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## Fast comprehension of geometrical primitives and rules in human adults and preschoolers

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► **To cite this version:**

Marie Amalric, Liping Wang, Pierre Pica, Santiago Figueira, Mariano Sigman, et al.. Fast comprehension of geometrical primitives and rules in human adults and preschoolers. Meeting of the Association for Psychological Science, May 2016, Chicago, United States. halshs-03399192

**HAL Id: halshs-03399192**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03399192v1>**

Submitted on 23 Oct 2021

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## INTRODUCTION: ARE HUMANS ENDOWED WITH A GEOMETRICAL LANGUAGE?

❖ Studies of sequence learning have outlined one possible mechanism by which complex mental representations are constructed out of simpler primitives: the human ability to **extract complex nested structures from sequential inputs**.

❖ Experiments in infants, preschoolers, and adults without

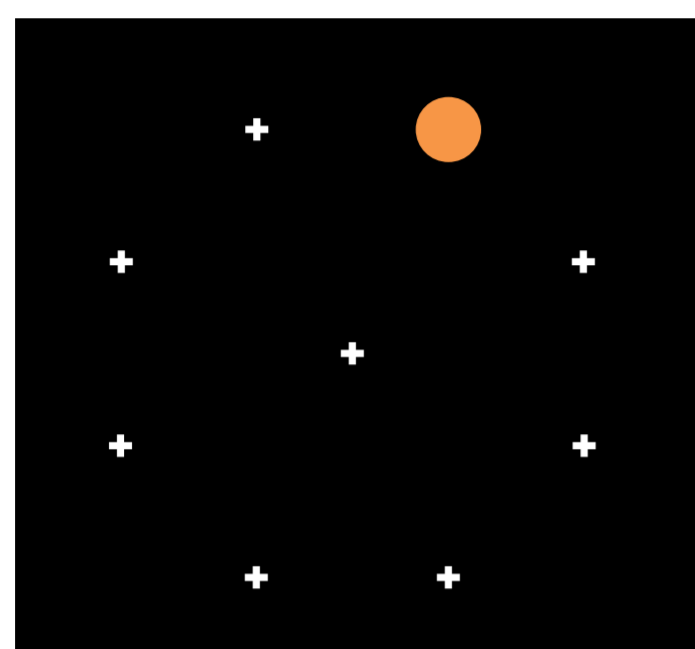
access to education have demonstrated the existence of innate **“core knowledge” for space**, endowing humans with spontaneous intuitions of geometry.

❖ The question therefore arises whether a capacity for the internal representation and manipulation of nested

sequences also underlies the acquisition of mathematics.

