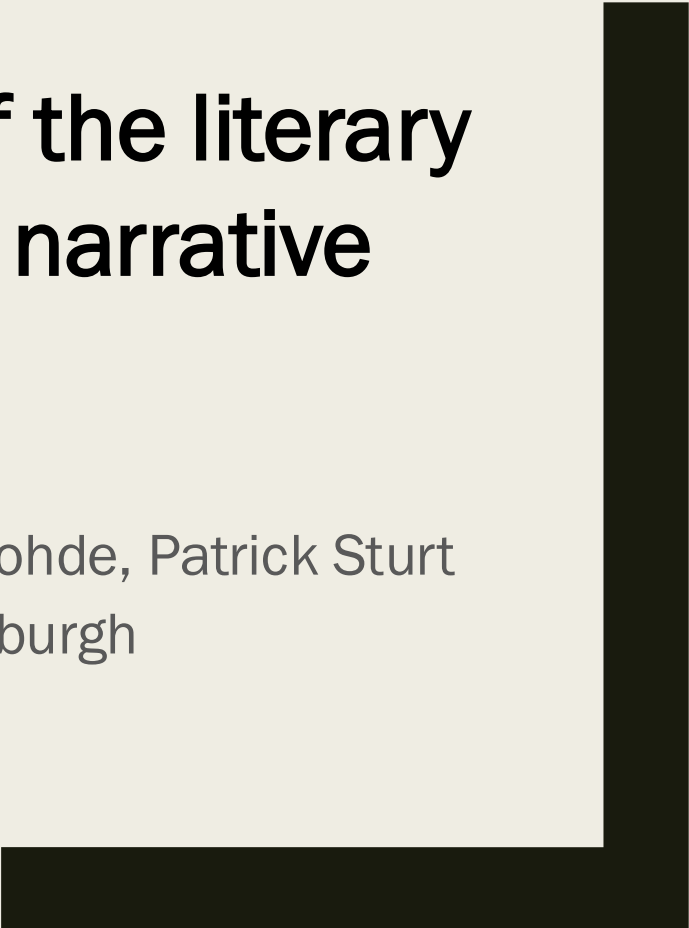




A psycholinguistic examination of the literary use of referring expressions in narrative

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Introduction

■ Aim:

- To investigate readers' sensitivity to the relationship between the use of referring expression and the manner of narration in literary narratives

Introduction

- The manner of rendering fictional events
 - Important consideration in literary narratives
- Degree of immediacy
 - Foreground or obscure the presence of the narrator -> how immediate the rendering of the fictional events -> perceived distance between the reader and the character's consciousness

Manner of narration: Immediacy

Mediated rendering

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him. [...] It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy [...] and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. (Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, 1908/1995, pp. 101-102)

Immediate rendering

She [Clarissa] had torn it. Some one had trod on the skirt. [...] She would mend it. Her maids had too much to do. She would wear it to-night. She would take her silks, her scissors, her—what was it?—her thimble, of course, down into the drawing-room, for she must also write [...] (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925/2018, p. 1379)

Present studies

- Study 1 (Exp. 1 & Exp. 2):
 - Manner of narration x Pronominalisation (Tiffany -> She)
- Study 2 (Exp. 3 & Exp. 4):
 - Manner of narration x Reflexivisation (Her -> Herself)

Overview

■ Key findings

- Stronger preference for pronouns (relative to proper names) in an immediate rendering of the character's consciousness
- Increased disposition to consider the reflexive (relative to pronouns) in an immediate rendering of the character's consciousness



- Empirical evidence: readers' expectations about the appropriate linguistic realisation of the character -> the degree of immediacy involved in narration

Study 1: Pronominalisation

- Pronominalisation of the character whose consciousness is being presented:
 - The explicitness of the referring expression -> the degree of immediacy
(e.g., Banfield, 1982; Vandelanotte, 2009)
 - In immediate renderings: using the proper name to realise the character ✕

Literary example

Was **he**/***Septimus** not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose?

(Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925/2018, p. 1360)

Choice of referring expression in psycholinguistics

- Choice of referring expression -> the status of the entity in the mental representation of the discourse
 - Focus of current debate: grammatical role, topicality, referential complexity, predictability (e.g., Stevenson et al., 1994; Fukumura & van Gompel, 2010; Rohde & Kehler, 2014 ; Weatherford & Arnold, 2021)
- Manner of consciousness presentation 

Study 1. Experiment 1

- Degree of immediacy → readers' pronominal preference
- Create short narratives resembling the style of literary stories
- Crucial manipulation: Immediacy-related stylistic features
 - questions, exclamations, repetitions, ellipses, fragmentation, parentheticals, colloquialisms (e.g., Humphrey, 1954; Cohn, 1978; Sotirova, 2013)

Stimuli

Stimuli	
(a) Mediated	(b) Immediate
Edmund lay on the grass and stared into the sky. Bridget was right about one thing. Having God did not make it easier; if anything, it actually made it worse. One could never be absolutely certain whether the suffering was part of God's test or actually a revelation for another path. It was highly probable for one to make mistakes in matters of the kind. Perhaps <u>[he/Edmund]</u> actually had <u>been toiling on a wrong path all this time, a path that God had never intended him to embark upon, and he was just too dull to realise.</u>	Edmund lay on the grass and stared into the sky. Well, Bridget was right about one thing. Having God did not make it easier; if anything, it actually made it worse. How could one ever be sure if the suffering was part of God's test or actually a revelation for another path? Oh Lord, what if... what if it was all an enormous mistake? What if <u>[he/Edmund]</u> actually had been toiling on a wrong path all this time, a path that God had never intended him to embark upon, and he was just too dull to realise?

Experiment details & Prediction

Prediction – literary studies

Stronger pronominal preference in the immediate condition, when compared to the mediated condition

