

The Mid-dot in Gender-Inclusive French: A Reading Study

To reduce the male bias induced by the use of the masculine as generic [1], mid-dot inclusive forms have become widespread in French (e.g., étudiant·e, auteur·rice). Few studies have investigated how the mid-dot is read in French [2, 3], and results suggest it does not impede reading.

However, these studies did not vary the type of inclusive form depending on the feminine suffix (see [4] for an exception).

Does the readability of mid-dot inclusive forms depend on the type of feminine suffix?

Four reading experiments including 24 experimental sentences with an identical structure, in three gender conditions: masculine, feminine, inclusive.

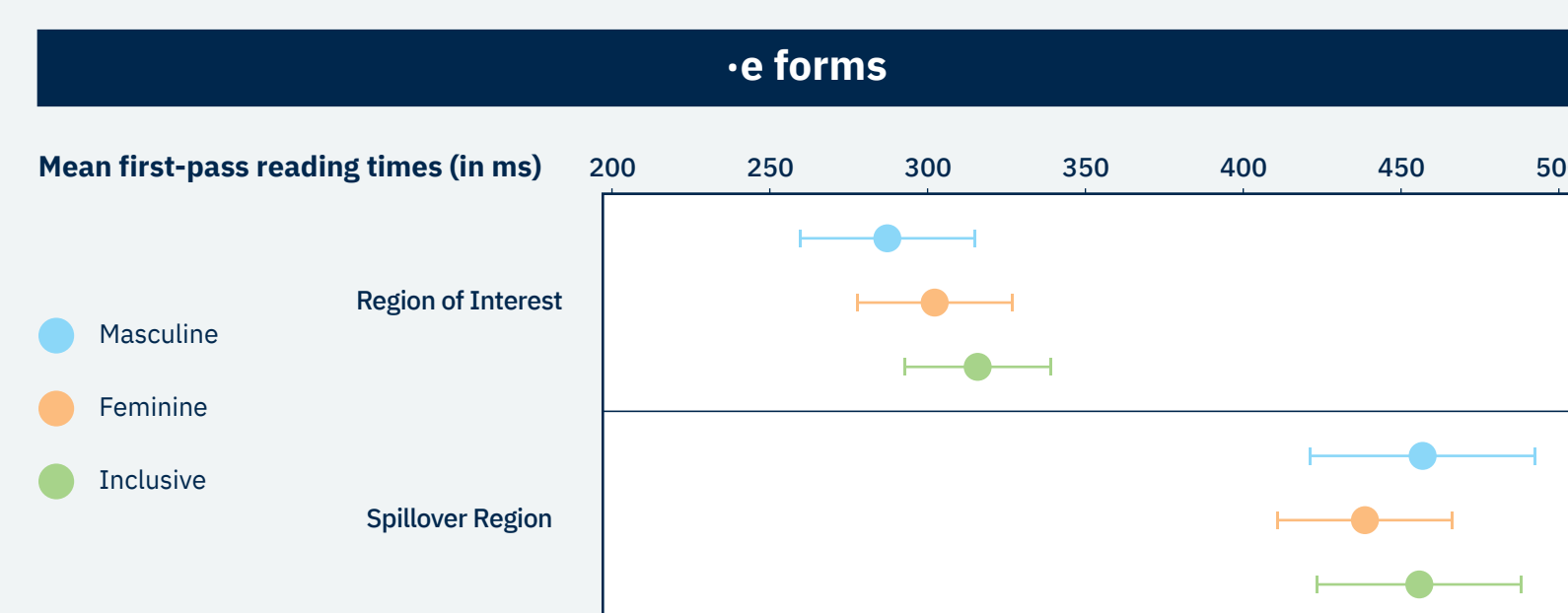
Agathe a sélectionné les étudiants/étudiantes/étudiant·e·s pour le concours d'éloquence.

Agathe selected students_{MASC}/students_{FEM}/students_{MASC-FEM-PL} for the eloquence contest.

