



# Say it with an Accent The role of Language and Accents in Social Perception

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*Talk given at the Language and Prejudice Symposium at  
Örebro University on 13/11/2019*



# Overview

- Accent and ethnic categorization
- Accent and evaluation
  - (mis)match between appearance and accent
  - Different accents
- Intersectionality between ethnicity and religion
  - Subgrouping vs. subtyping in cross categorization
- Conclusions



# *ETHNIC CATEGORIZATION*

In collaboration with:

Melanie C. Steffens & Amélie Mummendey

Rakić, T., Steffens, M. C., & Mummendey, A. (2011). Blinded by the accent! The minor role of looks in ethnic categorization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(1), 16-29. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021522>



# Social Categorization

- Gender
- Ethnicity/Race
- Age
- Understanding Social Categorization
  - Stereotyping
  - Discrimination



# Ethnic Categorization

Labels/Visual information

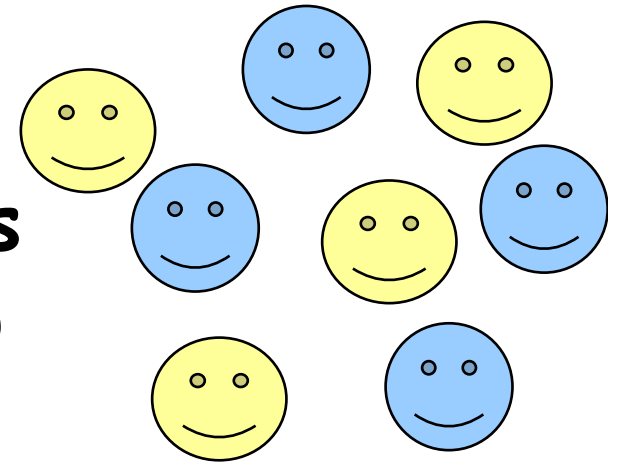
ELIT - ethnolinguistic identity theory  
(Giles & Johnson 1981,1987)  
language-ethnicity bond

Appearance vs. Accent - in Ethnicity  
categorization

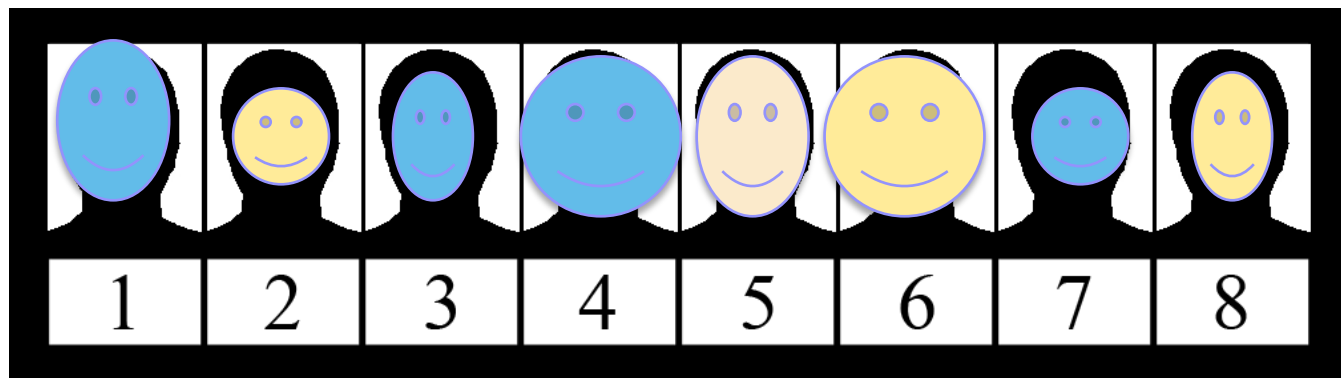
# „Who said what?“ paradigm

Taylor et al.(1978)

Observe a discussion of 8 students  
and *make an impression* of a group  
as a whole



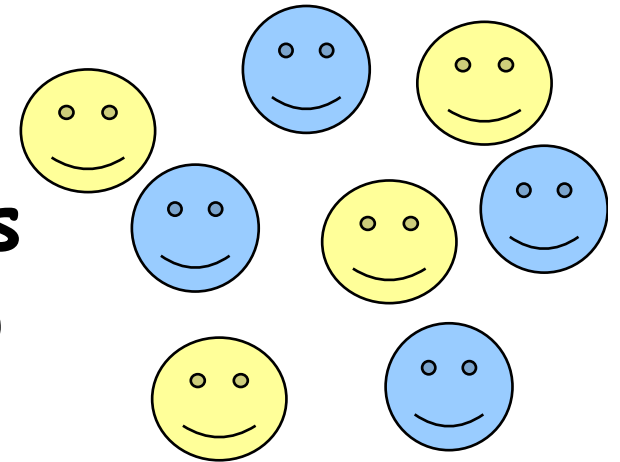
- Matching task (statement - speaker)



# „Who said what?“ paradigm

Taylor et al.(1978)

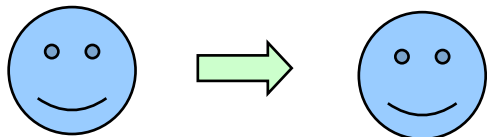
Observe a discussion of 8 students  
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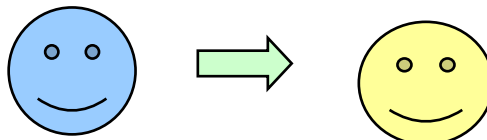
- Matching task (statement - speaker)

DV: number of correct answers and errors

Two type of errors :



