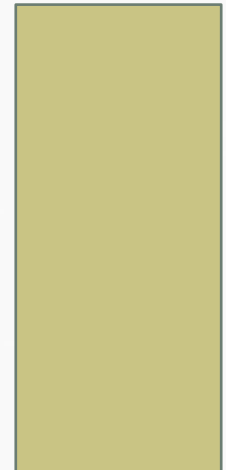# THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO BE NATIVE-LIKE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING?

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Agenda

- Introduction and Background of Neg-whQs
- SLA related issues and Inspiration to this study
- The Experiment : Context-based Judgment Task
- Main Findings
- Implication and Conclusion

What is Neg-*wh*-quantifier (Neg-whQ)?

1. mou-matje 無乜嘢
   no-what
   'nothing' / 'only a few things'

2. mou-bingo 無邊個
   no-who
   'no-one' / 'only a few people'

3. Ngo **mou-matje**$_i$ soeng maai t_i.
    I   no-what   want buy
   a. 'I want to buy nothing.'
   b. 'I want to buy only a few things.'

4. *Ngo soeng maai **mou-matje/mouje**.

5. I want to buy nothing.

6. Ngo **mouje**$_i$ soeng maai t_i.
   I   nothing want   buy
   'I want to buy nothing.'
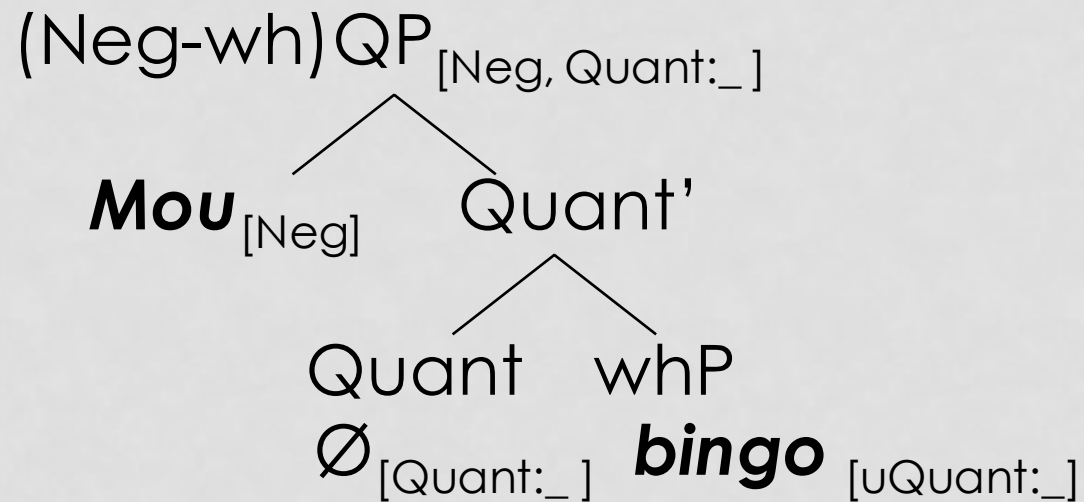
Proposed structure of Neg-whQ

(Neg-wh)QP[Neg, Quant:_]

Mou[Neg]   Quant'

Quant   whP
Ø[Quant:_] *bingo* [uQuant:_]

Table 1. Comparison of object Neg-whQs and NegQs in Cantonese and English

	Neg-whQ		NegQ	
Language	Cantonese	English	Cantonese	English
Examples	*Mou-bingo* ('no-who'), *mou-matje* ('no-what'), *mou-bindou* ('no-where')	*Nowhere, *no-what, *no-who*	*Moujan* ('no-one'), *mouje* ('nothing')	*Nobody, nothing*
Syntactic Features	[Neg] [Quant:_]	[Neg]	[Neg]	[Neg]
Word Order	SOV	SVO	SOV	SVO
Movement	Overt	Covert	Covert	Overt
Interpretation(s)	Sentential negation / existential presupposition 'only a few'	Sentential negation	Sentential negation	Sentential negation

Dual Reading Alternation

7. Ngo **mou-matje** soeng maai *laa3$_{[-p]}$* ('inchoative').
   I   no-what   want buy

   a. 'I want to buy nothing.'
   b. *'I want to buy only a few things.'

8. Ngo **mou-matje** soeng maai *zaa3$_{[+p]}$* ('only').
   I   no-what   want buy

   a. *'I want to buy nothing.'
   b. 'I want to buy only a few things.'

Research Questions

- Can English-speaking learners of Cantonese acquire the semantics of a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction?

