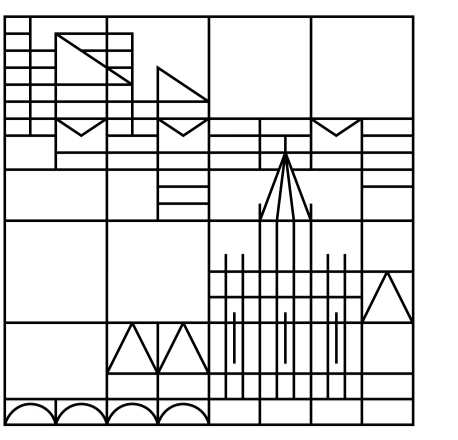




"Or not" vs. Complement Alternative Questions: two rating studies

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Polar vs "or not" questions

Bolinger 1978: "or not" questions (**NAQs**) more restricted than Polar questions (**PQs**) in non-canonical contexts

- | | |
|---|------------|
| (1) Do you want something to drink (# or not)? | Invites |
| (2) A: I just saw David. B: Is he back from Toronto (# or not)? | Inferences |
| (3) Are you crazy (# or not)? | Rhetorical |

Biezma 2009: NAQs, but not PQs, can be used to re-ask a question that previously went unanswered.

Scenario: You are coordinating the cooks for dinner. John is one of the cooks. Dinner is tomorrow and you need to know what is happening with the pasta.

- (4) A: Are you making pasta?
 B: (Silence and dubitative faces)
 A: ✓ Are you making pasta or not?

Introducing Complement Questions

a) PQs signal that p has higher *Utility Value*; NAQs signal indifference
→ NAQs out where p is more important (1-3) (Van Rooy & Šafářová '03)

b) PQs denote a singleton set $\{p, \dots\}$; NAQs denote two exhaustive, exclusive and logically opposite alternatives $\{p, \neg p\}$ (Biezma 2009)
→ NAQs induce a *cornering effect* that is functional in (4) and odd in (1-3)

Novel test case: Complement Alternative Questions (CAQ)
(5a) Is it a boy or a girl? (5b) Is it heads or tails?

Both a) and b) predict that CAQs and NAQs should pattern together:
CAQs pronounce both alternatives → They should convey indifference
CAQs pose opposite alternatives → They should induce *cornering*

If CAQs and NAQs don't pattern together, the specific formulation of "or not" must also play a role in determining the restrictions on NAQs

Experiment 1: non-canonical uses

Design: 4 (question types) x 3 (illocutionary contexts)

Invite: Joe and Fred are at a bar. Joe wants to invite Fred to Mary's party. He asks:

PQ: Hey, do you want to come to Mary's?

NAQ: Hey, do you want to come to Mary's or not?

CAQ: Hey, do you want to come to Mary's or do you want to stay here?

Control: Hey, do you want a beer?

Rhetorical: A coach wants to remind a player that he has to toughen up. He asks:

PQ: Are you a child?

NAQ: Are you a child or not?

CAQ: Are you a child or are you an adult?

Control: Is there any beer in the fridge?

Inference: George sees camping equipment all around Joe's house. Thinking that he might be going camping, George asks him:

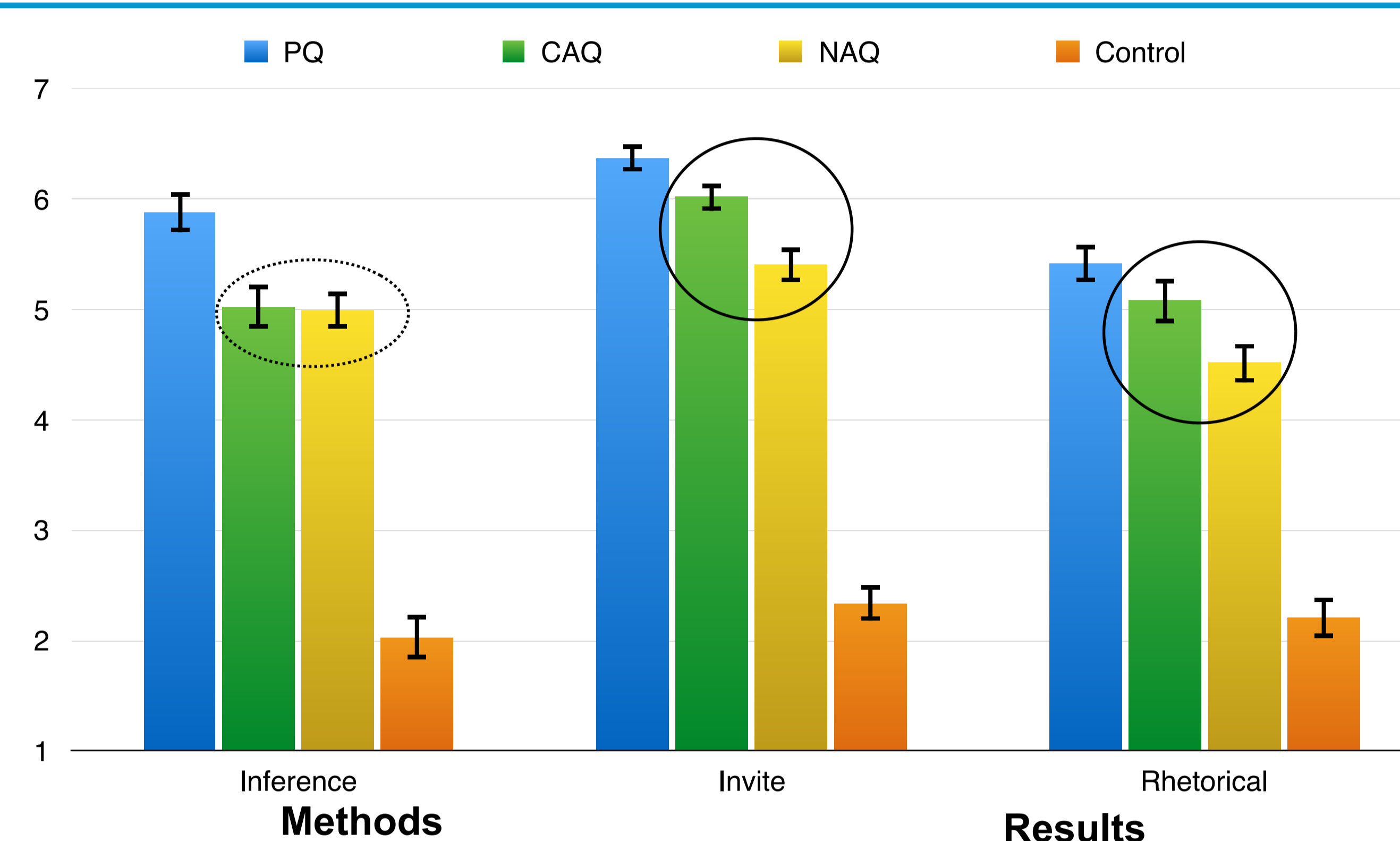
PQ: Are you going camping for spring break?

NAQ: Are you going camping for spring break or not?

CAQ: Are you going camping for spring break or are you doing something else?

Control: Are you having a good day today?

Prompt: How natural is the question? (1=max natural 7=max. unnatural)



- 24 items, 8 for each context type
- 48 subjects recruited on MTurk
- Ordinal Mixed Effects Models: Question/Context as fixed effects, random intercepts Subjects/Items
- Control bad across the board ($p < .001$)
- CAQs and NAQs both worse than PQs in inferences ($ps < .001$)
- CAQs better than NAQs in Invites and Rhetorical ($p < .001$)

Experiment 2: info-seeking use

Design: 4 (question types) x 2 (illocutionary contexts)

Ask 1st time: Mary runs into Greg on the street. It's been one year since they last saw each other, so they want to catch up:

Greg: "Hey! What's new?" Mary: "I just got a puppy!"

PQ: Greg: Oh! Cool! Is it a male?

NAQ: Greg: Oh! Cool! Is it a male or not?

CAQ: Greg: Oh! Cool! Is it a male or a female?

Control: Greg: Oh! Cool! Do you like baseball?

Ask 2nd time - Mark checks in at a hotel. After the receptionist hands him the keys, the following exchange ensues:

Receptionist: "Sir, would you like to have breakfast directly served in your room?"

Mark: "Is there a charge for it?" Receptionist: "Our customers love this service."

