

# The Influence of Conversational Partner on Expressive Language in Children and Adolescents with ASD

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## Introduction

- Expressive language is one of the most heterogeneous characteristics of ASD (Kjelgaard & Tager-Flusberg, 2001).
- Collecting natural language samples is an excellent way to examine it in a more naturalistic way (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009) and is especially useful for the understudied end of the spectrum of minimally and low verbal individuals making up about 30% of the population (Kim et al., 2014).
- Although numerous studies have used language samples to examine EL in autism, few have evaluated the role of sampling context, specifically, how the social demands of the context affect how representative the collected speech is.
- Only one study compared the role of conversational partner (parent vs. examiner) on EL in ASD, but it focused solely on 4-year-olds (Kover et al., 2014).

## Aims

We aimed to examine the effects of conversational partner (parent and examiner) and setting (home and lab) on the expressive language of children and adolescents with autism who varied in age and language ability, but with the majority classified as minimally verbal.

## Methods

**Participants:** N = 27 (4 females)

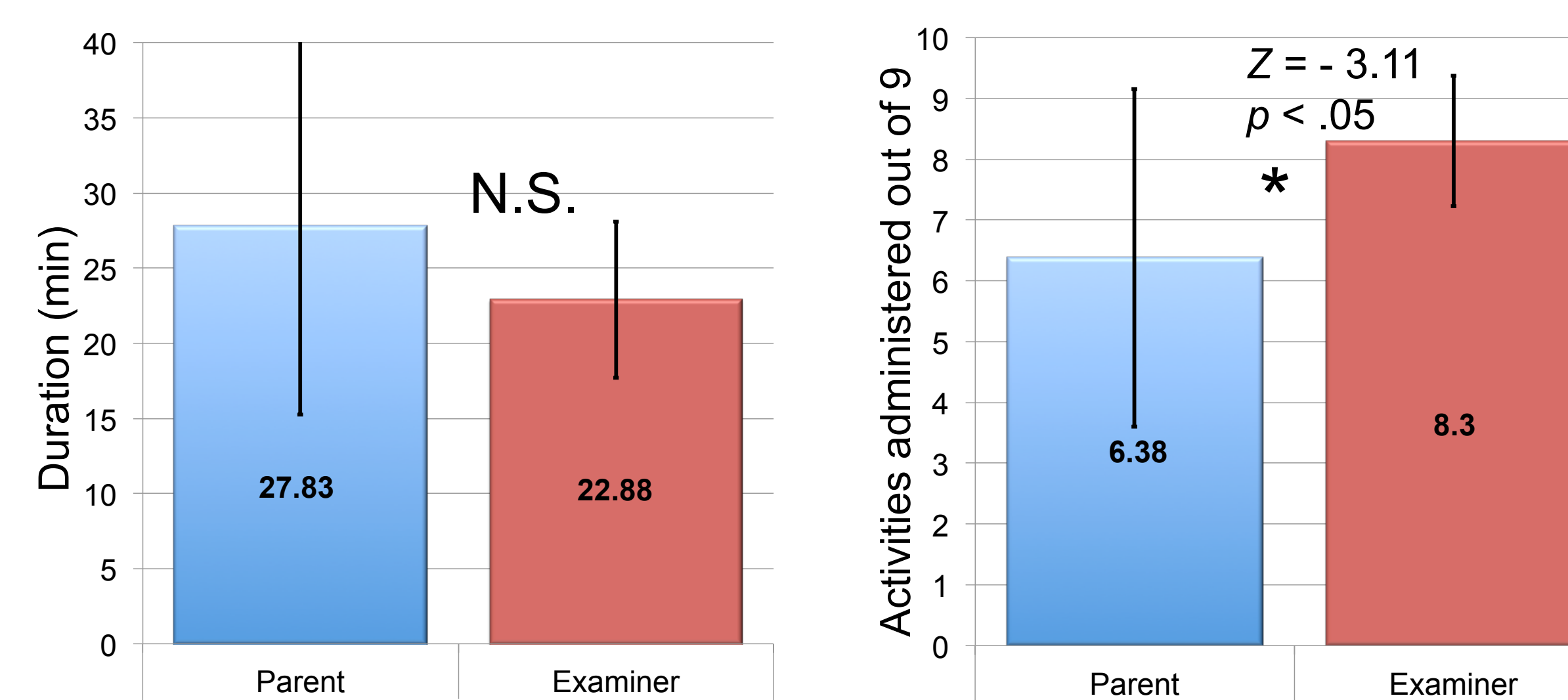
### Standardized Assessment Scores:

