



**NTNU – Trondheim**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology



# Generic Noun Phrases in the Third Language

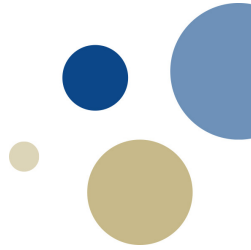
Marta Velnić, Roumyana Slabakova, and  
Anne Dahl  
Poznan Linguistics meeting  
13.09.2023



**ADIM**

# Genericity

- Generic meanings are universal
- No languages have a specific linguistic marker for marking genericity (Carlson & Pelletier, 1995)
- Languages use readily available forms that also have other meanings
- The distinction between existential and generic meaning is disambiguated by **context**
- Previous studies have shown that the acquisition of genericity is prone to cross-linguistic effects in the L2 (Ionin, Montrul, Kim, et al., 2011; Snape, 2013; Snape et al., 2013) and in the L3 (Ionin, Montrul, & Santos, 2011; Ionin et al., 2015).



# Generic vs. Specific (plural forms)



- Bare plurals lexicalise generic reference
- Definite plurals lexicalise maximality

*Bananer er gule.*

Bananas are yellow

- It is a typical property of bananas to be yellow
- Characterising

*Bananene er gule.*

The bananas are yellow.

- The maximal element from the set of bananas
- Episodic

Ionin & Montrul, 2010

# Genericity marking in Pol/Eng/Nor

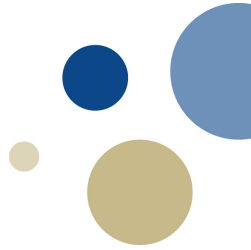
Language	Form	Generic	Episodic
Polish L1	Def. pl.		
	Bare pl.	√	√
English L2	Def. pl.	#	√
	Bare pl.	√	#
Norwegian L3	Def. pl.	#	√
	Bare pl.	√	#
		N=E=P	N=E≠P

# Predictions

- Polish L1 speakers will be more target-like in the generic condition
- Over acceptance of the bare form in Episodic conditions
- Target-like behaviour in Episodic conditions will depend on the acquisition of genericity in English L2 and exposure to Norwegian

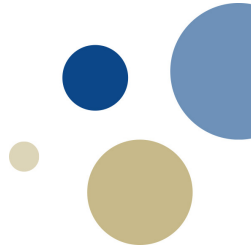
# Participants

- L1 Pol – L2 Eng – L3 Nor – living in Norway (n=27)
- L1 Pol – L2 Eng – L3 Nor – living in Poland (n=26)
  
- L1 Eng – L2 Nor – living in Norway (n=39)
- L1 Nor (n=33)



# The task

- Timed truth value judgment task (TVJT) with a written description and an image
- Design inspired by Ionin and Montrul (2010)
- Designed in OpenSesame Web and distributed through JATOS
- The task was a part of a bigger study (last of three tasks)



# Target items

- Testing Definite plurals and Bare plurals
- Characterising and Episodic conditions
- 9 contexts divided over 3 lists and 2 blocks within each list
- Out of the 9 items for Char/Ep, each participant saw 6 of each, 2 of which with overlapping contexts, but separated within the blocks





# Target example

Det er en dagligvarebutikk i byen som selger uvanlig frukt og grønnsaker. Mens en banan vanligvis er en gul frukt, er deres bananer blå og de smaker som vaniljeis.

Characterising condition

Bananer er gule. /Bananene er gule.

Episodic Condition

Bananer er blå./Bananene er blå.



# Target example

There is a supermarket in town that sells unusual fruit and vegetables. While the banana is usually a yellow fruit, their bananas are blue and they taste like vanilla ice cream.

Characterising condition

Bananas are yellow.

/ The bananas are yellow.

Episodic Condition

Bananas are blue.

/The bananas are blue.



# Fillers

- Statements that were either True/False
- 24 fillers divided equally among the two blocks

Katten min var en god jeger da han var ung. Han fanget mus hele tiden. Men nå er han gammel, og jakter ikke lenger. . Han bare sover hele dagen!

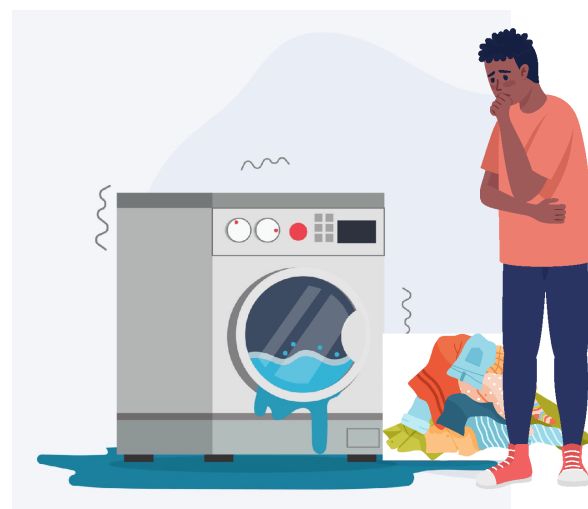
Katten min jaktet på mus.

TRUE/FALSE



I går kom Elias hjem fra ferie og hadde mye skittentøy å vaske. Dessverre ble vaskemaskinen ødelagt og han kunne ikke gjøre det. Nå må han vente på en reparatør.

