

2-year-old children omit subjects (*null subjects*) [1,2]:
(1) ∅ have two cookies.

→ **subject-initial/SVO: null subjects or first element?**

Irish: VSO

Mixed acquisition pattern (Hickey 1990) [3]:

- Subjects, most verbs **not** omitted
- Omitted: *tá* "to be" (substantive, vs. copula *is*) [4]:

(2) Tá an lá fliuch
Be the day wet
"The day is wet."

(3) Is múinteoir Aine
copula a-teacher Aine
"Aine is a teacher."

➤ **First element omission** → independent of input

- Irish-English bilingualism [5-6, 2]
- Individual input variation

Current Study: does *tá* omission depend on:

- Input language(s)? (Irish-English vs Irish only)
⇒ unclear
- Individual input?
⇒ if no omission in input: *tá* omitted anyway
⇒ qualitative difference in input vs child omissions

Corpus analysis in CHILDES [7]

corpus	N	input	data	ages
Guilfoyle [8] 4,790 utterances	6	bilingual (<i>bil</i>)	cross-sectional	1;7 - 2;9
Gaeltacht [9] 30,896 utterances (23)	1	monolingual (<i>mono</i>)	longitudinal: 23 sessions	1;5 - 2;2

Utterances were hand coded for whether:

➤ *tá* was **possible** (4) or **not possible** (5):

(4) (Tá) sin madra Be DEM dog "That's a dog" (1;10)
(5) (*Tá) mé leabhar Bran Be I book Bran "I'm Bran's book" (1;9)

➤ *tá* was **optional** (4) **obligatory** (6/7):

(6) Tá madra ag Labhaoise Be dog at Labhaoise "Labhaoise has a dog" (1;9)
(7) *(Ta) daidí crosta Be daddy cross "Daddy (is) cross" (1;9)

➤ *tá* was **overt** (5/6) or **omitted** (4/7)

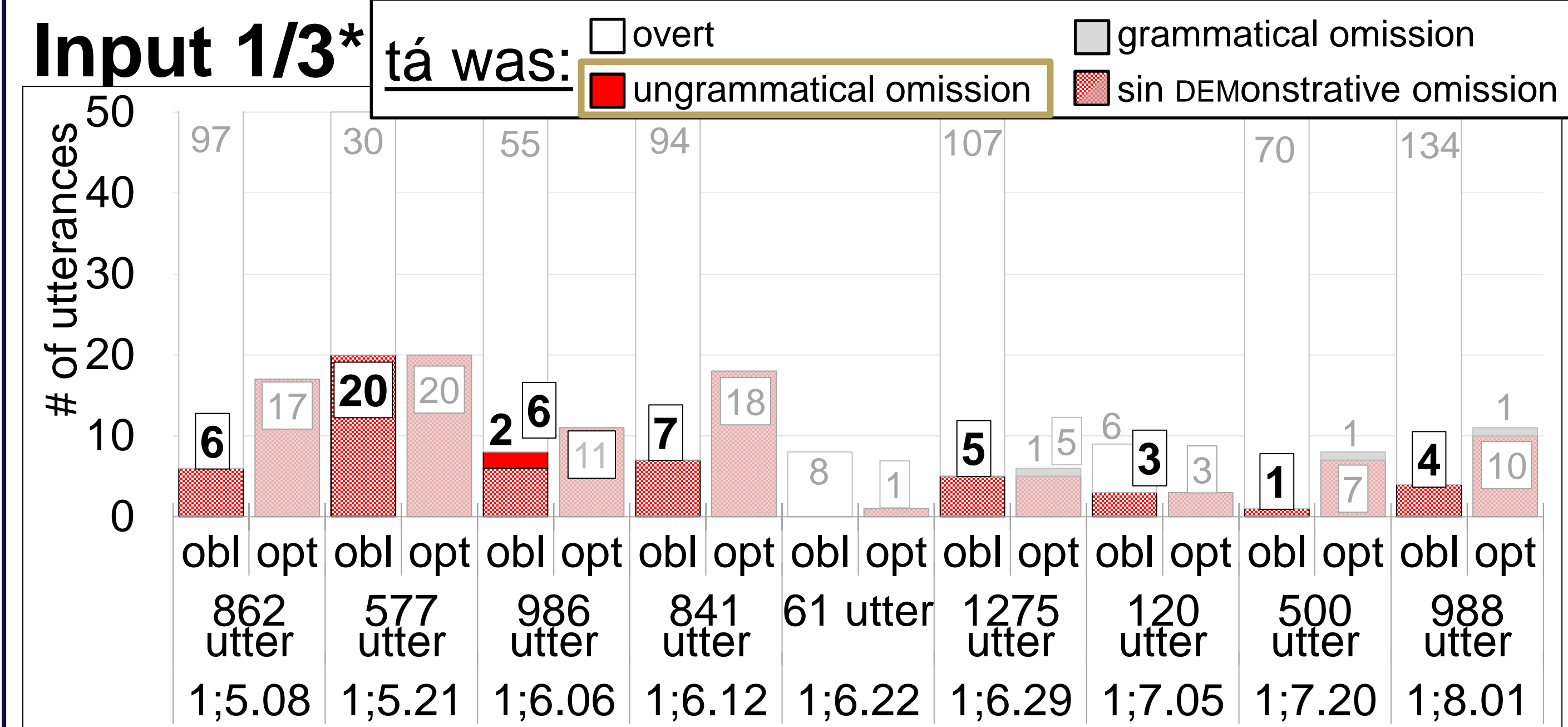
➤ *tá* omissions had a *sin* demonstrative (4) or not (7) [3]

