

The acceptability of null subjects

Juliana Gerard



Null subjects

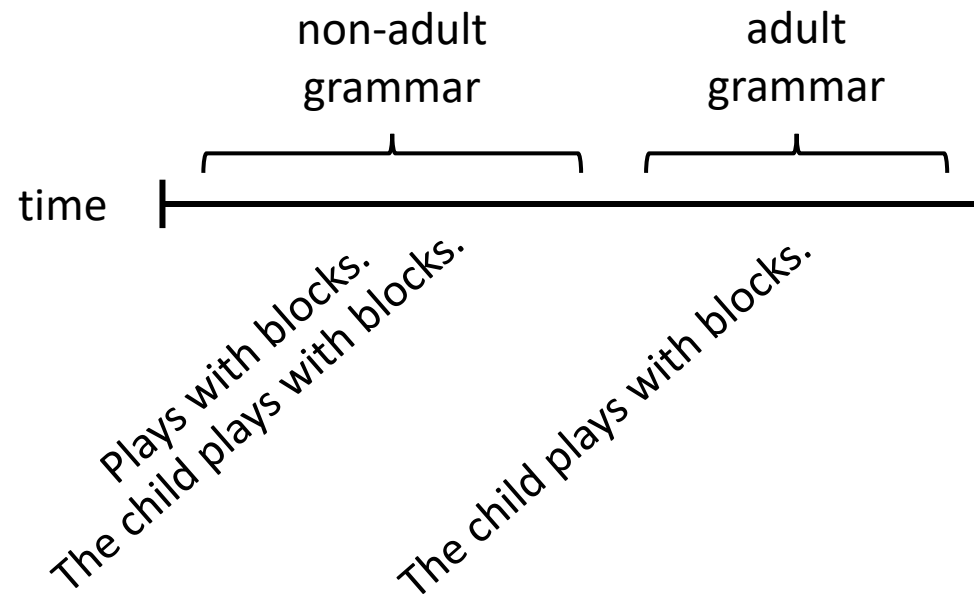
John is a child. ***Plays with blocks.**

why?

Plays with blocks.

