

Testing constructional tolerance

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What's constructional tolerance?

John sneezed

John all over his laptop

John a mighty sneeze

John his cat soaking wet

John the napkin off the table

Is constructional tolerance similar
across different languages?

Bob yelled himself hoarse.

He blinked the sweat out of
his eyes.

Snake legs it to freedom

There was cat all over the road.

Verbing weirds language.

etc, etc

French appears to be less ‘constructional’

*Jean éternua la serviette de la table.

(1) Paint sprayed into the air.

FR: De la peinture **gicla** dans l’air.

(2) He sprayed paint on the wall.

FR: Il **projeta** de la peinture sur le mur.

(3) He sprayed the wall with paint.

FR: Il **aspergea** le mur de peinture.

How can you test for differences in
constructional tolerance?

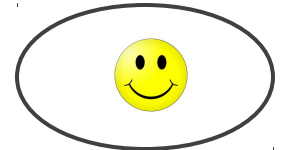
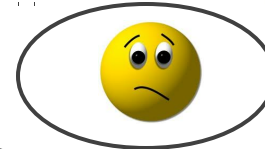
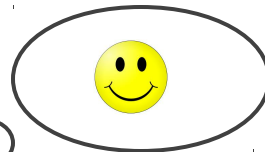
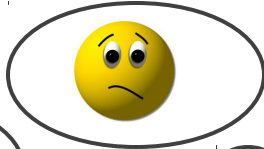
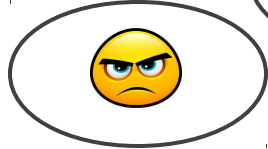




“Die Helfer wühlen sich durch den Schutt”



“Die Ratte nagt sich in die Speisekammer”



“Die Pflanze wächst sich ins Fenster”

