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2024

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Rojo, S., McCarthy, K., Caunt, A., Floccia, C., van de Weijer, J., & Paradis, C. (2024). *The development of linguistic biases in childhood*. Poster session presented at XVIth International Congress for the Study of Child Language, Prague.

Total number of authors:

6

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The development of linguistic biases in childhood

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Introduction

We know that adult speakers have linguistic biases: speakers of Standard British English are considered more ‘competent’ than speakers with a London accent (Sharma et al., 2022). However, we know little about how such biases develop in childhood (Dossey et al., 2020). This study investigates the development of these biases and how growing up in a linguistically diverse vs. less diverse environment might shape this developmental process

Method

Participants aged 7- through 11-years-old from Plymouth (South West England, 136, 74 girls) and London (113, 51 girls) completed four tasks: a speech-in-noise task, a social judgment task, a categorization task and the BPVS. All participants were native speakers of English. The stimuli included the Plymouth and London accents, Standard British English and French- and Chinese-accented English. Their caretakers completed a questionnaire regarding exposure to accents and languages as well as general demographic information.

Results

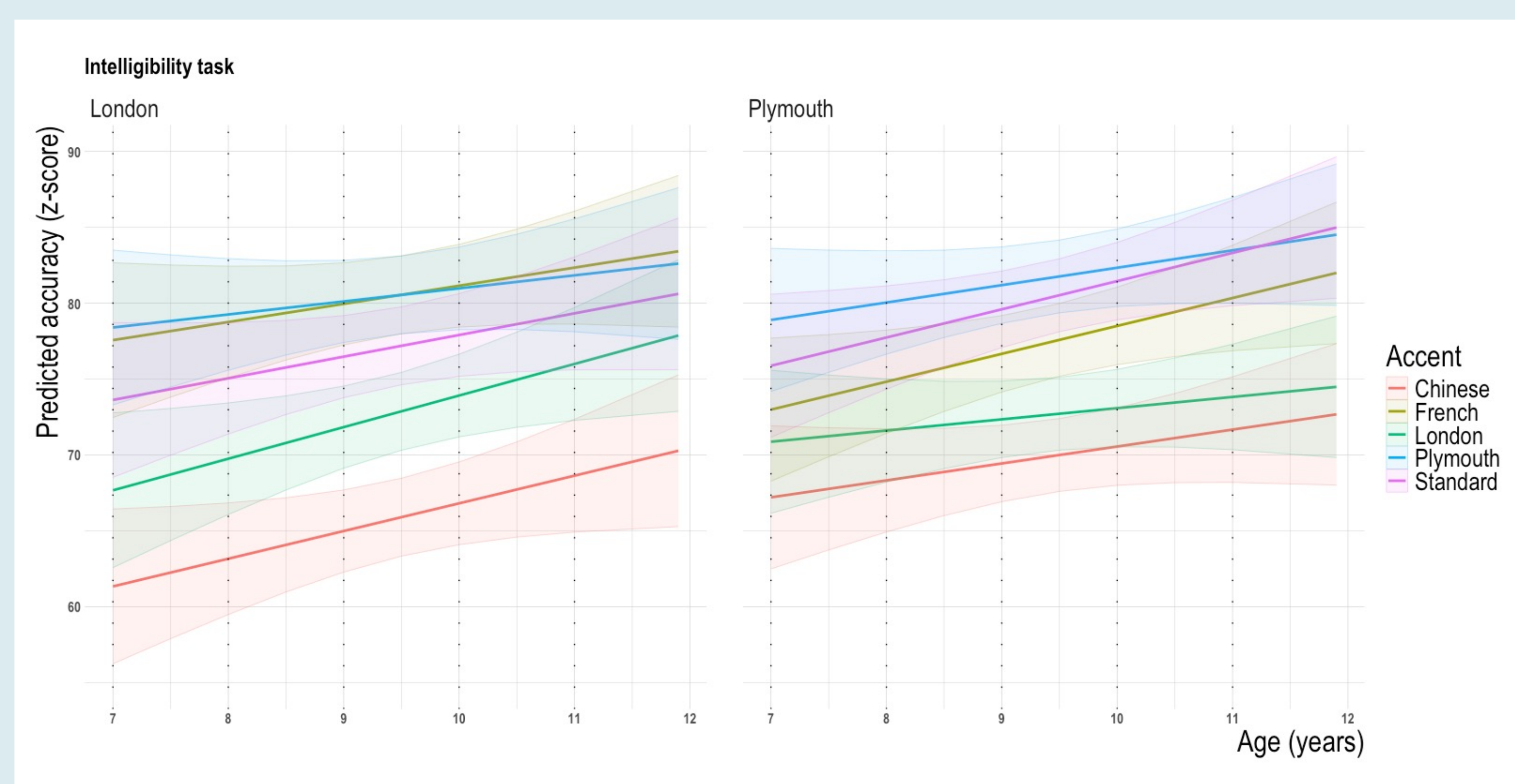


Figure 1. Intelligibility results across sites.