- Is the complex morphology of Neg-whQs a 'bottleneck' in adult L2 acquisition?

Predictable Problems

- Absence of respective (Neg-whQ) properties transfer from L1 English:

  - No negative quantifiers can be interpreted as existential

  -No sentence particles and no SOV structure

- Unambiguous evidence of "only a few" reading from Neg-whQs is rare in L2 learning input:

  -Not covered in any classroom teaching

  -Rare input to obtain such existential reading "only a few" of Neg-whQs

Hypotheses

❖ If Slabakova's 'bottleneck' (2008) persists, learners will reject Neg-whQ in existential context, but only accept it in negative context.

❖ If Schwartz and Sprouse's FT/FA (1996) is true, (advanced) learners will acquire both readings in the respective context correctly.

Experiment

Context-based Judgment Task (CJT)

Participants

- 21 Native speakers (NS)
- English speaking learners of Cantonese
→ 18 Intermediate learners
→ 20 Advanced learners

Context-based Judgment Task

- 18 test items

- ➤ 12 Experimental items
  - -6 Non-existential Contexts
  - -6 Existential Contexts

- ➤6 Distractors

Experimental Structure

9. Keoi ***mou-matje*** maai-zo zaa3 $_{[+p]}$

    he   no-what   buy-PFV SP

    'He bought only a few things!'

Table 2. Sentence types used in the test

Option	Sentence structure	Involved reading(s)
A	Subj-Neg-whQ-V-SP (SOV structure with object neg-whQ) e.g. I no-what like zaa$_3$	Existential 'only a few' (Lit. 'I like only a few things.')
B	Subj-Neg-V-NPI (SVO structure with a negator and a negative polarity item) e.g. I don't like anybody	Non-existential (Lit. 'I don't like anybody.')
C	Subj-NegQ-V-SP (SOV structure with ordinary negative quantifier object) e.g. I nobody like aa$_{(neutral)}$	Non-existential (Lit. 'I like nobody.')
D	Subj-V-$_{Few}$Obj-SP (SVO structure with 'only a few' object) e.g. I like only a few people zaa$_3$	Existential 'only a few' (Lit. 'I like only a few things.')
E	'None of the above'	

Experimental Item (Non-Ex Context)

Clara went to Japan, America and Beijing last month. She spent too much money on her trips and has become sick of travelling for the moment. In the coming few months, she would rather stay in her hometown. I believe:

☐ A) Clara   no-where   plan   go zaa$_{[+p]}$

☑ B) Clara   no   plan   go   any-place   SP$_{[neutral]}$

☑ C) Clara   nowhere   plan   go SP$_{[neutral]}$

☐ D) Clara   plan   go   only a few   places   zaa$_{[+p]}$

☐ E) None of the above.

Experimental Item (Ex Context)

Kitty often feels sick when she's very hungry. This afternoon, she just had a tiny cup of yogurt. That was not enough to fill her up, so now she's hungry. She is now on the bus to the restaurant, but it will take another 30 minutes before she gets there. She starts to feel sick, because:

☑ A) Kitty   no-what eat-PFV   zaa$_{[+p]}$

☐ B) Kitty   no eat-PFV any-people SP$_{[neutral]}$

☐ C) Kitty nothing eat-PFV SP$_{[neutral]}$

☑ D) Kitty eat-PFV a few things zaa$_{[+p]}$

☐ E) None of the above.

Findings

Table 3. Percentage of selecting correct responses in EX-items (5)			
	Int (n=18)	Adv (n=20)	NS (n=21)
Correct A and D	10%	12%	26%
Correct A/D	70%	82%	80%

