Black Aggression in the Wake of Pandemic Panic:
Effects of Word Choice and Race on Speaker Judgments

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Introduction

- Racial stereotypes against people of color:
  - Angry Black Woman, Docile Asian Woman
- COVID-19 highlighted disparities across races.
  - Blacks hospitalized 5x more than Whites (NCIRD, 2020)
  - Hate crimes against Asians (CSHE, 2020)
- Word choice matters.
  - COVID-19 causes <u>violence</u> <u>harm</u>
- Raciolinguistic research examines the use of language by people of color as compared to their white counterparts (e.g., Rosa & Flores, 2017).

COVID-19: Aggressive Language

Black Speaker / White Speaker

"I'm going to give my thoughts on COVID-19. COVID-19 as an infectious disease puts people at risk. It **causes violence** and, overall, I **despise** COVID-19."

East Asian Speaker / South Asian Speaker

Research Question

- **How do race, word choice, and COVID-19 affect judgments about Black and Asian speakers?**

Predictions:

- Listeners will respond differently given the speaker's race.
- The Black speaker will be judged as the most aggressive speakers when talking about COVID-19.
- The Asian speaker will be seen as less aggressive than the Black speaker but more aggressive than the South Asian and White Speaker.

Methods

- 90 adult native English speakers tested online (*Gorilla*).
- Videos (with subtitles) of four female speakers talking about **COVID-19** or **Social Media** (baseline).

- Speakers: **East Asian, Black, South Asian, White**
- Two scripts were written using sentiment analysis.
  - **Neutral word choice** ('COVID-19 impacts people')
  - **Aggressive word choice** ('COVID-19 harms people')
- Counterbalanced order example:
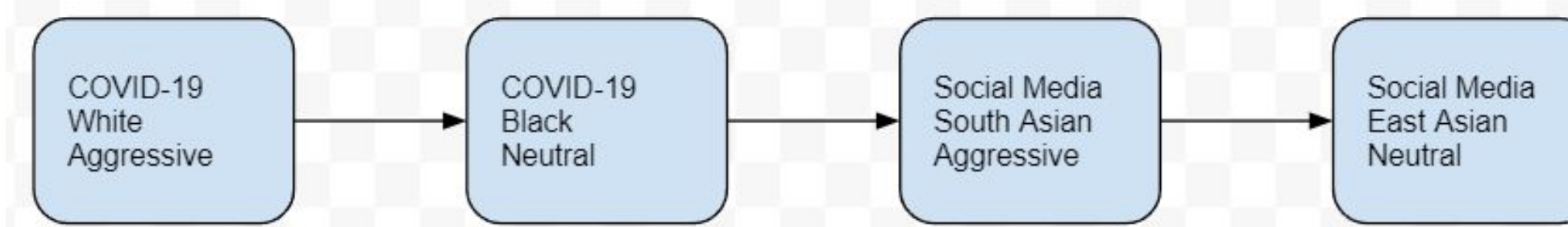
- Likert-scale questions (5 categories: very negative, somewhat negative, neural, somewhat positive, very positive).
- 10 total questions for each speaker.
- We focus on 3 questions:
  - *How positive/negative do you find the speaker's sentiments to be?*
  - *How unexpected do you find the speaker's sentiments to be?*
 - *How willing are you to continue talking with the speaker?*

Analysis

- Scan QR code for links to stimuli, data, and code.
- Ordinal logistic regression models were built for each question.
- (Likert scale response ~ topic + race + word choice)
- Treatment coded: Neutral ~ Social Media + White + Neutral word choice

Results

- <u>Speaker's sentiment</u>: effect of word choice (β = 0.55, t = 2.71, *p* = .007), null effects of topic (β = -0.24, t = -1.23, *p* = .22) and race (*p*s > .2).
- <u>Expectation of speaker</u>: effect of topic (β = 0.49, t = 2.60, *p* = .009), null effects of language (β = -0.07, t = -0.41, *p* = .68) and race (*p*s > .3).
- <u>Continue to talk with speaker</u>: effect of word choice (β = -0.84, t = -4.24, *p* < .001), null effects of topic (β = 0.29, t = 1.50, *p* = .14) and race (*p*s > .05).

