

DO NEGATIVE EXPRESSIVES IMPOSE CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS IN A SECOND LANGUAGE?

A bilingual replication and extension

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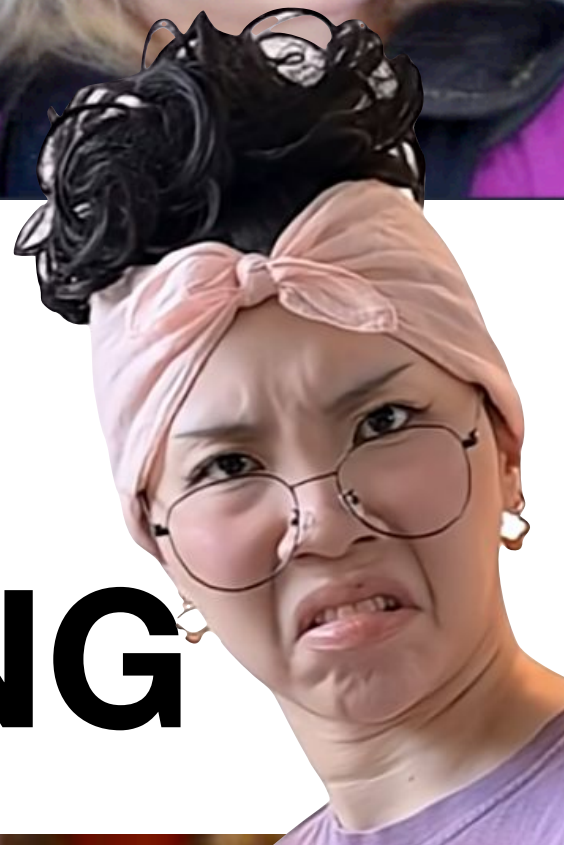
THAT BASTARD
MARCO IS TALKING



CROW OF JUDGMENT



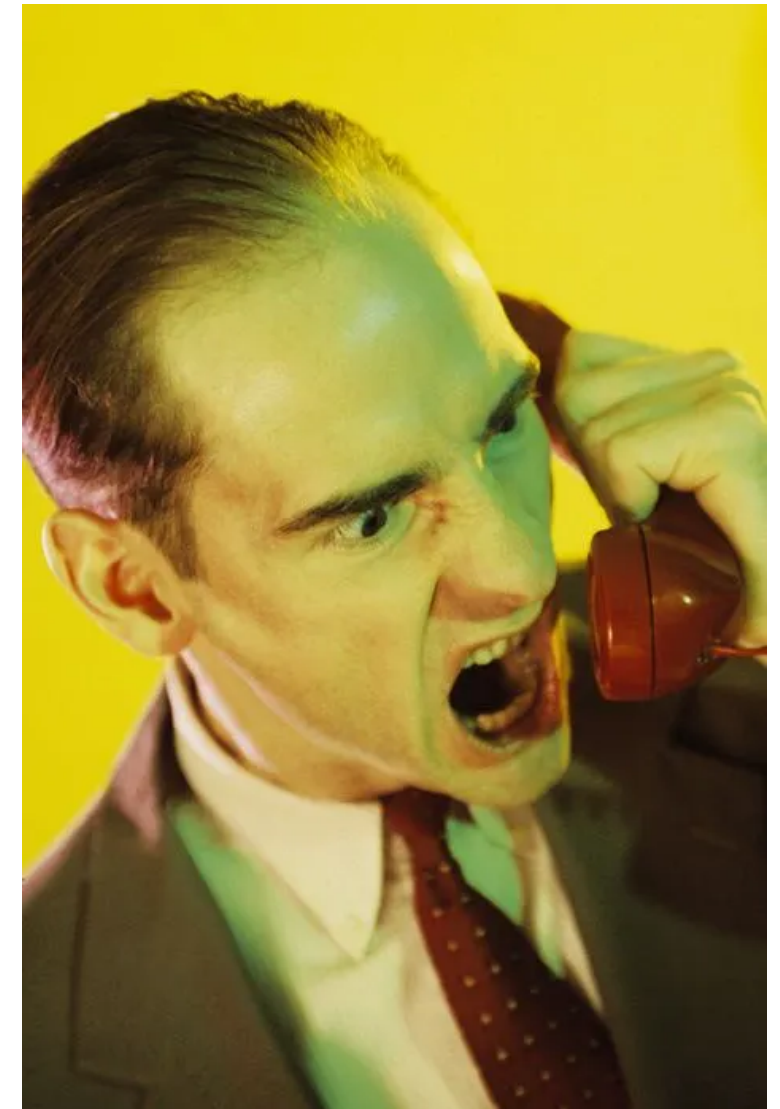
THAT **BASTARD**
MARCO IS TALKING



Mixed expressives

McCready (2010), Gutzmann (2015)

Expressive
content





r/AITAFiltered · -3 j
Judgement_Bot_AITA App



AITA for needing the umbrella at a hotel pool?

r/AmltheAsshole · il y a 4 j

AITA for needing the umbrella at a hotel pool?

Pretty much this.

I needed the umbrella at a hotel pool (light sensitivity) and the lady next to me said she wanted the sun. I proceeded to tell her that I needed the shade and popped open the umbrella. She scoffed, and I said "you don't own the pool"-- which may have been much, but its true?

There was plenty of sunny space next to her, which her husband noticed and helped her scoot over so she could be in the sun.

AITA?

EDIT: Thanks everyone. I really needed the perspective because I really needed the shade, but I knew I could have handled that better. I accept the YTA determination.

484 upvotes · 210 commentaires



Judgement_Bot_AITA [AO](#) • il y a 3 j

The final verdict is: **Asshole**

Judgement	Total
YTA	60%
NTA	30%
INFO	4%
ESH	4%
NAH	2%

The top comment was made by [u/notrightmeowthx](#).



