

# Adjective chains in children's and child-directed speech

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## Introduction

**Corpora we used:** longitudinal studies of the speech of Russian children from the onset of their speech production up to the age of 3–4 years; corpora “Liza” and “Filipp”.

We consider the “adjective chains” consisting of more than one adjective in one and the same NP (including the homogeneous and heterogeneous adjectives). E.g.:

MAM: A eto u tebja mašinka **gonočnaja, gruzovaja ili legkovaja?**

And this at you N|car-DIM:FEM:NOM:SG ADJ|racing-FEM:NOM:SG, ADJ|lorry-FEM:NOM:SG ADJ|passenger-FEM:NOM:SG

‘Is it a racing car, a lorry or a passenger car?’ (in Russian this difference is expressed by the relative adjectives)

FIL: **Bol'saja**, eto **bol'saja** mašina.

ADJ|big-FEM:NOM:SG this ADJ|big-FEM:NOM:SG N|car-FEM:NOM:SG

‘It is a big, a big car.’

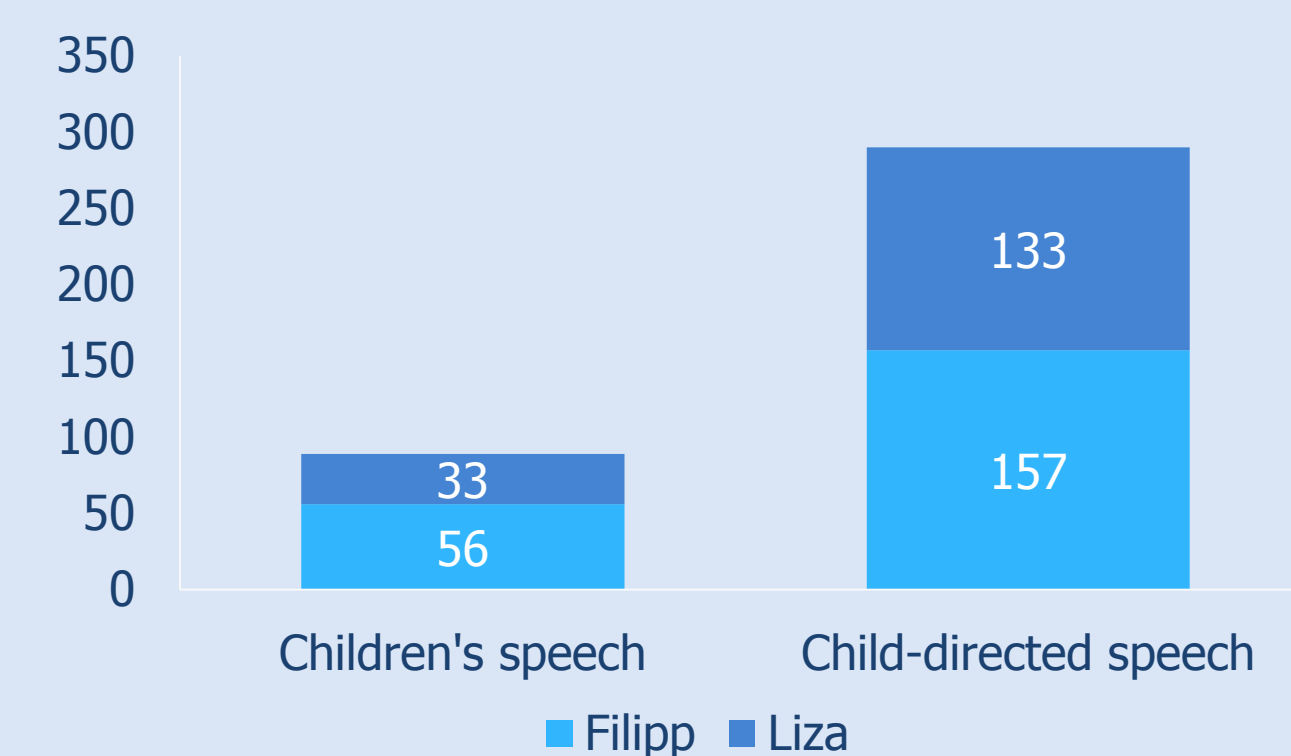
Filipp (2;07.19)

## Using adjective chains

Recent linguistic researches (based on the English and Dutch language material) have revealed that it is more typical for adjectives than for other parts of speech to be used in a chain. However in the context of child language this problem has not been widely discussed yet, especially on Russian data.

