



Evidence for a Discourse Account of Manner-of-Speaking Islands



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Background

Wh-questions formed by extracting the embedded constituent of a manner of speaking (MoS) verb exhibit degraded acceptability.

E.g., *Who_i did John whisper [that Mary met with t_i]?

Three accounts for MoS island effects

- **Subjacency:** Complements of MoS verbs are complex-NPs, which restrict extraction following the subjacency condition. [1]
- **Frequency:** MoS verbs rarely take complement clauses. [2,3]
- **Discourse:** Constituents inside the complements of MoS verbs are discourse backgrounded and thus resist movement which requires the fronted element to be foregrounded. [4-6]
 - Previous findings: the magnitude of the MoS island effect **correlates** with the backgroundedness of the embedded constituents.

Question

Does altering the backgroundedness of the extracted constituent change the MoS island effect?

Predictions

- **Subjacency and Frequency account:** Wh-questions that involve extraction of the embedded constituents of a MoS verb are degraded, regardless of the discourse.
- **Discourse account:** sentences with MoS island are sensitive to discourse status of the embedded constituent.

Take Away

- There is a **causal** relationship between the MoS island effect and the backgroundedness of the embedded constituent, further supporting the **Discourse** account.
 - foregrounding the originally backgrounded embedded content ameliorates the MoS island effect (Exps. 1, 3).
 - backgrounding the originally foregrounded content creates the MoS-like island effect (Exp. 2).
- Results implicate that **the discourse backgroundedness of the extracted elements, rather than structural properties, as the source of MoS island effects.**
- The difference in acceptability ratings between different discourse contexts cannot be explained by either the subjacency or the frequency account.

References

[1] Snyder (1992). [2,3] Liu, Ryskin, Futrell & Gibson (2019; 2022). [4] Erteschik-Shir (1973). [5] Ambridge & Goldberg (2008). [6] Goldberg (2013). [7] Kothari (2008). [8] Richter & Chaves (2020)

Resources

Experiment, data: https://github.com/pennydy/MOS_Island
Preregistrations: <https://osf.io/rsza5> (exp. 1), <https://osf.io/gu4ax> (exp. 2), <https://osf.io/djgcb> (exp. 3)

Methods

Experiment 1

Stimuli set

Embedded Focus condition

*Hanako said: John didn't whisper that Mary met with the **LAWYER**.*

Verb Focus condition

*Hanako said: John didn't **WHISPER** that Mary met with the lawyer*

Scott said: Then who did John whisper that Mary met with?

Experiment 2

Stimuli set

Say condition

Hanako said: John didn't say that Mary met with the lawyer.

Say + Adv. condition

Hanako said: John didn't say softly that Mary met with the lawyer.

Scott said: Then who did John say/say softly that Mary met with?