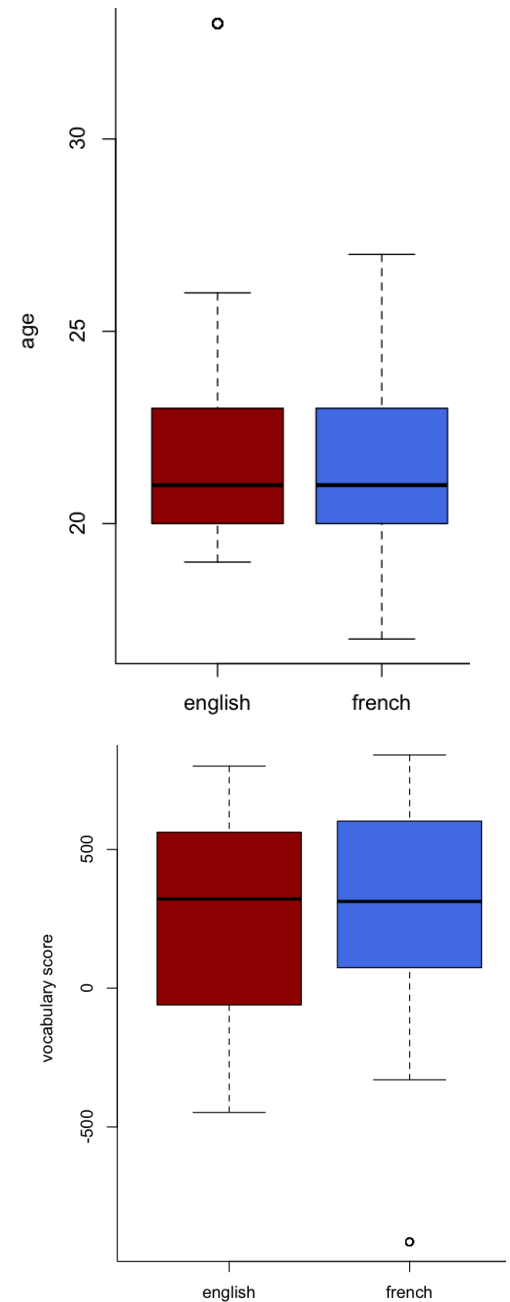
Experiment design

four construction types

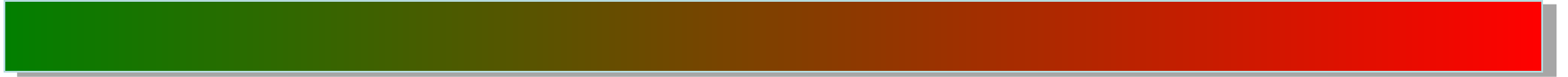
- ditransitive
 - Der Vater schenkt ihm eine Bohrmaschine.
 - Der Professor denkt uns eine Erklärung.
- caused motion
 - Die Retter brachten den Mann in eine Klinik.
 - Das Kind trinkt den Saft in den Bauch.
- the conative construction
 - Der Spieler tritt nach dem Ball.
 - Der Gärtner gießt nach der Pflanze.
- the ‘reflexive way’ construction
 - Die Helfer wühlen sich durch den Schutt.
 - Die Pflanze wächst sich ins Fenster.

three groups

- 44 Germans (control group)
- 35 native speakers of English
 - 20 F, 20 M
 - mean age = ~22
 - mean vocabulary score = 239.2
- 30 native speakers of French
 - 20 F, 10 M
 - mean age = ~21.5
 - mean vocabulary score = 320.5

