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

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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

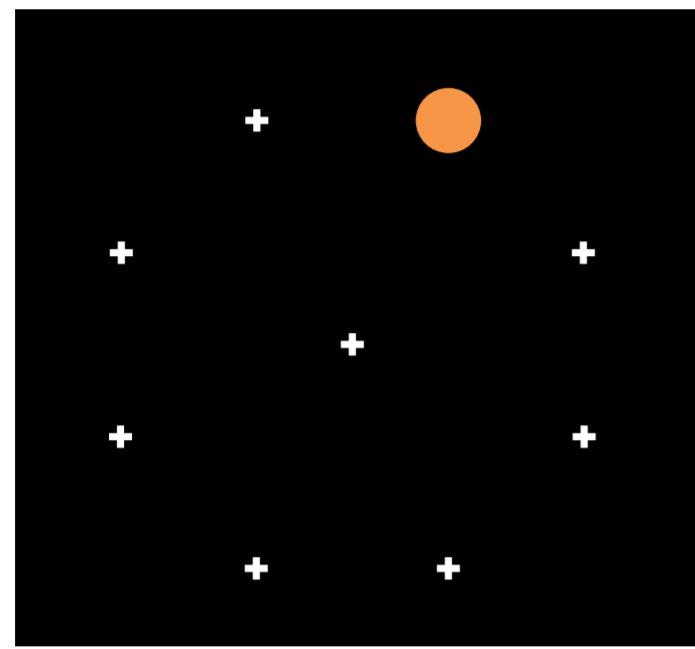
access to education have demonstrated the existence of innate **“core knowledge” for space**, endowing humans with spontaneous intuitions of geometry.

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

sequences also underlies the acquisition of mathematics.

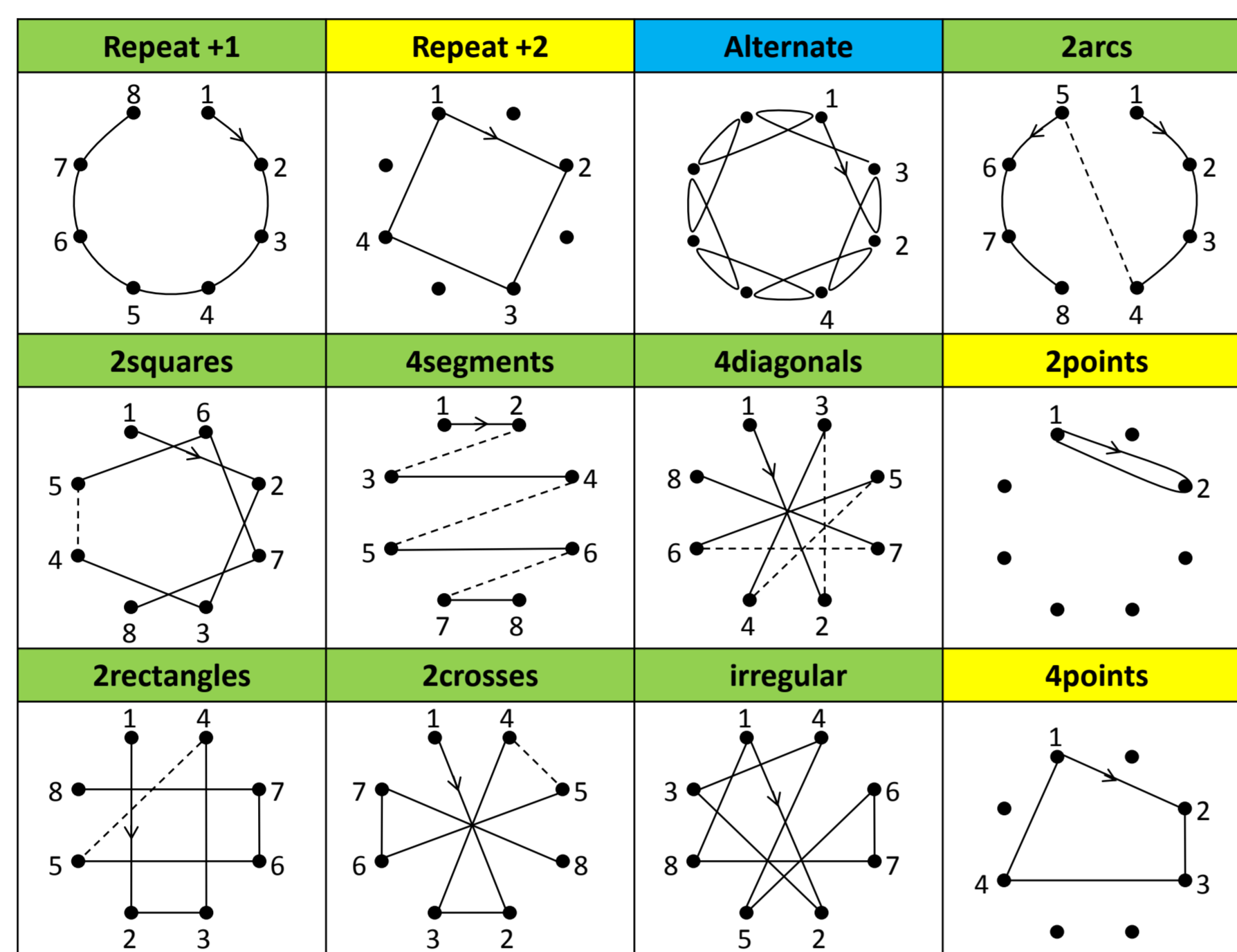
❖ We propose to formalize the human sensitivity to mathematical rules through a **“language of thought”** that allows the formation of complex representations from a small repertoire of primitives.