Experiment 3

Stimuli set

Embedded Focus condition

*Hanako said: John didn't say softly that Mary met with the **LAWYER**.*

Adverb Focus condition

*Hanako said: John didn't say **SOFTLY** that Mary met with the lawyer*

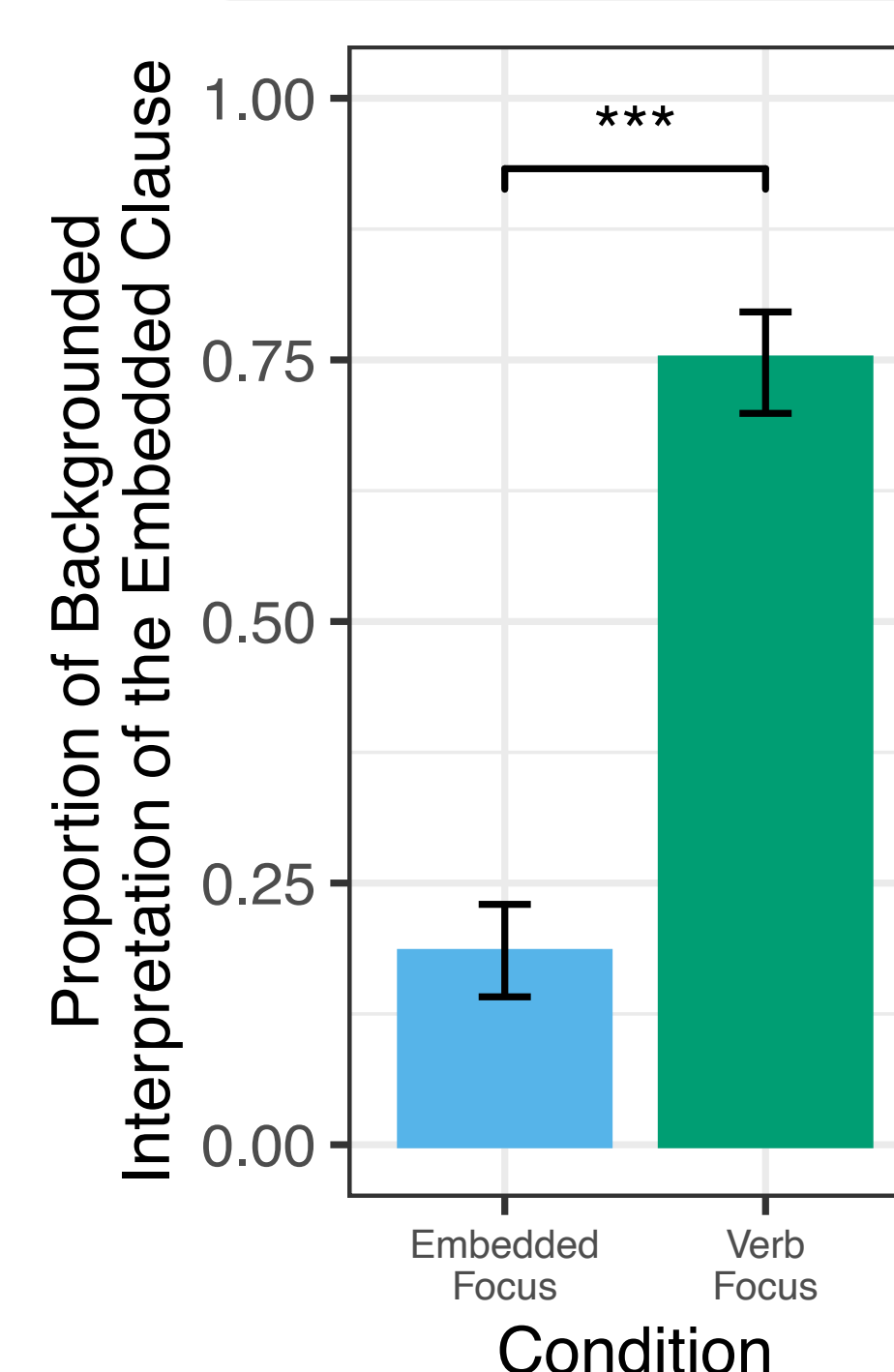
Scott said: Then who did John say softly that Mary met with?

Tasks Comprehension question (two-alternative forced choice): What was Hanako talking about?
Acceptability judgment (rating on a slider): How natural/acceptable does Scott's question sound?

