

Agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses: the role of inversion and prosody¹

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1. Russian binominal clauses

Binominal copular clauses feature minimally the copular verb and two noun phrases in nominative case.

Russian binominal clauses exhibit agreement variation (1).

- (1) [*Pričina* *avarii*]_{F.SG} *byla*_{F.SG} /*byli*_{PL} [*neispravnye* *tormoza*]_{PL}.
reason of failure was.F.SG /were.PL broken brakes
'The reason of failure were the broken brakes.'

1. Russian binominal copular clauses

~ **Class 2 : Class of identificational sentences:**

- (4) [*Edinstvennyj, kto stal na nashu storonu*], byla_F *Varvara*.
'The only one who took our side was Varvara.'

~ **Class 1 with different agreement pattern:**

- (5) *Svad'ba Natashi* bylo *poslednee radostnoe sobytie*.
'Natasha's wedding was the last happy event.'

~ **Class 2 with different agreement pattern:**

- (6) *Ego cel'* vsegda byla (**bylo*) *sluzhenie ljudjam*.
'His goal has always been serving people.'

The special intonation rule:

- (7) a. *Poza moja* – bylo *velichie*.
'My pose was greatness.'
b. *Poza ego* byla – *shik*.
'His pose was chic.'

1. Russian binominal copular clauses

Criticism of the approach by Paducheva & Uspenskij:

- the referentiality-based and agreement-based criteria can sometimes contradict each other;
- a set of problematic sentences;
- no agreement variation allowed.

Intuition 1:

Information structure *might* influence the choice of agreement pattern.

2. PREDICATIONAL VS. SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses

Germanic languages

— Position of a more referential NP.

PREDICATIONAL	<referential NP1, non-referential NP2>
SPECIFICATIONAL	<non-referential NP1, referential NP2>

(8) [Heycock 1994]

- a. *John was the culprit.*
- b. *The culprit was John.*

2. PREDICATIONAL VS. SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses

- Position of a more referential NP.
- Syntactic properties of SPECIFICATIONAL clauses.

1. Restrictions on *wh*-extraction:

[Grosu 1972; Heggie 1988; Moro 1997; Heycock, Kroch 1999]: English

- (9) a. *I believe that [the cause of the riot] was [a big surprise to us all].*
b. [*How big a surprise*] *do you believe [the cause of the riot was _____]?*
- (10) a. *I believe that [the cause of the riot] was [a picture of the wall].*
b. **[Which picture] do you believe that [the cause of the riot was _____]?*

2. Only overt copula in raising/ECM constructions: [Moro 1997], [Mikkelsen 2011]

- (11) a. I consider [s [DP a picture of the wall]_j (to be) t_j [DP the cause of the riot]]
b. I consider [s [DP the cause of the riot]_j *(to be) t_j [DP a picture of the wall]]

3. Agreement variation:

[Hartmann Heycock 2020]: German, Icelandic, Dutch, Faroese:

- (12) *Meiner Meinung nach, war/ waren [das Schlimmste am Urlaub]_{SG} [die vielen Mücken]_{PL}.*
my opinion after was/were the.SG worst at.the holiday the.PL many mosquitos
'In my opinion, the worst part of the holiday was the many mosquitos.'

3. Modelling the opposition

[Blom, Daalder 1977; Heggie 1988; Declerck 1988; Moro 1997, Mikkelsen 2005, den Dikken 2006, Hartmann, Heycock 2020]: both types of binominal copular clauses have the same base structure, the differences result from differences in derivation.

The underlying subject-predicate relationship with the corresponding small clause structure:

(13) be [sc [Subj XP] [Pred XP]]

3. Modelling the opposition

- (14) a. *was* [SC [Subj *a picture of the wall*] [Pred *the cause of the riot*]]
- b. [Subj *a picture of the wall*]_i *was* [SC t_i [Pred *the cause of the riot*]] **PRED**
- c. [Pred *the cause of the riot*]_i *was* [SC [Subj *a picture of the wall*] t_i] **SPEC**

SPECIFICATIONAL clause as an inverted PREDICATIONAL clause.

The position of a non-referential NP:

[Blom, Daalder 1977; Heggie 1988]: A'-position, COMP/SpecCP

[Moro 1997, Hartmann, Heycock 2016, 2017, 2020; Béjar, Kahnemuyipour 2017, 2018]: A-position, Spec,TP

3. Modelling the opposition

What motivates the inversion?

[Moro 2000]: the need to derive a non-symmetric structure for it to be linearized.

[Den Dikken 1995b, den Dikken 2006]: the need to create a structure in which the subject can check its Case-feature.

[Mikkelsen 2005, Shlonsky, Rizzi 2018, Hartmann 2019]:

- the movement is motivated by the information structure,
- [+Topic] / [+Focus] feature on T and one of the NPs.

3. Modelling the opposition

Constraints on information structure of SPECIFICATIONAL clauses.