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.

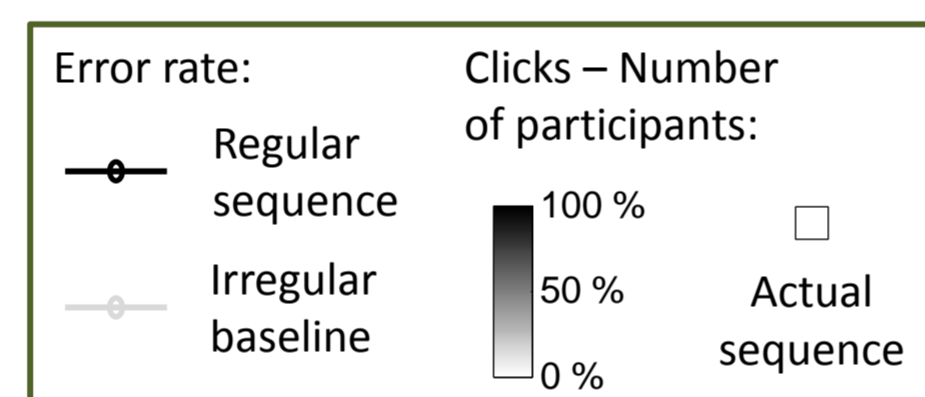
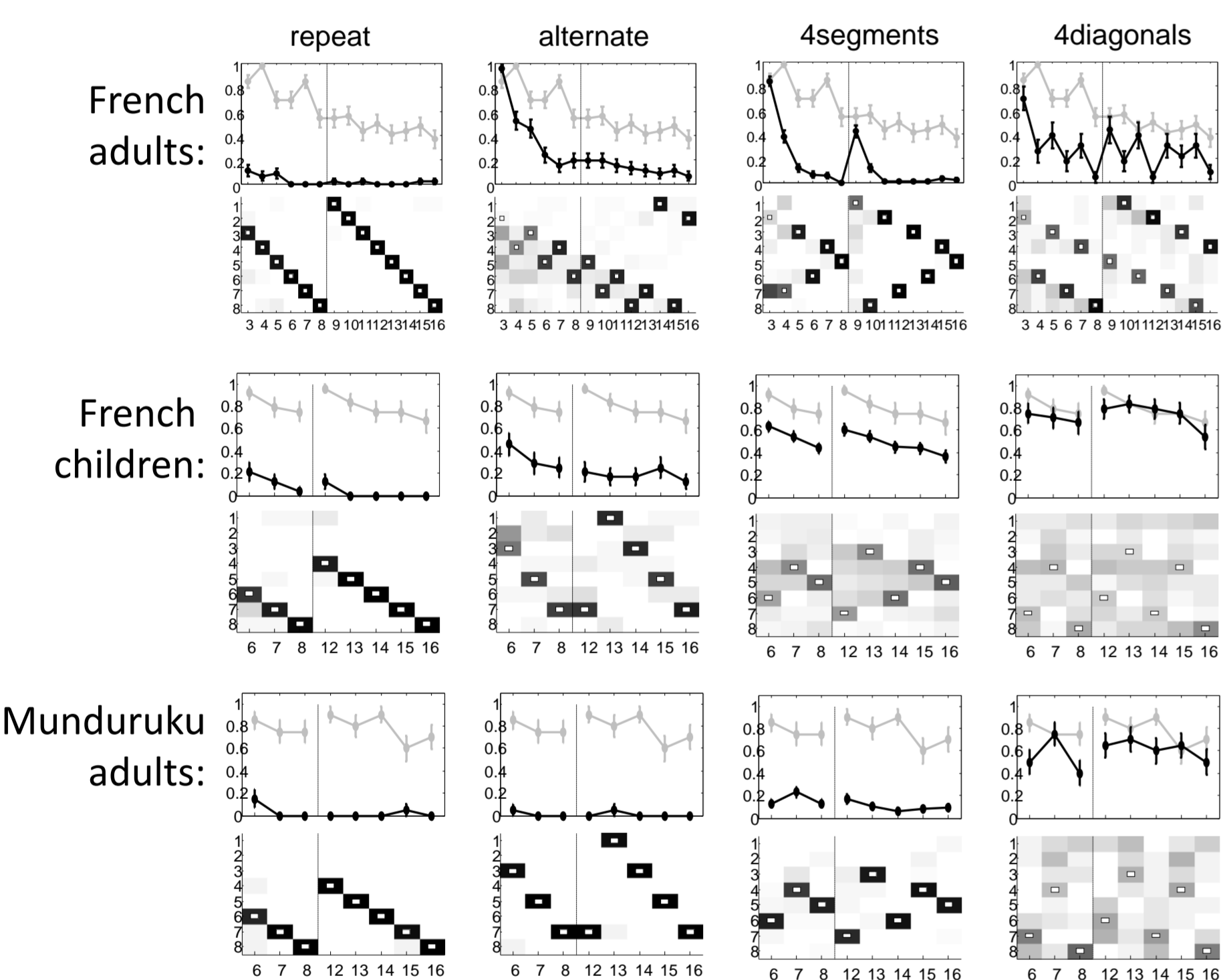