2



Récompenser



Partager

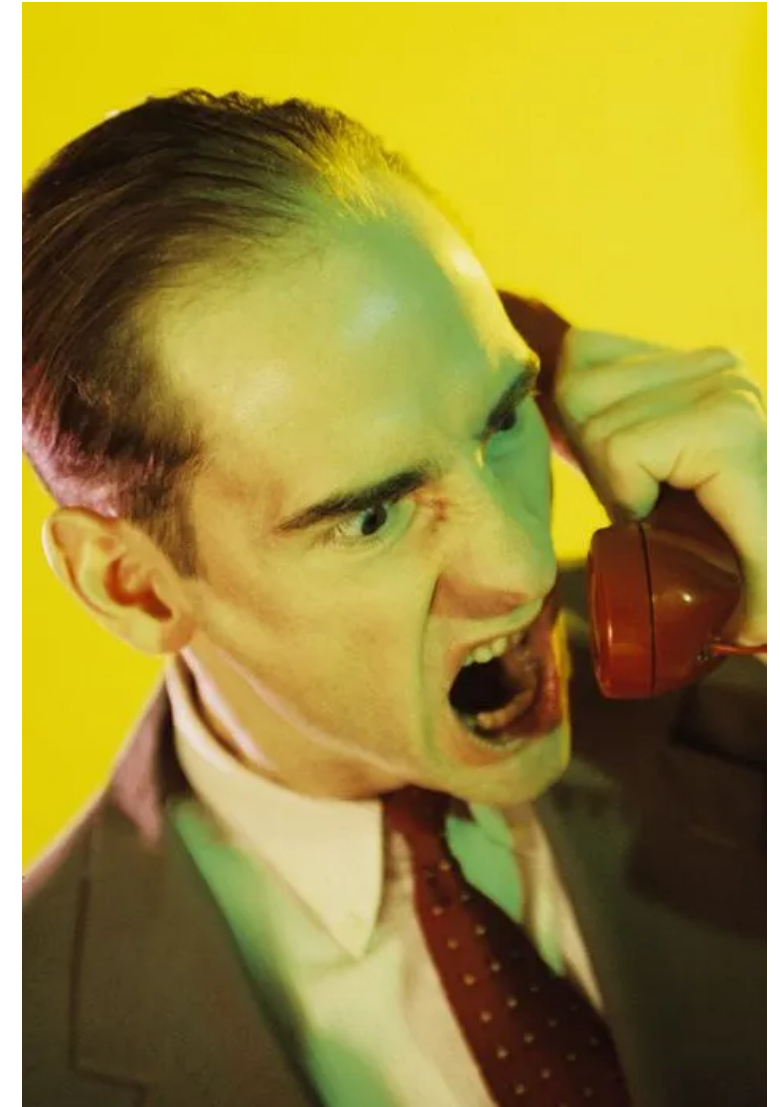


Mixed expressives

McCready (2010), Gutzmann (2015)

**Descriptive
content**

**Expressive
content**



Roadmap

- 1. Background: Expressive Content**
- 2. Background: Bilinguals**
- 3. Acceptability Task**
 1. Do we replicate Domaneschi et al. (2025)?
 2. Do we find the BAA effect?
- 4. Valence/Arousal Ratings: It. v. Eng**
- 5. Discussion / Work-in-progress**

What is expressive content?

Attitudinal and speaker-oriented

**That bastard Marco is
talking again...**



What is expressive content?

Attitudinal and speaker-oriented

That bastard Marco is
talking again...



S **believes** Marco
is a bad guy



What is expressive content?

Attitudinal and speaker-oriented

That bastard Marco is
talking again...



S **believes** Marco
is a bad guy

Marco **is** a
bad guy



What is expressive content?

- Conventional implicature, i.e., semantic content about the speaker's attitude (Potts 2005, 2006)
- Indexical presupposition about the speaker's attitude (Schlenker 2007)
- Projective lexical items but do not impose a strong contextual felicity constraint (Tonhauser et al 2013)

Experimental evidence

No clear natural classes

CI content (Amaral et al. 2007; Harris & Potts 2009; Syrett & Koev 2015; Simons et al 2017; Koev 2018)

- Can be at-issue under the right conditions
- Not clearly different from presupposition

Projective content (Simons et al (2010); Tonhauser et al (2013); Simons et al (2017); Degen & Tonhauser (2021); Tonhauser et al (2018); Degen & Tonhauser (2022))

- Variable across triggers and contexts
- Sensitive to discourse structure/QUD
- Contextual beliefs modulate projection

Mixed Expressives: context licensed?

1. Ceporallo et al (2020)

SentenceType (2)

- **Referential** (that jerk V NP)
- **Predicative** (N is a jerk)

ContextCondition (2)

- **Neutral** (no info)
- **Satisfied** (Marco IS a jerk)

LexicalType (2)

- **Expressive** (jerk)
- **NegAdjective** (nasty)

5-pt likert

That jerk Marco is talking.



Marco is a jerk.

Mixed Expressives: context licensed?

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- **NegAdjective** (nasty)

**Ref structures more
context sensitive**

**In Satisfied contexts
jerk $\approx$ nasty
In neutral contexts
jerk $<$ nasty**

Worse than Neg Adjs

5-pt likert

Mixed Expressives: speaker oriented?

2. Domaneschi et al (2025)

ContextCondition:

- **Agent-oriented** (S thinks badly of M)
- **Target-oriented** (Marco **IS** a jerk)
- **Neutral** (no information)

Lexical type:

- **Expressive** (e.g., jerk) (test)
- **Adjectives** (e.g., rude) (fillers)

Valence (pos. vs. neg., fillers only)

Marco is a jerk.



CONTEXT	CONDITIONS		CONTEXT 2	TARGET
Sara, Luca e Chiara are at the pub with some friends. Marco is drinking a coffee at another table.	AO	Luca dislikes Marco.	Luca says to Sara:	Marco is [a] jerk
	Int SBJ 1	Sara, Luca and Chiara dislike Marco.		
	Int SBJ 2	Sara, Luca, Chiara and others dislike Marco		
	TO	Marco is a fake and dishonest person.		
	NEU	//		

Mixed Expressives: speaker oriented?