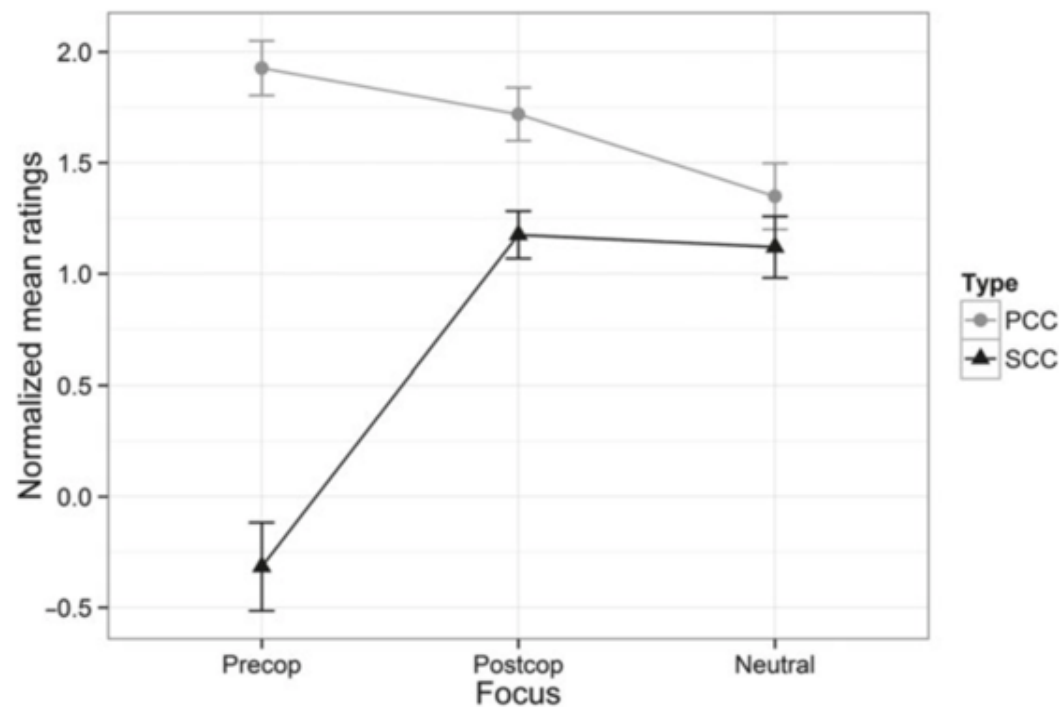
[Heggie, 1988, Heycock 1994, Heycock, Kroch 2002, Hartmann 2019]:
focus on NP2 only

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| (15) A: Who was the culprit? (John or Bill?) | questioning a referential NP |
| B: JOHN was the culprit. | PREDICATIONAL reading |
| B': The culprit was JOHN. | SPECIFICATIONAL reading |
| | |
| (16) A: What was John? | questioning a non-referential NP |
| (Was John the culprit or the victim?) | PREDICATIONAL reading |
| B: John/he was the CULPRIT. | SPECIFICATIONAL reading |
| B': *The CULPRIT was John/him. | |

3. Modelling the opposition

Experimental study by [Hartmann 2019]:

Appropriate context to support the intonational patterns of focus.
Focus on a non-referential NP1 in English specificational clauses is unacceptable.



3. Modelling the opposition

Corpus study by [van Praet 2019]:

600 sentences from London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (1953 – 1987)

	Specificational	Predicational
Widest pitch excursion		
referential NP	35%	45%
non-referential NP	65%	55%
Highest intensity, or loudness		
referential NP	33%	38%
non-referential NP	67%	62%

3. Modelling the opposition

What motivates the inversion?

[Mikkelsen 2005]: the movement is motivated by the information structure, [+Topic] feature on T and one of the NPs.

[Shlonsky, Rizzi 2018]: the subject NP moves to the low Focus position, the movement results in a *freezing effect* and the further movement is restricted.

[Hartmann 2019]: the Focus-Background Mapping results in syntactic inversion of the background.

- The difference between PREDICATIONAL and SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses is not captured!
- Why non-referential NP in PREDICATIONAL clauses can be in focus?

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Information structure *might* be connected to the syntactic structure.

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4. The problem

In Germanic binominal clauses:

information structure as a reason for SPECIFICATIONAL inversion;

SPECIFICATIONAL reading allows for agreement variation.

The possible reasons for agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses:

the theme-rheme mapping?

the syntactic structure?

5. The information structure of specificational copular clauses

The linear position of NPs in SPECIFICATIONAL clauses is changed due to communicative or pragmatic factors (cf. the hyponym – hyperonym relation).

In English left dislocation obligatory leads to thematization [Bache, Davidsen-Nielsen 1997, Biber et al. 1999].

- (17) a. **A LITTLE ANGLE** I've worked out. [Benito 2009: (3)-(4)]
b. Now, **THOSE THINGS** I would have to give away.

- (18) a. What did the boy buy yesterday?
The boy bought **THE CHOCOLATES**.
THEME RHEME
- b. Where do the chocolates come from?
THE CHOCOLATES the boy bought.
THEME RHEME

5. The information structure of specificational copular clauses

In Russian the informational status of the dislocated element is not restricted.

(19) Čto včera kupil mal'čik?

a. Mal'čik ↗ kupil šokoladki ↘.
boy bought chocolates
THEME RHEME

b. Šokoladki ↘ mal'čik kupil.
chocolates boy bought
RHEME THEME

Kto kupil včera šokoladki?

c. Šokoladki ↗ mal'čik ↘ kupil.
chocolates boy bought
THEME RHEME

Annotation in spirit of [Paduceva, Uspenskij 1997], [Janko 2001]:

- a thematic accent on the constituent X (X↗),
- a rhematic accent on the constituent X (X↘),
- a pause between the constituents X₁ and X₂ (X₁ | X₂).

4. The problem

In Germanic binominal clauses:

information structure as a reason for SPECIFICATIONAL inversion;

SPECIFICATIONAL reading allows for agreement variation.

The possible reasons for agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses:

the theme-rheme mapping? → no data

the syntactic structure? → no data

5. The experimental study

Goal: investigate whether agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses depends on the theme-rheme mapping and the syntactic structure.

2 x 2 x 2 design

- PREDICATIONAL VS. SPECIFICATIONAL CLAUSE

[Heycock, Hartmann 2020]: the prototypical lexical material

- NUMBER AGREEMENT PATTERN (NP1 VS. NP2)

(20) a. [Prichina spora]_{F.SG} byla_{F.SG} / byli_{PL} [pretendenty na premiju]_{PL}.
reason of discussion was.f.sg / were.pl contenders for award
'The reason for discussion were the award contenders.'

b. [Komnaty osobnjaka]_{PL} byli_{PL} / byla_{F.SG} [sploshnaja tajna]_{F.SG}.
rooms of villa were.pl / was.f.sg complete mystery
'The villa rooms were complete mystery.'