GEOMETRICAL LANGUAGE

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

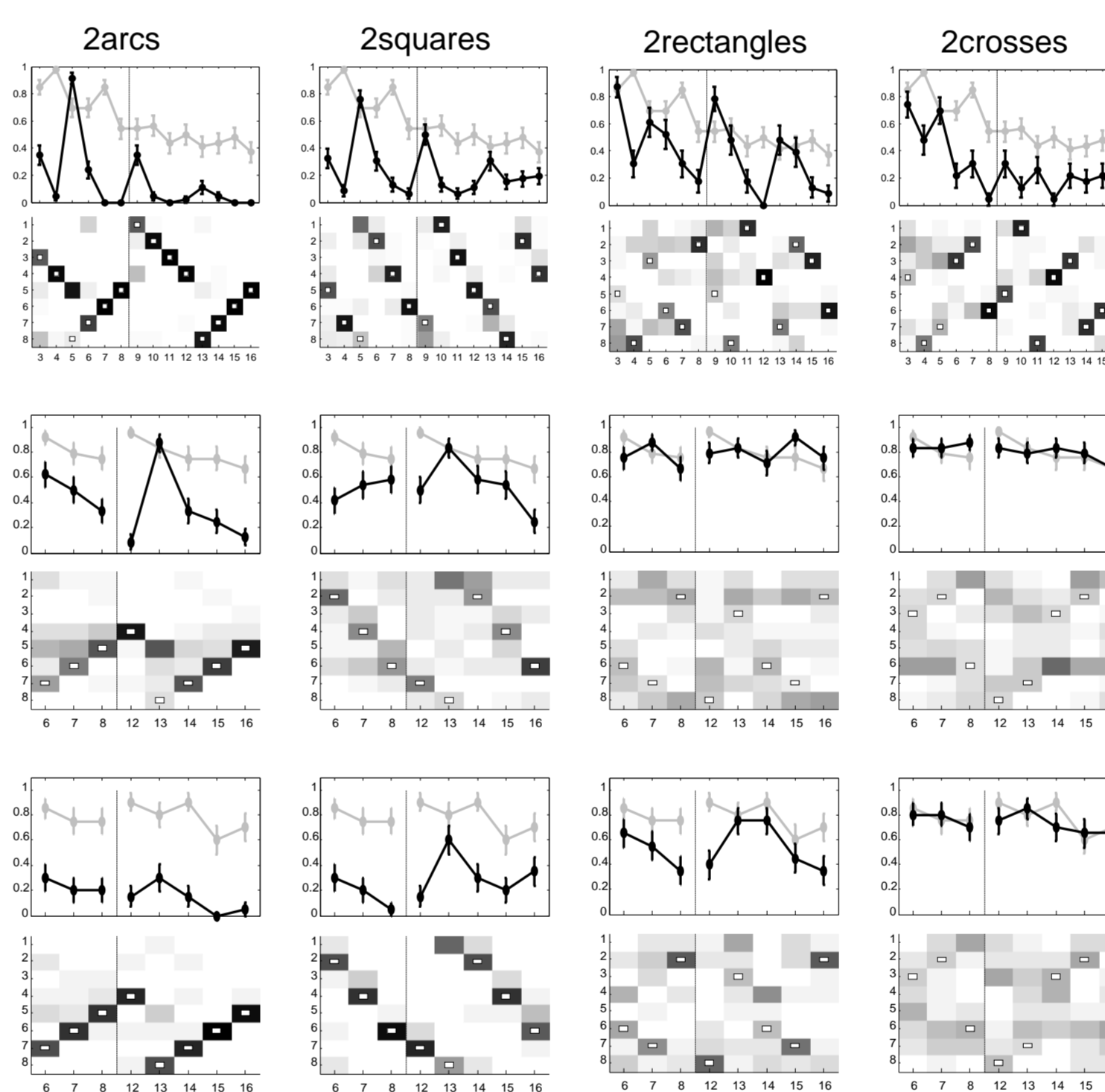
RESULTS

Knowledge of geometrical primitive rules

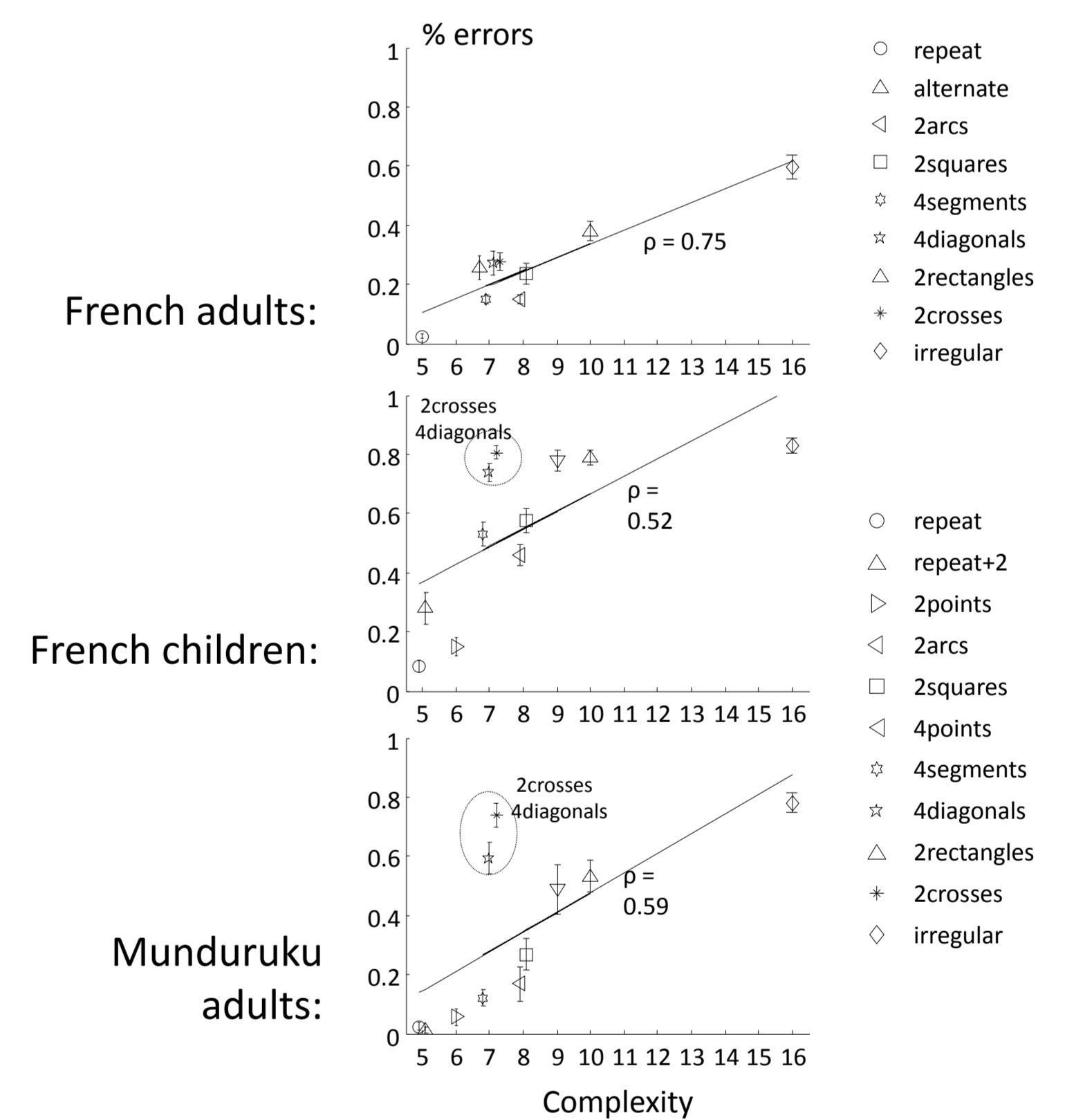


➤ In comparison to irregular baseline, most of the regular sequences were well learnt.
➤ Error pattern directly reflects the hierarchical internal representation of sequences.
➤ Error rate at specific data point indicates how well a given rule is understood: e.g. in “4segments”, even data points reveal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