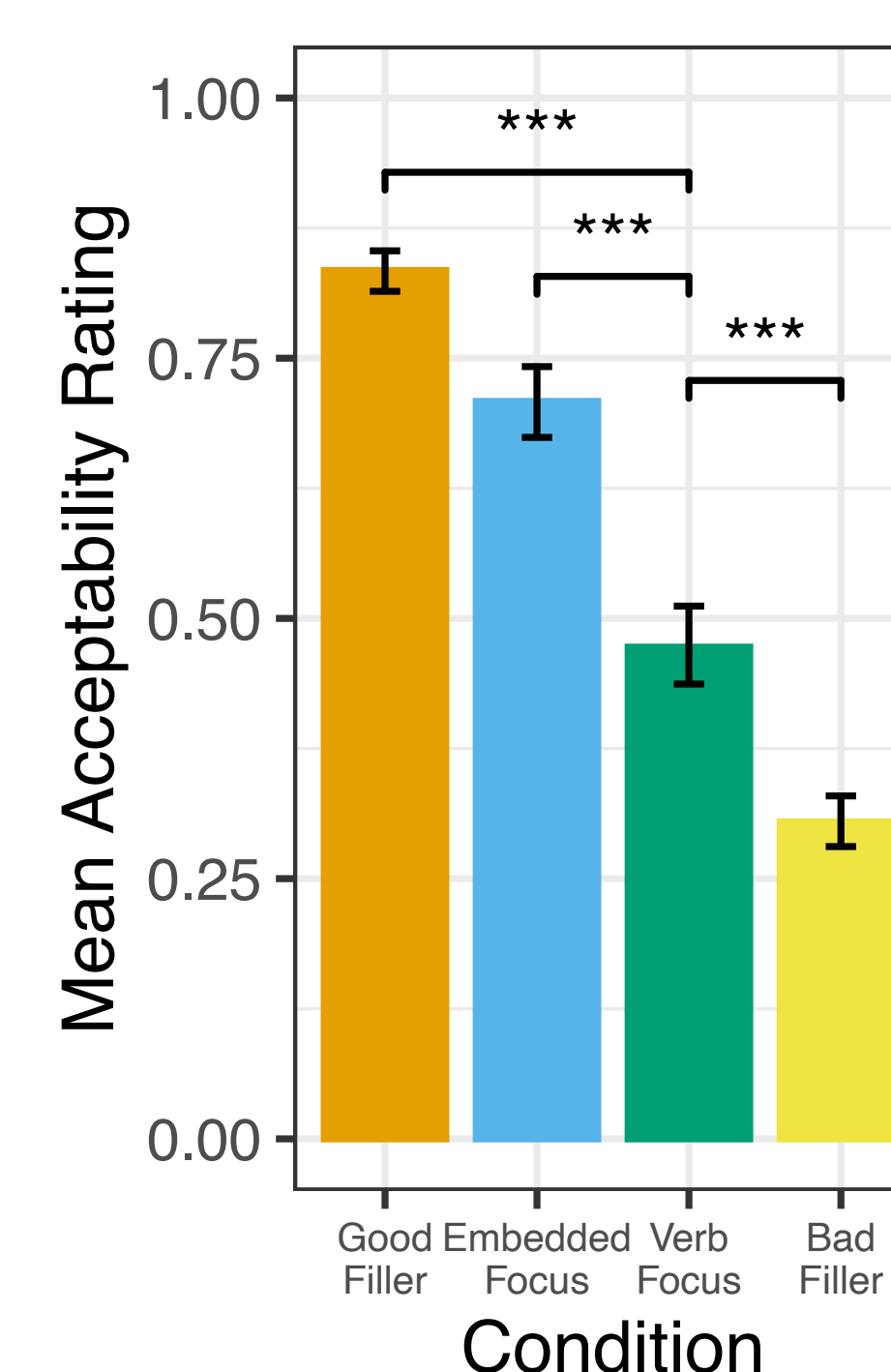
Results

94 Participants

Backgroundedness check