5. The experimental study

2 x 2 x 2 design

- INFORMATION STRUCTURE (FOCUS ON NP1 / FOCUS ON NP2)
- Appropriate context to license the NP under focus as a rheme, the other NP – as a theme (a preceding question).
- The special intonation rule [Paduceva, Uspenskij 1997].
 - ⇒ 2 parallel experiments with different pause position.

96 sentences (64 target, 32 filler, 4 practice) on a 7-point Likert scale.

Grammatical and ungrammatical fillers. Two female voices.

All pauses of equal length. lab.js [Henninger 2019], JATOS3 [Lange, Kühn, Filevich 2015], Yandex.Toloka.

5. The experimental study

EXAMPLES OF STIMULI

(21) a. Question to NP1: *Chto pokazalos' tebe neudachnym v nashej reklamnoj kompanii?*
'What did you find strange in the advertizing campaign?'

Answer (focus on NP1): *Zametki v gazete* ↘ *byli/byla polnaja nerazberiha*
RHEME | THEME
'Articles in the newspaper were a complete mess.'

b. Question to NP2: *Kakoe u tebjaslozhilos' mnenie o zametkah v gazete?*
What opinion do you have about the articles in the newspaper?

Answer (focus on NP2): *Zametki v gazete* ↗ *byli/byla polnaja nerazberiha* ↘
THEME | RHEME
'Articles in the newspaper were a complete mess.'

5. The experimental study

EXAMPLES OF STIMULI

(22) a. Question to NP1: *Čto studenty delali na plošhadke?*
'What were the students doing on the set?'

Answer (focus on NP1): *Assistenty režissera* ↘ *byli/byla komanda studentov*
RHEME | THEME
'The group of students were director's assistants.'

b. Question to NP2: *Kto assistiroval režisseru vo vremja s'jemok?*
Who has been assisting the director during the shoot?

Answer (focus on NP2): *Assistenty režissera* ↗ *byli/byla komanda studentov* ↘
THEME | RHEME
'The group of students were director's assistants.'

5. The experimental study

EXAMPLES OF FILLERS

- (23) a. Question: *O čem vy besedovali s korrespondentom gazety?*
‘What were you discussing with the newspaper reporter?’
Korrespondent gazety ↗ | interesovalsja rezul'tatami issledovanij ↘
‘The newspaper reporter was interested in the research results.’
- b. Question: *Začem k vam prihodil pomošhnik mašinista?*
‘Why did the assistant driver come to you?’
Pomoshhnik mašinista napisal ↗ | zajavlenie ob uvol'nenii ↘
‘The assistant driver wrote the resignation notice.’
- c. Question: *Počemu dežurnyj operator hotel s toboj pogovorit'?*
‘Why did the operator on duty want to talk to you?’
Dezhurnyj operator ↗ | dogadalsja za prichiny neispravnosti ↘
Int.: ‘The operator on duty has found the reasons for failure.’
- d. Question: *Čto sprašival assistent režissera?*
‘What did the director’s assistant ask?’
Assistent režissera sprašival ↗ | ot poslednih novostej ↘
Int.: ‘The director’s assistant asked about the latest news.’

5. The experimental study

RESULTS

— 100 participants
(50 participants in each experiment,
43/57 females/males, mean age = 43, min. 18, max. 72, SD = 12)

— Linear mixed effects models:

Pause before copula:

INFORMATION STRUCTURE ($\beta = -0.21$, p-value = 0.009 *)

CLAUSE TYPE ($\beta = -0.32$, p-value $\ll 0.0001$ *)

INFORMATION STRUCTURE : CLAUSE TYPE ($\beta = 0.75$, p-value $\ll 0.0001$ *)

Pause after copula:

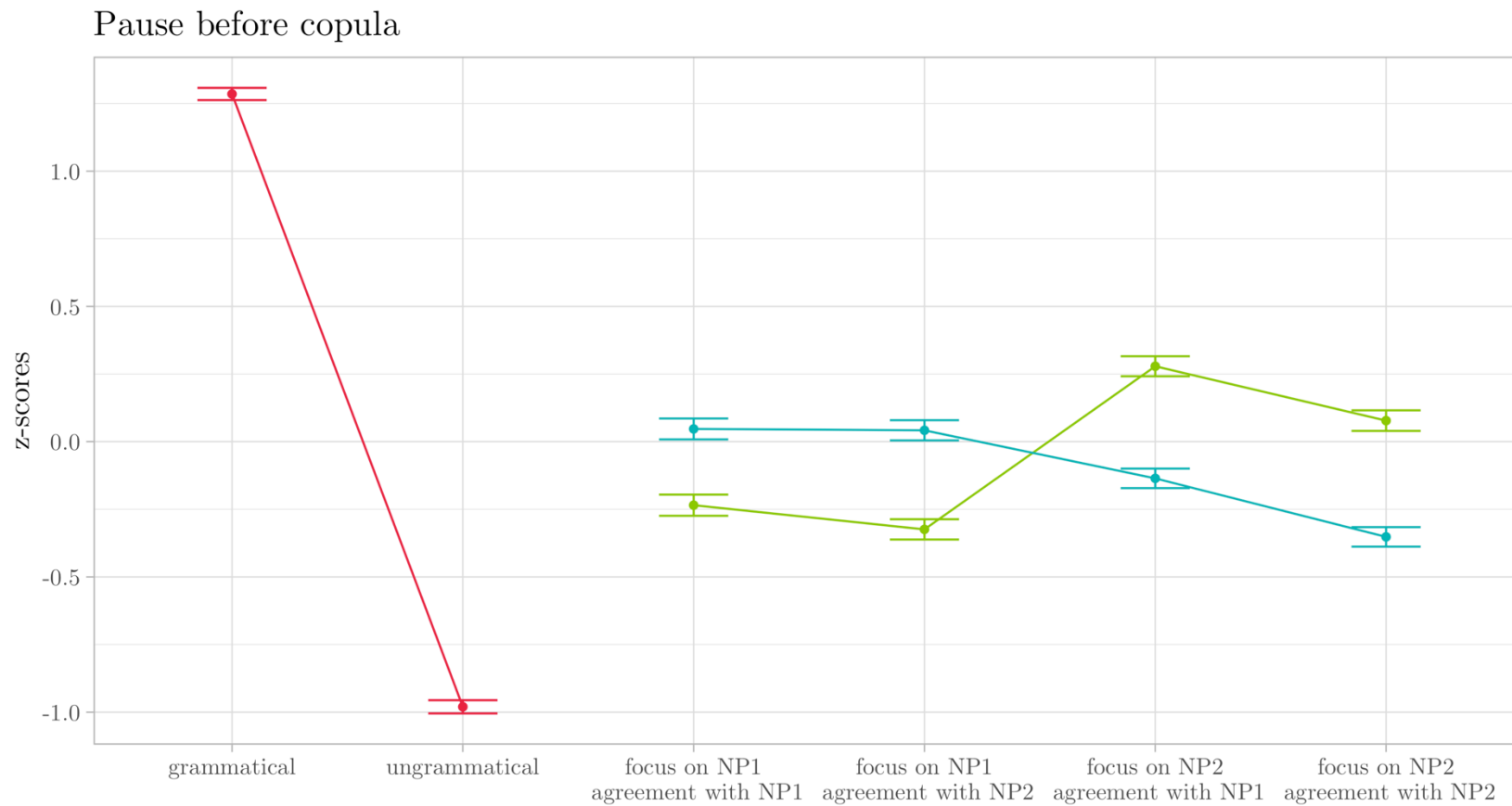
AGREEMENT ($\beta = -0.53$, p-value $\ll 0.0001$ *)