Prediction – psycholinguistics

General pronominal preference in both conditions

Experiment details

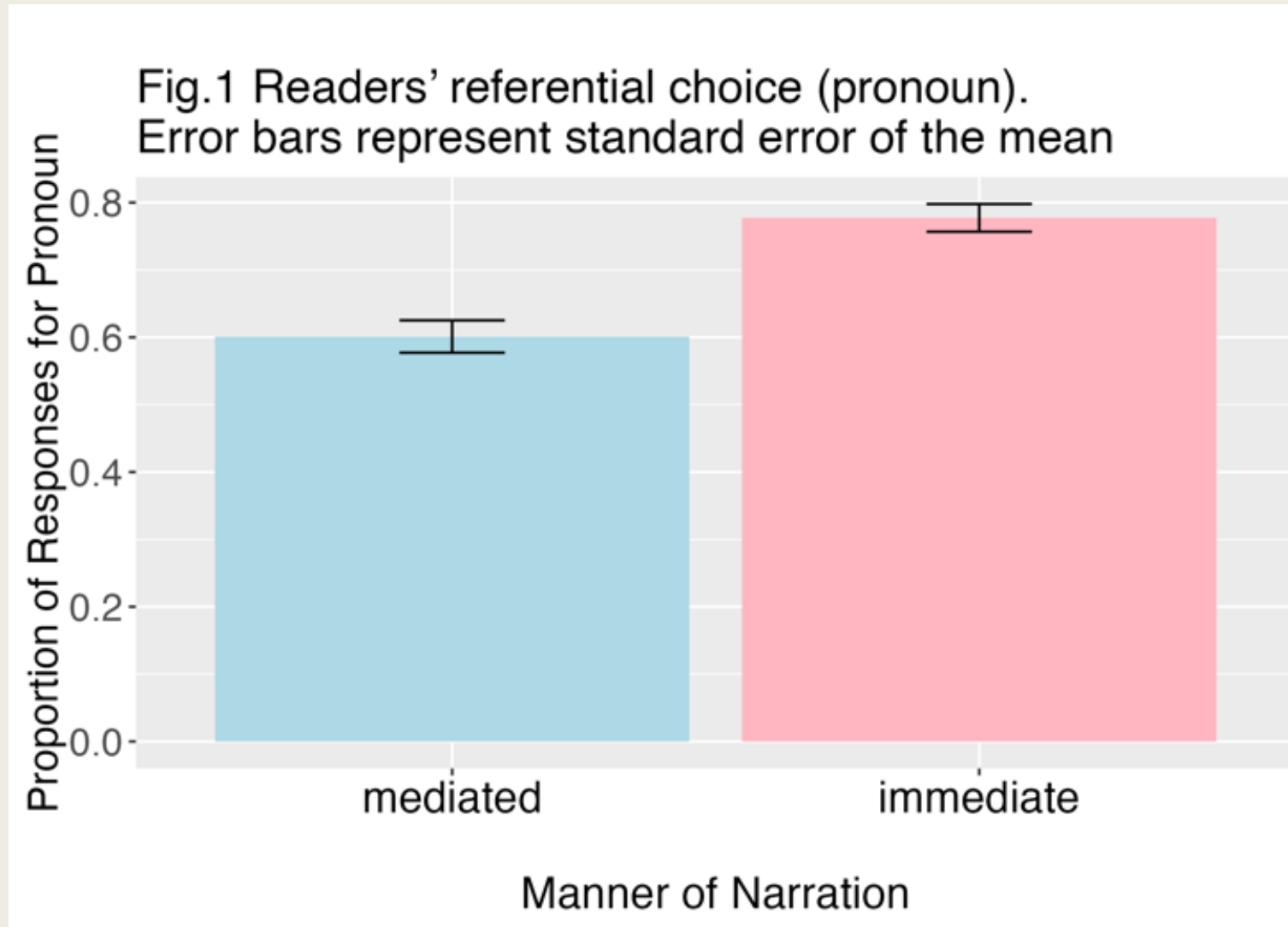
