The *that*-trace effect in Trinidadian English Creole

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Overview

About Trinidadian English Creole (TEC)

- Atlantic Creole

- Primarily used in Trinidad and Tobago and in diaspora communities in the UK, Canada and the US

- Major lexifier: English

- Other contributing languages: West Bantu languages, Caribbean French Creoles, Spanish, Bhojpuri (Mülheisen 2013)

About this study

Exploratory descriptive study of the *that*-trace effect in TEC using acceptability judgements presented orally

Questions

1. Does the *that*-trace effect occur in TEC?

2. Are *that*-trace judgements different if the anterior completive marker *had* is present in the embedded clause?

The *that*-trace effect

- Ungrammaticality of sentences in which:

  - a **subject** is extracted from an embedded clause

  - presence of complementiser *that*

The *that*-trace effect in Standard English

1. Keisha called Michael

2. Who do you think Keisha called?

3. Who do you think **that** Keisha called?

The *that*-trace effect in Standard English

1. Keisha called Michael

2. Who do you think Keisha called?

3. Who do you think *that* Keisha called?

4. Who do you think called Michael?

5. *Who do you think *that* called Michael?

The *that*-trace effect in TEC

1. Keisha call Michael

2. Who you think Keisha call?

3. Who you think *that* Keisha call?

4. Who you think call Michael?

5. ?Who you think *that* call Michael?

The *that*-trace effect in TEC

1. Keisha call Michael

6. Keisha <u>had</u> call Michael

2. Who you think Keisha call?

7. Who you think Keisha <u>had</u> call?

3. Who you think *that* Keisha call?

8. Who you think *that* Keisha <u>had</u> call?

4. Who you think call Michael?

9. Who you think <u>had</u> call Michael?

5. ?Who you think *that* call Michael?

10. ??Who you think *that* <u>had</u> call Michael?

That *that*-trace effect cross-linguistically

- **Reported** in various unrelated languages e.g. French, Russian, Wolof, Nupe, Levantine Arabic, Jamaican Creole (mesolect and to some extent in basilect) (Perlmutter 1971, Pesetsky 1982, Martinović 2014, Kandybowicz 2006, Kenstowicz 1983)

- Subject to

  - **dialectal** and **idiolectal variation** in American English (Robin 1987; Cowart 1997, 2003)

  - **dialectal variation** in Norwegian (Lohndal 2015)

- **Not reported** in Berbice Dutch, Cape Verdean Creole, Kriyol, Mauritian Creole, Papiamentu and Saramaccan (Nicolis 2005)

Use of written language in larger-scale studies of acceptability

- Studies conducted online have the potential to reach many language users, making generalisations about language more robust

- Large-scale experimental studies of acceptability are typically collected using **written stimuli**

- Many Creoles e.g. TEC

  - do not have a standardised written form that is used widely

  - exist alongside a more prestigious standardised variant with a written form that is used widely

Use of written language in larger-scale studies of acceptability

- The use of written language stimuli to collect acceptability judgements in a minoritised oral language can impact ratings e.g. the use of written English to collect TEC judgements can invoke English norms

- The use of **audio stimuli** has the potential to mitigate such effects (Sedarous & Namboodiripad 2019)

Method

- Acceptability judgements administered through Qualtrics **online** in **2020**

Participants

- **34** speakers of TEC recruited through my social network
  - 30 with tertiary-level education
    - Likely to be influenced by written and spoken Standard English norms
- Average age: 31.6 years
- Average length of time lived in Trinidad & Tobago: 28.3 years

Design

- 24 sentences presented through audio recordings

  - 10 target

  - 14 fillers

  - random order

Design

- Participants listen to sentence and rate using a five-point Likert scale

- Ratings were z-scored
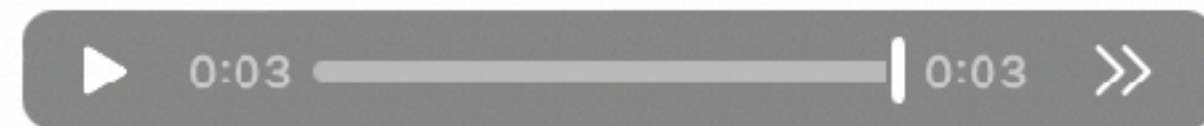
Increasingly **less** acceptable

