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Early communicative gestures and signs in French Sign Language acquisition

Guy-Guyenet, Bogliotti & Lacheret-Dujour

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1. BACKGROUND

- Sign-exposed children (SI-E) acquiring Sign Languages follow a developmental sequence similar to their speech-exposed (SP-E) counterparts acquiring spoken languages.
- SP-E and SI-E children communicate through gestural means – mainly **Deictic Gestures** – before they are able to produce their **first Lexical Units – words or signs** (Volterra, Iverson & Castrataro, 2006).
- Throughout the second year, two other types of communicative gestures complement the SP-E children's repertoires:
 - Conventional Gestures** (CG: codified gestures shared among a given community)
 - Representational Gestures** (RG: or iconic gestures, representing a referent based on its formal aspects or the action associated with it).
- During the « bimodal period » between 12 and 16 months, gestural and lexical repertoires are **equipotential**, then a **reorganization** occurs. From 20 months on, children show a **preference for the modality of the input** (Capirci et al, 1996, Bates et al, 1981).

2. METHODOLOGY

Corpus-based study: longitudinal design

Participants: 4 sign-exposed children between 3 and 36 months.

NAME	SEX	HEARING STATUS	BIRTH ORDER	NUMBER OF VISITS
Maya	female	hearing	1st	19
Soline	female	deaf	2nd	20
Robin	male	hearing	2nd	16
Paul	male	hearing	3rd	15

Data collection:

- Spontaneous child-caregiver interactions at home
- Video recording with 2 cameras
- 45-minute sessions at monthly intervals (2 years)
- Notes: contextual information per session

Coding procedure: ELAN software: 10-minute sample per session

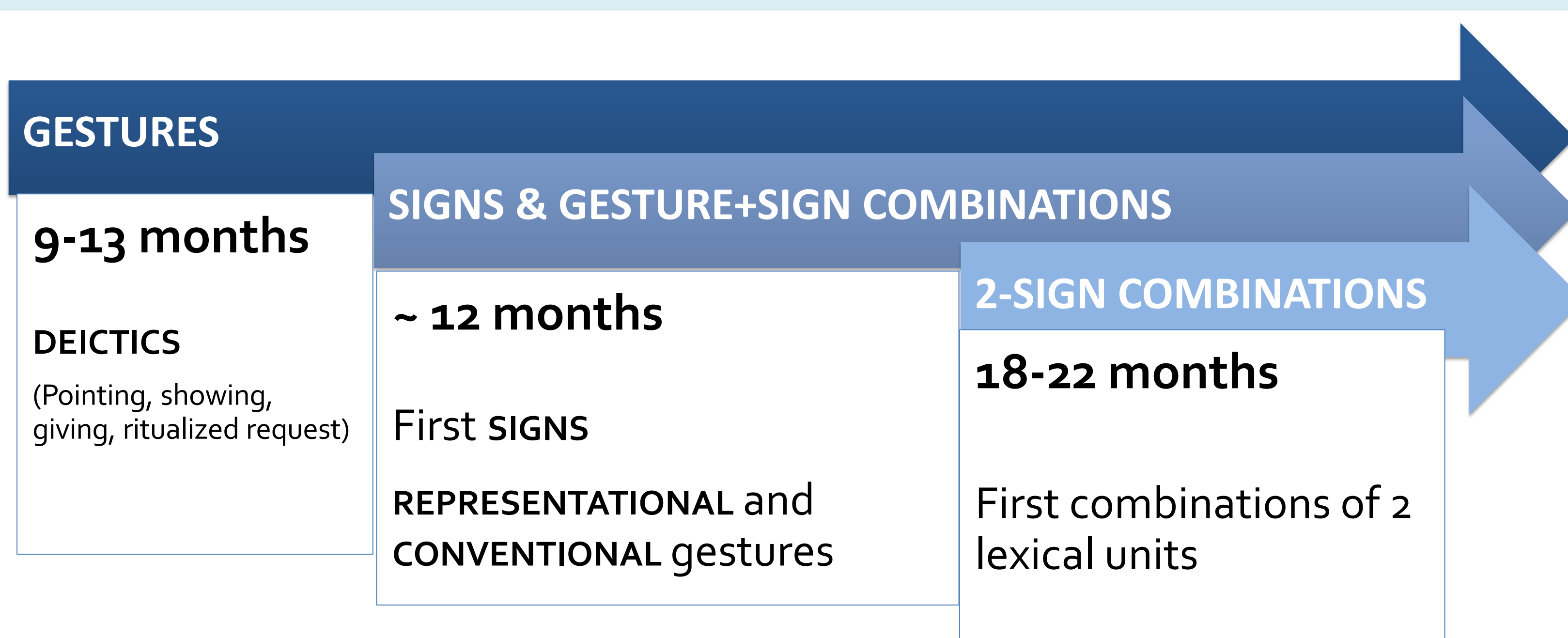
Focus on manual behaviours: identifying and categorizing **DEICTIC** and **NON DEICTIC** behaviours.