2. Domaneschi et al (2025)

ContextCondition:

- **Agent-oriented** (S thinks badly of M)
- **Target-oriented** (Marco **IS** a jerk)
- **Neutral** (no information)

TO > AO

**in neutral contexts:
jerk < rude < kind**

Lexical type:

- **Expressive** (e.g., jerk) (test)
- **Adjectives** (e.g., rude) (fillers)

**Exp2: hearers infer
MARCO DONE
WRONG**

Valence (pos. vs. neg., fillers only)

CONTEXT	CONDITIONS		CONTEXT 2	TARGET
Sara, Luca e Chiara are at the pub with some friends. Marco is drinking a coffee at another table.	AO	Luca dislikes Marco.	Luca says to Sara:	Marco is [a] jerk
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	TO	Marco is a fake and dishonest person.		
	NEU	//		

Summary of *jerk* papers

Contextual licensing: We need to have evidence of Marco's assholery to use 'asshole' (unlike 'nasty')

Blameworthiness: Not so clearly just about (speaker's/people's) attitude, hearers infer Marco done wrong

Valence Asymmetry: Positive evaluations seem always good

What about L2 Speakers?

Do they show the same context sensitivity?

- Mixed expressives express an attitude + something about the target
- But - there is also an effect of valence (exploratory analyses; Domaneschi et al., 2025).
- Bilinguals may know the dictionary translation of an expressive without having identical pragmatic command over its use.
- If L2 processing attenuates affective force, then L2 participants might show weaker differences between expressive and adjective items, or weaker sensitivity to context
- If L2 processing preserves semantic/pragmatic licensing, then the TO > NEU pattern should appear in both L1 and L2.

Attenuated Affect in L2

*Does an expressive need contextual support because of its semantic/pragmatic licensing conditions, or because its **affective force** makes unsupported use feel less acceptable?*

- L2 words often have weaker affective force (Ferré et al., 2018; Imbault et al., 2021; Thoma, 2024)
 - Pronounced for Taboo words (Dewaele, 2004) and terms of endearment (Dewaele, 2008)
- Valence Effects - valence is a prominent aspect of meaning (Moyer et al., 2025)
- Effects should be more pronounced when bilinguals have less experience in their L2 (measuring experience is complicated...)

Pragmatics in L2

Evidence of difficulty with pragmatics and context-sensitive meaning

Taguchi 2019; Ren 2022; Wang & Wang 2023; McConachy 2019

YET potential reliance on context cues to compensate

Norman & Demain 2023; Bor & Prior 2022; Gollan et al 2002

Measuring Language Experience

Learning and Contexts of Use: Native vs. L2

Native Language:

- Family
- Play (childhood)
- School
- Internal monologue
- Social, emotional, moral learning

Sara, Gianluca and Chiara are attending a university lecture. A few places ahead they see Samuele sitting. Gianluca hates Samuele.

Gianluca says to Chiara:

"Samuele is an asshole."

L2:

- Classroom
- Formal work context
- Reading
- Paperwork



Language Experience & Proficiency

LEAP-Q assesses:

- Self-reported proficiency (reading, writing, listening, speaking)
- Age of acquisition
- Daily language use (% and contexts, e.g., reading)
- Immersion (country, school, family)
- Language learning contexts (e.g., friends, family, class, TV, etc.)
- Cultural identification
- Foreign accent
 - *Correlated variables*
 - *Inform affective engagement*



Roadmap

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1. Do we replicate Domaneschi et al. (2025)?

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5. Discussion / Work-in-progress

Questions

1. What is the nature of the expressive content in mixed expressive?
 - contextual constraint asymmetry for negative expressives (neutral < supporting; target-oriented > agent-oriented)?
 - Asymmetry: only for negative expressives?
2. Does language nativeness (L1 vs. L2) modulate these effects?
3. Are L1/L2 effects uniform across negative expressives (e.g., jerk) and ordinary insults (e.g., rude) differ? ADJ vs PEJ (LexicalType)

Our Study

Language nativeness:

- Italian-English bilinguals responding in *either* L1 or L2

Three context conditions:

- Neutral (e.g., no context) vs.
- agent oriented (e.g., Andrea hates Marco, Lorenza really likes Laura) vs.
- target oriented (e.g., Roberto is a bad person, Paolo is a good person)

Lexical type: +positive pejorative/expressive (sweetheart)! jerk -> asshole

- Pejorative vs. adjective

Valence:

- Positive vs. negative

Background	Context Manipulation		Target
<i>Sara, Luca and Chiara are sitting at the bar with some friends. At another table Marco is drinking a coffee</i>	(1) Agent-oriented	Luca hates Marco (Luca odia Marco)	<i>Luca says to Sara (Luca dice a Sara), Marco is an asshole (Marco e uno stronzo)</i>
	(2) Target-oriented	Marco is bad person (Marco è una cattiva persona)	
	(3) Neutral	//	

Note. Conditions are counterbalanced, such that participants see at least two vignettes for each condition across the 9 target vignettes.

Design

Within-Subjects

- **LexicalType** (pej,adj)
- **Valence** (neg,pos) +positive expressives!
- **ContextCondition** (TO,AO,NEU)

12 unique test trial types

36 total trials

counterbalanced in a Latin-Square design

24 filler vignettes

Between-subjects:

- **Language** (Italian, English)

Procedure

- Acceptability judgment task with stimuli from Domaneschi et al. (2025) (minimally modified)
- LEAP-Q bilingual demographics
- + Valence/Arousal rating task

Participants ($n = 300$)

- Italian-English Bilinguals
 - Living in Italy ✓
 - Living in English-speaking countries ($n \approx 190$ 😭)
- English-Italian Bilinguals
 - Living in English-speaking countries
 - Living in Italy ($n \approx 22$ 😭)

TO: Giovanni is a bad person

AO: Luca hates Giovanni



progress

Pier, Gianluca and Luisa and other friends are jogging. A few meters away they notice Giovanni.

ContextCondition

Luisa says to Pier:

"Giovanni is an asshole."

How acceptable do you consider the statement in red?

completely
unacceptable



completely
acceptable

Next



progress

Laura, Stefano and Valentina are standing at the entrance of a cinema. In the queue they see Paolo buying tickets. Laura really likes Paolo.

Laura says to Stefano:

LexicalType

"Paolo is a sweetheart."