Sentence types

S = sentence

OE = object extraction, SE = subject extraction

+that = *that* present, −that = *that* absent

- S1 = no extraction *e.g. I think Sean call Kelly yesterday*
- S2 = OE, +that *e.g. Who you think that Sean call yesterday?*
- S3 = OE, −that *e.g. Who you think Sean call yesterday?*
- S4 = SE, −that *e.g. Who you think call Kelly yesterday?*
- S5 = SE, +that *e.g. Who you think that call Kelly yesterday?* target
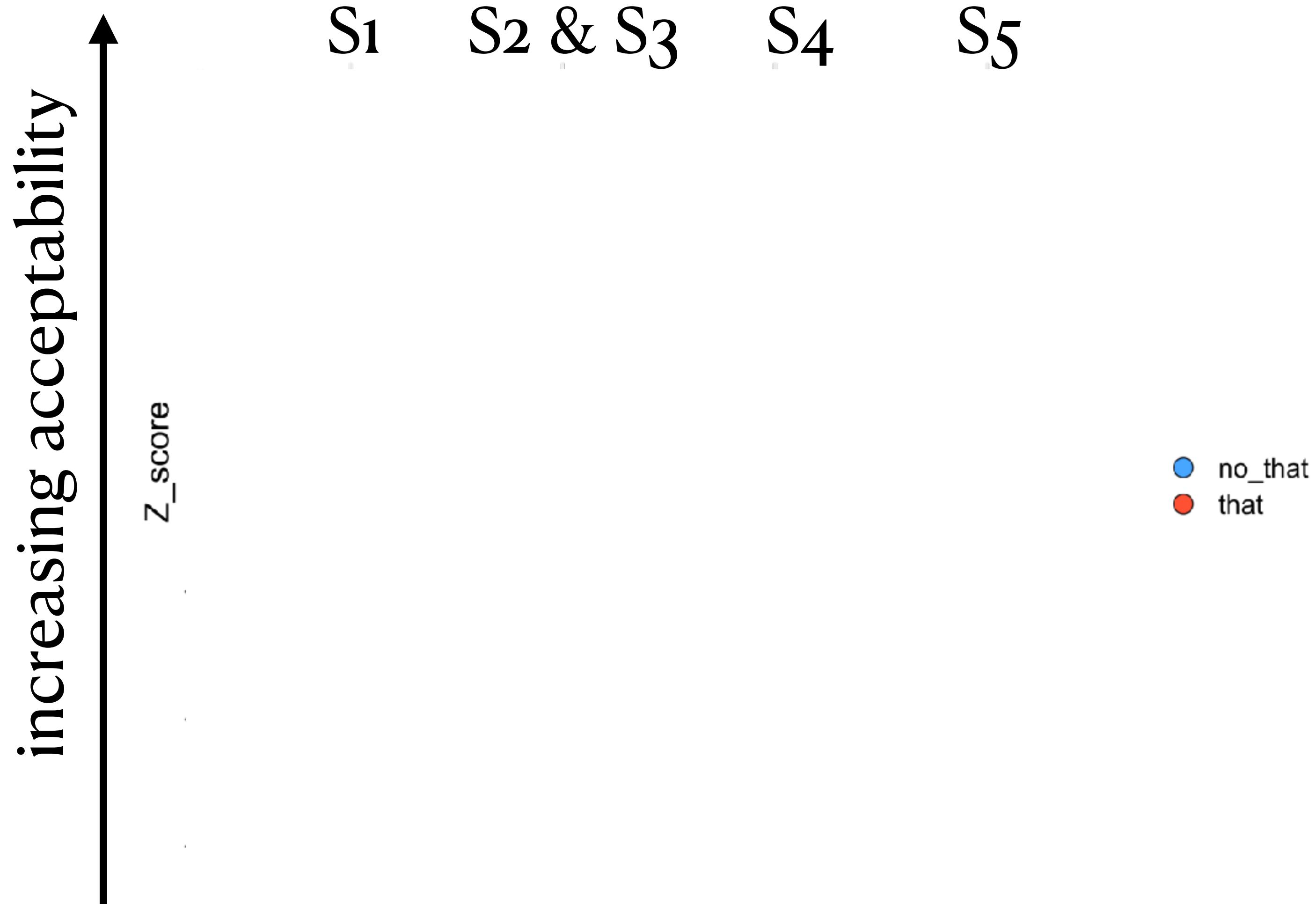
Conditions