- Within-category errors



- Between-category errors

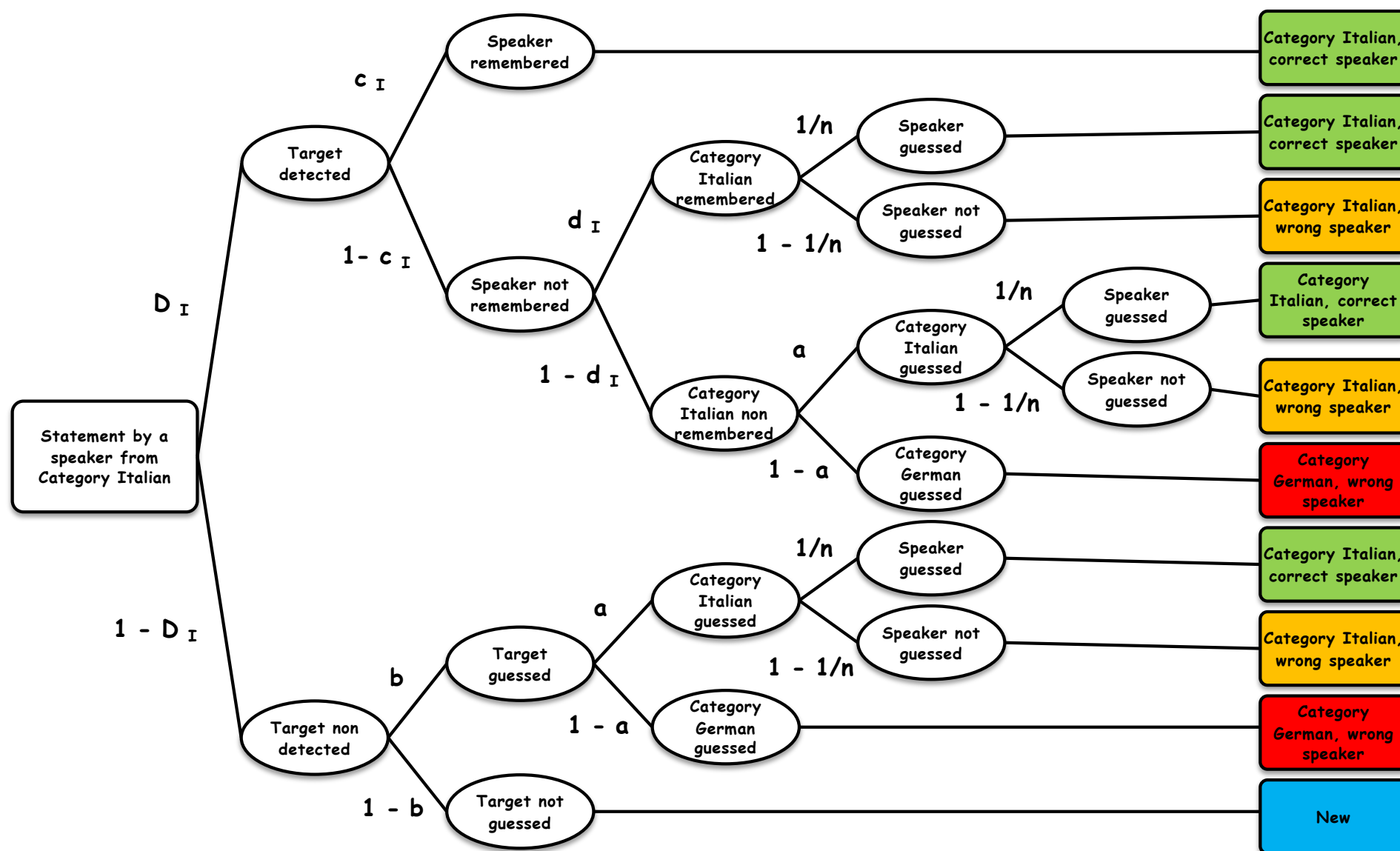


# Multinomial Model

*Klauer & Wegener (1998); Klauer, Ehrenberg, & Wegener (2003)*

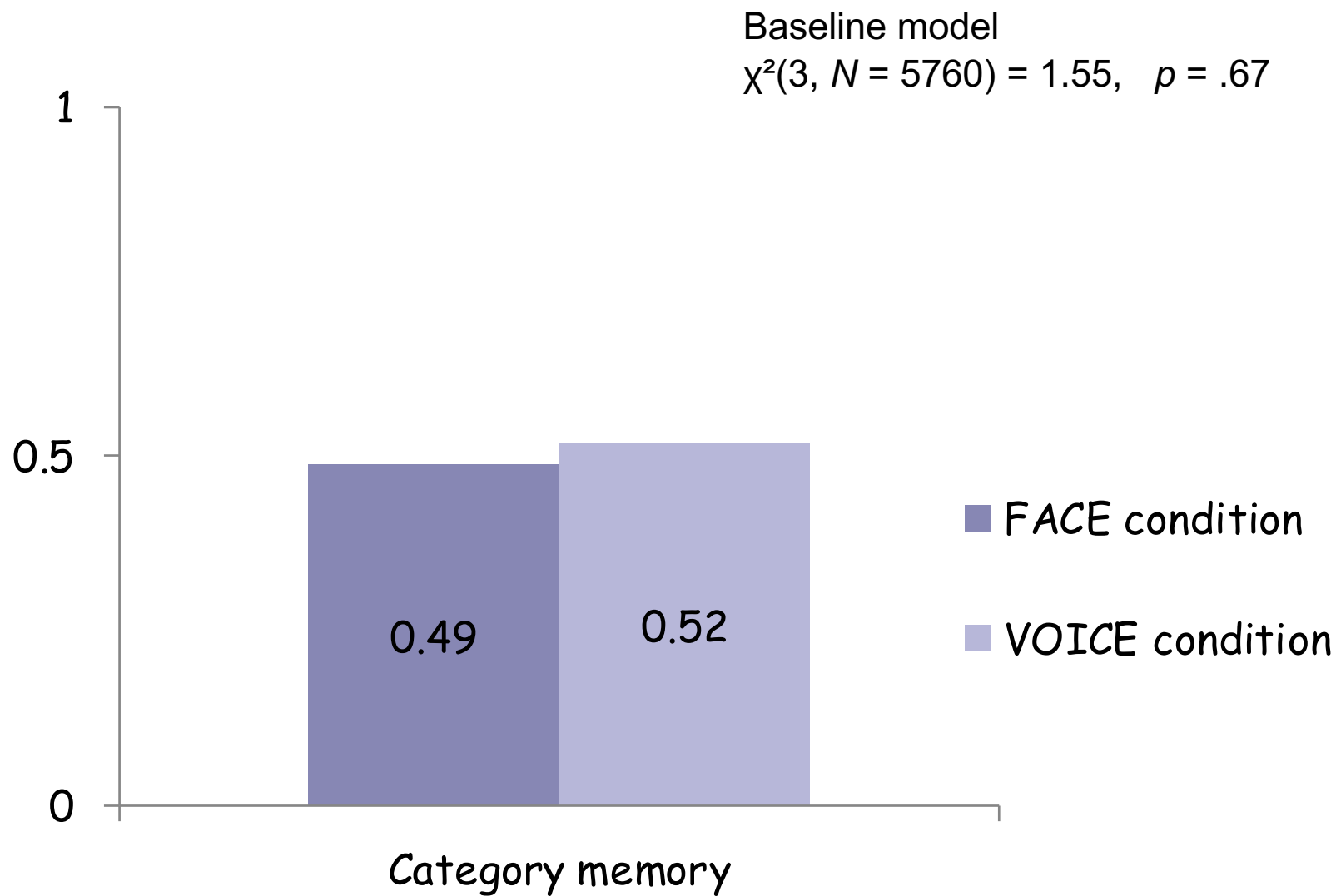
- Discussion part:
  - each of 8 targets makes 6 statements
- Matching task:
  - 48 from discussion + 48 new statements
- Decision old vs. new:
  - If *old* then who said it;
  - if *new* then the next statement





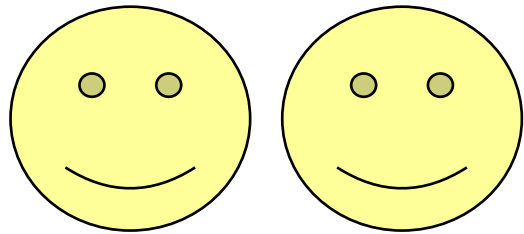


# *Ethnic Categorization*

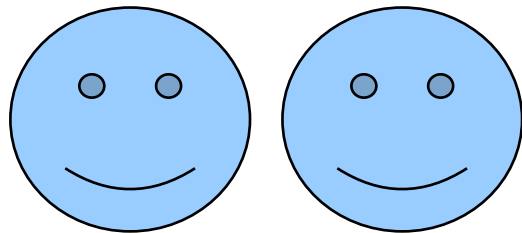
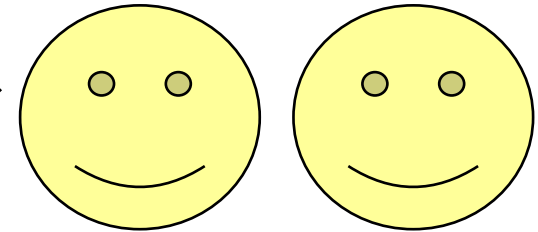


$$\Delta\chi^2(3, N = 5760) = 1.03, p = .79$$

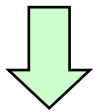
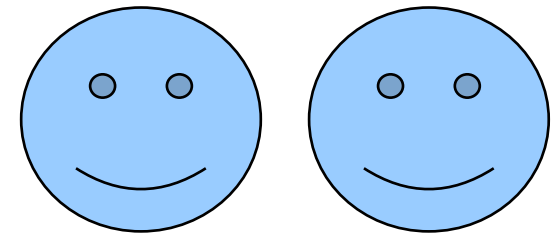
# Cross Categorization