→ Possible *tá* contexts/transcript:

- children: 34 possible *tá* contexts (SD=35)
- adults: 91 possible *tá* contexts (SD=41)

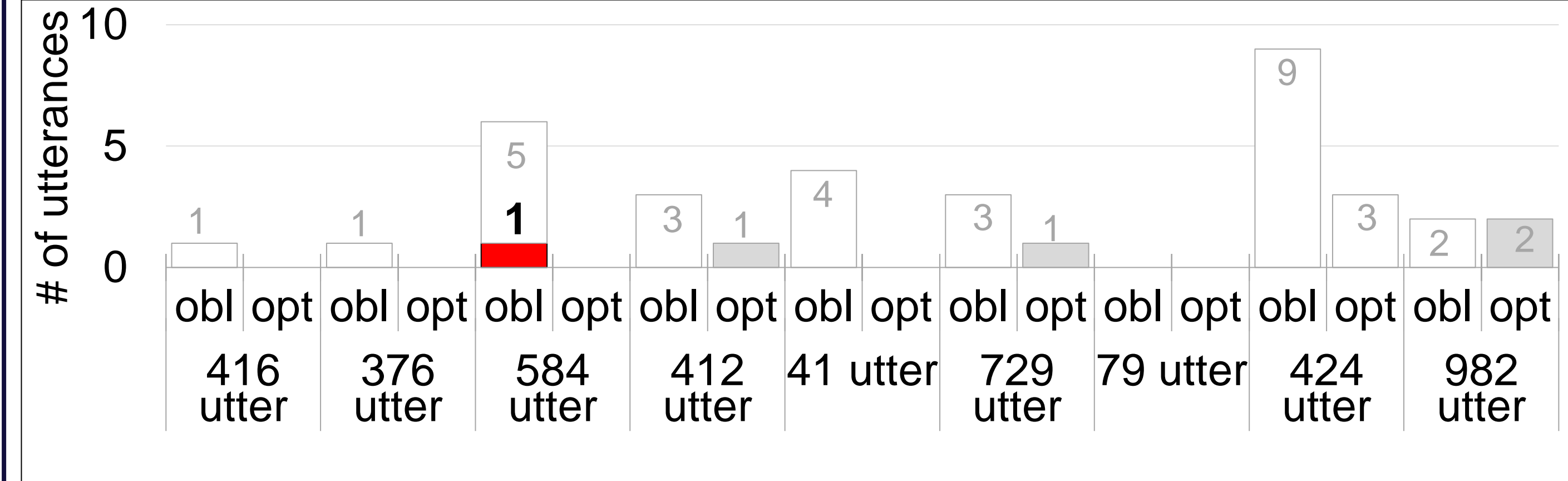
