

Playing with the Perfect

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Background

Past Tense vs. Past Participles

- In English, verbs have two forms, the past tense and past participle.
- For regular verbs, like *play*, the past tense and the past participle forms are the same, *-ed*.
- For irregular verbs, like *ride*, the past tense form and the past participle are distinct.

	Past Tense	Present Perfect Tense	Modal Perfect Tense
Regular Verbs	Mary <i>played</i> at the park.	Mary <i>has played</i> at the park.	Mary <i>should have played</i> at her house.
Irregular Verb	Mary <i>rode</i> to the park.	Mary <i>has ridden</i> to the park.	Mary <i>should have ridden</i> to her house.

Leveling

- “Leveling” happens when someone uses the past form in place of the participle form.

“Mary should have rode to her house.”

- Munn 2015 found that although people preferred unlevelled participles, they still accepted leveled participles in the context of a modal verb like *should* or *could*.
- Our experiment investigates whether or not people will produce leveled participles in an experimental context.

Methods and Materials

Sentence Completion Game

- Participants were asked to play a game which involved a character who was sometimes silly and sometimes not silly.
- They flipped over three cards with a verb, silly noun, and non-silly noun and asked to complete sentences about the character.

Modal Condition

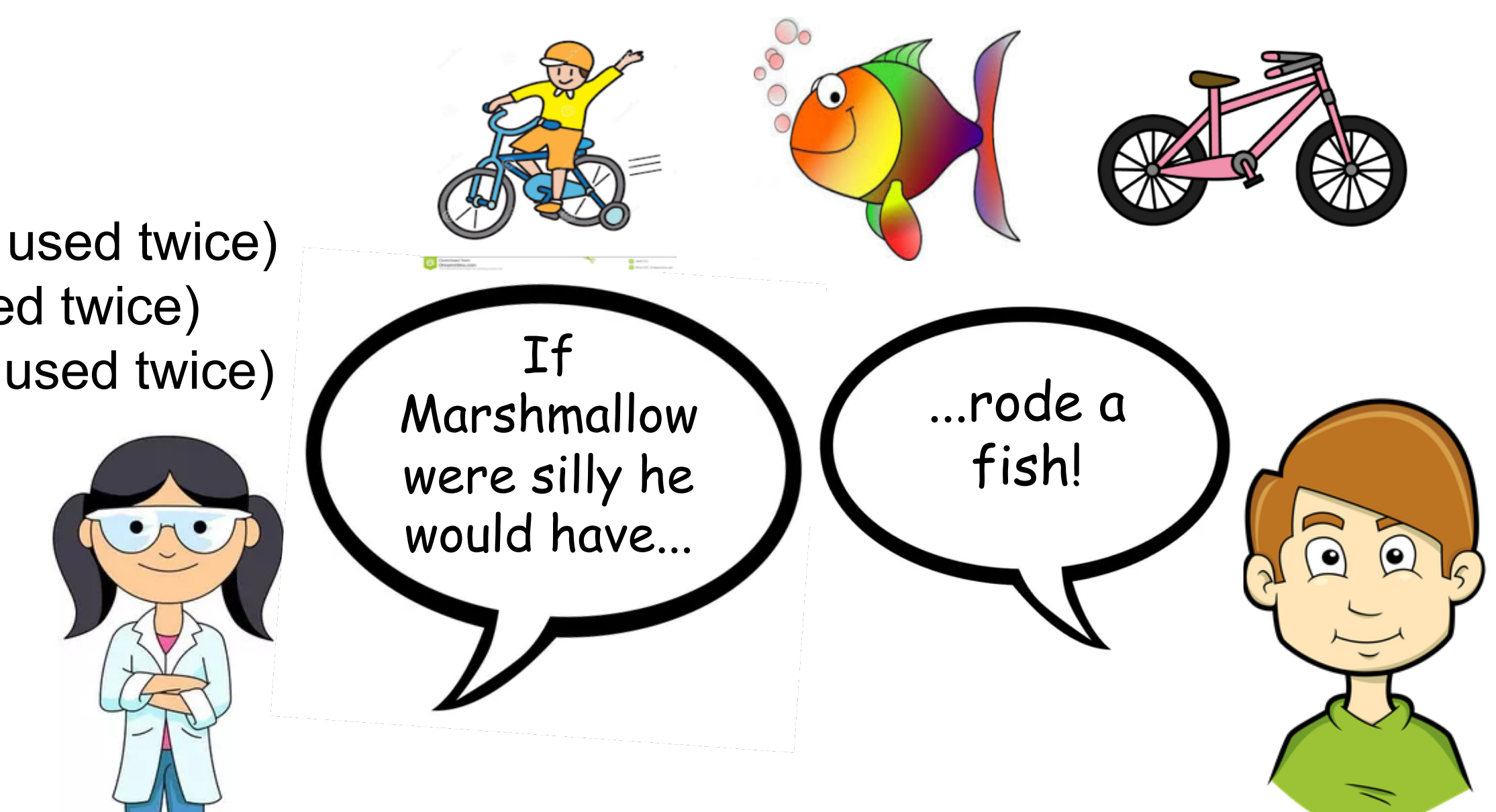
“If Marshmallow were silly he would have...”

