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Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience

ERP-based assessment of letter-speech sound integration in dyslexic and normally reading children

Žarić, G.[A,B], Fraga González, G.[C], Tijms, J.[C,D], Van der Molen, M.[C,E], Blomert, L.[A,B,†] & Bonte, M.[A,B]

A Department of Cognitive Neuroscience, Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience, Maastricht University, Maastricht, The Netherlands
B Maastricht Brain Imaging Center (M-BIC), Maastricht, The Netherlands
C Department of Developmental Psychology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
D IWAL Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
E Cognitive Science Center Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
† Leo Blomert passed away on November 25, 2012

Introduction

Dyslexia is a disorder in the neural network for reading, with dysfluent reading as its most persistent symptom (Gabrieli, 2009). Individuals with dyslexia are at severe risk for adverse academic, economic, and psychosocial consequences, because of their inability to attain society’s literacy demands.

A series of electrophysiological (EEG) studies employing a cross-modal oddball paradigm revealed that automatic letter-speech sound integration takes years to develop in normally reading children, despite the fact that they ‘know’ which letter goes with which sound (Froyen et al, 2008; 2009).

Furthermore letter-speech sound associations were shown to be less automatic in dyslexic readers (Froyen et al., 2011). And fMRI evidence showed reduced neural integration of letters and speech sounds in the Planum Temporale (PT) /Heschl Sulcus (HS) and the Superior Temporal Sulcus (STS) in 9 year old dyslexic children compared to age-matched controls (Blau et al, 2010).

Objective

To compare the effective functioning of letter-speech sound integration of normal and dyslexic readers with 2.5 years of reading instruction by means of ERP and behavioral measures.

Methods

Participants:
36 with dyslexia; age: M(SD)=9.0(0.43)
20 normally reading; age: M(SD)=8.8(0.38)

Stimuli: Dutch phonemes /a/ and /o/ And letter “a”.

Mismatch negativity (MMN) paradigm:
Standard 83%; Deviant 17% (**Fig. 1**)

3 conditions:
- Auditory (Au)
- Two audiovisual conditions with different stimulus onset asynchronies (SOA):
Audiovisual SOA 0ms (Av0)
Audiovisual SOA 200ms (Av200)

3 blocks per condition
288 trials per block
Trial onset asynchrony 1750ms

EEG recordings: 64 active channels Biosemi system (**Fig. 2**)

EEG analysis:
Two time windows of interest:
75-275ms (MMN) and 550ms-750ms (Late Negativity)

Repeated measures ANOVA on mean amplitudes (across 50 ms centered on the individual peak latency) in fronto-central electrodes (Fz, Cz, FC3 and FC4).

Behavioural measures (3DM, Blomert & Vaessen, 2009):
- Letter-speech sound identification
- Letter-speech sound discrimination
- Spelling
- Word reading (high and low frequency words and pseudowords)

