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



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

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
DLD children	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
	Total	14	4;9 - 8;7	5F/9M
TD children	5	14	4;6 - 5;5	4F/10M
	6	14	5;6 - 6;5	6F/8M
	7	14	6;6 - 7;5	6F/8M
	Total	42	4;6 - 7;5	16F/26M

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

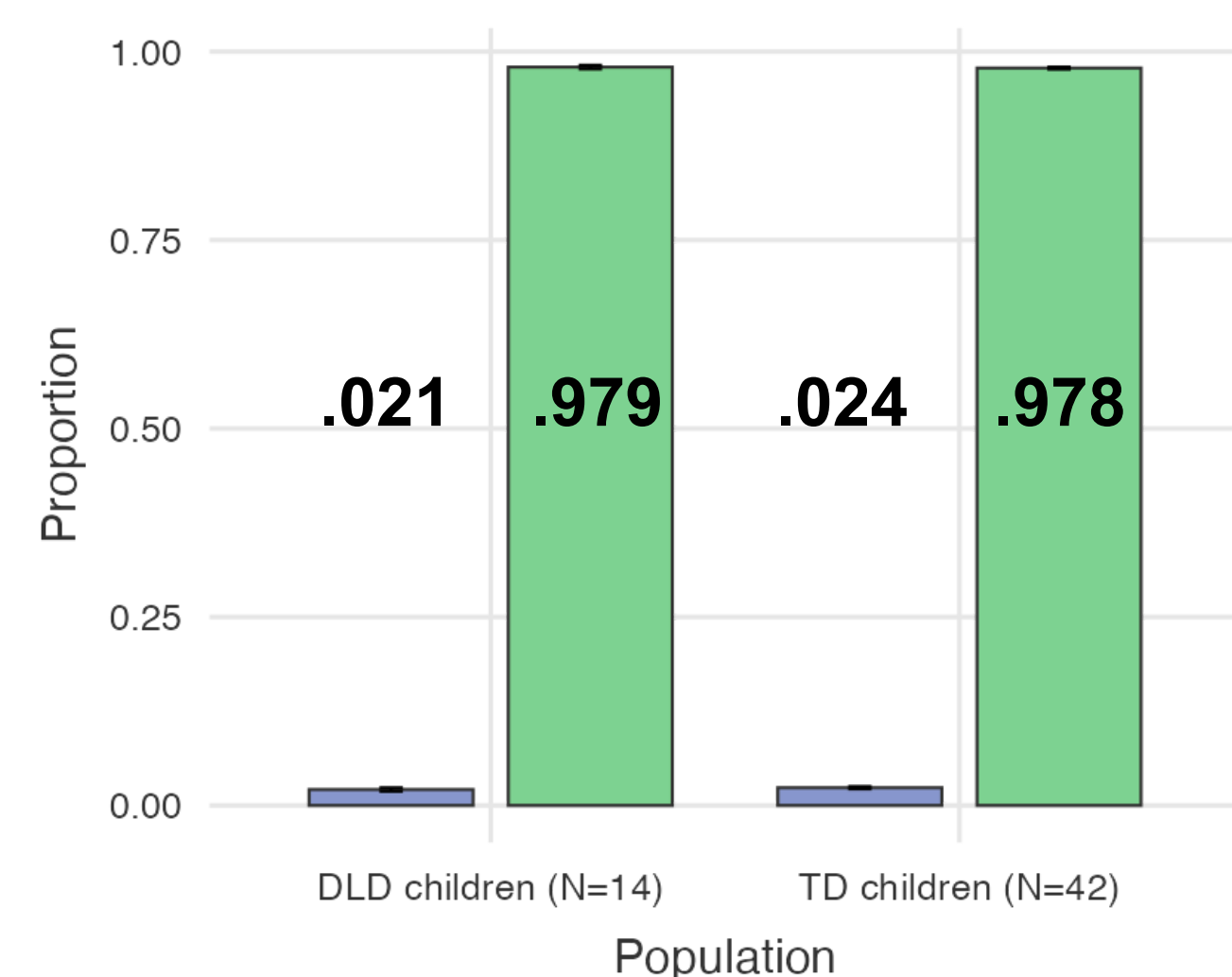
	Expected uses	Non-expected uses
DLD (N=14)	93.33%	6.67%
TD (N=42)	98.96%	1.04%

- 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)