Figure 1. Average selection of Option A-D in % in EX-items

Existential Context

Effect of Group

	A (Neg-whQ)	B (Neg+NPI)	C (Neg-Q)	D (only a few)
Int (n=18)	14.44	13.33	10	74.44
Adv (n=20)	18	9	5	89
NS (n=21)	36.19	4.76	4.76	76.19
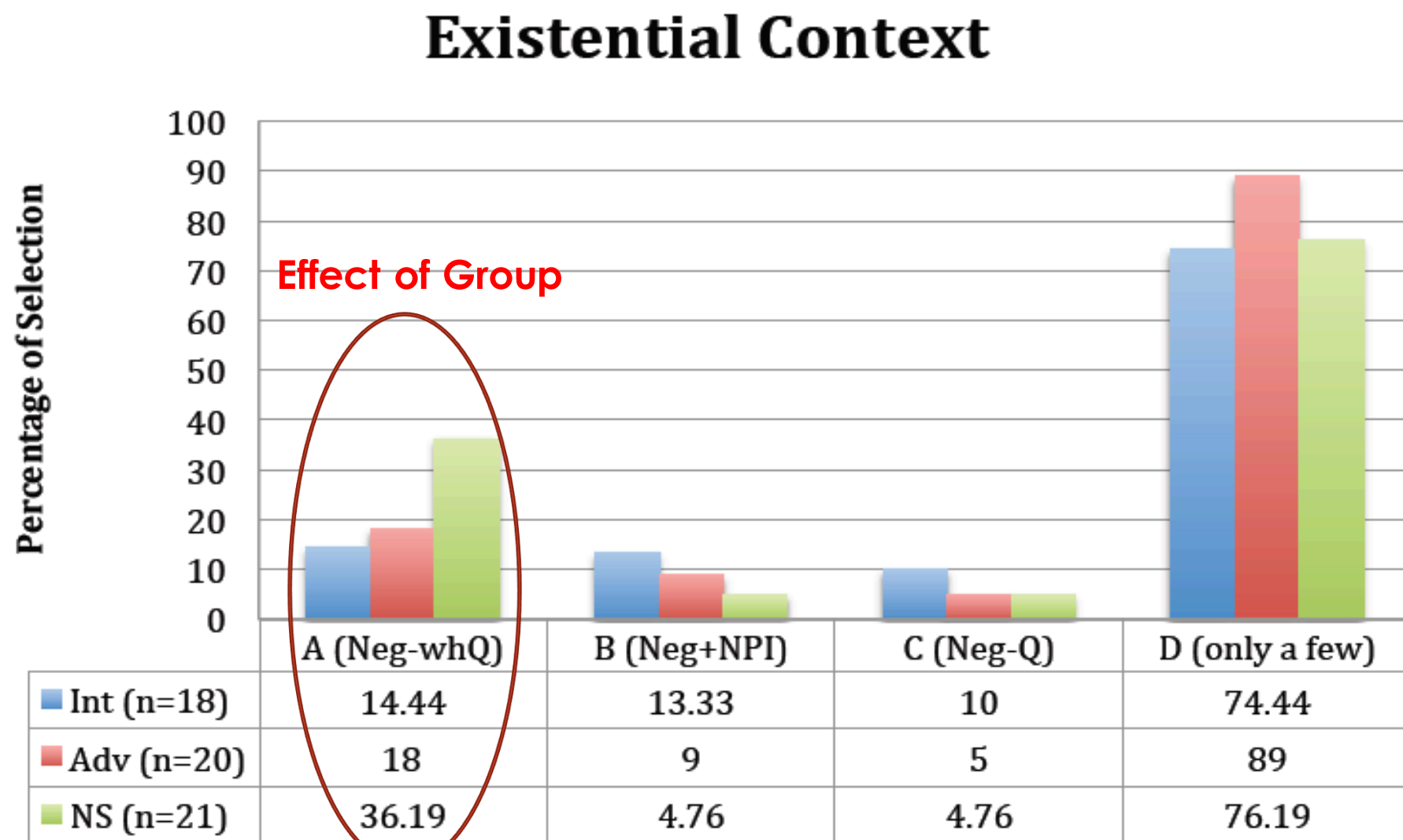
Table 4. Percentage of selecting incorrect and correct responses in NEG-items (4)			
Responses	Int (n=18)	Adv (n=20)	NS (n=21)
Incorrect A and (B or C or both)	40%	48%	7%
Correct B/C	83%	85%	82%

