

NUMBER-SENSITIVE REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS IN DANISH



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PHD DEFENCE
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THE REFLEXIVE PRONOUN *SIN*

The English sentence in 1) can mean two different things:

- 1) She photographs **her** cat.
 - a) She photographs **her own** cat
 - b) She photographs **someone else's** cat

Danish has a reflexive pronoun *sin* that allows us to distinguish between the two meanings:

2a) Hun fotograferer **sin** kat. = 1 a), **her own** cat

2b) Hun fotograferer **hendes** kat. = 1 b), **someone else's** cat



REFLEXIVE AND NON-REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

Reflexive pronouns (e.g. *sin*) must be **bound** by an **antecedent**. (A * means that the sentence is ungrammatical.)

1) No antecedent

* *Sin* mor er glad.
'*Sin* mother is happy.'

2) Bound by an antecedent

Hun tager sin hat og går sin vej.
'She takes *sin* hat and walks *sin* way (=walks away).'

Non-reflexive pronouns (e.g. *hendes* or *deres*) can be **free** or bound.

3) No antecedent (free)

Hendes mor er glad.
'Her mother is happy.'

Deres mor er glad.
'Their mother is happy.'

4) Bound by an antecedent

(* Hun tager hendes hat og går hendes vej.
'She takes her hat and walks her way (= walks away).'

De tager deres hat og går deres vej.
'They take their hat and walk their way (= walk away).'

THE RIGHT KIND OF ANTECEDENT

The Danish *sin* has to be bound by **the right kind of antecedent**

Wrong kind of antecedent: 1st and 2nd person

* Jeg henter sin kaffe.

* Du henter sin kaffe.

* Vi henter sin kaffe.

* I henter sin kaffe.

'I/you.sg/we/you.pl fetch *sin* coffee.'

Right kind of antecedent: 3rd person singular

3rd person singular:

Han henter sin kaffe.

Hun henter sin kaffe.

'He/she fetches *sin* coffee.'

3rd person plural:

(*) De henter sin kaffe.

'They fetch *sin* coffee.'





VORES NATUR

Er det giftigt? **1**

Blæksprutter

prøvesmager maden med

sine fangearme



TV 2 NEWS ✓

15 t. · 🌐

2

De første danskere kan snart få **sit** tredje vaccinstik, men ifølge eksperter bør Danmark vente med at give stikket til resten af befolkningen.



INFORMATION.DK

3

Ni EU-lande har nu helt eller delvist lukket **sine** grænser. 'Helt forståeligt', siger EU

¹ **English:** Octopi sample the food with their tentacles

² **English:** The first Danes can soon get their third vaccine shot

³ **English:** Nine EU countries have now fully or partly closed their borders

STANDARD AND VARIATION

1.

- a) Blæksprutter prøvesmager maden med **deres** fangarme
 - b) Blæksprutter prøvesmager maden med **sine** fangarme
- 'Octopi sample the food with their tentacles'

2.

- a) De første danskere kan snart få **deres** tredje vaccinstik
 - b) De første danskere kan snart få **sit** tredje vaccinstik
- 'The first Danes can soon get their first vaccine shot'

3.

- a) Ni EU-lande har nu helt eller delvist lukket **deres** grænser
 - b) Ni EU-lande har nu helt eller delvist lukket **sine** grænser
- 'Nine EU countries have now fully or partly closed their borders'



NUMBER-SENSITIVE SIN, NOT SIG

Danish has (at least) two kinds of reflexive pronouns:

- Possessive reflexives: *sin, sit, sine*
- Non-possessive reflexives: *sig, sig selv*

Sig and *sig selv* allow both singular and plural antecedents in modern standard Danish, in contrast to *sin*. This is surprising, given how similar they otherwise are.

Hun vasker sig.

De vasker sig.

'She/they wash *sig*.'

Hun maler sig selv.

De maler sig selv.

'She/they paint *sig* self.'

Hun vasker sin kat.

De vasker **deres** kat.

'She/they wash *sin*/their cat.'

Hun maler sin kat.

De maler **deres** kat.

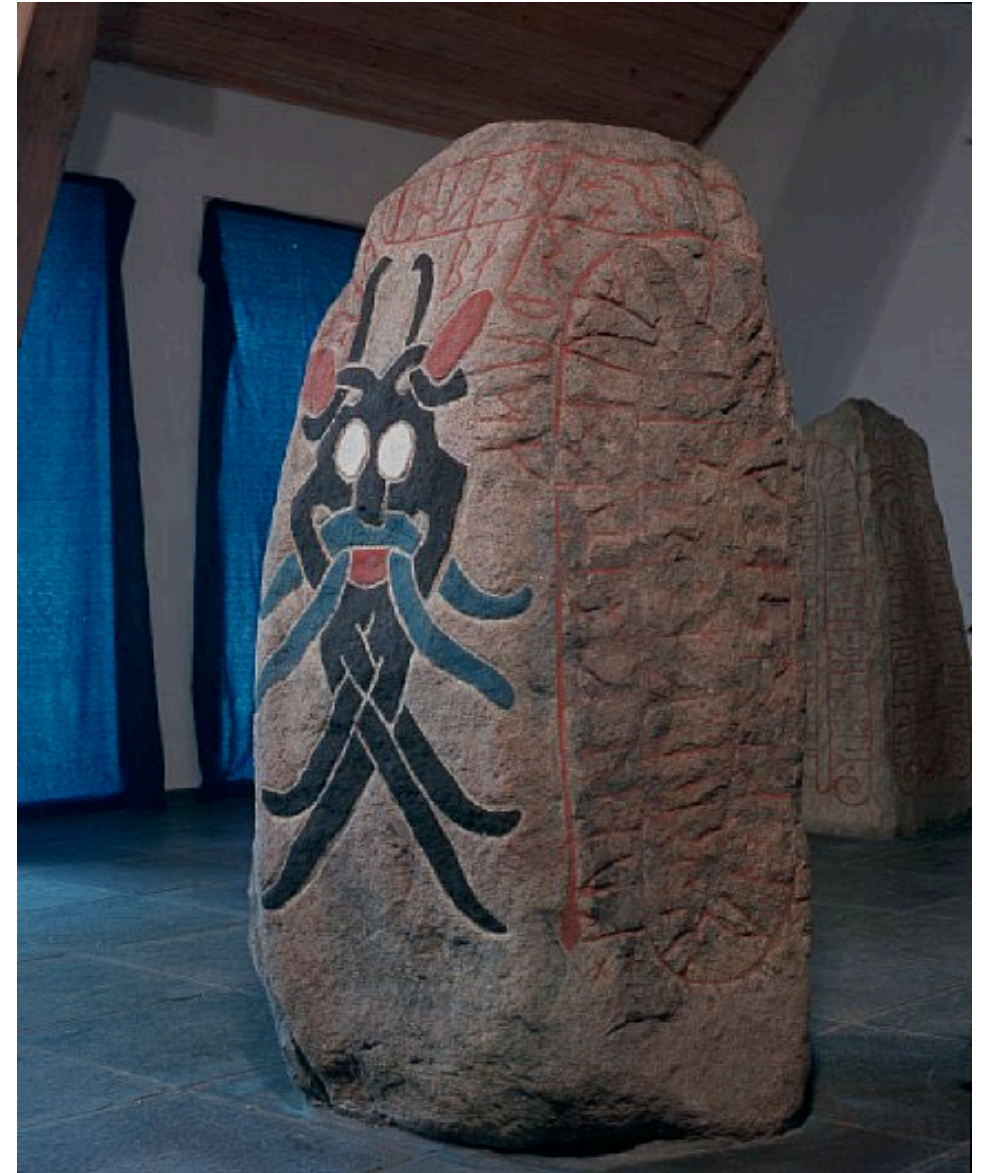
'She/they paint *sin*/their cat.'



