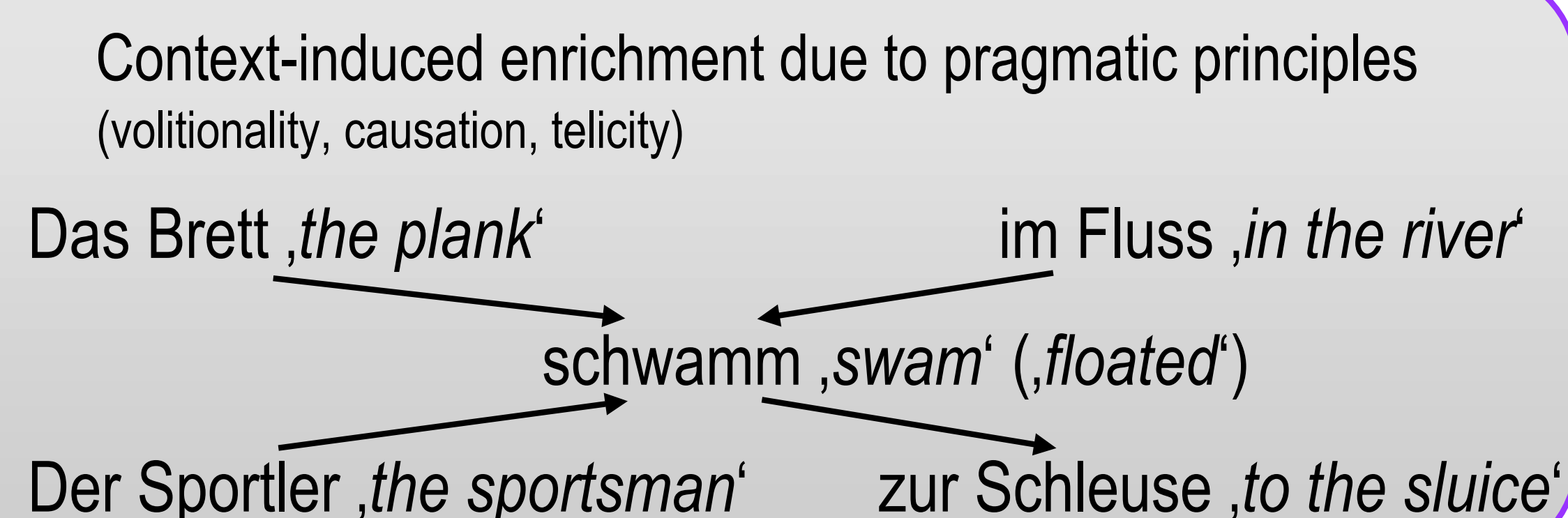# Agentivity, Animacy and Telicity: Inferences in Intransitive Clauses

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Hypotheses

Context-induced enrichment due to pragmatic principles
(volitionality, causation, telicity)

Das Brett ‚the plank'   im Fluss ‚in the river'

schwamm ‚swam' („floated")

Der Sportler ‚the sportsman'   zur Schleuse ‚to the sluice'

Our project examines the interpretation and syntactic behaviour of clauses with intransitve verbs in interaction with agentivity, animacy and telicity.

The example shows the underspecified German verb *schwimmen* ‚swim'.

In the context of an inanimate referent the event is interpreted as a non-volitional process. This process is interpreted as atelic with a locative PP like *im Fluss* ‚in the river´ and as telic with a directional PP like *zur Schleuse* ‚to the sluice´.

In the context of an animate referent the event is interpreted as a volitional act due to the maxim of informativity. According to this maxim the most specific interpretation compatible with the given situation is chosen.

<u>Hypothesis 1</u>: Many intransitive verbs are underspecified with respect to agentivity, animacy and telicity.

