



Introduction

- English follows adjective + noun word order and Spanish generally follows noun + adjective word order.
- little research on what determines position of Spanish adjectives
 - there may be regional differences in adjective usage
 - adjectives can be categorized based on where they occur in relation to the noun, and if the adjective changes meaning (Zagona, 2002)
 - **Pre-nominal**: adjectives that must go before the noun (quantifiers)
 - **Post-nominal** (relational): adjectives that describe relations and must go after the noun (nationality, material composition)
 - **Change** (qualitative): adjectives that can go before or after the noun and change meaning based on their location (e.g., *pobre*)
 - to include adjectives that do not describe relations but occur after the noun, we suggest a fourth class:
 - **No change**: adjectives that can go before or after the noun, do not change meaning based on their location, and are preferred after the noun (colors)
 - classes likely based on monolingual Spanish usage and there is no data to support these classes

This experiment aims to 1) evaluate the validity of these adjective classes, 2) understand how Spanish/English bilinguals process Spanish adjectives, and 3) select a set of adjectives to use for an experiment testing the same bilingual community.

Method

38 self-identifying Spanish/English bilinguals from El Paso, TX rated 80 Spanish sentences on a scale of 1 (bad) to 7 (good).

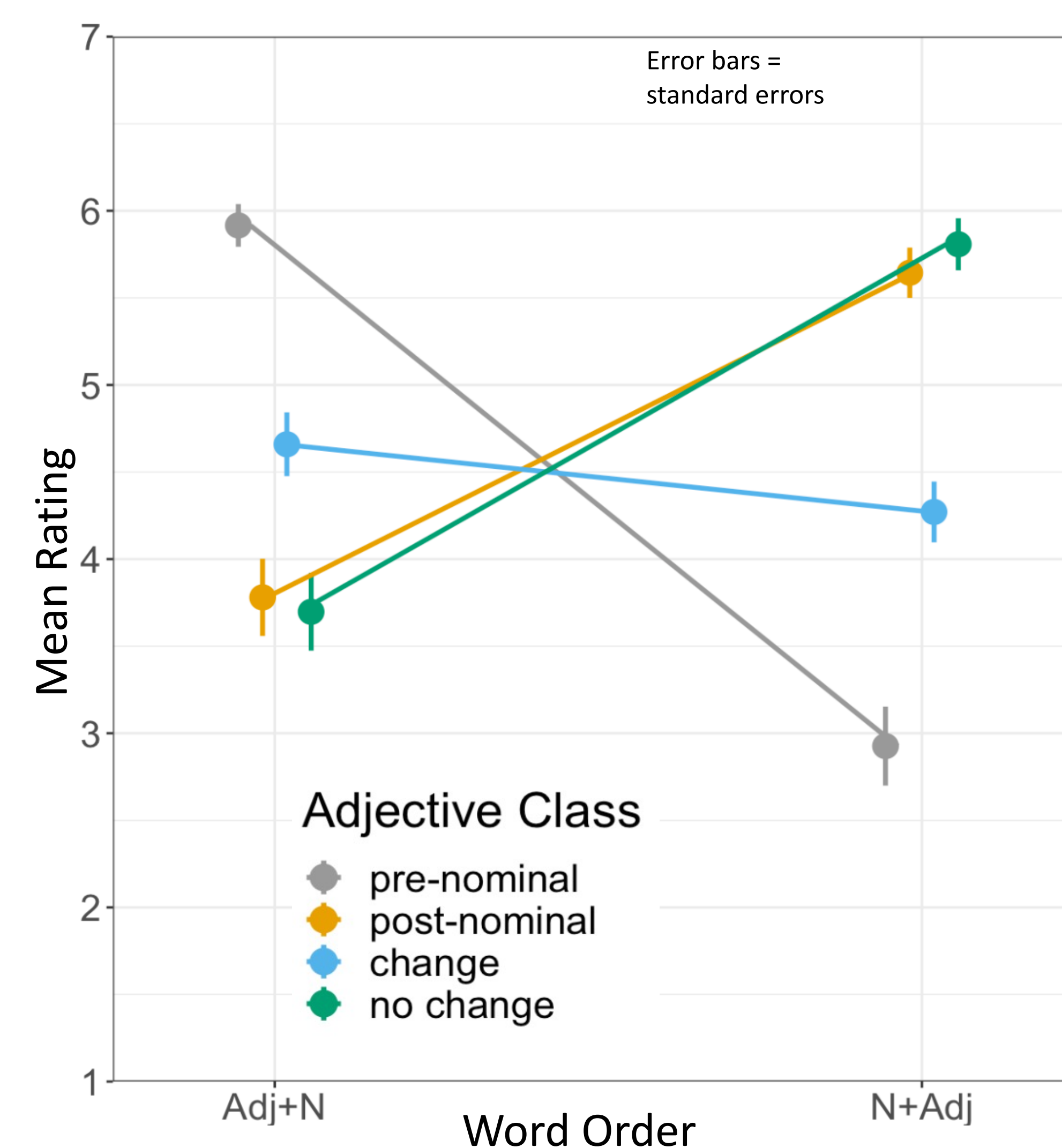
Sentences varied in the type of adjective (**pre-nominal**, **post-nominal**, **change**, or **no change**) and the word order (**adjective + noun** or **noun + adjective**) in a within-subjects design. Each participant saw all adjectives in both a pre- and post-nominal position but in different sentences. **Change** adjectives were excluded if they did not make sense in both word orders.