SIN AND SIG: CYCLIC CHANGE (OR: "THERE-AND-BACK-AGAIN")

Indskrift

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| DK nr. | MJy 77 |
| Dansk oversættelse | Gunulv og Øgot og Aslak og Rolf rejste denne sten efter deres fælle Ful. Han fandt døden ... da konger kæmpede. |
| English translation | Gunnulfr and Eygautr/ Auðgautr and Áslakr and Hrólfur raised this stone in memory of Fúl, their partner, who died when kings fought. |
| Transskription | Gunnulfr ok Øgotr/Øðgotr ok Áslakr ok Rölfur rēspu stēn þannsi æftiR Fúl, fēlaga sinn, eR varð ... dóðr, þā kunungaR barðusk. |

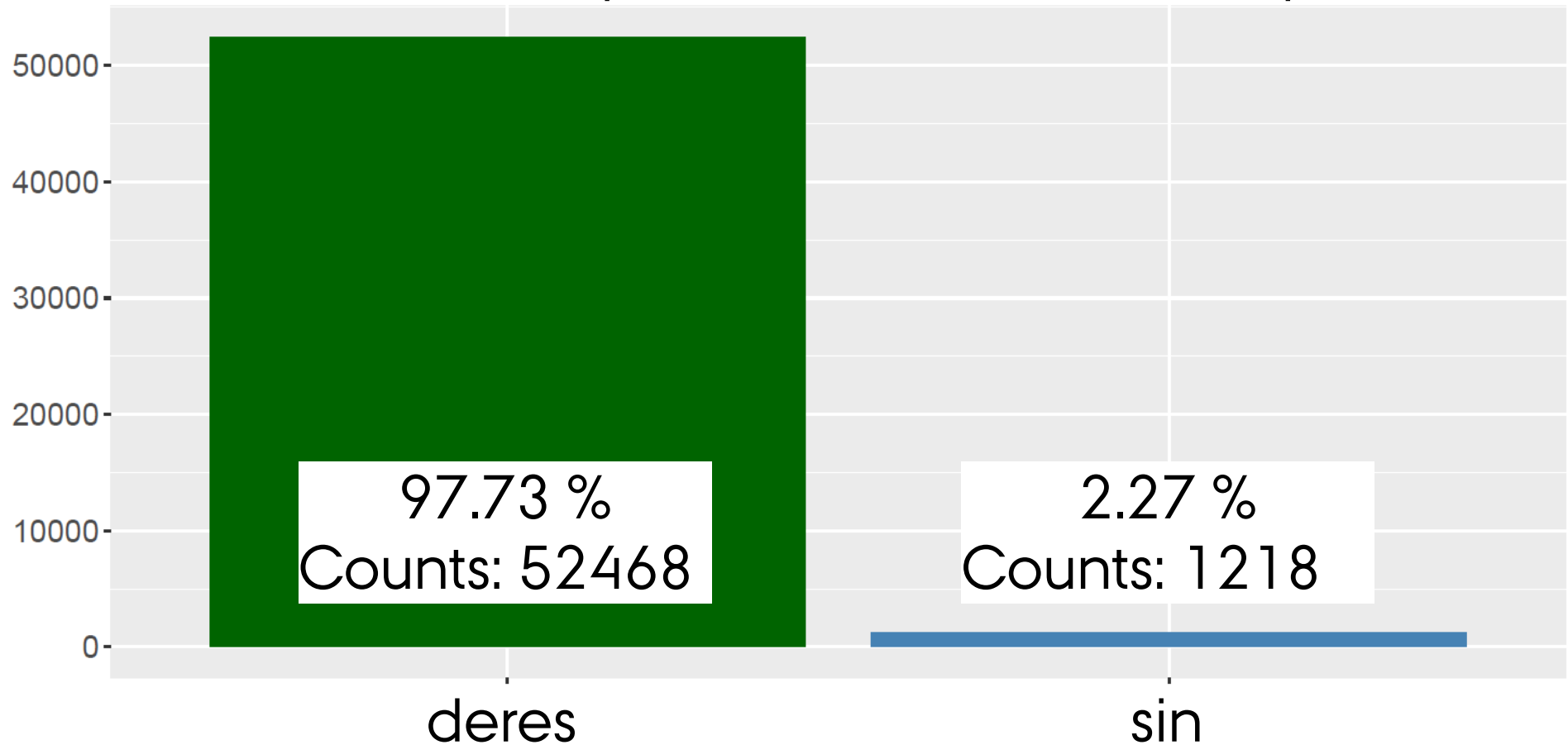


| | Singular antecedent | Plural antecedent |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Danish, before 1000 AD antecedent 3rd person, all genders | sig sin | sig sin |
| Danish, 1200(?)–1900(?) AD antecedent 3rd person, all genders | sig sin | dem deres |
| Standard Danish, 2024 antecedent 3rd person, all genders | sig sin | sig deres |
| A future stage of Danish? antecedent 3rd person, all genders | sig sin | sig sin |



PLURAL ANTECEDENT SIN IN KORPUSDK

sin and *deres* with plural antecedents in KorpusDK



ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT STUDY



(2/20)

Mia elsker is. * 'Mia loves icecream.'

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Helt uacceptabel | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | Helt acceptabel |

Klovnene har sin egen fest efter forestillingen. * 'The clowns have *sin* own party after the show.'