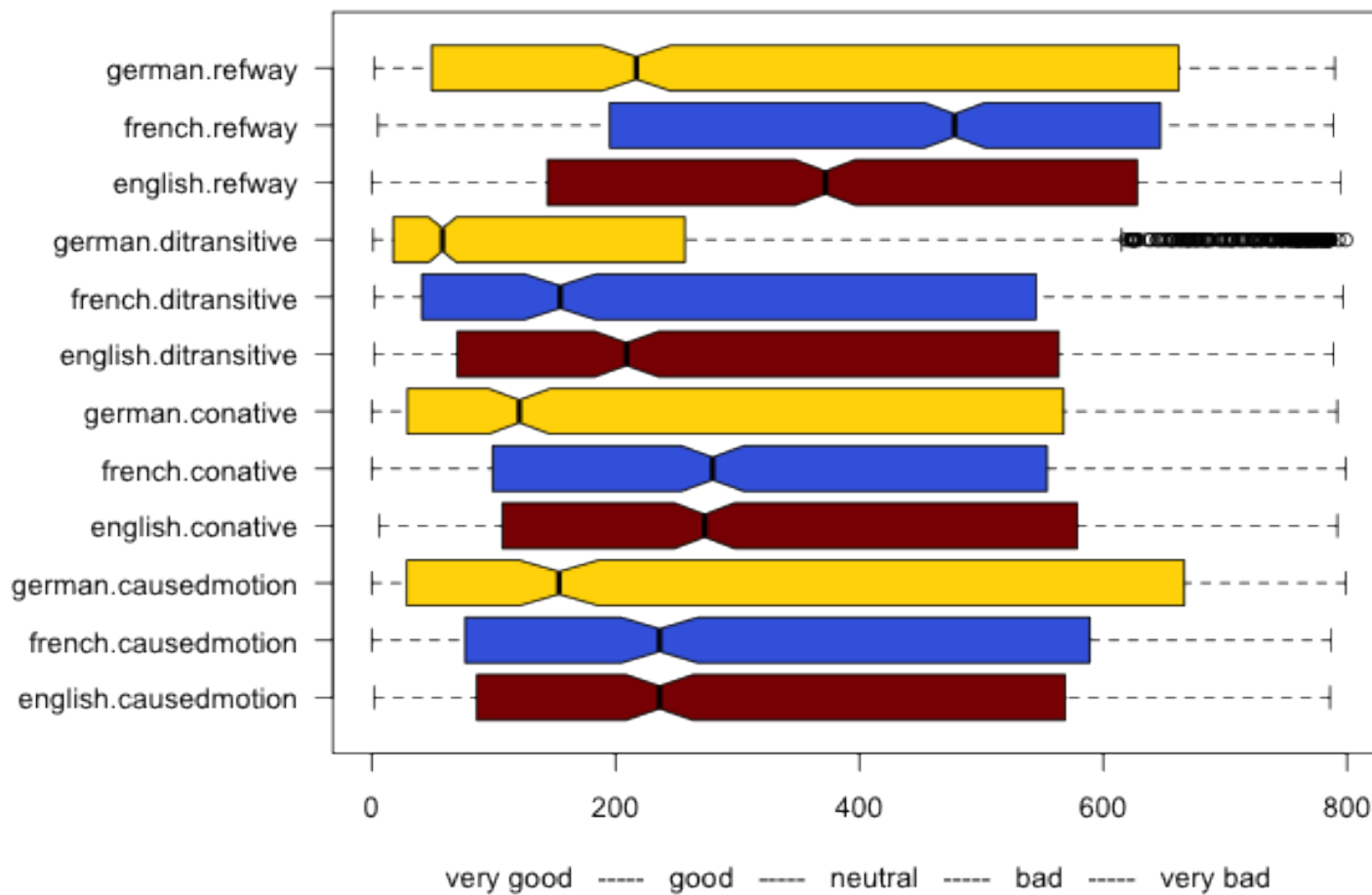


the task



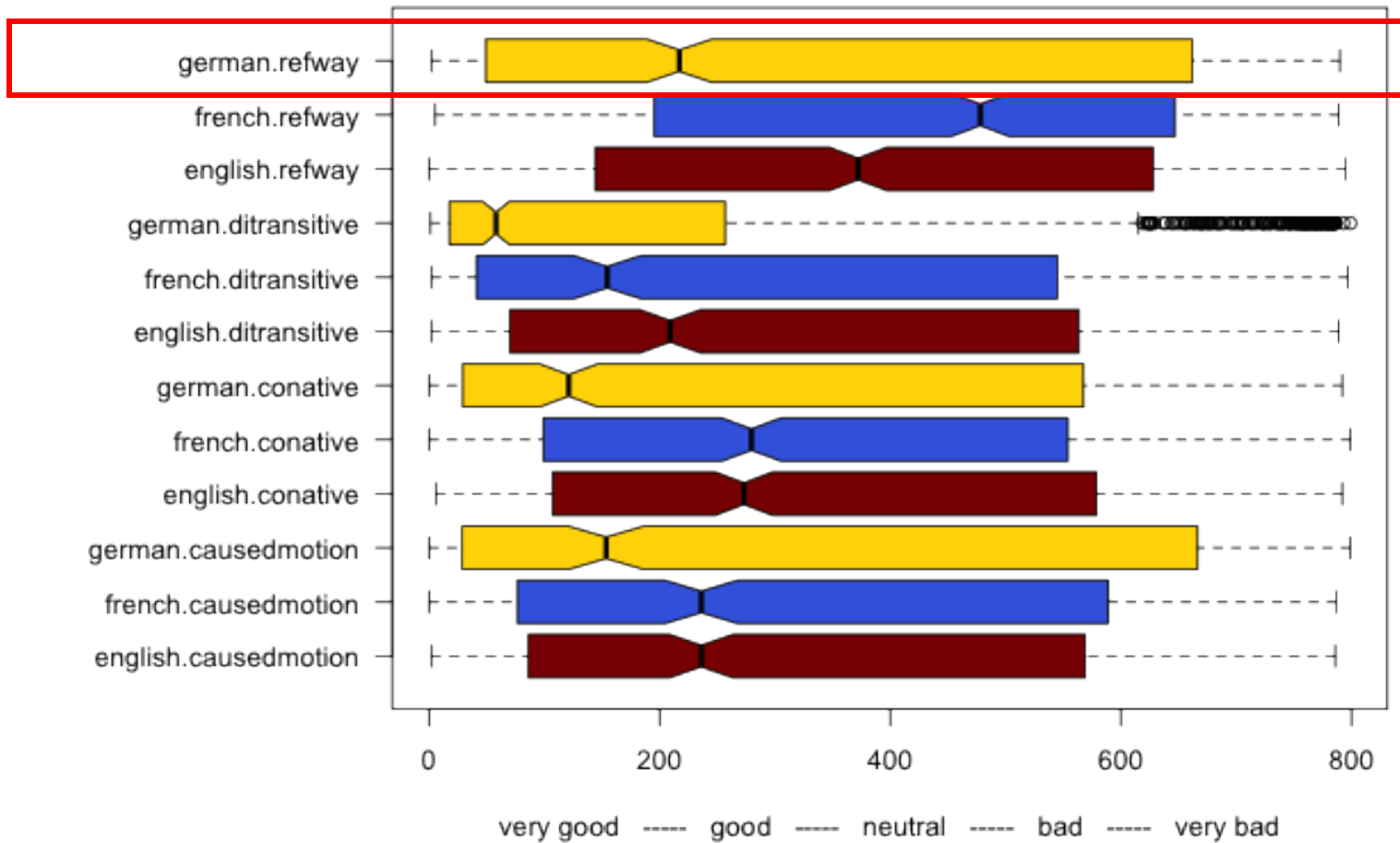
- Where on the color bar does this sentence belong?
- “Die Ratte nagt sich in die Speisekammer.”