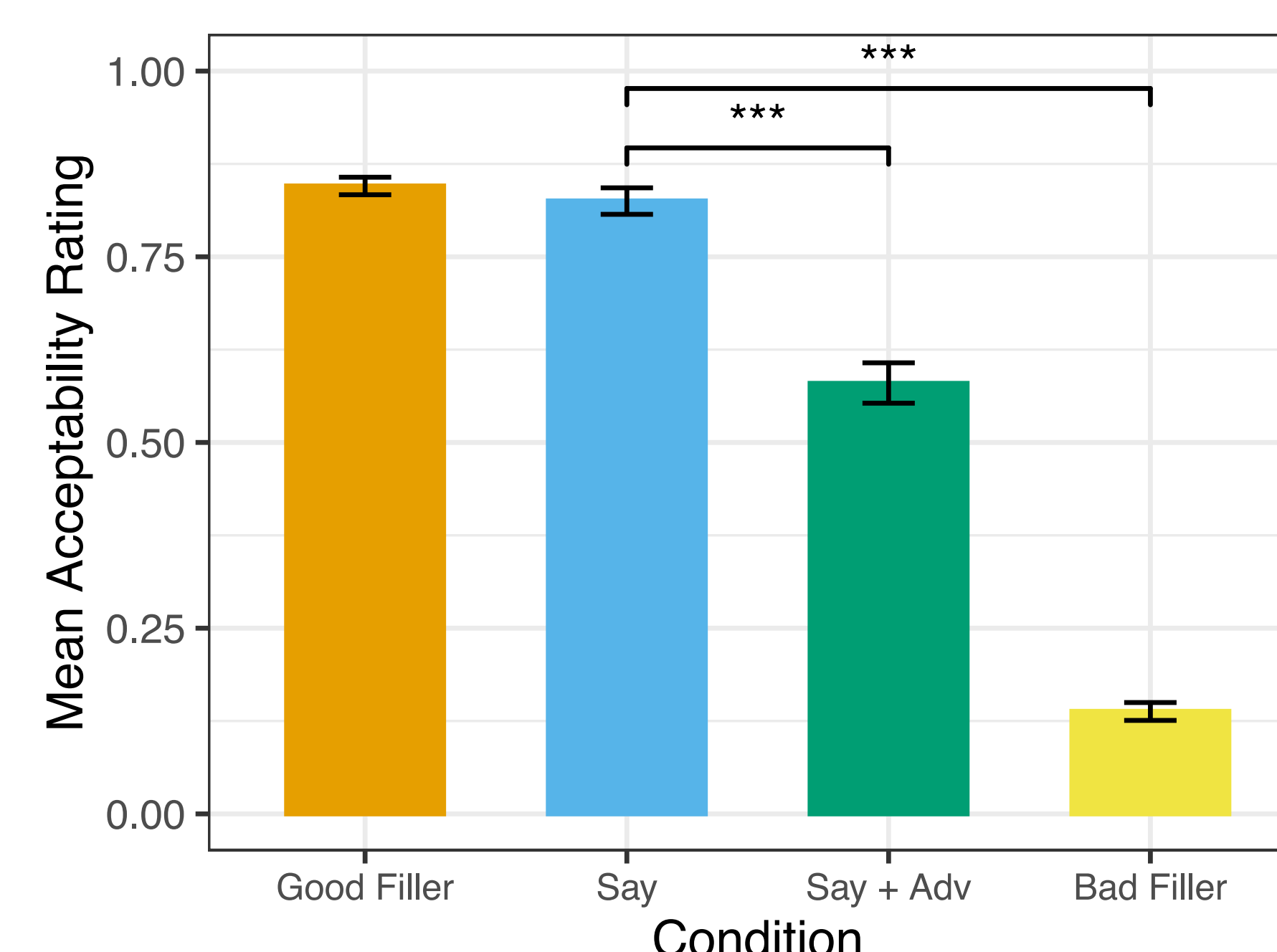


Main analysis



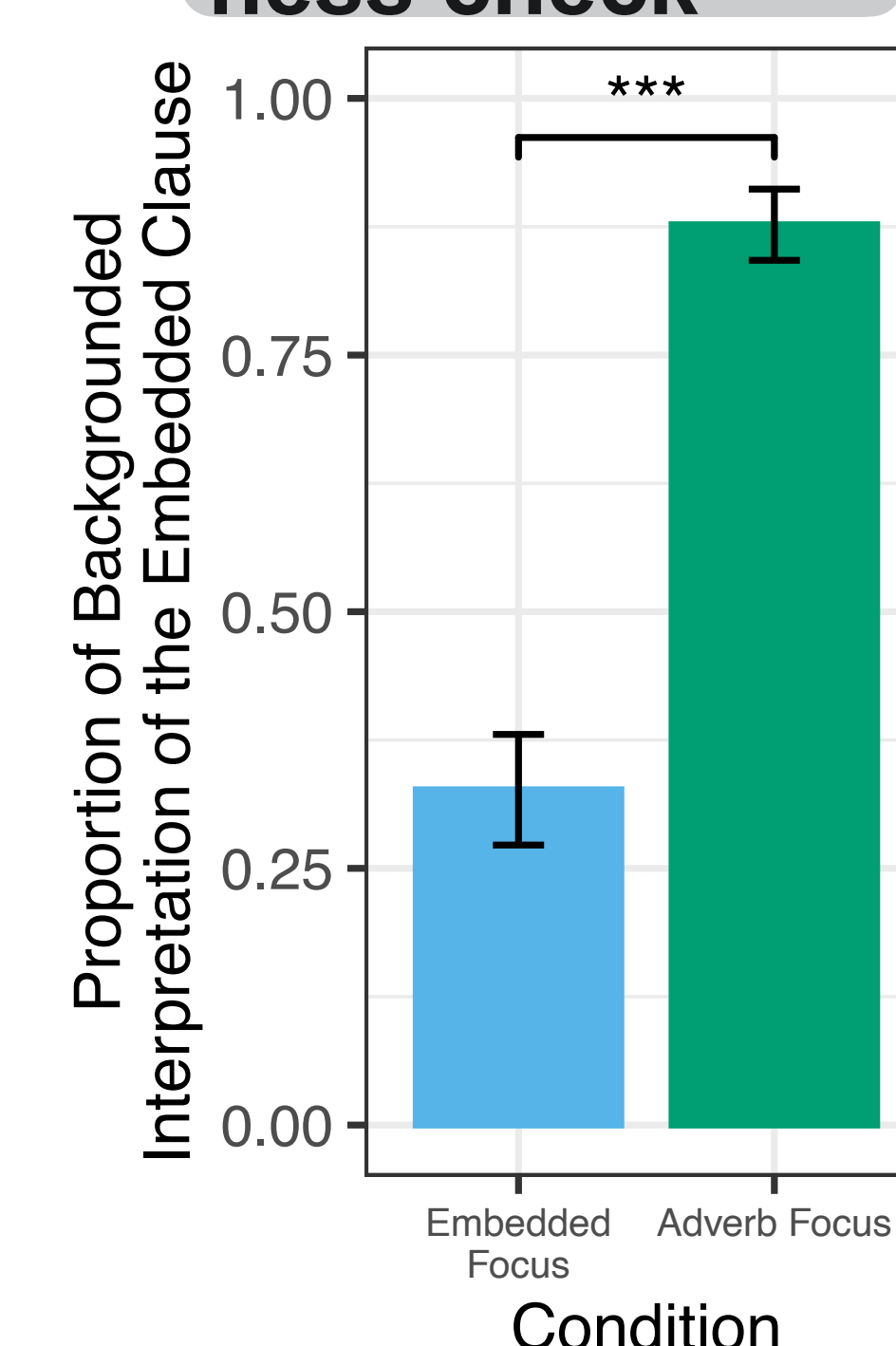