<u>Hypothesis 2</u>: Animacy triggers an implicature of volitionality according to the maxim of informativity (Foley / van Valin 1984, Engelberg 2005, Primus 2010, 2011a, b)

Theoretical Background

- multi-dimensional concept of agentivity (e. g. Cruse 1973, Dowty 1991, Primus 1999)
- multi-dimensional concept of telicity (e. g. Legendre 2007a, b)
- co-argument dependency model *
  grammar: Primus 1996, 1999, 2006
  neurolinguistics: Bornkessel 2002, Bornkessel & Schlesewsky 2006, Bornkessel-Schlesewsky & Schlesewsky 2009, Philipp 2008, 2010

* A patient is not determined by patient-specific properties but as the converse to the properties of the agent-participant.

Intransitive Verbs might be a problem for the co-argument depency model since there is no co-argument relation.

Without assuming a patient- or theme-role for intransitive verbs, these can only be sub-classified in terms of event structure, for instance by various dimensions of telicity, or by various dimensions of agentivity, including the lack of any agentive properties.

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Acceptability rating study

Design

	± animacy	± telicity	auxiliary selection
	(± vol. cause)		
Annika weiß, dass	**der Sportler**	<u>im Fluss</u>	geschwommen *ist* / *hat*.
Annika weiß, dass	**das Brett**	<u>im Fluss</u>	geschwommen *ist* / *hat*.
Annika weiß, dass	**der Sportler**	<u>zur Schleuse</u>	geschwommen *ist* / *hat*.
Annika weiß, dass	**das Brett**	<u>zur Schleuse</u>	geschwommen *ist* / *hat*.
Annika knows that	the sportsman	in the river	swum is / has
	the plank	to the sluice	

‚Annika knows that the sportsman / the plank swam (floated) in the river/ to the sluice.'

Method

acceptability rating study using questionnaires

26 monolingual native speakers of German

four point scale: 3 = `totally acceptable´ to 0 = `totally inacceptable´

32 critical items, three factors (ANIMACY, TELICITY, AUXILIARY)