Participants

- ❖ Native English speakers (n=100)

Stimuli

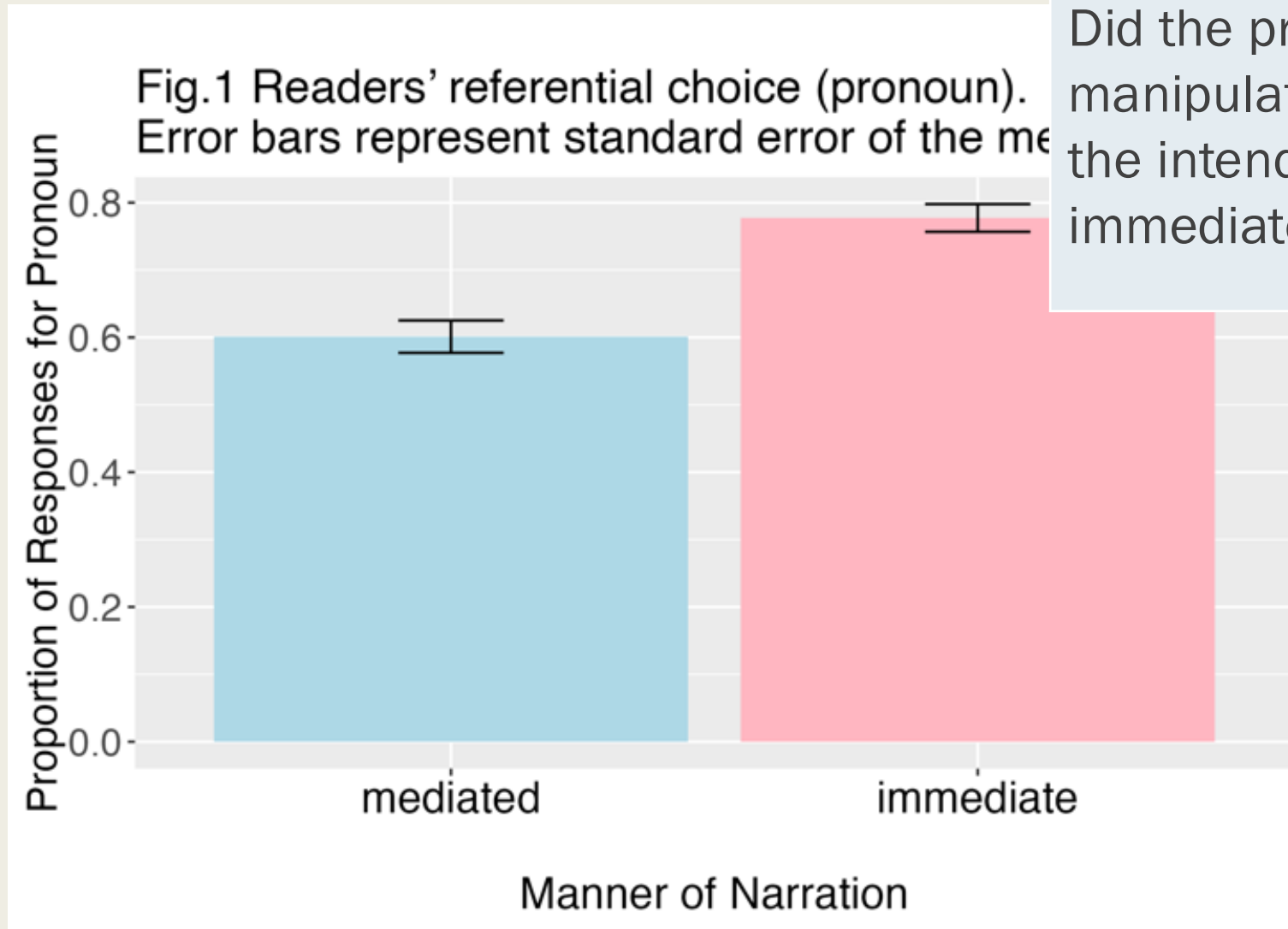
- ❖ 52 sets (60 fillers, 30 comprehension questions)

