

Non-Māori speaking New Zealanders show surprisingly sophisticated Māori phonotactic knowledge



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ABSTRACT

○ **Background:** Language speakers can rate the gradient well-formedness of nonwords in their language. Such phonotactic knowledge is assumed to have been acquired from statistical learning over speakers' lexicons [1-3]. Most New Zealanders (NZers) are exposed to Māori in their daily lives but do not speak it.

○ **Objective:** What phonotactic knowledge do NZ-based non-Māori-speakers (NMS) have?

○ **Results:** Non-speakers of a language can develop sophisticated phonotactic knowledge through ambient exposure. Phonotactics need not arise as a generalization over a large explicit lexicon. Non-fluent speakers seem to possess implicit knowledge of the statistical properties of the lexicon.

GOALS OF THE STUDY

⇒ Collect NZers' well-formedness ratings of Māori-like nonwords to assess their phonotactic knowledge of Māori.

⇒ Compare the phonotactic knowledge that NZ-based non-Māori-speakers (NMS) and Māori-speakers (MS) have.

⇒ Explore possible explanations for NMS' surprisingly sophisticated phonotactic knowledge of Māori.

MATERIALS

○ **Stimulus preparation**

- ⇒ 1760 Māori-like nonwords generated from a trigram model using a pseudoword generator [4]
- ⇒ The trigram model trained by means of a Māori dictionary [5] and Māori running speech data (RS) [6-7]
- ⇒ Lists of stimuli, with each list set to a particular length (3 to 8 phonemes), and each list containing 240-320 nonwords

○ **Participants**

- ⇒ 41 Māori-speakers (MS): 5-9 participants per length
- ⇒ 137 non-Māori speakers (NMS): 20-25 participants per length

○ **Measures of linguistic knowledge**

⇒ **Phonotactic score:** sum of log transitional trigram probabilities normalized by length using a language model (LM) based on:

- a Māori dictionary [5]
- segmented Māori RS [6-7]
- a list of 963 Māori words in NZ English [8]

⇒ **Word shape score:** sum of log transitional trigram probabilities normalized by length using a LM obtained by identifying each segment as a consonant, vowel, or long vowel, and calculating probabilities over sequences of those categories.

⇒ **Presence of macron** in nonwords: used as long vowel markers in written Māori.

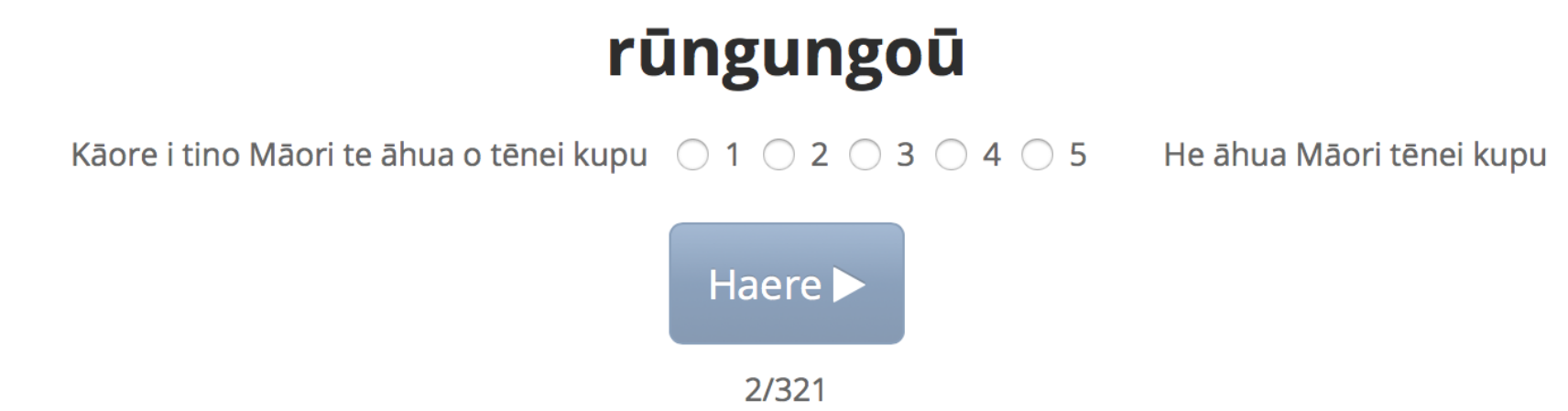
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EXPERIMENTS

① **Online Māori well-formedness rating task (for MS)**

⇒ In a rating task in Māori, participants rate Māori-like nonwords for how good they would be as Māori using a 1-5 scale.