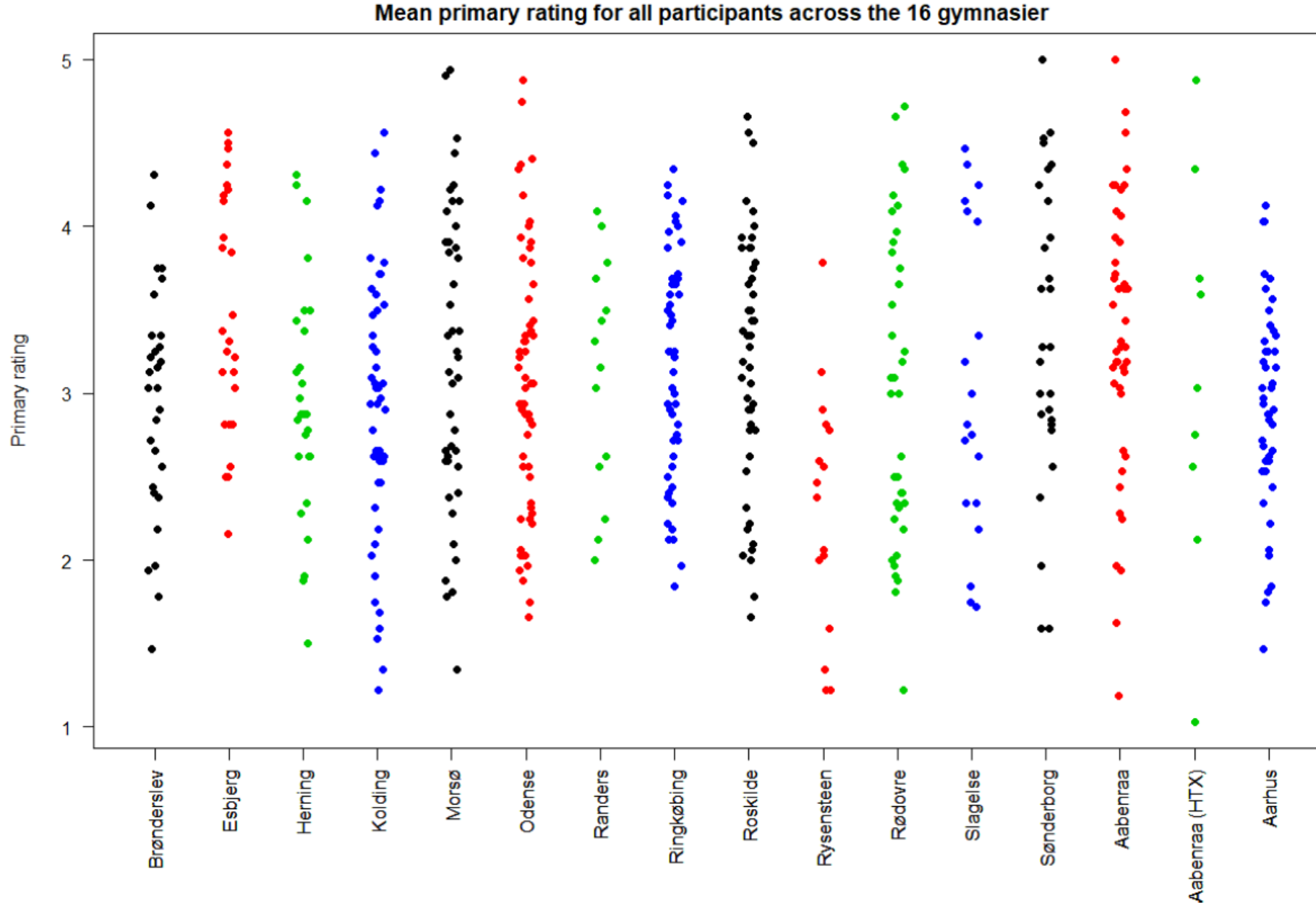
| | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Helt uacceptabel | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Helt acceptabel |

Bo har læst bøgerne aldrig. * 'Bo has read the books never.'

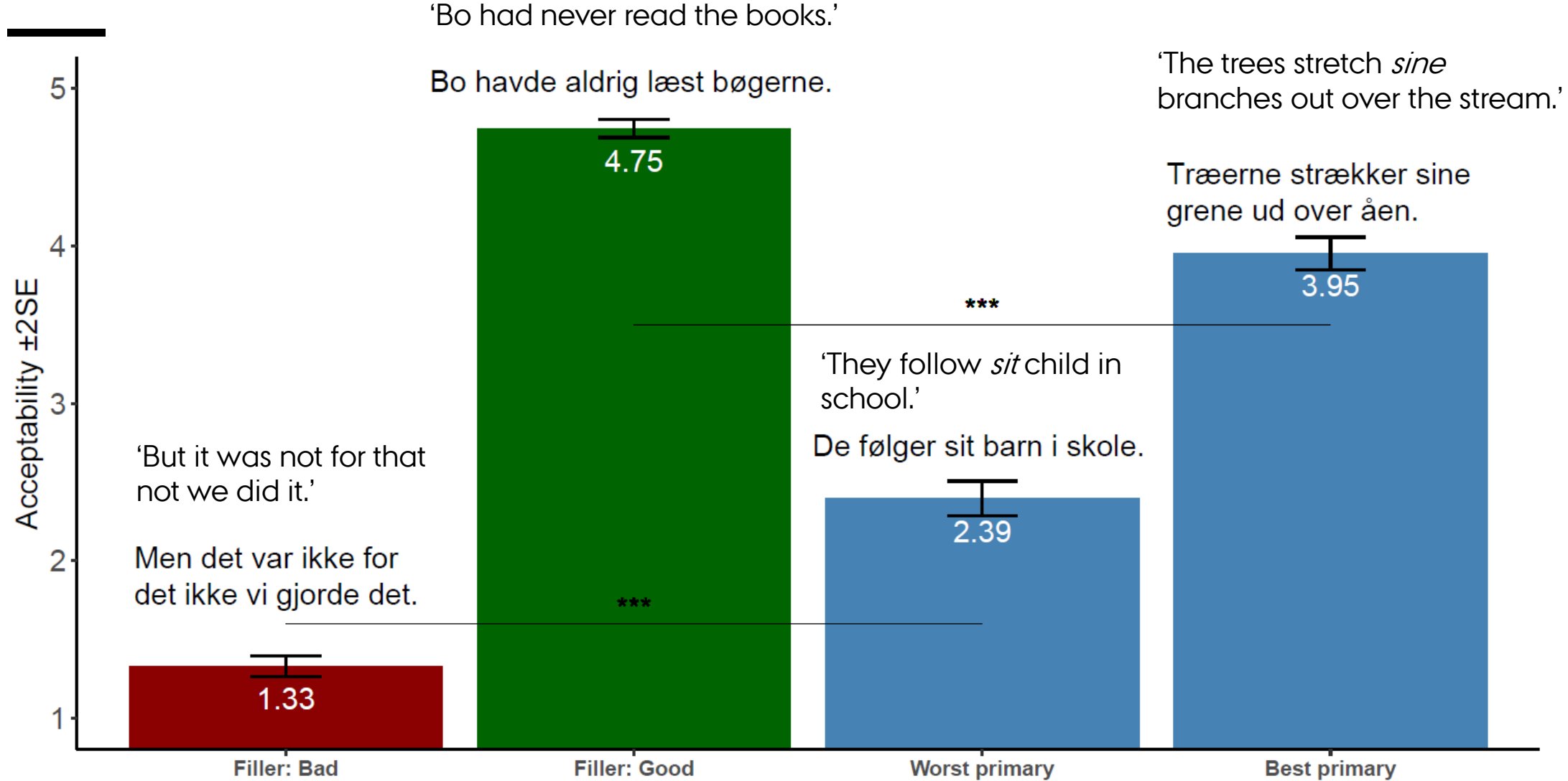
| | | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Helt uacceptabel | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Helt acceptabel |