Valence

How acceptable do you consider the statement in red?

completely
unacceptable

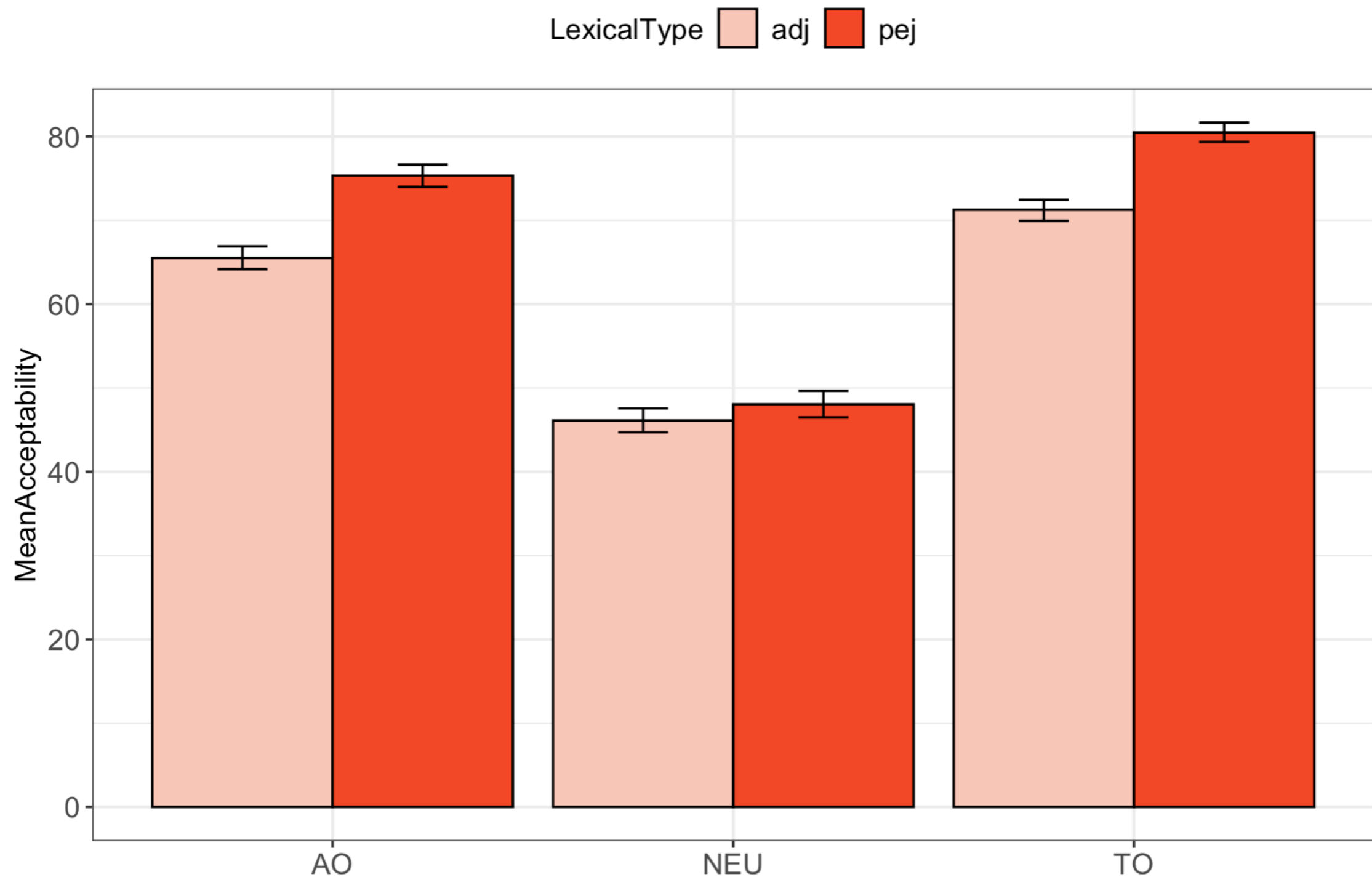


completely
acceptable

Next

Replication?

- $\{TO, AO\} > NEU$
- $TO > AO$



M1: Acceptability ~ LexicalType*ContextCondition

RQ1: Context Effects

Replicated Domaneschi et al. (2025)