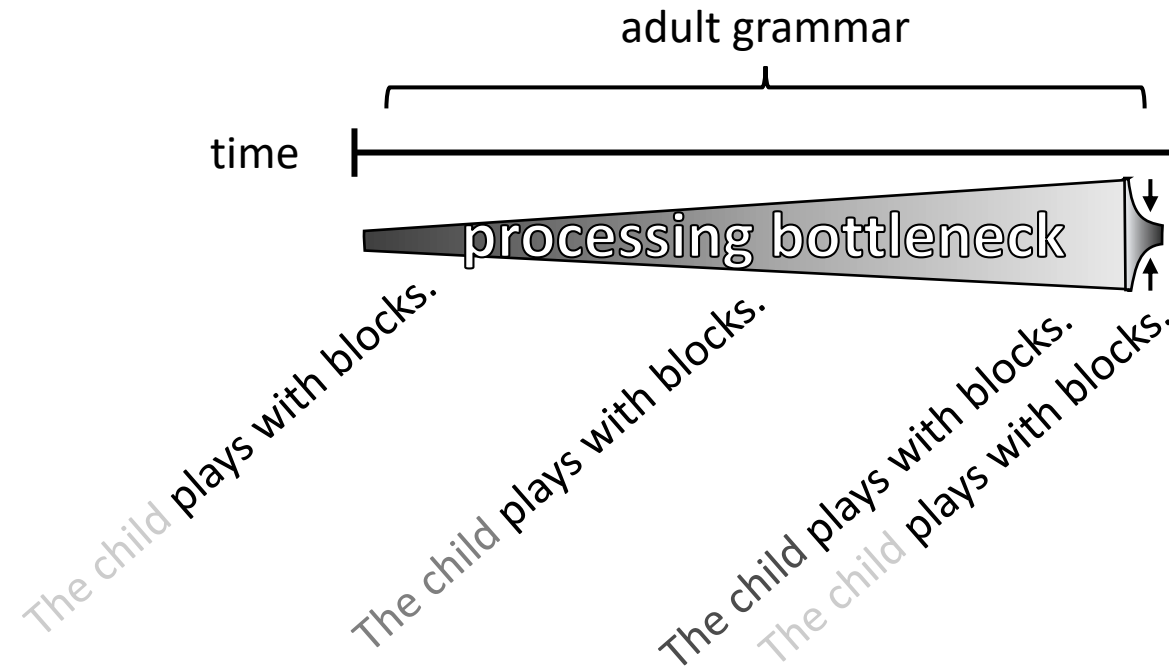


1. Non-adult grammar



Hyams (1986, 1992), Lebeaux (1987), O'Grady, Peters, & Masterson (1989), Radford (1990), Roeper & Weissenborn (1990), Guilfoyle and Noonan (1992), Hyams and Wexler (1993), Rizzi (1994, 2000), Yang (2002, 2004), Orfitelli & Hyams (2012)

2. Non-adult processing



Current study: acceptability of null subjects

- Null subject production predicts comprehension
 - ↑ production → ↑ acceptability
 - The children **play** with blocks. (**bare**)
 - The child **plays** with blocks. (**inflected**)

Current study: acceptability of null subjects

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 - The children **play** with blocks. (**bare**)
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- Null subjects more likely with **longer VP**:
 - The child play(s) with exciting new blocks.
- Presentation **timing**: 1200ms, 2000ms, no limit

(Bad) (Good)

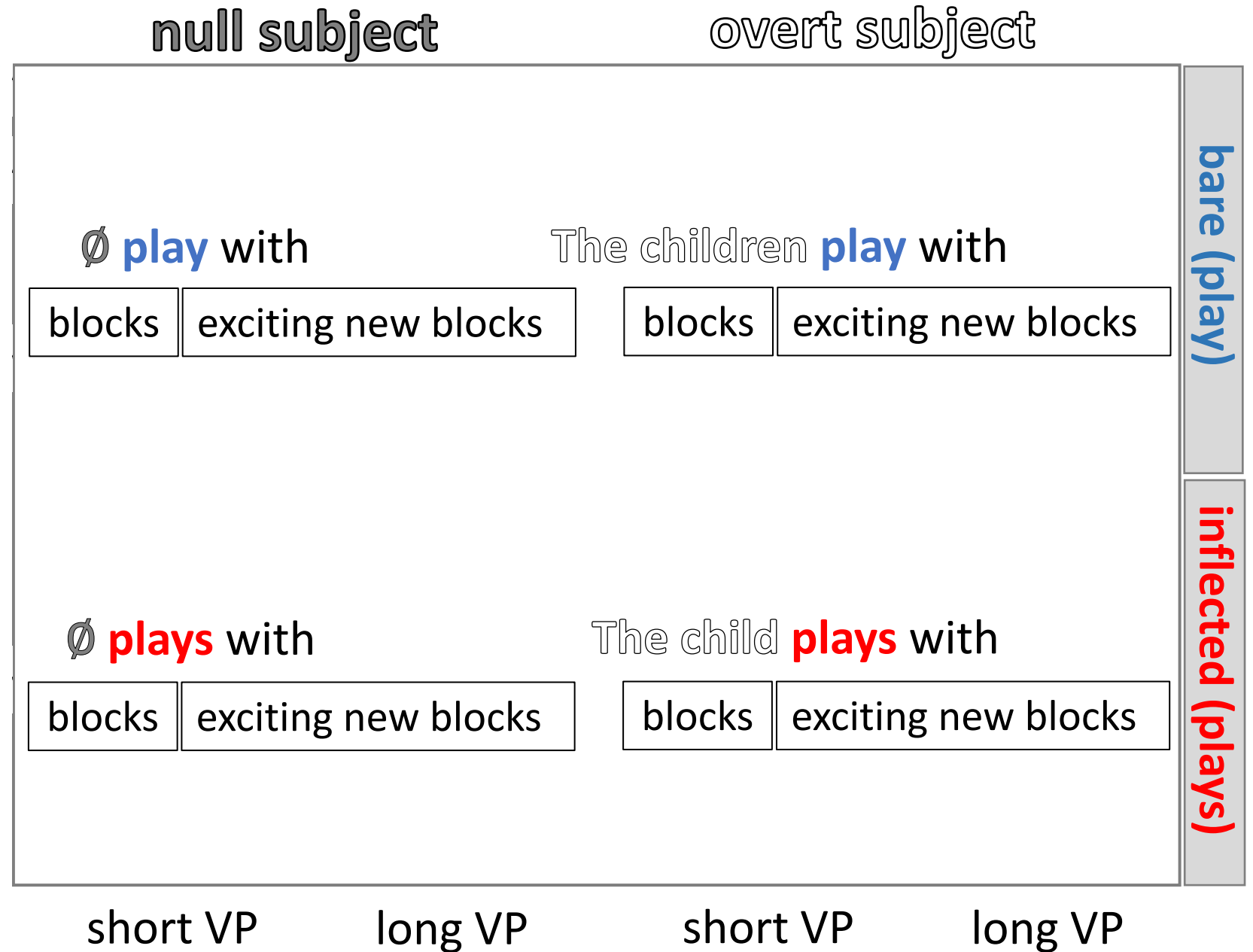
Use number keys to rate this sentence.

