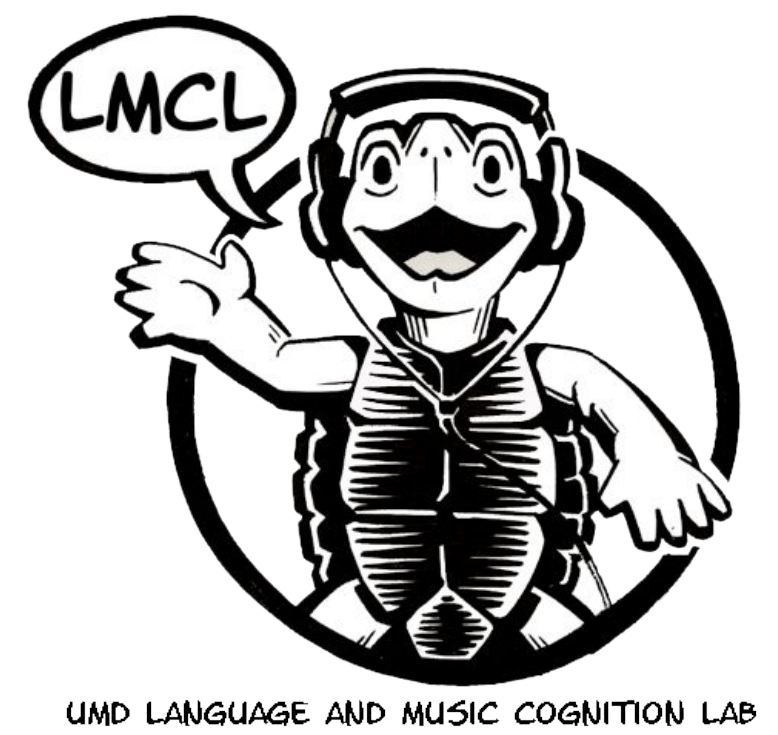
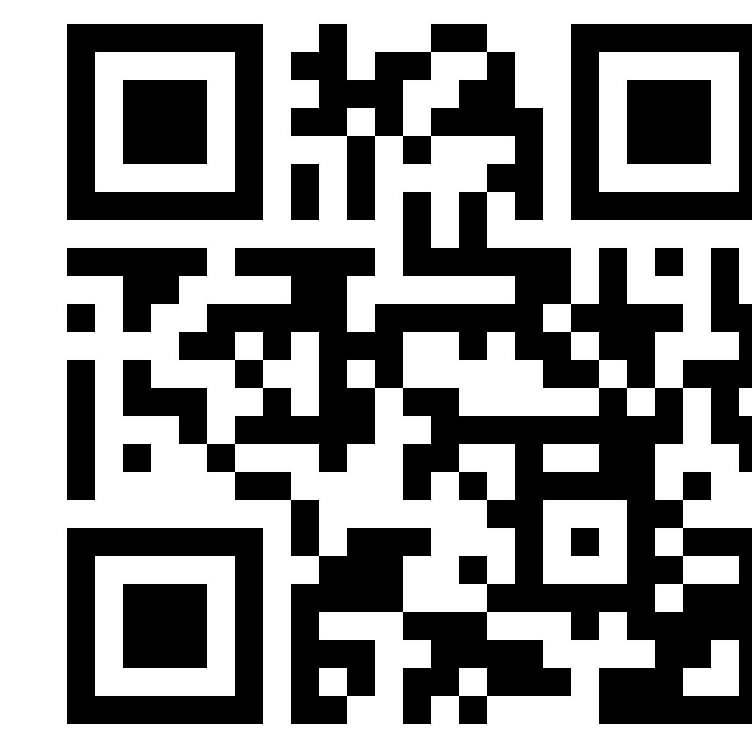