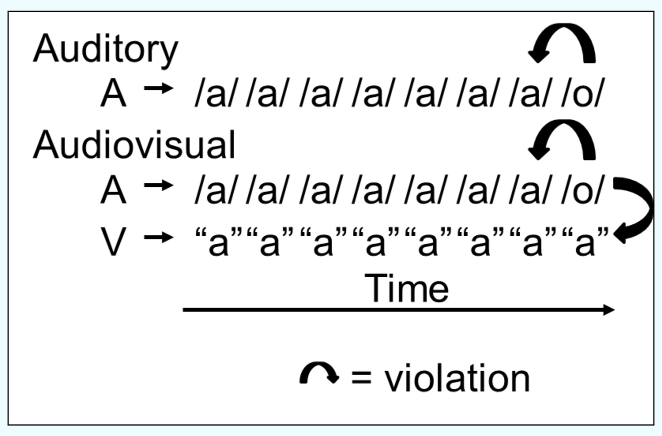

***Figure 1**: Mismatch negativity paradigm for investigating letter-speech sound integration*

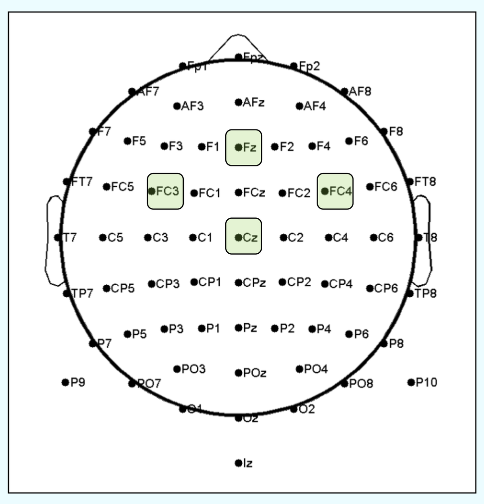

***Figure 2**: Channel locations with channels used for ERP analysis marked in green*

Results

- Comparable auditory MMN responses around 180ms in both groups (**Fig. 3**).
- Cross-modal MMN enhancement in audiovisual conditions in both groups, but only an LN enhancement for normally reading children (**Fig. 4**).
- Normally reading children were significantly better in all behavioral tasks except in letter-speech sound discrimination.
- In the simultaneous audiovisual condition (Av0) MMN latency of Dyslexic readers showed a positive correlation with the number of correctly written words (HF and LF) and pseudowords (**Fig. 5**).