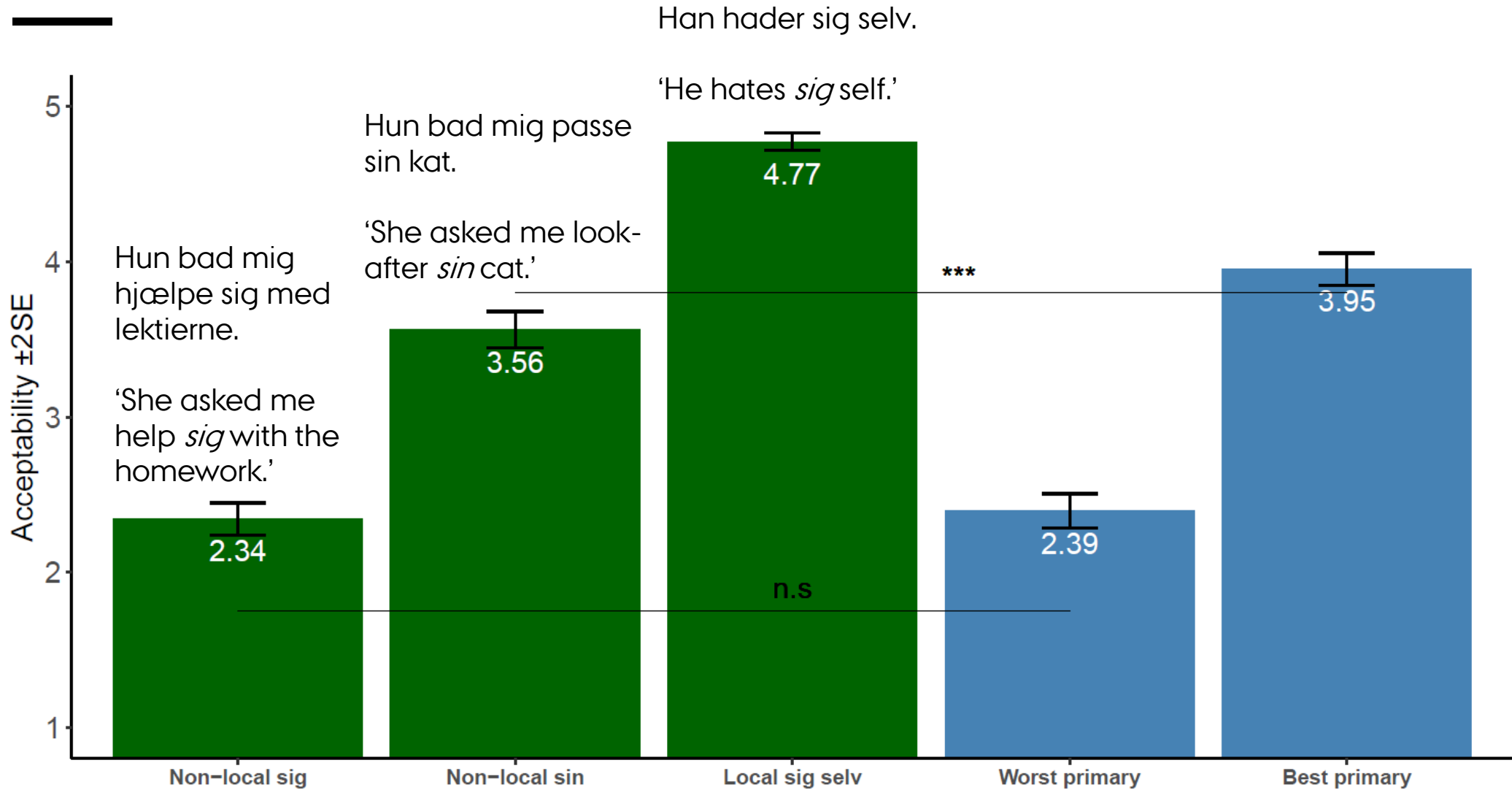
RESULTS: VARIATION *EVERYWHERE* IN ACCEPTABILITY OF PL. ANTECEDENT *S/N*



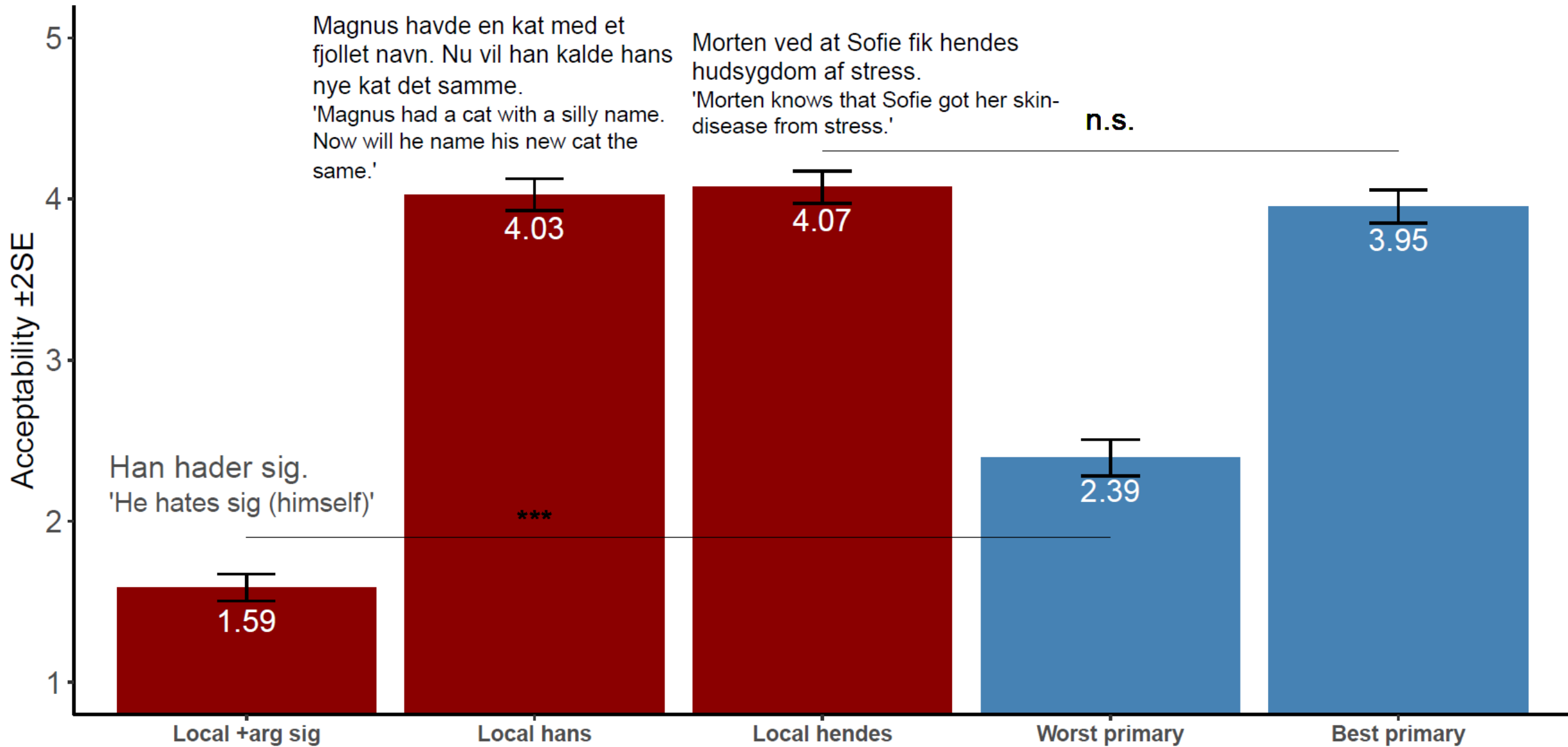