- **−had**
  - S1 = no extraction *e.g. I think Sean call Kelly yesterday*
  - S2 = OE, +that *e.g. Who you think that Sean call yesterday?*
  - S3 = OE, −that *e.g. Who you think Sean call yesterday?*
  - S4 = SE, −that *e.g. Who you think call Kelly yesterday?*
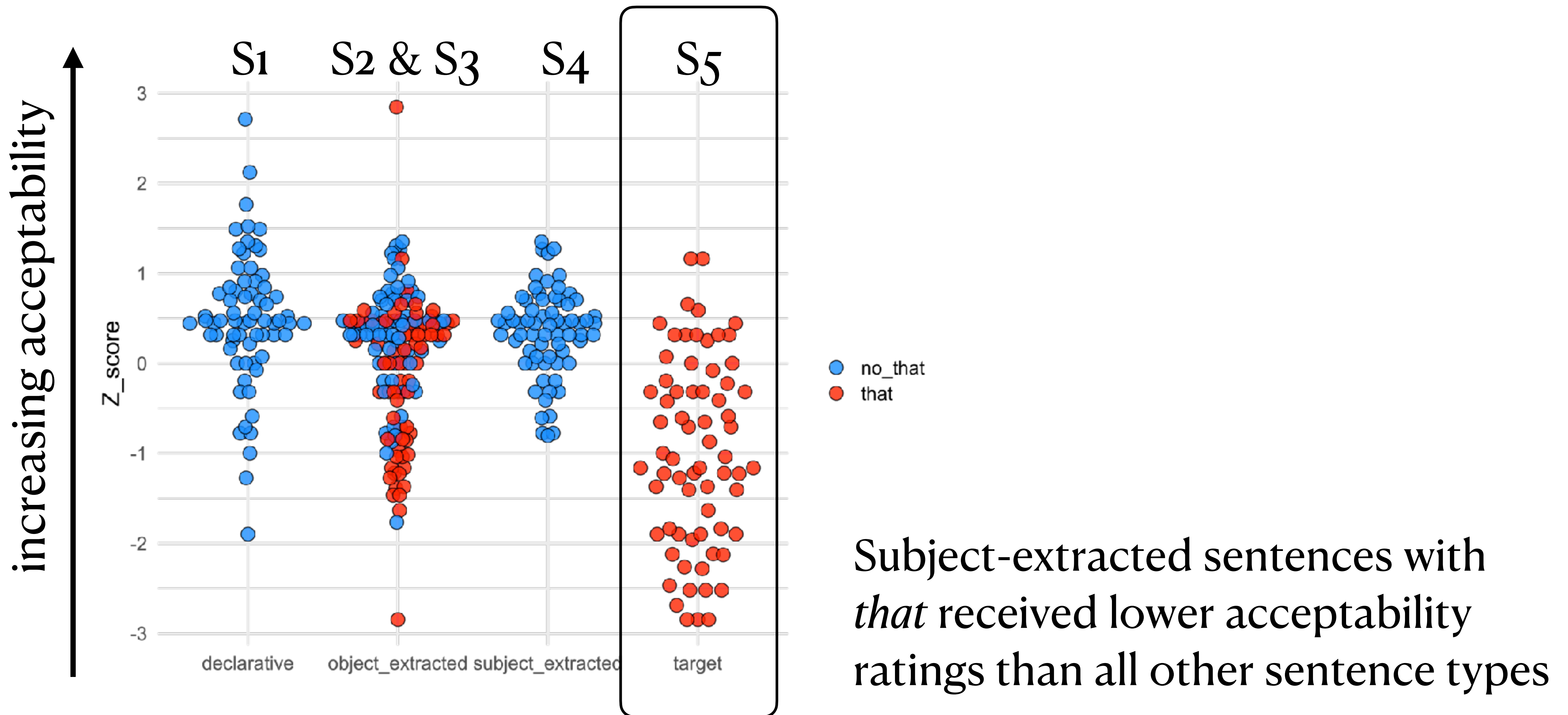 - S5 = SE, +that *e.g. Who you think that call Kelly yesterday?*
- +**had**
  - S1 = no extraction *e.g. I think Sean **had** call Kelly yesterday*