	Adj+N	N+Adj
Pre-nominal	Una chica compra unos caramelos en la tienda.	Una chica compra caramelos unos en la tienda.
Post-nominal	Un estudiante lee un alemán libro en el tren.	Un estudiante lee un libro alemán en el tren.
Change	El libro describe un solo pintor de una ciudad.	El libro describe un pintor solo de una ciudad.
No change	El perro muerde la roja pelota en el dormitorio.	El perro muerde la pelota roja en el dormitorio.

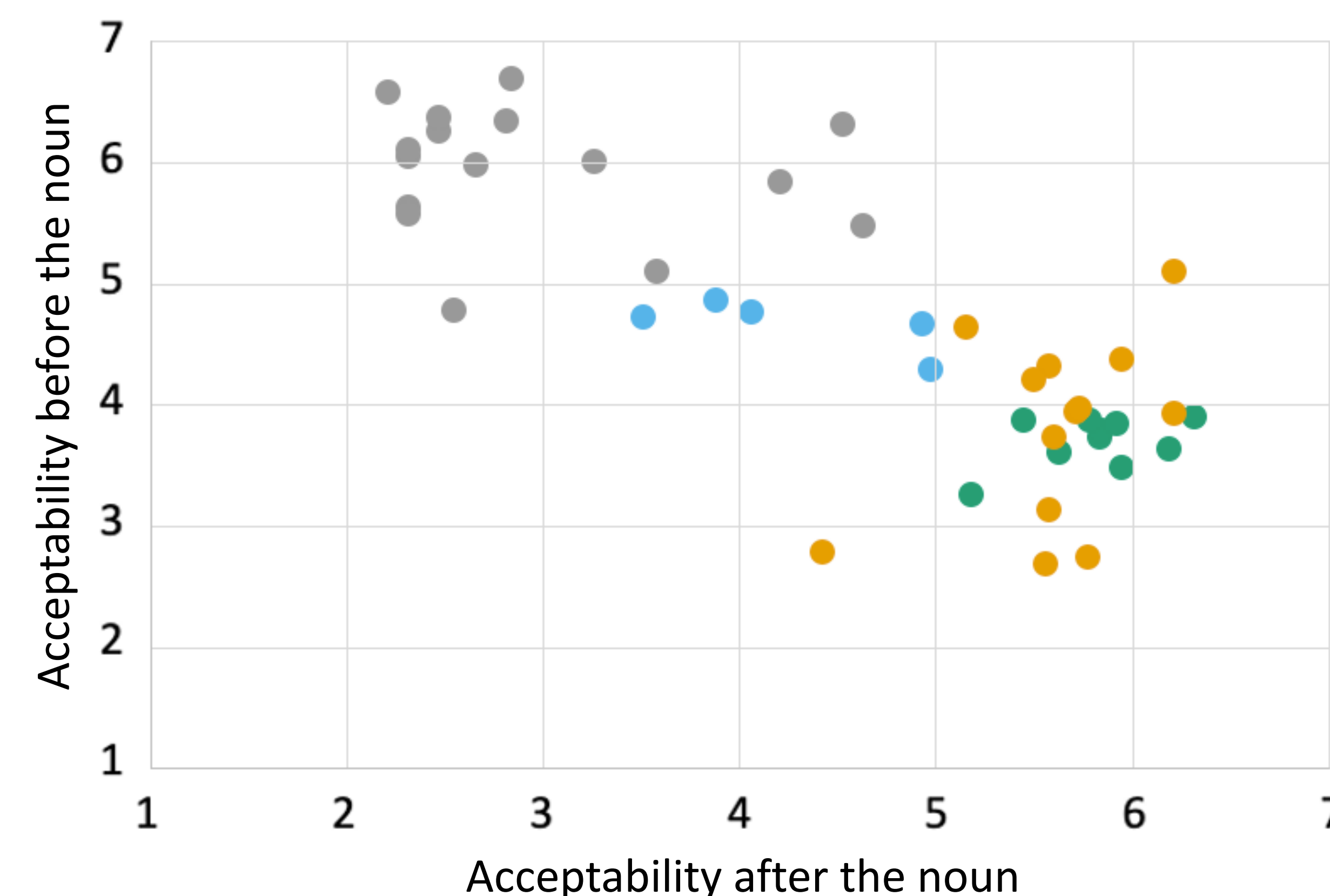
Results

Overall, bilingual's ratings reflect the pre-determined categories:

- **Pre-nominal** adjectives are strongly preferred before the noun, $t(37) = 11.81, p < .001$
- **Post-nominal** and **no change** adjectives are strongly preferred after the noun, $t(37) = -7.14, p < .001$ and $t(37) = -7.13, p < .001$
- **Change** adjectives almost equivalent in each position, but are slightly preferred before the noun, $t(37) = 3.14, p < .01$



Item means show that ratings within classes vary, **change** adjectives are not rated particularly well in either position, and some **pre-nominal** adjectives are rated more highly than expected after nouns.



Discussion

The predictions of the 4 adjective classes motivated by Zagona (2002) capture some of the variance in acceptability judgments by these bilingual participants. **No change** adjectives patterned more closely than expected with the mandatory **post-nominal** adjectives. The slight preference for **change** adjectives to occur before the noun may be because this is the marked case of adjective usage and has an appositive definition (ex. *mi amigo pobre* (N+Adj) = *my financially poor friend* versus *mi pobre amigo* (Adj+N) = *my pitiable friend*).

Together with the adjective classifications, these norms help clarify usage of Spanish adjectives and the variability of adjectives within the classes, and can help guide stimuli creation for experiments involving Spanish adjectives. For example, to maximize the degree of opposing word orders between Spanish and English, **post-nominal** and **no change** adjectives should be used.

Open Questions:

- Why are **change** adjectives preferred before the noun?
- Why are some **pre-nominal** adjective rated highly after the noun?
- Are there regional differences in bilingual adjective usage and acceptability judgments?

Item means and proficiency data are available on OSF. Scan the QR code below to view.



References

Zagona, K.T. (2002). *The syntax of Spanish*. Cambridge University Press.