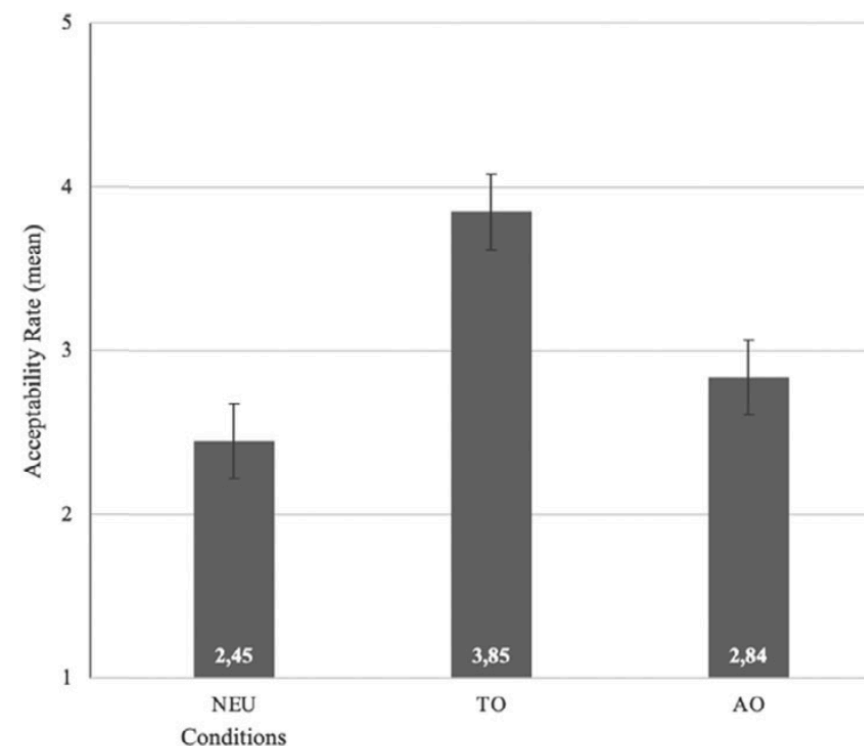
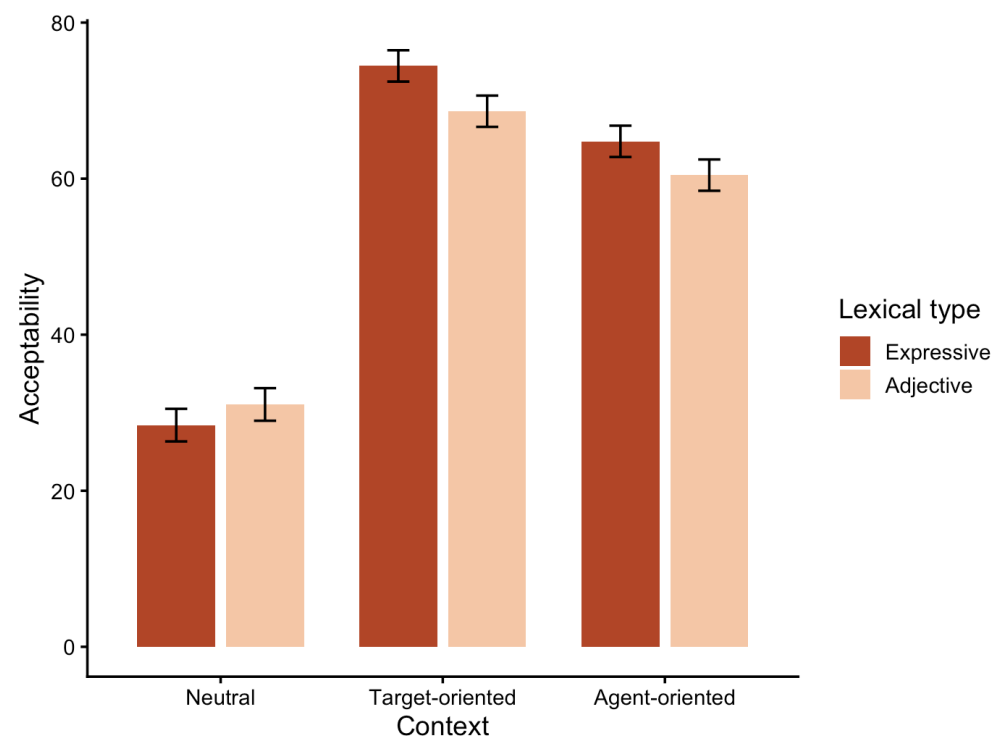
Model: acceptability $\sim$ context $\times$ lexical type $\times$ language

Context effect:

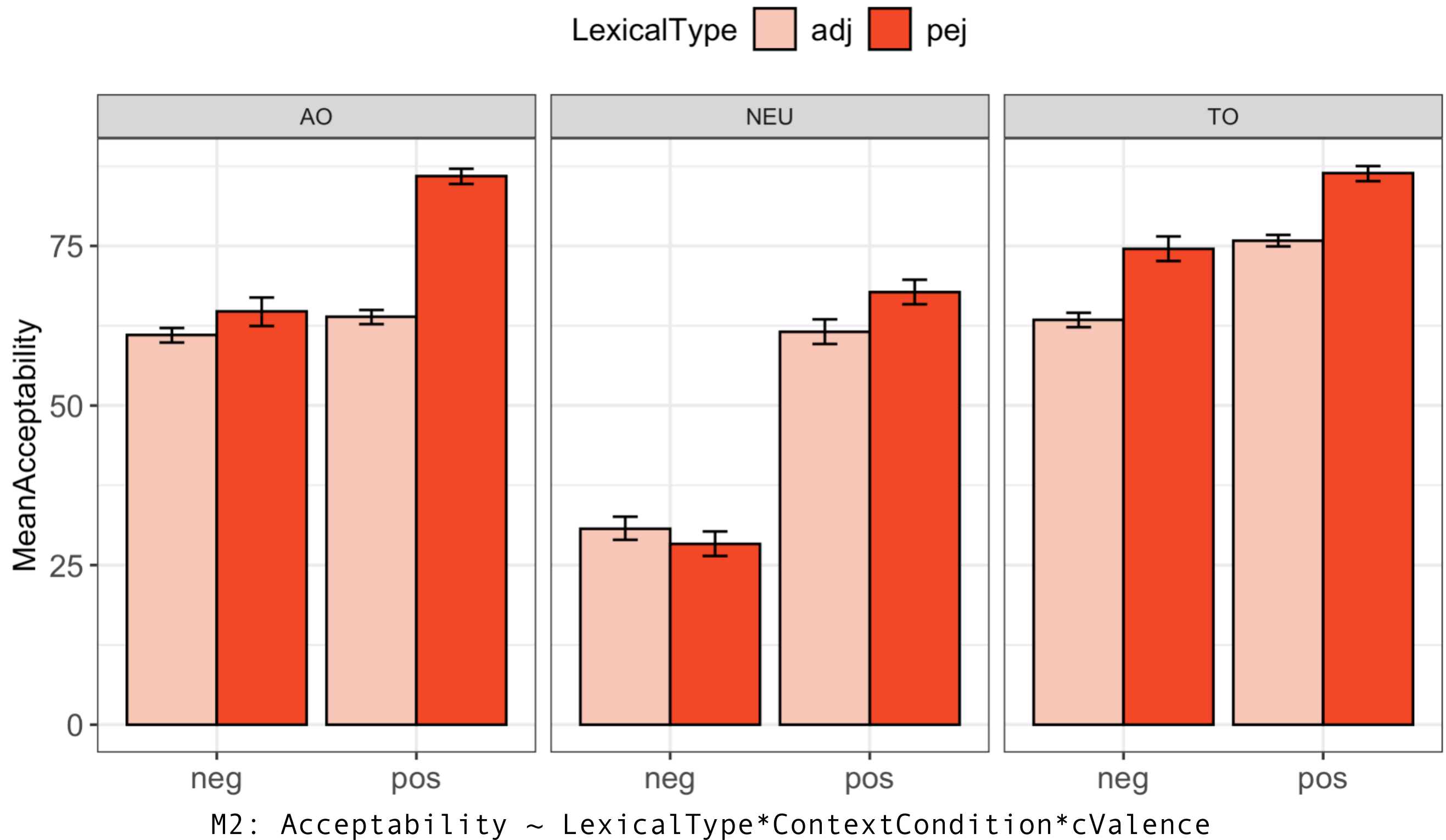
- Differed by lexical type: stronger for expressives
- But not by language

Negative expressives show:

- Lower acceptability in neutral contexts than supporting contexts (TO & AO)
- Higher acceptability in target-oriented than agent-oriented contexts



Valence Asymmetry?