Elias vasket tøyet sitt. TRUE/FALSE

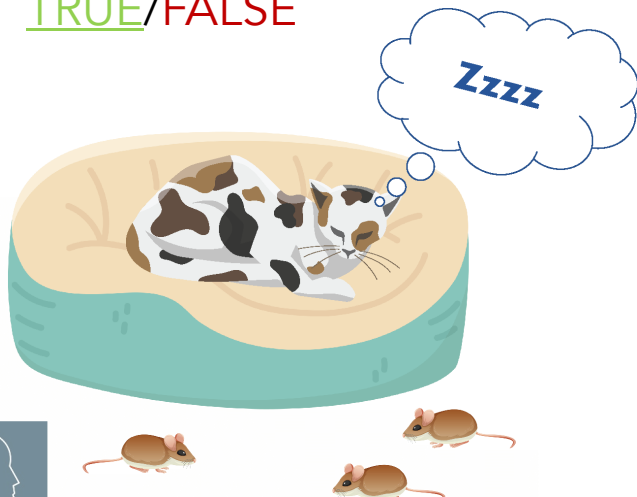


# Fillers

- Statements that were either True/False
- 24 fillers divided equally among the two blocks

My cat was a great hunter when he was young. He caught mice all the time. But now he is old, and doesn't hunt anymore. He just sleeps all day long!

My cat hunted mice.  
TRUE/FALSE



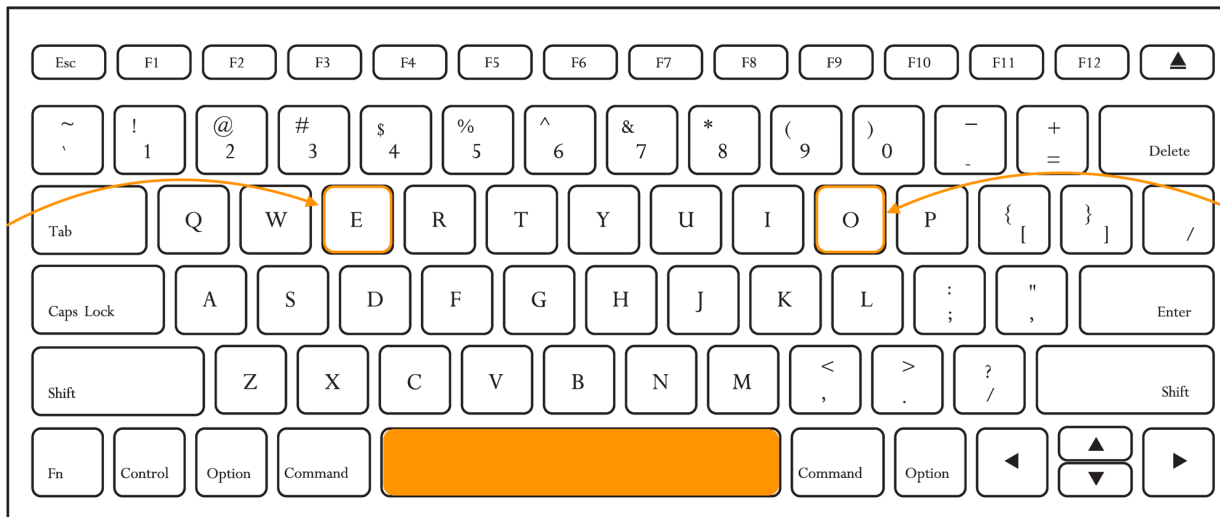
Yesterday Craig returned from holiday and had a lot of laundry to wash. Unfortunately, the machine broke and he couldn't do it. Now he has to wait for the repair-man.

Craig washed his clothes.  
TRUE/FALSE



# Procedure

- Fixation point 500ms in the middle of the screen
- Then the image appeared and stays on screen for 1000ms
- A smaller version of the image on the left hand side appeared, along with the description
- The participants were instructed to press the space bar once they have read the description.
- The summary sentence appeared together with True/False at the bottom of the screen
- E for Good, O for Bad



# Layout

Det er en dagligvarebutikk i byen som selger uvanlige frukt og grønnsaker.  
Mens en banan vanligvis er en gul frukt,  
er deres bananer blå og de smaker som vaniljeis.