Experiments | Eye tracking studies

Testing “·e” forms

N _{participants} = 42		
Masculine	étudiants	'students _{MASC} '
Feminine	étudiantes	'students _{FEM} '
Inclusive	étudiant·e·s	'students _{MASC-FEM-PL} '



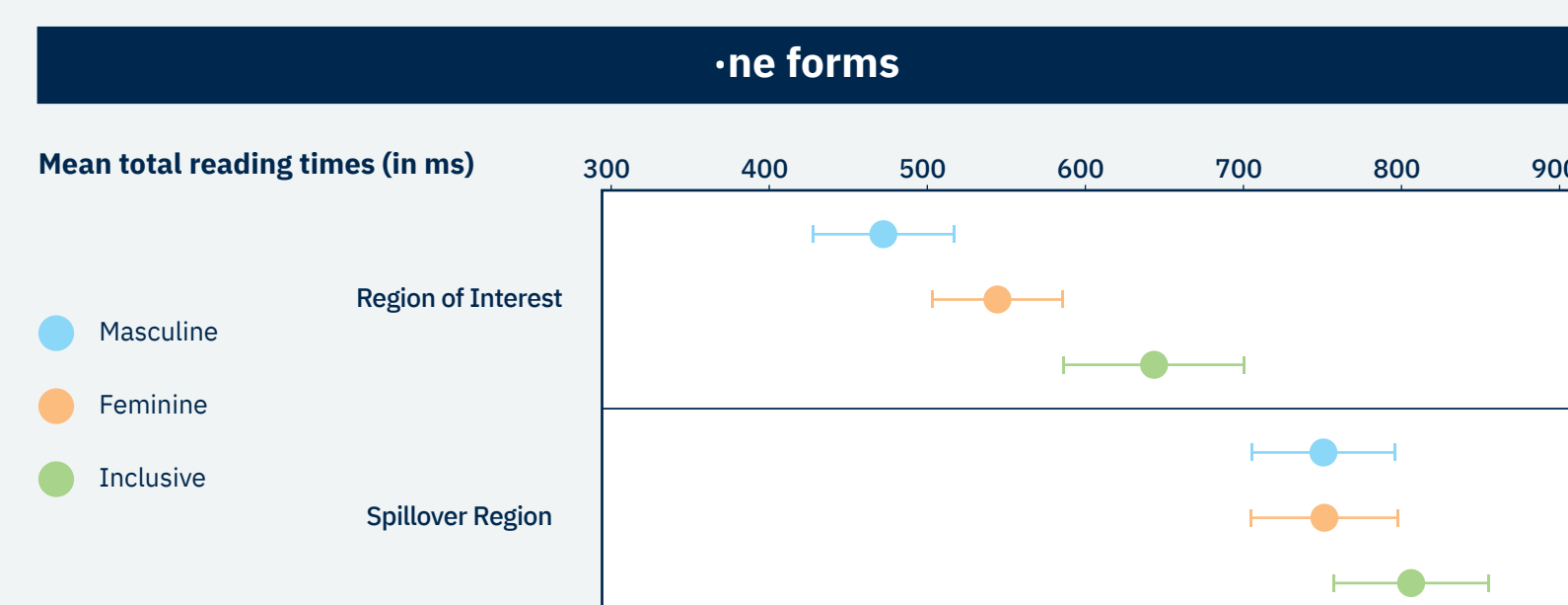
First-pass RTs in ·e form

Longer RTs for the “·e” form only during early measure, not in late measures

$\hat{B} = 0.035$, $P(\text{coef.}>0) = 0.810$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.043, 0.114]$

Testing “·ne” forms

N _{participants} = 41		
Masculine	mécaniciens	'mechanics _{MASC} '
Feminine	mécaniciennes	'mechanics _{FEM} '
Inclusive	mécanicien·ne·s	'mechanics _{MASC-FEM-PL} '