Results

Main Effects
ANIMACY $(F(1.25) = 16.6, p < 0.001)$
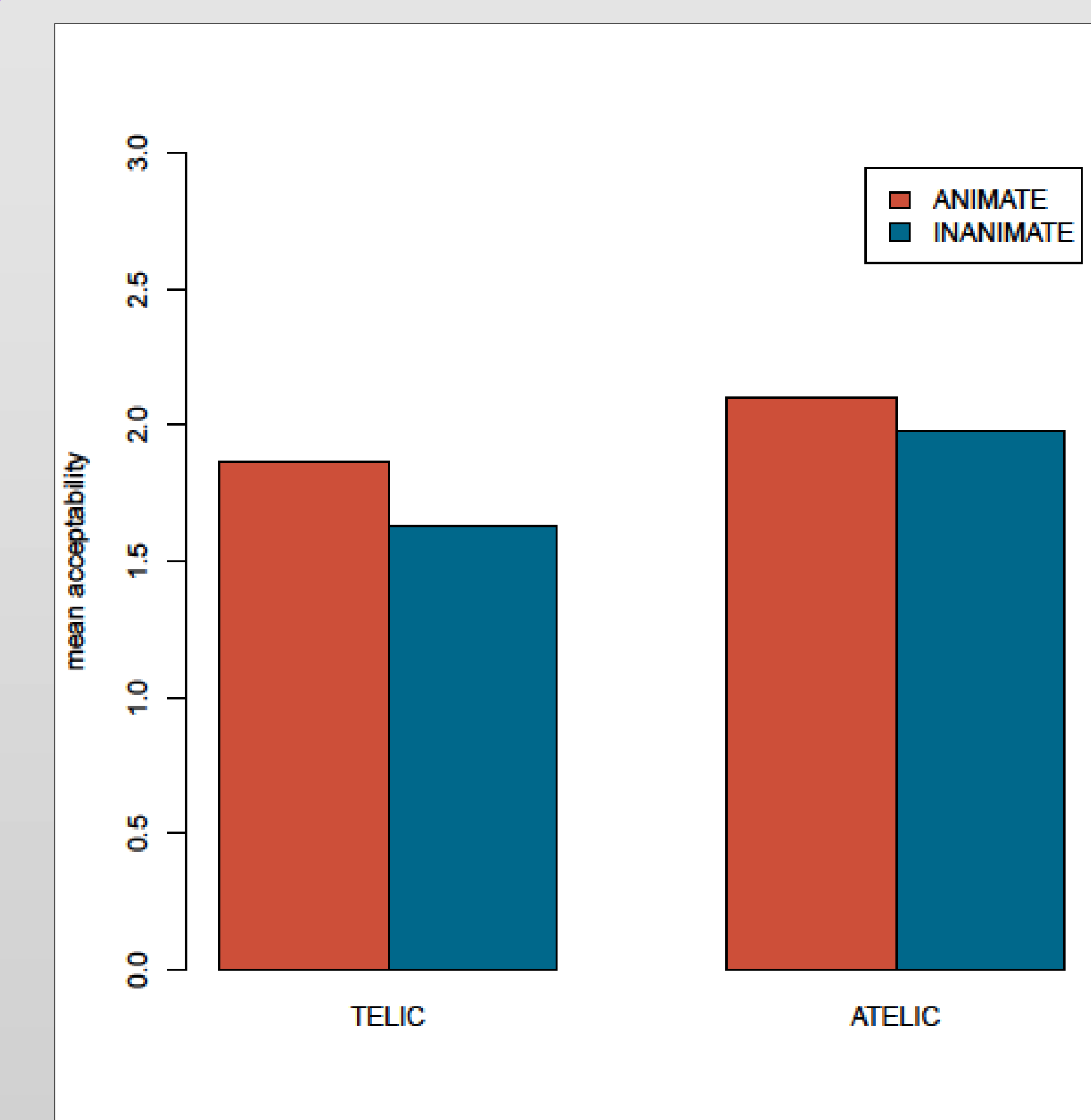TELICITY $(F(1.25) = 12.9, p < 0.01)$
AUXILIARY $(F(1.25) = 734.9, p < 0.001)$