ACCEPTABILITY VARIES: BAD-ISH → DECENT



GRAMMATICAL-BUT-SOMEWHAT-UNACCEPTABLE REFLEXIVES



UNGRAMMATICAL-BUT-ACCEPTABLE(?) REFLEXIVES

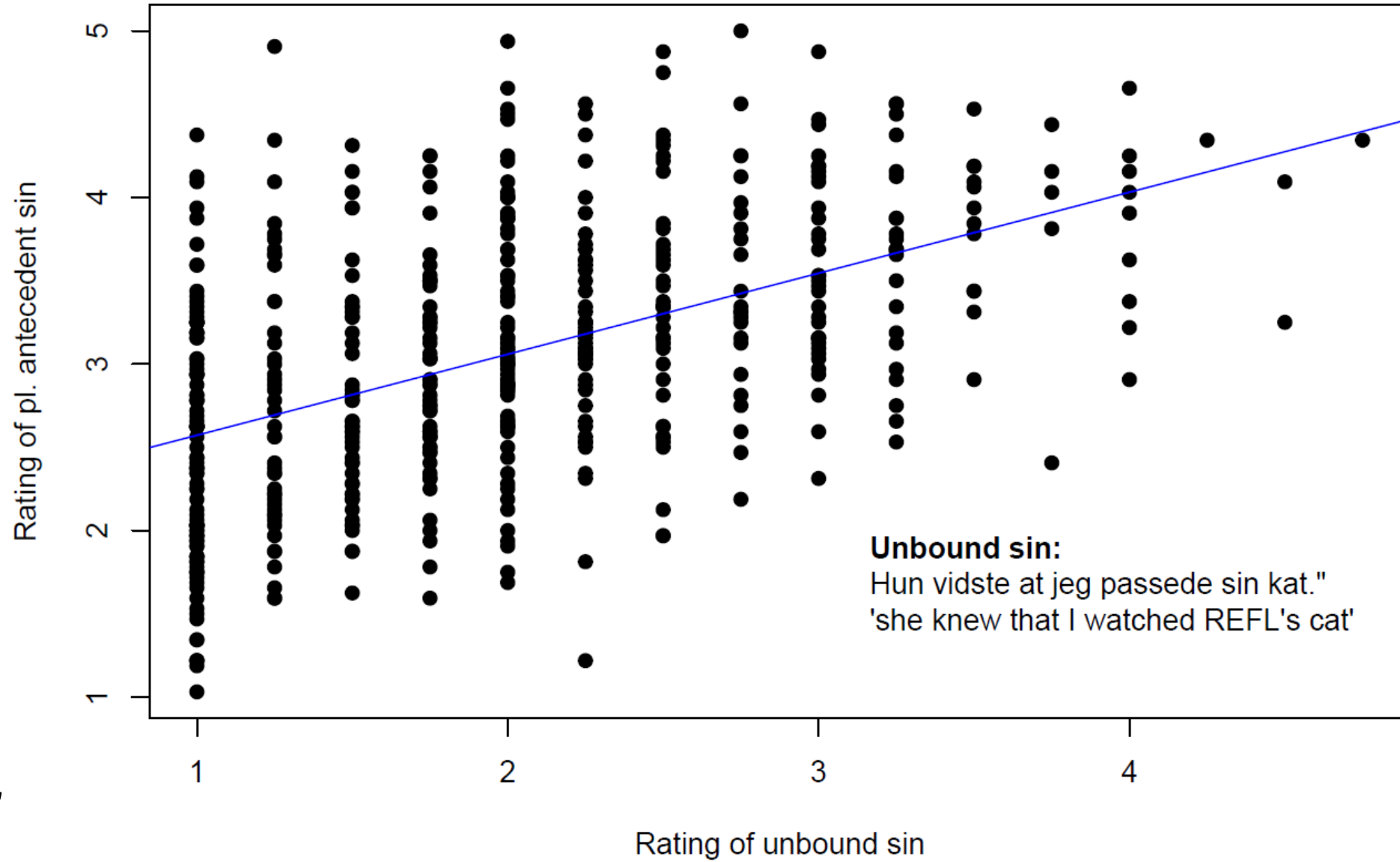


THANK YOU!