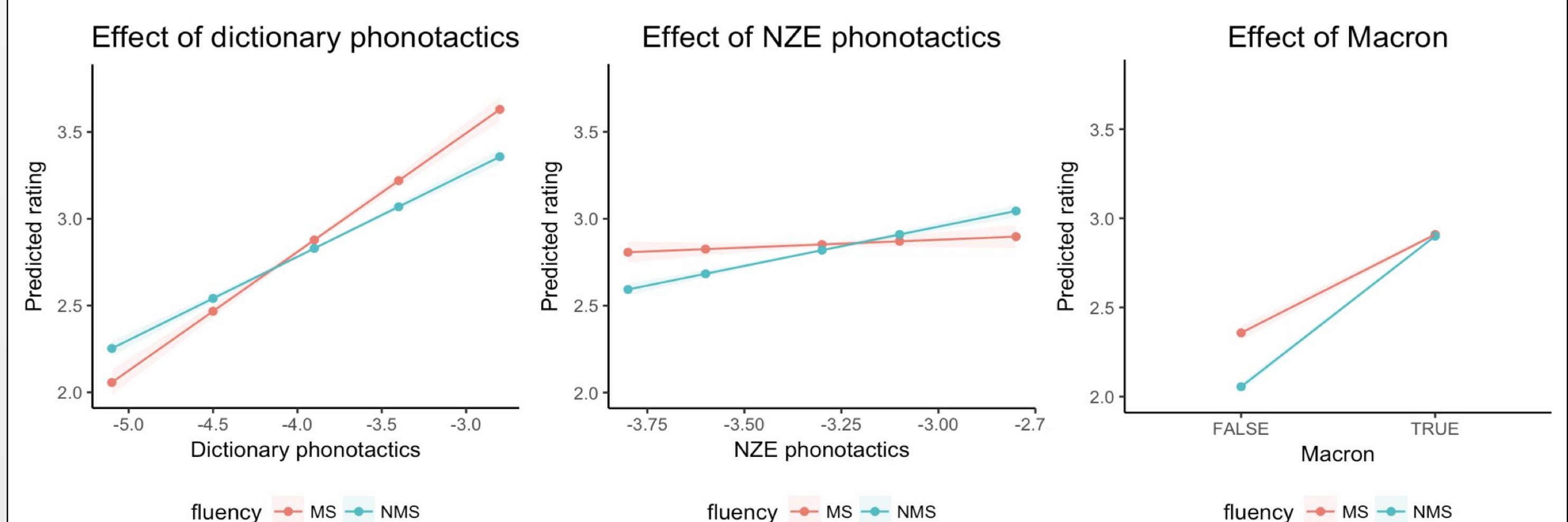
② **Online Māori well-formedness rating task (for NMS)**

⇒ The same instructions in English and set of stimuli as in the Exp for MS



RESULTS

○ **Modeling ratings with a linear mixed effects model**



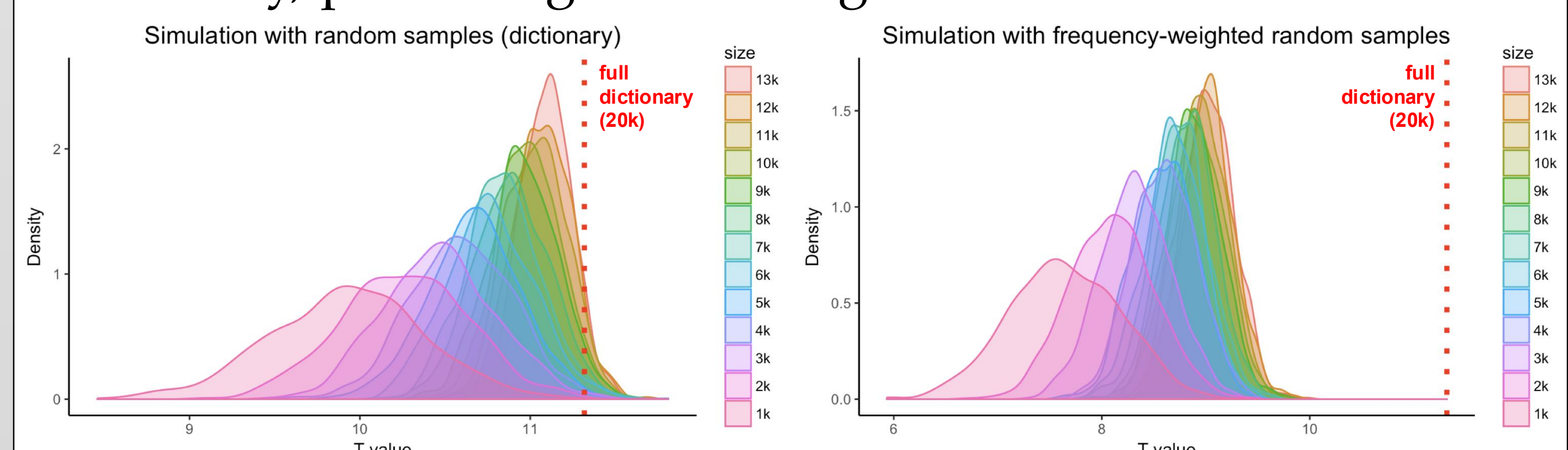
⇒ When rating nonwords, Māori speakers (MS) are more sensitive than non-Māori speakers (NMS) to dictionary-based phonotactics.

⇒ NMS are more influenced than MS by phonotactics based on the list of Māori words in NZ English (i.e. NZE phonotactics) and macron of nonwords.

⇒ For both NMS and MS, dictionary-based phonotactics is the best predictor of their ratings.

○ **Is NMS' apparent knowledge of dictionary-based phonotactics captured by small subsets of a dictionary?**

⇒ To understand their phonotactic knowledge, we conduct Monte Carlo simulations with varying sample size of a dictionary, predicting their ratings of nonwords.



⇒ NMS' ratings are better predicted by large samples of a Māori dictionary [5] (on the left). Phonotactics derived from frequency-weighted random samples perform even worse (on the right).

DISCUSSION

○ MS are more sensitive to the overall statistical patterns, while NMS are more driven by the phonotactics of a set of Māori words in NZ English and the presence of macron.

○ NMS' Māori phonotactic knowledge is best explained if we assume they have a large implicit lexicon acquired by ambient exposure.

○ To study NMS' knowledge of Māori, we further explore their implicit lexicon by testing whether they can identify infrequent Māori words as well as frequent Māori words.