Interaction TELICITY by AUXILIARY

Interaction ANIMACY by TELICITY
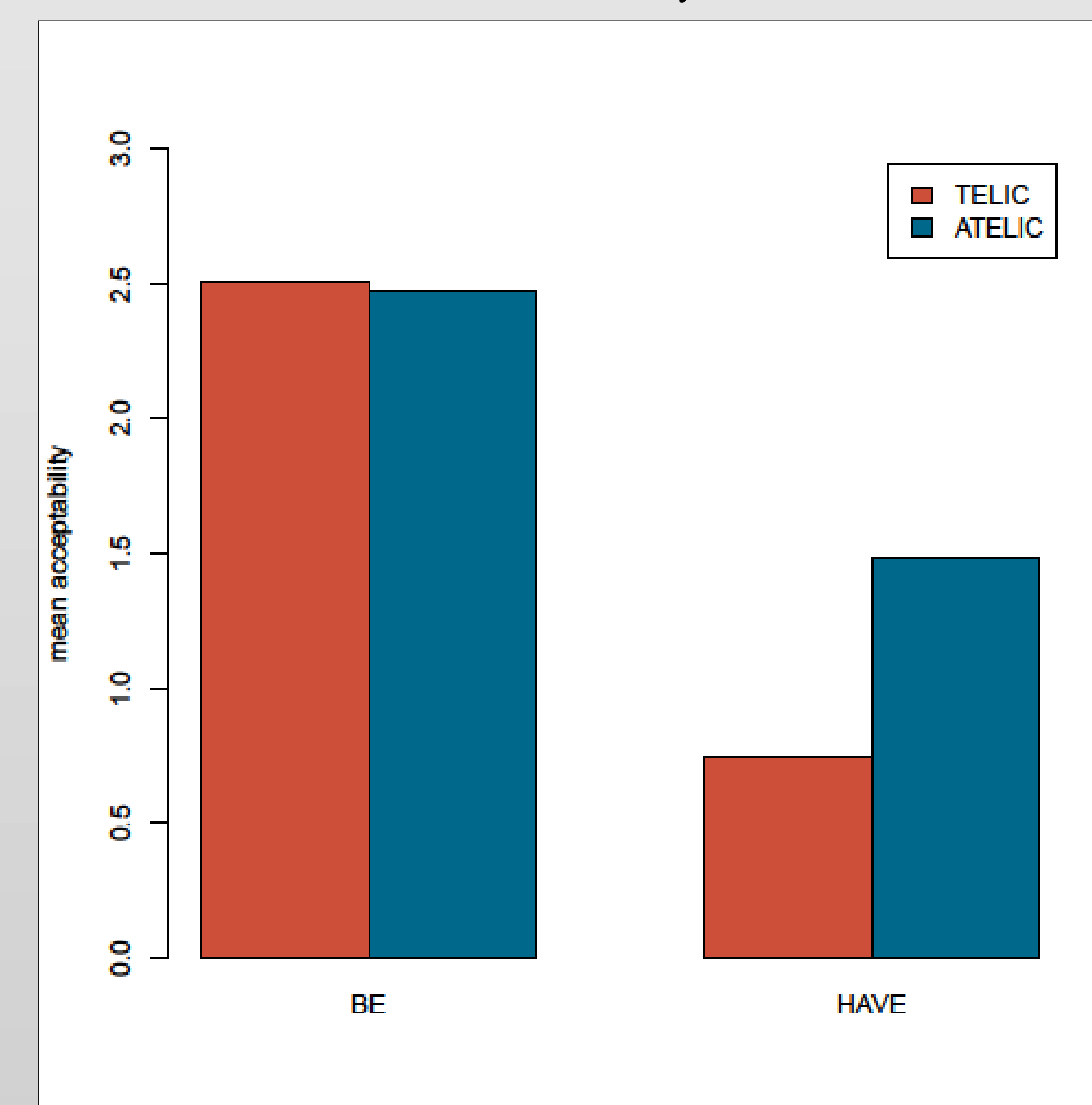
Interaction
TELICITY by AUXILIARY $(F(1.25) = 64.4, p < 0.01)$
   HAVE: TELICITY $(F(1.25) = 45.9, p < 0.01)$
   BE: TELICITY $(p > 0.1)$, n. s.

Interaction
ANIMACY by TELICITY $(F(1.25) = 3.6, p < 0.07)$, marginal
   TELIC: ANIMACY $(F(1.25) = 29.3, p < 0.001)$
   ATELIC: ANIMACY $(F(1.25) = 4.2, p < 0.06)$ marginal

Conclusion and Preface

The data show that Telicity interacts with Auxiliary Selection: in atelic contexts the acceptability of HAVE is increased in comparison to telic contexts. We have also found an interaction between Animacy and Telicity: in telic contexts the choice of an animate referent increases the acceptability in comparison to an inanimate one. However, contrary to the assumption in the literature (c.f. Keller & Sorace 2003), we did not found a direct interaction between Animacy and Auxiliary Selection.
We assume that the impact of Animacy on Telicity is caused by the implicature of volitional causation triggered by an animate referent. Causation increases the telicity of the event (cf. Liu 2007). Furthermore, the descriptive impression of the data gives rise to the assumption that the higher sensibility of HAVE with respect to TELICITY might be an epiphenomenon of this implicature. However, it might be the case that the effect of volitionality can be examined more precisely when the time course of incremental processing is taken into account. Therefore, we are preparing an ERP-experiment using a similar design to record brain activity at different points in time.