SIGNS OF HYPER-CORRECTION

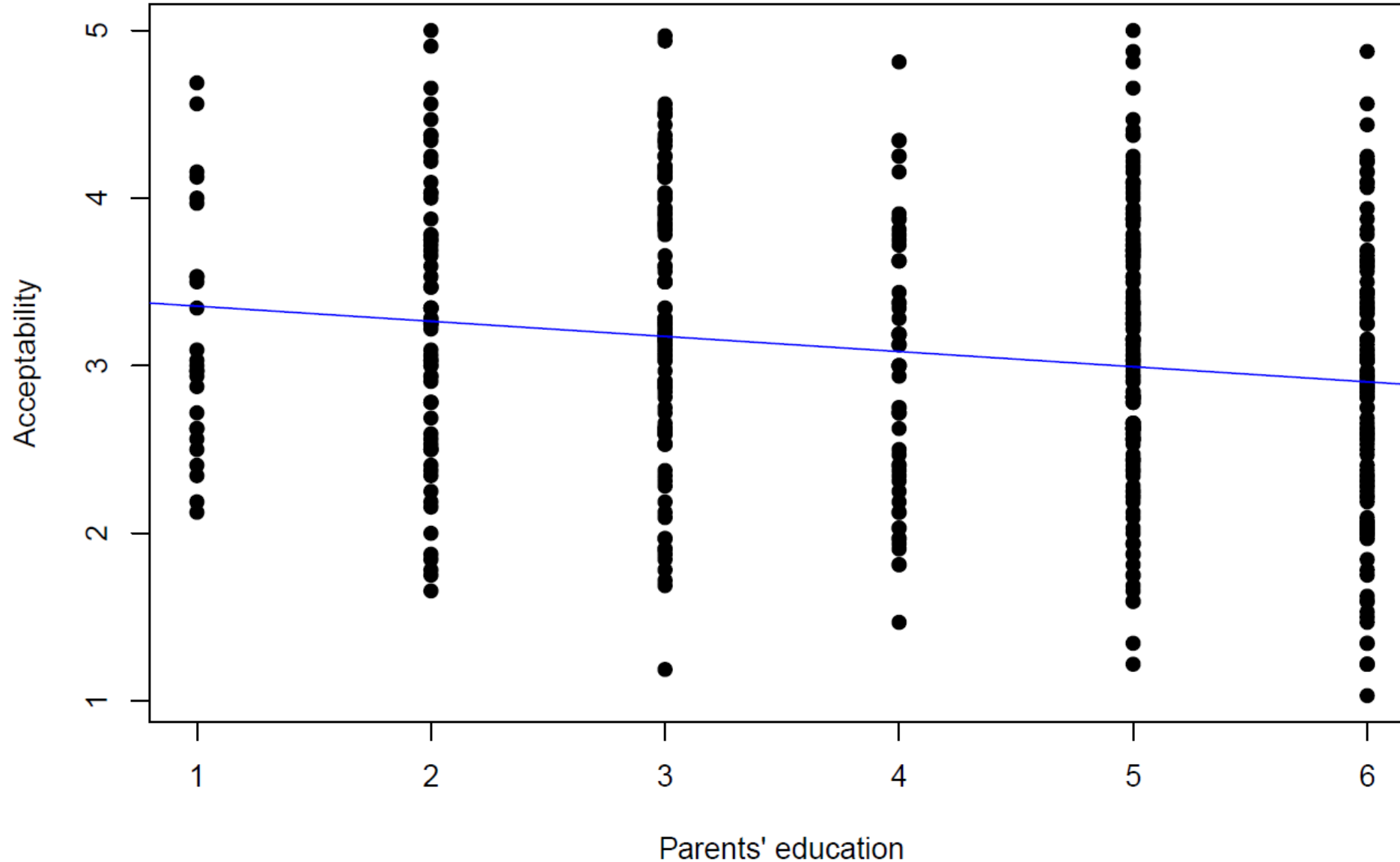
Connection between unbound sin and primary rating
Correlation coefficient: 0.50



LENGTH OF EDUCATION AND PL. *S/N*

Connection between SES and primary rating

Correlation coefficient: -0.17



GYMNASIUM AND PL. *S/N*

Primary rating per gymnasium (error bars: +/- 1.96 SEM)