Results



glmm: $\beta = 1.19$, SE = 0.14, $z = 8.42$, $p < .001$

Results



Did the present manipulation indeed have the intended effect on the immediate status?

glmm: $\beta = 1.19$, $SE = 0.14$, $z = 8.42$, $p < .001$

Study 2. Experiment 2

Stimuli	
(a) Mediated	(b) Immediate
Edmund lay on the grass and stared into the sky. Bridget was right about one thing. Having God did not make it easier; if anything, it actually made it worse. One could never be absolutely certain whether the suffering was part of God's test or actually a revelation for another path. It was highly probable for one to make mistakes in matters of the kind.	Edmund lay on the grass and stared into the sky. Well, Bridget was right about one thing. Having God did not make it easier; if anything, it actually made it worse. How could one ever be sure if the suffering was part of God's test or actually a revelation for another path? Oh Lord, what if... what if it was all an enormous mistake?

On a scale of 1 to 7, how much would you say you are inside Edmund's / the narrator's mind when reading the passage?

1 = Edmund's exclusively

7 = Narrator's exclusively

1

2

3

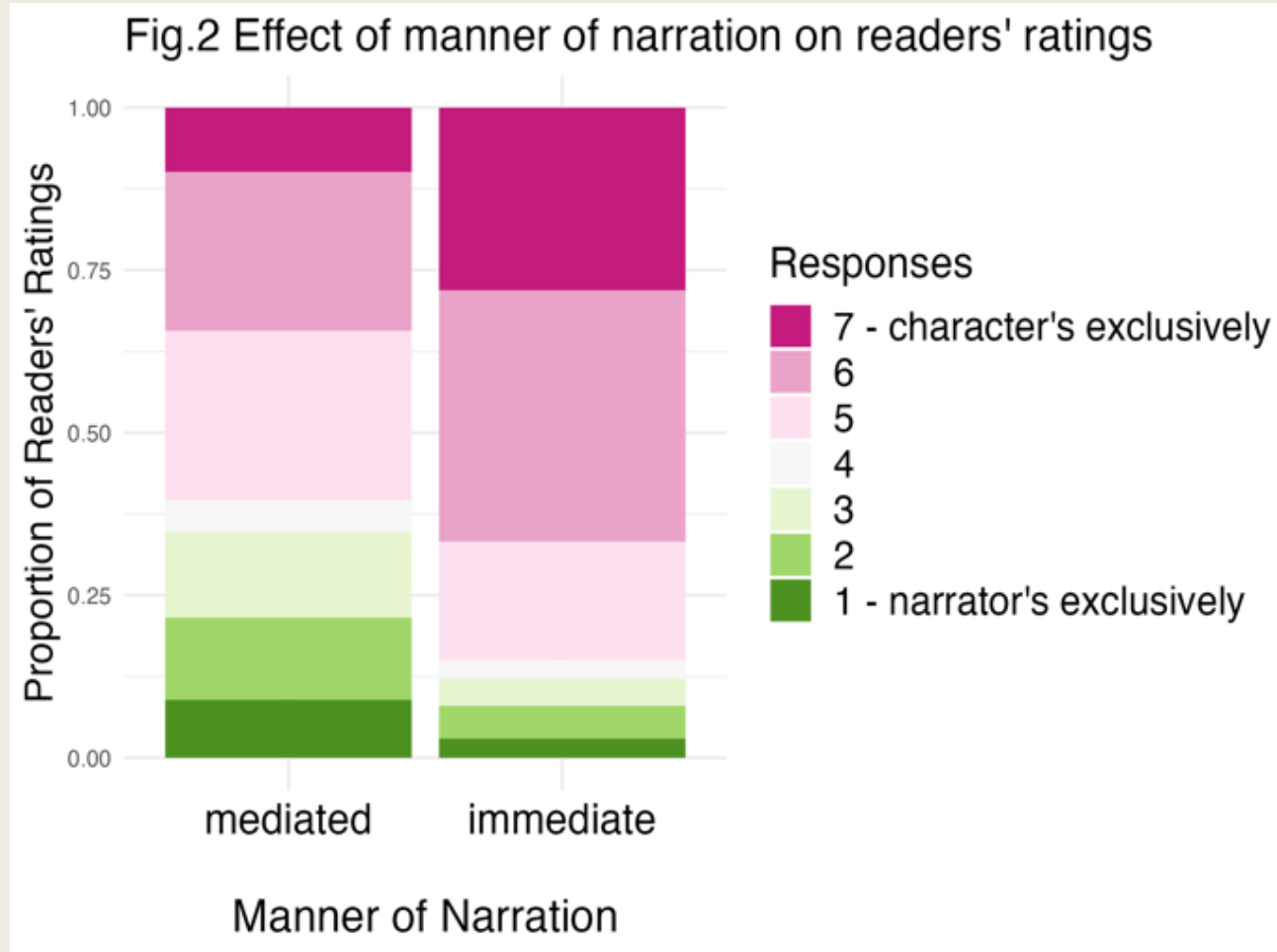
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5

6

7

Results



Experiment details

Participants

- ❖ Native English speakers (n=100)

Stimuli

- ❖ 52 sets (60 fillers, 30 comprehension questions)

clmm: $\beta = 1.69$, $SE = 0.09$, $z = 18.02$, $p < .001$

Discussion

- General pronominal preference in both conditions +
- Stronger pronominal preference in the immediate condition, compared to the mediated condition +
- Increased likelihood of feeling deeper inside the character's consciousness in the immediate condition, compared to the mediated condition



- Literary studies:
 - Empirical evidence: consistent with existing research on modernist writing
- Psycholinguistics:
 - Possibility: Perspective-taking → increased preference for pronouns ✕
 - Evidence: e.g., Hinterwimmer (2019)
 - Degree of immediacy -> a valid factor to be incorporated into current frameworks on pronominalisation ✓

Study 2: Reflexivisation

- Reflexivisation of the pronoun designating the character whose consciousness is being presented:
 - In an immediate rendering of consciousness, the pronoun referring to the character can often be reflexivised (e.g., Dillon & Kirchhoff, 1976; Dry, 1977; Vandelanotte, 2009; Brinton, 1995)
 - More immediate → more reflexives

Literary example

That was one of the bonds between Sally and **himself**. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925/2018, p. 1412)

Pronoun version

That was one of the bonds between Sally and **him**.

Study 2: Reflexivisation

■ Characteristics

- (i) Complementary distribution ✕
- (ii) Textually manifested antecedent ✕
- (iii) Serve special stylistic effects

Literary example

That was one of the bonds between Sally and **himself**. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925/2018, p. 1412)

Pronoun version

That was one of the bonds between Sally and **him**.

