

Child language input does not reflect world frequency: Typical and atypical feature description across development

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Children learn much about the world from two sources: observation and language.

In some cases, these sources appear to be well-aligned (Landau & Gleitman, 1985).

However, language does not perfectly reflect the world, and often reflects communicative needs instead.



Given children's nascent world knowledge, how does caregiver speech reflect world typicality?

We extracted concrete nouns and co-occurring adjectives (> 2000 pairs) from longitudinal corpus data of parent-child communication (Goldin-Meadow et al., 2014).

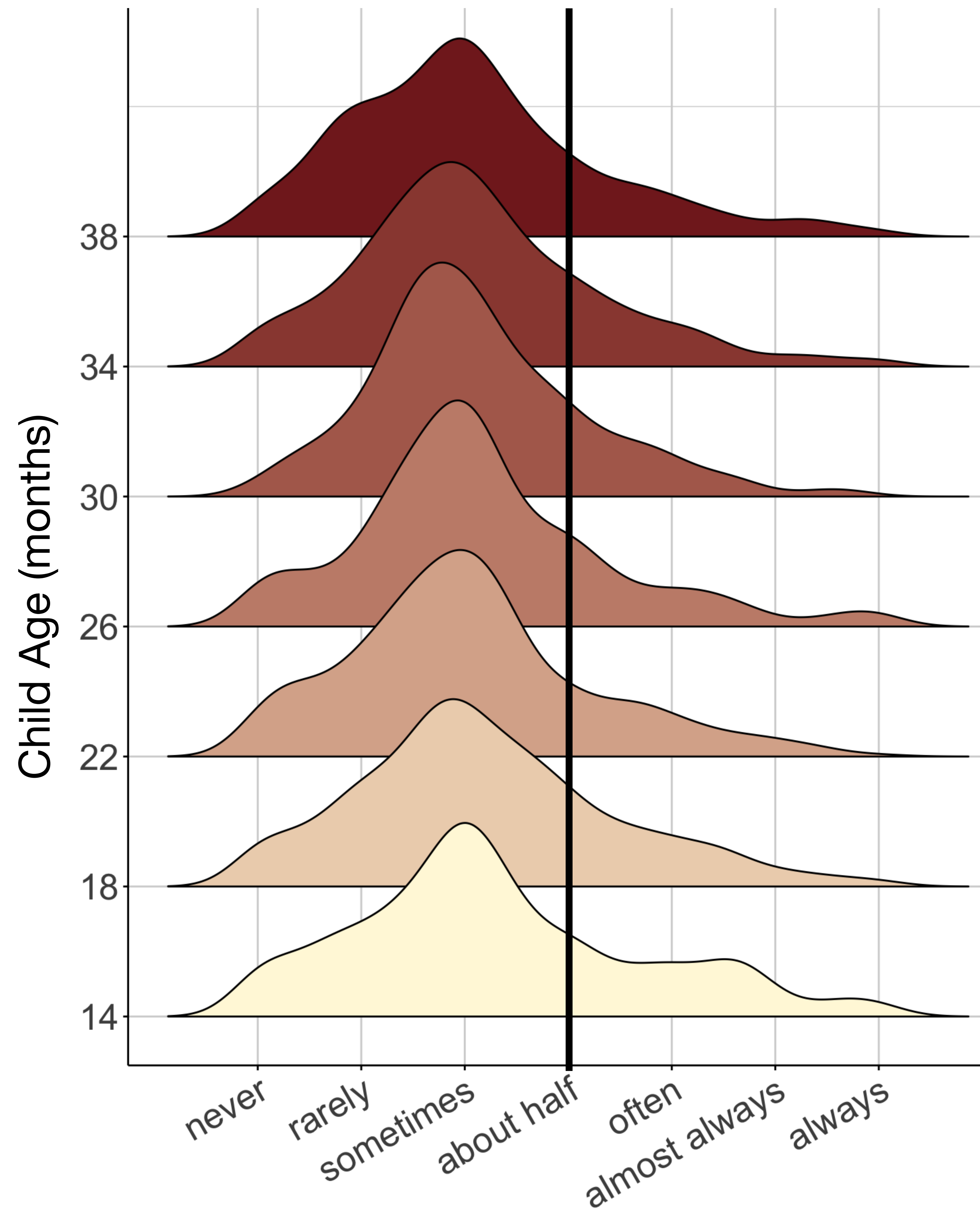
Utterance	Typicality
"Are bananas yellow ?"	5.75
...	
"Some of our green bananas too."	3.75
...	
"Especially with wooden shoes ."	2.25

