



READING AID?

- German highlights the head of the NP by capitalizing its initial letter
- It is assumed to be a reading aid [1-2]
- Benefits for readers, challenging for writers [2-4]
- Contradictory results for Dutch [5-6]



THREE THEORIES

Noun capitalization:

- 1 helps syntactic parsing of written sentences [7]
- 2 pre-activates words from mental lexicon [8]
- 3 helps to activate words based on its shape [9]

Theory 1 makes unclear predictions for Dutch, whereas theory 2 & 3 would predict a slowdown

CONDITIONS

Three conditions:

- N** normal Dutch spelling
- C** following German noun capitalization rules
- H** nouns highlighted by darkening them

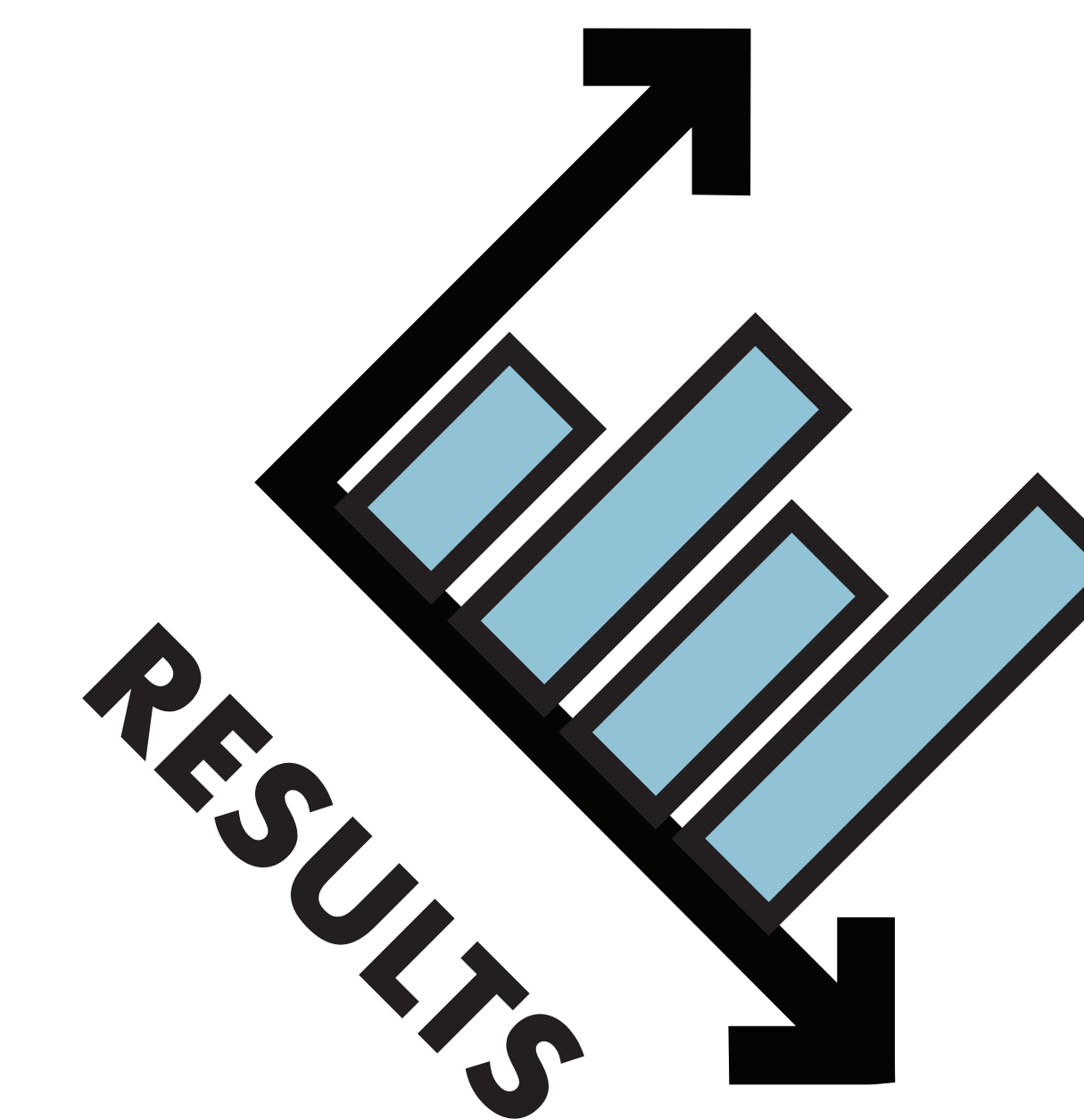
15 native Dutch participants, *Eye-Link Portable Duo*, participants received no payment, the experiment took 30 minutes

STIMULI

Participants read 6 texts paragraph-wise

The texts (see website):

- are about various topics,
- have the same length & the same complexity,
- contain 5 NP-types (e.g., DET+NOUN), each type is used at least 4x per text,
- no proper nouns (except sentence initial)