93 Participants

Main analysis

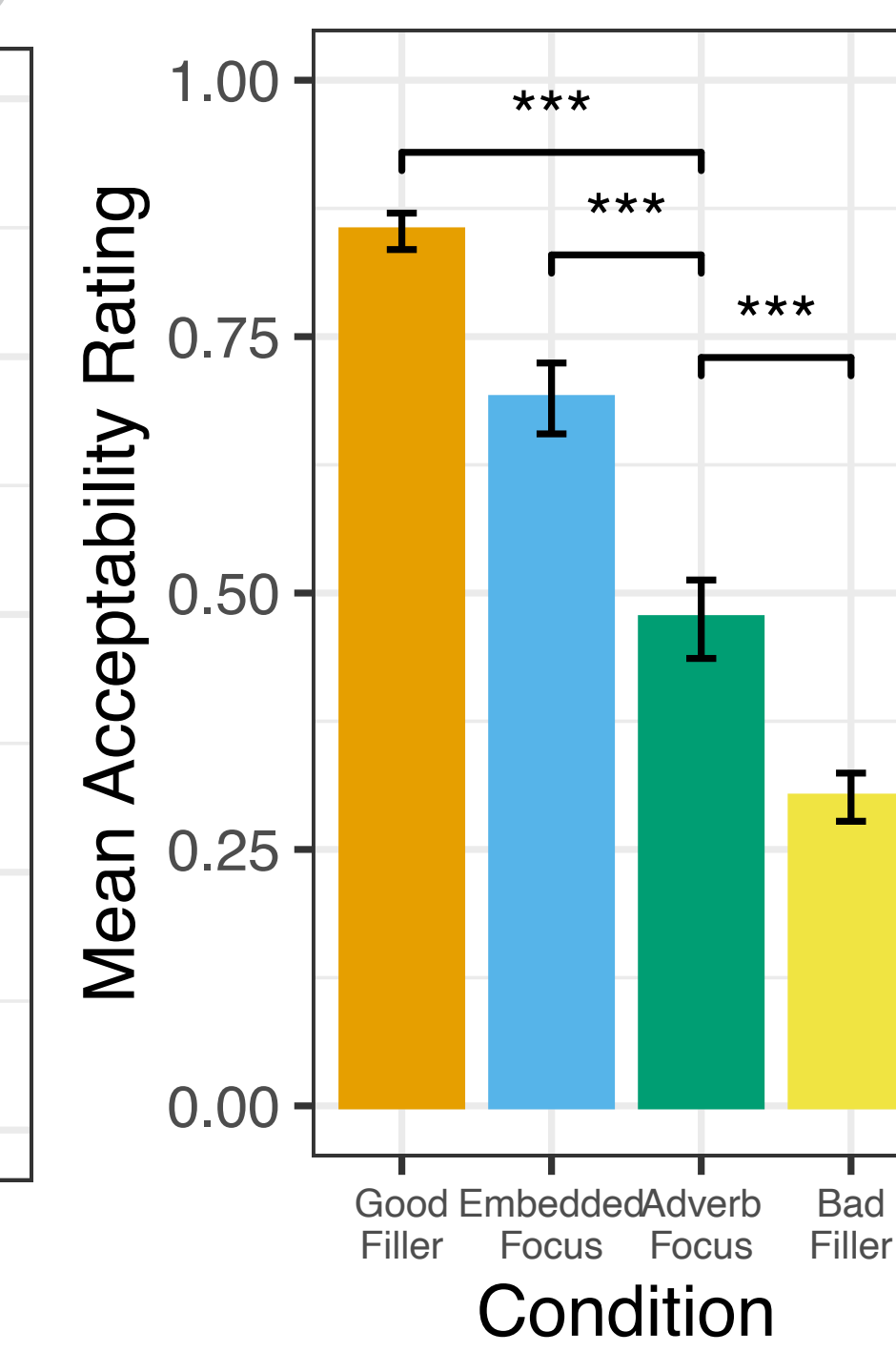


94 Participants