  - S2 = OE, +that *e.g. Who you think that Sean **had** call yesterday?*
  - S3 = OE, −that *e.g. Who you think Sean **had** call yesterday?*
  - S4 = SE, −that *e.g. Who you think **had** call Kelly yesterday?*
  - S5 = SE, +that *e.g. Who you think that **had** call Kelly yesterday?*
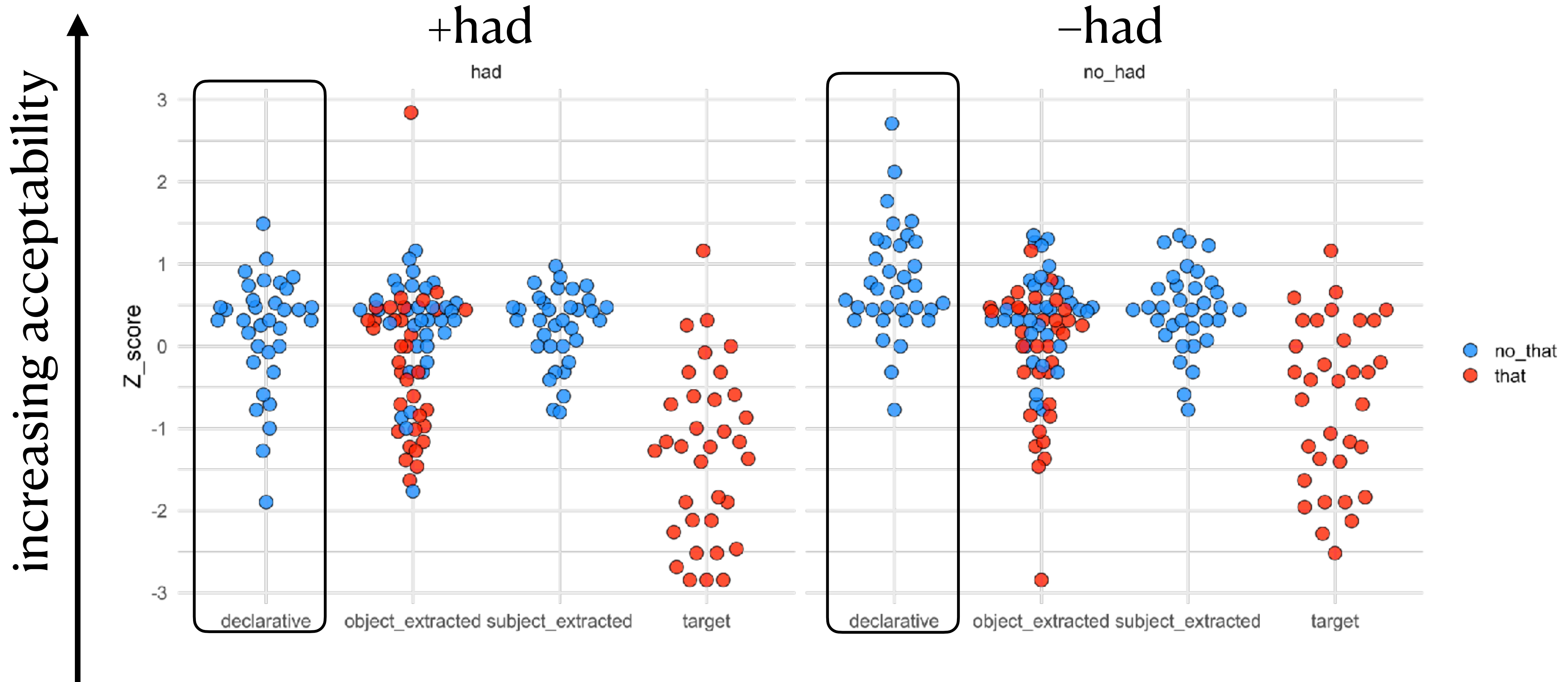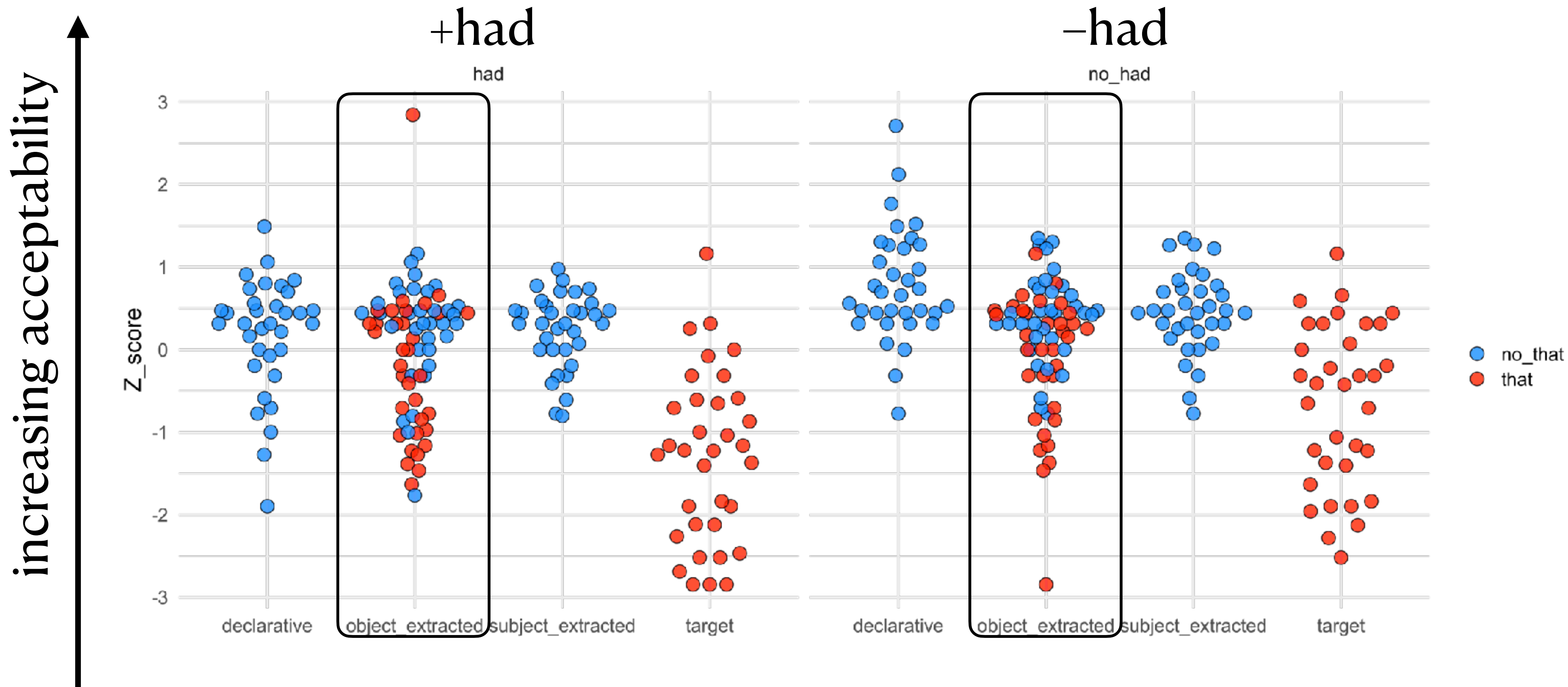
Overall acceptability of sentence types