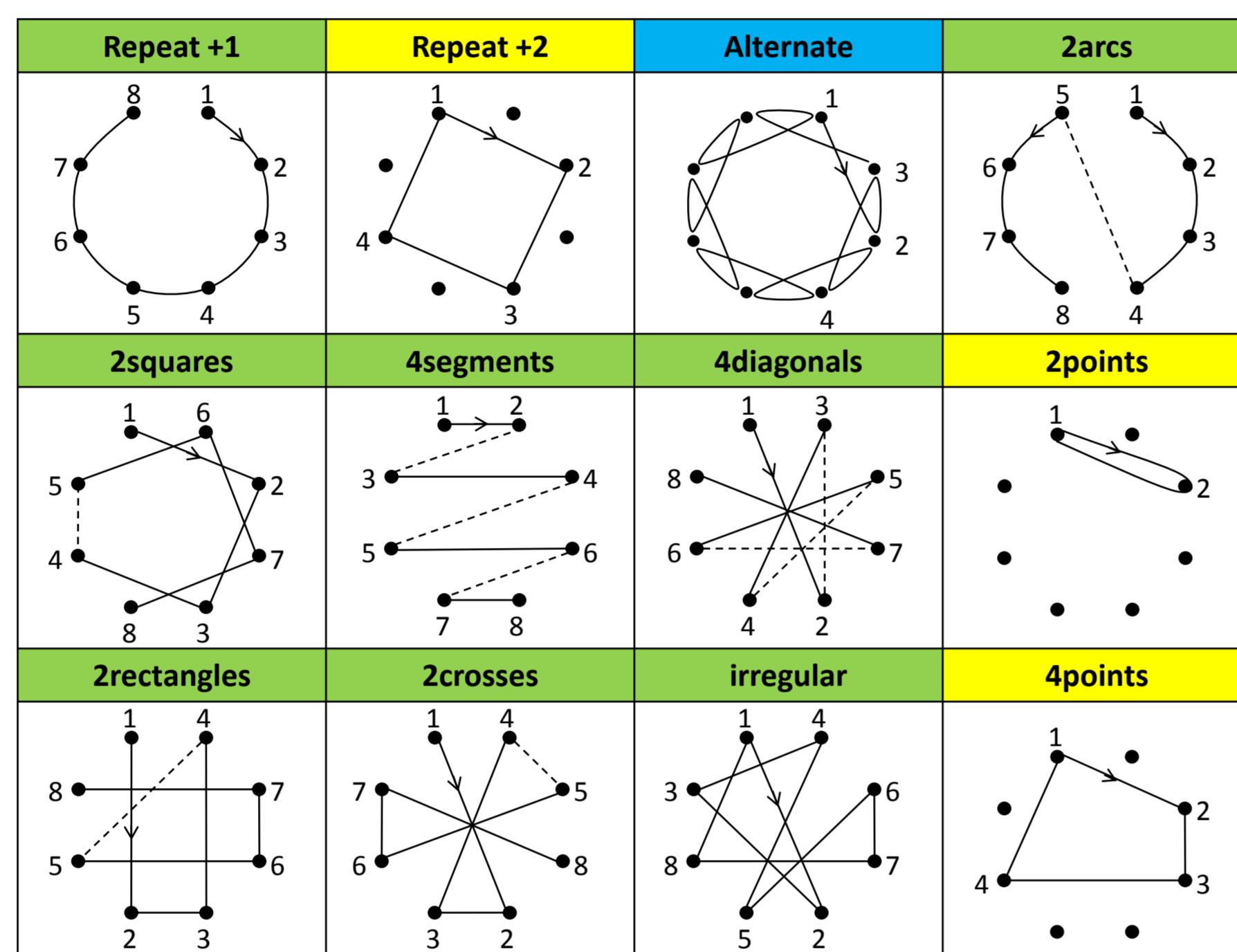
❖ We propose to formalize the human sensitivity to mathematical rules through a **“language of thought”** that allows the formation of complex representations from a small repertoire of primitives.

## METHOD: COMPLETION TASK



Subjects saw the first locations of a given sequence and had to point to the next ones. If they were mistaken, the sequence restarted.

