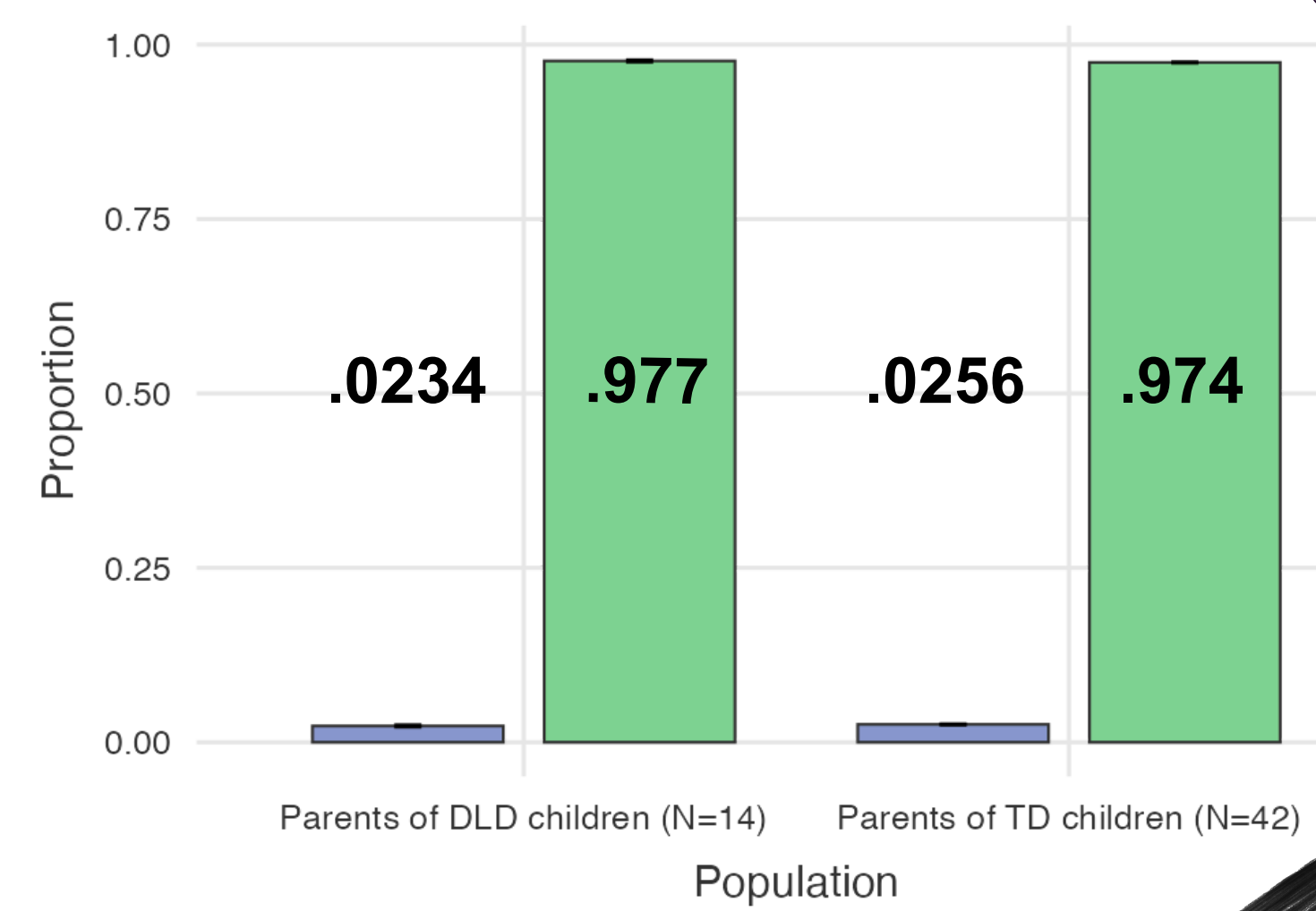
## Analysis & Results

### 1. Proportion of adjectives in the data

#### In children's discourse



#### In parents' discourse

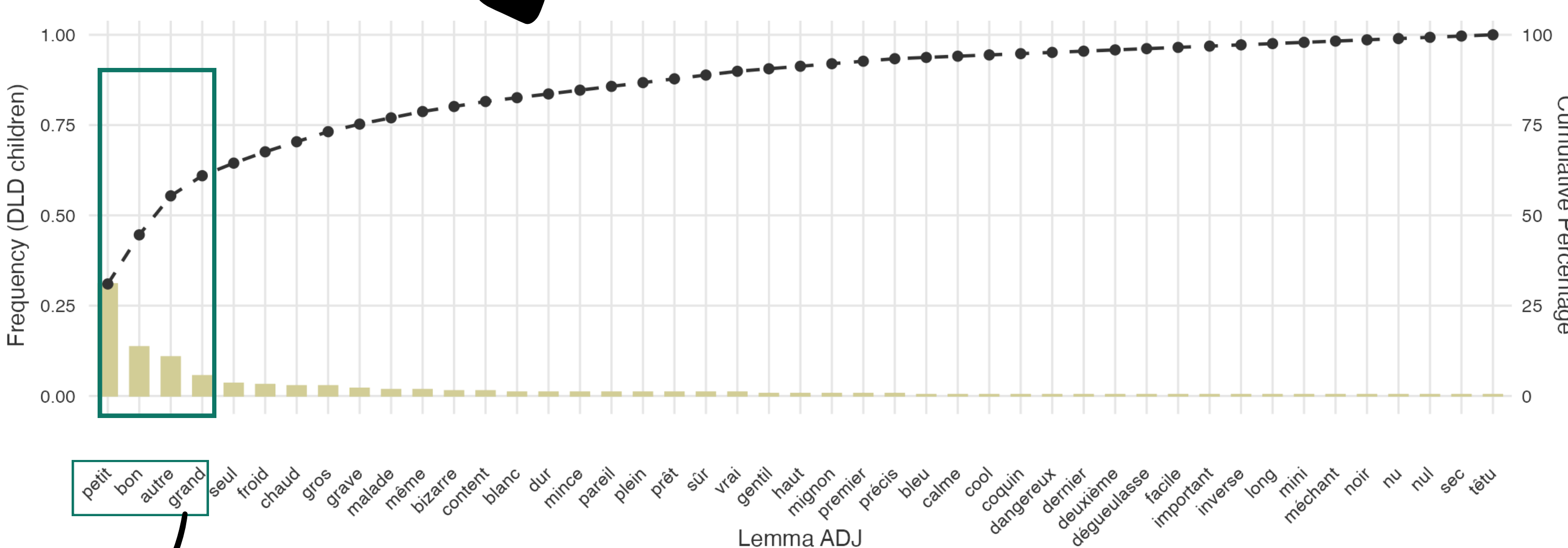


- Very few adjectives, both in parents and children's speech
- No significant difference between DLD and TD and between age groups

### 2. Lexical diversity

	Children	Parents
<b>DLD (N=14)</b>	0.16	0.11
<b>TD (N=42)</b>	0.10	0.08

- In average, only 11% of the tokens are different
- Very little variation across groups (no significant differences)
- Methodological issue : unequal sizes of datasets for DLD and TD populations



**DLD children**  
 petit (small, little); bon (good); autre (other); grand (big, tall) = **60.98%**

**TD children**  
 petit (small, little); bon (good); autre (other); grand (big, tall); vrai (true) = **62.00%**

- Both in children's and adults' data: only 4 adjectives accounting for more than half of the data
- Same 4 most frequent adjectives in children and adults' data (size, comparison, evaluation)

## Discussion

- No differences between DLD and TD children regarding the proportion of adjectives, the diversity of adjectives and [Adj+Noun] combinations but **some differences regarding the rate of errors and the complexity of NPs**
- Some differences between the parents of DLD children and TD children: more diversity in the [Adj+Noun] combinations in the TD group**
- Major influence of both parents' speech and activity**
- Study highlighting the interest of working on adjectives throughout the speech therapy process**

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