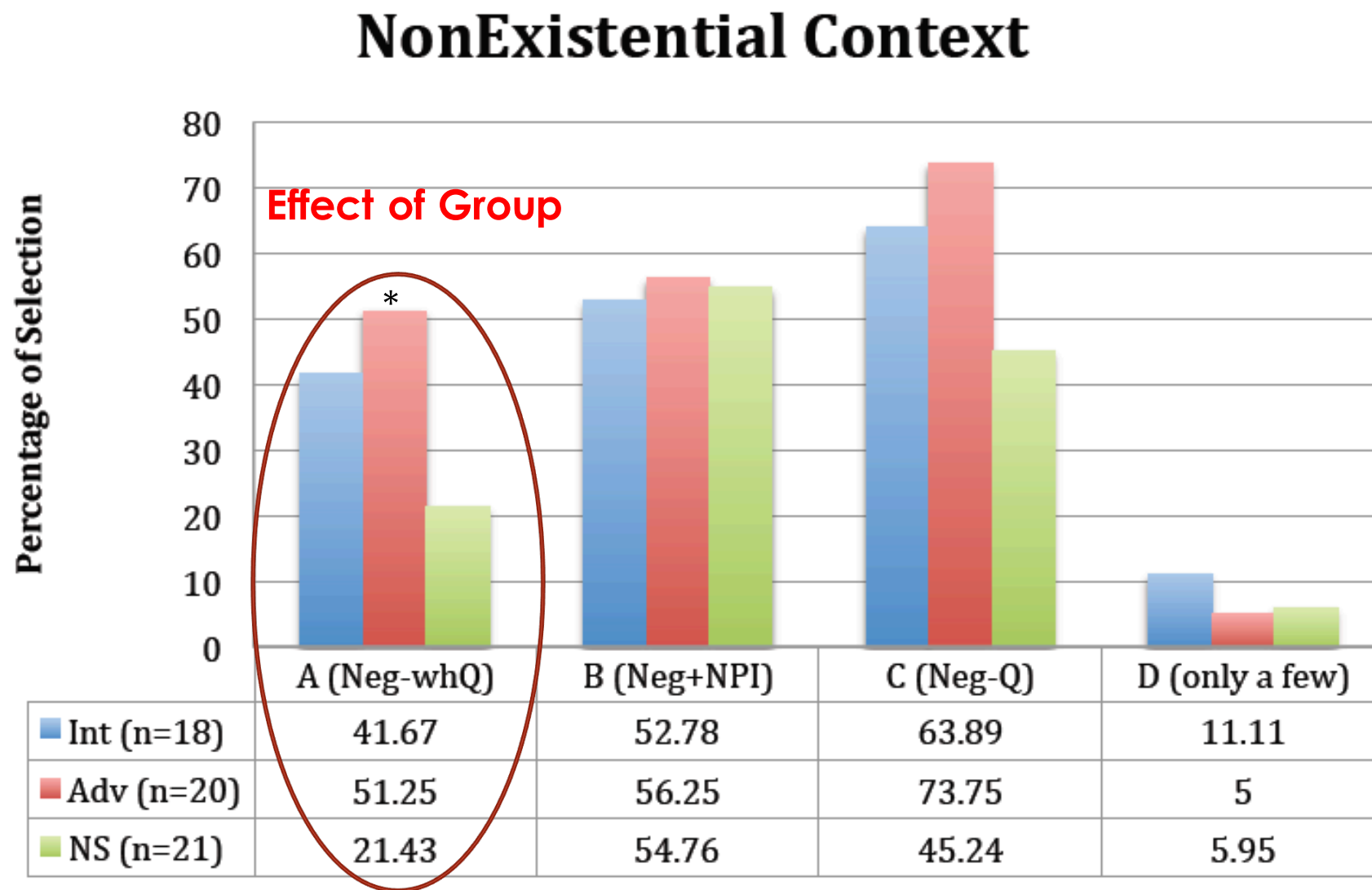Figure 2. Average selection of Option A-D in % in NEG-items

NonExistential Context

Effect of Group

	A (Neg-whQ)	B (Neg+NPI)	C (Neg-Q)	D (only a few)
Int (n=18)	41.67	52.78	63.89	11.11
Adv (n=20)	51.25	56.25	73.75	5
NS (n=21)	21.43	54.76	45.24	5.95

Figure 3. Average selections of Neg-whQ+zaa$_{[+p]}$ in both contexts

	Int (n=18)	Adv (n=20)	NS (n=21)
Negative Context	42%	51%	21%
Existential Context	14%	18%	36%