|  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|
| <b>Age</b> in months                         | 138.18   | 51.64     |
| <b>ADOS</b> Calibrated Severity Scores       | 7.63     | 1.86      |
| <b>Leiter</b> – Nonverbal IQ Score           | 71.44    | 22.77     |
| <b>SCQ</b> Communication Score               | 5.52     | 3.71      |
| <b>VABS</b> Expressive Language Scaled Score | 6.07     | 4.79      |

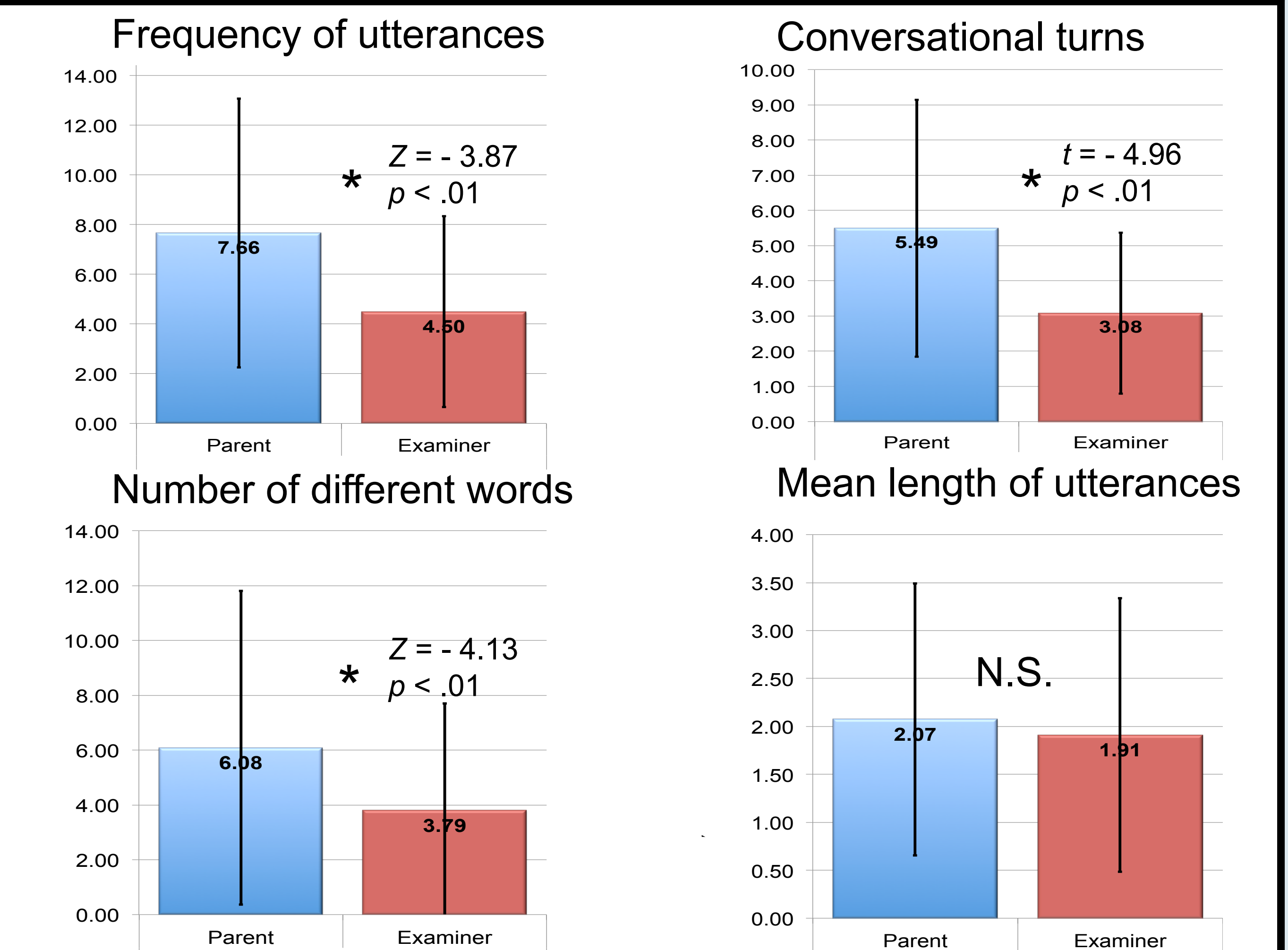
**Natural Language Sample:** ELSA was collected by a parent and by an examiner