INFORMATION STRUCTURE : AGREEMENT ($\beta = -0.18$, p-value = 0.0398 *)

INFORMATION STRUCTURE : CLAUSE TYPE ($\beta = 0.43$, p-value $\ll 0.0001$ *)

5. The experimental study

RESULTS



Copular clause type — filler — specificational — predicational

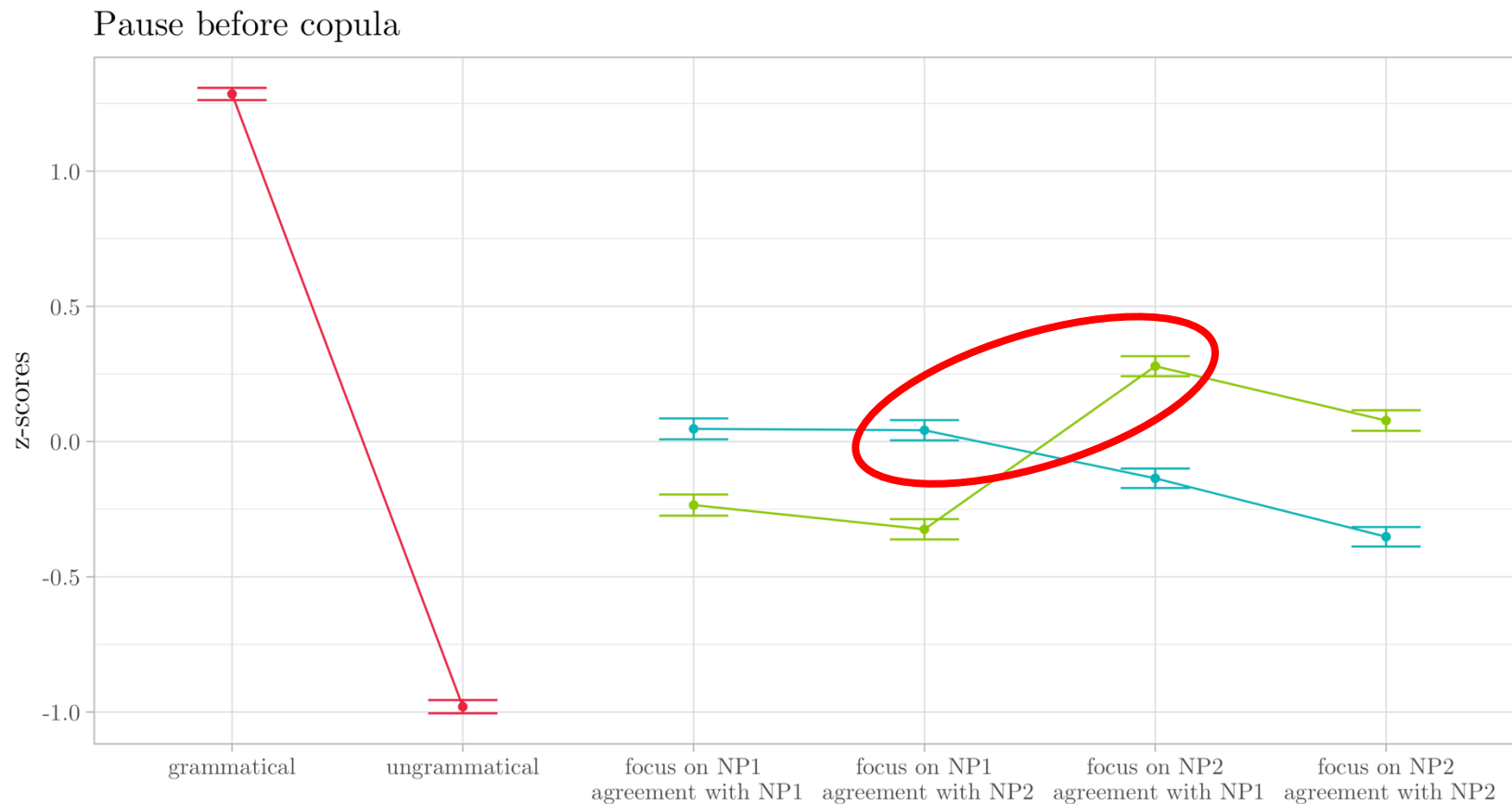
[*Zametki v gazete*]
articles in the newspaper

