

“There’s a lot of baggage”: Trans North Carolinians’ Orientations to Southern Identity in Discourse

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SECOL/LAVIS 24

Introduction

- ❑ **Research Question:** What kinds of stances do trans and nonbinary people in North Carolina take toward Southern identity? Do they often view themselves as Southerners? Do they invoke dominant narratives about the South in their discussion? How does that come into conversation with transness, queerness, and LGBTQIA+ issues in the South?
- ❑ This work is rooted in the discipline of trans linguistics, utilizing it as a means for exploring how trans and nonbinary people use their linguistic expertise to respond to outsiders' views of the South
- ❑ This requires giving them the agency to share their views on Southern identity, both in terms of dominant narratives about what it means to be a Southerner, as well as their personal orientations to Southern identity

Trans Life in North Carolina

Rise in anti-trans legislation

- ❑ 3 bills passed in 2023
- ❑ Legislative session begins in late April with 7 anti-trans bills currently sitting in the legislature

Community and organizing

- ❑ There are several statewide and local organizations focused on LGBTQIA+ advocacy in the state
- ❑ Pride events are growing in some areas



Press conference outside of North Carolina General Assembly to speak out against SB 49

Photo Credit: Rose Hoban | NC Health News | June 28th, 2023

Literature Review

Kiesling (2011)

- ❑ “Stance creates relationships of speaker[s] to some discursive figure” (2)

Jones (2022) on stancetaking in the discourse of trans youth in the United Kingdom

Agha (2005) Enregisterment

- ❑ The *enregistered voice* as “the class of social voices linked to registers... a register’s forms are social indexicals in that they index stereotypic social personae” (39)

Southern & Queer Identity

- ❑ “Our projects will be stronger if we consider our subjects’ *relationships* to popular definitions of the South and inquire about *their* definitions of *southern*, rather than presuming or requiring regional identification” (Smith 1997: 382)

North Carolina Trans & Nonbinary Language Project

Sociolinguistic interviews with 18 participants conducted between August and October of 2023



Participants span a range of counties including Alamance, Durham, Forsyth, Johnston, Orange, and Wake

Methods

- This analysis looks at 13 participant interviews from the corpus from participants who grew up in the South
- Verbal data analysis
 - Conducted using methodology outlined in Geisler and Swarts' (2019) book *Coding Streams of Language*
 - Statistical analysis of qualitative codes through models in R
 - Mixed Effects Logistic Regression: STANCE + IDENTITY + PRONOUN + participant contrast groups + random effect for speaker
 - Multinomial Logistic Regression: STANCE + IDENTITY + presence of 1st person singular pronouns + participant contrast group
- Discourse analysis of representative excerpts from participants

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Race	Ethnicity	Age
Daisy	White	White, sometimes will say Scots-Irish	26
digit	white	white/i dont really get asked	20
Hannah	White	White	36
Jaden	Caucasian	Hispanic	25
Jeremy	White	Non-Hispanic	36
Kay	Black	African-American	23
M	White	Non-Hispanic	35
Oliver	White, not hispanic	American	25
RB	White	Ashkenazi Jew and Western European	35
Seth H.	White	Southern American	45
Starlight	White	N/A	22
Stone	afro-caribbean	american	21
Sylvia	Black and White (mixed Race)	American	26

Table 2: Coding Scheme

Stance Dimension	
Affective	Code for Affective any segment in which the participant is offering a stance based on an emotion
Epistemic	Code for Epistemic any segment in which the participant is offering a stance based on their knowledge and beliefs or expressing commitment to a point of view
Evaluative	Code for Evaluative any time that the participant is offering an assessment of something
Evaluation Dimension	
Affirmative	Code for Affirmative any segment in which the participant is offering a positive assessment of something as part of an evaluative stance move
Unfavorable	Code for Unfavorable any segment in which t the participant is offering a positive assessment of something as part of an evaluative stance move
Identity Dimension	
Alignment	Code for Alignment any segment in which the participant states that they identify as a Southerner or references a particular context in which they would identify as a Southerner or a reason they cite to validate why they identify as a Southerner
Disalignment	Code for Disalignment any segment in which the participant states that they do not identify as a Southerner or references a particular context in which they would not identify as a Southerner or a reason they cite to validate why they do not identify as a Southerner
Persona	Code for Persona any segment in which the participant references a larger Southern register or persona
Pronoun Dimension	
Code the first objective or subjective pronoun that occurs in a clause	