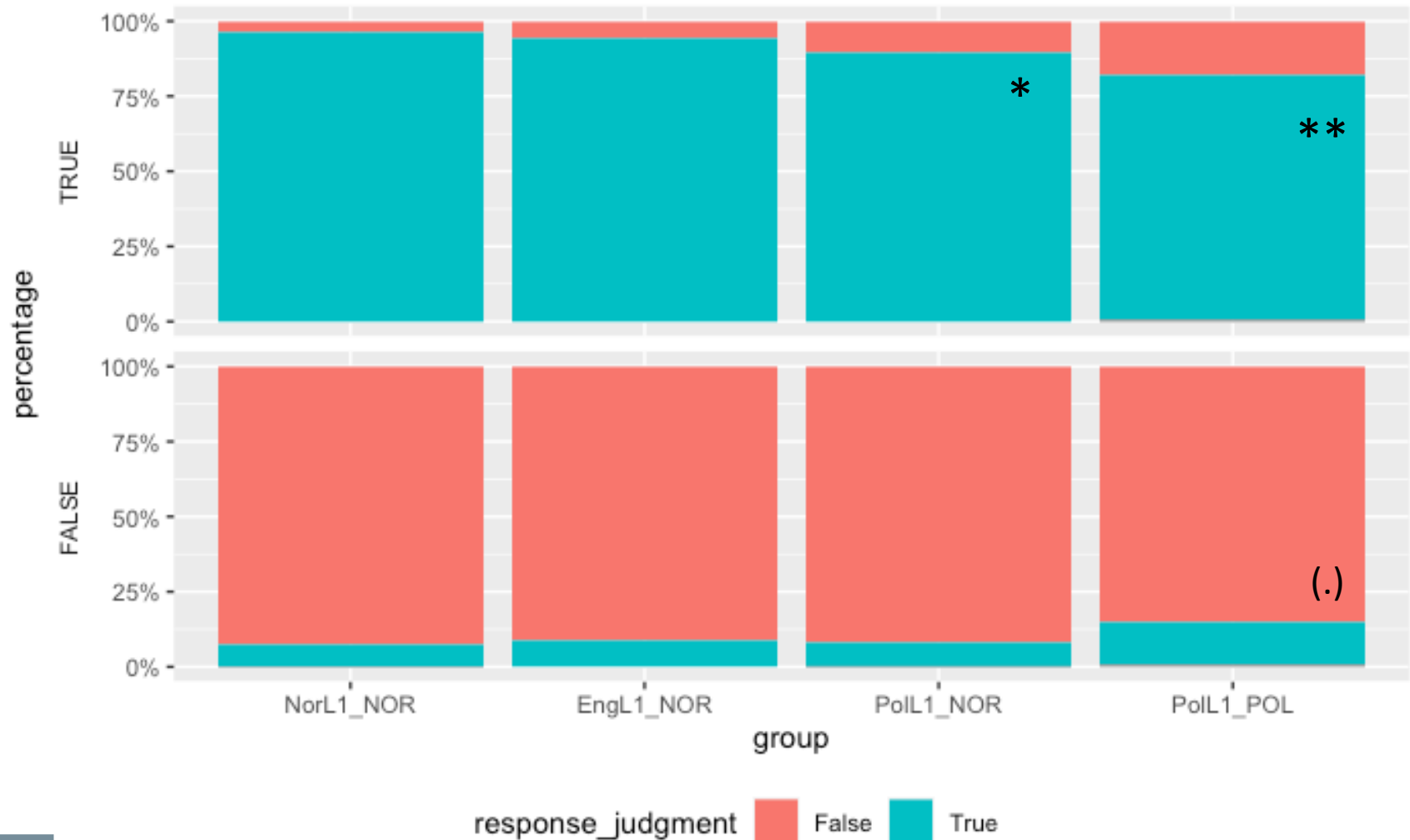


Bananene er blå.

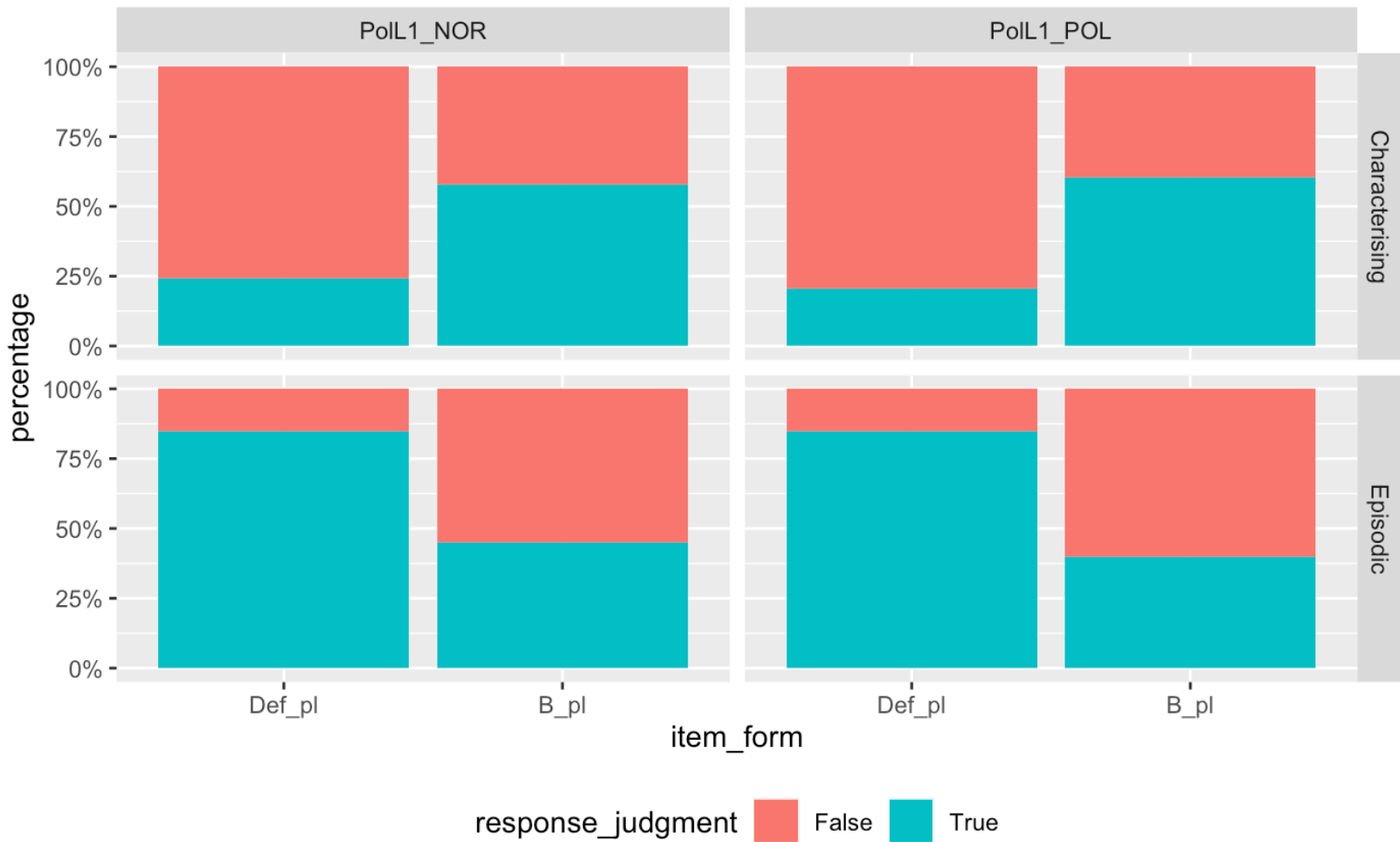
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# Results: Fillers