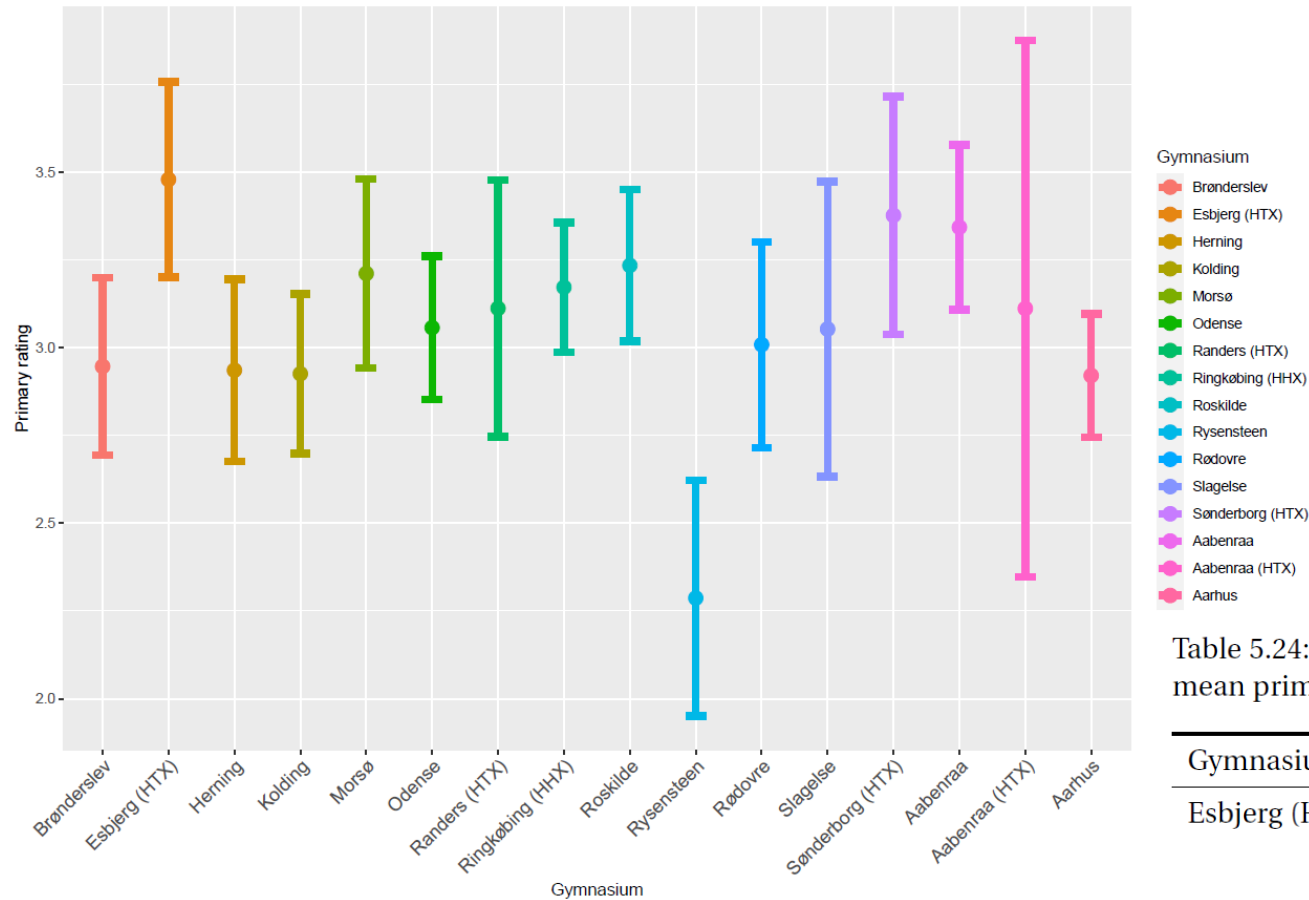
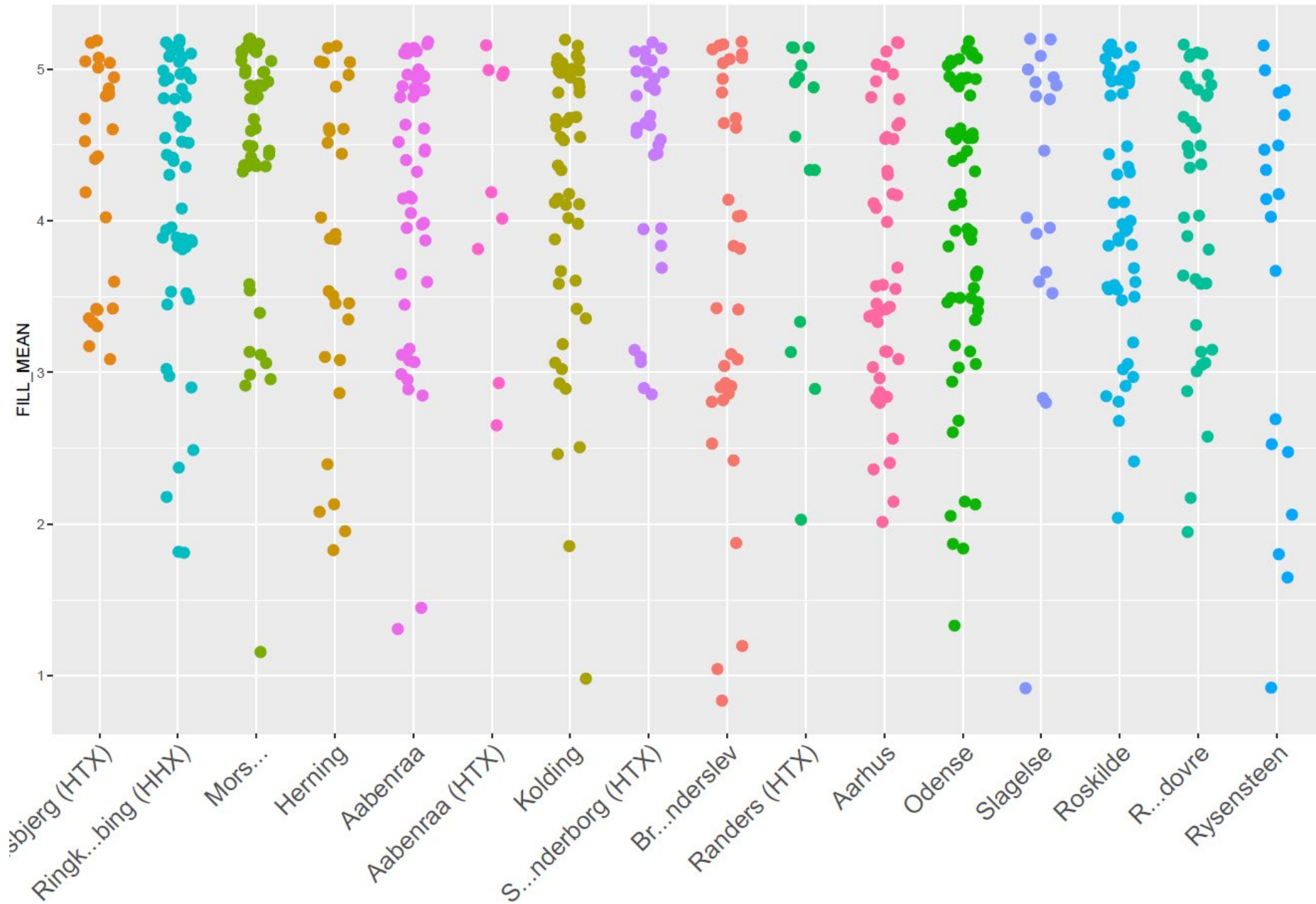


Table 5.24: Gymnasiums where we can assume a statistically significant difference in mean primary rating.

| Gymnasium to compare | Other gymnasium | Higher or lower |
|----------------------|--|-----------------|
| Esbjerg (HTX) | Brønderslev | Lower |
| | Herning | Lower |
| | Kolding | Lower |
| | Aarhus | Lower |
| | All gymnasiums (except Aabenraa (HTX)) | Higher |
| Aabenraa | Aarhus | Lower |