All **NON DEICTIC** types are then coded as:

- SIGNS** (LSF and Sign-like)
- REPRESENTATIONAL** Gestures
- CONVENTIONAL** Gestures
- G/S?** (unclear ones)

+ **Annotation of functional aspects:** (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1988; Petitto, 1988)

- Meaning
- Gaze direction
- Manner of use
- Caregiver's response



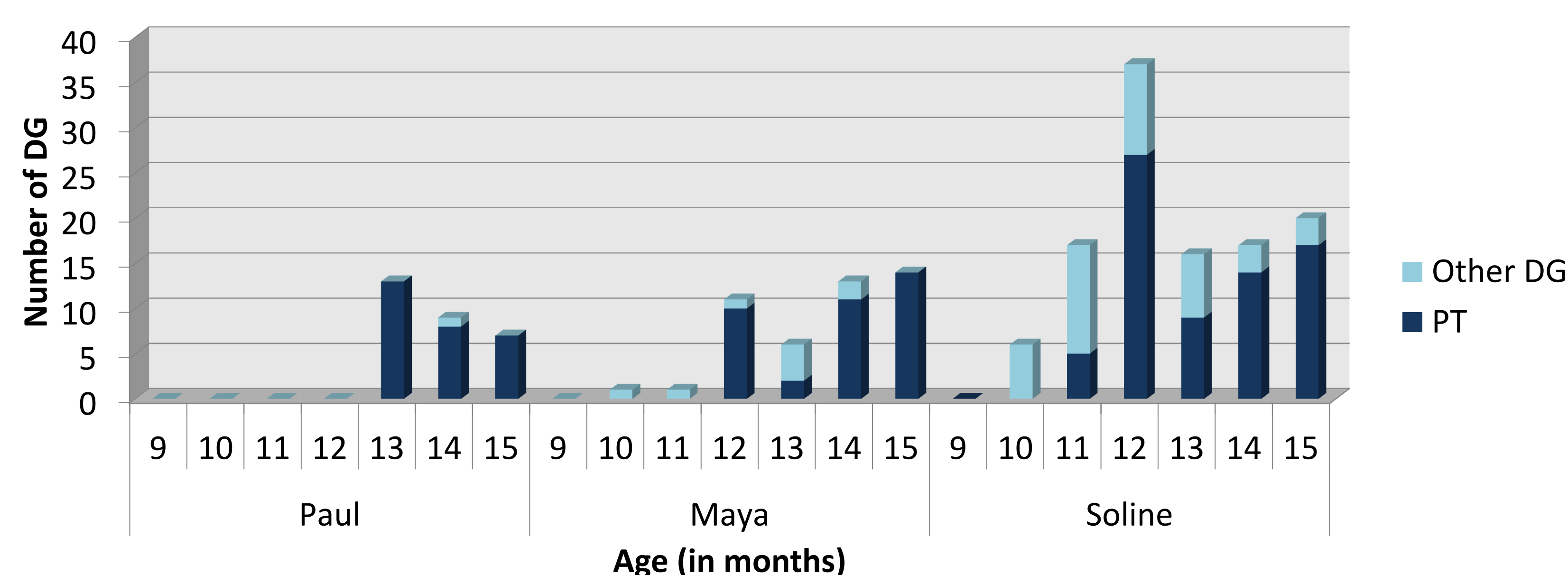
Communicative gestures precede and coexist with first signs

3. THIS STUDY

What is specific to the language acquisition of SI-E children is that gestural and lexical development occurs in the same visual-gestural modality :

→ How signing children reorganize their gestural communication system (gestural communicative and gestural linguistic repertoires) during early language development ?