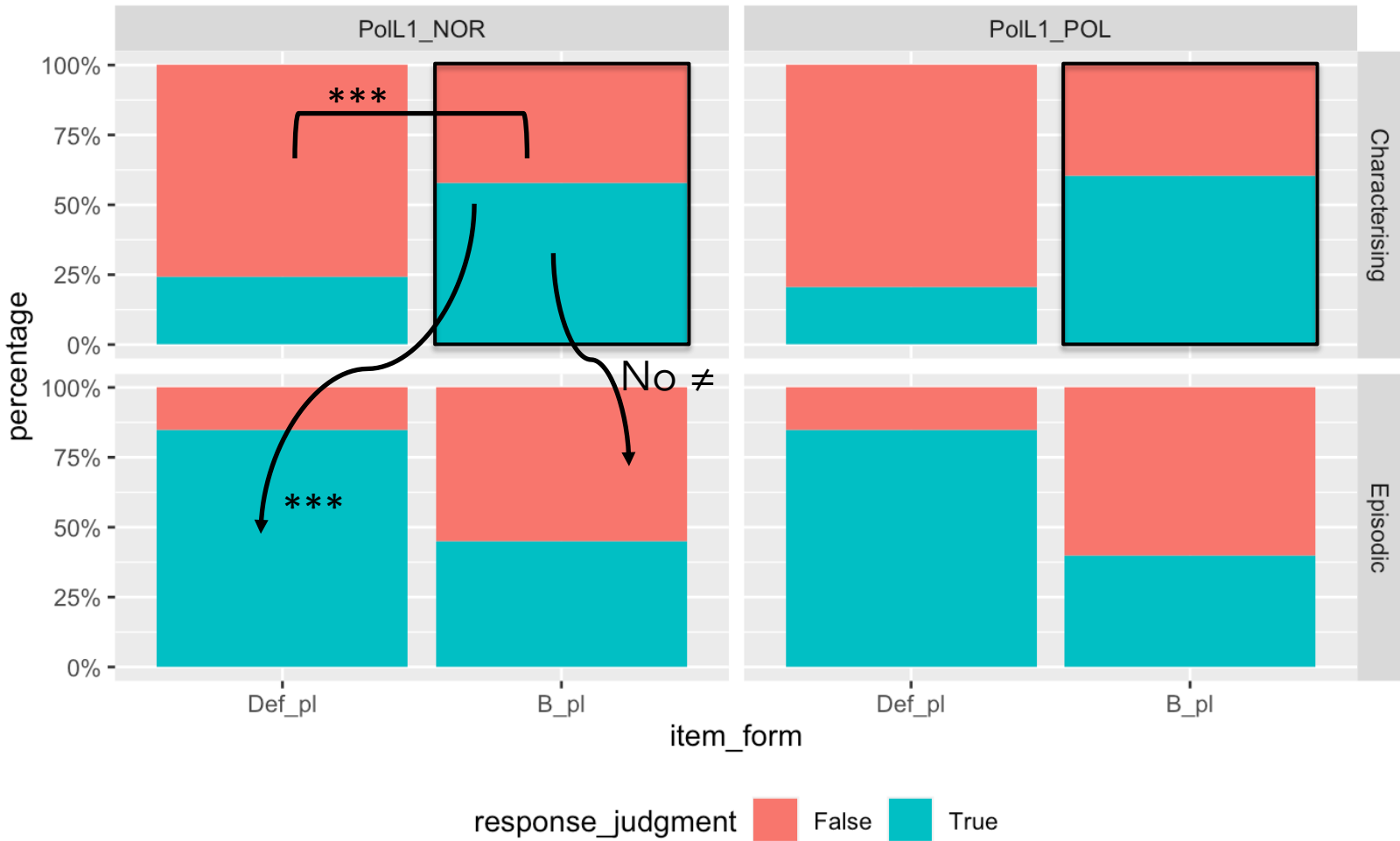


# Results: Polish groups

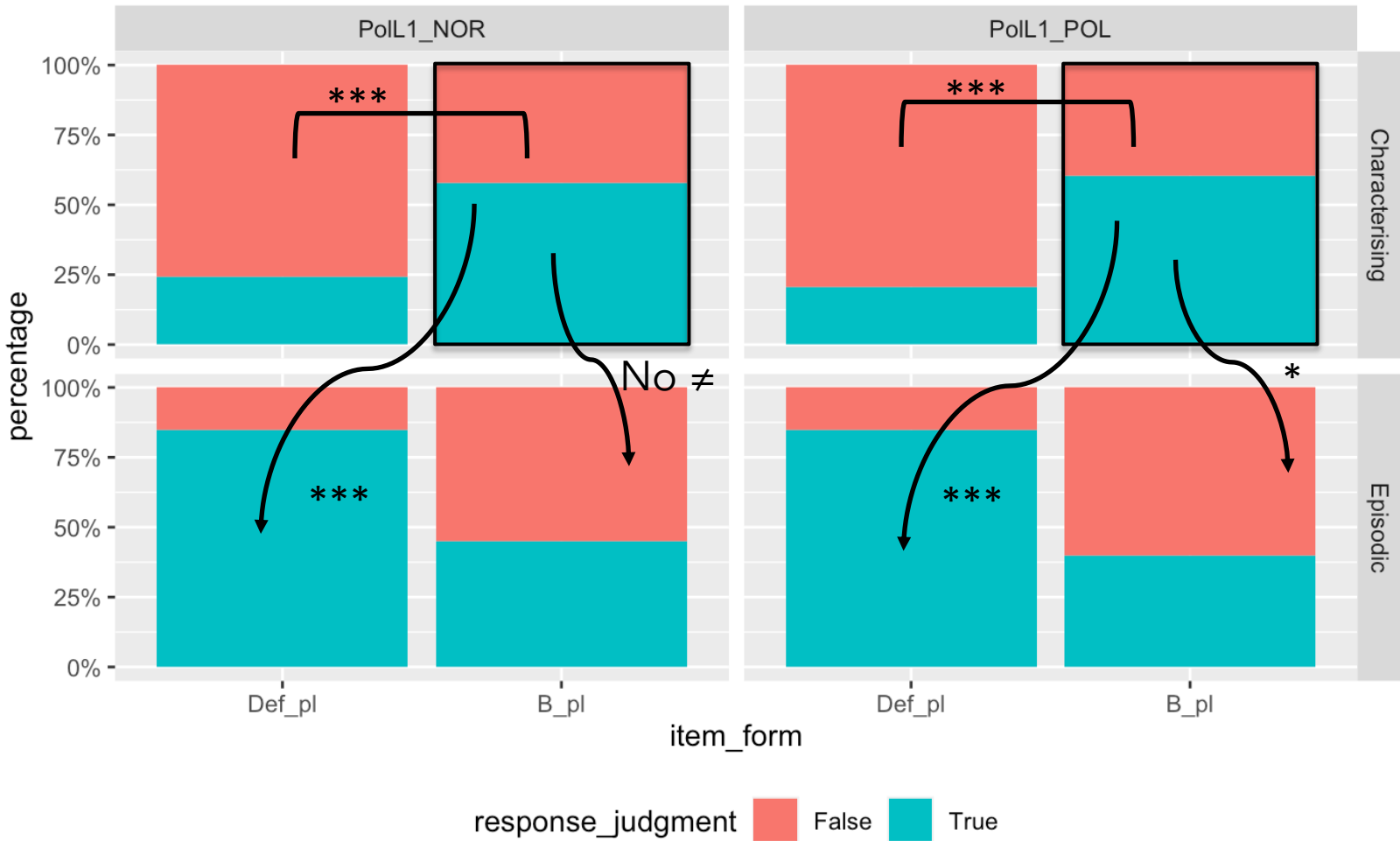




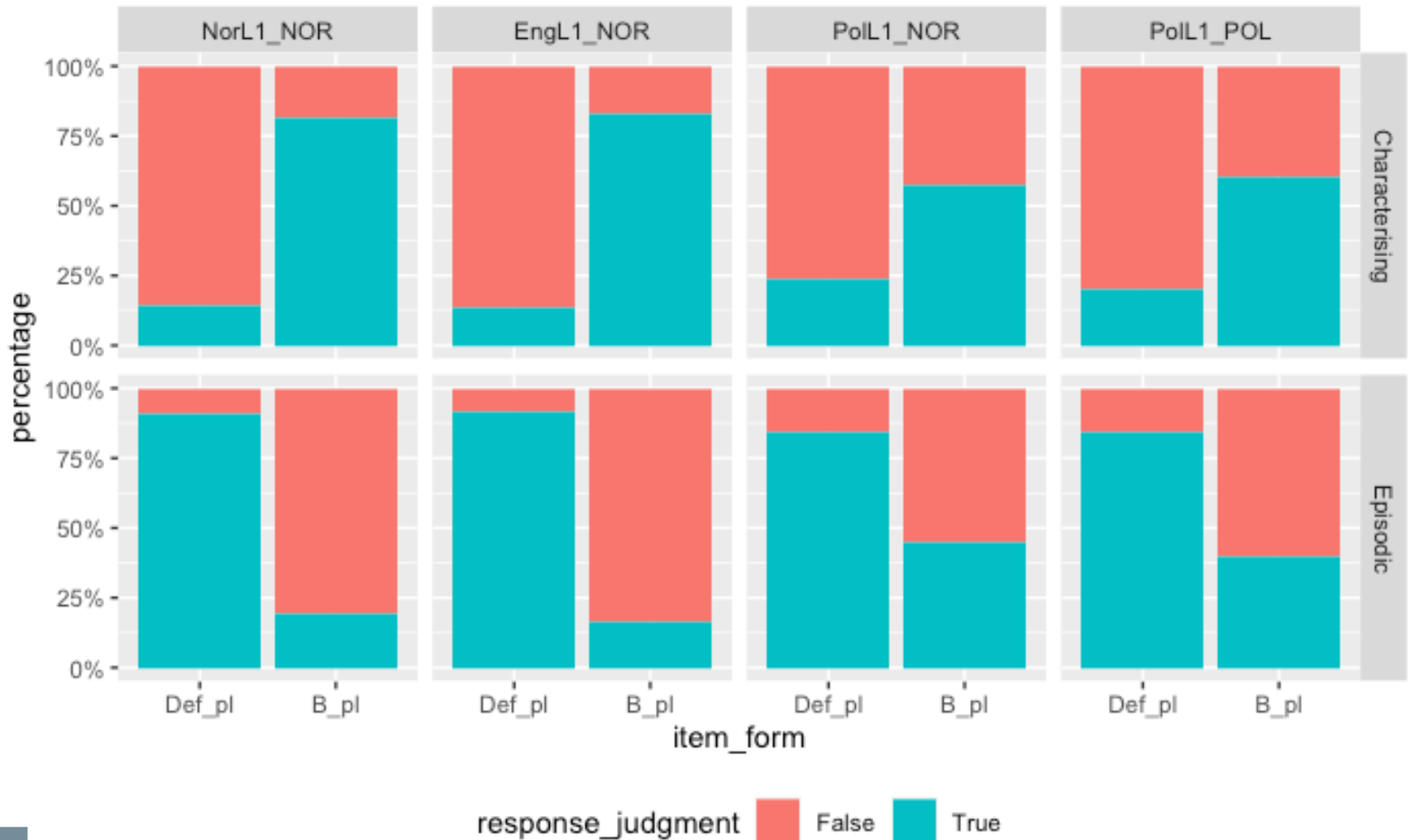
# Results: Polish groups



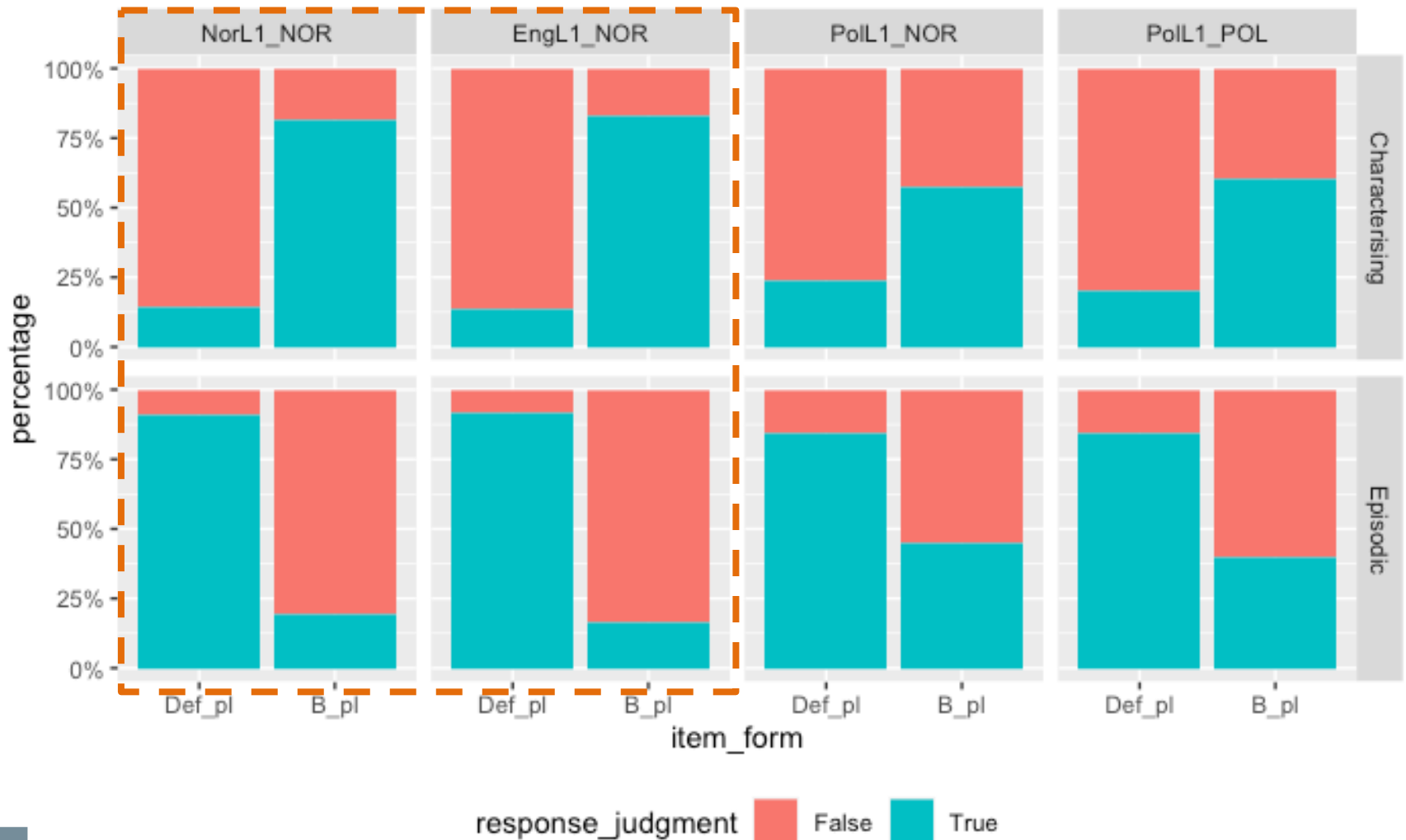
# Results: Polish groups



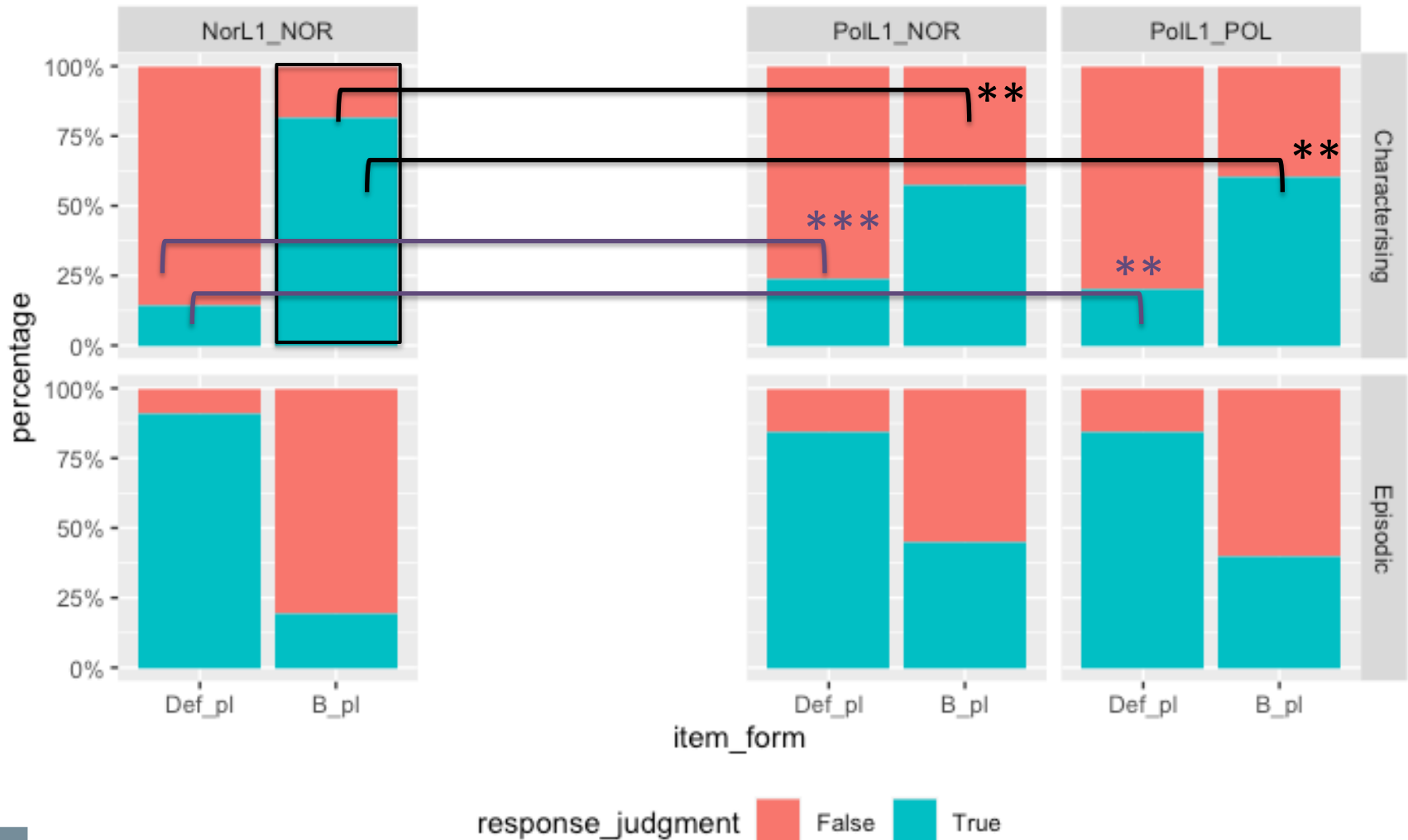