Participant Contrast Groups

Southern Participants

- These are participants who indicated a strong proximity to Southern identity and stated that they fully identify themselves as Southerners

Contextually Southern Participants

- These are participants who stated that they only identified as Southern in particular contexts or used it as a descriptive label rather than an identity marker

Non-Southern Participants

- These are participants who indicated a distance from Southern identity and did not identify themselves as Southerners

Table 3: Code Counts Across Participants							
Interview Information		Stance			Identity		
Participant	Clauses	Affective	Epistemic	Evaluative	Alignment	Disalignment	Persona
Southern							
Daisy	114	2	2	35	6	9	14
digit	24	0	0	0	5	1	2
Kay	26	8	1	2	5	4	0
RB	17	0	1	0	8	0	1
Seth H.	87	4	3	6	5	2	21
Contextually Southern							
Hannah	33	0	9	0	6	3	8
Jaden	47	2	3	5	9	7	13
M	55	4	5	3	8	2	2
Oliver	63	0	7	3	5	0	3
Sylvia	101	6	4	5	4	5	22
Non-Southern							
Jeremy	38	0	3	10	3	12	2
Starlight	17	0	3	0	0	2	1
Stone	21	1	2	3	1	4	6
Total	643	27	43	72	65	51	95

Table 4: Coefficient Table for Mixed Effects Logistic Regression

Factor Group	Factor Type	Est	SE	Z Score	p Value
Intercept		-1.91	0.04	-6.41	1.45e-10 ***
Identity	Alignment	1.30	1.20	4.04	5.40e-05 ***
	Disalignment	2.04	2.72	5.76	8.17e-09 ***
	Persona	1.29	1.03	4.54	5.52e-06 ***
Random Effects		N	σ^2	τ^2	ICC
Participant		13	3.29	0.17	0.05

