

Do I Wanna Know?

Explicit information, structure awareness, and the acquisition of structures of low communicative value

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Background & Motivation

Error-based learning accounts of implicit learning propose that learning happens due to a mismatch between anticipated outcomes and the actual input, which leads to the **adjustment of expectations** (Chang et al., 2006). This process is affected by **attention** and **awareness** (Zarcone et al., 2016).

Grammatical awareness can help overcome L1 processing routines. It can facilitate the **indirect development of implicit knowledge** by engaging with explicit knowledge (N.C. Ellis, 2007) and by **noticing** and consciously contrasting structures (R. Ellis, 2006).

Schmidt's original Noticing Hypothesis (1993) stated that only forms that are **consciously registered** are available as intake and thus are acquired. Bill VanPatten's **Input Processing** (2020), however, emphasizes that it's **processing** and not awareness that leads to acquisition, and that attention is allocated depending on the **communicative value** of the form.

Target structure: Subject-Verb Inversion / V2 constraint

- Die Frau_{subj} **kaufte**_{verb} gestern Bananen.
- Gestern **kaufte**_{verb} die Frau_{subj} Bananen.

⚠ V2 constraint does not have a semantic/pragmatic function (Lund, 1997), *fronting* does.

Inversion is a demanding structure unless already proficient (Brautaset, 1996; Sørby & Kristensen, 2025; Westergaard, 2003): It is acquired late (Clahsen et al., 1983; Ellis, 1989; Pienemann, 1984), and emphasis in instruction does not compensate for this difficulty (Ellis, 1989).

Research Goal

How does the acquisition of a structure with low communicative value relate to
? the attention paid to the structure, and
? the learner's explicit knowledge (= awareness) of it?

Expectation: bigger role for attention than for awareness
re: IP principles: Attention > Awareness?
V2/Inversion no direct form-meaning connection → Not ideal!

Methods

The participants were naïve learners of German (N=68, L1 English) with no previous knowledge of or exposure to any V2 constraint language, divided in three groups:

- Incidental:** instructed to **only understand**
- Intentional:** instructed to understand + **pattern search**
- Instructed:** instructed to understand + received **metalinguistic explanation**

They participated in three sessions: Two training + immediate test + debriefing sessions, and one delayed post-test + debriefing.

The collected measures were:

- Attention:** Eye-tracking: ΔOE
Observed TFD on the verb – Expected TFD on the verb
- Awareness:** Verbal reports; d' confidence/accuracy GJT
- Learning:** Receptive (GJT accuracy), Productive (Accurate production rates)