| *byli/byla*
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RESULTS



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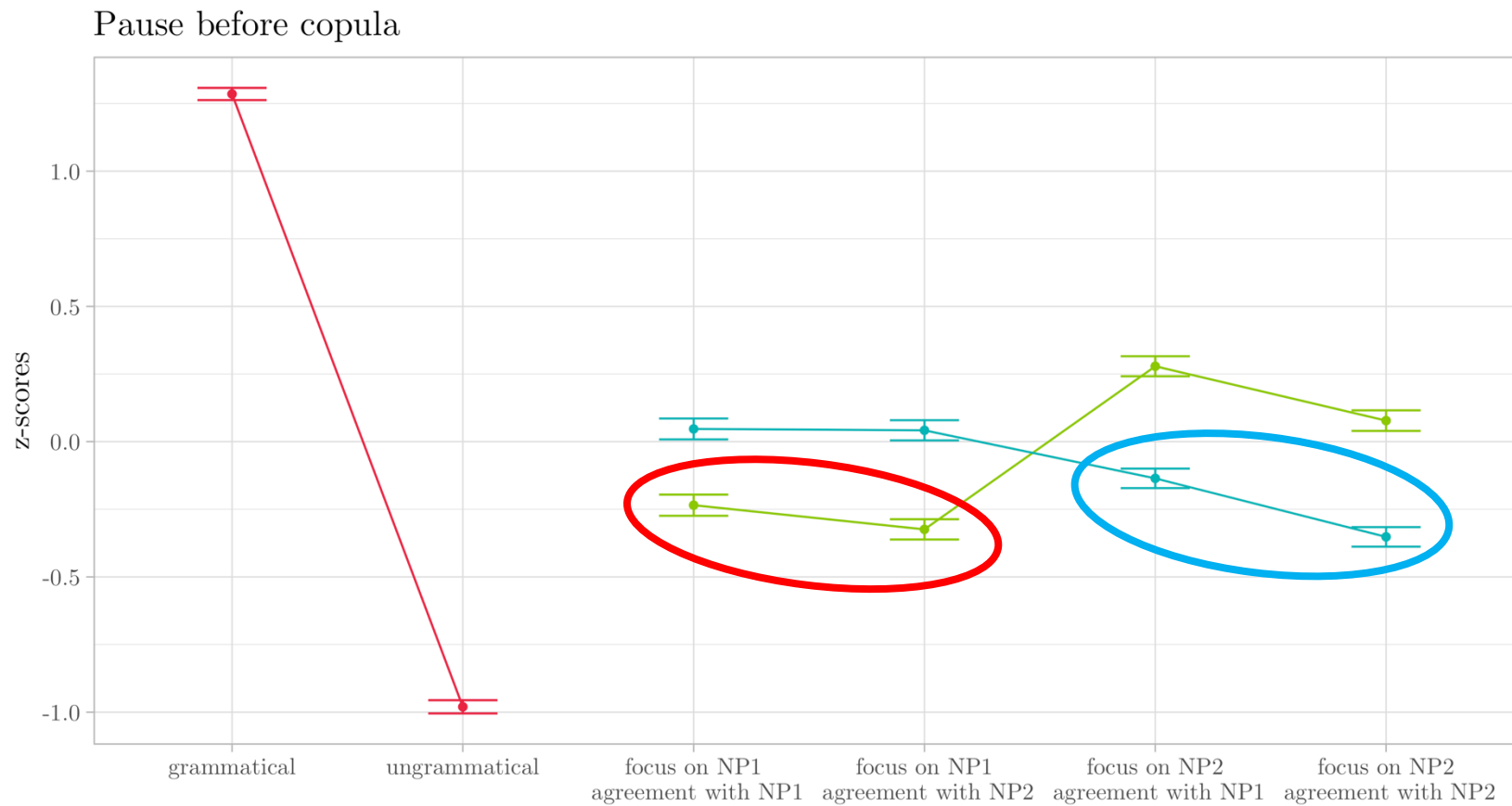
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