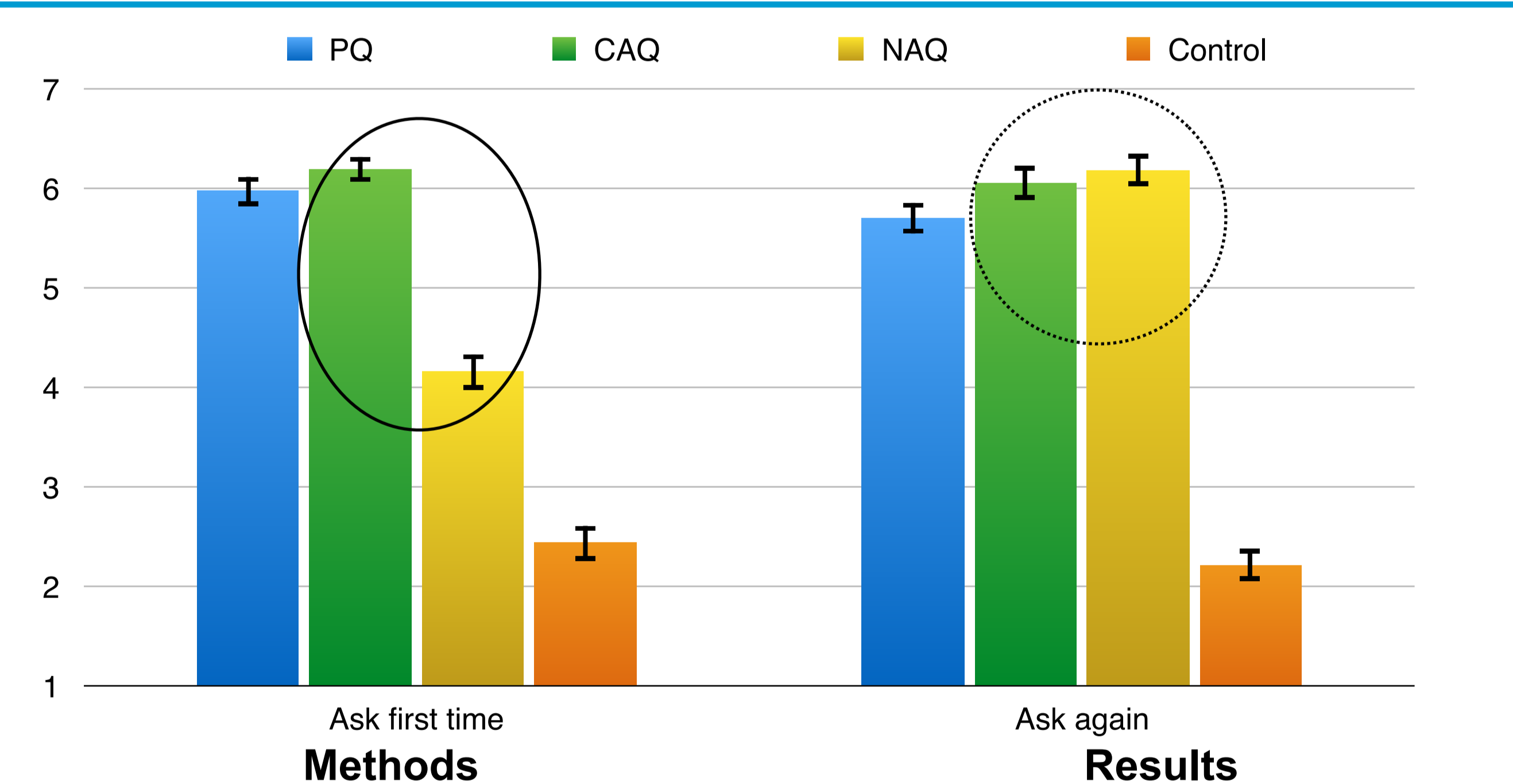
Mark: "Ok, but is there a charge for it?" Receptionist: "There is also a special menu!"

PQ: Mark: "Is there a charge for it?"

NAQ: Mark: "Is there a charge for it or not?"

CAQ: Mark: "Is there a charge for it or is it free?"

Control: Mark: "Is there cable in the room?"



- 24 items, 12 for each context type
- 48 subjects recruited on MTurk
- Ordinal Mixed Effects Models: Question/Context as fixed effects, random intercepts Subjects/Items
- Control bad across the board ($ps < .001$)
- CAQs more natural than NAQs when asking for 1st time ($p < .001$)
- CAQs more natural than PQs when asking a question again ($p < .001$)

General discussion

- The "or not" formulation of the second disjunct plays a crucial role in determining the distribution of NAQs
- Pragmatic (e.g., highlighting) and semantic factors (e.g., exhaustivity/exclusivity) alone are not sufficient to explain the differential distribution of PQs, NAQs and CAQs. We need a more-fine grained model interact to determine the utterance meaning a question.

- **Work in progress:** While NAQs pronounce both alternatives, they do not present them on equal footing:
 - They express the 2nd disjunct in terms of the 1st one, and not as a distinct proposition (see Biezma & Rawlins 2014, *bundling*)
 - As such, they signal that one proposition is to be preferred/is more important than the other
 - NAQs are restricted to contexts in which the combination of inducing cornering and highlighting p is consistent with the speaker's goal – i.e., those in which the speaker aims to re-ask a question about p to wrestle an answer from the listener
- CAQs', by contrast, do present the alternatives on a par with one another:
 - This makes CAQs felicitous to ask a question for the first time and to make an invitation (granting the listener freedom)
 - At the same time, the status of the alternatives as logically opposite makes them ok to re-ask a polar question that wasn't answered previously

Further research

How do the illocutionary properties of polar and alternative questions interact with complementizer choice?

(6a) I asked Joan if / #whether she would marry me but she refused.

(6b) I asked Joan if / #whether she was crazy and told her to stop.

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