S1   S2 & S3   S4   S5

increasing acceptability

Z_score

○ no_that
● that

Overall acceptability of sentence types

Subject-extracted sentences with *that* received lower acceptability ratings than all other sentence types

Acceptability of sentence types in +**had** vs –**had**
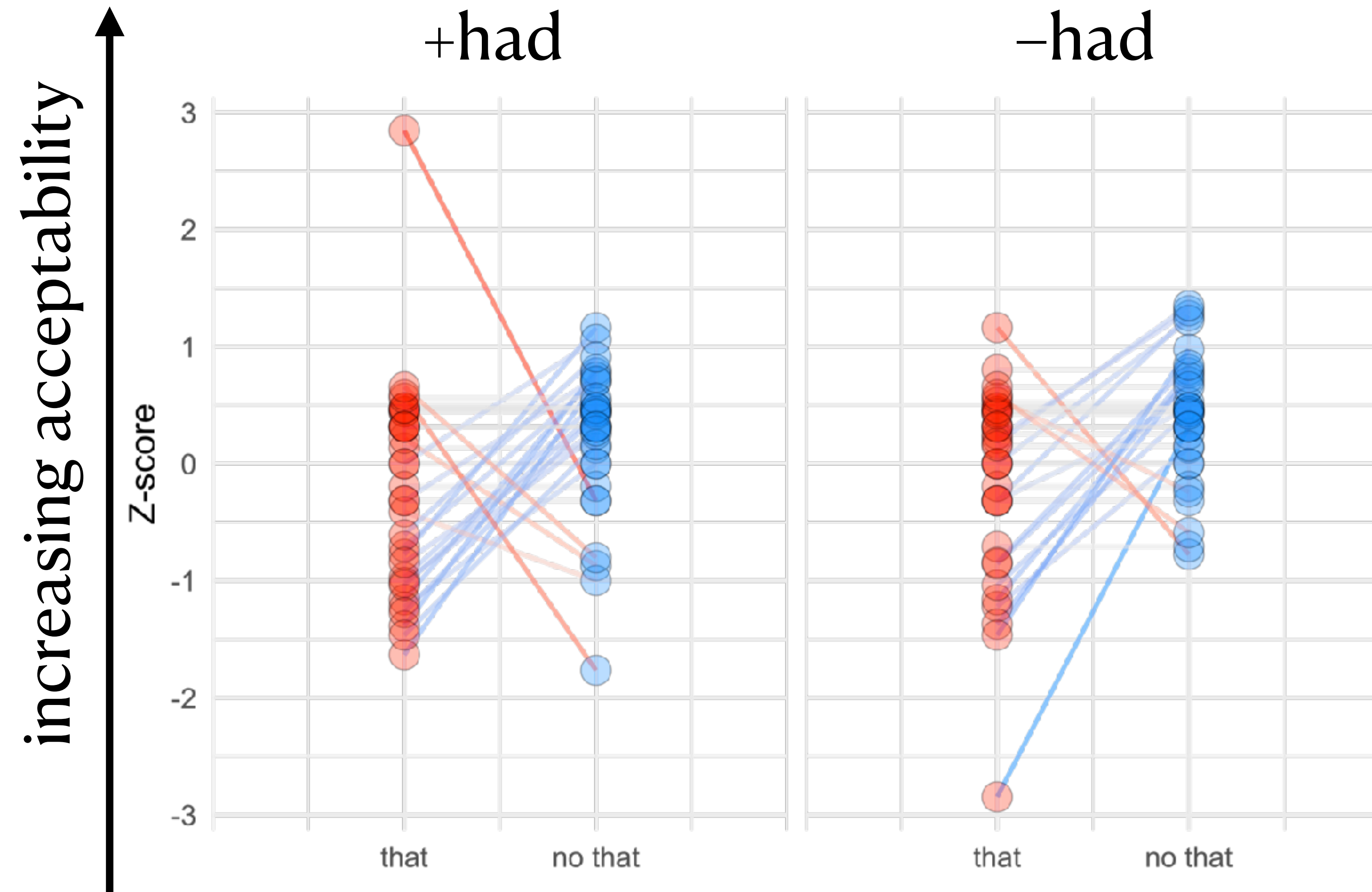