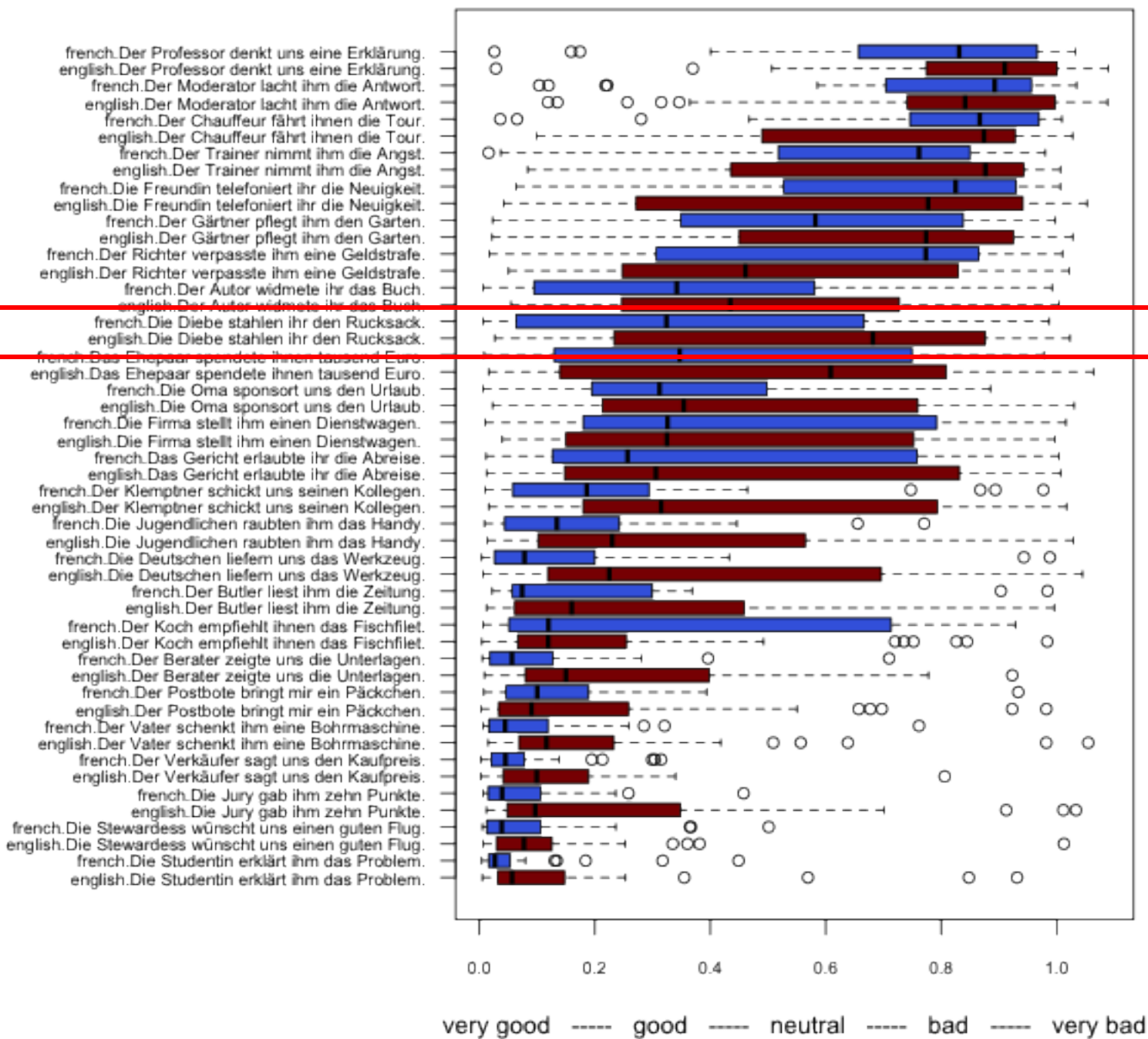
ratings across four constructions