# Results: group comparisons



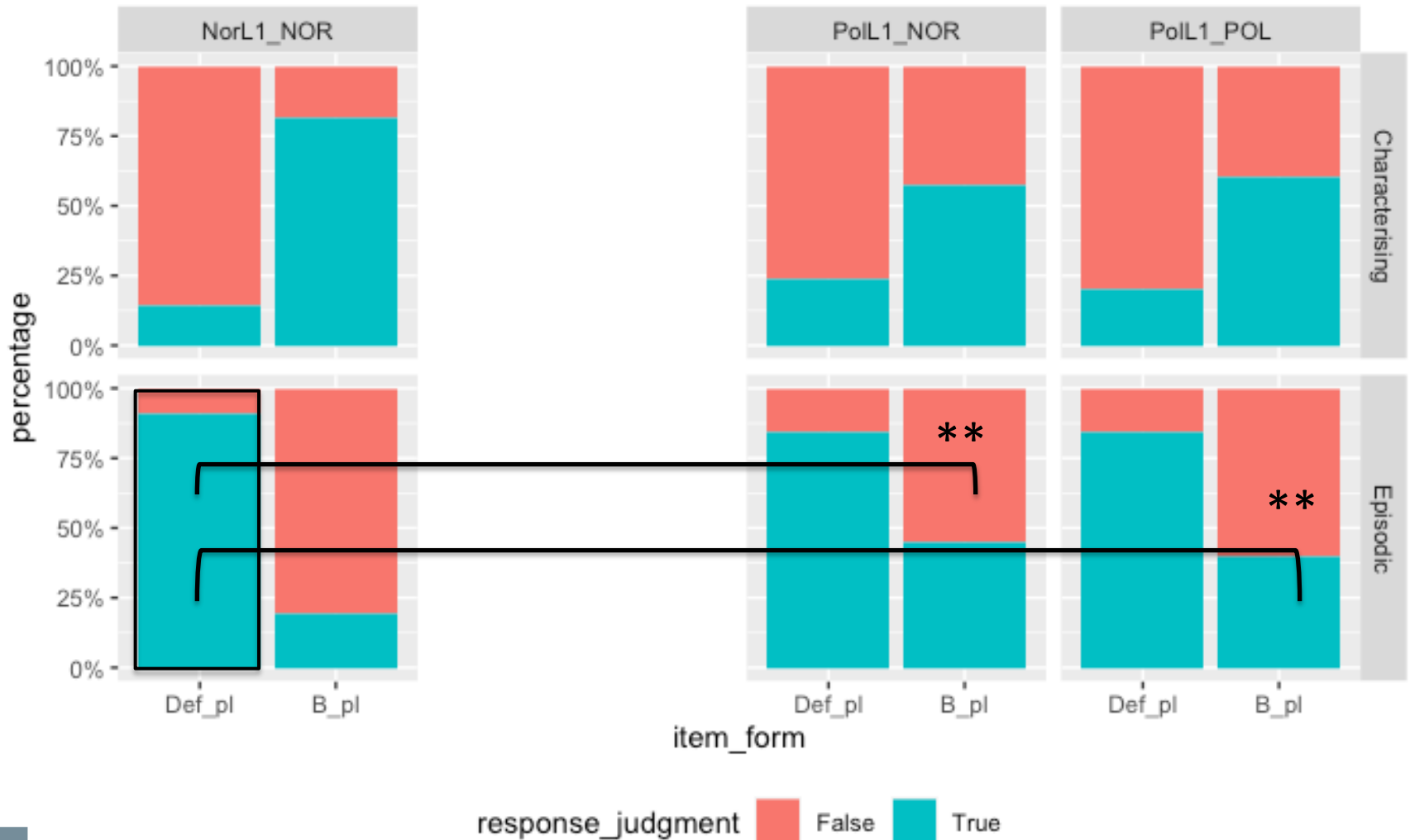
# Results: group comparisons



# Results: group comparisons



# Results: group comparisons



# Discussion

- Our most important discovery is that multilinguals are sensitive to the generic distinction with plurals, and pattern with native speakers
- Contrary to our predictions, the Polish speakers were more target-like in **Episodic** than in **Characterising** conditions.
- We found an over-acceptance of the bare form in the Episodic contexts: L1 influence or lack of precision in differentiating between the conditions?
- Surprising: PoLP was more accurate than PoLN in the acceptance of the definite form. Instruction?

# Conclusions

- Both Polish group seem to grasp the semantic uses of characterising vs. episodic conditions
- The presence of the bare plural in the L1 does not yield an advantage for the Characterising condition
- The group that is receiving explicit instruction in Norwegian is performing better with the definite plural.





# Selected references

Carlson, G. N., & Pelletier, F. J. (1995). *The generic book*. University of Chicago Press.

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