Figure 1: Repartition of PT gestures among DG



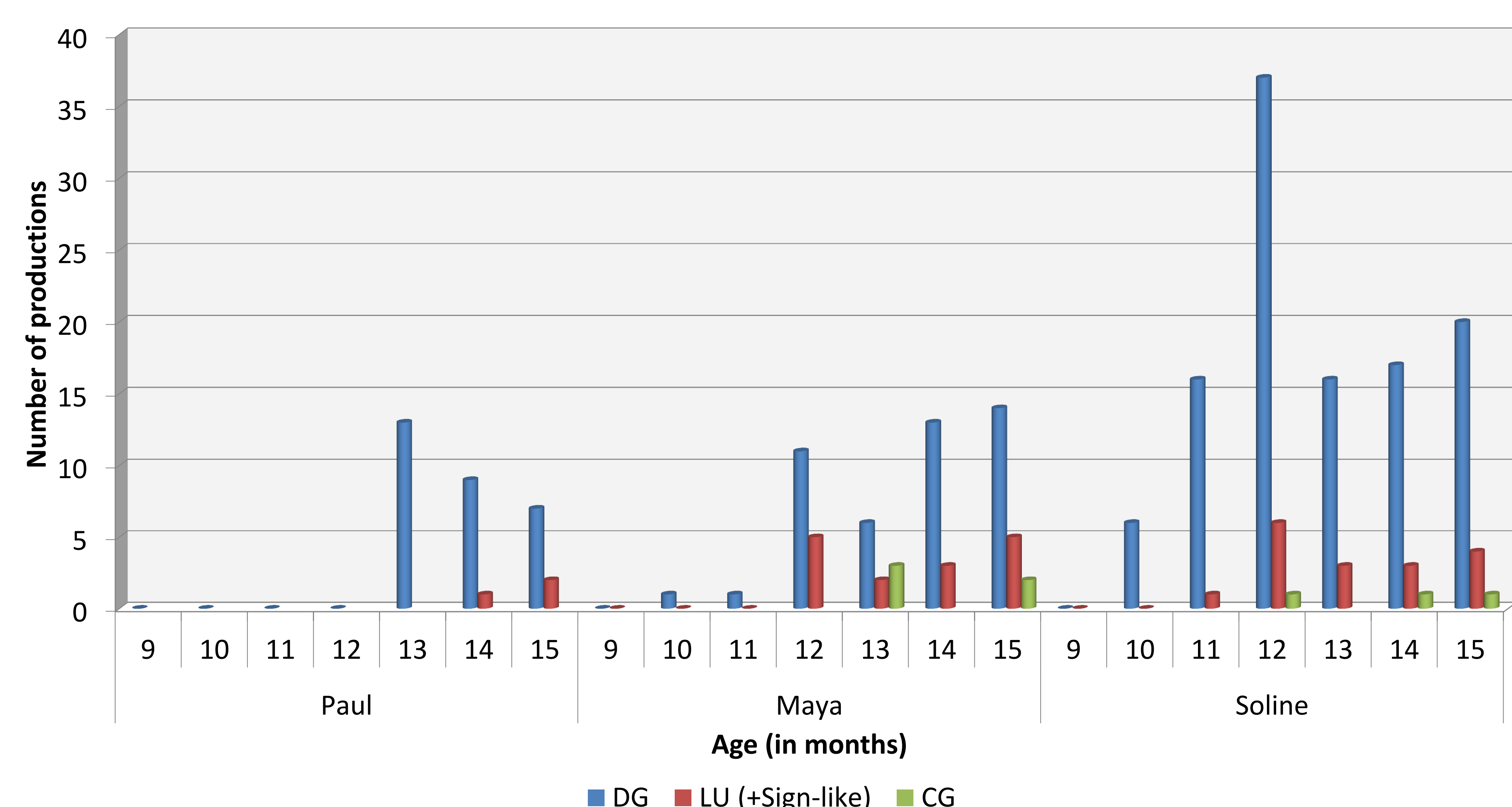
- POINTING** gestures (PT) start between 11 and 13 months and are the most frequently used type of **DG** (Fig. 1).
- First **LEXICAL UNITS** (LU or signs) are observed between 11-12 months. Their frequency increases between 12 and 15 months (Fig. 2). **CONVENTIONAL** gestures (CG) emerge around 12-13 months (Fig. 2).

4. PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The spontaneous gesturing and signing of 3 children (1 deaf and 2 hearing) were coded and analyzed between 9 and 15 months.

- The first communicative behaviours observed are **DEICTICS (DG)** and emerge between 10 and 13 months (Fig. 1 and 2).
- DG** are the most frequently used type and their frequency increases over the study period (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Emergence of the different types of communicative acts



5. DISCUSSION & PERSPECTIVES

From a qualitative perspective: so far, the developmental progression of communicative gestures and signs observed is in line with previous research. The types of gestures used by the child change over time. The different types and tokens of communicative gestures and signs will be analyzed and described further. Data from the sessions between 16 and 24 months are currently being annotated.