Past Condition

“But he wasn’t silly so he...”

Participants and Materials

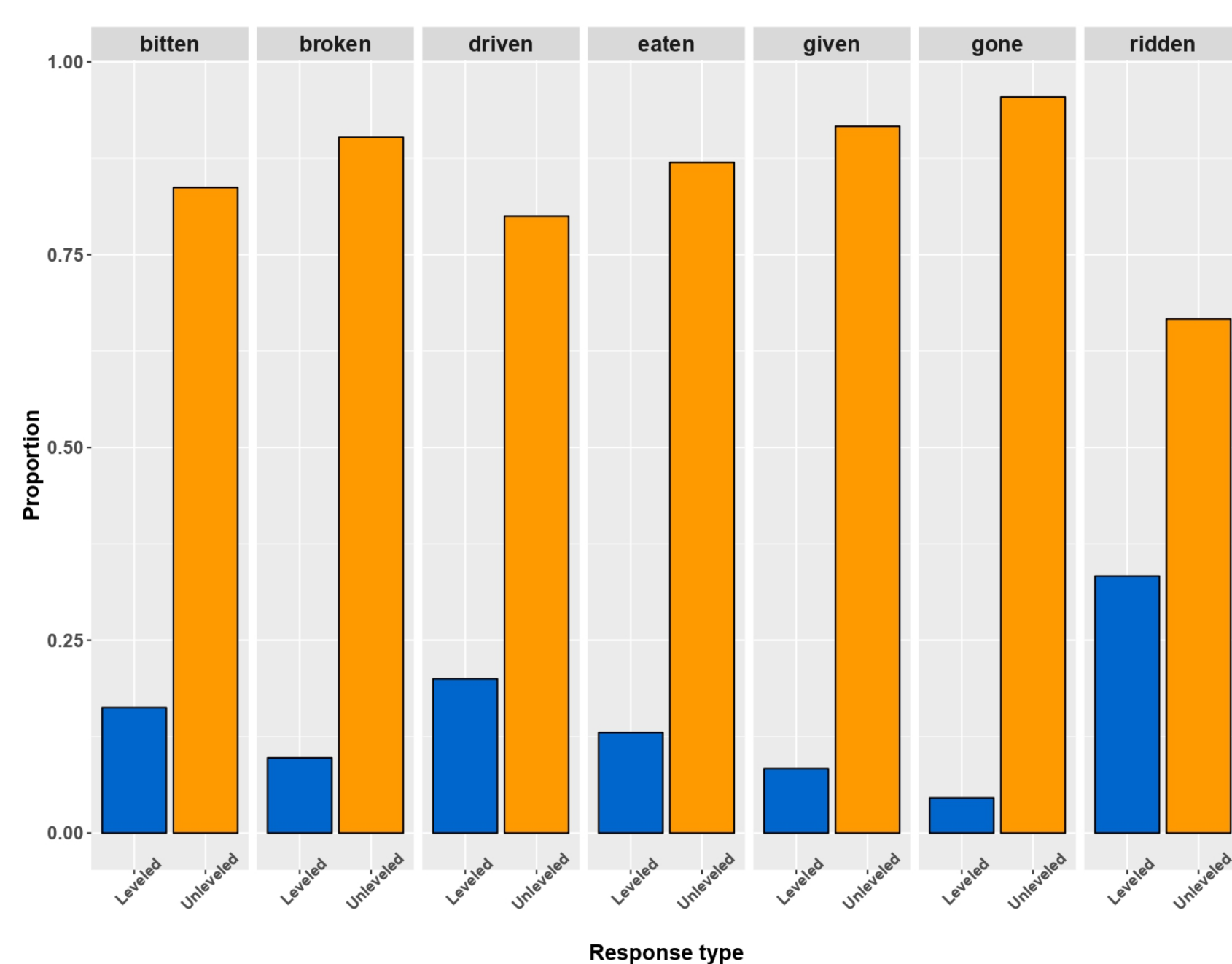
- 25 adults, ages 19 - 26
- Materials
 - 14 verb cards (7 irregular verbs, used twice)
 - 14 silly noun cards (7 nouns, used twice)
 - 14 normal noun cards (7 nouns, used twice)
 - Puppet