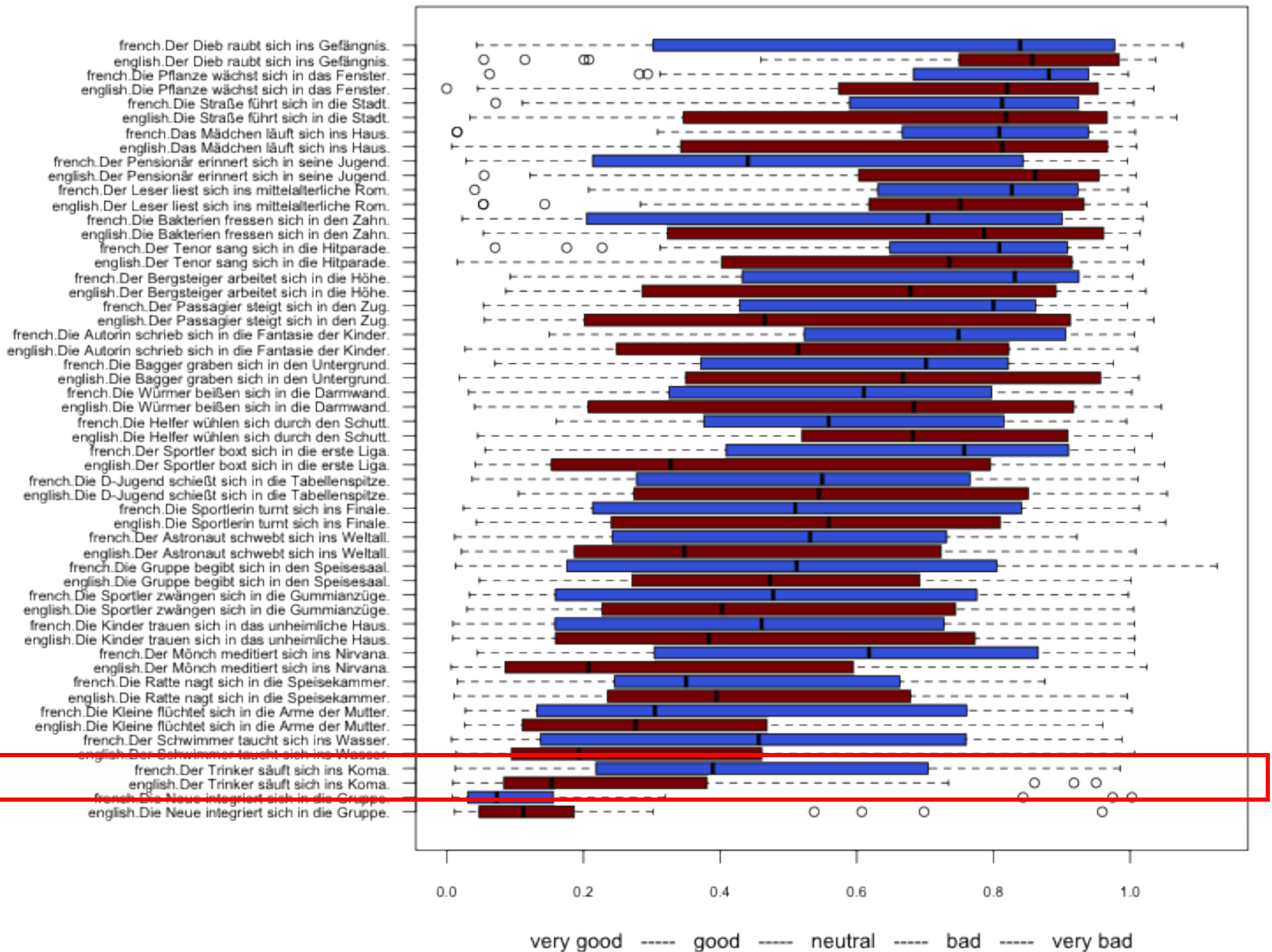


lmer(rating ~ language*construction + (1|stimulus) + (1|subject))