Bloom (1989, 1990, 1993), Valian (1991), Valian, Hoeffner, and Aubry (1996)

Current study: acceptability of null subjects

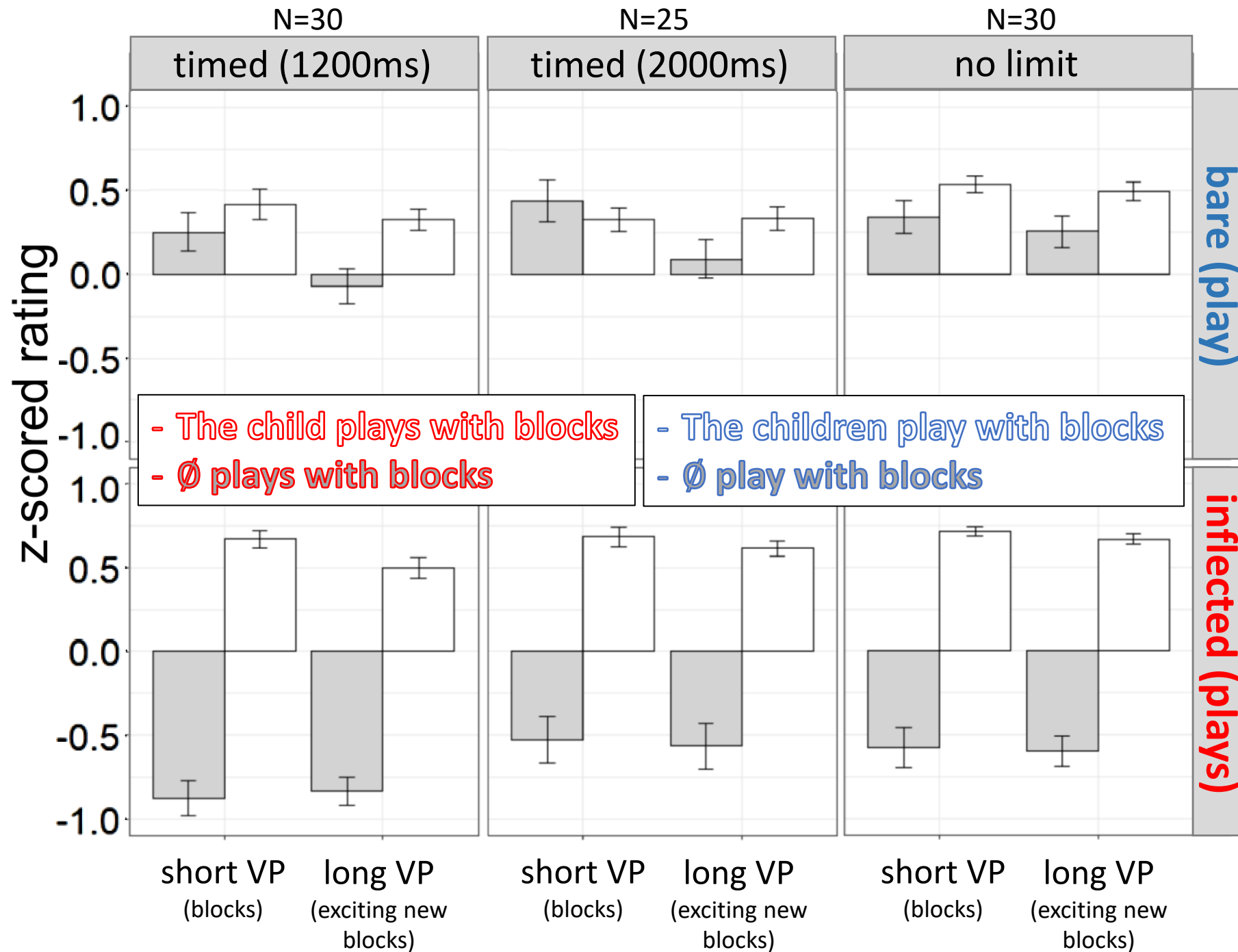
- Null subject production predicts comprehension
 - ↑ production → ↑ acceptability
 - ✓ The children **play** with blocks. (**bare**)
 - ✗ The child **plays** with blocks. (**inflected**)
- Null subjects ~~more~~ likely with **longer VP**:
 - The child play(s) with exciting new blocks.
- ✓ Presentation **timing**: 1200ms, 2000ms, no limit