Data, Results, and Analysis

Overall Results (Modal Context)

	bite	break	drive	eat	give	go	ride
Leveled	7	4	9	6	4	2	15
Un-leveled	36	37	36	40	44	42	30
Total tokens	48	50	48	49	49	49	49



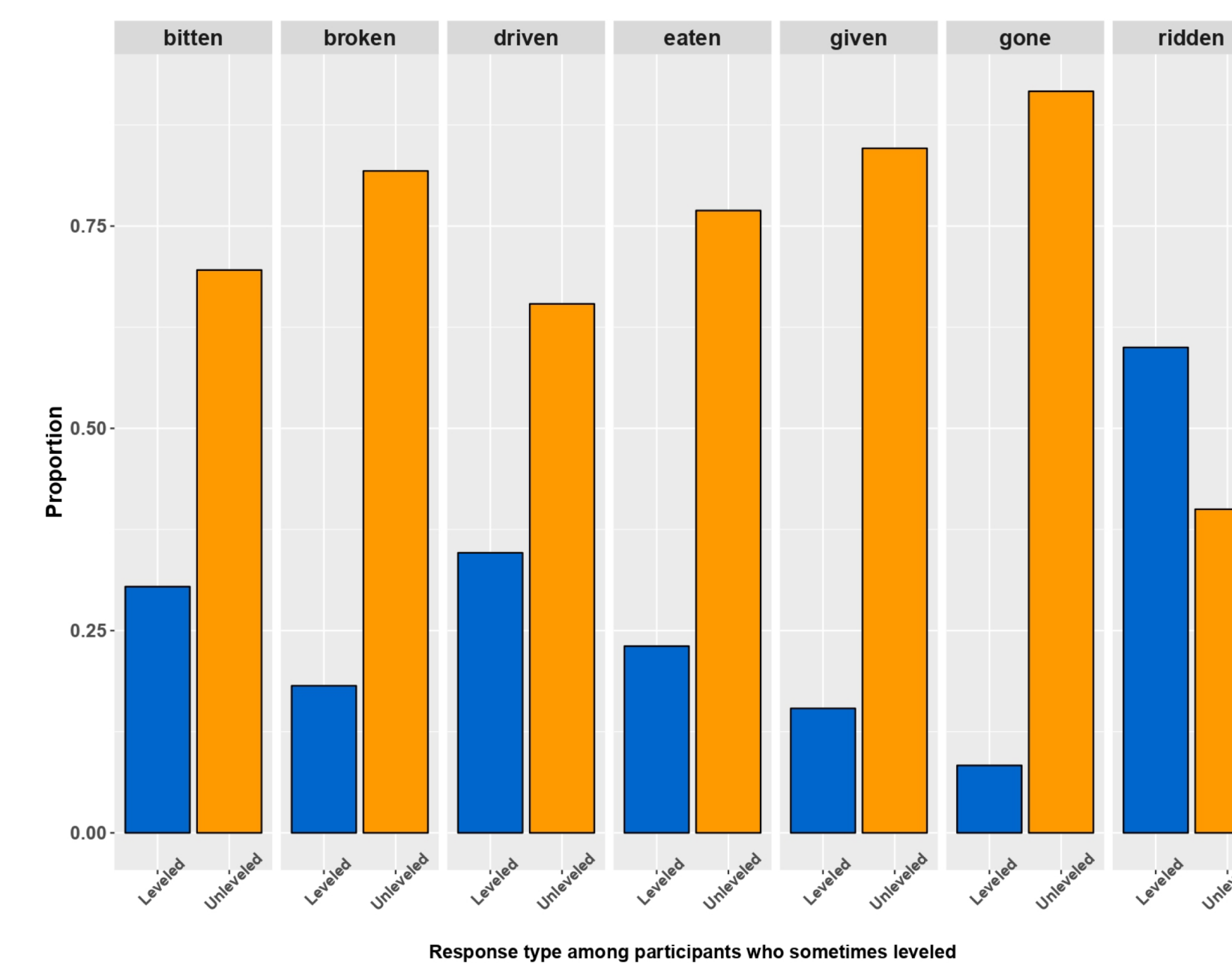
Coding Information

- We coded responses that produced the correct verb in the modal context as being leveled or unlevelled.