**Participants:**  
23 French adults and 47 5-years-old children, and 14 Mundurucu teenagers and adults.

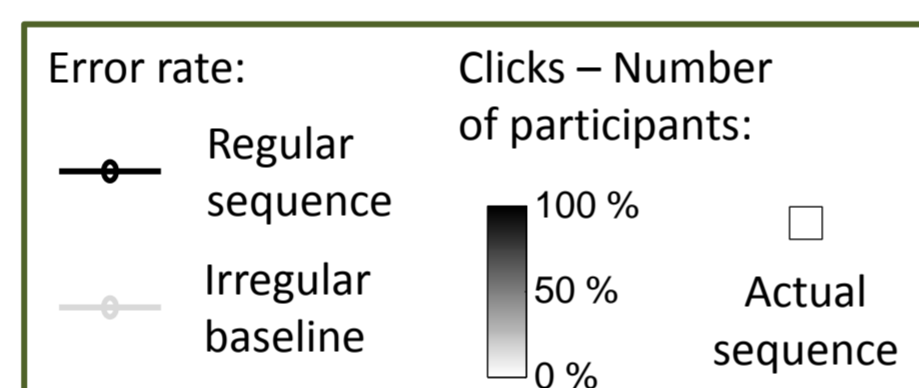
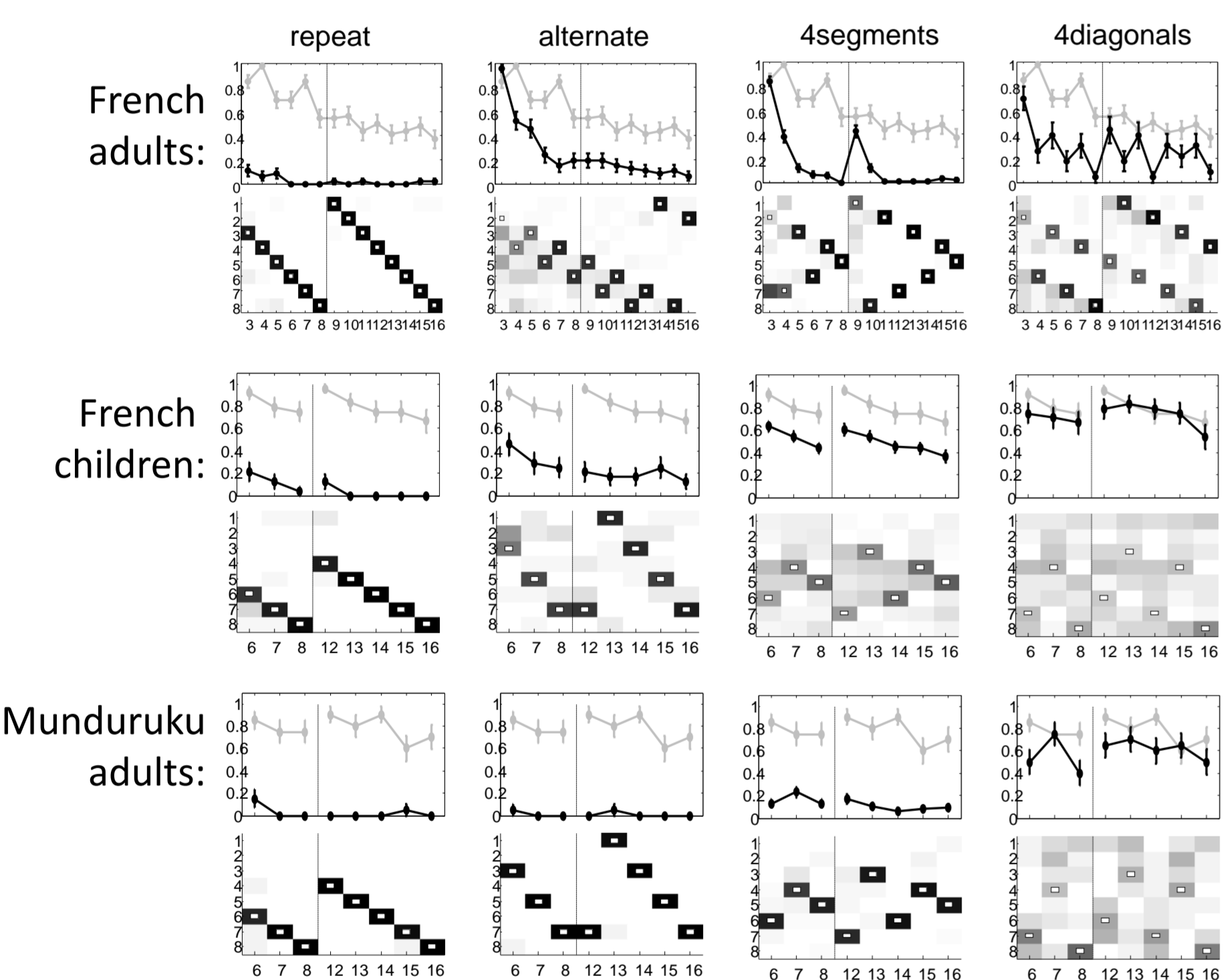


## GEOMETRICAL LANGUAGE

		<b>Repeat +1</b> 01234567 K=5 [+0, [+1] <sup>7</sup> ]	<b>Repeat +2</b> 02460246 K=5 [+0, [+2] <sup>7</sup> ]
		<b>Alternate</b> 0213243546 K=8 [+0, +2] <sup>8</sup> {+1}	<b>2arcs</b> 01237654 K=8 [[+0, [+1] <sup>3</sup> ] <sup>2</sup> <V>]
<b>2squares</b> 02467135 K=8 [[+0, [+2] <sup>3</sup> ] <sup>2</sup> <-1>]	<b>4segments</b> 01726354 K=7 [[+0, H] <sup>4</sup> {-1}]	<b>4diagonals</b> 04152637 K=7 [[+0, P] <sup>4</sup> {+1}]	<b>2points</b> 02020202 K=7 [[+0, +2] <sup>4</sup> {+0}]
<b>2rectangles</b> 05416327 K=10 [[+0, -3] <sup>2</sup> {P}] <sup>2</sup> <-2>]	<b>2crosses</b> 04512673 K=7 [[+0, P] <sup>4</sup> {-3}]	<b>Irregular</b> 04715236 K=16 [+0, P, B, +2, P, B, +1, H]	<b>4points</b> 02360236 K=11 [[+0, +2, +1, +3] <sup>2</sup> <+0>]