ID	Ex01	Ex02	Ex03	Ex05	Ex06	NonEx01	NonEx02	NonEx03	NonEx04
Adv06	A	A/D	A/D	A/D	A/D	C	B/C	B/C	B/C
Adv21	A/D	A/D	A/C/D	A/D	A/D	B/C	B	A/B/C	B/C
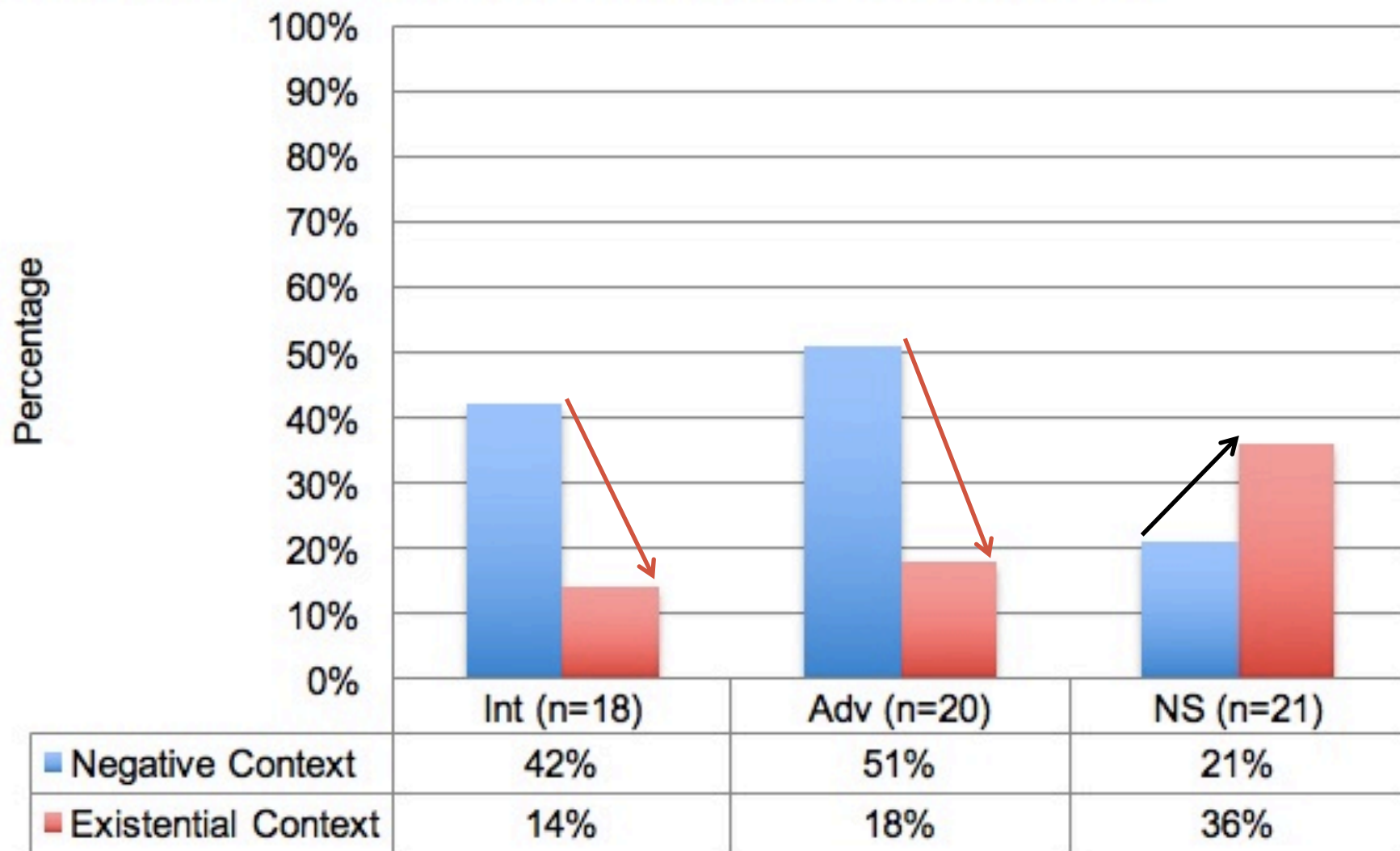
Table 5. Main Study - Responses from the two individual advanced learners with native-like competence

Discussion

- Ex-contexts:

  -Learners were less likely to select Option A in general compared to the native control group.

  -The difficulty in fully acquiring Neg-whQs in seems to persist to the advanced level in English Cantonese interlanguage.

Discussion

- NonEx-contexts:

  -Neither learner group treated Neg-whQ constructions (Option A) differently from negative constructions (Option B and C) as the native speakers did.

Discussion

- Individual successful case from 2 advanced learners suggested enough relevant input had been processed to motivate the acquisition of the 'only a few' reading.

- Individual Adv 06, who has been learning Cantonese for 25 years and living in Hong Kong for 22 years, showed 100% native-like competence.

Implication and Conclusion

- More failures than successes provides evidence that it is difficult to fully acquire L2 colloquial terms.

- Semantics of colloquial terms are attainable with continued exposure to L2 input.

- The imoportance to incorporate communicative teaching and explicit instructions into L2 classroom.

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Thank you ☺
Q&A

By believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it. The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired. — Franz Kraft