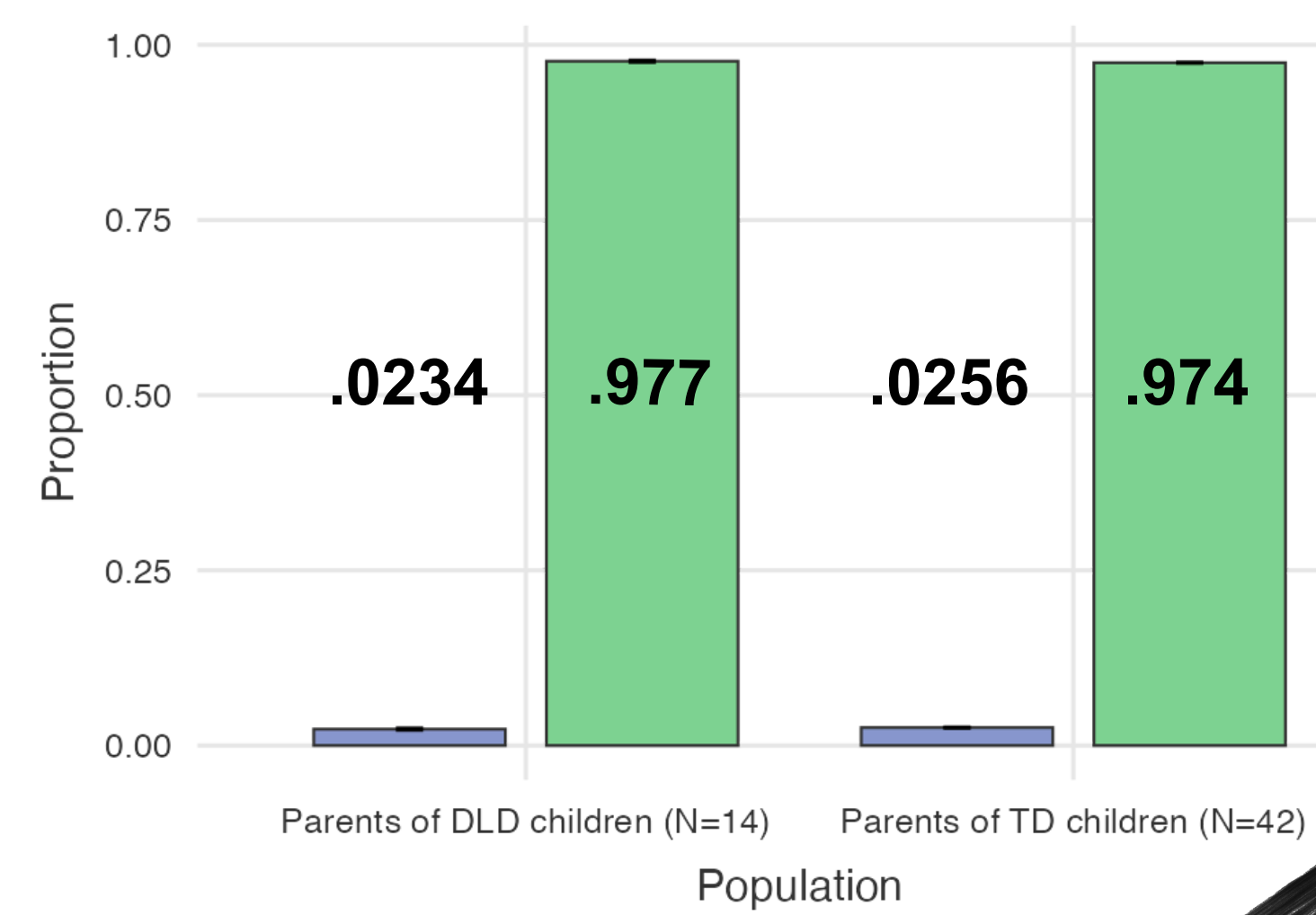
Analysis & Results

1. Proportion of adjectives in the data

In children's discourse



In parents' discourse

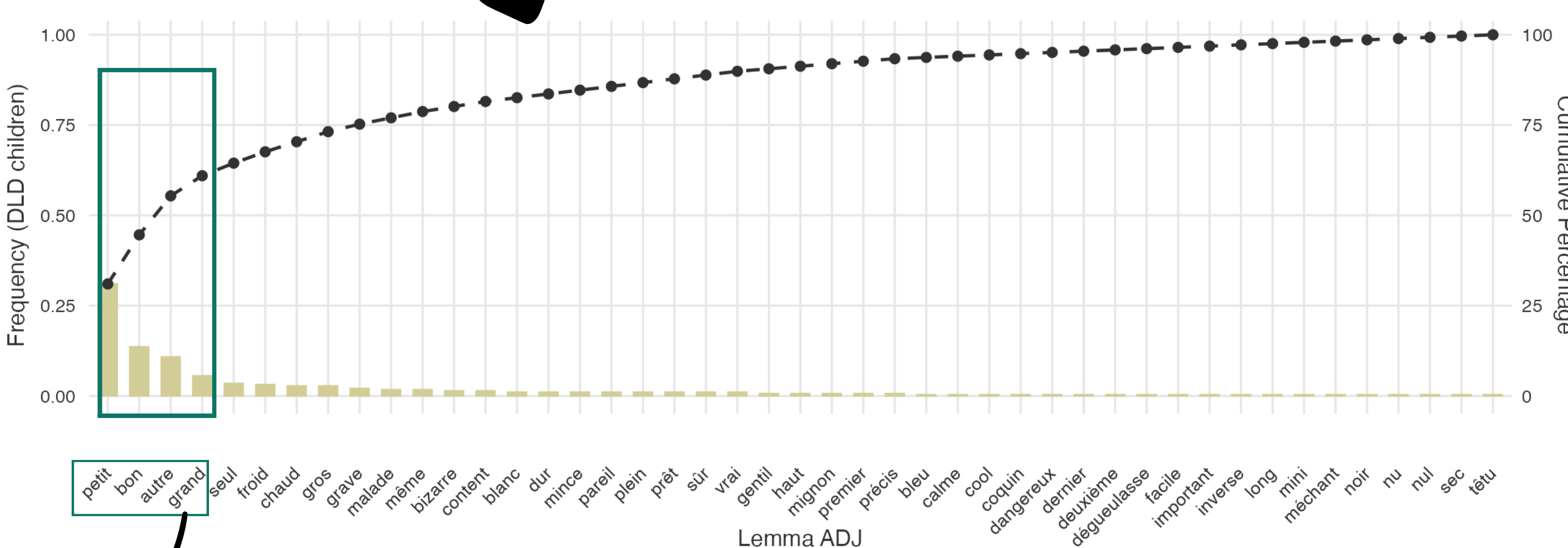


- Very few adjectives, both in parents and children's speech
- No significant difference between DLD and TD and between age groups

2. Lexical diversity

	Children	Parents
DLD (N=14)	0.16	0.11
TD (N=42)	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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