We then collected typicality judgments for each pair on Amazon Mechanical Turk:

"How common is it for a banana to be a yellow banana?"

never (1) rarely (2) sometimes (3) about half the time (4) often (5) almost always (6) always (7)

Developmental Consistency: People talk about the atypical



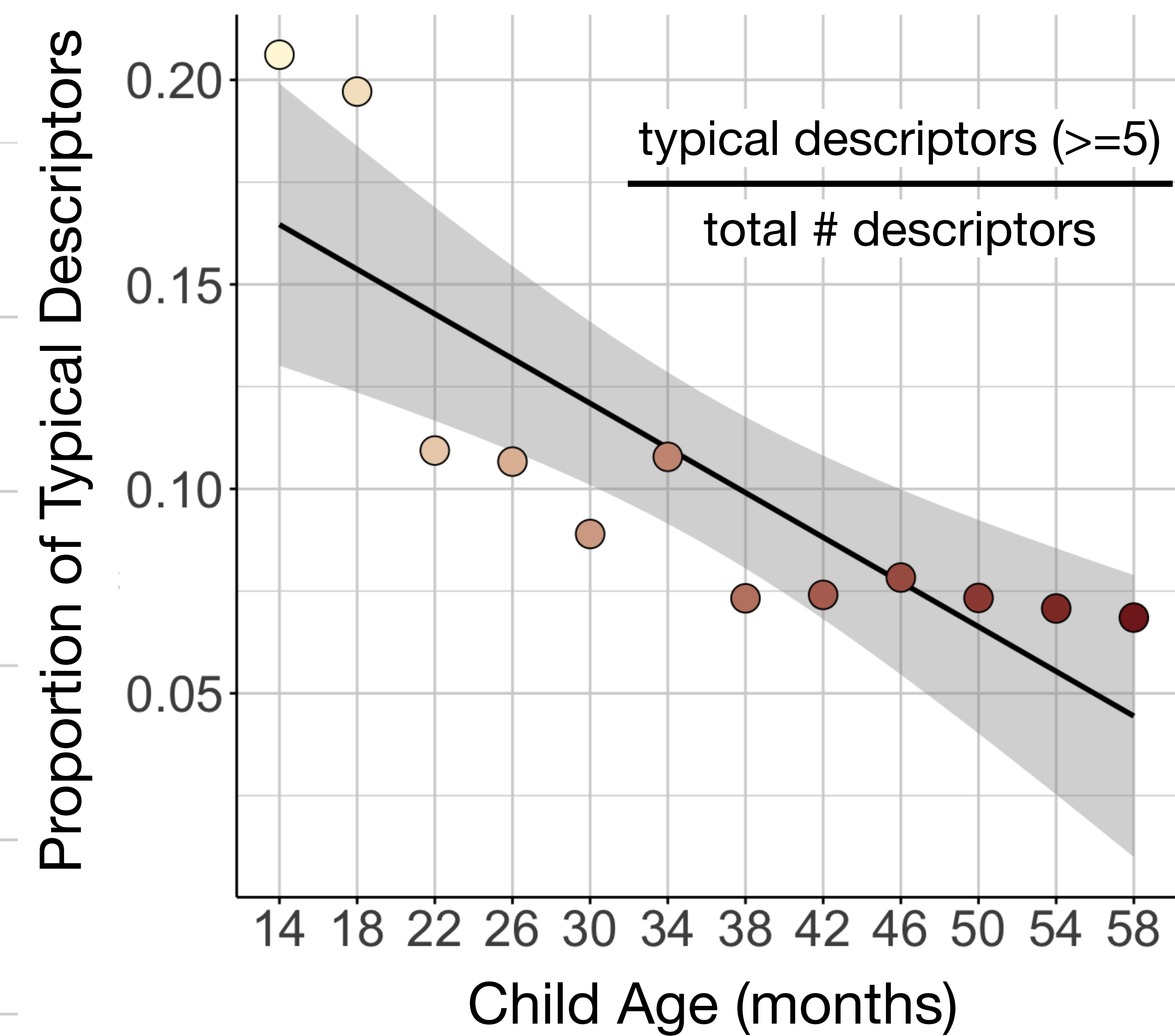
more atypical
"blue" — "banana"

more typical
"yellow" — "banana"

Typicality of an Adjective-Noun Pair

Developmental Shift: Less typical talk over development

Less typical talk over development



- Child language input reflects notable more than typical features.
- More description of typical features early in development may provide a foothold for young learners.
- Next steps investigate syntactic position.

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