← German Faces →

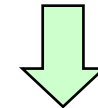


← Italian Faces →



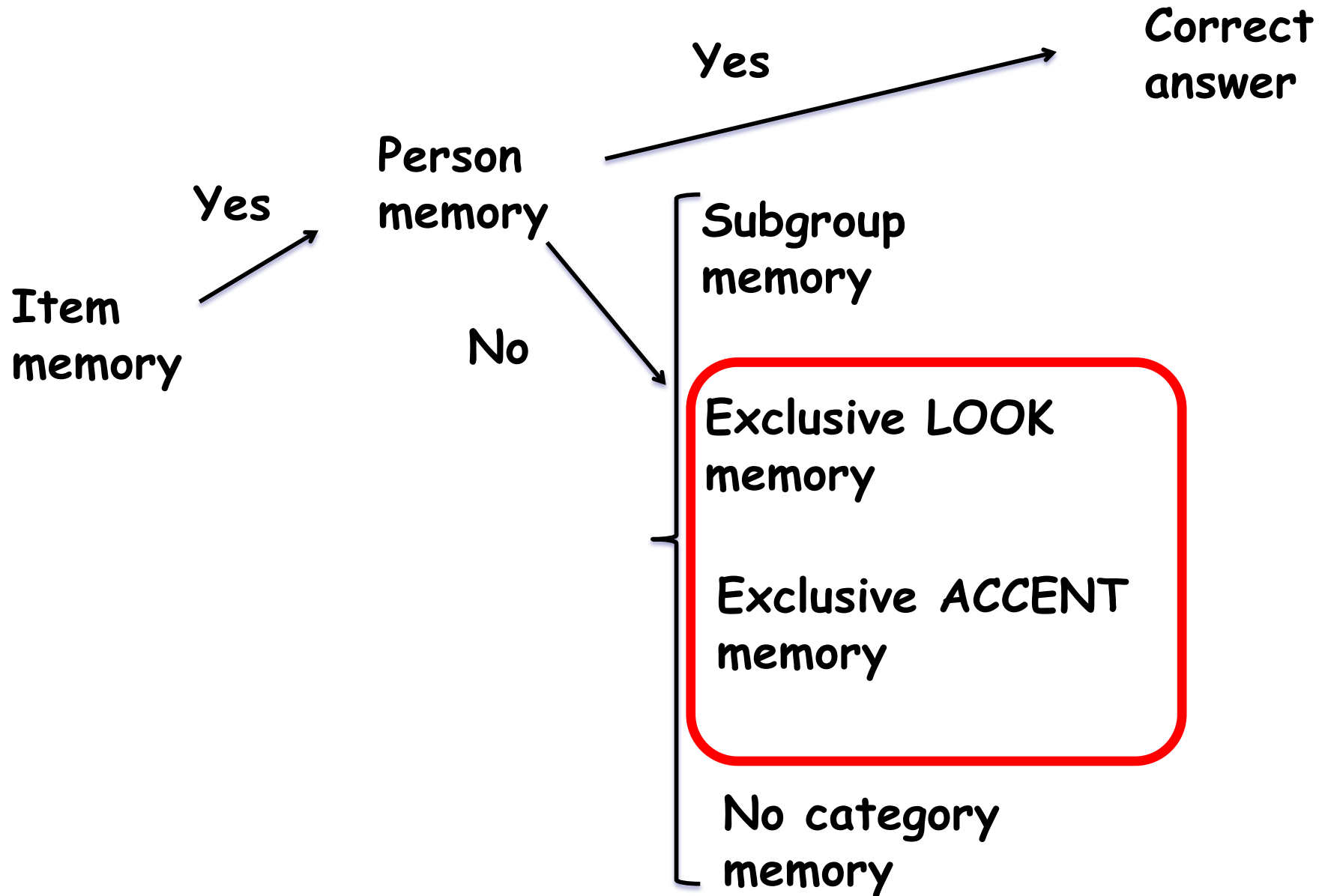
Standard  
German

VISUAL  
vs.  
AUDITORY

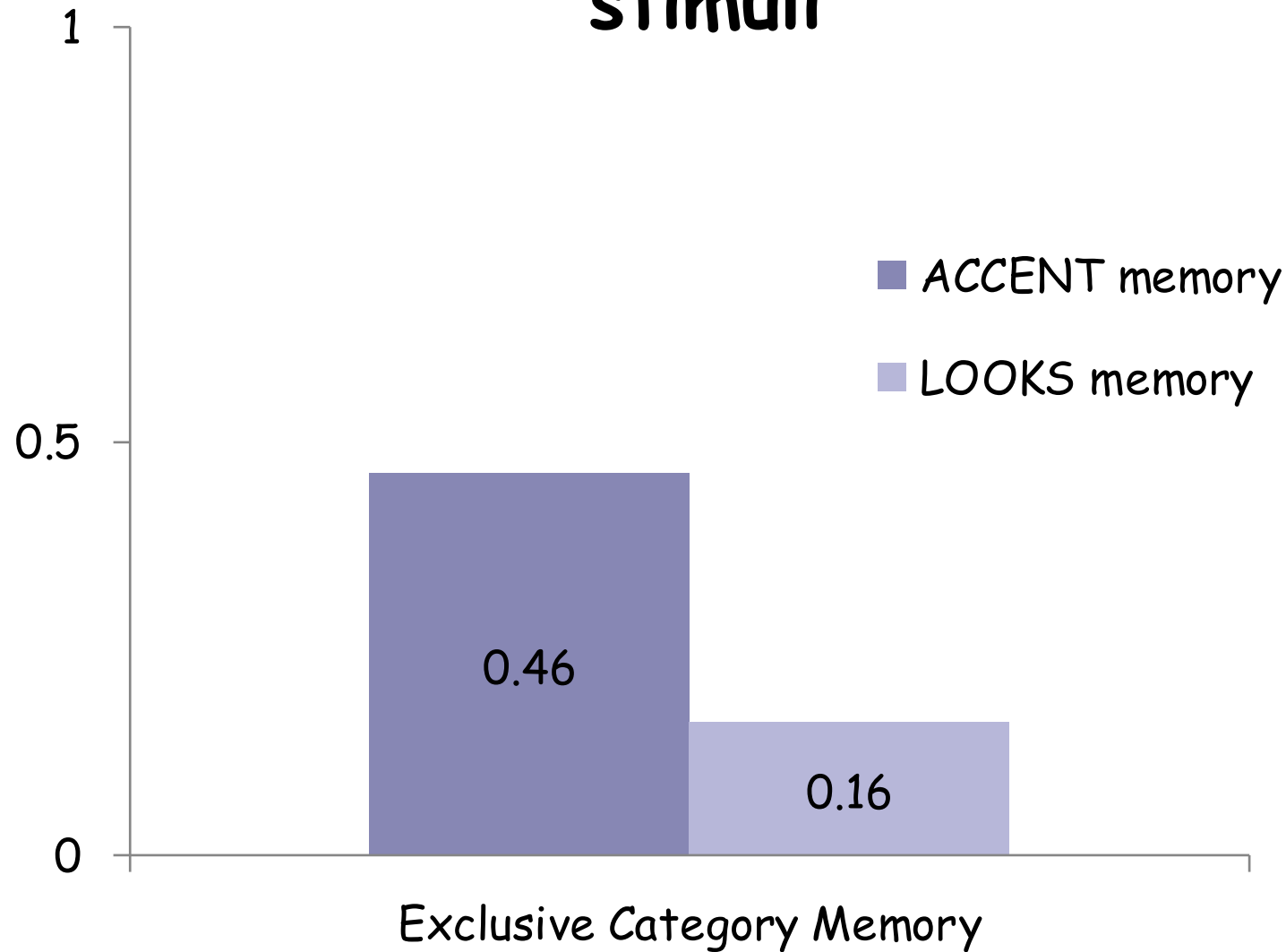


German with  
Italian accent

# Cross Categorization



# Previous findings - ethnicity & type of stimuli



$$\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 3168) = 39.38, p < .001$$