+had

–had

increasing acceptability

–had declaratives received higher ratings than +had declaratives

Object extraction condition

+had   −had

- blue circle = −that rating
- red circle = +that rating

Object extraction condition

+had −had

increasing acceptability

- blue circle = −that rating
- red circle = +that rating

/ blue line = −that sentence rated higher
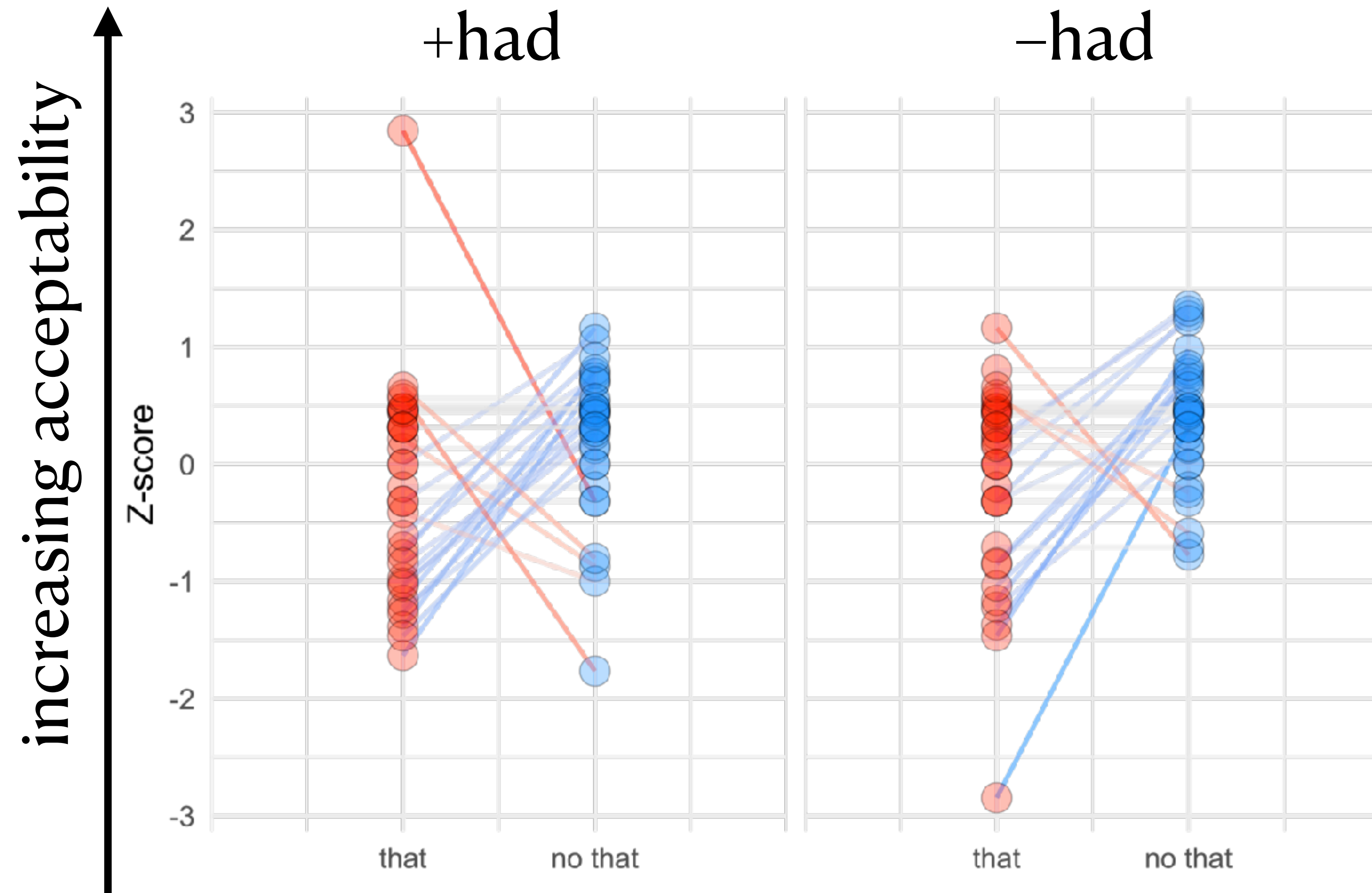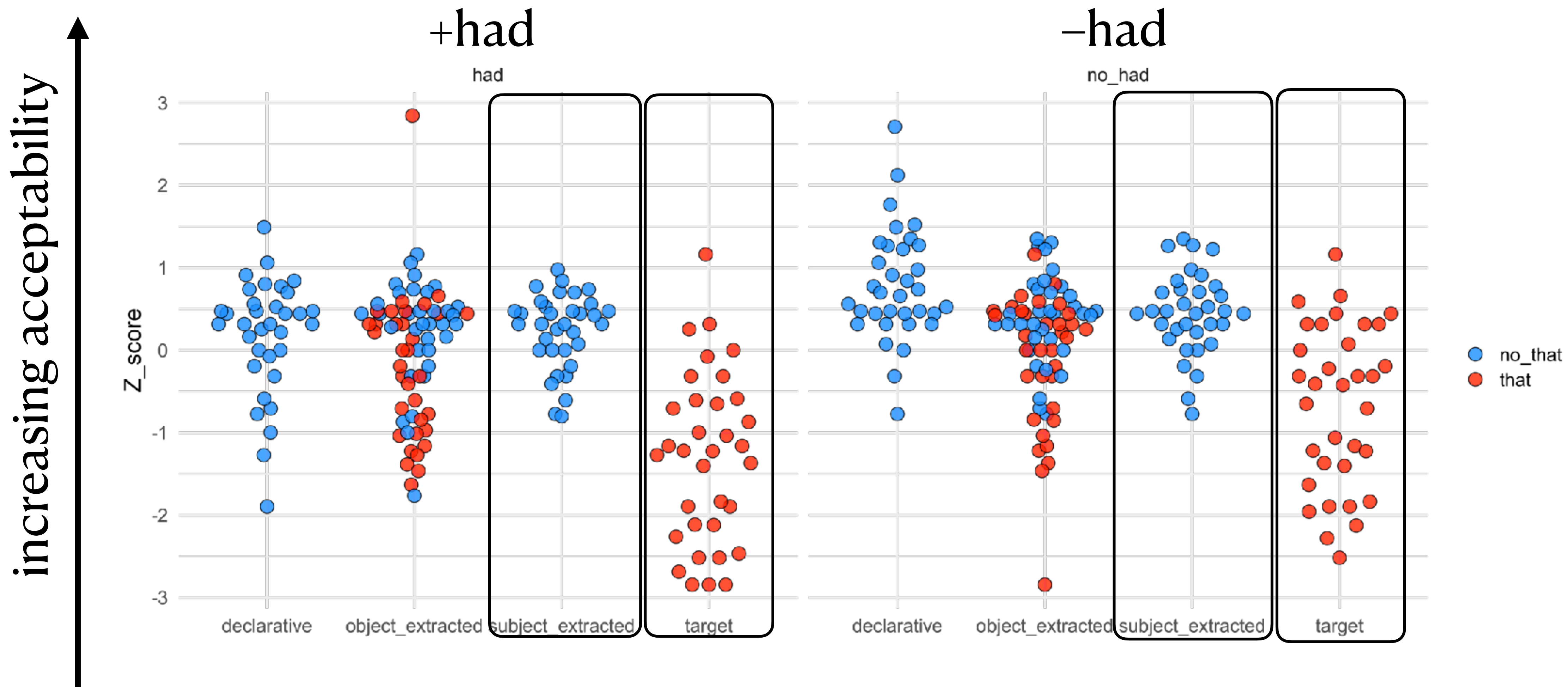\ red line = +that sentence rated higher
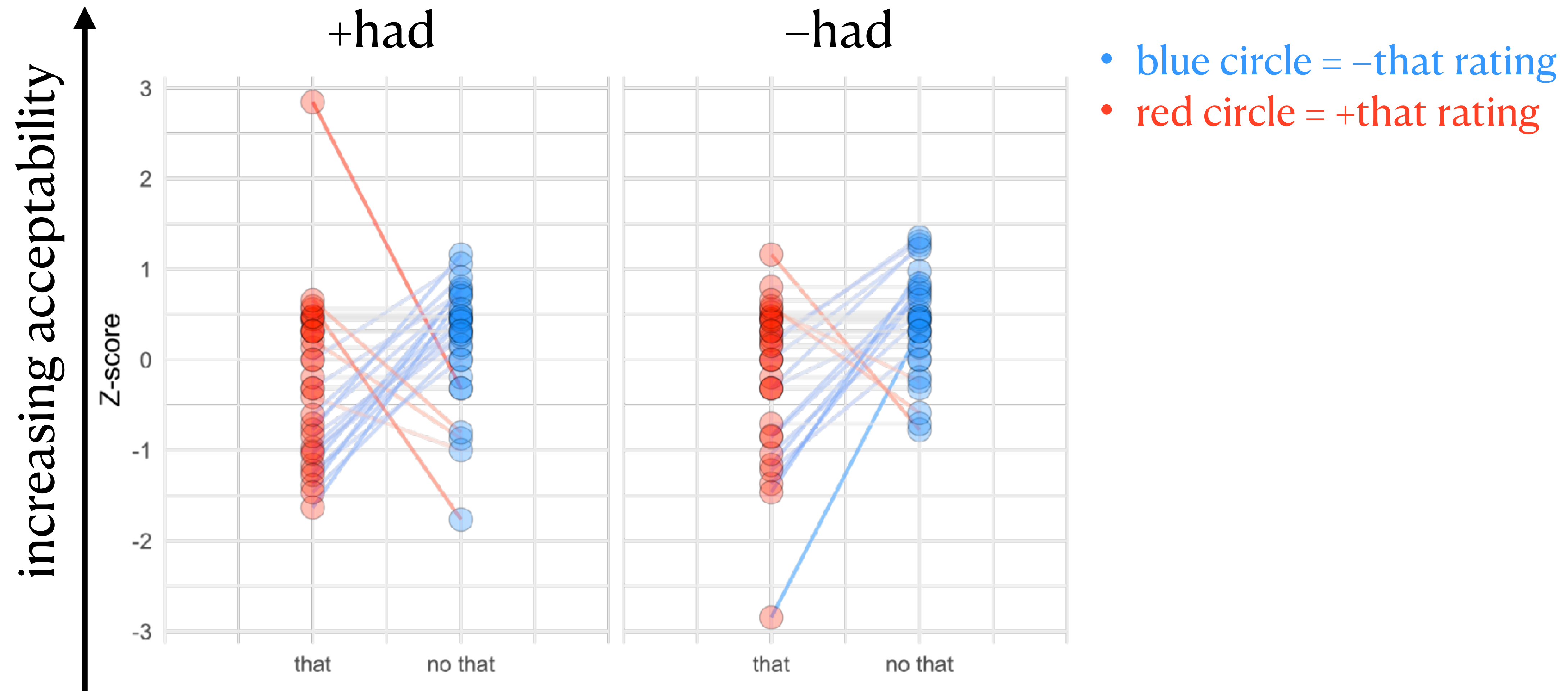
Object extraction condition