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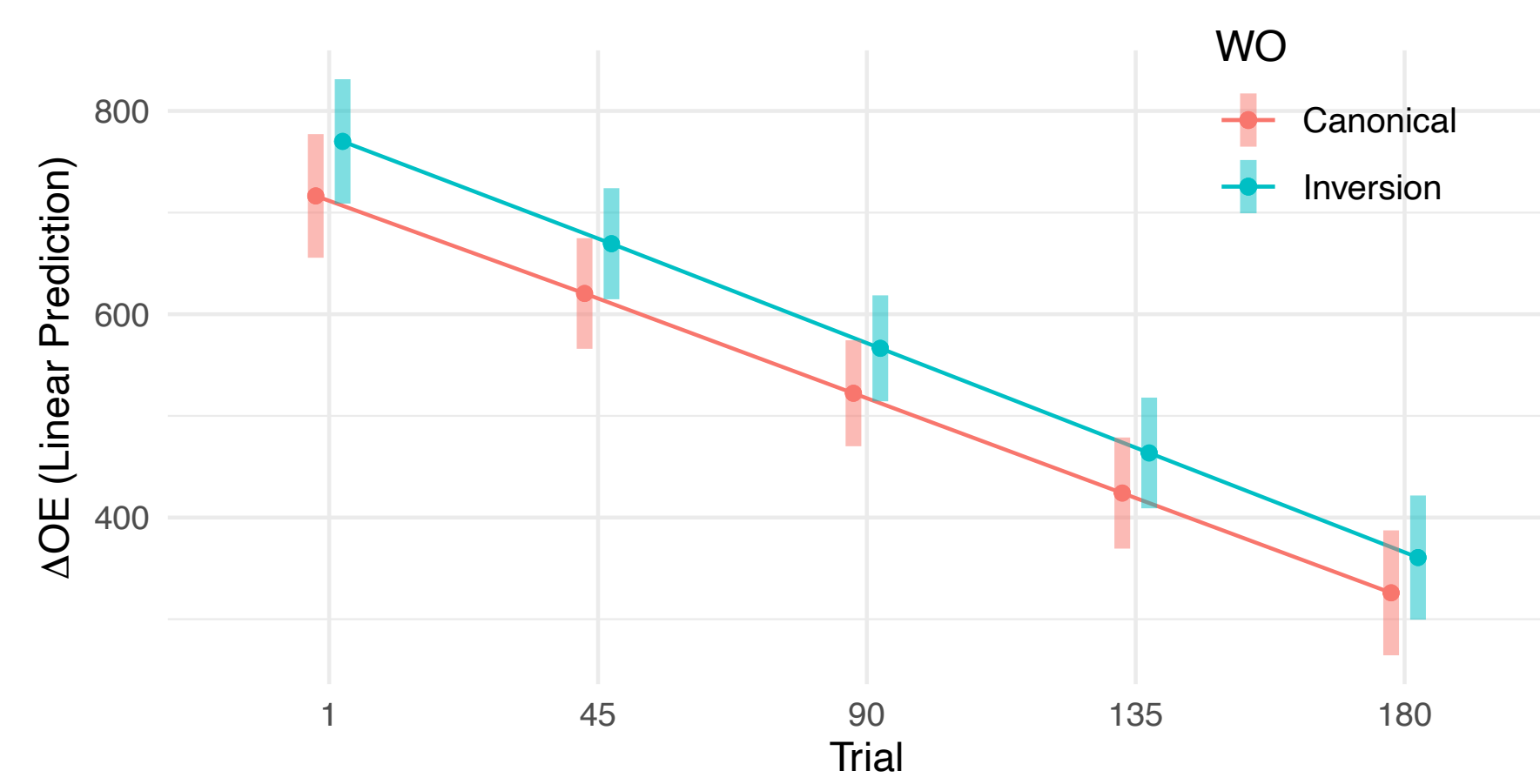