Results (continued)
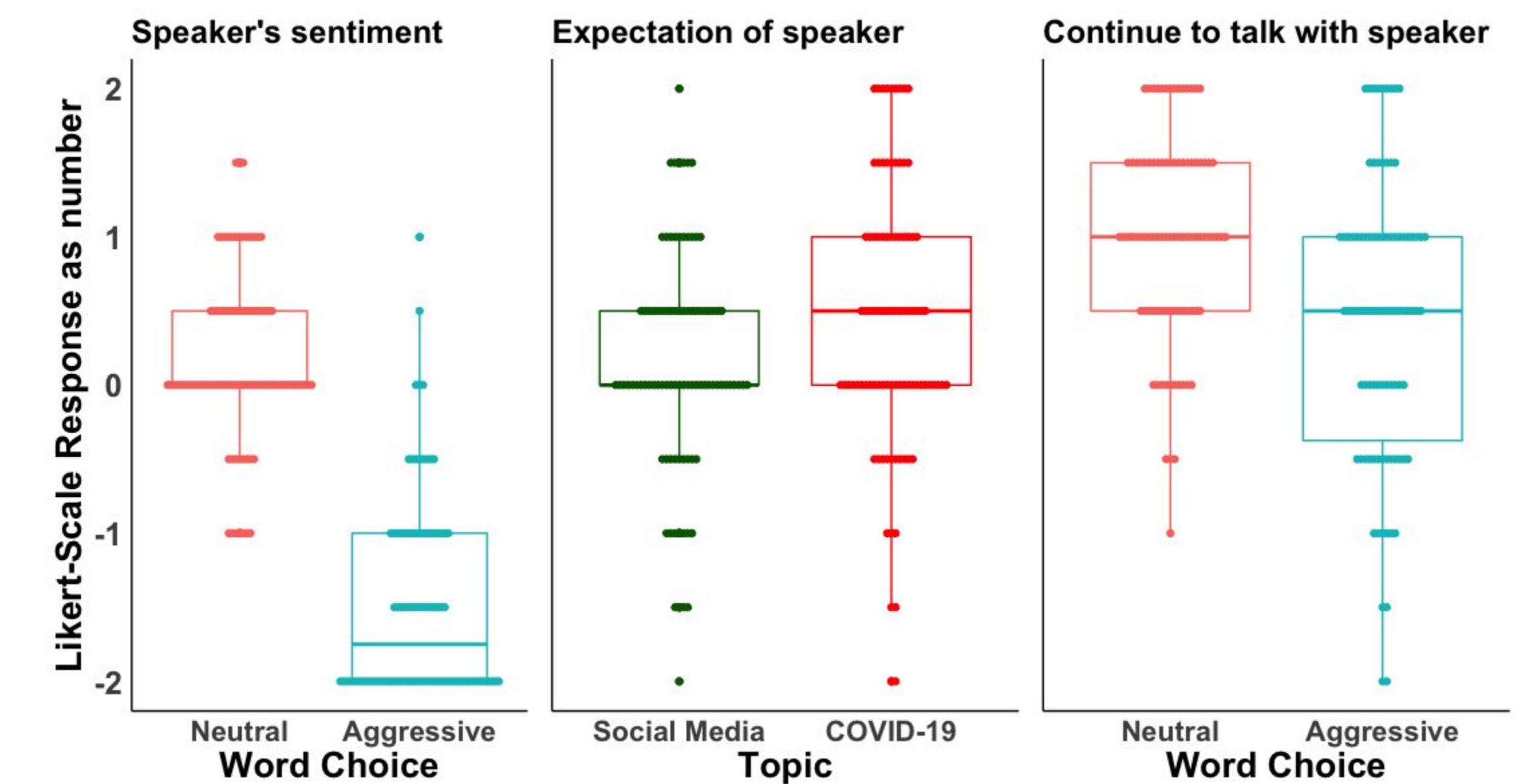
- Exploratory analyses found two-way and three-way interactions with race, suggesting that the Black speaker and Asian speaker may have been judged differently than the White speaker, especially when discussing COVID-19.

Findings

- We found effects of word choice and topic but not race in our confirmatory analysis.
- An exploratory analysis found interactions between race and language and race, language, and topic.
- Listeners may have race-based expectations about speakers (e.g., Kang & Rubin, 2009).

Limitations and Future Directions

- Only one speaker per race; results may be due, in part, to the individual speaker.
- Listeners' race was not controlled; Black listeners may respond differently.
- Making the tropes of racialized womanhood more apparent may change the results.

Acknowledgements

References

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