Monolingual *tá* contexts

obl = obligatory
opt = optional

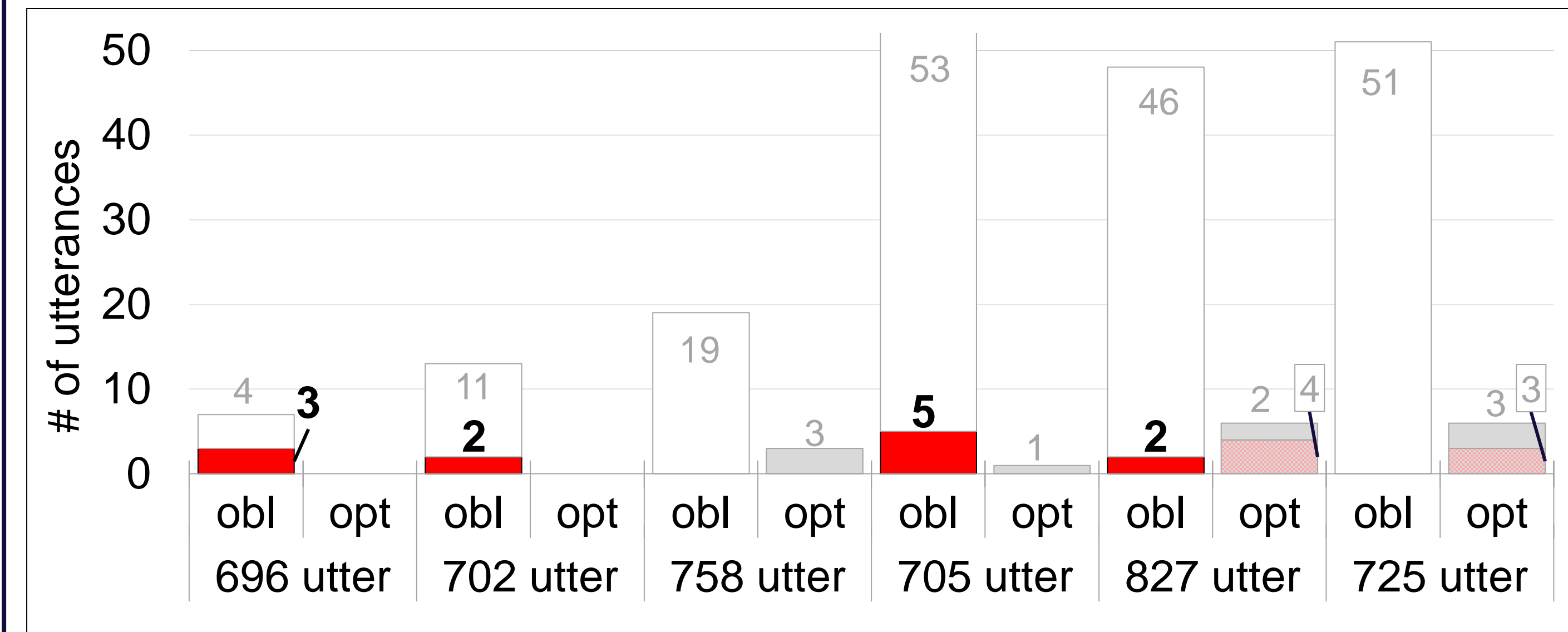


*further input is comparable, see [supplementary materials](#)