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

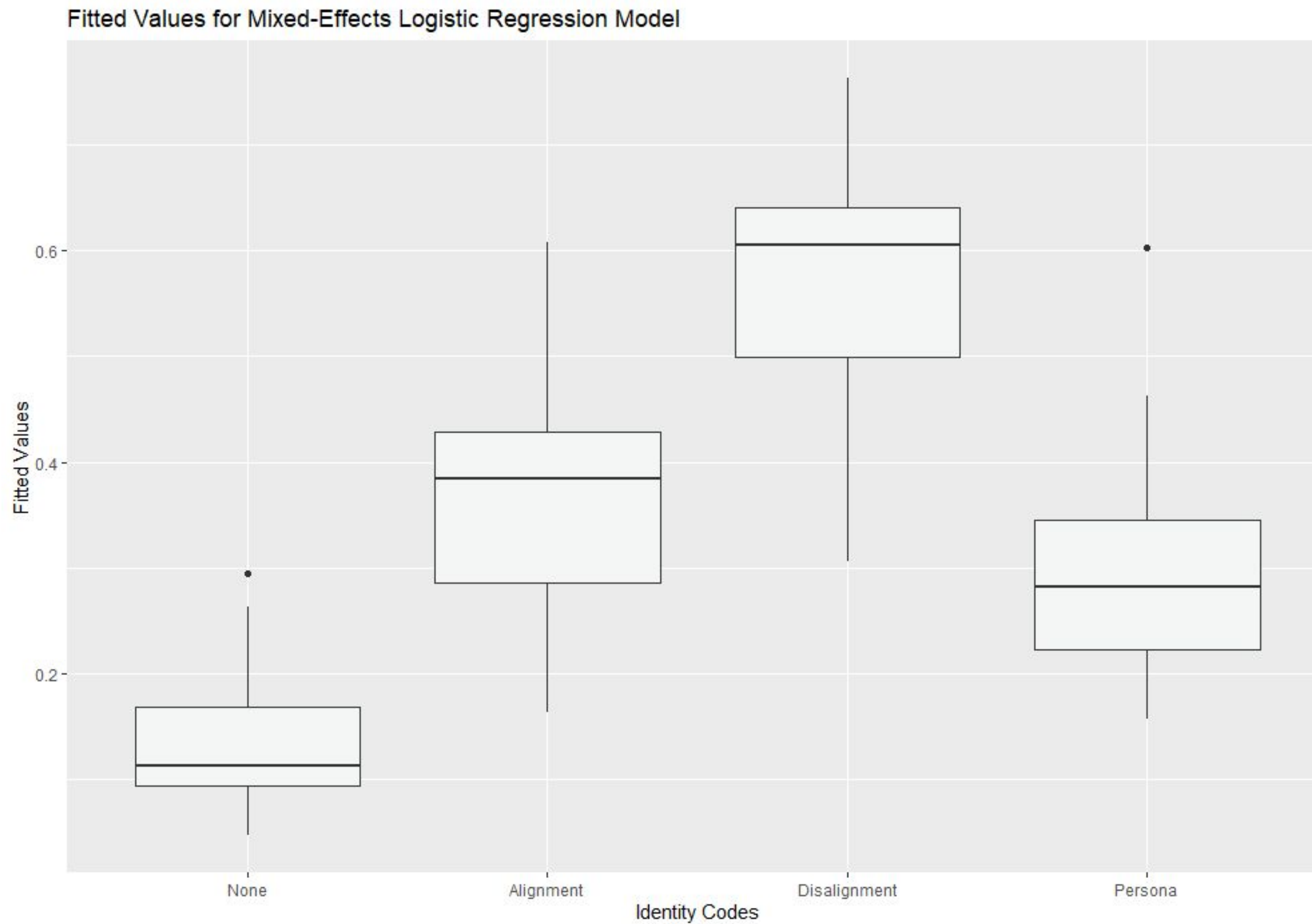


Figure 1: Fitted Values for Mixed-Effects Logistic Regression

Table 5: Coefficient Table for Multinomial Logistic Regression

Response	Predictor Group	Predictor	Odds Ratios	SE	Z Score	p Value
Affective	Intercept		-1.91	0.04	-6.41	< 0.001
	Contrast	Not Southern	0.07	0.08	-2.34	< 0.05
		Southern	0.44	0.24	-1.49	0.138
Epistemic			1.29	1.03	4.54	< 0.001
	Intercept					
	Contrast	Not Southern	0.32	0.20	-1.84	0.067
		Southern	0.11	0.06	-4.04	< 0.001

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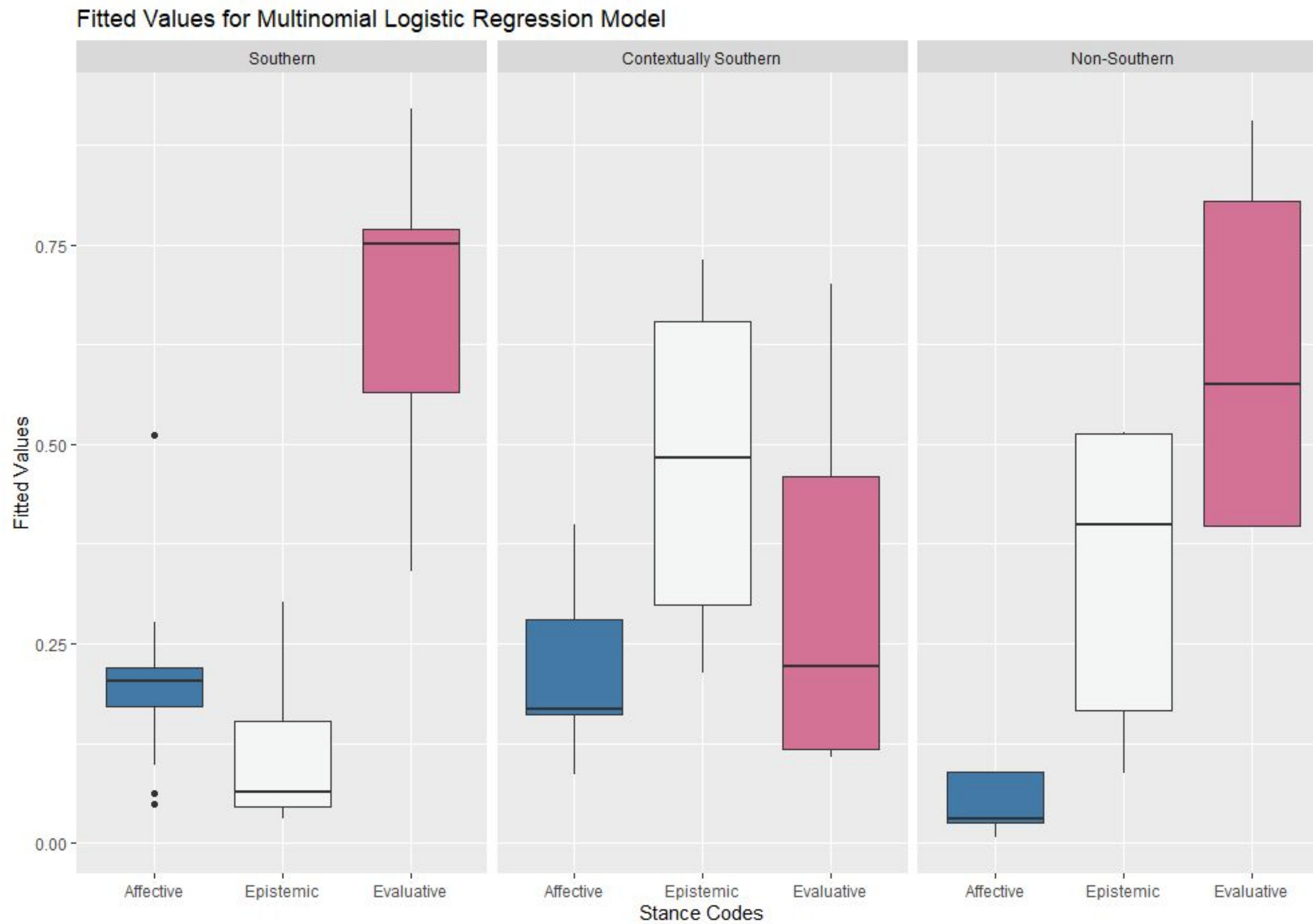