RECRUITMENT SOFTWARE

???

check if participant suits requirements



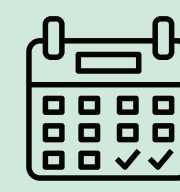
attach important files



completely anonymous



create message templates



participants select their own time slots



fill out a survey after the experiment

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The experiment, including scripts to generate the AOIs can be found at:

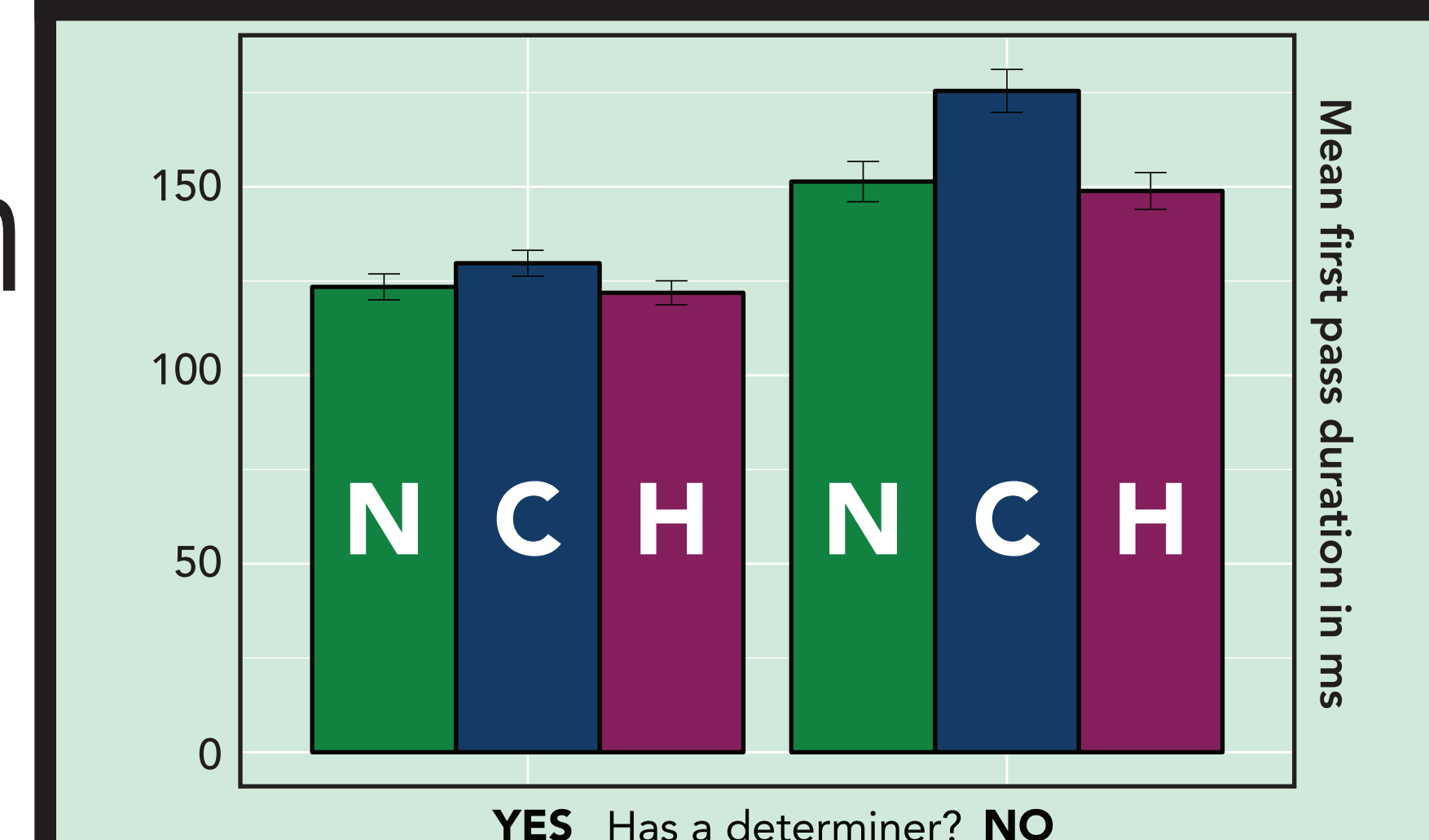
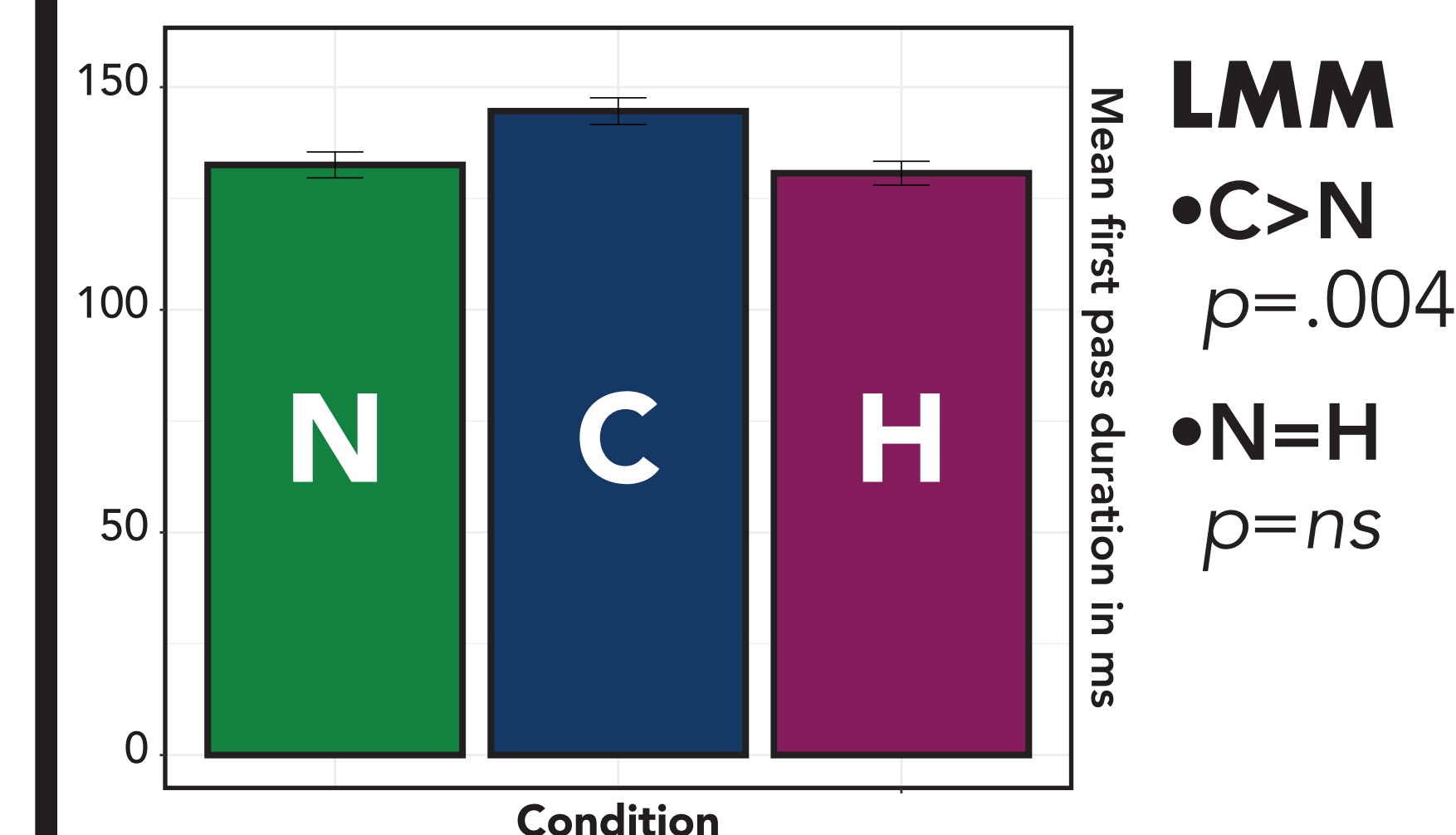
www.tabu.pol.works