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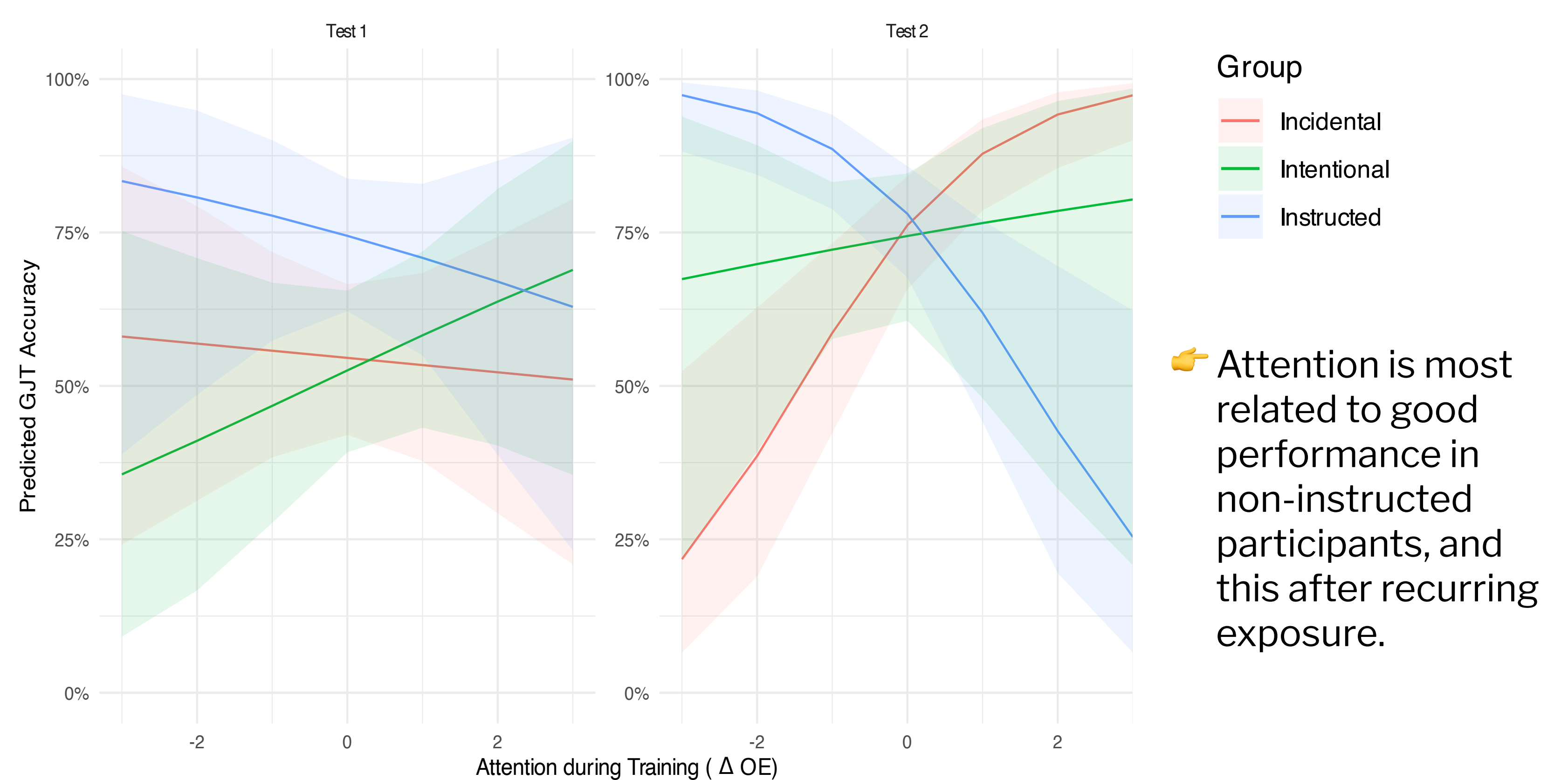
Findings