Reflexivisation in psycholinguistics

■ Exempt reflexives

- Focus: the licensing of exempt reflexives and readers' resolution
- Factors: e.g., source of information, verbs of mental perception (e.g., realise), empathy constraints (e.g., Kuno, 1987; Zribi-Hertz, 1989; Pollard & Sag, 1992; Cunnings & Sturt, 2014; Kaiser, 2022)
 - Source of information (Kaiser, 2022)
 - Nora {told/heard from} Kimberly about the frightening photograph of {herself/her}.

■ Manner of consciousness presentation



Study 2. Experiment 3

- Degree of immediacy → suitability of reflexives
- Create short narratives resembling the style of literary stories
- Crucial manipulation: Immediacy-related stylistic features
 - questions, exclamations, repetitions, ellipses, fragmentation, parentheticals, colloquialism (e.g., Humphrey, 1954; Cohn, 1978; Sotirova, 2013)

Stimuli

Stimuli

(a) Mediated

Percy stopped and gazed at the painting. It seemed rather likely that he was not so different from the crowds of people walking round in a ring after all. As a matter of fact, all Percy had ever wanted was to return to his homeland. However, it was quite possible that the homeland, the very chalice in his lifelong quest, was already a different land that could never be returned to. It was also possible that the home in quest was already not the sweet home that he had so hastily forsaken that day, but an unattainable Arcadia standing amongst the untrodden paths. Unfortunately, if that was truly the case, it would also mean that the aching desire that had been so deeply rooted in [himself/him] was in fact never fated to be realised.

(b) Immediate

Percy stopped and gazed at the painting. Heavens, perhaps he was not so different from the crowds of people walking round in a ring after all! By God, all he had ever wanted was to return to his homeland! But... but what if that homeland, the very chalice in his lifelong quest, was already a different land that could never be returned to? What if... that home in quest... was already not the sweet home that he had so hastily forsaken that day, but an unattainable Arcadia standing amongst the untrodden paths? O the horror! And if, O God forbend, if that was truly the case, then alas, wouldn't that also mean that the aching desire that had been so deeply rooted in [himself/him] was in fact not, nay, never fated to be realised?

Experiment details & Prediction

Prediction – literary studies

More reflexive choice in the immediate condition, compared to the mediated condition