**Filipp** started using adjective chains at the age of **1;8**, while the first groups of adjectives appeared in **Liza's** speech four months later, when she was **2** years old. **Filipp's mother** also began to use adjective chains in child-directed speech earlier than **Liza's parents** (at the age of **1;5** and **1;8** respectively).

## Corpus analysis: number of adjective chains



The prototypical adjective chain in children and child-directed speech consists of **two** components. The earliest adjective chains consist of the adjectives belonging to one and the same semantic group (for example **color adjectives**) or in **antonymous rows**.

At the earliest stage children tend to **repeat** the adjective stem or the whole lemma (**bol'soj-bol'soj**, **bol'soj-prebol'soj** means ‘very big’). Such repetitions function as natural intensifiers.

Distribution of adjective repetitions in children's speech is shown in Table 1. We can see that Liza uses more repetitions of adjectives than Filipp.

**Table 1. Adjective repetitions in children's speech (statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2$ ,  $P < 0,01$ )**

	Number of adjective repetitions in a chain	Number of adjective chains without repetition	% of adjective repetitions
Filipp	9	47	16,1%
Liza	18	15	54,5%

## Adjective chains in children's speech as repetitions of adult utterances

The first adjective chains in children's speech often occur as **repetitions of adult utterances**. Adults can also repeat the child's utterance using the same adjective chain, but such repetitions are mostly used in order to **correct or specify** the previous child's remark.

