

Relative clause subextraction in English

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Q: Are English relative clauses always strong islands?

A: No; island effects are substantially reduced in certain environments.

Background

- RCs are “selective” islands in a handful of other languages (subextraction is tolerated in limited environments).
 - Mainland Scandinavian (Danish [5], Swedish [4], Norwegian [9])
 - Romance languages [3]
 - Hebrew [7]
- Environments that facilitate extraction in above languages:
 - Existential clause
 - Predicates like *know* (1st pers. subject)
 - DP predicate (Hebrew)

Why investigate English RCs?

- Limited earlier work identified unusually acceptable examples of subextraction that seem parallel to examples from the above languages.

Existential

This is the child who there is nobody who is willing to accept . [6]

Predicates like *know*

That's one trick that I've known a lot of people who've been taken in by . [2]

DP predicate

Isn't that the song that Paul and Stevie were the only ones who wanted to record ? [2]

References

[1] Bhatt, R. (1999). Covert Modality in Non-finite Contexts. UPenn. [2] Chung, S. & McCloskey, J. (1983). On the Interpretation of Certain Island Facts in GPSG. LI, 14(4), 704–713. [3] Cinque, G. On a Selective “Violation” of the CNPC. In *Structure Preserved* (pp. 81–89). John Benjamins. [4] Engdahl, E. (1997). RC Extractions in Context. *Wkg Pprs in Scand Syntax*, (60), 51–79. [5] Erteschik-Shir, N. & Lappin, S. (1979). Dominance and the Functnl Expl. of Island Phenom. *Theor Ling*, 6(1), 41–86. [6] Kuno, S. (1976). Subj, Theme, and the Spker's Empathy. In *Subj and Topic* (pp. 417–444). Academic Press. [7] Sichel, I. (2018). Anat. of a Ctrexamp: Extraction from RCs. LI, 49(2). [8] Sprouse, J., Wagers, M.W., & Phillips, C. (2012). A Test of the Reln Btw. Wkg Mem Capac. & Synt. Isl. Effects. *Lang*, 88(1), 82–123. [9] Taraldsen, K.T. (1982). Extraction from RCs in Norwegian. In *Reading on Unbounded Dependencies in Scand. Langs* (pp. 205–221). Almqvist & Wiksell International.

EXPERIMENT 1 (n=46)

Finite relative clauses // Acceptability judgment // 3x2x2 design

ENVIRONMENT: object, predicate, existential
STRUCTURE: [non-island], { island }
LENGTH: short, long