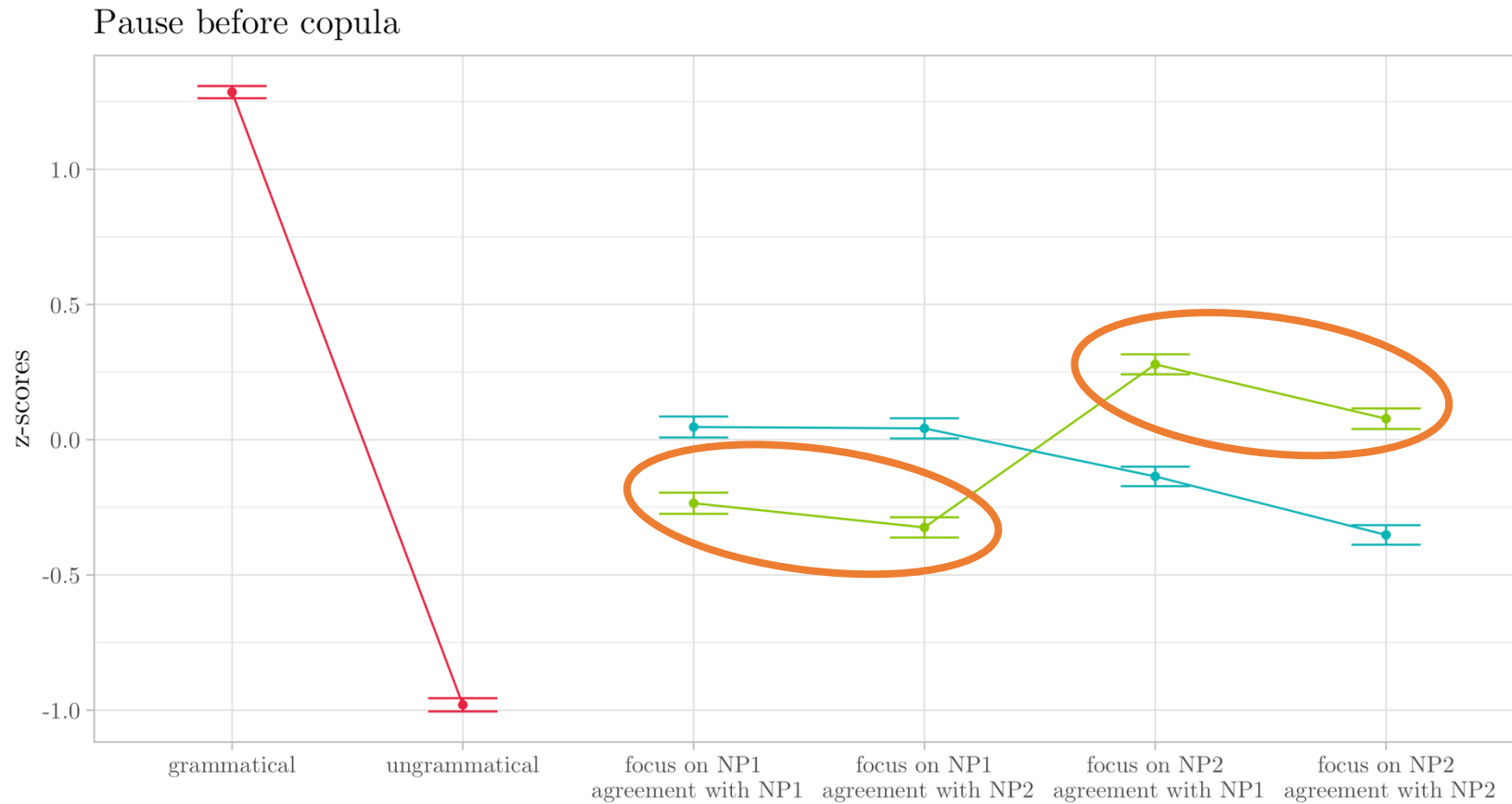
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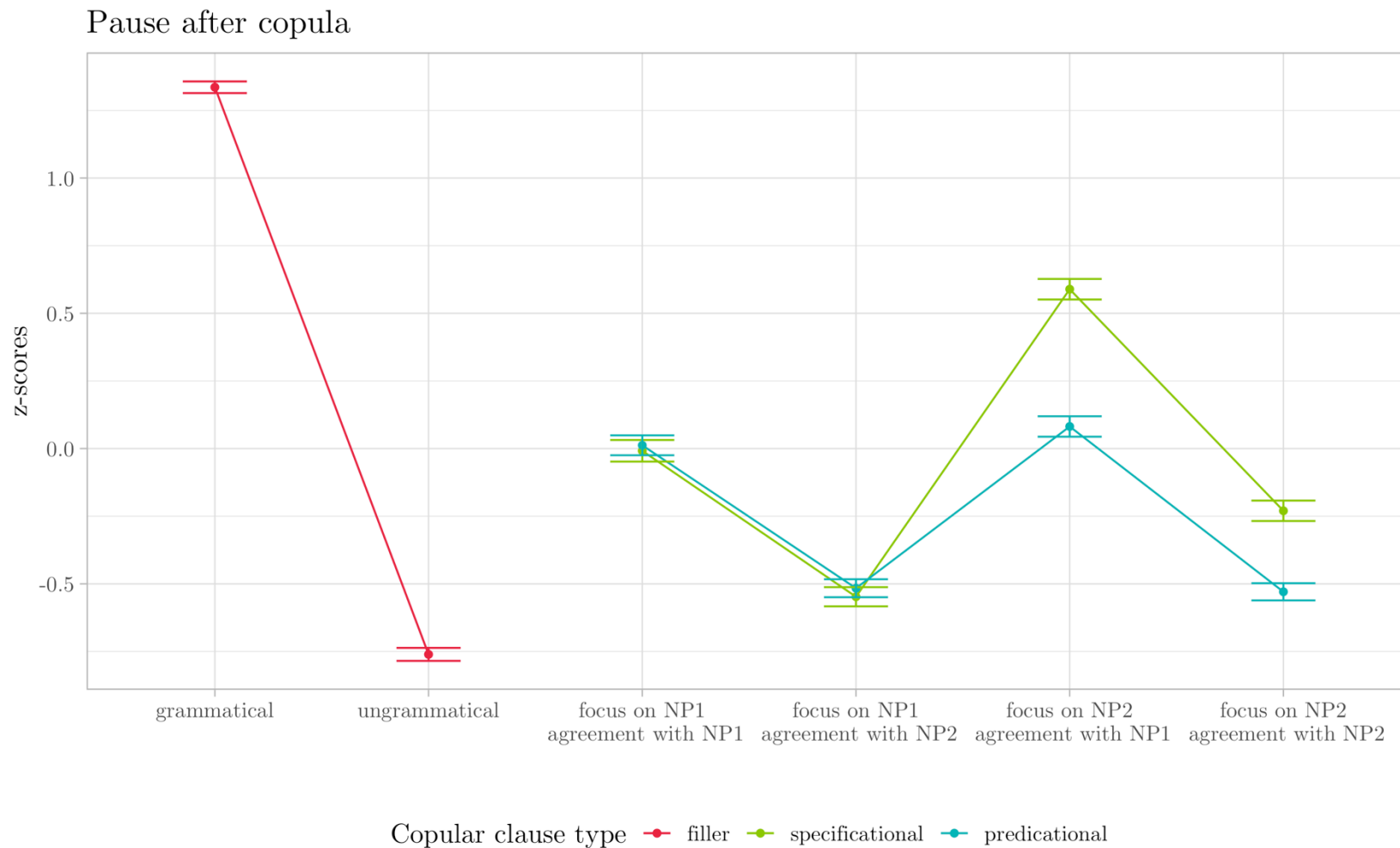
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