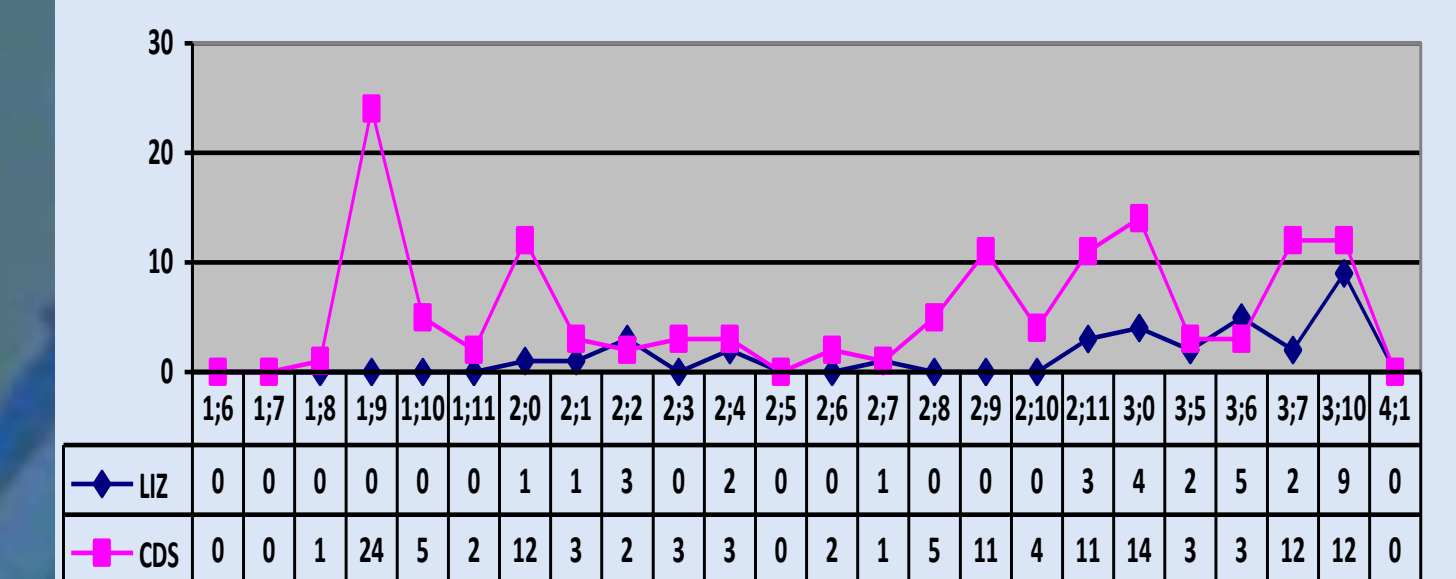
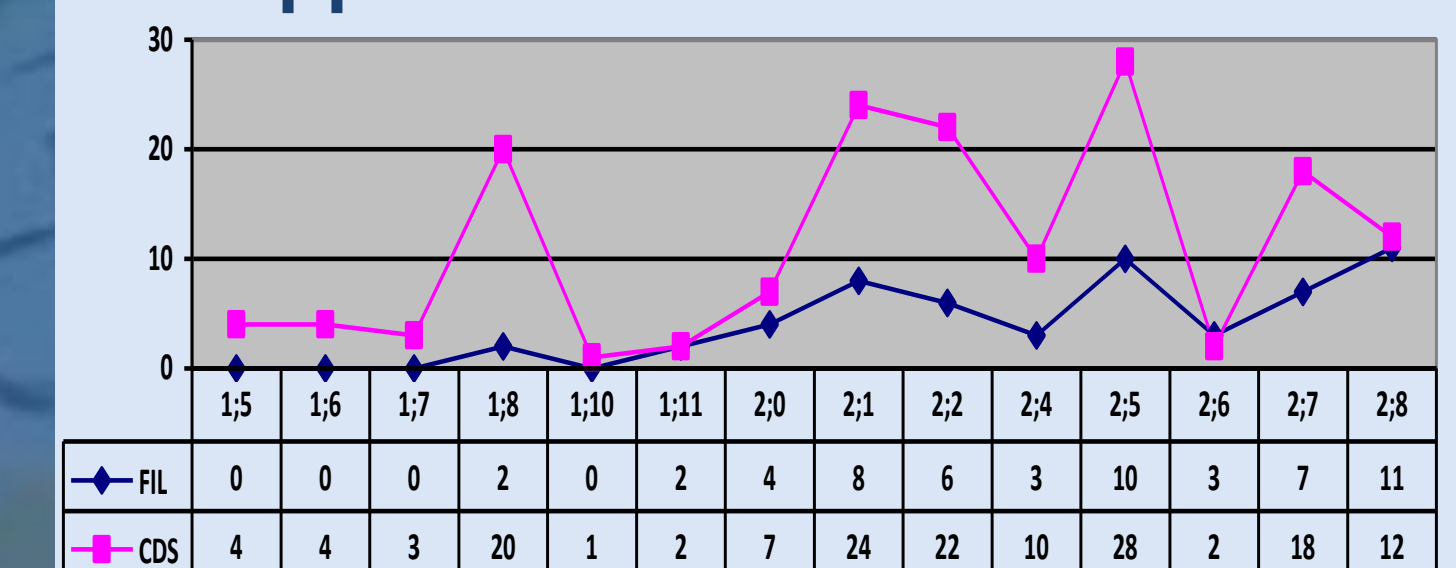
Both **Filipp** and **Liza** use adjective chains mainly in **declarative sentences**. The number of adjective chains in questions is very small. On the contrary, **for adults** it is rather typical to use groups of adjectives in **interrogative sentences**. Nevertheless the number of adjective chains in questions isn't the same in Filipp's and Liza's child-directed speech. See the table 2 below.

**Table 2. Adjective chains in interrogative sentences in child-directed speech (statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2$ ,  $P < 0,01$ )**

	Number of adjective chains in interrogative sentences	Number of adjective chains in declarative sentences	% of adjective chains in interrogative sentences
Filipp's mother	115	42	73,2%
Liza's caregivers	46	87	34,6%

Using of adjective chains in Filipp's and Liza's data is shown in two diagrams below. A number of adjective chains in Filipp's data correlates better with their number in mother's speech than in Liza's material. That is the more adjective chains are used in input the more we expect to see in boy's speech production. In contrast to Filipp Liza uses adjective chains rather independently to her caregivers' input.

## Using of adjective chains in Filipp's and Liza's data



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