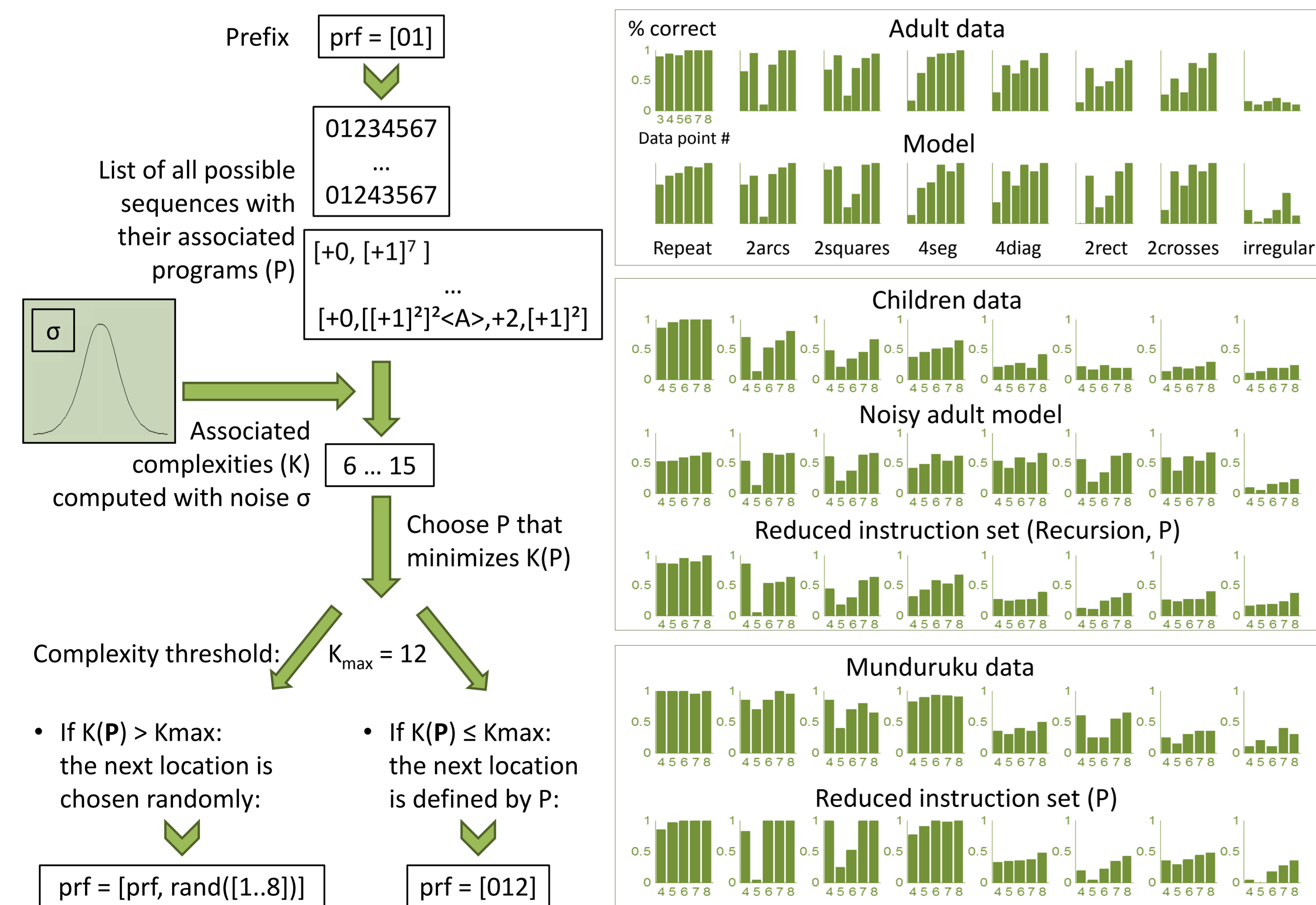
Learning of embedded rules



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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