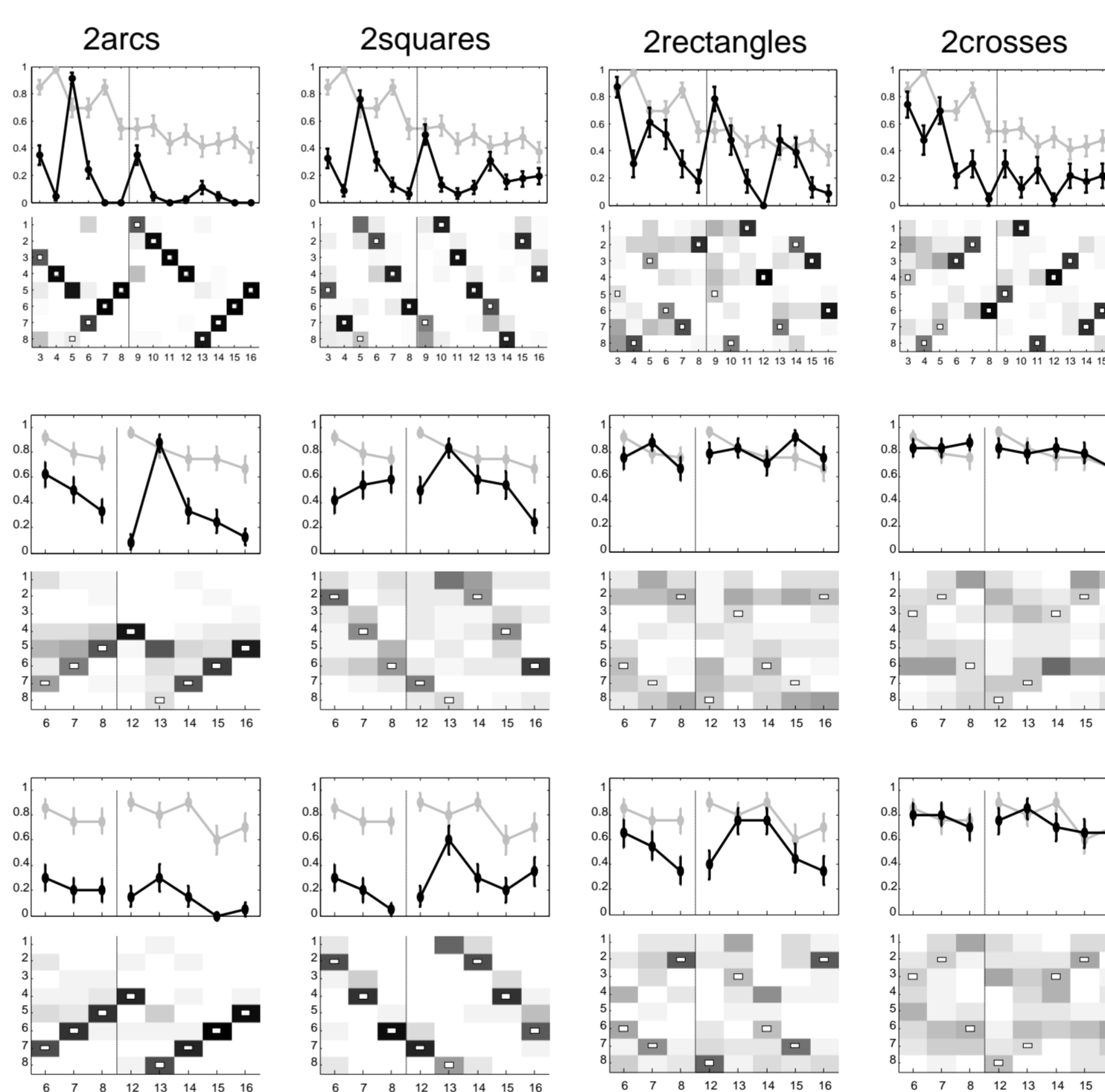
## RESULTS

### Knowledge of geometrical primitive rules

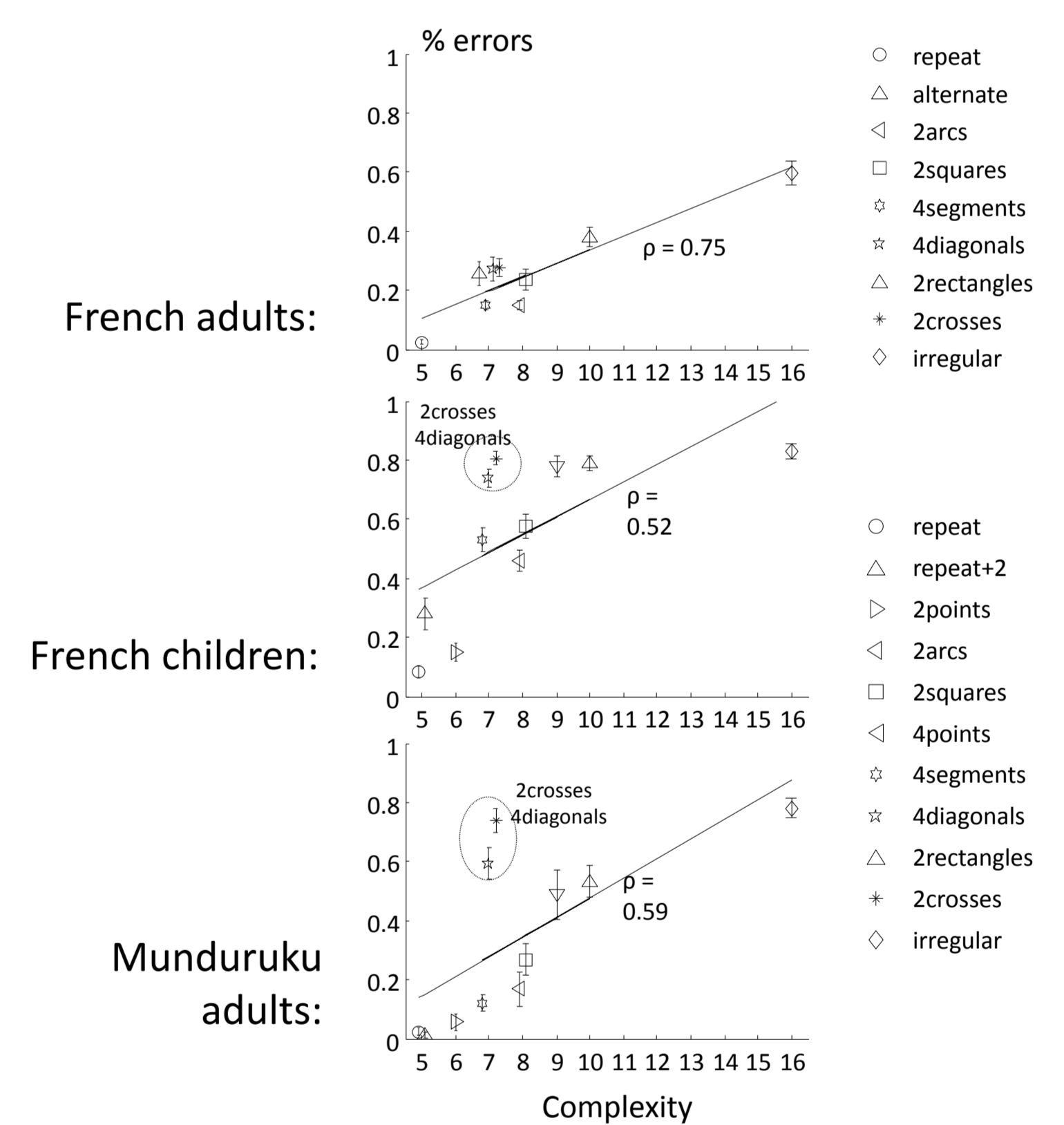


➤ In comparison to irregular baseline, most of the regular sequences were well learnt.  
➤ Error pattern directly reflects the hierarchical internal representation of sequences.  
➤ Error rate at specific data point indicates how well a given rule is understood: e.g. in “4segments”, even data points reveal that all axial symmetries are detected by all groups of participants.