- blue circle = −that rating
- red circle = +that rating

/ blue line = −that sentence rated higher
\ red line = +that sentence rated higher

No significant difference in ratings when *had* is present vs absent
(X^2 (1) = 0.060714, p = 0.8054)

Subject extraction condition

+had

−had

increasing acceptability

- blue circle = −that rating
- red circle = +that rating

/ blue line = −that sentence rated higher
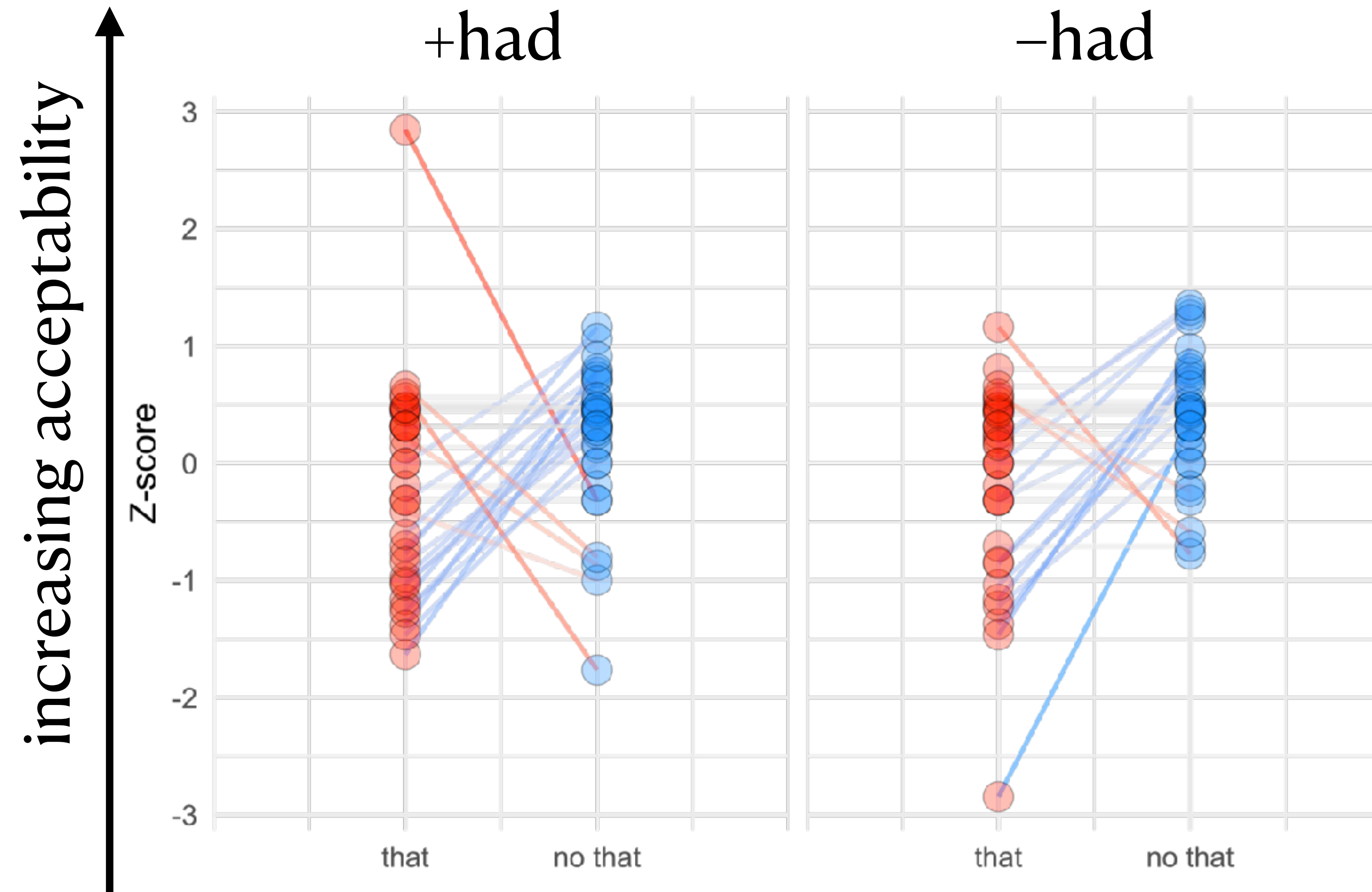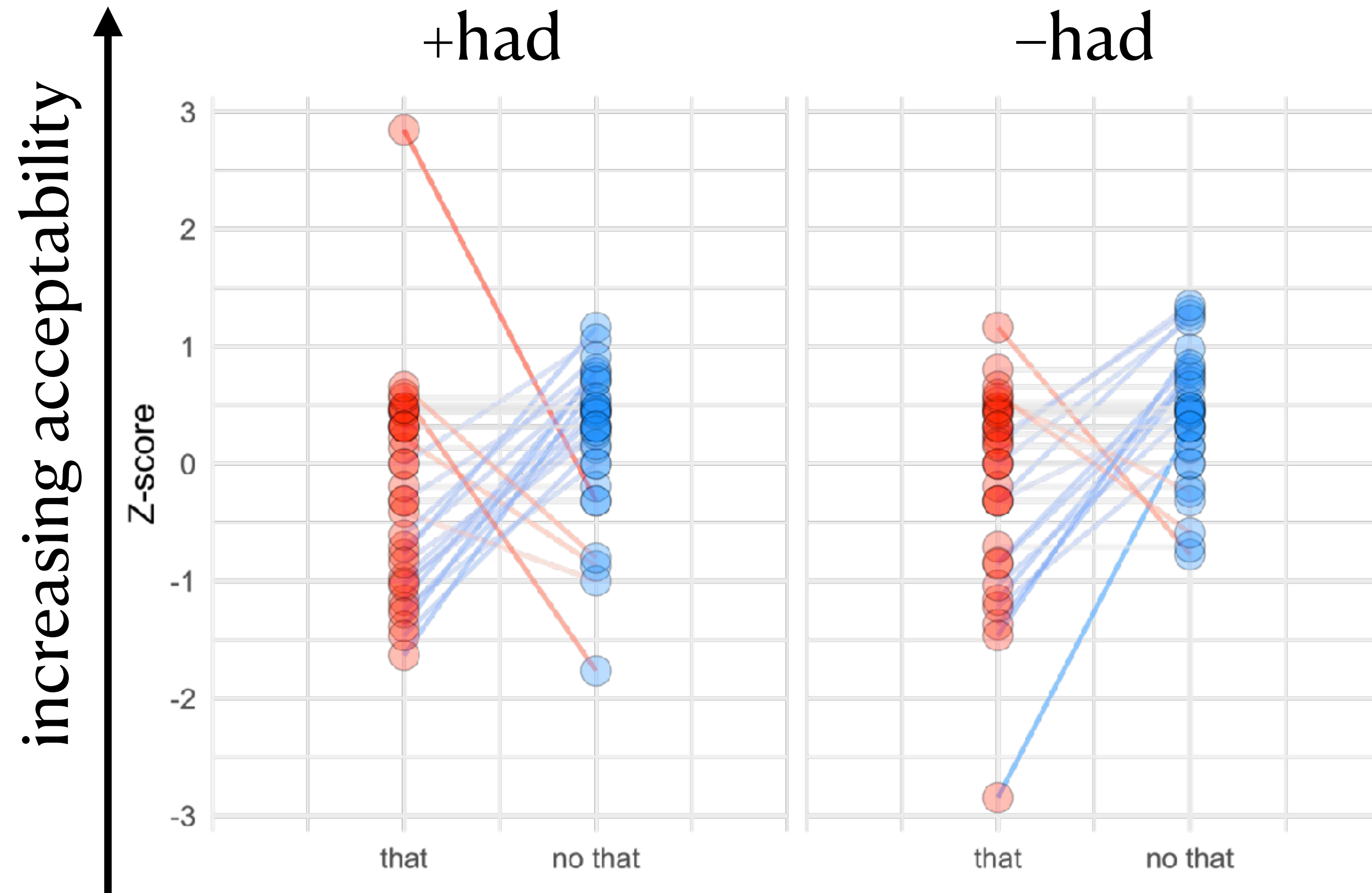\ red line = +that sentence rated higher

