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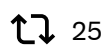
syntactic “islands”: Why is a better?

- a What did J think that M bought?
- b factive: What did J know that M bought?
- c manner: What did J whisper that M bought?



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In four acceptability judgement experiments, we found that verb-frame frequency offers the best explanation, as compared to syntax, semantics and discourse-based proposals





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Theory 1: extra nodes in syntax (e.g. Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971)

In factive and manner-of-speaking verbs, there is extra structure crossed in wh-movement, leading to ungrammaticality:

What did J whisper [NP [S that Mary bought __]]

What did J know [NP [S that Mary bought __]]



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Theory 2: The lower acceptability of extractions across factive verbs may be because presupposition does not allow extraction (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971)

What did J know [NP [S that Mary bought __]] ?

What did J discover [NP [S that Mary bought __]] ?



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Theory 3:

Perhaps complements of factive and manner-of-speaking verbs are more backgrounded:

Backgrounded Constituents are Islands (BCI):

Backgrounded constituents may not serve as gaps in filler-gap constructions (Ambridge & Goldberg, 2008).



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A&G test of backgroundedness: the more backgrounded a constituent, the less likely that sentential negation can fall on it

I didn't think that M bought a car.
can entail
M didn't buy a car.

but
I didn't know/whisper that M bought a car.
does not entail...
Show more



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Theory 4:
Verb-frame Frequency: (cf. Dabrowska, 2008)
Acceptability depends on (i) the frequency of the construction (wh-question vs. declarative) and (ii) the frequency of the verb head-structure = $P(\text{matrix verb}) * P(\text{sentence complement} | \text{matrix verb})$



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According to the verb-frame frequency hypothesis, there is nothing special about wh-extraction structures, other than being lower frequency constructions. The same patterns of acceptability are expected in declaratives as wh-questions (or other extraction structures)



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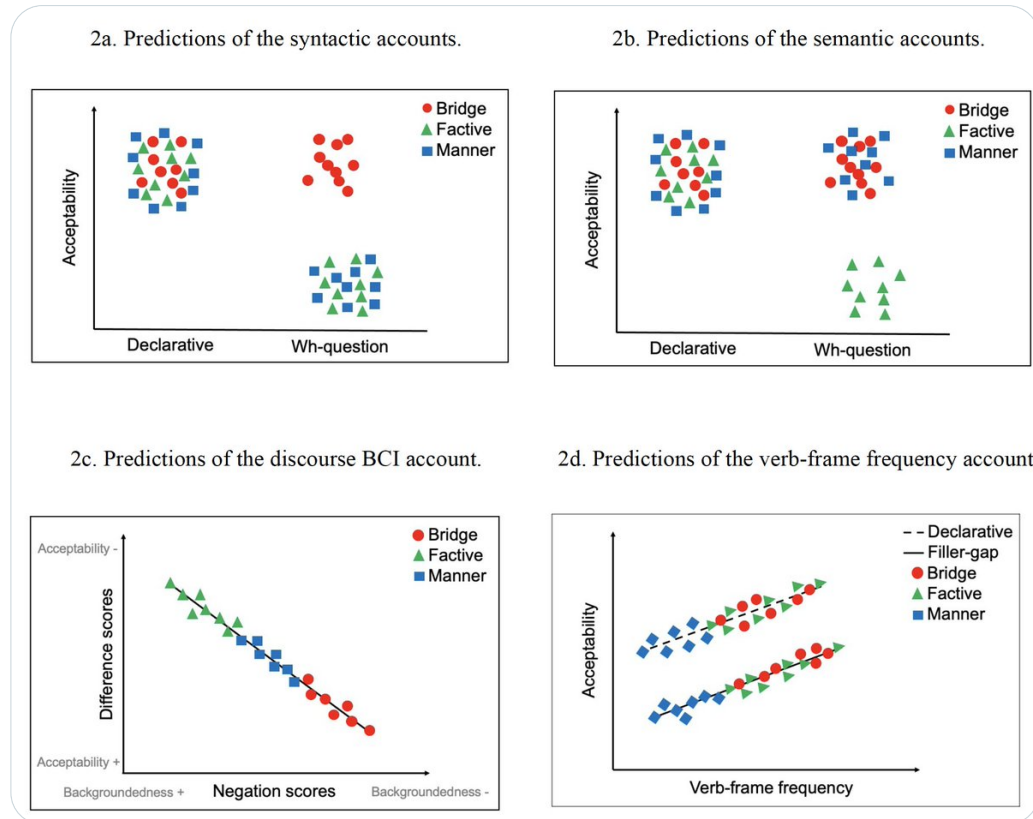
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Predictions of the four theories:

declarative, bridge / factive / manner: Susan thought / knew / whispered that Anthony liked something.

wh-question, bridge / factive / manner: What did Susan think / know / whisper that Anthony liked?



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here are the verbs in E1:

"Bridge" verbs: say, decide, think, believe, feel, hope, claim, report, declare

Factive verbs: know, realize, remember, notice, discover, forget

Manner-of-speaking verbs: whisper, stammer, mumble, mutter, shout, yell, scream, murmur, whine



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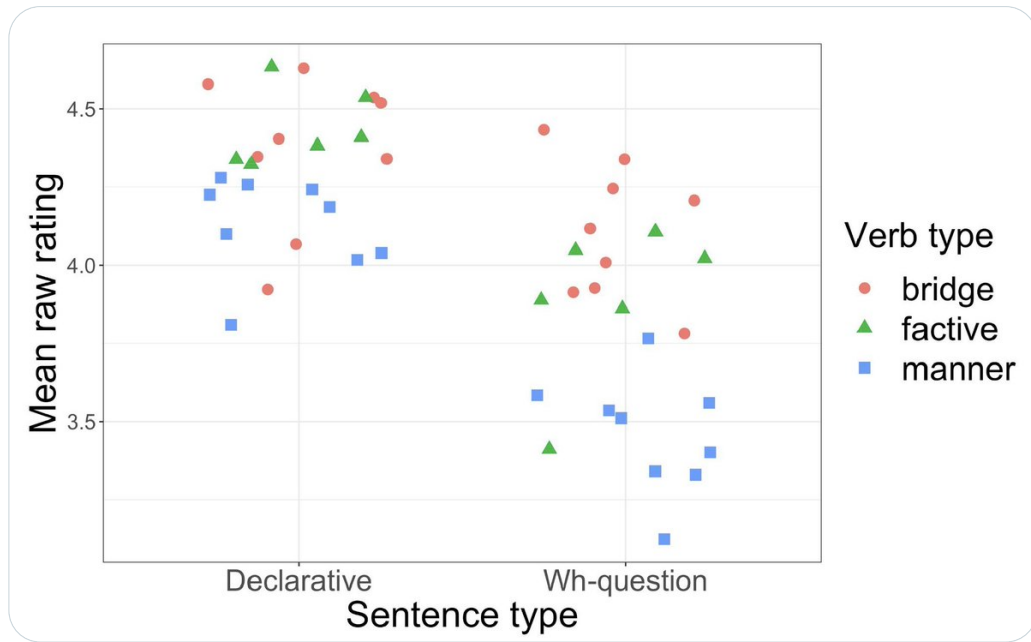




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Experiment 1 results n = 120. These results are far from what the syntactic and semantic theories predict. The predicted interactions aren't close to being there.