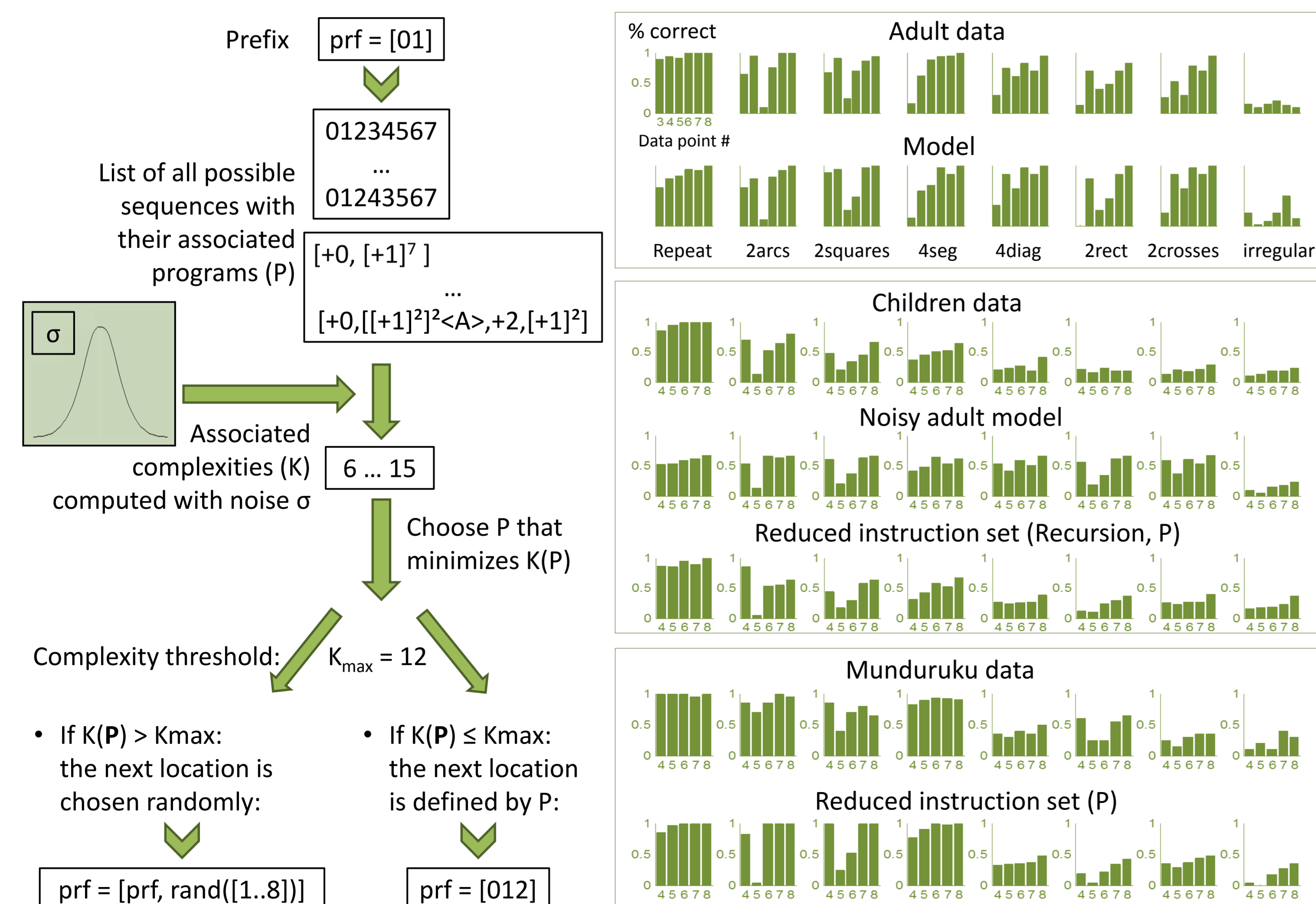
### Learning of embedded rules



### Kolmogorov complexity well predicts subjects' performance



## MODEL FITS



## CONCLUSIONS

- **Simple rotations and axial symmetries were all detected** and quickly used by human adults and 5-years-old children. Point symmetry was more challenging for French preschoolers or Mundurucu adults than for French adults.
- Human subjects were able to detect most of the embedded expressions we used to define our visuospatial sequences such as simple repetition, concatenation, and some repetition with variation.
- **The analysis of error patterns provided direct evidence for hierarchical embedding:** superficial rules were acquired more quickly and induced fewer errors than deeper rules.
- **With age, a geometrical language endowed with nested rules seems to arise even in the absence of formal schooling,** as Mundurucu adults who lacked school-based education, performed better than 5-years-old kids.
- In children, the failure with complex sequences could arise from limitations in working memory and not necessarily to a lack of understanding nested structures.
- **The theoretical complexity of a sequence was an excellent predictor of its mean error rate,** and we confirm that minimal description length is a reasonable approach of adult sequence learning capacity.
- Additional primitives, both geometrical and non-geometrical still need to be added to our model to complete its description of “core geometry”.

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