# The Influence of Accent Prestige on Lexical and Syntactic Alignment in “Dialogue”

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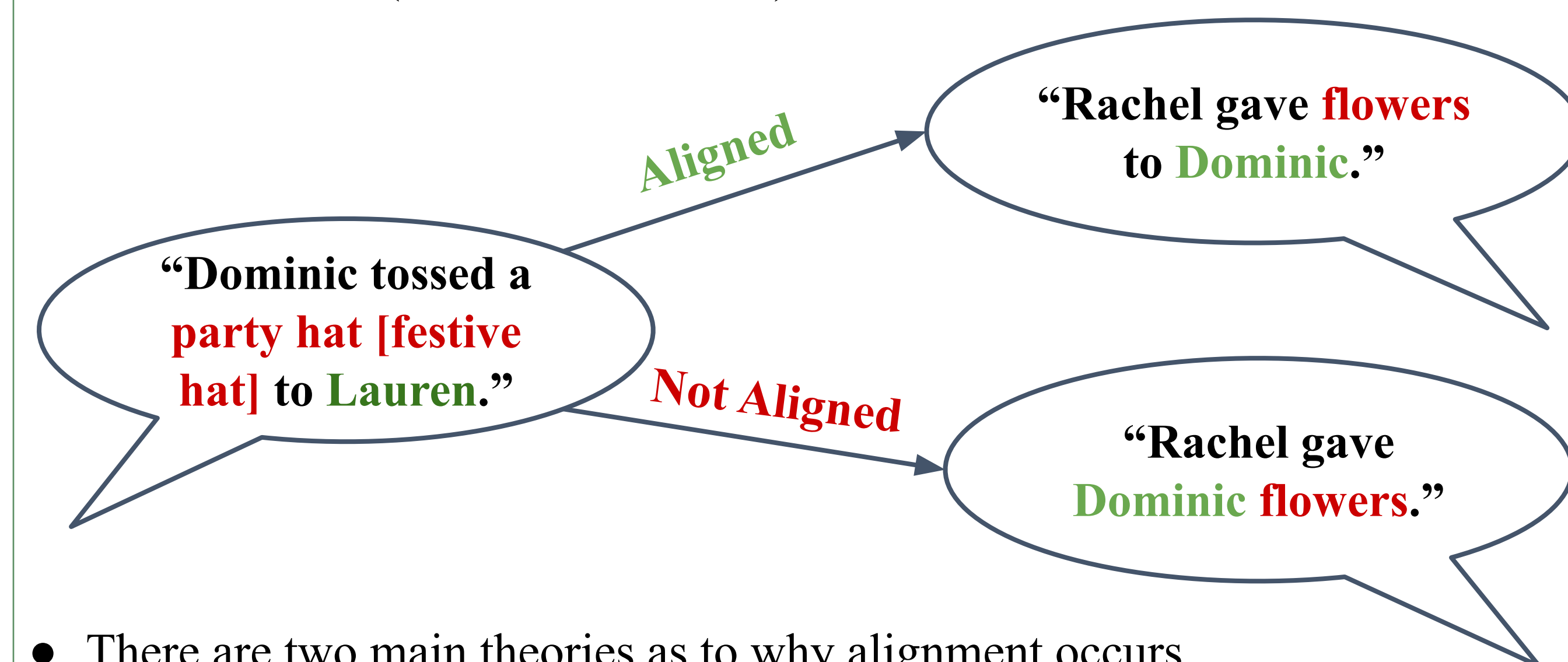


## ABSTRACT

Linguistic alignment is a conversational phenomenon that occurs when a speaker adopts linguistic aspects of their conversational partner's speech. The current research assesses the impact of accent prestige, an underexplored social factor, on the frequency of alignment between native English speakers and foreign-accented English speakers. Using a novel interactive narrative task, native English-speaking participants took turns describing pictures with a prerecorded speaker to tell a collaborative story. Critically, the prerecorded speakers had different foreign accents that varied in social prestige as assessed through a prior norming study. Data collection is ongoing. These results may have important implications for cross-cultural interactions in many settings such as the workplace, the classroom, or just in day-to-day life.

## INTRODUCTION

- Linguistic alignment is a phenomenon that occurs when a speaker uses a linguistic aspect of their conversational partner's speech (Pickering & Garrod, 2004).
  - This alignment could be lexical, using the same terminology, syntactic, using the same sentence structure, or phonetic, using the same vowel pronunciation for instance (Rahimi et al., 2017).



