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Do spelling error patterns differ in French-speaking children with and without dyslexia ?

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INTRODUCTION

Learning French spelling is a challenge for dyslexic children but also for non-dyslexic readers, due to the high inconsistency of phoneme-grapheme relationships (Fayol, 2003). A number of studies have shown that dyslexic children have lower spelling performance than non-dyslexic children of the same chronological age (eg, Martinet & Valdois, 1999). However, the question of whether dyslexic children have different spelling error patterns than typical readers has received little attention so far.

AIM

To determine whether the spelling error patterns produced by dyslexic children (D) should be characterized as a simple delay or as a deviance in the development of spelling, by comparing their performance on a written word production task to that of typical readers matched on chronological age (CA) or on reading age (RA).

METHOD

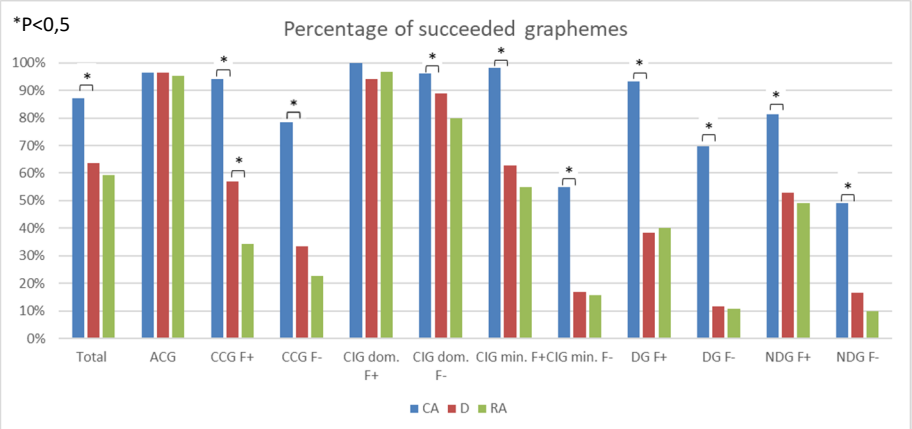
Participants

- **D group** : 17 children with developmental dyslexia (mean age 10;6 years old)
- **CA group** : 17 children of the same chronological age as dyslexic children (mean age 10;6 years old)
- **RA group** : 17 children of the same reading age as dyslexic children (mean age 7;5 years old), based on the reading test “Alouette” (Lefavrais, 1967, 2005).

Written word production task

- **BELEC Ortho 3** (Mousty, Leybaert, Alegria, Content, & Morais, 1994) :
  - consists of completing 38 written sentences by using 70 words dictated by the examiner
  - words divided into 4 types, as a function of the level of consistency of the target graphemes as well as their morphological characteristics :
    - ✓ Acontextual Consistent Graphemes – ACG (eg : b, ch, gr)
    - ✓ Contextual Consistent Graphemes - CCG (eg : an/am)
    - ✓ Contextual Inconsistent Graphemes dominant vs minoritary – CIG dom/min (eg : s/c at the begining of a word)
    - ✓ Derivable or Non Derivable Graphemes – DG / NDG
  - the lexical frequency of the words in which the target graphemes appear is manipulated (F+/F-).

RESULTS



DISCUSSION

This study shows that children with dyslexia make more errors than typical readers of the same chronological age, but that their spelling performance is quantitatively and qualitatively similar to that of younger typical readers of the same reading level. Therefore, there would be no errors specific to dyslexic children allowing them to be distinguished from normal-reading children. Dyslexics would present a delay rather than a deviance from the orthographic development of normal-reading children.