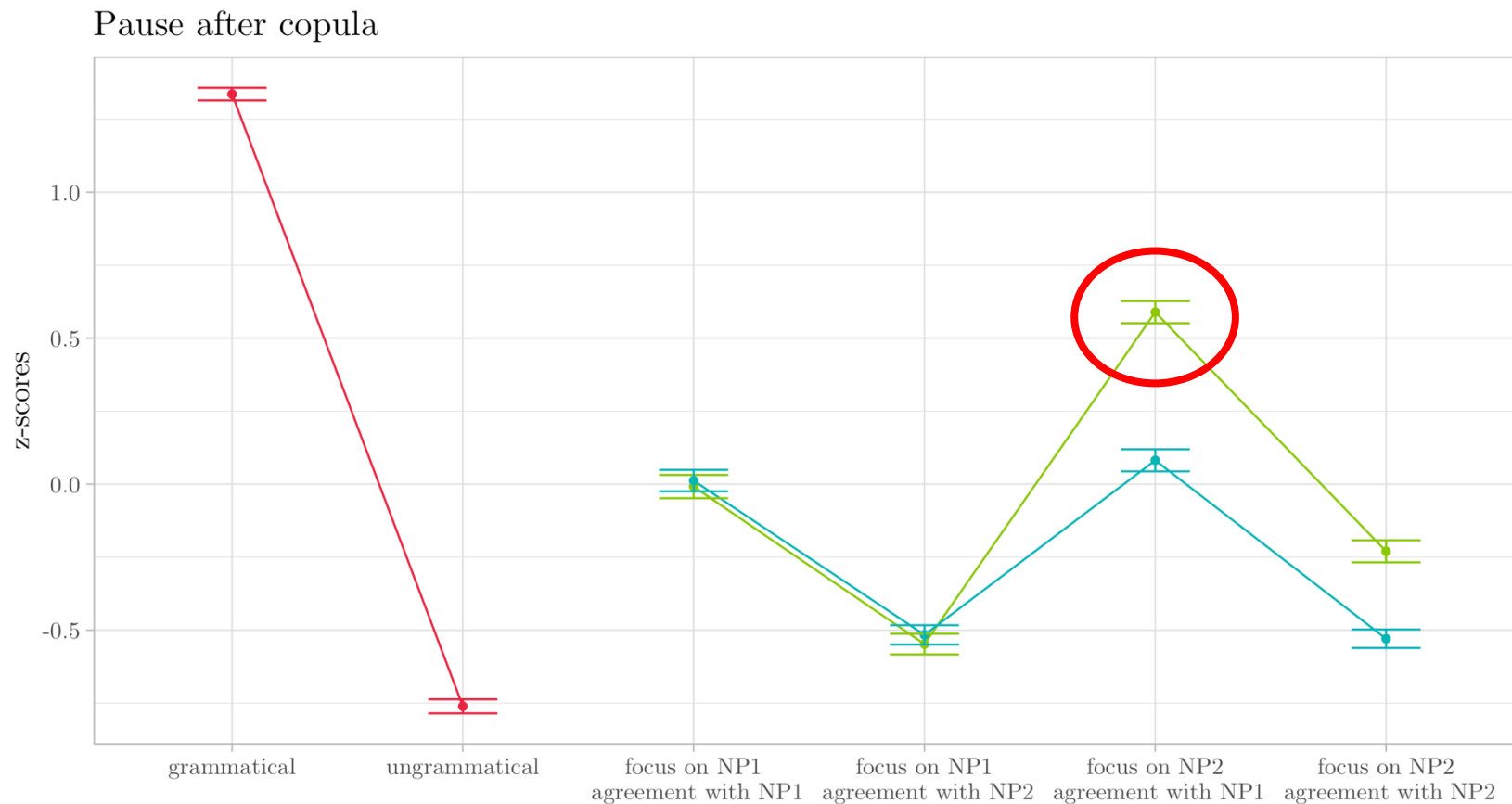
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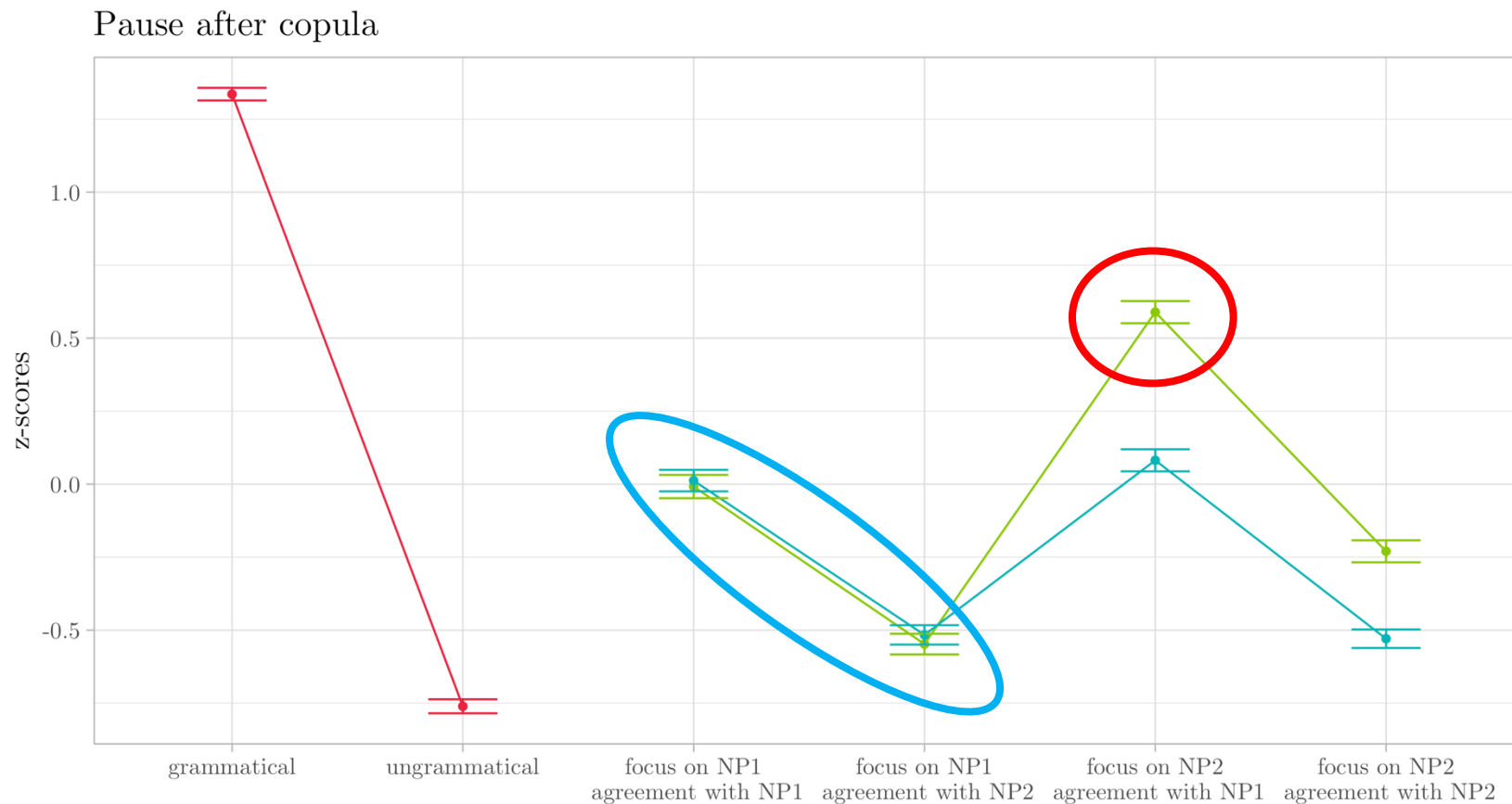
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5. The experimental study