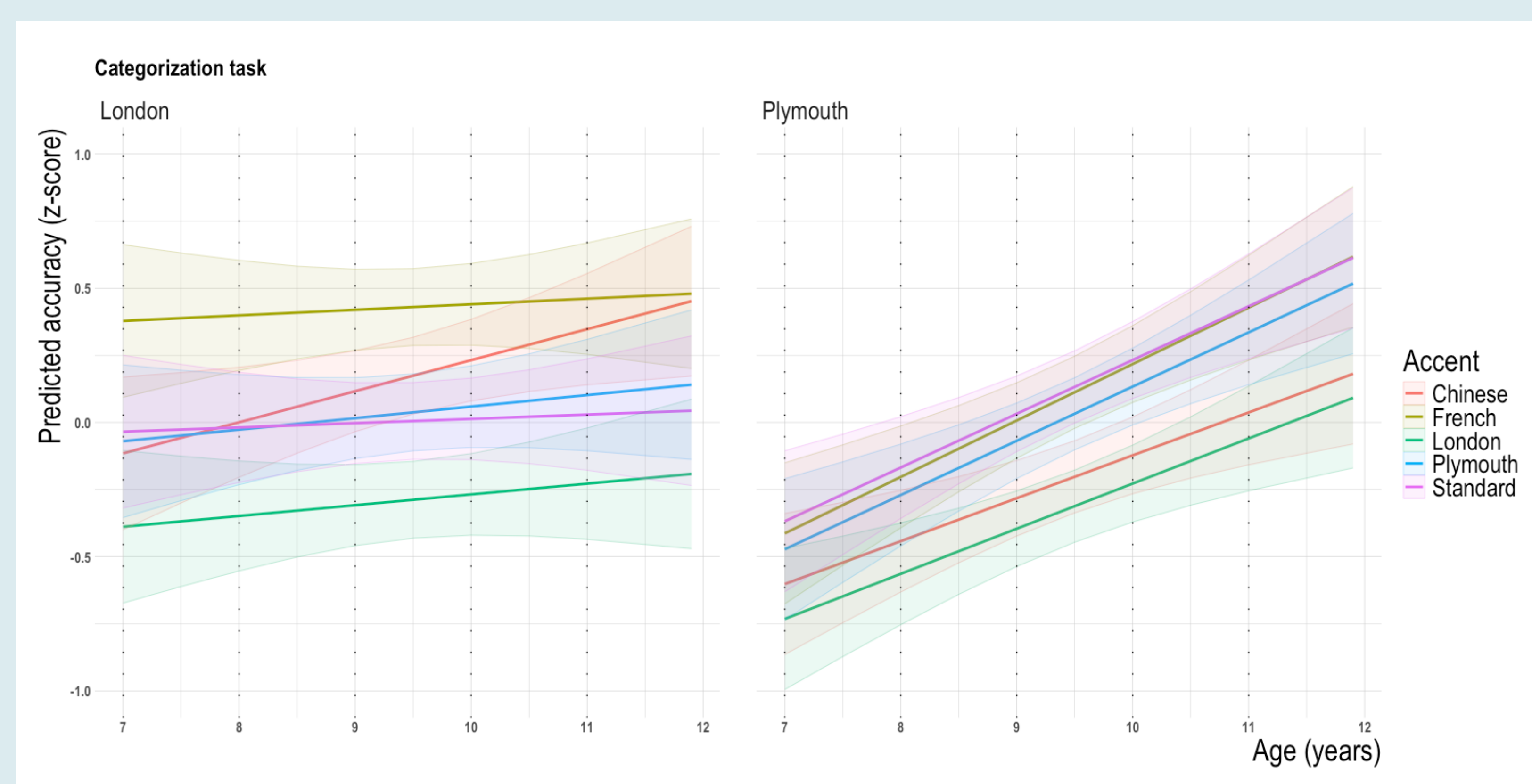


Figure 2. Categorization results across sites.

