



INTRODUCTION

- Previous research in psycholinguistics has shown that language users construe events based on implicit meanings conveyed by the verb as who is likely to have caused an event.
- We tend to attribute causality to the subject for certain verbs (e.g., frighten, amuse), but to the object for others (e.g., thank, praise).
- This implicit causality (IC) effect is affected by properties of the verb (positive vs. negative valence; action vs. state).
- Who is perceived to be the causal agent may also be affected by the social power held by the subject versus the object (Garvey & Caramazza, 1974; Lafrance, Brownell, & Hahn, 1997).

OBJECTIVE

- Aimed to investigate whether the use of proper names associated with different racial-ethnic groups (White vs. Hispanic) would differentially affect attributions of implicit causality in described events.

METHODS

- **Participants:** 121 participants (79 F, 77% non-Hispanic, mean age = 19 yrs)
- **Stimuli :** 16 sentences of the form “X verbs Y” with a factorial combination of verb type (action vs. state) and verb valence (positive vs. negative). Verbs were taken from Lafrance, Brownell, & Hahn, 1997.
- The names in the X (subject) and Y (object) role were those commonly associated with Whites or Hispanics (Texas Department of State Health and Services Database, 2001-2015).
- Names were presented in four conditions: White names in both roles (WW), Hispanic names in both roles (HH), (WH), and (HW).
- Name gender was kept constant across roles.
- **Procedure:**
- Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.
- For each stimulus, participants were to select which of the two names in the sentence they thought the sentence should continue with. For example:

John fascinates George because...