Total RTs in ·ne form

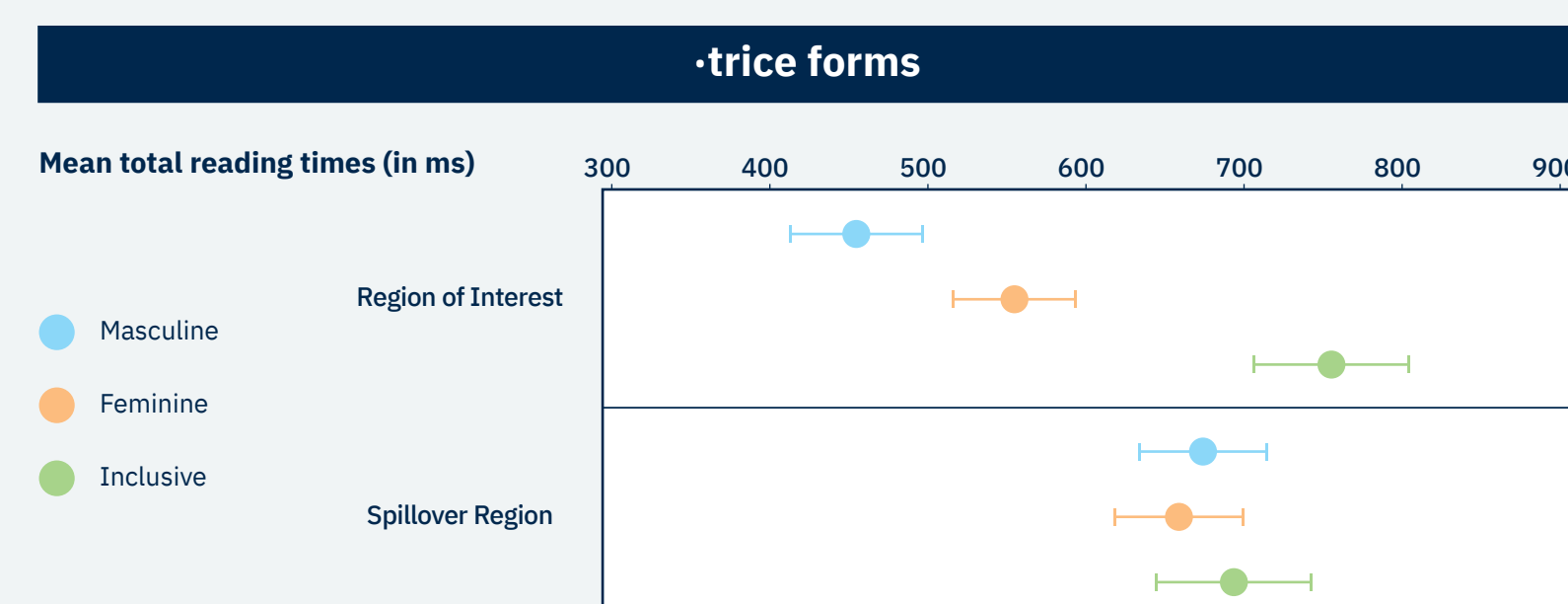
Masculine < feminine
 $\hat{B} = 0.169$, $P(\text{coef.}<0) = 1$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.286, 0.089]$

Feminine < inclusive
 $\hat{B} = -0.188$, $P(\text{coef.}>0) = 1$, $\text{CrI} = [0.087, 0.252]$

Effect of the self-reported exposure:
the more the exposure, the shorter the differences
 $\hat{B} = -0.094$, $P(\text{coef.}<0) = 0.923$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.224, 0.034]$

Testing “·rice” forms

N _{participants} = 38		
Masculine	agriculteurs	'farmers _{MASC} '
Feminine	agricultrices	'farmers _{FEM} '
Inclusive	agriculteur·rice·s	'farmers _{MASC-FEM-PL} '



Total RTs in ·rice form

Masculine < feminine
 $\hat{B} = 0.162$, $P(\text{coef.}<0) = 0.997$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.271, -0.051]$