Leveled vs. Unleveled

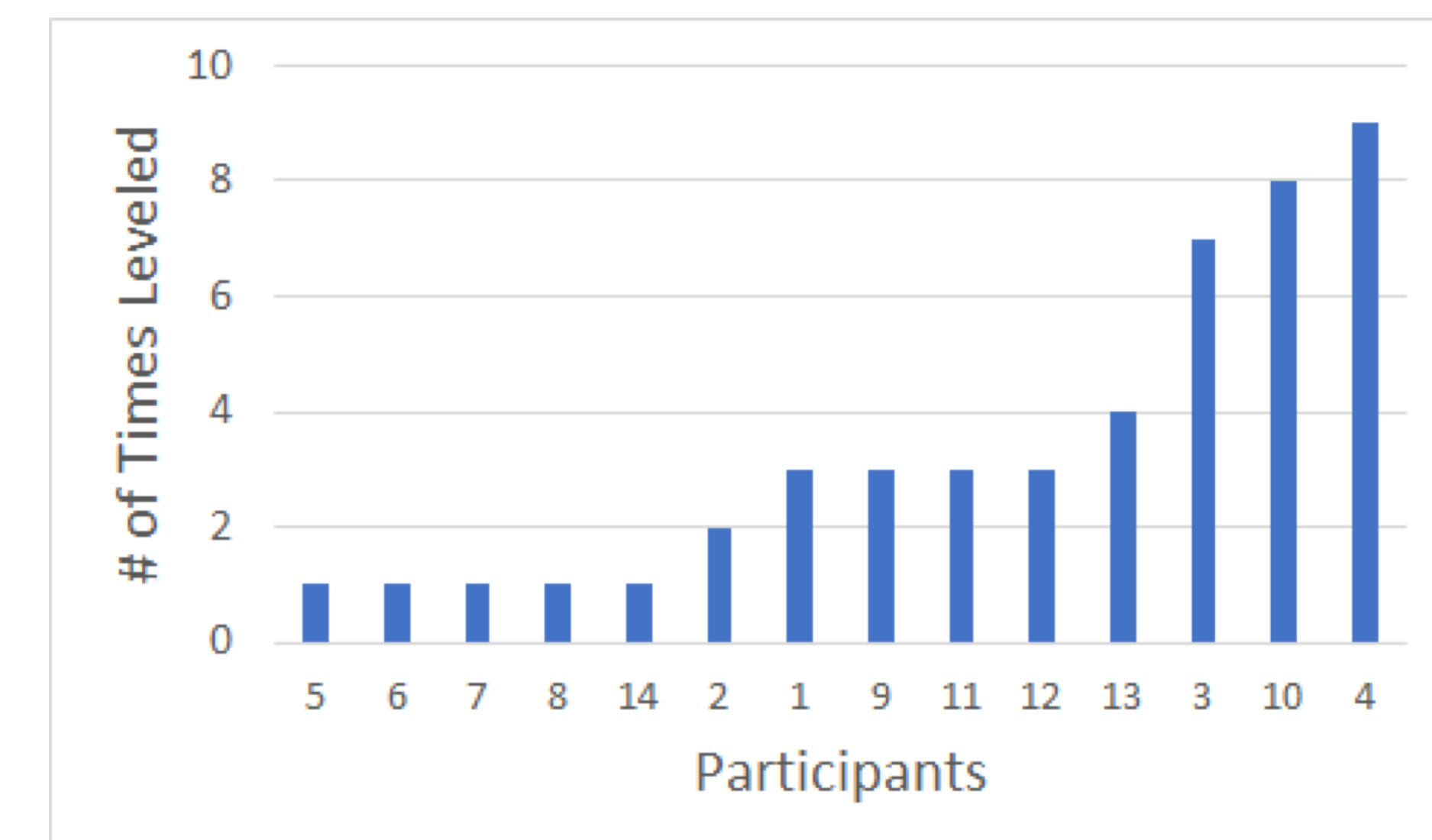
- Not every person leveled, but every verb was leveled at least once.
- Leveling is variable; even within the group that leveled, nobody leveled every time.
- *Ride* was leveled the most among all these verbs.

Results for Participants who Leveled at Least Once



Individual results

- 14 people leveled at least once



Differences within Leveling

- Not all verbs level at the same rate.
- The *-en* form of *ride* is being replaced by the past form.
- Similar to *drink*, which for many speakers, uses only *drank* as the participle form.

I should have drank more water.

Acknowledgements

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Munn, Alan 2015. “Participle Levelling in American English: syntactic differentiation and auxiliary *have*.” Paper presented at: The Perfect: variation workshop. Synchrony, diachrony, and acquisition, Trondheim, November 5-7, 2015.
Bross, Madeline, Bush, Melissa, Yatooma, Megan. “Past or Perfect?: Playing the Game of Verb Choice.” Poster presented at: UURAF, East Lansing, April 7, 2017.

Conclusion

- We found that when prompted, people will level in an experimental context.
- Leveling seems to be variable, both by speaker and by verb.