## ELSA

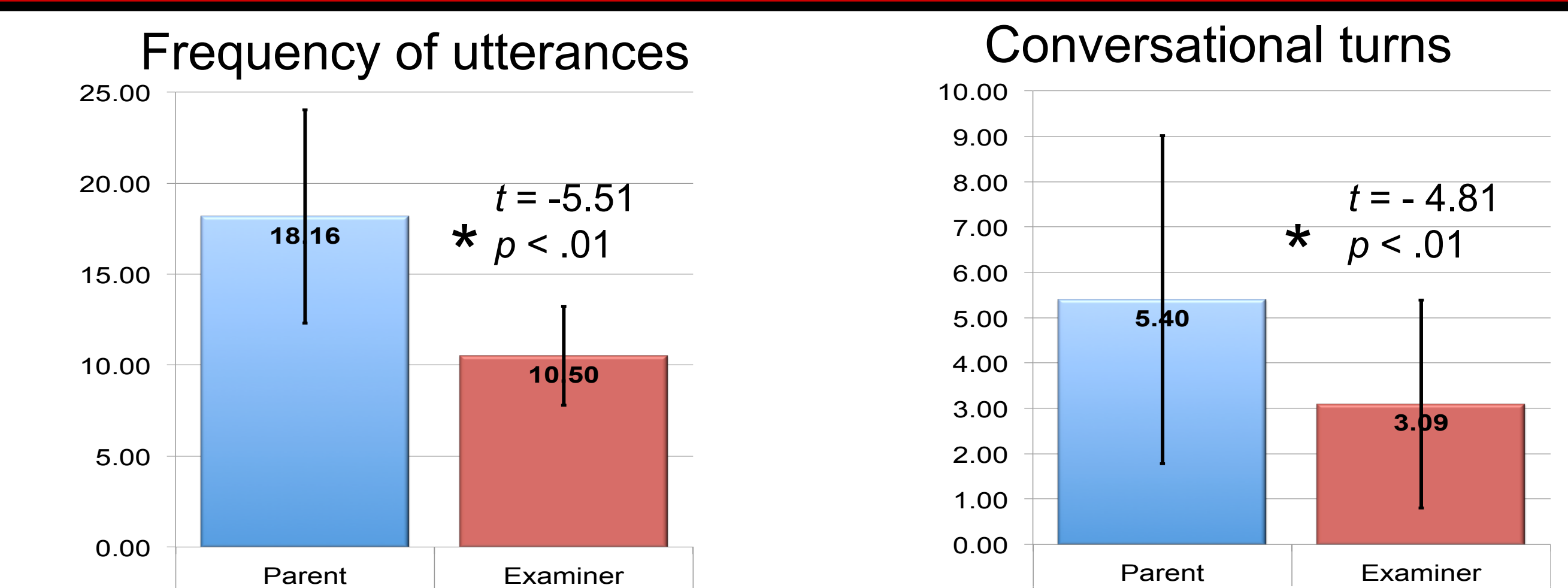
- The **E**liciting **L**anguage **S**ample for **A**nalysis protocol, which consists of 9 activities, was developed to collect language samples from children and adolescents with a wide range of age and language ability.
- ELSAs were coded for a administration fidelity and were transcribed following standard transcription procedures (SALT; Miller et al., 2012).
- ELSA Expressive Language Measures:**
  - Frequency of speech utterances per minute
  - Number of conversational turns per minute
  - Number of different words per minute
  - Mean length of utterances in words
- ELSA administration:**



## Results: Participants



## Results: Adults



## Discussion

- Children and adolescents, the majority classified as minimally verbal (21/27), produced utterances and took turns more often when with their parents, and their speech was characterized by a more diverse lexicon.
- In addition, parents themselves spoke more often and took more turns during ELSA compared to examiners.
- These findings demonstrate the importance of context, conversational partner, in particular, in the evaluation of speech in autism.

## Acknowledgements

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