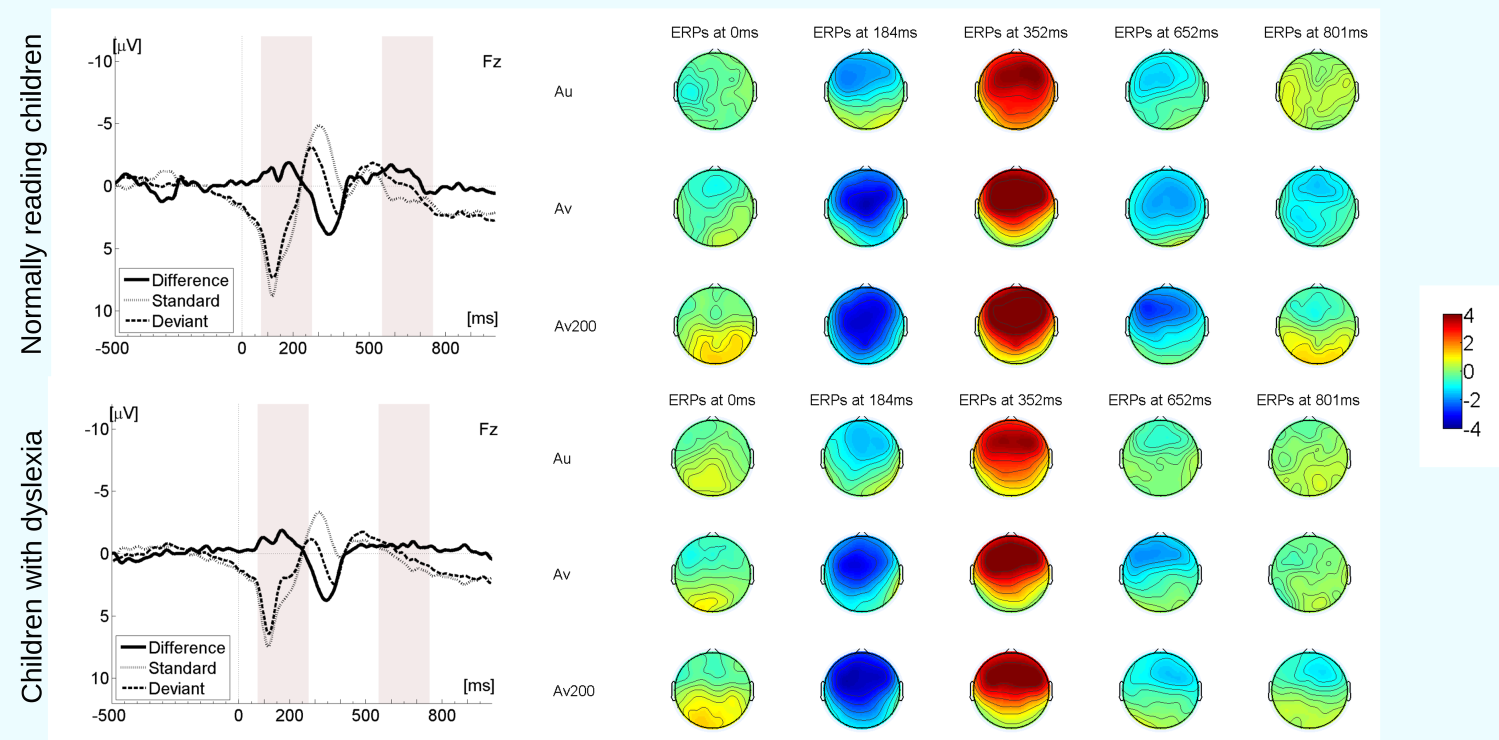

***Figure 3**: Grand average ERPs in the Auditory condition at Fz (left panel). Topographical distribution of difference waves in the Auditory and Audiovisual conditions (right panel).*