Valence Asymmetry?

Model: acceptability $\sim$ context $\times$ lexical type $\times$ **valence**

Context effect differed by *both* lexical type and valence

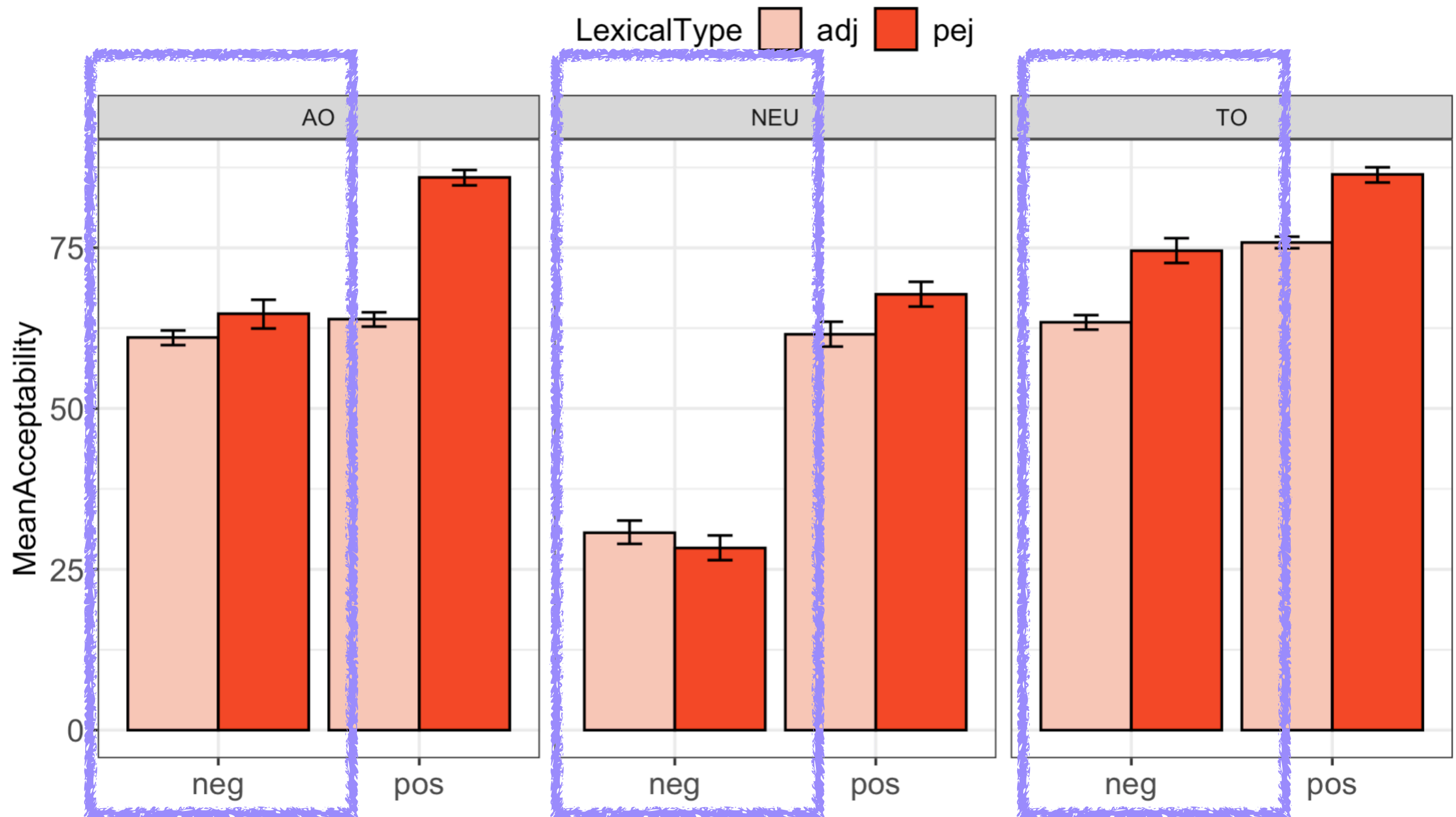
Supporting > NEU

- Effect is stronger for **negative** words (vs. positive)
 - Positive expressives show a weaker context effect
 - Positive expressives show no clear TO > AO pattern.
- Effect is stronger for **expressives** (vs. adjectives)