Subject extraction condition

+had   **−had**

increasing acceptability

- blue circle = −that rating
- red circle = +that rating

/ blue line = −that sentence rated higher
\ red line = +that sentence rated higher

No significant difference in ratings when *had* is present vs absent
(X^2 (1) = 1.7708, p = 0.1833)

Subject vs object condition — the *that*-trace effect

- No difference in +had vs –had condition

  - Ratings are grouped by subject vs object extraction condition

	Subject extraction	Object extraction
+that	a. Who you think **that** (had) call Kelly yesterday?	c. Who you think **that** Sean (had) call yesterday?
–that	b. Who you think (had) call Kelly yesterday?	d. Who you think Sean (had) call yesterday?

Subject vs object condition — the *that*-trace effect

- No difference in +had vs –had condition

  - Ratings are grouped by subject vs object extraction condition

	Subject extraction	Object extraction
+that	a. Who you think **that** (had) call Kelly yesterday?	c. Who you think **that** Sean (had) call yesterday?
–that	b. Who you think (had) call Kelly yesterday?	d. Who you think Sean (had) call yesterday?

- $X^2 (1) = 10.767,$ $p < 0.01$

  - a +that construction is rated lower than a –that construction more times in the subject extraction condition than the object condition

Discussion

- The *that*-trace effect occurs in this group of TEC users (30-year-olds with tertiary education)

  - Aligns with studies of the mesolectal variety of Jamaican Creole

- No significant difference in *that*-trace effect if anterior completive marker, *had,* is present in embedded clause or not

- Presence of *had* lowers acceptability of declaratives

  - Maybe *had* more clearly marks a sentence as Creole, leading to lower ratings?

Discussion

- More judgements needed

- **Prosody in stimuli should be controlled more and accounted for**
  (Kandybowicz 2006)

- Instructions given in written English which could skew participants toward using English norms
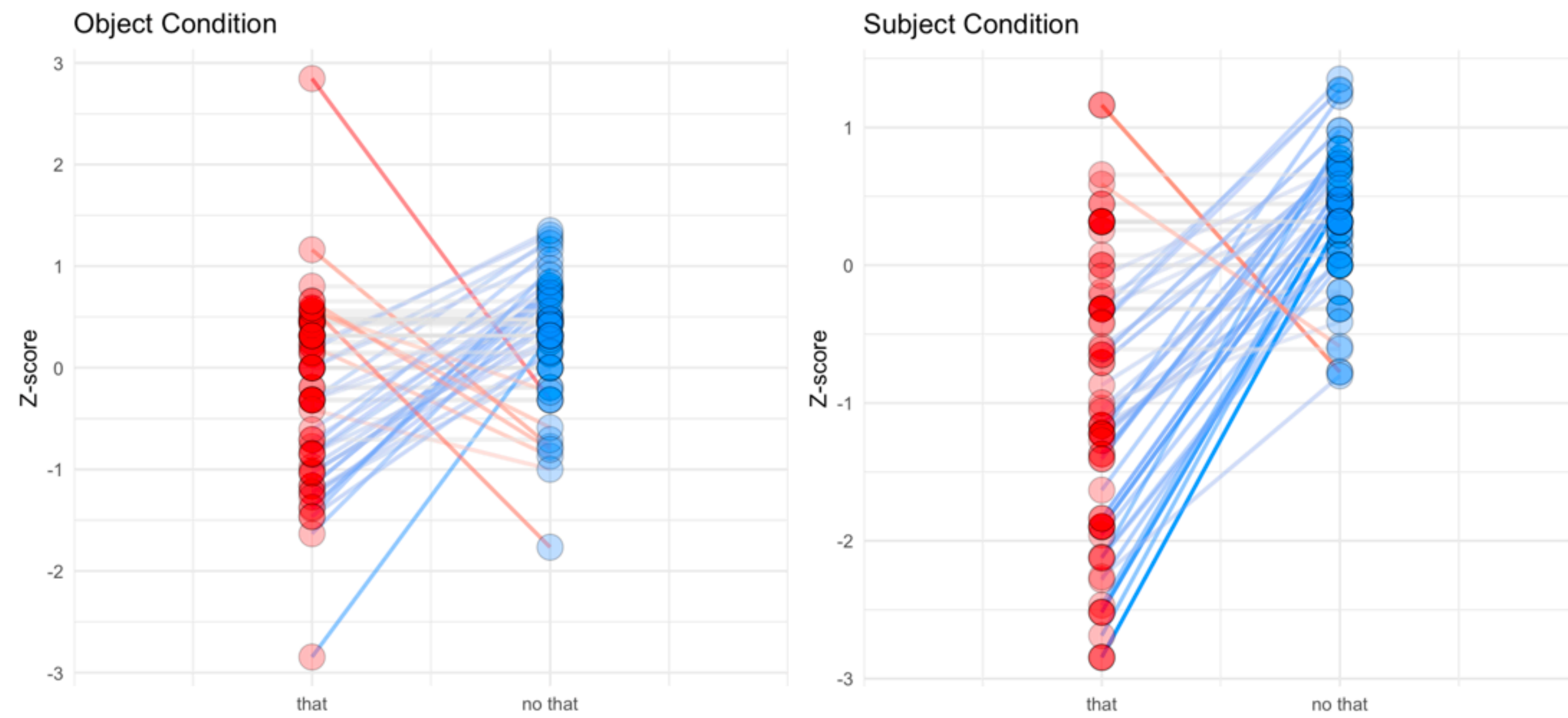
Conclusions

- *that*-trace effect occurs in TEC but may be subject to idiolectal variation

- online surveys using audio stimuli are useful when collecting acceptability judgements in Creoles

  - however, judgements may generally be lower when more Creole-type features are present in any modality

Thanks!

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/ blue line = −that sentence rated higher

\ red line = +that sentence rated higher