RESULTS

Experiment 1, pause before copula:

- SCC with focus on NP2 and agreement with NP1 do not differ from PCC with focus on NP1 agreement with NP1 (p-value = 0.14).
- focus on NP1 in SCC is not ungrammatical.
- SCC with focus on NP1 do not differ from PCC with accent on NP2 (agreement with NP1: p-value = 0.81; agreement with NP2: p-value = 0.95).

Experiment 2, pause after copula:

- SCC with focus on NP2 and agreement with NP1 is the most acceptable condition (compared to all other conditions, p-value > 0.5).
- SCC and PCC with focus on NP1 are rated the same (p-value = 0.99).

6. Discussion

- The syntactic structure and theme-rheme mapping **do not** define agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses.
- The only factor that can influence acceptability of different agreement patterns is the pause position, i.e. **the prosodic segmentation**.

6. Discussion

We found the asymmetry between information structure of specificational and predicational copular clauses. However, this asymmetry is of different kind.

- Acceptability of focus position in binominal clauses of different types is defined by language-specific set of communicative transformations.
- Focus on NP2 is indeed «prototypical» for specificational copular clauses (rated as most acceptable).

6. Discussion

What is the nature of SPECIFICATIONAL vs. PREDICATIONAL copular clauses opposition?

[Mikkelsen 2005, 2011; Geist 2007; Partee 2010]: semantical analysis

referential NP as type $\langle e \rangle$

non-referential NP as type $\langle e, t \rangle$ / $\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$

(25)	a.	$\langle e \rangle$	<i>be</i>	$\langle e, t \rangle$	PREDICATIONAL
	b.	$\langle e, t \rangle$	<i>be</i>	$\langle e \rangle$	SPECIFICATIONAL
	c.	$\langle e \rangle$	<i>be</i>	$\langle e \rangle$	EQUATIVE

6. Discussion

Attributive use of NP1 in SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses [Paducheva 1985; Donnellan 1966, 1968]: the description refers to a person or an object that satisfies the description, specifies the content of the list.

SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses as question-answer / variable-value pairs

[Hartmann & Heycock 2020]:

operationalization of the category of SPECIFICATIONAL clauses.

~ “prototypical” lexical material

NP1 is a definite description, headed by a noun that either

i. denotes a role

winner(s), the only witness(es), her favorite drinking companion(s)

ii. is an abstract noun

reason/cause, problem, hope, inspiration

6. Discussion

In SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses NP1 serves as a cataphora:

NP1 opens a set/posits a variable that is forward referring

[den Dikken 2006]: the value that satisfies the variable cannot be anaphoric.

The opposition between PREDICATIONAL vs. SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses:

- «referential NP» vs. «non-referential NP»?
- attributive vs. predicative status of the «non-referential NP»?

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— «referential NP» vs. «non-referential NP»?

— attributive vs. predicative status of the «non-referential NP»?

⇒ Attributive status as the motivation for the SPECIFICATIONAL inversion.

The corresponding feature in a DP-shell, designated for the referential characteristics of the DP [Pereltsvaig, 2001, 2015].

7. Summary

- The information structure of SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses is defined by language-specific set of communicative transformations.
- No effect of the syntactic structure and theme-rheme mapping on agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses.

7. Summary

- The information structure of SPECIFICATIONAL copular clauses is defined by language-specific set of communicative transformations.
 - No effect of the syntactic structure and theme-rheme mapping on agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses.
- ⇒ We suggest that the agreement variation in Russian binominal clauses is determined by other factors, namely, the φ -features of potential agreement controllers.

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