- There are two main theories as to why alignment occurs.
  - the *Interactive Alignment Model* (IAT), argues that alignment is an automatic process that increases comprehension (Pickering & Garrod, 2004).
  - Prior work has shown support for the IAT in both a verbal teamwork task (Garrod & Anderson, 1987) and a cooperative decision-making task (Fusaroli et al., 2012).
  - Communication Accommodation Theory* (CAT), proposes that alignment is influenced by sociocultural factors and the level of alignment between a speaker and their conversational partner reflects their social attitudes towards one another (Giles & Ogay, 2007).
  - Prior research has found support for CAT as factors such as interpersonal similarity (Weatherholtz et al., 2014), the perceived standardness of a speaker's accent (Weatherholtz et al., 2014), and familiarity with a speaker's accent (Chun et al., 2016), can affect alignment in conversation.
- The current research assesses both the comprehension-based (IAT) and socially-based (CAT) accounts of alignment by exploring the impact of *accent prestige*, an underexplored social factor, on the frequency of lexical and syntactic alignment between native English speakers and foreign-accented English speakers.

## STUDY 1A

### Methods

#### Participants

- Undergraduate participants ( $N = 109$ ; 34 men, 73 women, 2 non-binary,  $Mean$  age = 19 years;  $SD = 1.17$ ), who are native English speakers completed this study.
  - 51.38% White, 19.27% Asian/Asian American, 17.43% Black/African American, 7.34% Hispanic/Latino American, and 4.59% mixed or other.

#### Measures

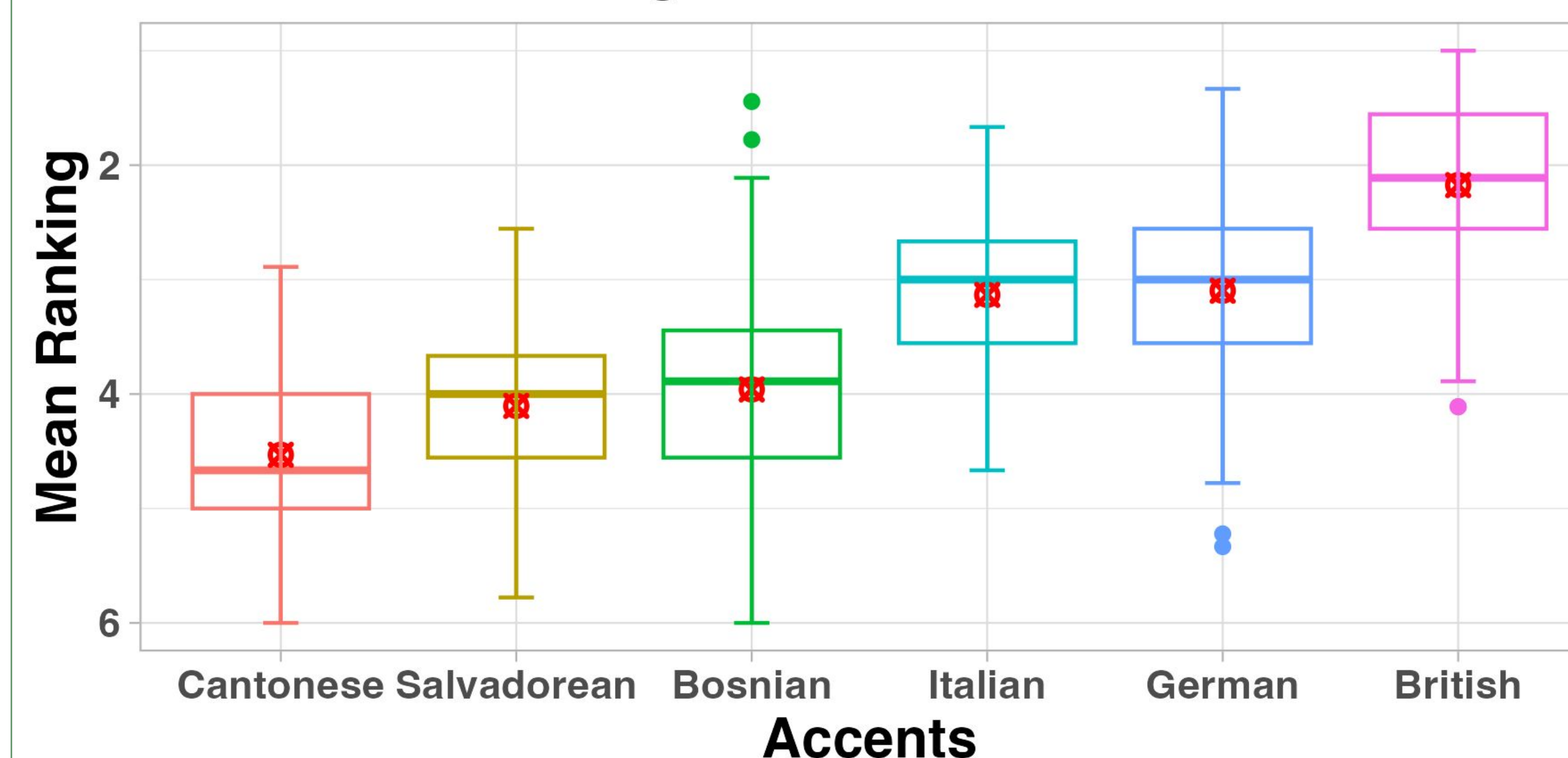
- Ranking Survey*: Participants completed a 10-item measure assessing rankings of six foreign-accented English speakers on various characteristics related to perceived social status and prestige using a 5-point ranking scale.
  - e.g., “How do you think most people would rank these speakers in terms of popularity? In this context, popularity refers to ‘the relative interpersonal position of a member within a group as determined by other group members’.
  - Drag the speakers upward and downward to rearrange them for your response with 1 being the most popular and 5 being the least popular.”
  - Participants ranked the accented speakers against each other on each item.
  - One item was not used in the analysis due to an experimental error.