TO > AO

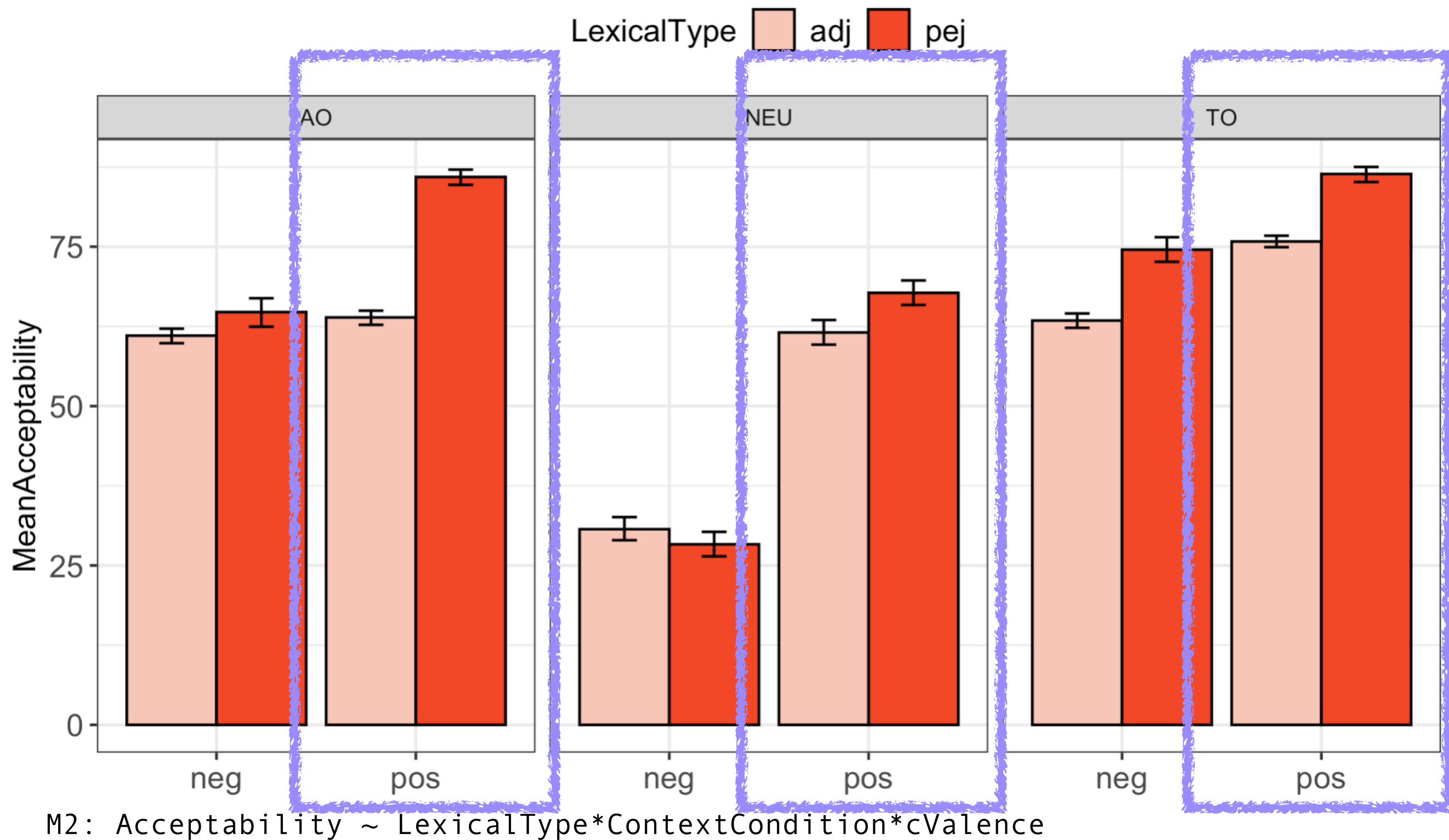
- Clear preferences for TO for negative words
 - Similar pattern for *neg* expressives and adjectives ($p = .332$)
- No clear pattern for positive words

Valence Asymmetry?



M2: Acceptability ~ LexicalType*ContextCondition*cValence

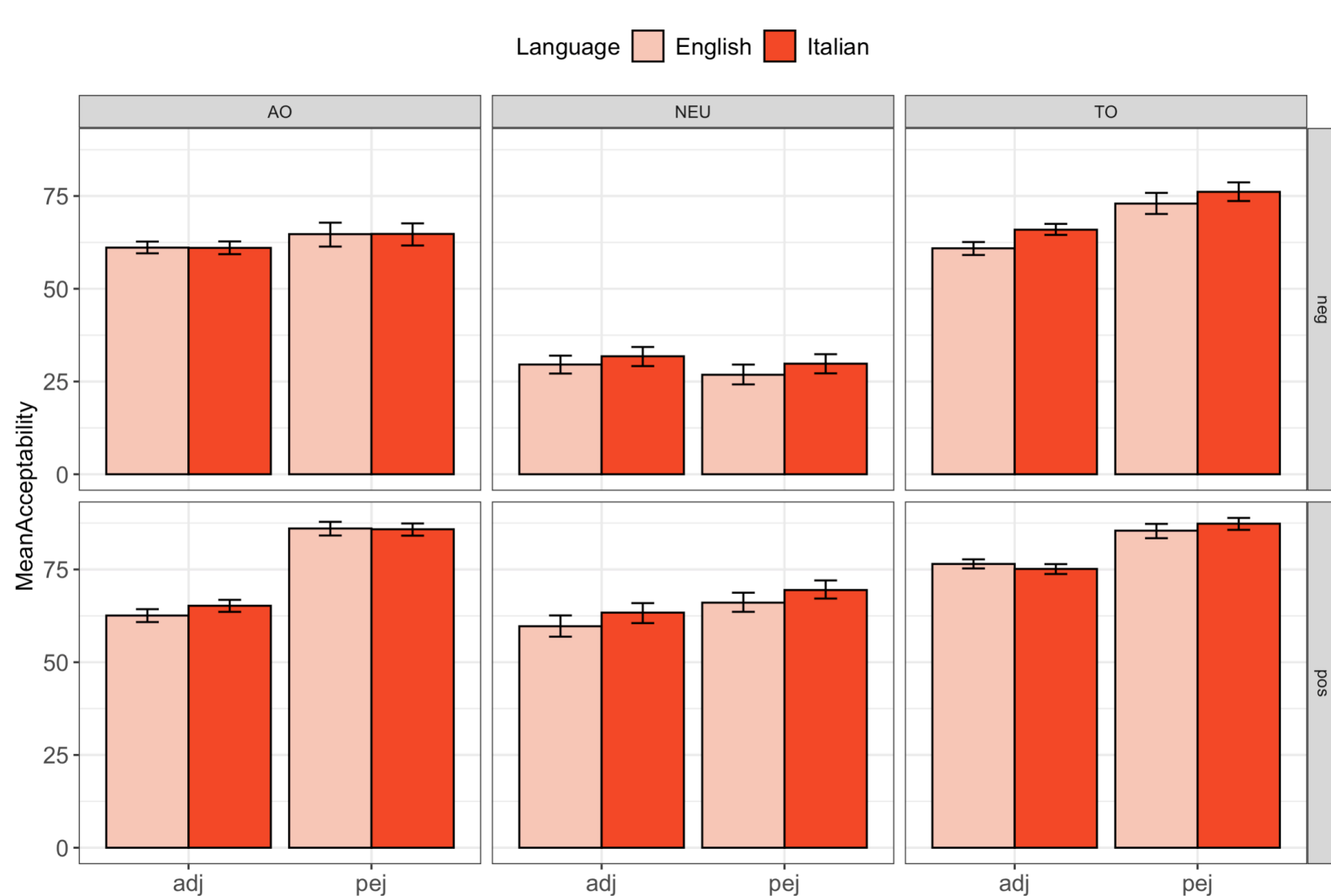
Valence Asymmetry?