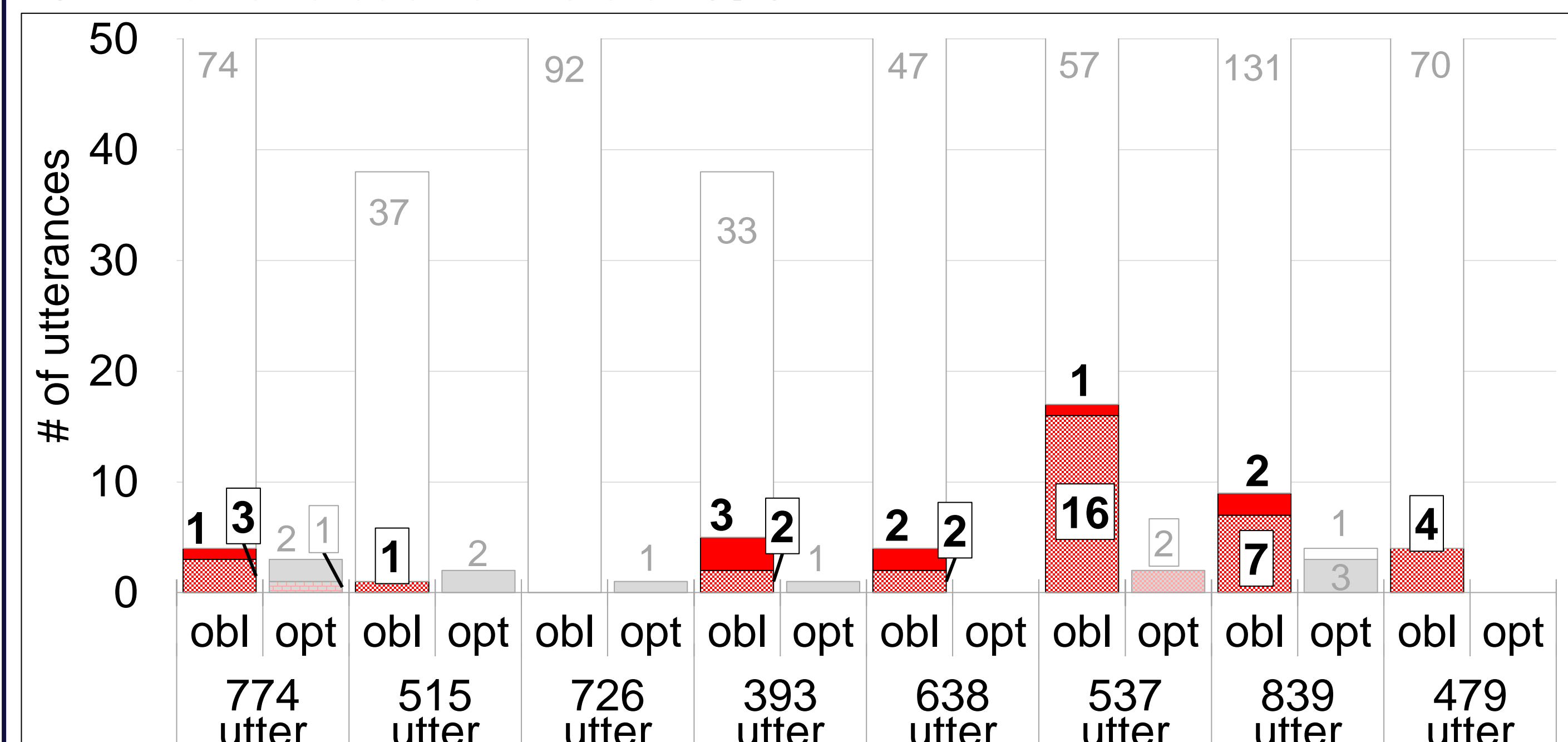
Child's utterances 1/3:



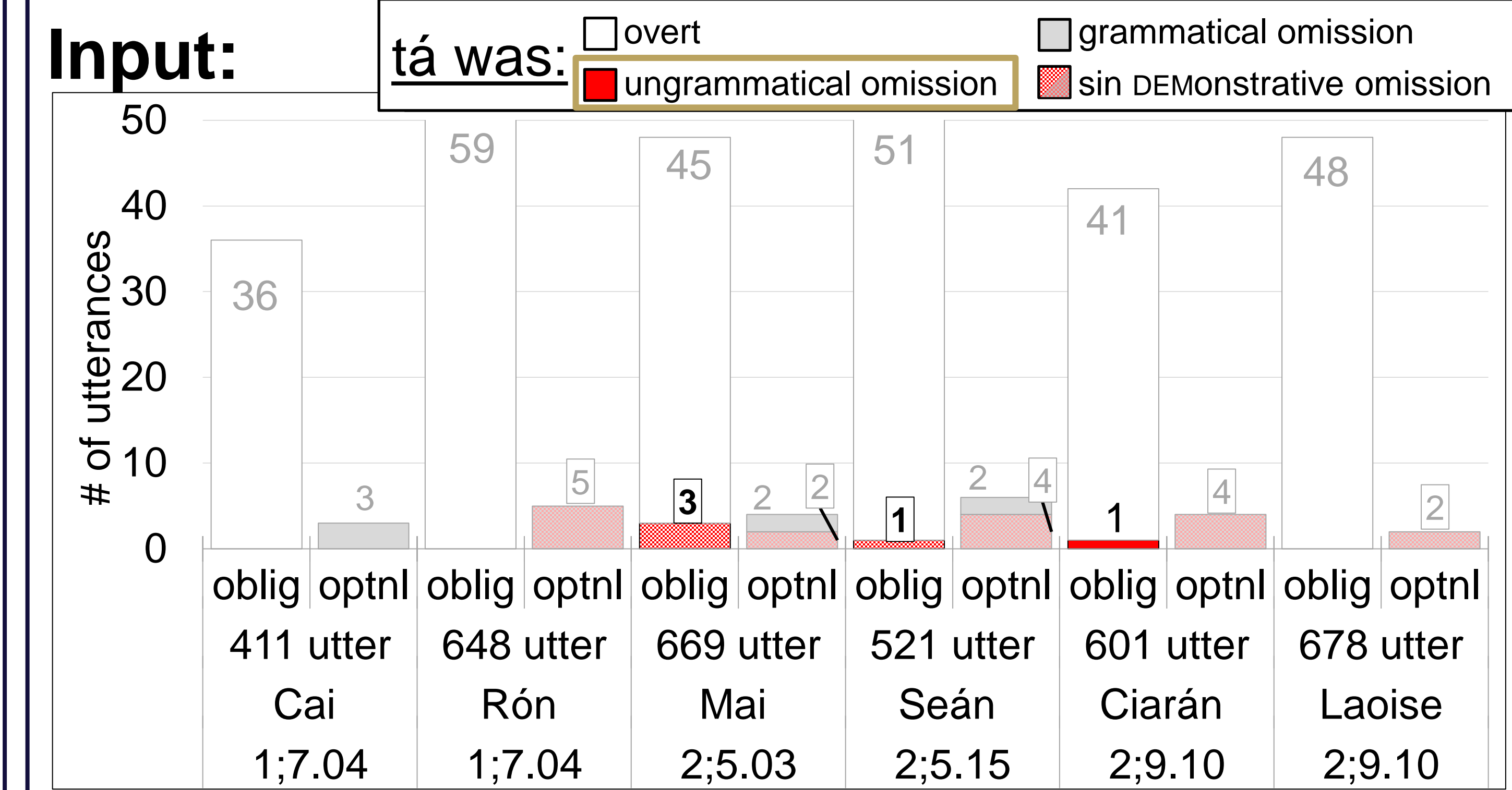
Child's utterances 2/3:



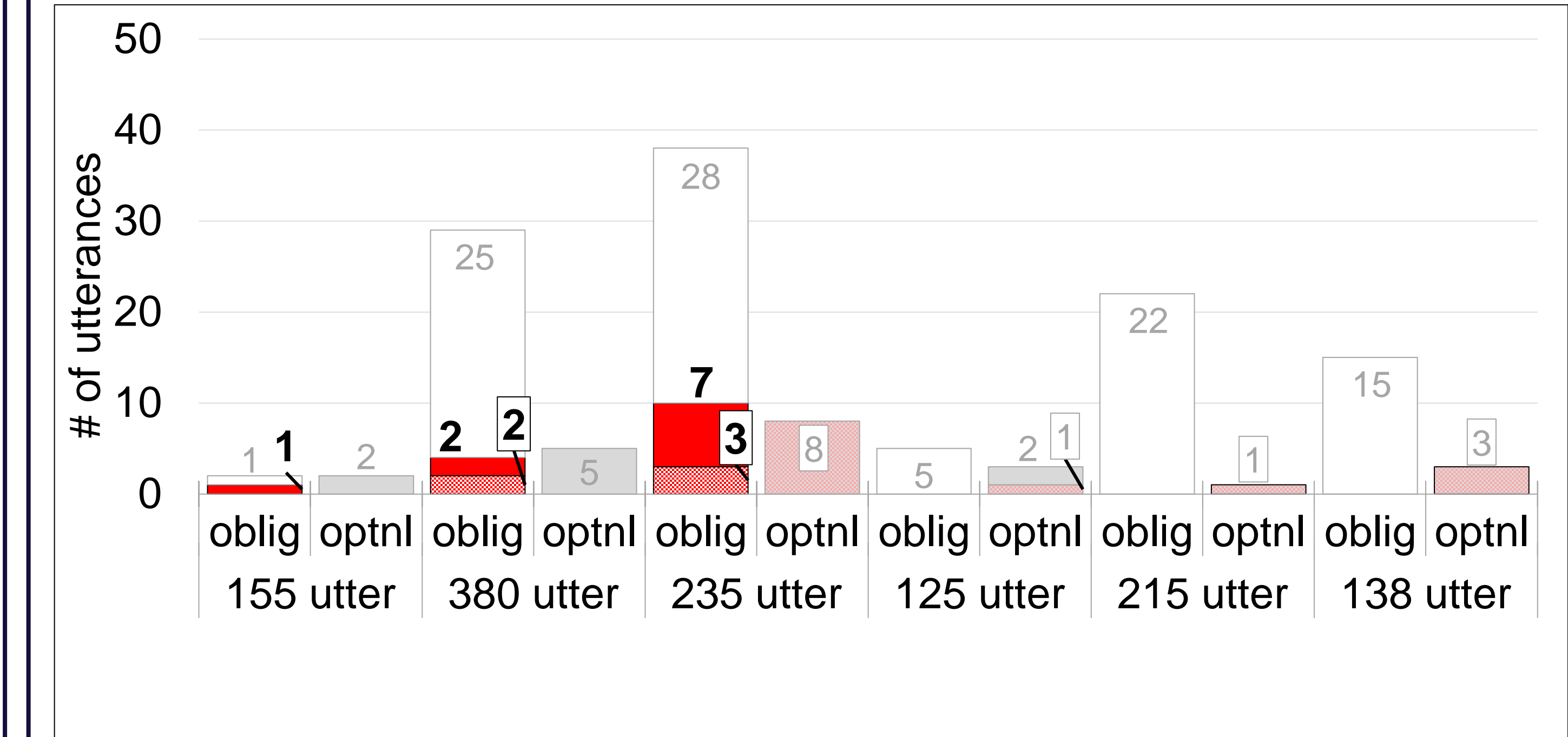
Child's utterances 3/3:



Bilingual *tá* contexts



Children's utterances:



Results

- IVs: obl/optnl; chi/adlt; transcript(N=29); bil/mono; sin-DEM
- DV: *tá* was **overt** or **omitted** → main effect of obl/opt, but:
 - different omission rates for child vs adult (obl/opt * chi/adlt)
 - variation across transcripts (obl/opt * chi/adlt * transcript)

- input omissions are mostly sin-DEMONstratives (4); children omit *tá* in ungrammatical contexts
(obl/opt * sin-DEM * chi/adlt) [data code](#)

Conclusions

- Ungrammatical omission at same age as null subjects
→ first element omission (given discourse information) [1-3]
- Variation: omission in input → also in output, vs bil/mono

References:

[1] Hyams (2011) in *Handbook of Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition*
 [2] Valian (2016) in *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Linguistics*
 [3] Hickey (1990) *JCL* 17 (1): 17-41.
 [4] Doherty (1996) *NLLT* 14 (1): 1-46.
 [5] Hickey (2012) *In Assessing Grammar: The Languages of LARSP*
 [6] Paradis & Navarro (2003) *JCL* 30 (2): 371-93.
 [7] MacWhinney (2000) *The CHILDES Project*.
 [8] Guilfoyle (2004) "Irish Guilfoyle Corpus."
 [9] Cameron-Faulkner & Hickey (2010) "Irish Gaeltacht Corpus."