* Eye-tracking study (N=15): German noun capitalization slows down reading process in Dutch → does not seem to be a reading aid

* NP type plays important role: the slowdown for capitalized NPs was smaller for NPs with a determiner compared to NPs without

* Previous research has a methodological bias: comparing common spelling against the uncommon → unfair comparison

* Caution interpreting results → avoid presenting consensus



BONUS MATERIALS



CAUTION

Despite this methodological bias, noun capitalization is often presented as a reading aid in didactical material [10-12] and even in introductions into linguistics [13-14]:

“Selbst holländische Muttersprachler lesen schneller, wenn das Niederländische, das normalerweise eine gemäßigte Kleinschreibung hat, nach den Regeln des Deutschen geschrieben wird” (Eisenberg, 2013: 329)

FUTURE RESEARCH

In this, and previous studies, we've compared common against uncommon spelling, which is a biased comparison. Possibly we could test native participants in similar languages reading exactly the same text. If we find Germans to read faster compared to other countries, this might indicate noun capitalization is a reading aid.¹

ROLE DETERMINER

Second LMM shows:

- speed-up due to the determiner is present across all conditions
- the effect of capitalization is stronger when there is no determiner present → indicates that the determiner, signaling an NP, seems to be important for processing



C>N & N=H

First linear mixed-effects model (LMM) shows:

- significant longer fixation on capitalized nouns compared to normal condition
- no significant differences between the normal and highlighted condition → highlighting nouns does not seem to be a productive mechanism in Dutch