Figure 2: Fitted Values for Multinomial Logistic Regression

Daisy (he/they)

white, agender/genderqueer, 26

- 1 like even just a few years ago
- 2 I hated anything that like made me seem like a Southerner
- 3 all through like middle school and high school
- 4 it was like
- 5 I hate when people say y'all
- 6 y'all is stupid
- 7 no one says that



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Daisy (he/they)

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- 8 but like **it actually is really important to me now as a Southerner**
- 9 as a person that grew up in a rural area
- 10 as a person that grew up in poverty
- 11 like when I was a kid
- 12 my stepfather like took us all hunting
- 13 and like I was always in the woods etc.
- 14 and like **that's really important to the way I feel about everything**
now
- 15 **like being queer in any way**



Kay (they/them)

Black, non-binary, 23

- 1 I feel like in the last couple of years is when I've actually started feeling more confident in saying that
- 2 because it's- it's felt good to know like my origin
- 3 the origin in terms of like land I was born on
- 4 but knowing that the experiences I had on that land don't have to define my connection with that land as well
- 5 because I think for a long time I hated being from here because just politically I mean it's awful

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because just **politically I mean it's awful**



Jaden (they/them/theirs)

white, nonbinary, trans-feminine, 25

- 1 it- it has a lot of connotations
- 2 and I've experienced this also with my accent
- 3 I don't have nearly as pronounced an accent as a lot of people I know
- 4 but I do have some people pick up on it and like ask me where I'm from
- 5 and definitely if I am speaking with a more pronounced Southern accent
- 6 which I do have access to
- 7 it seems to shape people's opinions of me in a way that I don't like
- 8 with being kind of backwards
- 9 with being maybe a bit less intelligent
- 10 those sorts of things

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M (they/them)

white, non-binary, 25

1	So like I don't think I would identify as a Southerner
2	until somebody not from here was being shitty about the South
3	and then I would very much be like
4	"no shut up"
5	like if that makes sense
6	yeah that's interesting

7 I hadn't thought about that too much
8 because like it feels
9 it feels like there's a lot of baggage with being a Southerner
10 but like I'm absolutely like from here
11 and like a lot of what makes me me probably came from that