#### Procedures

- Participants completed the measures described through a Qualtrics survey.

### Results

#### Boxplot of Mean of Social Prestige Rankings Across All Accents



### Discussion

- Across six items in the measure, the British-accented speaker was ranked first.
- Across six items in the measure, the Cantonese-accented speaker was ranked last.
- These rankings informed our accent selection in Study 1B.

#### Limitations and Future Directions

- Future research should consider the addition of more diverse accents that are not easily identifiable.

## STUDY 1B

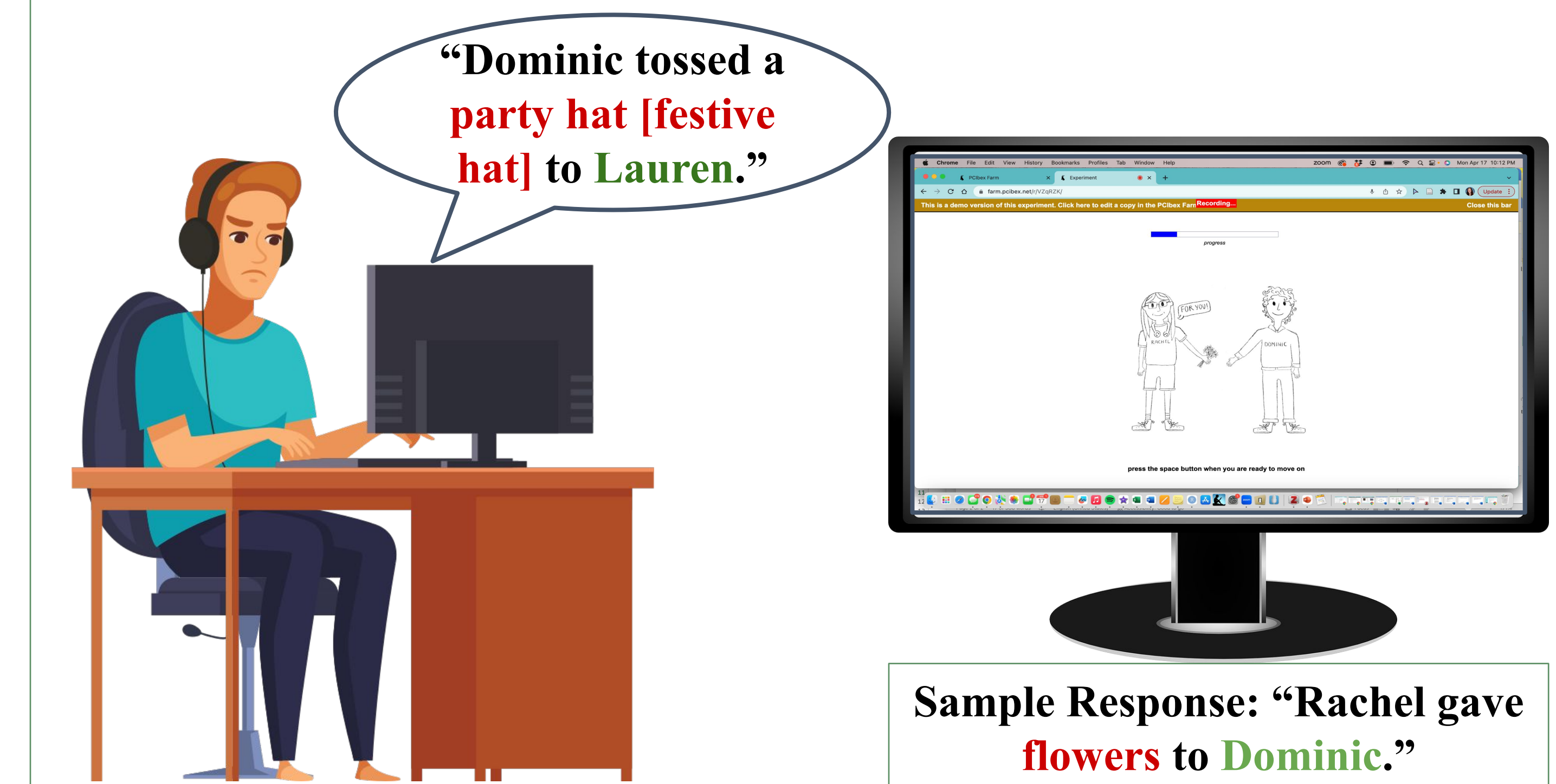
### Methods

#### Participants

- Undergraduate participants who are native English speakers can participate in this study.

#### Procedures

- Partner Narration Task*: Participants alternate narrating simple line-drawn picture stories with two “partners”.
  - Participants narrate two short stories with each partner.
  - The partners are a pre-recorded British accented speaker and a pre-recorded Cantonese accented speaker. The order in which participants interact with the pre-recordings is randomized.
  - The pre-recorded accented speakers use specific lexical items (e.g., “couch” vs “sofa”) and syntactic structures (e.g., specific dative sentence structures) in their narrations.



#### Exploratory Measures

- ADHD*: 1-item measure assessing ADHD diagnosis.
  - “Have you ever received a formal ADHD diagnosis from a licensed practitioner?”
- Autism*: 1-item measure assessing Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis.
  - “Have you ever received a formal Autism diagnosis from a licensed practitioner?”
- Social Anxiety*: 1-item measure assessing Social Anxiety Disorder diagnosis.
  - “Have you ever received a formal social anxiety disorder diagnosis from a licensed practitioner?”
- Extraversion*: 8-item adaption of the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) assessing extraversion using a 5-point response scale (1: *Disagree strongly*; 5: *Agree strongly*; “Has an assertive personality.”).
- Need to Belong*: 10-item Need to Belong Scale (NTBS) (Leary, 2013) assessing desire for acceptance using a 5-point response scale (1: *Strongly disagree*; 5: *Strongly agree*; “I want other people to accept me.”).
- Partner Report*: 6-item measure assessing participants’ evaluation of their partners across four domains: comprehension, prestige, perceived social status, and native English status (e.g., “Based on your subjective evaluation which of the two partners was more prestigious? Your response will not be shared with the other participants.”).
- Study Purpose*: 1-item measure assessing participants’ beliefs regarding the purpose of the study.
  - “Please briefly describe what you believe this research is about.”

### Results

- Study 1B is preregistered ( <https://osf.io/sp9ag>; right QR code).
- Data collection is ongoing.