When dealing with **structures of low communicative value**...

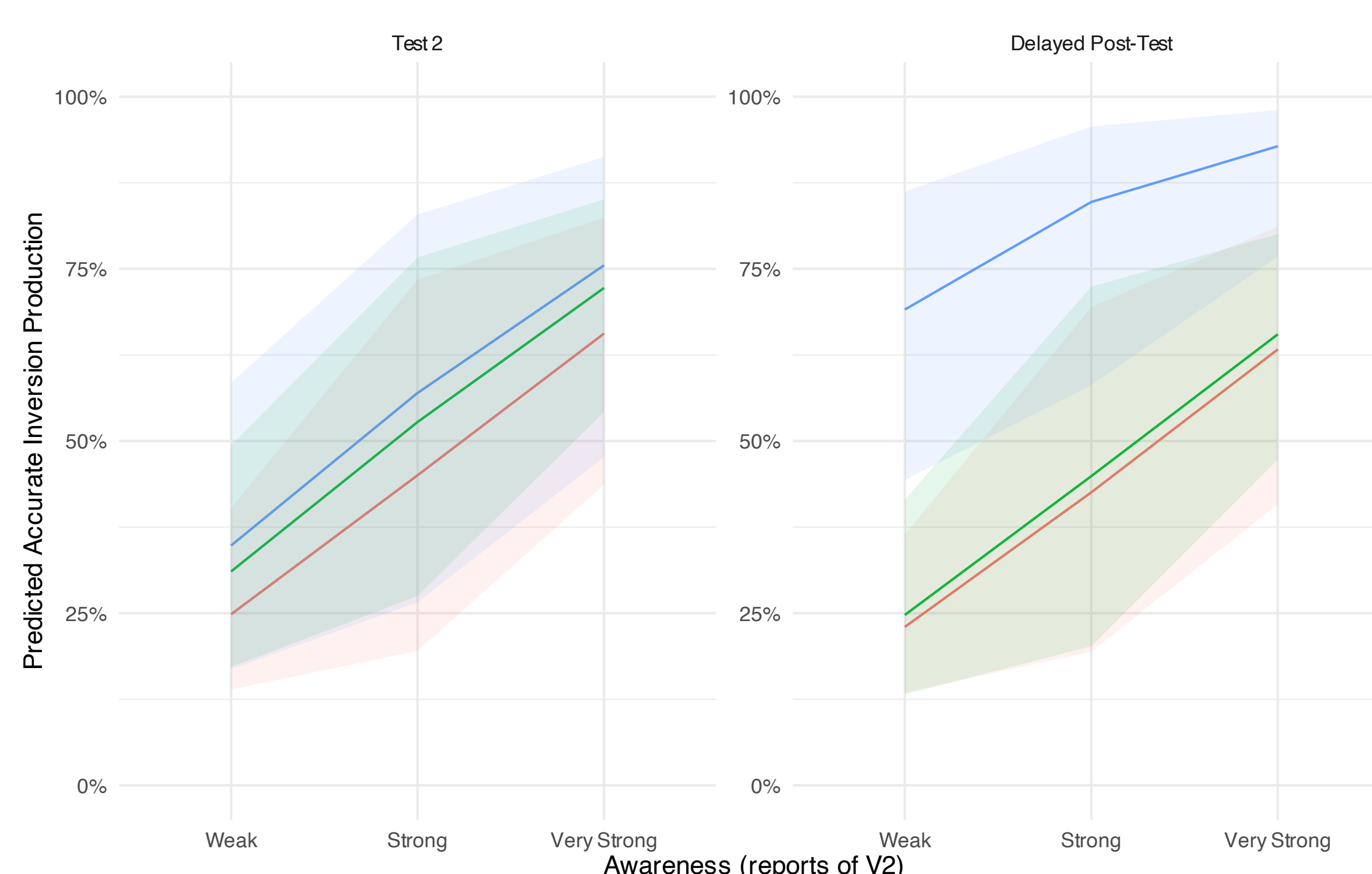
- 👉 Learners pay more attention than expected to the verb when encountering subject-verb inversion, regardless of whether they know about the structure or not.
- 👉 We found **no direct** relationship between attention and awareness
- 👉 Priming supports learning even without instruction, **but** instruction leads to more durability of gains in time.



Testing Time	Group	Aware		Unaware		N
		Poor	Good	Poor	Good	
Test 1	Incidental	2	13	2	6	23
	Intentional	2	15	0	5	22
	Instructed	3	15	0	4	22
		50		17		67
Test 2	Incidental	1	12	1	5	19
	Intentional	2	13	0	5	20
	Instructed	3	11	1	4	19
		42		16		58
Delayed Post-Test	Incidental	1	13	0	7	21
	Intentional	2	7	0	10	19
	Instructed	8	7	1	4	20
		38		22		60



👉 Attention is most related to good performance in non-instructed participants, and this after recurring exposure.



👉 No effect of instruction on the relationship between awareness and performance (but: more durability).

Awareness > Attention?

- 👉 Providing metalinguistic information increases awareness → More durability of performance on metalinguistic tasks
- ! But: Instruction is **not essential for awareness development**, acquisition, or producing the target structure (in a limited capacity).

! Moreover: Awareness resulting from instruction ≠ awareness sourced in comprehension

- 👉 Awareness from instruction leads to durable awareness, but not necessarily durable performance
- 👉 Awareness sourced in input is less durable, but maintains better performance



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