# *EXPECTANCY VIOLATIONS*

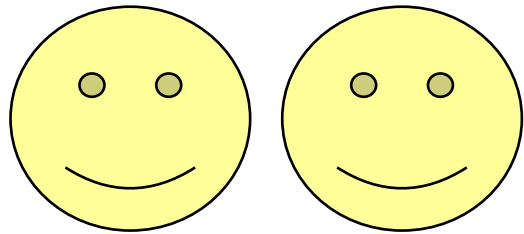
In collaboration with:

Karolina Hansen & Melanie C. Steffens

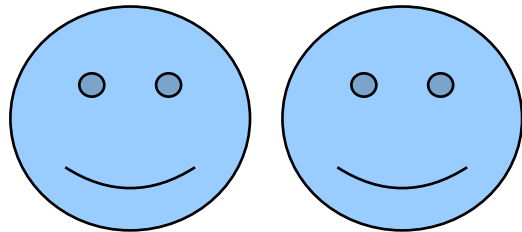
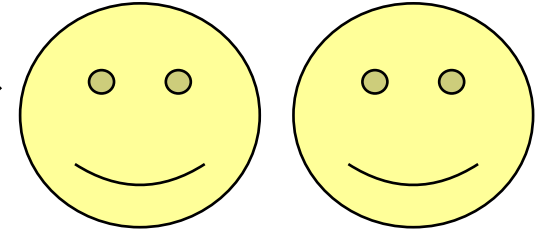
Hansen, K., Rakić, T., & Steffens, M. C. (2017). Competent and warm? How mismatching appearance and accent influence first impressions.

*Experimental Psychology*, 64(1), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1618-3169/a000348>

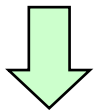
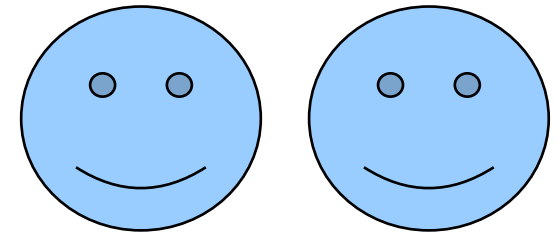
# Expectancy Violation



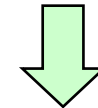
← German Faces →



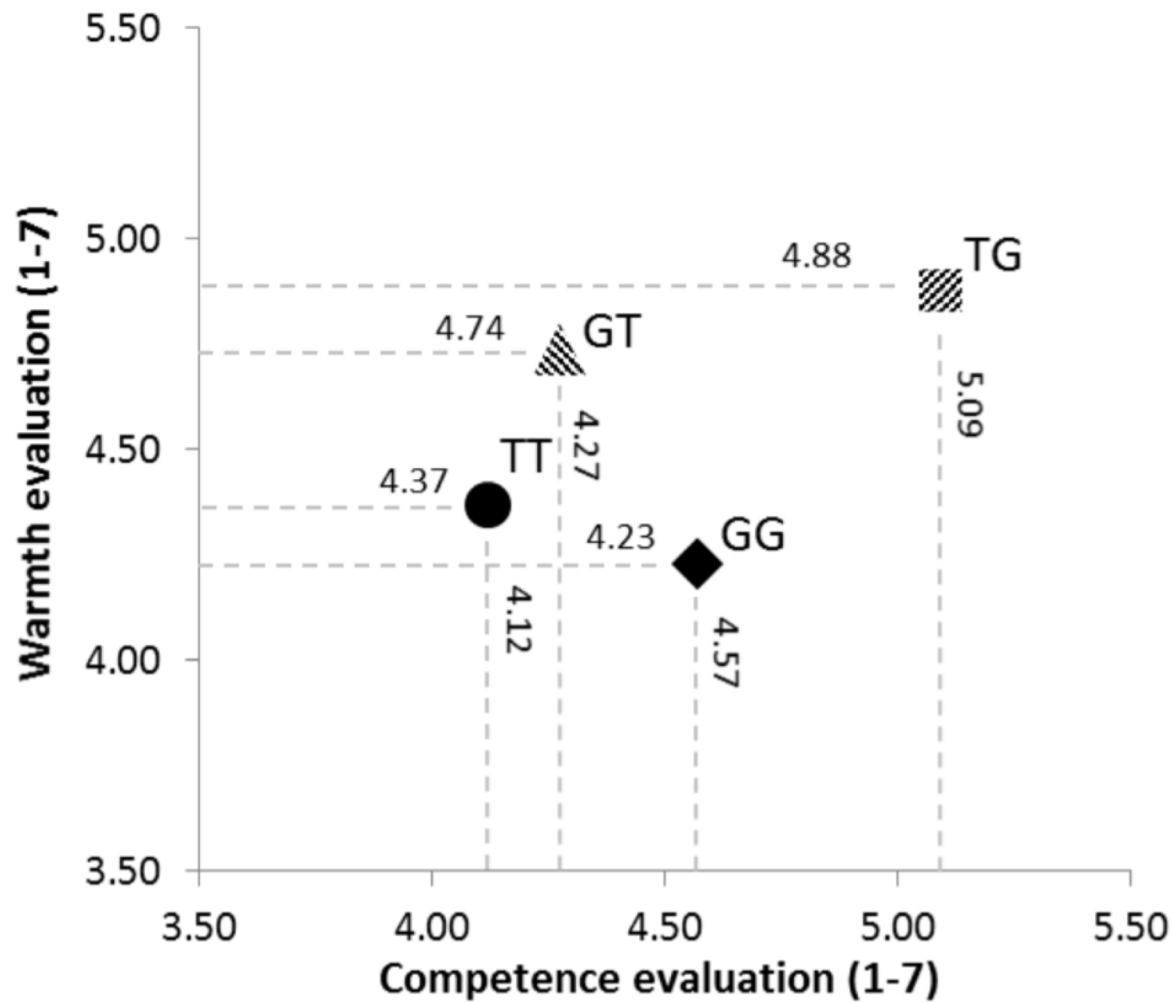
← Turkish Faces →



Standard  
German



German with  
Turkish accent



- ◆ GG = German appearance German accent
- ▨ TG = Turkish appearance German accent
- △ GT = German appearance Turkish accent
- TT = Turkish appearance Turkish accent





# *ACCENTS AND EVALUATIONS*

In collaboration with:

Melanie C. Steffens & Amélie Mummendey

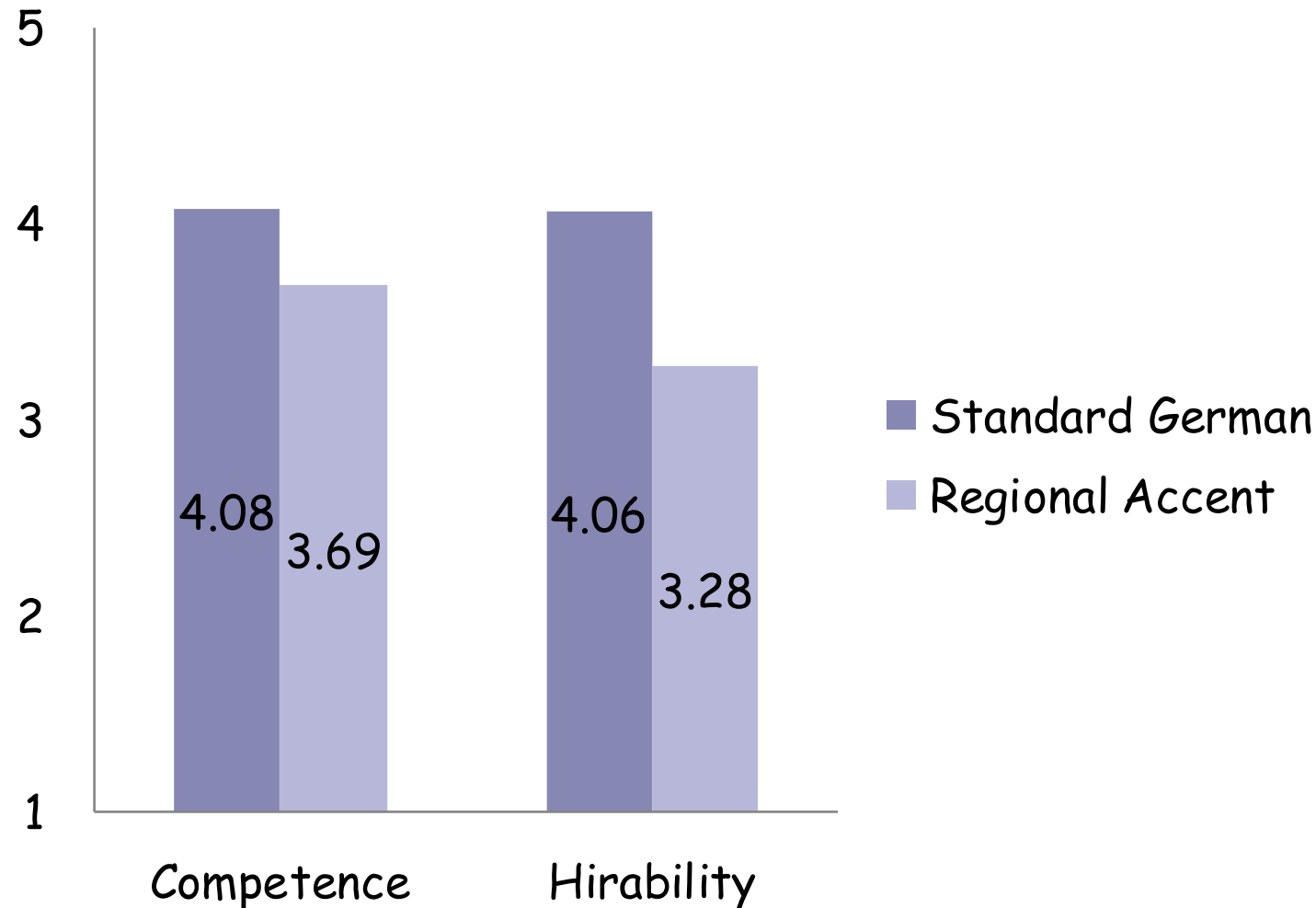
Rakić, T., Steffens, M. C., & Mummendey, A. (2011). When it matters how you pronounce it: The influence of regional accents on job interview outcome. *British Journal of Psychology*, 102(4), 868-883. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.2011.02051.x>



# Speaker evaluation in a job context

- Evaluation of different candidates that spoke with:
  - *Standard German*
  - *Berlin accent*
  - *Bavarian accent*
  - *Saxon accent*
- Evaluation ratings for:
  - *Aesthetic qualities*
  - *Competence*
  - *Hirability*
  - *Socio-intellectual status*