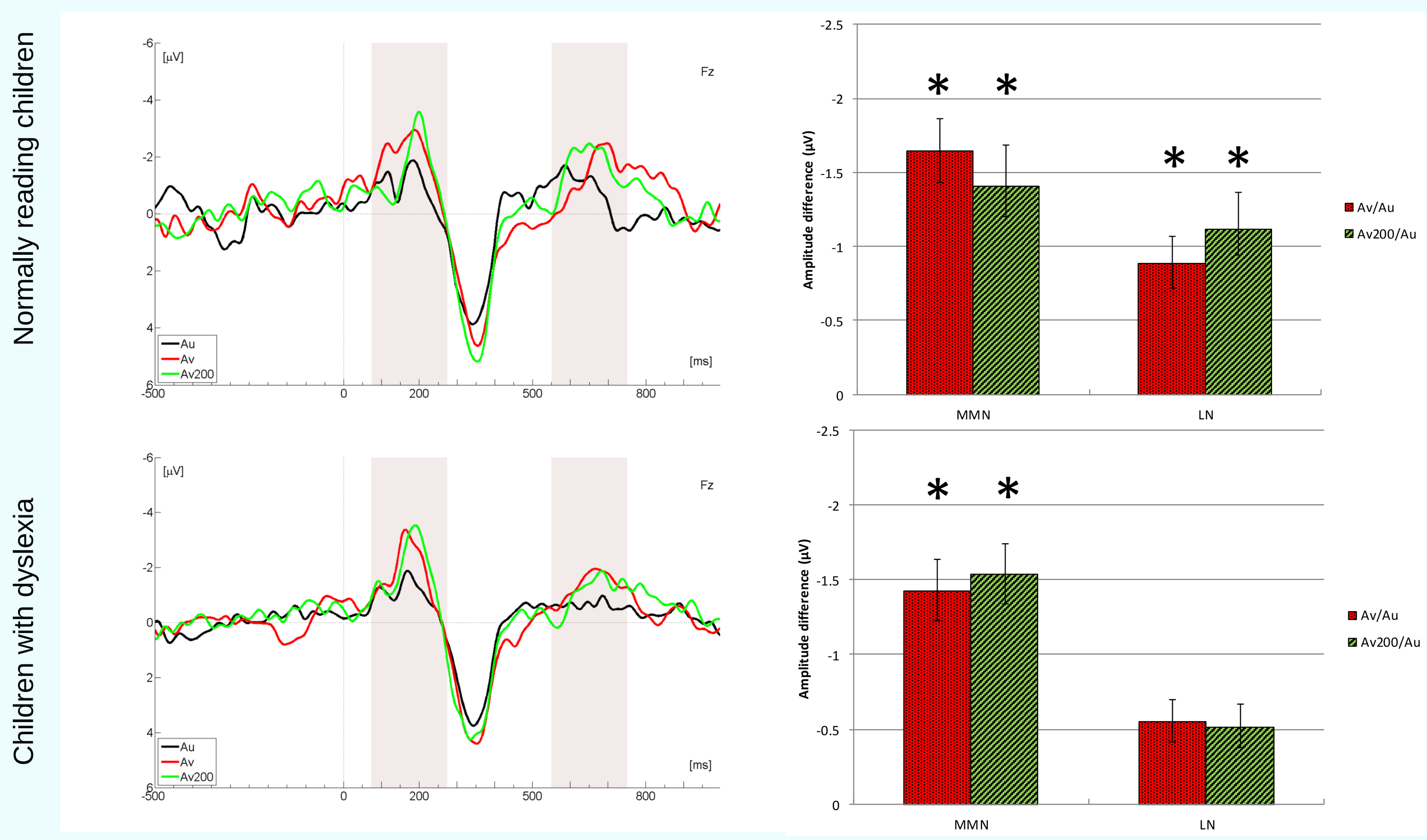

***Figure 4**: Grand average ERP difference waves (left panel) and cross-modal enhancement of difference waves (right panel) for the mismatch negativity (MMN) and late negativity (LN).*

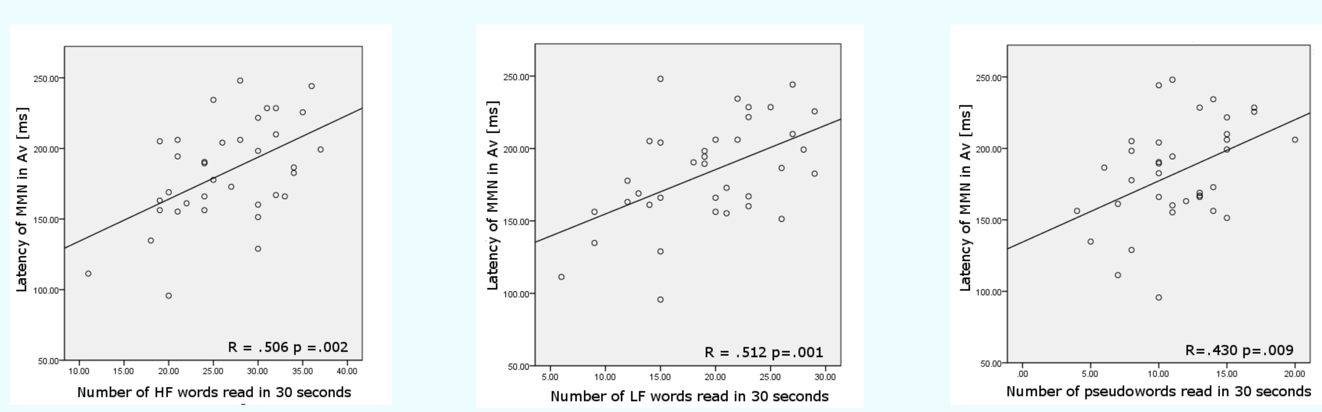

***Figure 5**: Correlations of MMN latency in the Av0 condition with the number of correctly read words in 3DM task for dyslexic children*

Discussion

These preliminary results indicate that after 2.5 years of reading instruction, normal readers show integration of letters and speech sounds at a different temporal window of integration in comparison with experienced readers (Froyen et al., 2008; 2009).

Our results confirm deficient letter-speech sound integration in dyslexic children, but with a different timing as compared to previous findings with 11-year old dyslexic children (Froyen et al., 2011).

Apart from indicating deficient letter-speech sound integration, the lack of cross-modal LN enhancement is consistent with recent findings suggesting this component as a neural marker of dyslexia (Neuhoff et al., 2012).

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NWO Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek | National Initiative Brain & Cognition | University of Amsterdam | IWAL instituten voor dyslexie

Correspondence to:
Gojko Žarić

gojko.zaric@maastrichtuniversity.nl
www. maastrichtuniversity.nl

Department of Cognitive Neuroscience
Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience

T +3143 388 1480

F +3143 388 4125

Maastricht University

P.O. Box 616
6200 MD Maastricht, The Netherlands