A. John

B. George

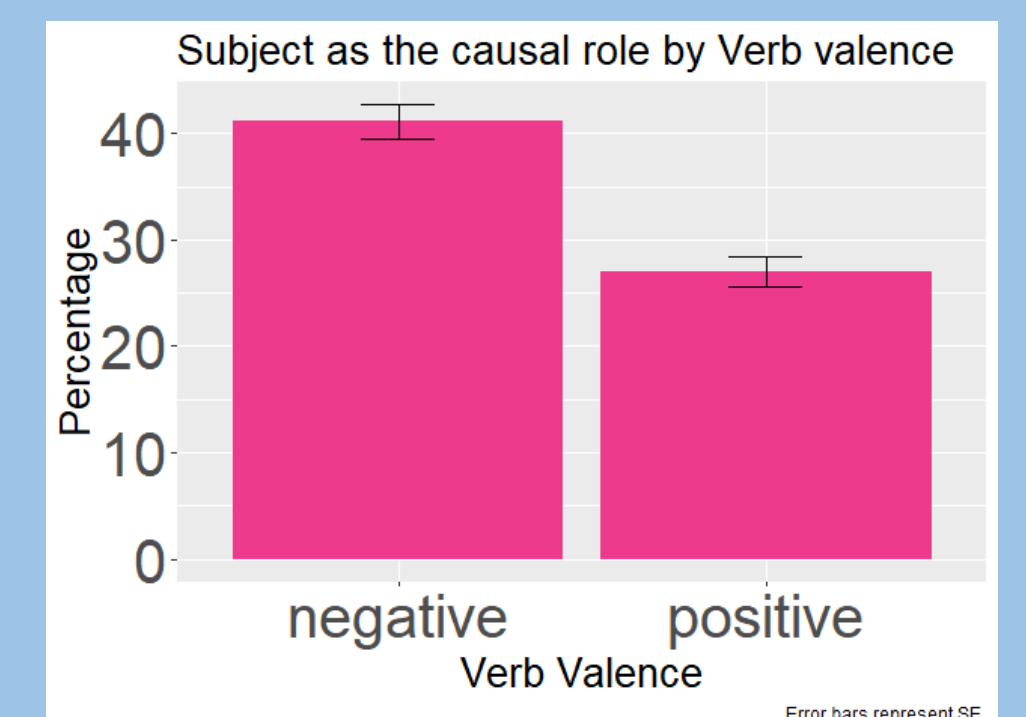
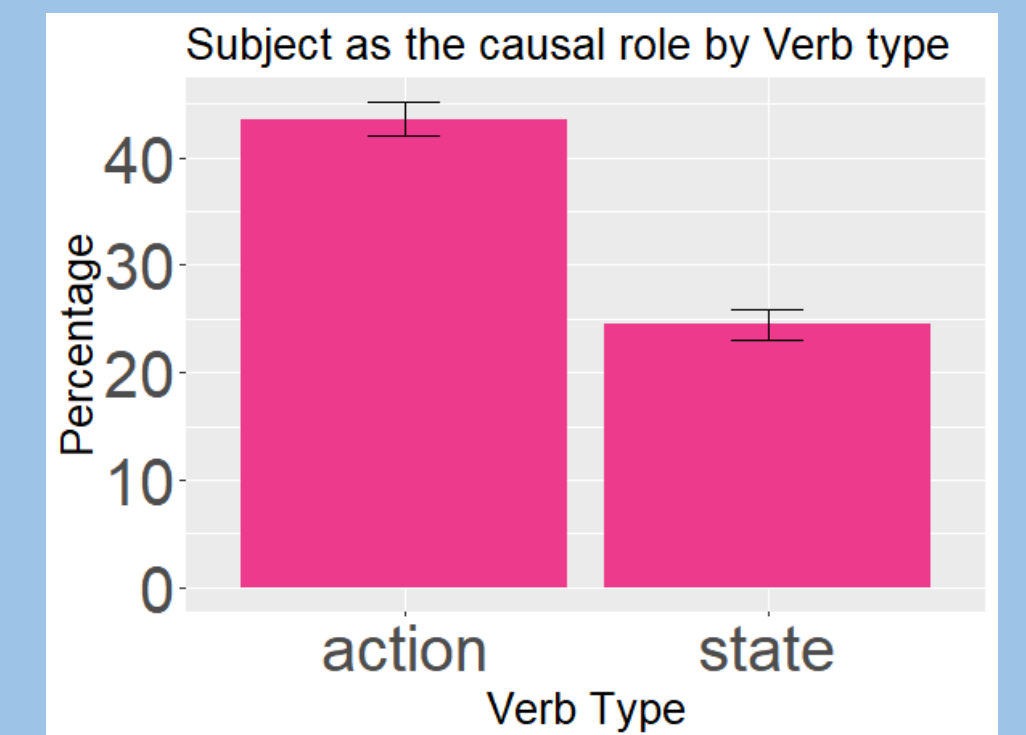
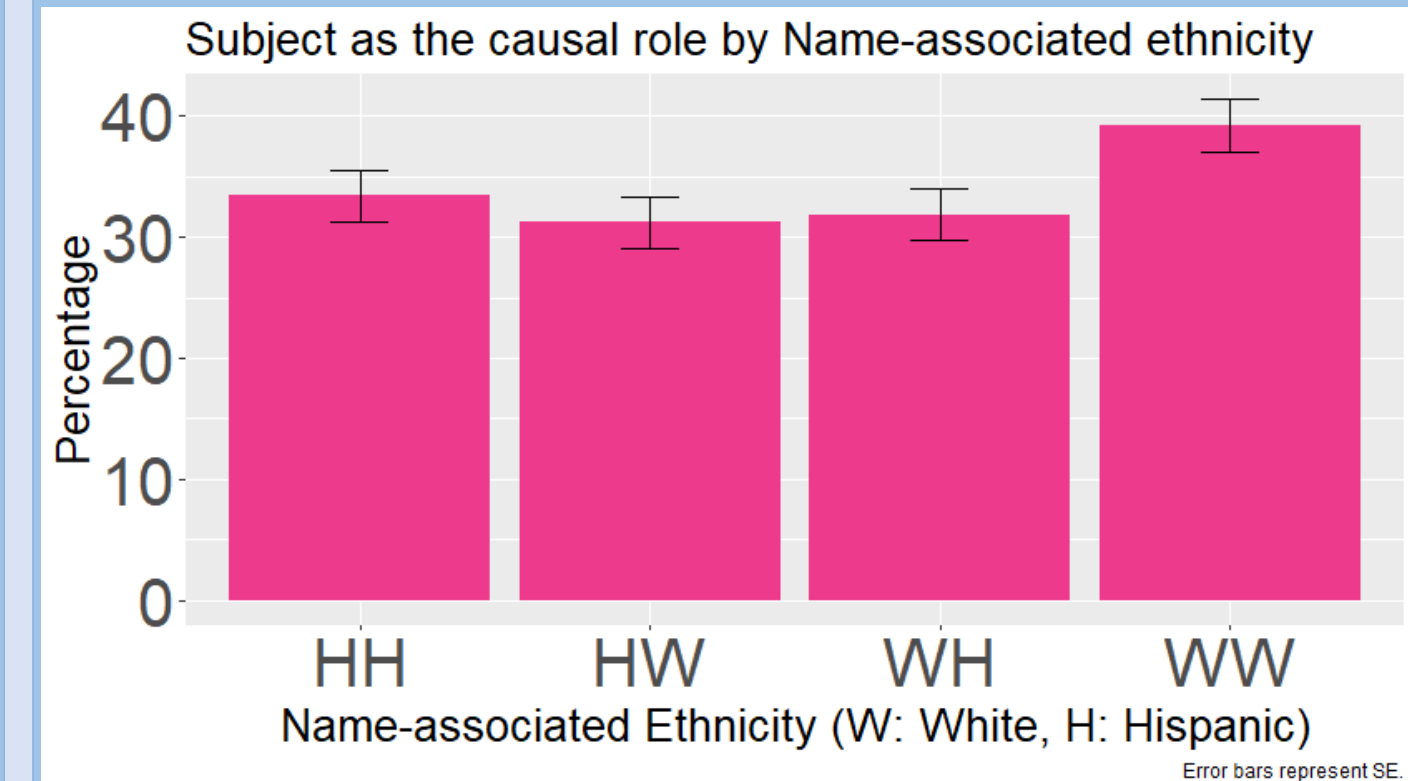
DATA ANALYSIS

- A logistic mixed effects regression was conducted on the causal role (subject vs. object) as a function of ethnic composition (WW, WH, HH, HW), verb type (action, state), and verb valence (positive, negative).

FINDINGS and CONCLUSIONS

- Causality was attributed more often to the object role than the subject role.
- The incidence of attributed causality to the subject role was significantly higher when the verb was an action rather than a state verb, and when it was negative vs. positive in valence.
- Most importantly, attributions of causality to the subject role were significantly higher for the WW condition (39%) as compared to the HW condition (31%).
- This finding suggests that the ethnicity evoked by a name affects judgments of who is more likely to be the causal agent in a social interaction.
- Our findings may be a reflection of the perceived social power of whites relative to Hispanics in the U.S. at large.

RESULTS



REFERENCES

- Garvey, C., & Caramazza, A. (1974). Implicit causality in verbs. *Linguistic inquiry*, 5(3), 459-464.
- Lafrance, M., Brownell, H., & Hahn, E. (1997). Interpersonal verbs, gender, and implicit causality. *Social psychology quarterly*, 60, 138-152.