Bilingual Effects?

Model: acceptability $\sim$ context $\times$ lexical type $\times$ valence $\times$ **language**

- No evidence that language nativeness modulated context effects



- *Further analysis -> limited due data loss (for now...)*

Rating Task

Instructions from Warriner et al. 2013

progress

rude

Valence

unhappy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 happy
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

calm 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 excited
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Arousal

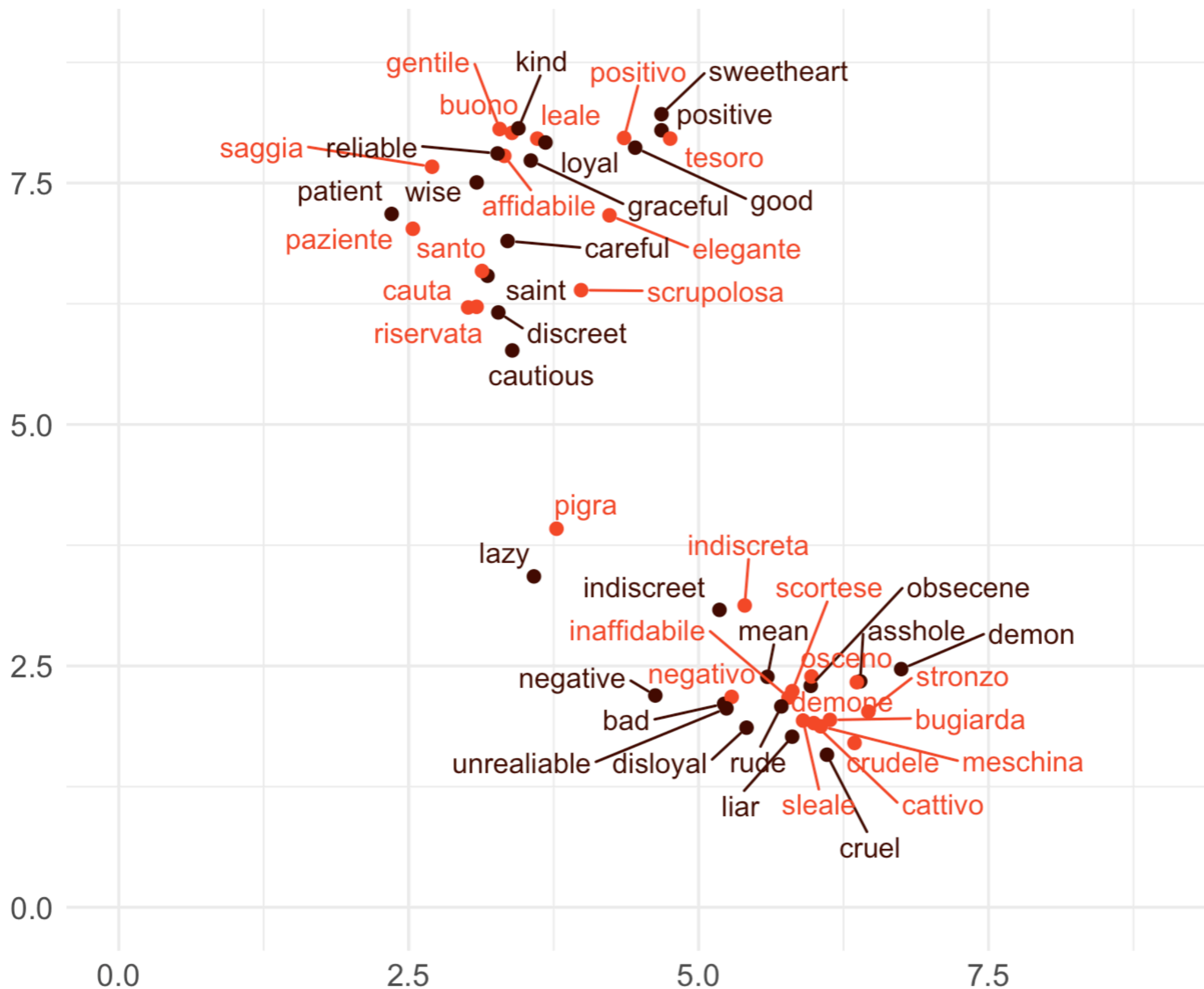
☐ I don't understand this word.

Next

Italian-English word pairs

English	Italian
reliable	affidabile
unreliable	inaffidabile
liar	bugiarda
obscene	oscena
rude	scortese
lazy	pigra
mean	meschina
cruel	crudele
disloyal	sleale
kind	gentile

English	Italian
graceful	elegante
wise	saggia
careful	scrupolosa
cautious	cauta
discreet	riservata
indiscreet	indiscreta
loyal	leale
patient	paziente
sweetheart	tesoro
asshole	stronza



Language

- English
- Italian

Summary

Do we replicate the contextual constraint asymmetry for negative expressives? **Yes**

- neutral < supporting ? **Yes**
- target-oriented > agent-oriented? **Yes**

Is there a valence asymmetry? **Yes**

Does language nativeness (L1 vs. L2) modulate these effects? **No?**

Does affective impact contribute to felicity judgments? **TBD**

Are L1/L2 effects uniform across derogatory categories, or do negative expressives (e.g., asshole) and ordinary insults (e.g., rude) differ?

Do valence or arousal ratings impact **TBD**

Next Steps

1. Recover LEAP-Q data from Exp 1

- Need additional ethics approval (GDPR - linking)

2. Analyse word ratings (valence/arousal)

3. Assessing English-Italian participants

- Moving away from ESL groups
- Separating nativeness from language-specific properties

4. Manipulating the syntactic position of the pejorative (e.g., “that asshole Luigi” vs. “Luigi is an asshole”)

5. Extend to other expressives (“mixed expressives” McCready; “hybrid evaluatives”, Ceperallo & Stojanovic 2016; “value-associated terms” Willemsen & Reuter)

6. Different Language Groups (e.g., Catalan-Spanish-English)