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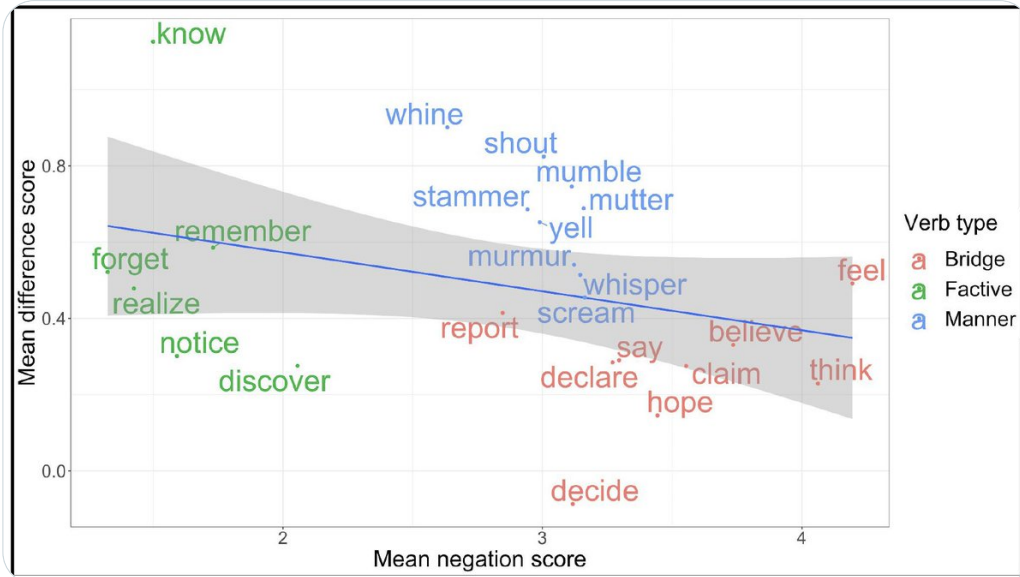




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To evaluate backgrounded-ness, we ran A&G's negation test (n=60). The background account predicts a correlation between negation score and the difference in acceptability for the wh-question and declarative versions. We did not find a reliable correlation $r=-0.31$, $p=0.13$.

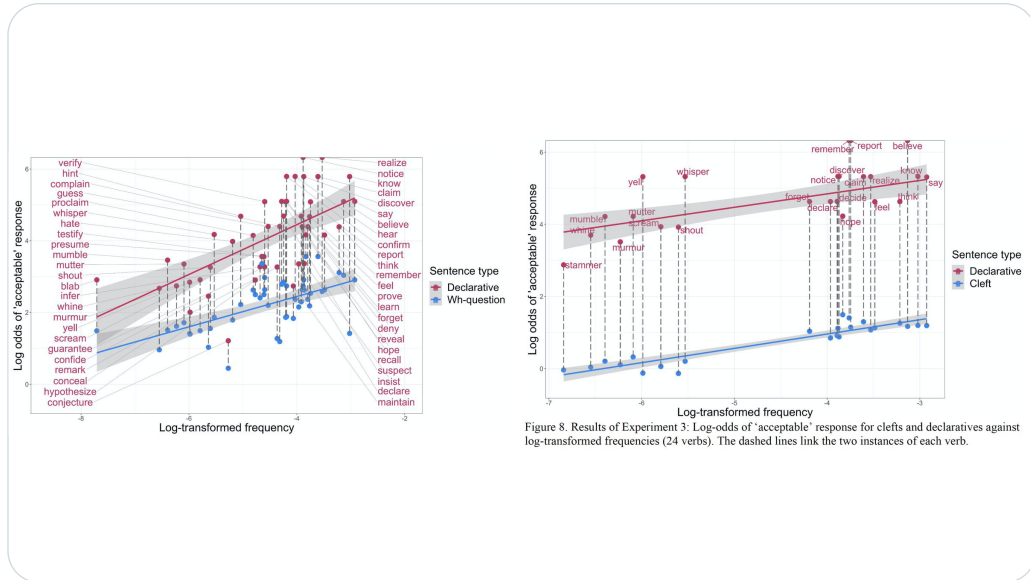




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There are 3 further experiments, all showing strong effects of construction (declarative vs wh-question or cleft) and verb-frequency, using either a 5-point rating scale or a binary acceptability rating scale.



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Open question: why is it that the embedding verb matters so much in the acceptability of these materials? Do all words contribute similarly?



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In addition, we found that the widely adopted approach in our field - application of linear models to Likert-scale acceptability data - can lead to false positives, especially for data skewed towards one end of the scale.



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