object

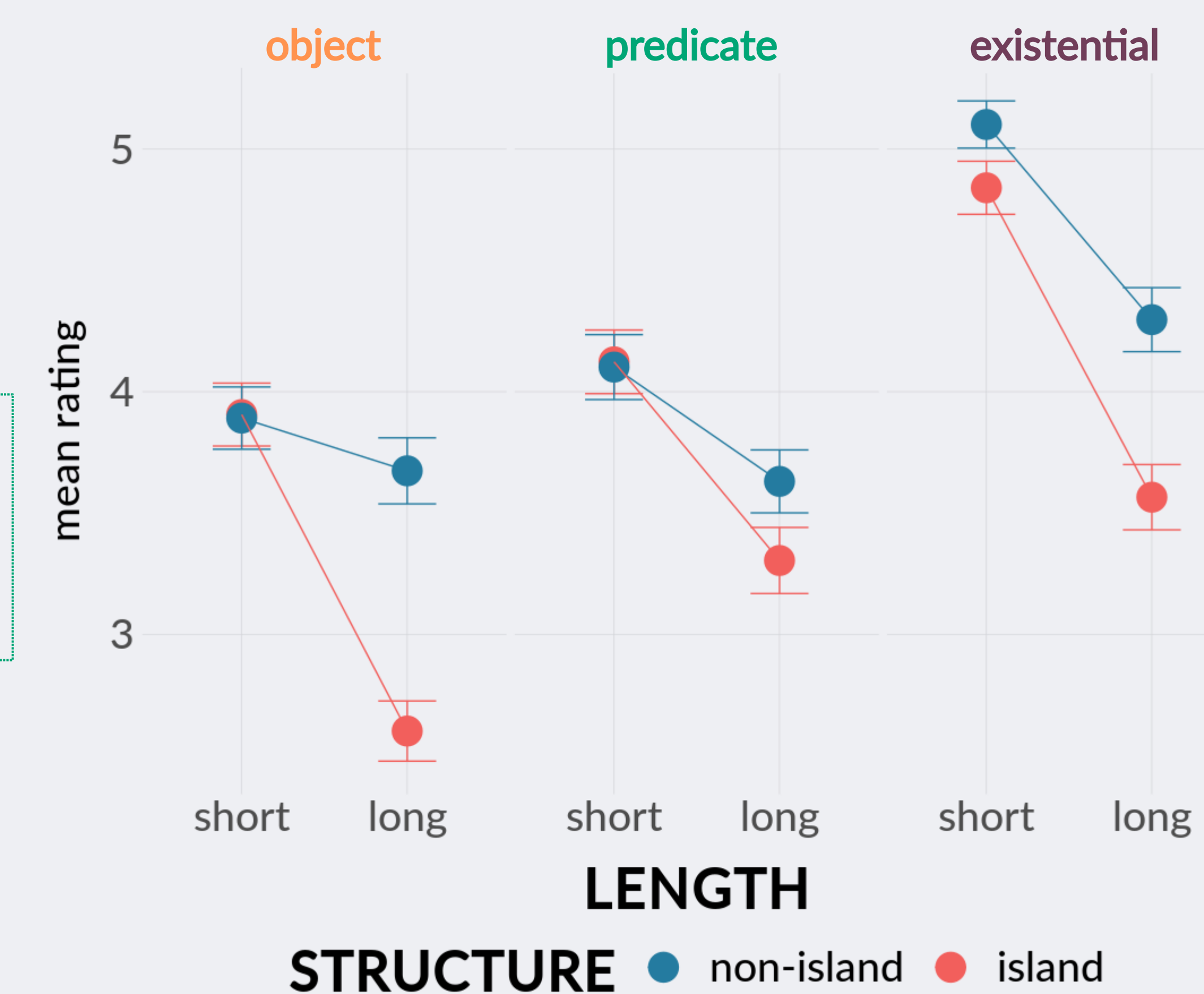
Who \circ thinks that Courtney saw [that only one art collector bid on this painting] ?
Which painting do you think that Courtney saw [that only one art collector bid on \circ] ?
Who \circ thinks that Courtney saw { the only art collector who bid on this painting } ?
Which painting do you think that Courtney saw { the only art collector who bid on \circ } ?

predicate

Who \circ thinks that Courtney believes [that only one art collector bid on this painting] ?
Which painting do you think that Courtney believes [that only one art collector bid on \circ] ?
Who \circ thinks that Courtney believes that she is { the only art collector who bid on this painting } ?
Which painting do you think that Courtney believes that she is { the only art collector who bid on \circ } ?

existential

Who \circ thinks that there is only one art collector [bidding on this painting] ?
Which painting do you think that there is only one art collector [bidding on \circ] ?
Who \circ thinks that there is only one art collector { who bid on this painting } ?
Which painting do you think that there is only one art collector { who bid on \circ } ?



Findings

Island effects in **object** ($p < 0.001$) and **existential** ($p = 0.038$), but not in **predicate** conditions ($p = 0.124$).

Differences-in-differences (DD) scores used as a proxy for island strength [8] indicate that RCs are over twice as “porous” in **predicate** and **existential** environments than in **object** environments.