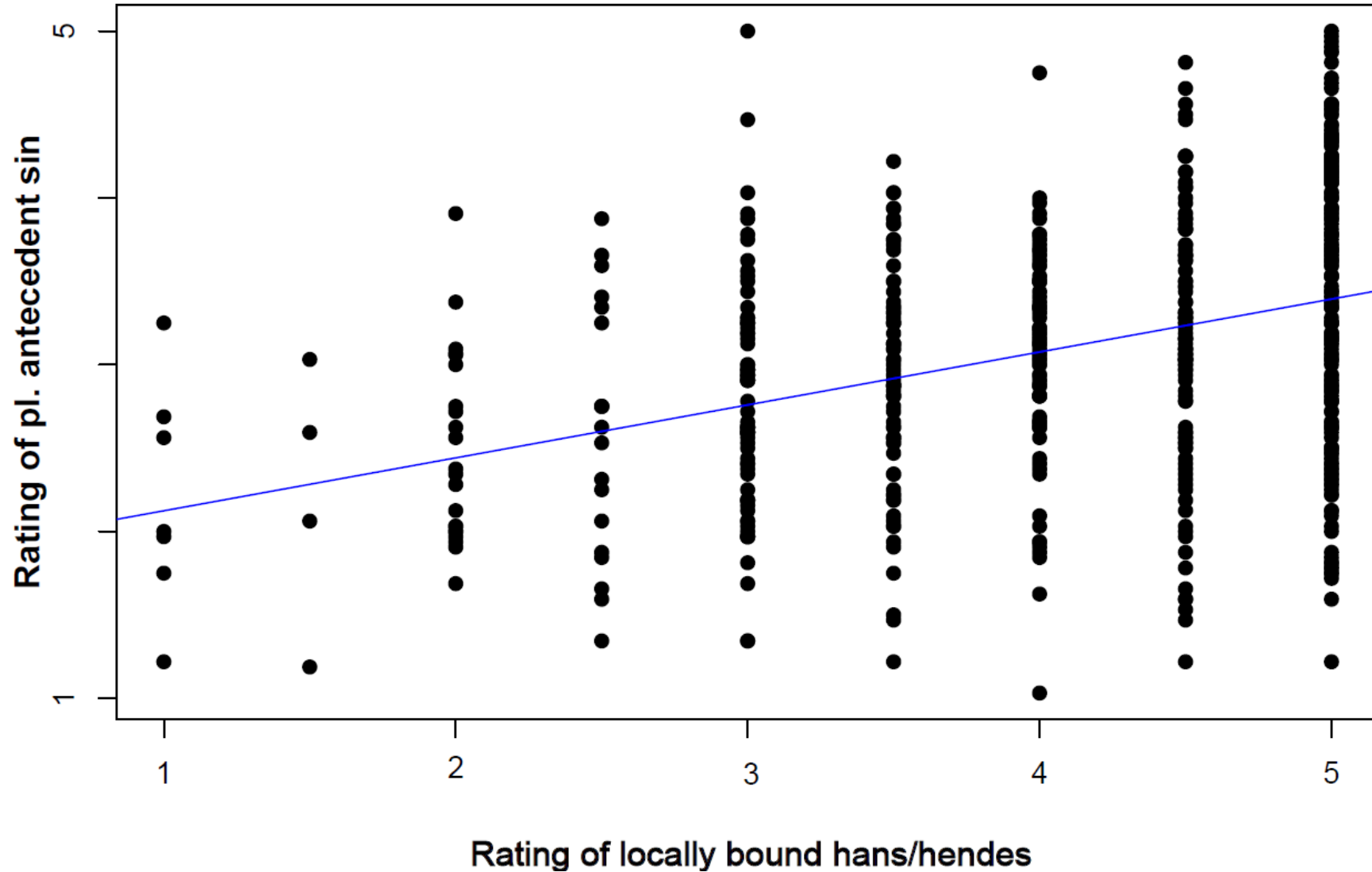
LOCALLY BOUND HANS/HENDES PER GYM, SORTED PER REGION



LOCALLY BOUND HANS/HENDES AND PL. *S/N*

Connection between locally bound hans/hendes and primary rating

Correlation coefficient: 0.37



| PERCENTAGES | Pred. adj. | | Bound pron. form | | |
|---------------------|------------|--------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | singular | plural | | sin | deres |
| Collectives | 74 % | 26 % | | 79 % | 21 % |
| Impersonal man | 94 % | 6 % | | 100 % | 0 % |
| | | | | | |
| Quantifiers | | | | | |
| Alle | 2 % | 98 % | | 16 % | 84 % |
| Begge | 0 % | 100 % | | 5 % | 95 % |
| Enhver | 100 % | 0 % | | 97 % | 3 % |
| Hver | 100 % | 0 % | | 90 % | 10 % |
| Hver N | 100 % | 0 % | | 97 % | 3 % |
| Hvem som helst | 0 % | 0 % | | 100 % | 0 % |
| Nogen = someone | 75 % | 25 % | | 52 % | 48 % |
| Nogen = some people | 53 % | 47 % | | 8 % | 92 % |
| Nogle | 0 % | 100 % | | 2 % | 98 % |
| Én | 100 % | 0 % | | 100 % | 0 % |
| Ingen | 70 % | 30 % | | 63 % | 37 % |

Expanded and revised version of table 2.4 on page 117



Characteristics of plural antecedent *sin* in KorpusDK: Somewhere between *sin* in general and bound *deres* but not identical to either of them.

- Full noun antecedents
- Inanimate antecedents
- Higher occurrence of plural possessums (but not as high as for bound *deres*)
- Relatively more frequent in relative clauses
- Relatively more frequent with coordinated singular subjects
- Less frequent in distributive contexts than bound *deres*



CLEFTS AND TOPICALISATIONS WITH PLURAL ANTECEDENT SIN: NOT FREQUENT

[word="det"][word="er|var"] [word="sin|sit|sine"]: 36 hits, 8 clefts with *sin*, 0 with **pl-antecedent**

[word="det"][word="er|var"] [word="deres"]: 350 hits, 1 cleft with bound *deres*

Men vi- og de- troede jo, <det var deres> selvstændighed, de kæmpede for at realisere.

[word="det"][word="er|var"][pos!="V"]{1, 3}[word="sin|sit|sine"]: 325 hits, 1 cleft with **pl-antecedent sin**
der senere sammen med Zanzibar blev til Tanzania. <Det var fra sine> østafrikanske kystforter, at tyskerne ekspanderede mod vest. Således blev Berlin-konferencens

<s> [word="sin|sit|sine"][pos="N"][pos="V"]: 107 hits, 0 with pl-antecedent and approx. 100 with sg-antecedent (the rest are fixed expressions, e.g. *sine steder*)

<s> [word="sin|sit|sine"] [pos!="V"]{1, 6}[pos="N"][pos="V"]: 162 hits, 0 with pl-antecedent



PARTITIVE RELATIVES AS BRIDGING CONTEXTS? NOT UNLIKELY – THIS SENTENCE TYPE OCCURS MUCH LESS FREQUENTLY WITH *DERES*

(this construction occurs 46+ times in 1218 examples of plural antecedent *sin* in KorpusDK)

Han er **en af de få præster i landet**, som må sejle for at komme frem til **sin** kirke.

He is one of the few priests in the-country who must sail for to come over to REFL's church

Finn Danbo er **en af dem**, der lever af **sit** keyboard.

Finn Danbo is one of them who live off REFL's keyboard.

Metalformanden er **en af de 17 socialdemokrater**, der med **sin** underskrift har markeret, at han støtter oplægget.

The-metal-president is one of the 17 social-democrats who with REFL's signature have noted that he supports the suggestion.

An excluded example: **En af narkomanerne** der ikke kunne betale **sin** gæld er fundet i nøgen i en skov (context indicates sg.)

one of the drug-users who not could pay REFL's debt is found naked in a forest

(this construction occurs **0** times in the coded sample of 1152 examples of plural antecedent *deres* in KorpusDK) – the ones below are from KorpusDK, found with a very specific search string

[...] endelig har vi fået hapsed **en af dem**, der ødelægger Statens ejendom med **deres** beskidte skriverier.

[...] finally have we got grabbed one of them who destroys the State's property with their dirty writings

Arkæologer er samtidig **en af de faggrupper** der har den stærkeste identitetsfølelse i forhold til **deres** fag ...

Archaeologists are also one of the professions who have the strongest sense of identity in relation to their subjects ...





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