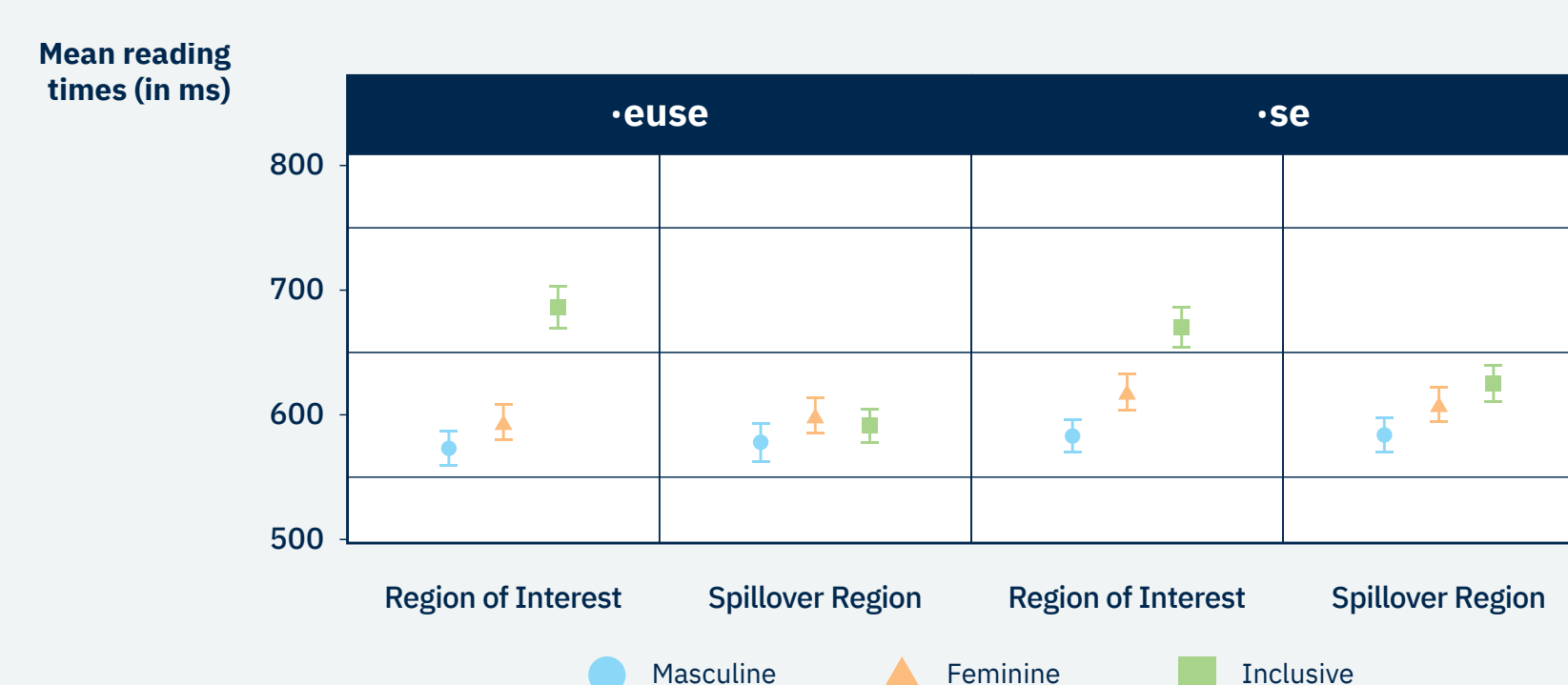
Feminine < inclusive
 $\hat{B} = -0.125$, $P(\text{coef.}>0) = 0.947$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.028, 0.277]$

This difference decreased over the course of the experiment suggesting an adaptation effect
 $\hat{B} = 0.131$, $P(\text{coef.}>0) = 0.996$, $\text{CrI} = [0.038, 0.224]$

Experiments | Self-paced reading experiment

Testing “·euse/·se” forms

N _{participants} = 78		
Masculine	chanteurs	'singers _{MASC} '
Feminine	chanteuses	'singers _{FEM} '
Inclusive 1	chanteur·euse·s	'singers _{MASC-FEM-PL} '
Inclusive 2	chanteur·se·s	'singers _{MASC-FEM-PL} '



Mean RTs for both endings, “·euse” and “·se”.

Masculine < feminine
 $\hat{B} = -0.028$, $P(\text{coef.}<0) = 0.966$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.058, 0.002]$

Feminine < Inclusive
 $\hat{B} = 0.052$, $P(\text{coef.}>0) = 0.980$, $\text{CrI} = [0.002, 0.104]$

Interaction : effect lasting on the spillover region, only for the “·se” condition
 $\hat{B} = -0.004$, $P(\text{coef.}<0) = 0.881$, $\text{CrI} = [-0.010, 0.003]$

Discussion

- “·e” form: longer RTs only in the early measures
- “·ne” form: long-lasting effect, self-reported exposure to IW reduced this effect
- “·rice” form: adaptation effect over the course of the experiment
- “·euse / ·se” forms: long-lasting effect for the less pronounceable form (“·se”)

Overall, exposure and pronounceability influence RTs of inclusive forms

References

- [1] Gygax P., Gabriel U., Lévy A., Pool E., Grivel M., Pedrazzini E. (2012). The masculine form and its competing interpretations in French: when linking grammatically masculine role nouns to female referents is difficult. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 24, 395-408.
- [2] Liénardy, C., Tibblin, J., Gygax, P., & Simon, A.-C. (2023). Écriture inclusive, lisibilité textuelle et représentations mentales. *Discours*, 33.
- [3] Girard, G., Foucambert, D., & Le Mené, M. (2022). Lisibilité de l'écriture inclusive : apports des techniques d'oculométrie. *Proceedings of the 2022 annual conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*.
- [4] Zami, J., & Hamforth, B. (2024). Intelligibilité de l'écriture inclusive : une approche expérimentale. In F. Neveu, S. Prévost, A. Montebrun, A. Steuckardt, G. Bergounioux, G. Merminod & G. Philippe (Eds.), *SHS Web of Conferences*, 191.