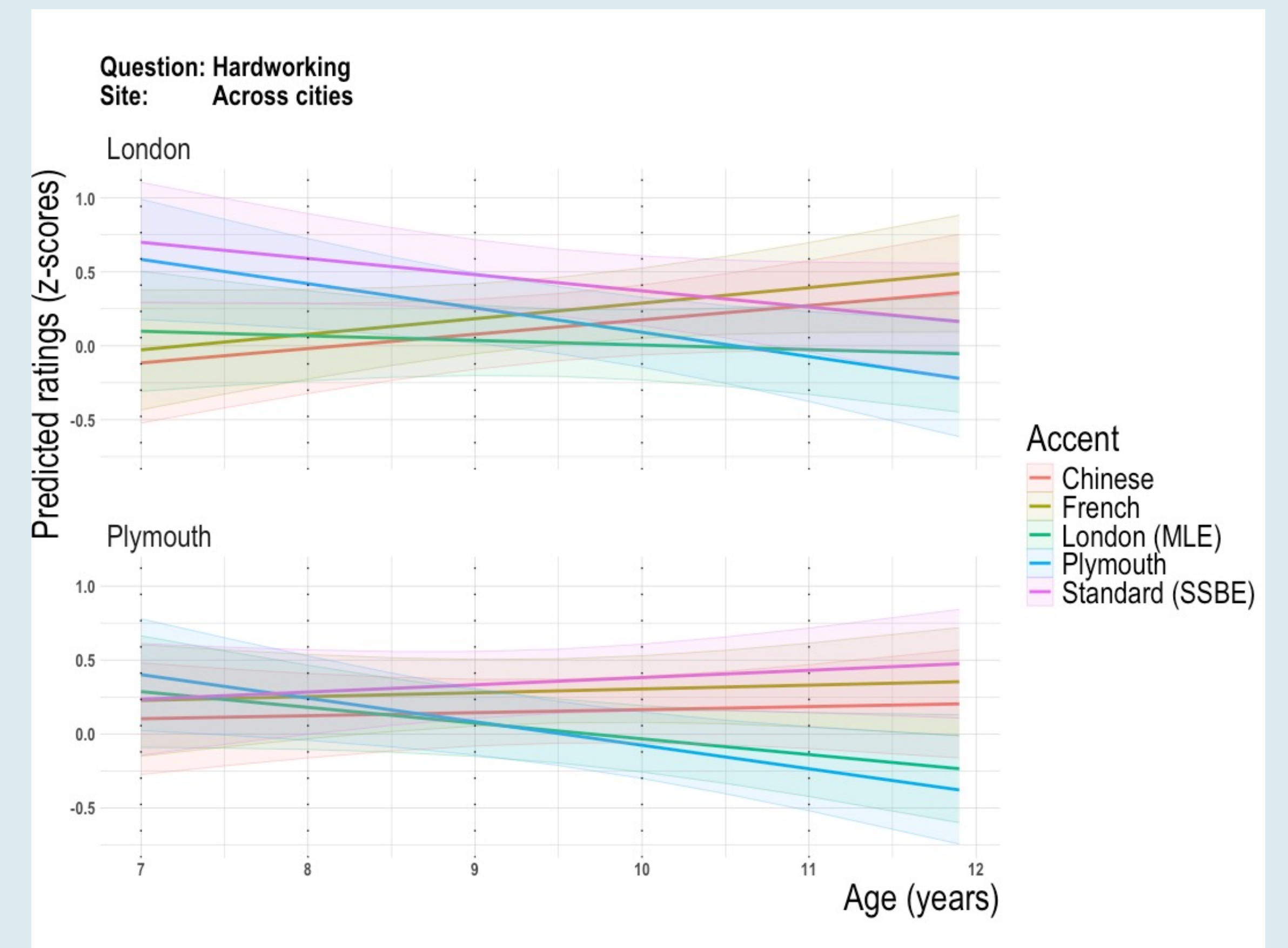


Figure 3. Results from the *hardworking* variable across sites

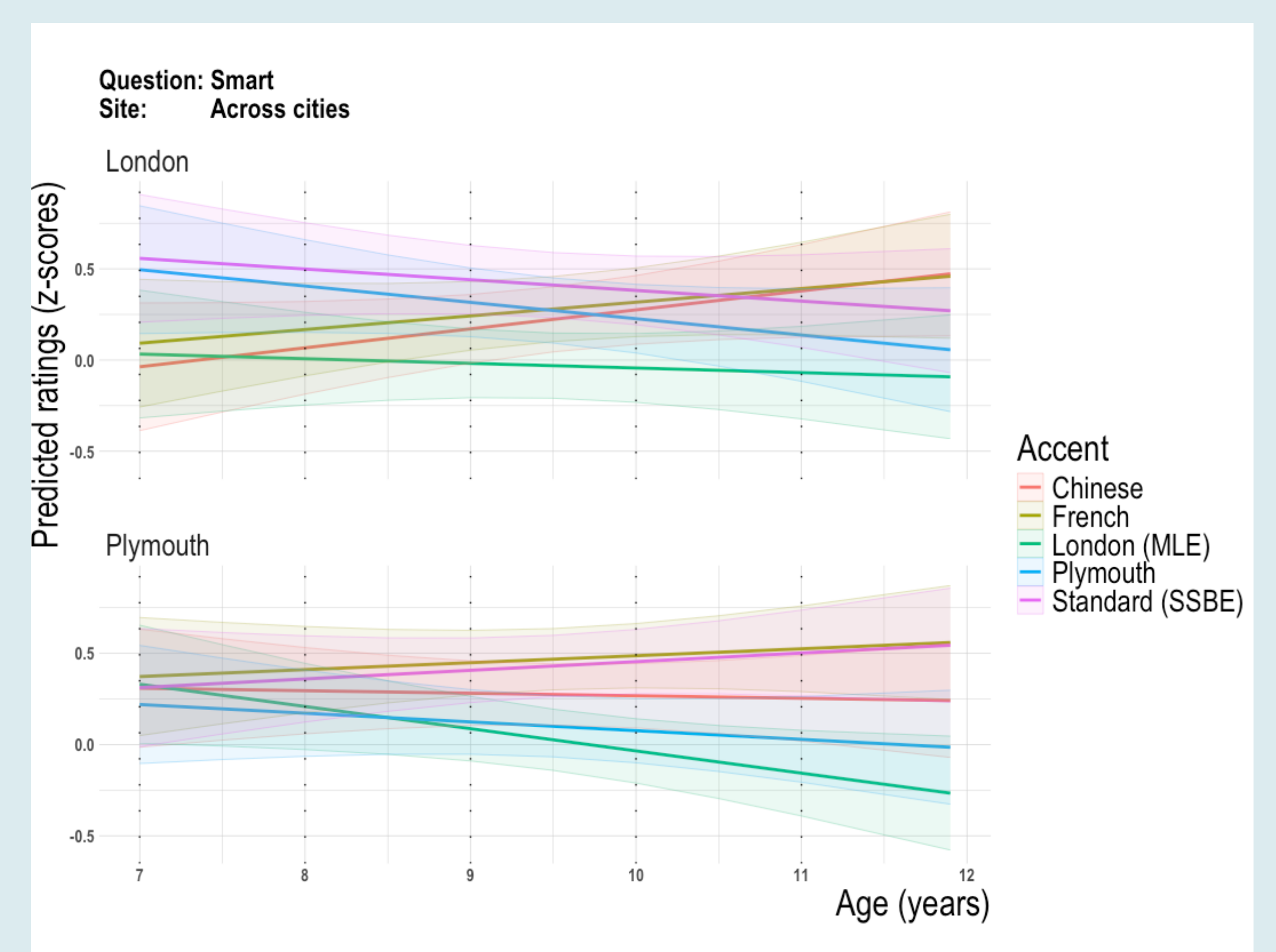


Figure 4. Results from the *smart* variable across sites

Conclusions

- No correlation between the results of the intelligibility and social judgement tasks
- Different age of onset of social judgements from accents across cities: London earlier than Plymouth.
- Correlation between categorization and onset of social judgement from accents
- Possible link between exposure, categorization and social judgement from accents

References

- Dossey, E., Clopper, C. G., & Wagner, L. (2020). The Development of Sociolinguistic Competence across the Lifespan: Three Domains of Regional Dialect Perception. *Language Learning and Development*, 16(4), 330-350.
- Sharma, D., Levon, E., & Ye, Y. (2022). 50 years of British accent bias: Stability and lifespan change in attitudes to accents. *English World-Wide*, 43(2), 135-166.

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