# Results - Competence & Hirability

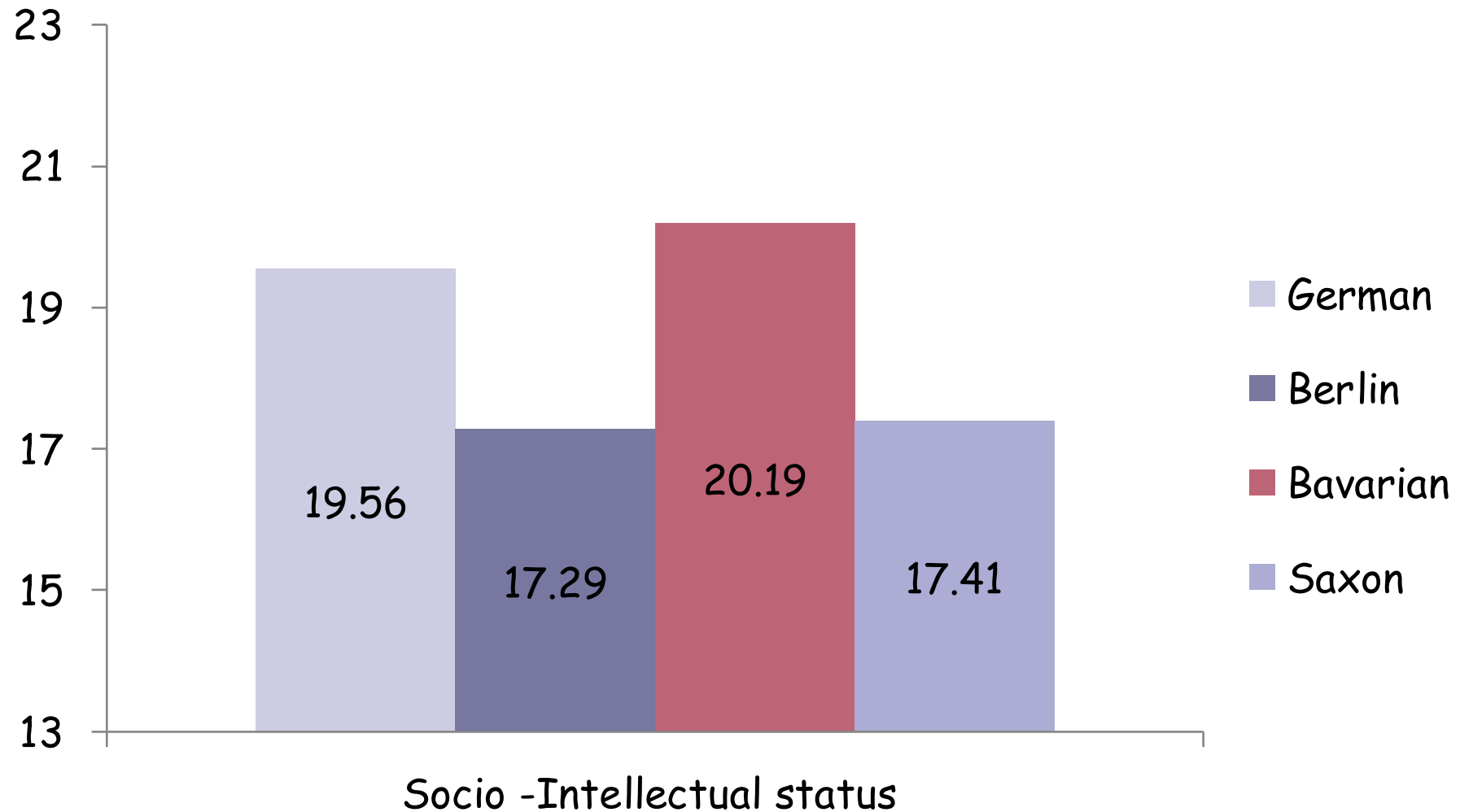


*Competence:*  $F(1, 96) = 12.05, p < .05 \eta_p^2 = .12$

*Hirability:*  $F(1, 96) = 21.91, p < .05 \eta_p^2 = .21$

Rakić et al. (2011) *BJP*

# Results - Socio-Intellectual Status



$F(1,96) = 6.22, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .06$



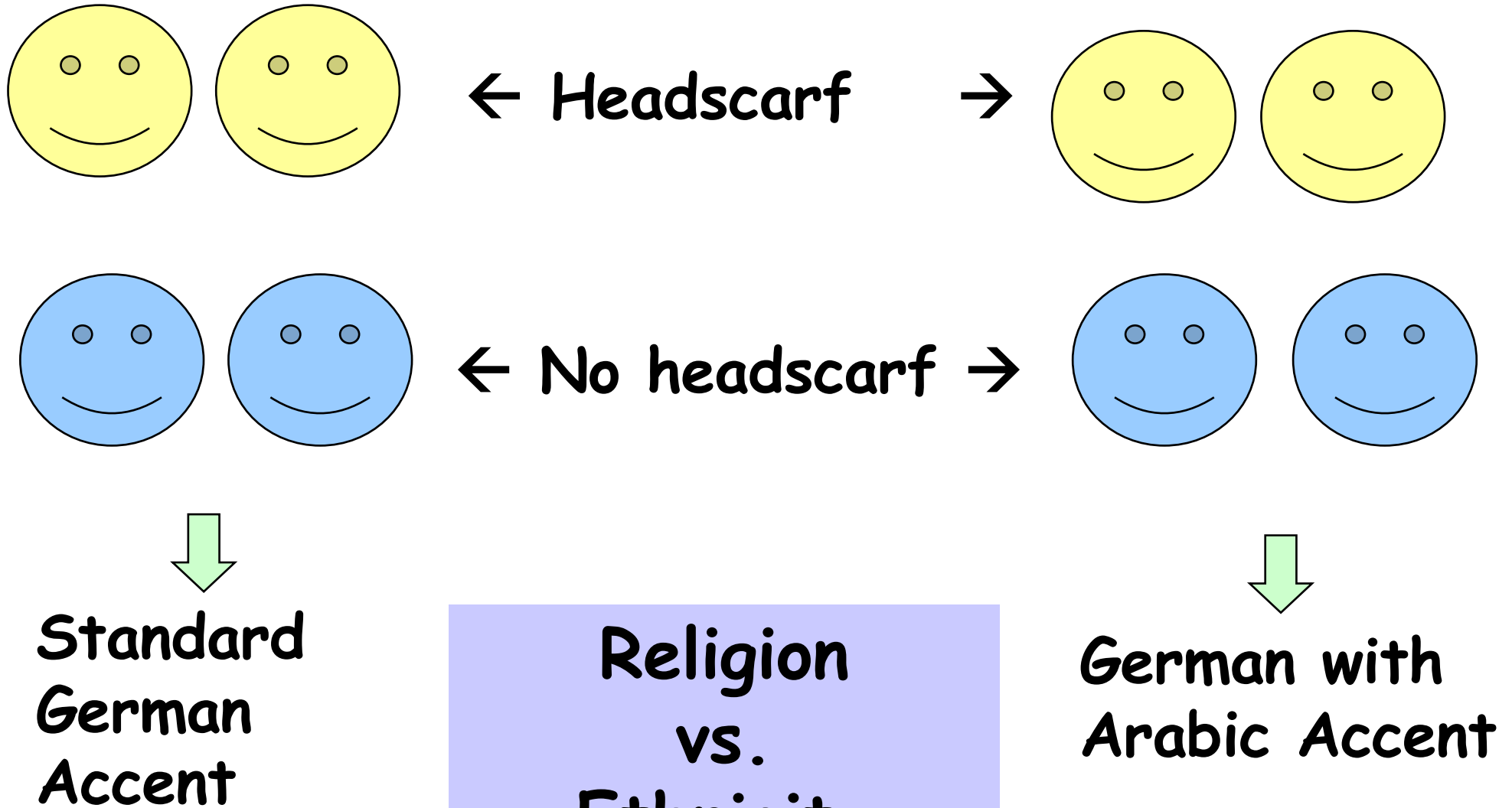
# *INTERSECTIONALITY OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION*

In collaboration with:

Melanie C. Steffens & Atena Sazegar

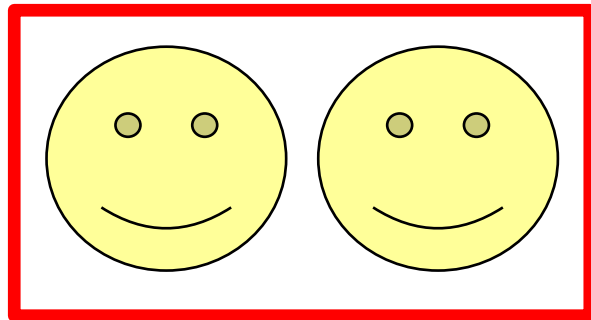
Rakić, T., Steffens, M. C., & Sazegar, A. (under review). Do People Remember What Fits Their Stereotypes? Spontaneous Subtyping of Stereotype-inconsistent Exemplars. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*.

# Ethnicity-Religion

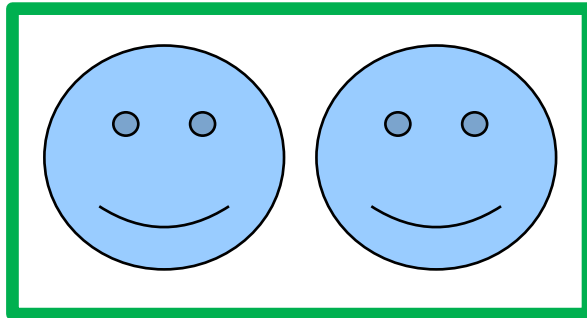
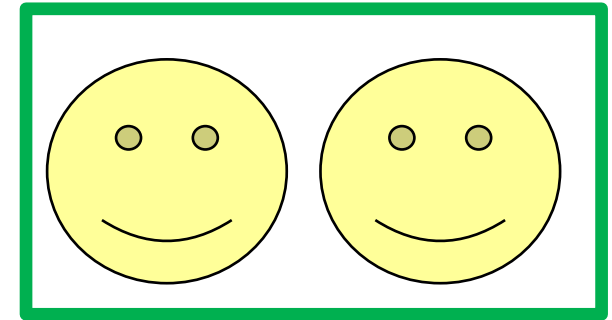


Religion  
vs.  
Ethnicity

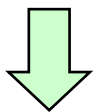
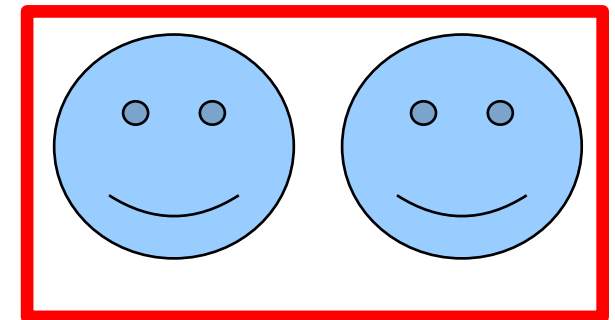
# Ethnicity-Religion



← Headscarf



← No headscarf →

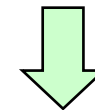


Standard  
German  
Accent

Stereotype consistent

vs.