Backgroundedness check



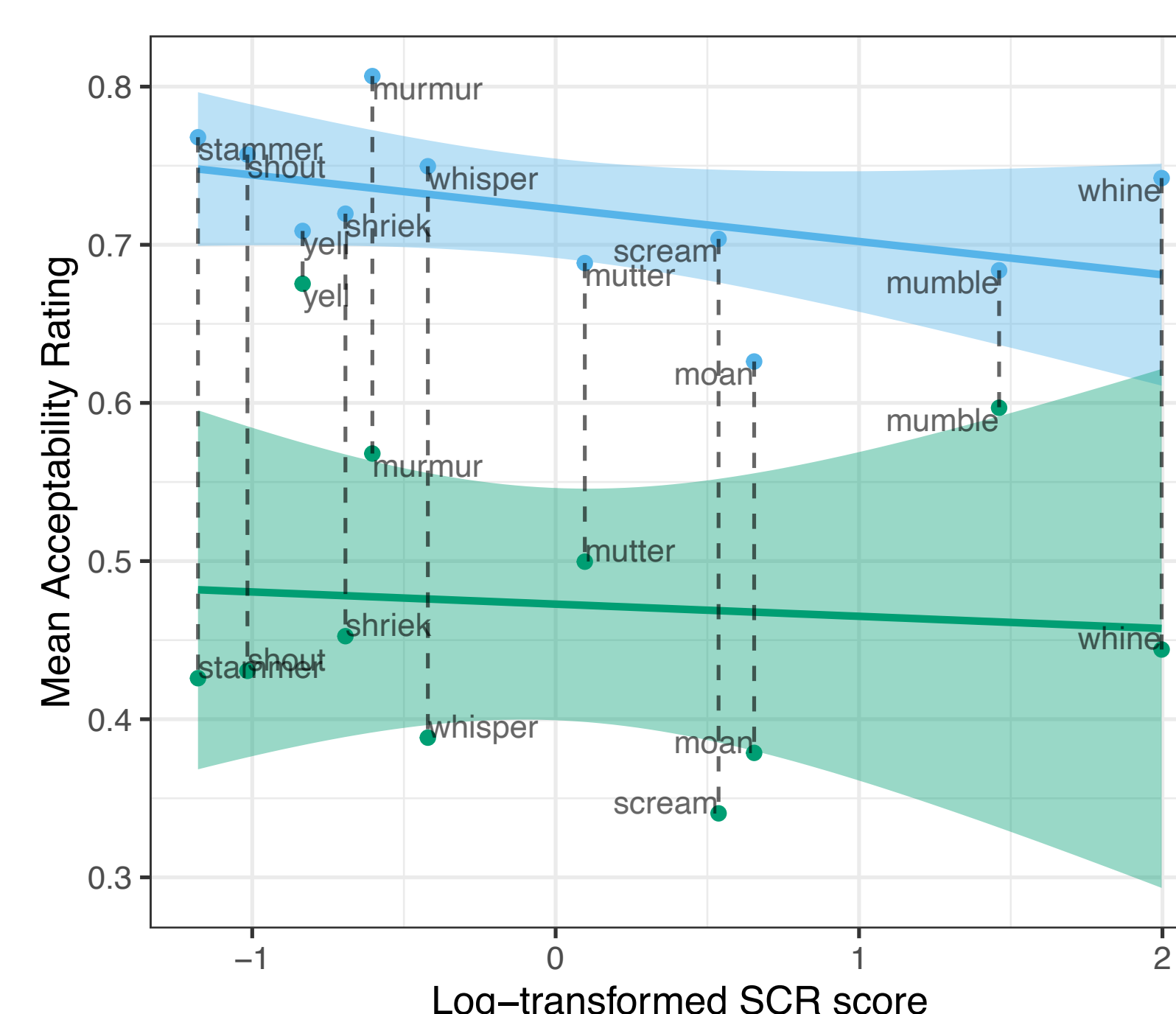
Main analysis



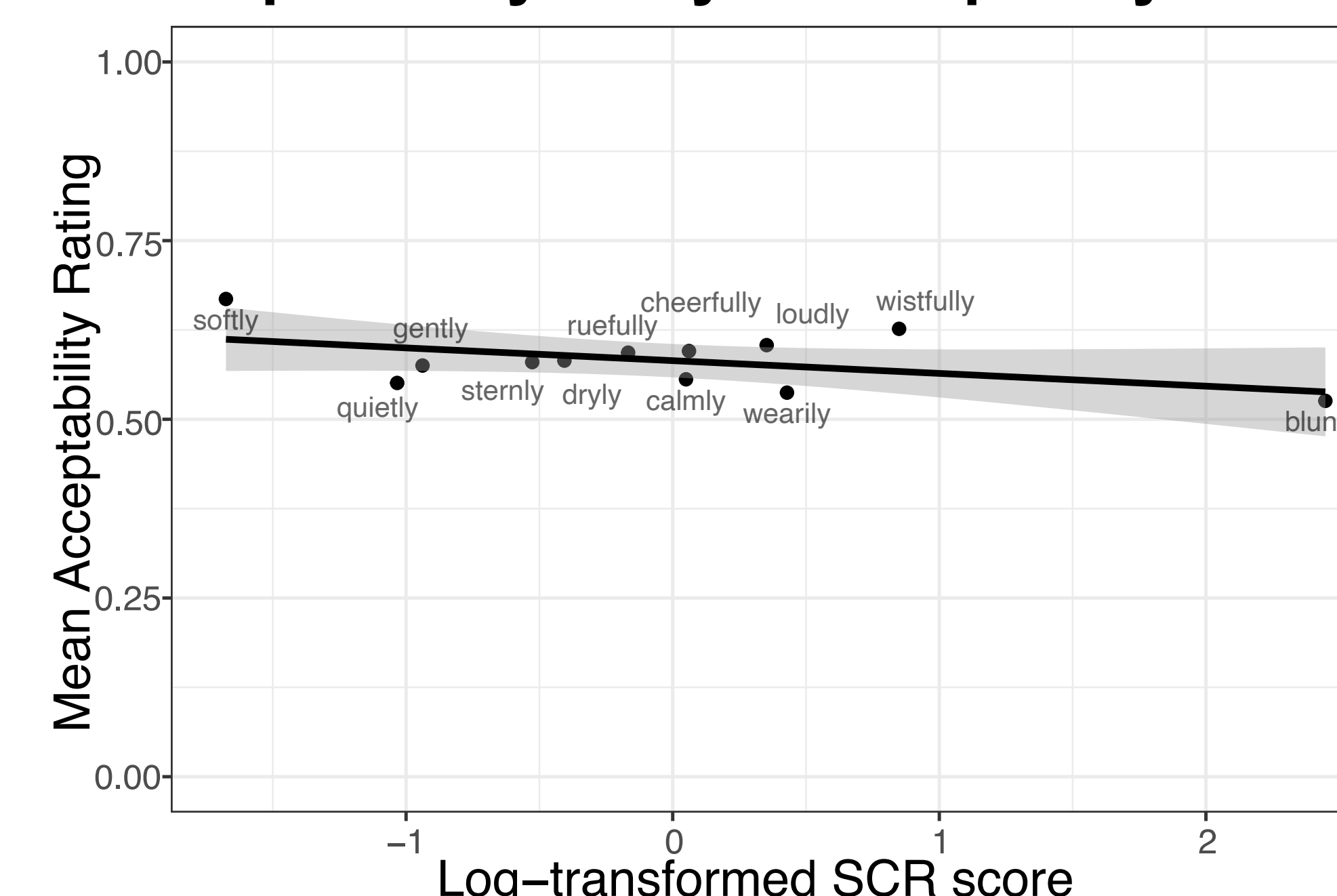
Exploratory analysis: frequency

Sentential Complement Ratio (SCR), following [7,8]:

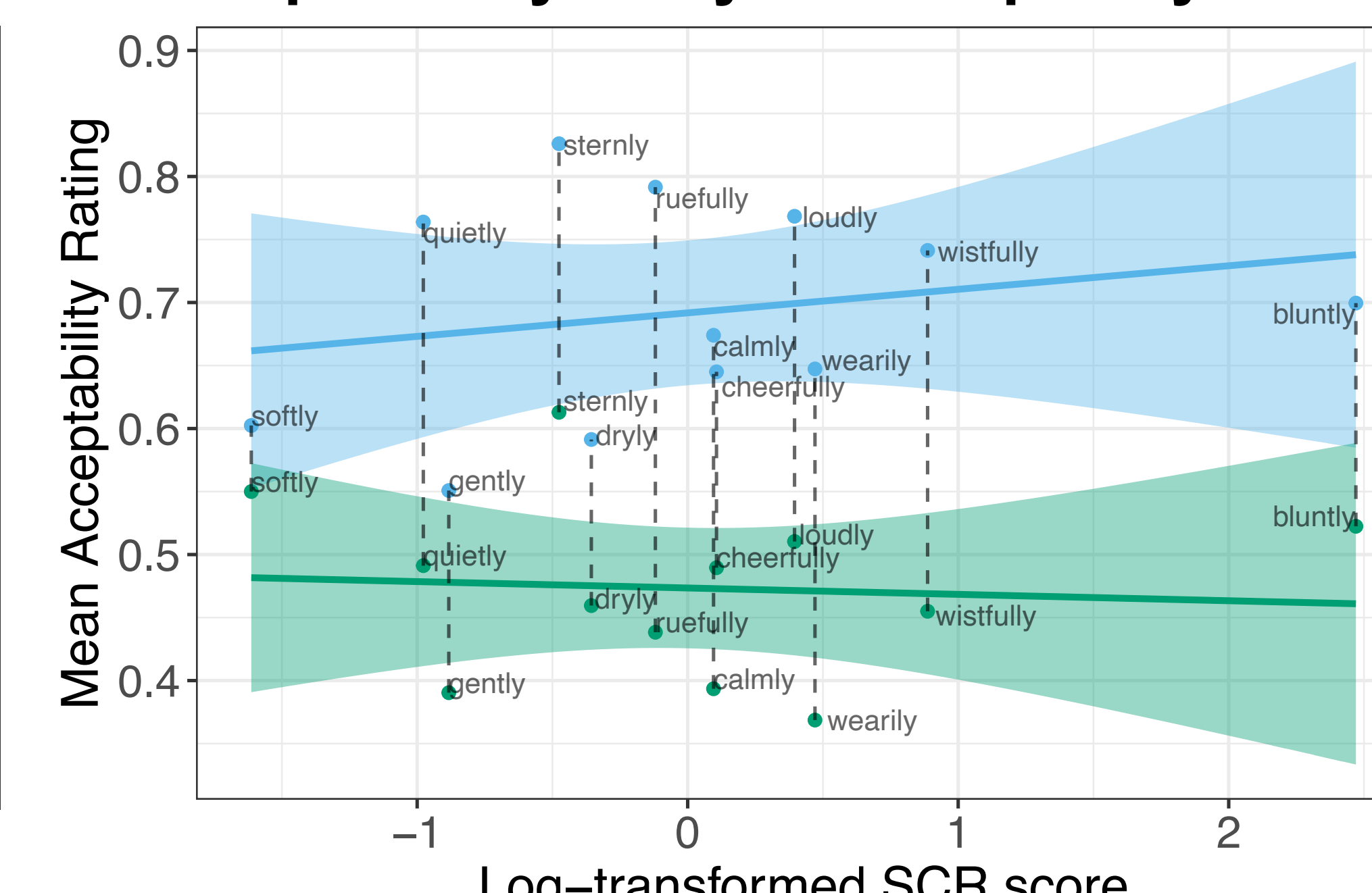
$$SCR = \frac{\# \text{ (verb used with sentential complement)}}{\# \text{ (verb)}}$$



Exploratory analysis: frequency



Exploratory analysis: frequency



Results of the **backgroundedness check** in exps.1 and 3 show that the context changed the discourse status of the embedded clause in the expected way. More importantly, **sentence acceptability** ratings were higher in the *Embedded Focus* (exps. 1 & 3) / *Say* (exp. 2) condition than those in the *Verb Focus* (exp. 1) / *Say + Adv.* (exp. 2) / *Adverb Focus* (exp. 3) condition. The post-hoc analyses reveal that there was no significant effect of frequency nor an interaction between frequency and focus condition in all three experiments.