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Starlight (he/they)

white, genderqueer, transmasculine, 22

- 1 I would not personally identify as a Southerner
- 2 my family moved here from California
- 3 and so like I- we moved here when I was three
- 4 I don't remember anything else
- 5 you know
- 6 I've lived in North Carolina my entire life
- 7 but like my parents and my family, the people who are around me
- 8 during my childhood, are not Southerners
- 9 and so like well I have grown up and lived here my whole life
- 10 I don't really - I don't necessarily identify as a Southerner

Non-Southern Participants

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Conclusions

- ❑ This work may offer a potential model for further mixed-methods approaches to discourse analysis.
- ❑ Overall, variation in the types of stances taken by the participants in this study were instrumental in allowing them the agency to offer a more complicated picture of trans life in the South. In some cases, participants rejected stigmatized characteristics that are associated with particular enregistered (Agha 2005) Southern identities, such as conservatism or anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment. In other cases, participants indicated that their Southern identity allows them to combat these dominant social narratives, rendering the diverse experiences of trans people in the South more visible.

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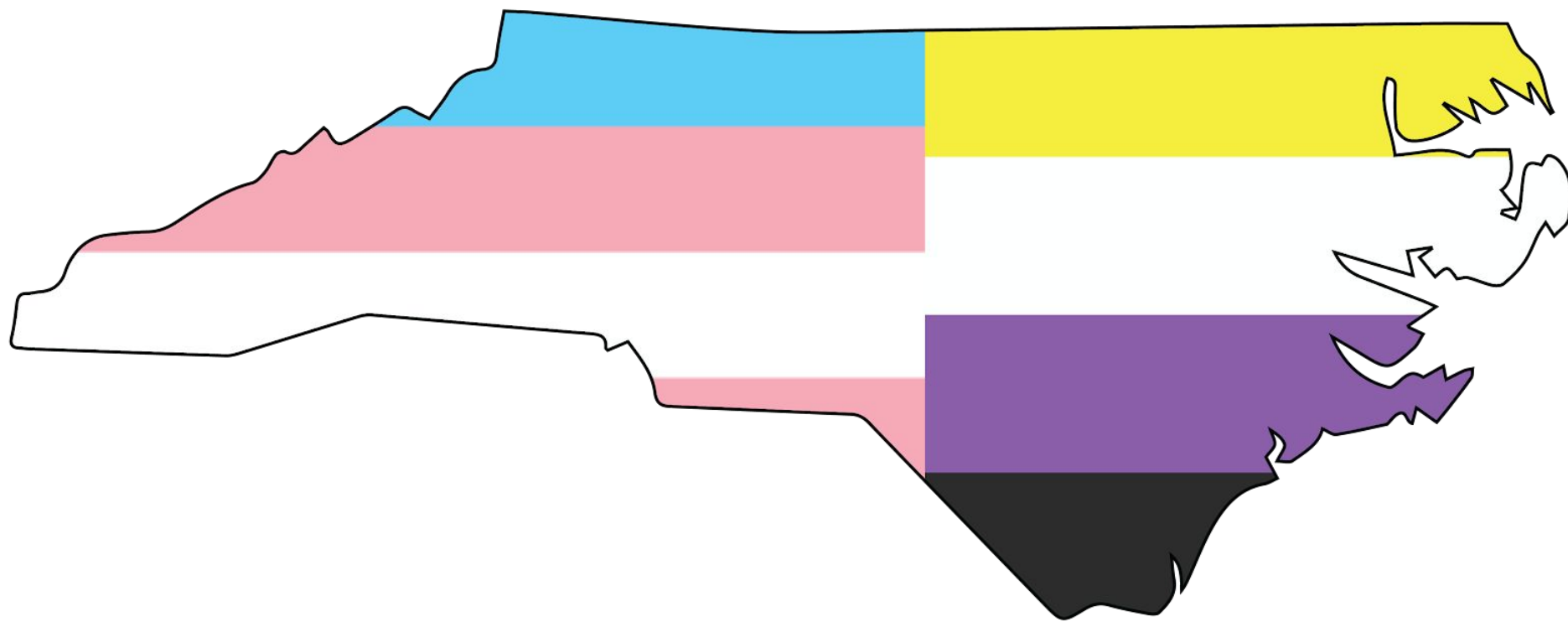
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*THANK YOU FOR YOUR
TIME AND SUPPORT
OF TRANS LINGUISTIC
WORK IN THE SOUTH!*



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