Stereotype inconsistent



German with  
Arabic Accent



# Stereotype change vs. maintenance

## ■ *Subtyping*

- the stereotype inconsistent individuals is seen as the exceptions to the generally correct rule (or stereotype)

- Leading to **stereotype maintenance**

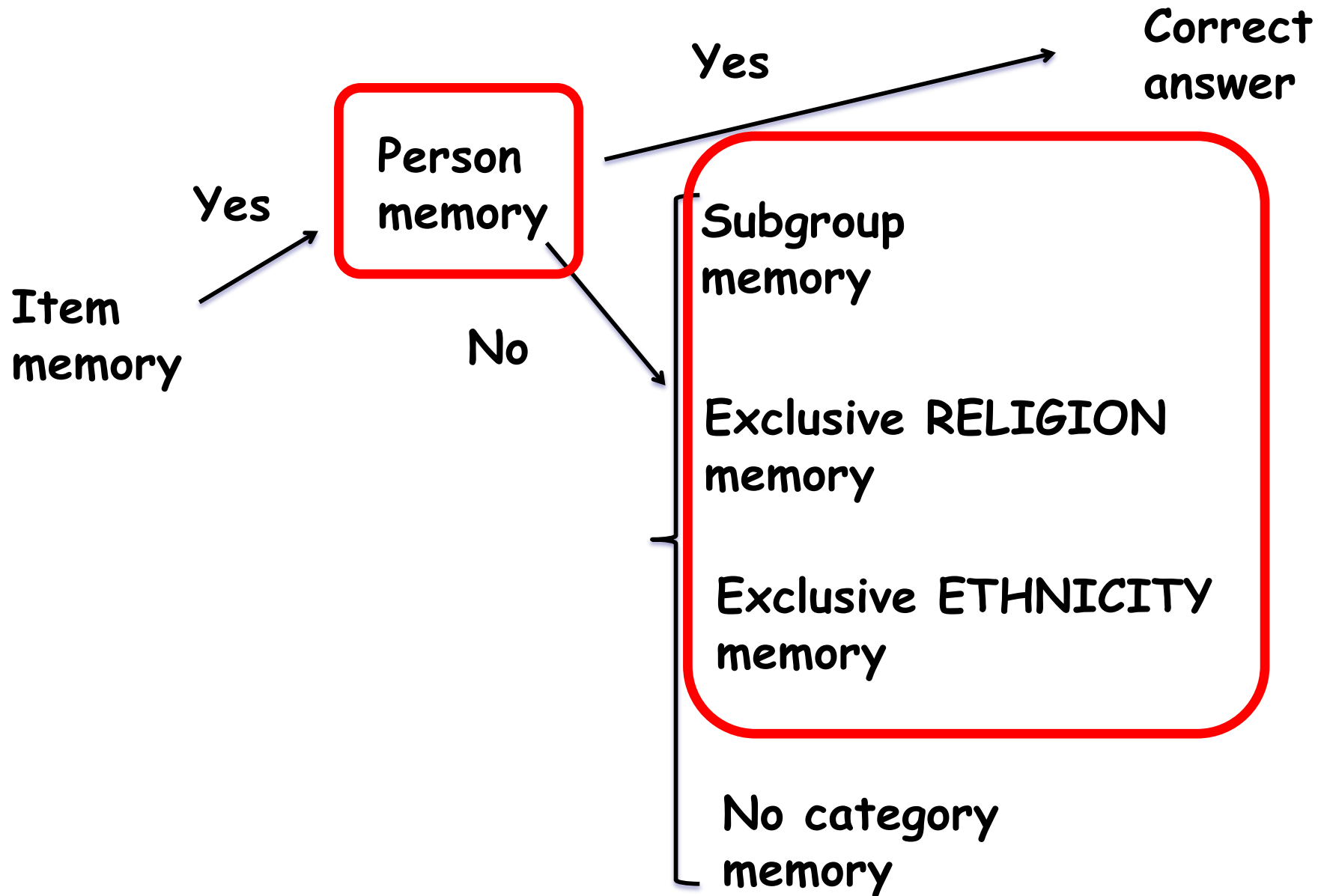
## ■ *Subgrouping*

- by creating a more differentiated picture of a given social group while accounting for different and potentially stereotype-inconsistent members.