Prediction – psycholinguistics

Existing frameworks may not be able generate specific predictions

Experiment details

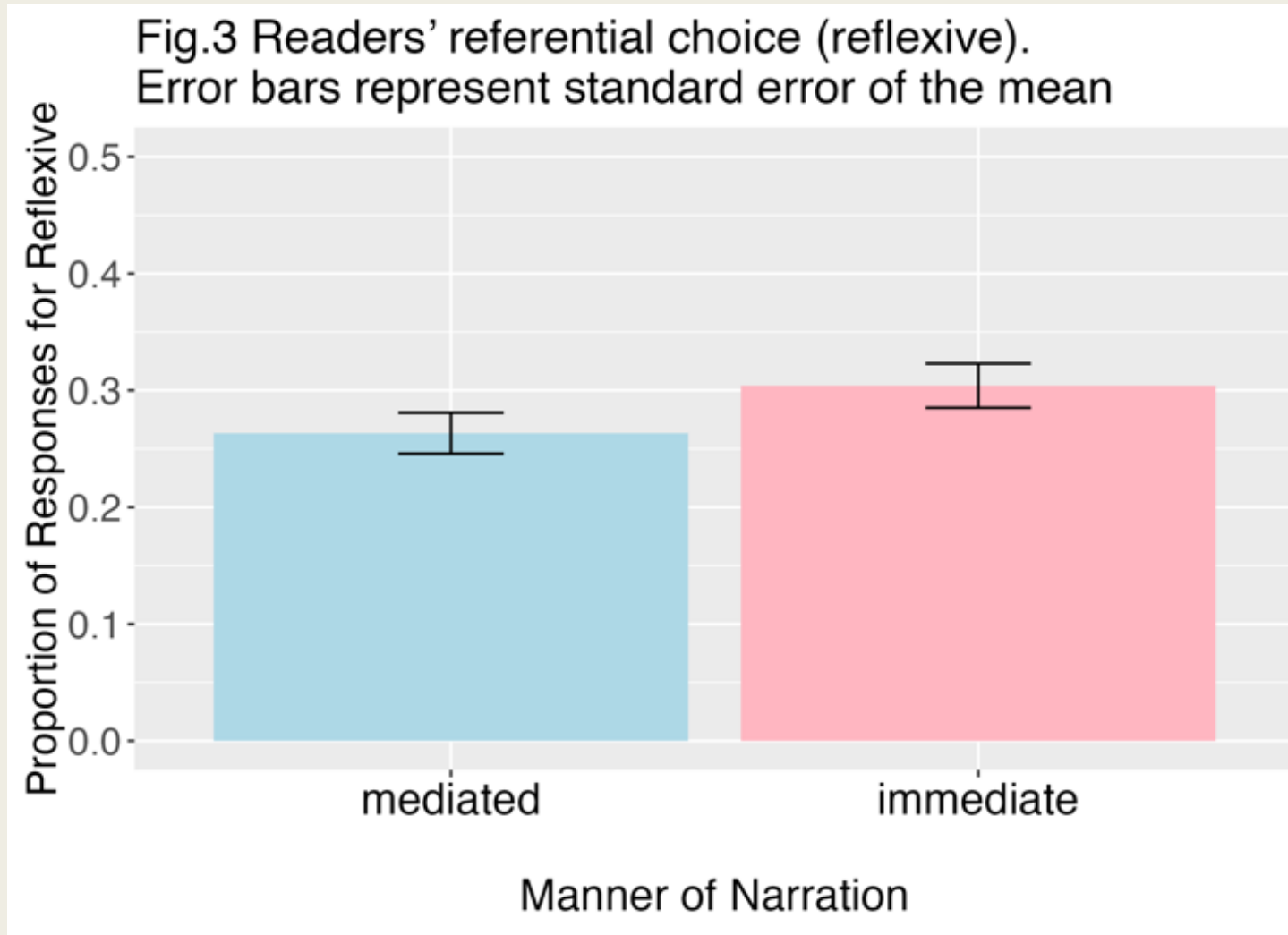
Participants

- ❖ Native English speakers (n=100)

Stimuli

- ❖ 30 sets (42 fillers, 24 comprehension questions)

Results



glmm: $\beta = 0.25$, $SE = 0.10$, $z = 2.56$, $p = .011$

Stimuli

Stimuli	
(a) Mediated	(b) Immediate
Percy stopped and gazed at the painting. It seemed rather likely that he was not so different from the crowds of people walking round in a ring after all. As a matter of fact, all Percy had ever wanted was to return to his homeland. However, it was quite possible that the homeland, the very chalice in his lifelong quest, was already a different land that could never be returned to. It was also possible that the home in quest was already not the sweet home that he had so hastily forsaken that day, but an unattainable Arcadia standing amongst the untrodden paths.	Percy stopped and gazed at the painting. Heavens, perhaps he was not so different from the crowds of people walking round in a ring after all! By God, all he had ever wanted was to return to his homeland! But... but what if that homeland, the very chalice in his lifelong quest, was already a different land that could never be returned to? What if... that home in quest... was already not the sweet home that he had so hastily forsaken that day, but an unattainable Arcadia standing amongst the untrodden paths? O the horror!

On a scale of 1 to 7, how much would you say you are inside Percy's / the narrator's mind when reading the passage?