DD scores

object	0.62
predicate	0.16
existential	0.26

EXPERIMENTS 2 & 3 (n=46)

Infinitival relative clauses // Acceptability judgment // Exp. 2 = 2x2x2 // Exp. 3 = 2x2

ENVIRONMENT: predicate, existential
STRUCTURE: [non-island], { island }
LENGTH: short, long

ENVIRONMENT: object, predicate
DEPENDENCY: referential, movement

Exp. 2 predicate

Who \circ thinks that Mary believes [only one senator to have watched this show] ?
Which show do you think that Mary believes [only one senator to have watched \circ] ?
Who \circ thinks that Mary believes that she is { the only senator to have watched this show } ?
Which show do you think that Mary believes that she is { the only senator to have watched \circ } ?

existential

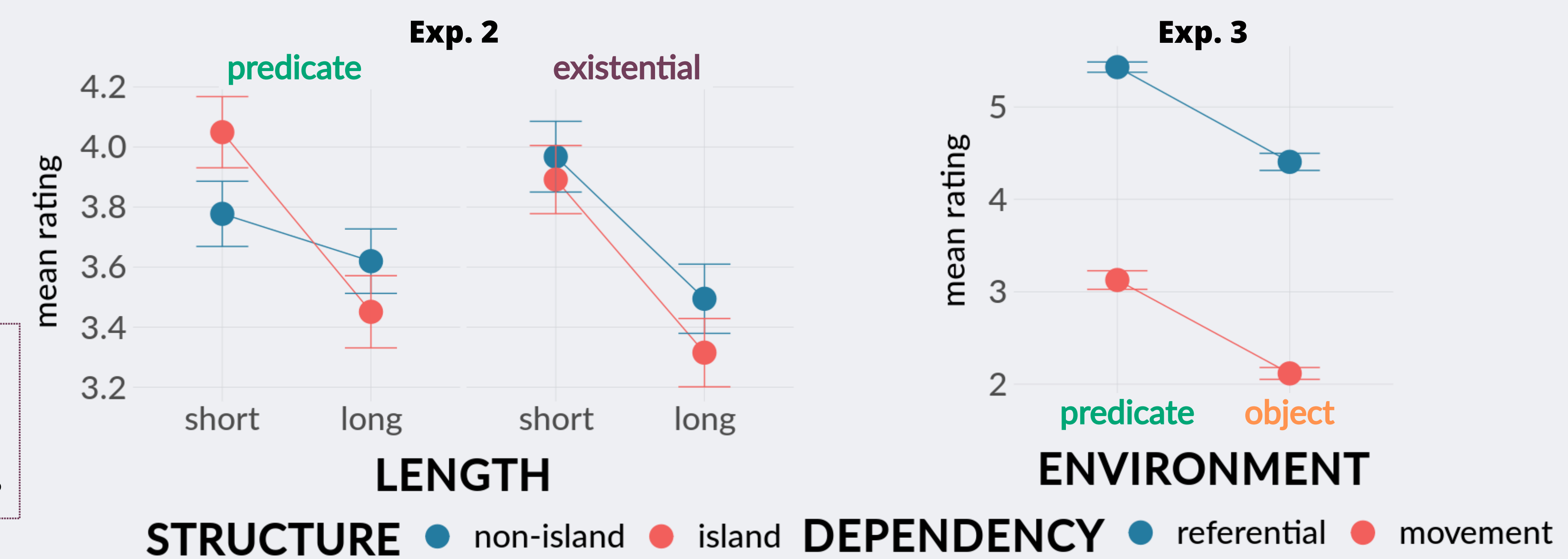
Who \circ thinks that Mary believes that there is only one senator [watching this show] ?
Which show do you think that Mary believes that there is only one senator [watching \circ] ?
Who \circ thinks that Mary believes that there is only one senator { to have watched this show } ?
Which show do you think that Mary believes that there is only one senator { to have watched \circ } ?

Exp. 3 object

Bill Nye, claims that Vivian interviewed the only scientist to have condemned him, .
Bill Nye is someone that Vivian interviewed the only scientist to have condemned \circ .

predicate

Bill Nye, claims that Vivian is the only scientist to have condemned him, .
Bill Nye is someone that Vivian is the only scientist to have condemned \circ .



Findings & Conclusions

Exp. 2: No island effects for infinitival RCs in either the **predicate** or **existential** environment ($p = 0.563$).

Exp. 3: Equal decrement in **predicate** and **object** ($p = 0.673$) → infinitival RCs unselectively allow extraction [1].

Finite RCs in English are more tolerant of subextraction in environments that facilitate subextraction in Hebrew, Scandinavian, and Romance languages. A unified analysis is warranted (in terms of either structure of processing).