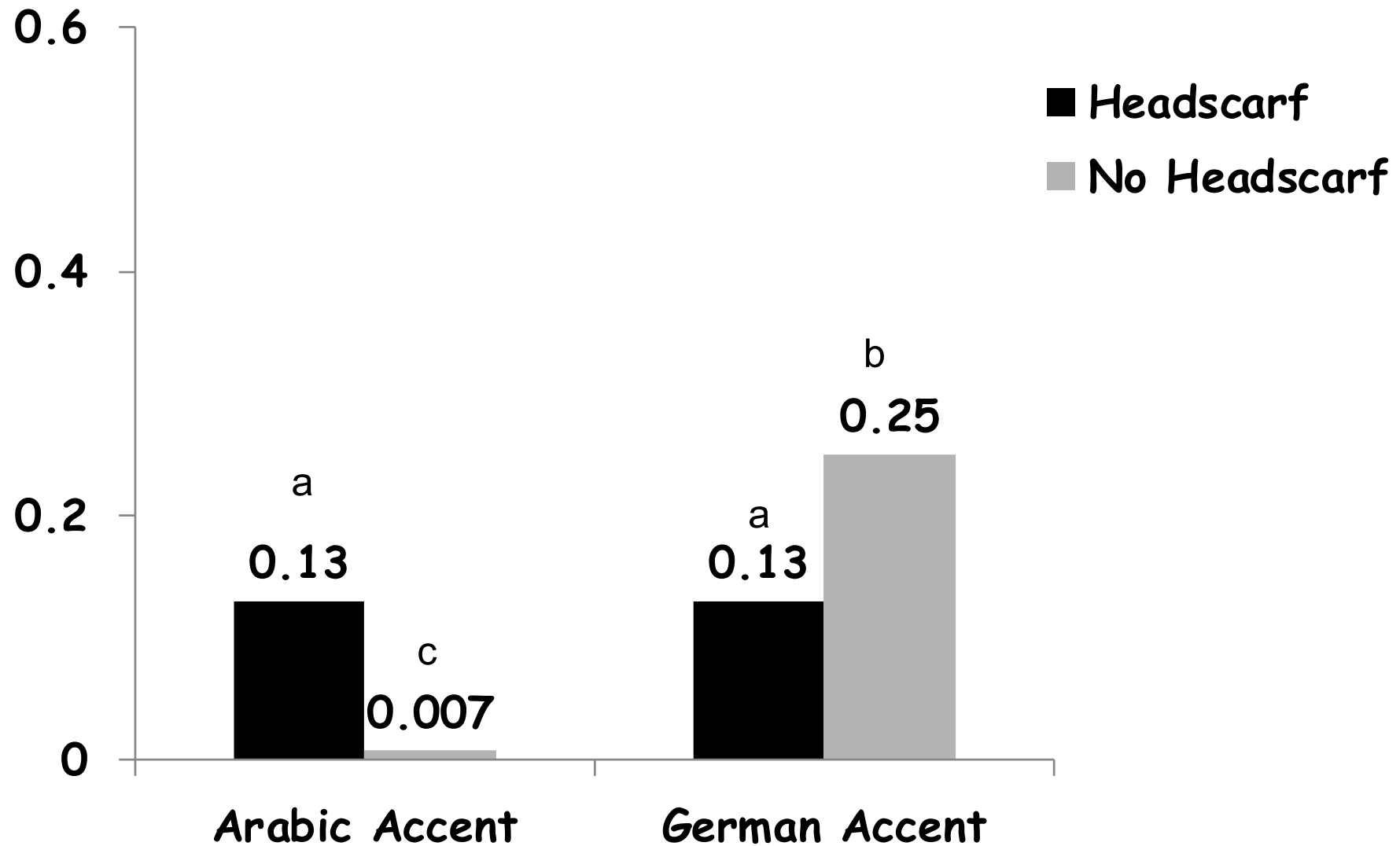
- Leading to **stereotype change**



# Cross Categorization



# Person Memory

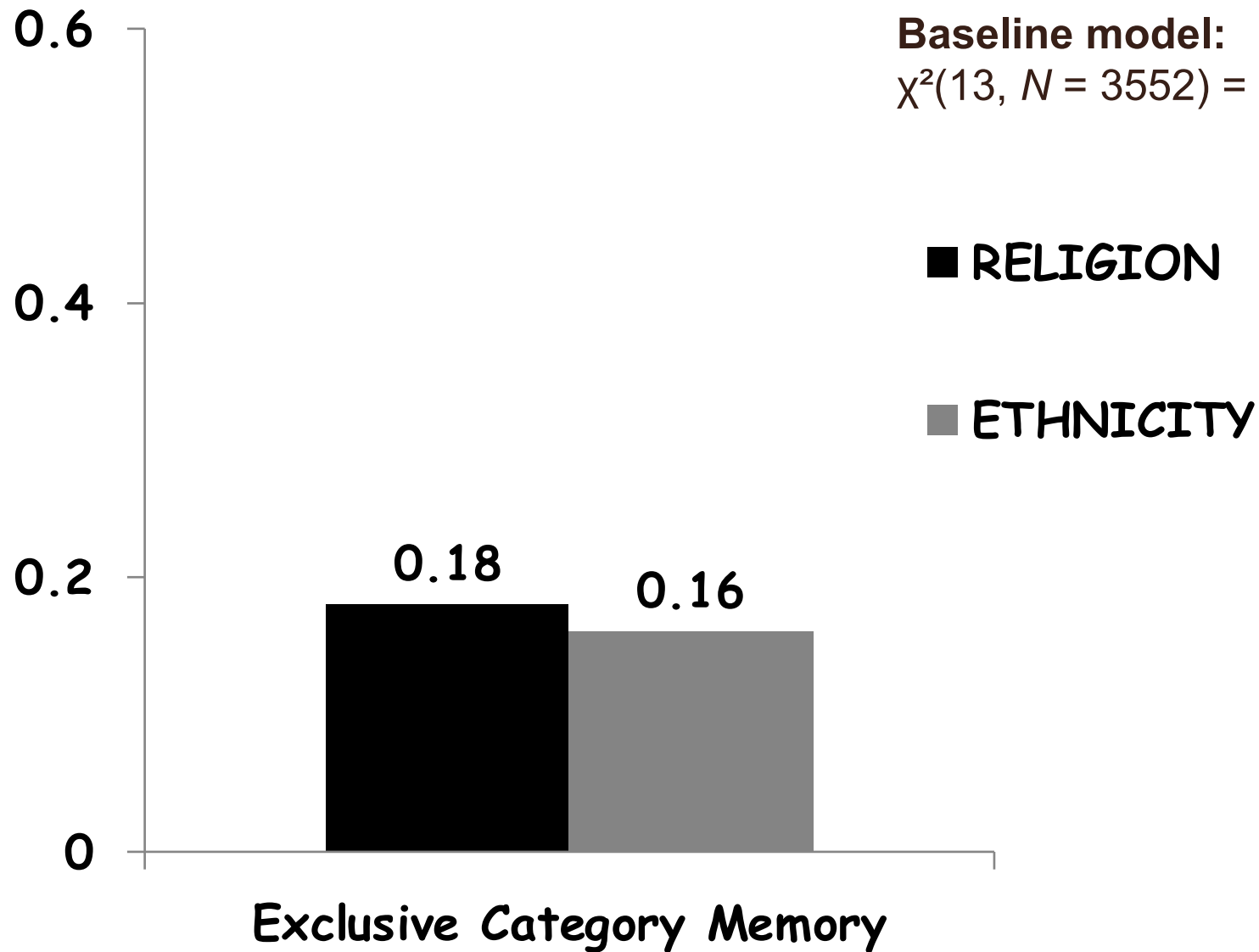


Person memory:

$\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 3552) = 21.09, p < .001$

$\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 3552) = 1.18, p = .28$

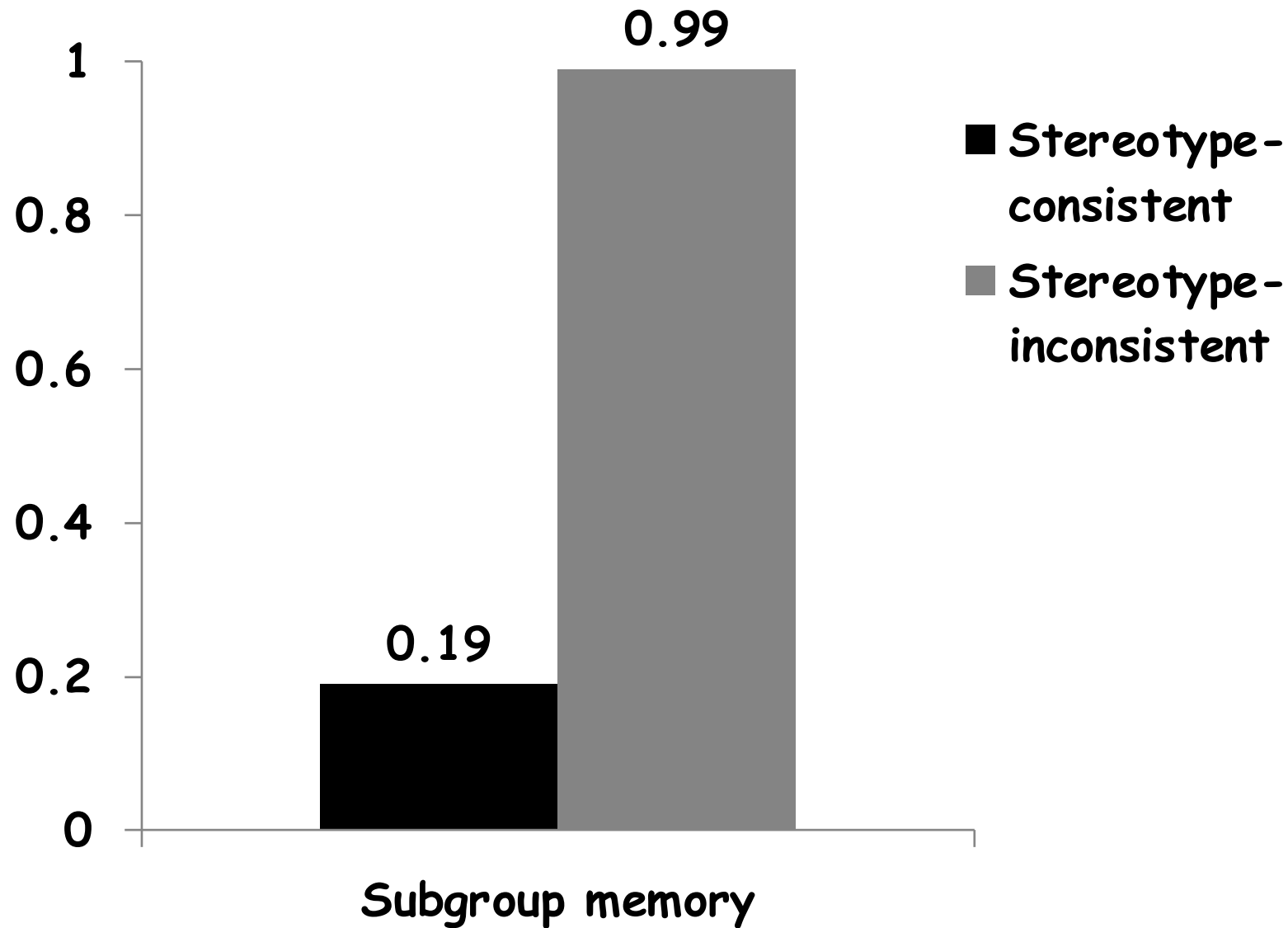
# Exclusive Category Memory



**Baseline model:**  
 $\chi^2(13, N = 3552) = 18.76, p = .13$

**Exclusive category memory:**  
 $\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 3552) = .09, p = .75$

# Subgroup Memory



**Subgroup memory:**

$\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 3552) = 35.996, p < .001$



## Conclusions

- Accents are subtle and natural yet very powerful and socially meaningful stimuli
- It is not just accent itself but the social category that it carries that makes the difference



*L'accent est l'âme du discours.*

Accent is the soul of language;  
it gives to it both feeling and truth.

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*