1 = Percy's exclusively

7 = Narrator's exclusively

1

2

3

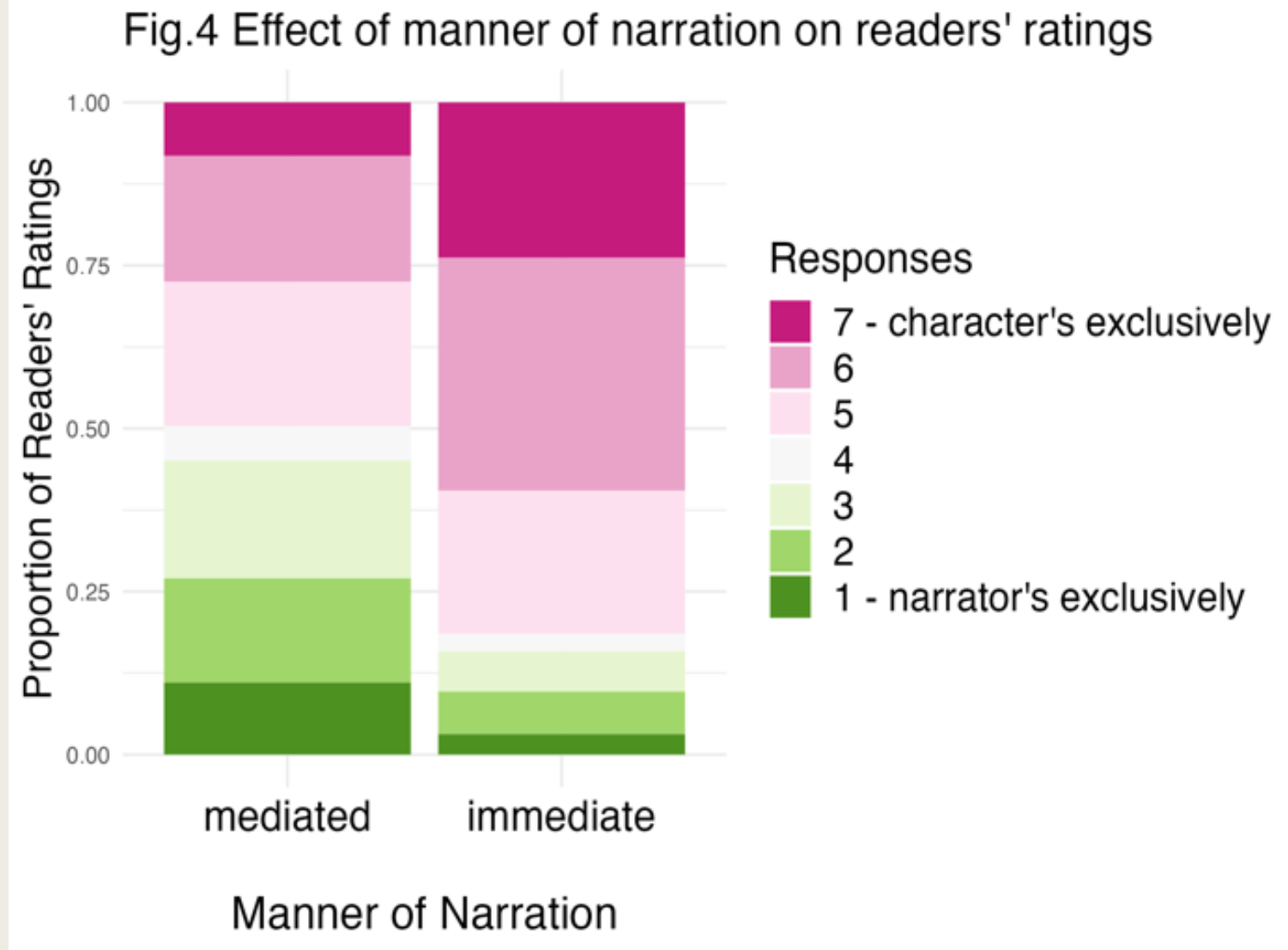
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Experiment 4



clmm: $\beta = 2.00$, $SE = 0.20$, $z = 10.05$, $p < .001$

Experiment details

Participants

- ❖ Native English speakers (n=96)

Stimuli

- ❖ 30 sets (42 fillers, 24 comprehension questions)

Discussion

- Increased disposition to consider the exempt reflexive in the immediate condition, compared to the mediated condition
- Deeper inside the character's mind in the immediate condition, compared to the mediated condition



- Literary studies: empirical evidence for the use of reflexives in immediate consciousness presentation
- Psycholinguistics: the manner of consciousness presentation -> a valid factor to be considered in the licensing of exempt reflexives

Take-home messages

1. Using longer, more naturalistic narratives in psycholinguistic studies allow us to capture nuanced phenomena previously assumed to be confined to literary theory.
2. Given the sensitivity displayed by readers in the present study, a writer may feel more reassured to manipulate the textual manifestation of the characters in their writing, so as to “[facilitate] the transfer of the reader to the consciousness of the character” when so desired (Stanzel, 1984, p. 189).