Design



Results

overt
null



Why?

- acceptability judgment:

Play with exciting new blocks.



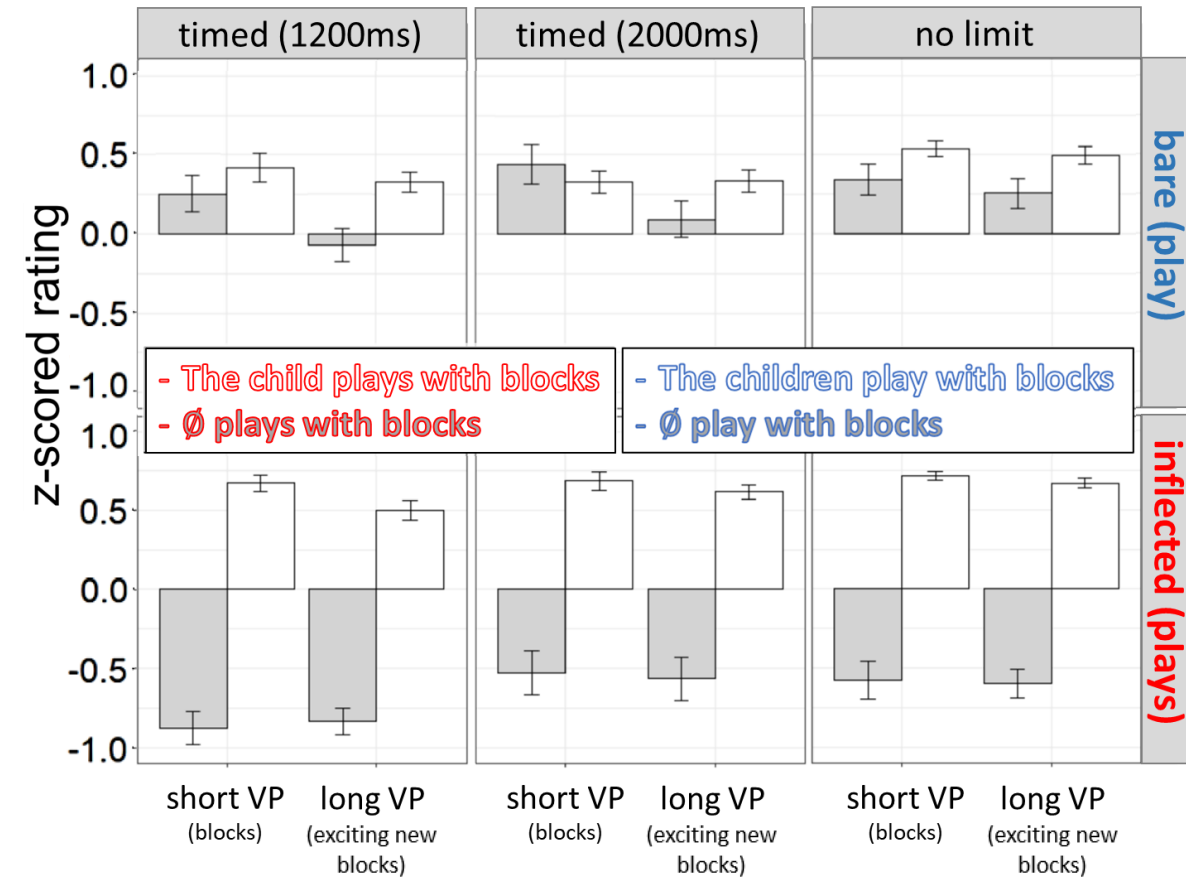
Use number keys to rate this sentence.