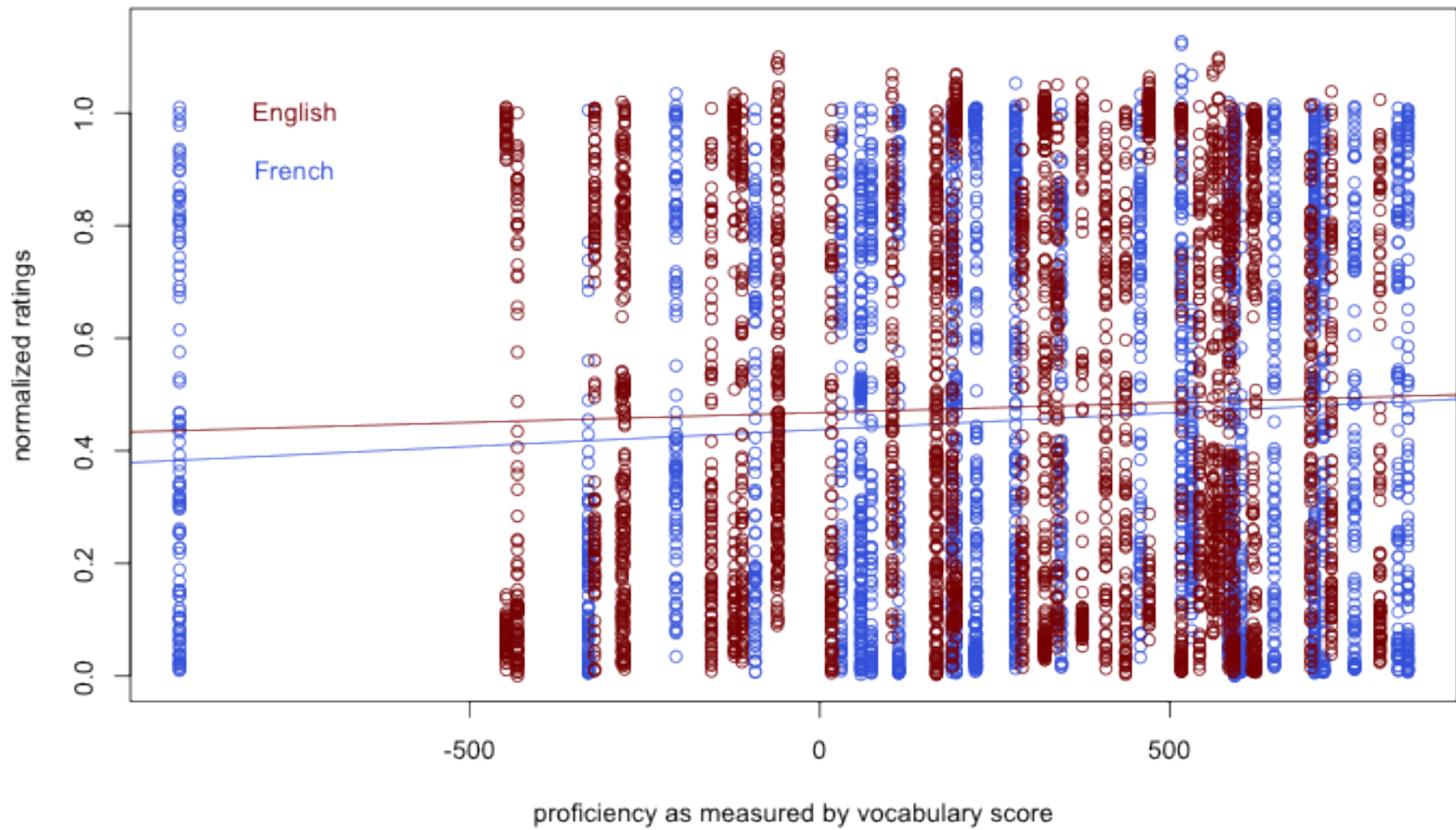
ratings across four constructions



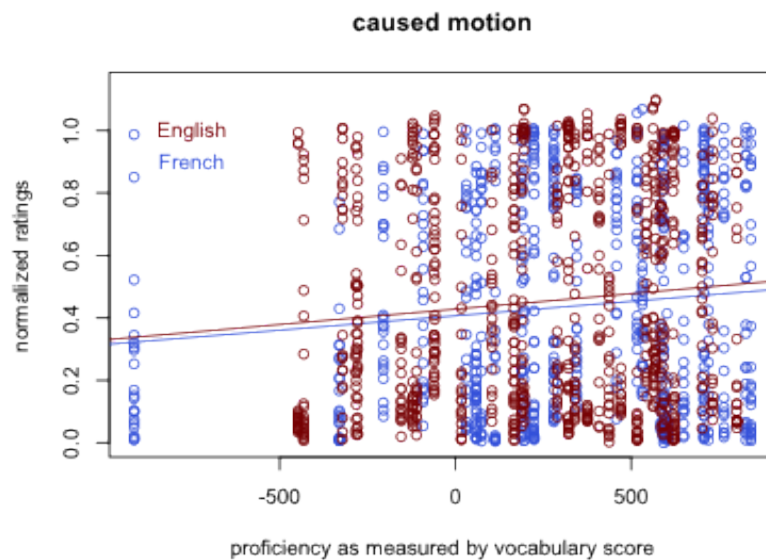
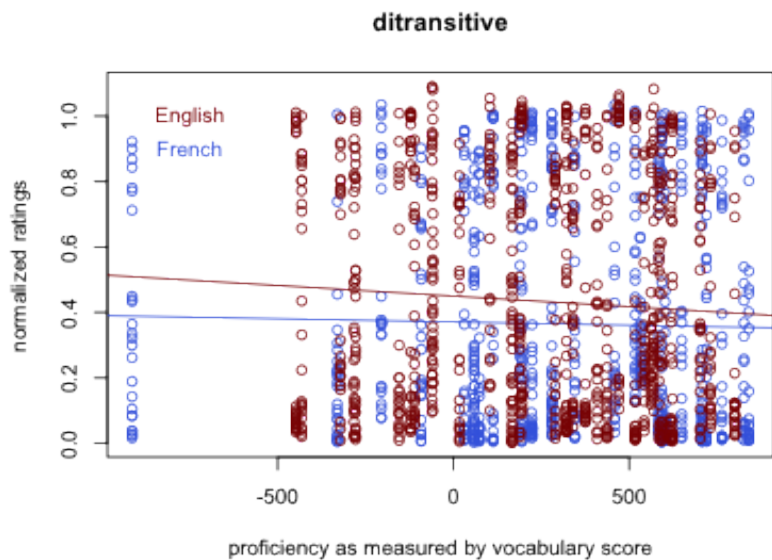
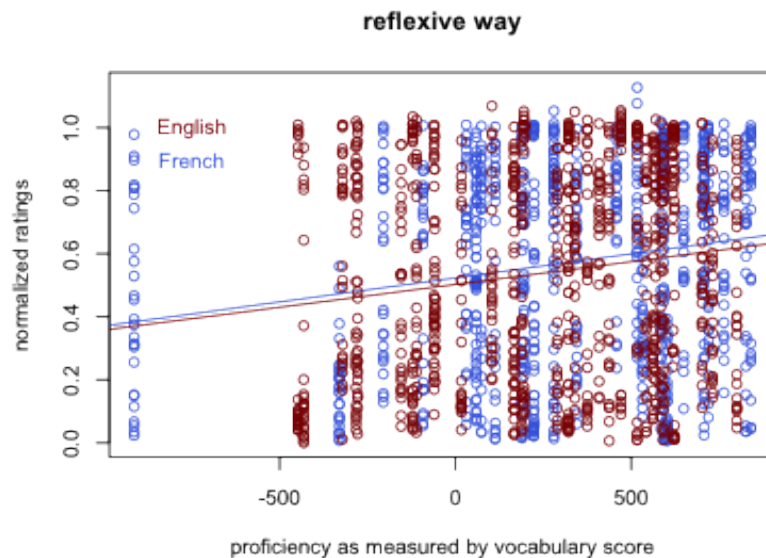
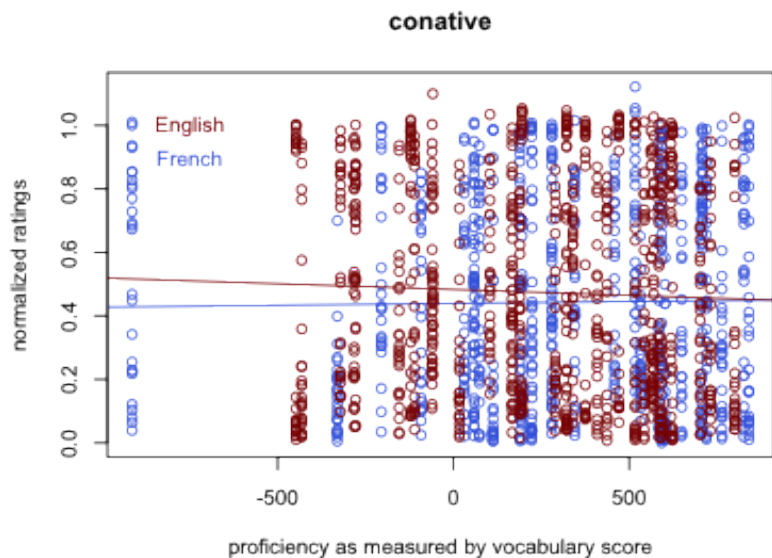








$\text{lmer}(\text{rating} \sim (\text{language} + \text{construction} + \text{vocscore})^2 + (1|\text{stimulus}) + (1|\text{subject}))$



Summing up our results

L2 learners are conservative

constructional tolerance

- a constructionally prolific L1 does not lead to constructional tolerance in general
- different groups are tolerant towards different constructions
 - French speakers accept creative ditransitives
 - English speakers accept creative reflexives

the role of proficiency

- L2 learners do not become more tolerant with increased proficiency
- tendency towards conservatism
 - reflexive way construction
 - caused-motion construction
- steady state
 - conative construction
 - ditransitive construction

Constructions across Grammars

- part of L2 learning:
 - establishing correspondences between constructions in L1 and L2
- a beginner's strategy? an expert's strategy?
 - increased proficiency \neq increased tolerance
- the role of individual constructions:
 - L2 is acquired against the backdrop of individual L1 constructions, not large-scale characteristics of the L1

Many thanks!

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