→ grammatical as imperative

- All other sentences = declarative

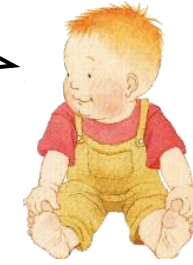
- Interpretation as imperative, or *interference from* imperative**

overt
null



Grammar and processing

Plays with blocks.



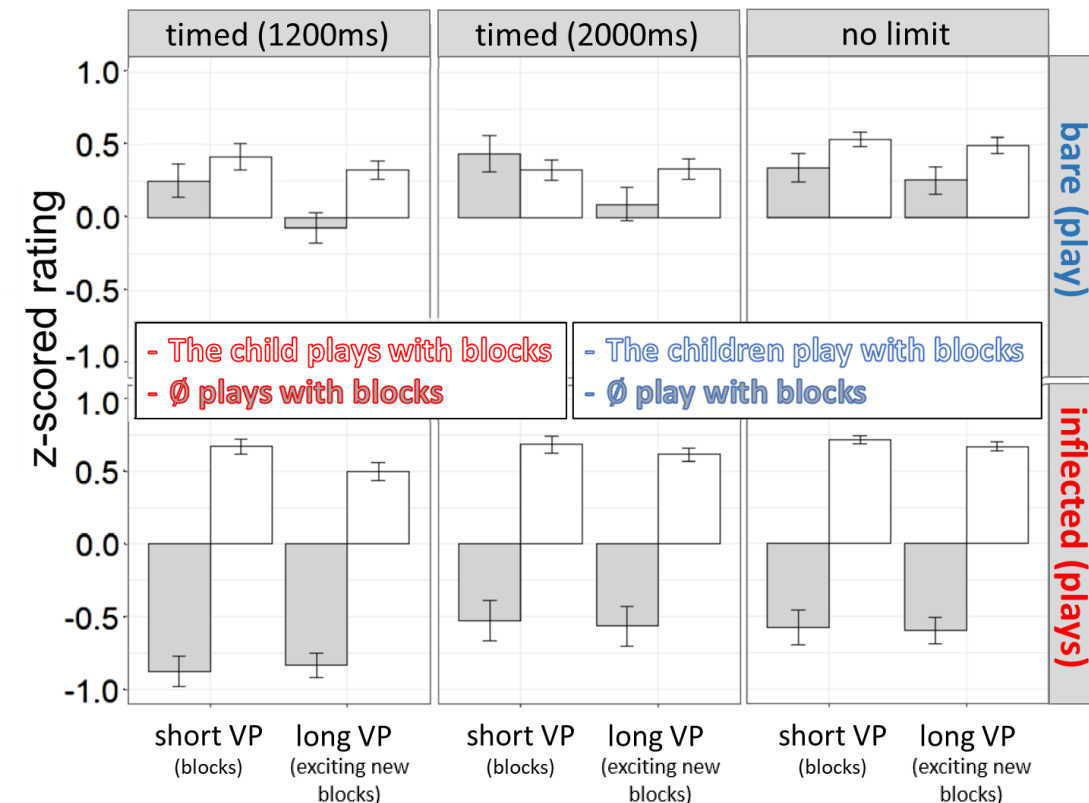
- Grammar: no effect of processing on acceptability
- Processing: greater acceptability with *longer* VP

- Bare form/imperatives

Play with (exciting new) blocks.

- acceptability
- acquisition

overt 
null 



Thanks!

- CUNY organizers
- Ulster University Research Institute for Modern Languages and Linguistics
- Virginia Valian

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