Meaning & Language Development Lab

Discourse cues for the acquisition of the Mandarin contrafactive verb *yiwei*

Penny Pan & Rachel Dudley, CogSci (2026)

UC San Diego

“falsely believe”

John *yiwei* it is raining.

⇝ it’s not raining.

John: 

reality: 

“think”

John *juede* it is raining.

⇝ maybe it’s raining, maybe it is not.

John: 

reality:  or 

- *yiwei* is **more informative** than *juede* to indicate false beliefs.
- *yiwei* is **less frequent** than *juede* in child-directed speech.
- But 4yo can understand *yiwei*.

How do children learn *yiwei*?

Maybe the **discourse**! ✅

	Constrained	Unconstrained
yiwei	… CONTEXT Child: Oh, it's sunny. ☀️ Mom: John *yiwei* it is raining. ☂️ CONTEXT …	… CONTEXT Dad: Let's go to the zoo. Mom: I *yiwei* it's raining. ☂️ CONTEXT …
juede	… CONTEXT Child: Oh, it's raining. ☂️ Mom: John *juede* it is raining. ☂️ CONTEXT …	… CONTEXT Child: I don't like eating vegetables. Mom: Mary *juede* it's raining. ☂️ CONTEXT …

10 dialogues per condition

Human simulation paradigm

…

CONTEXT

Child: Oh, it's sunny.

Mom: John ____ it is raining.

CONTEXT

…

yiwei *or* ***juede***

✅ ❌

Human simulation paradigm

...

CONTEXT

Child: Oh, it's sunny.

Mom: John ____ it is raining.

CONTEXT

...

yiwei *or* ***juede***

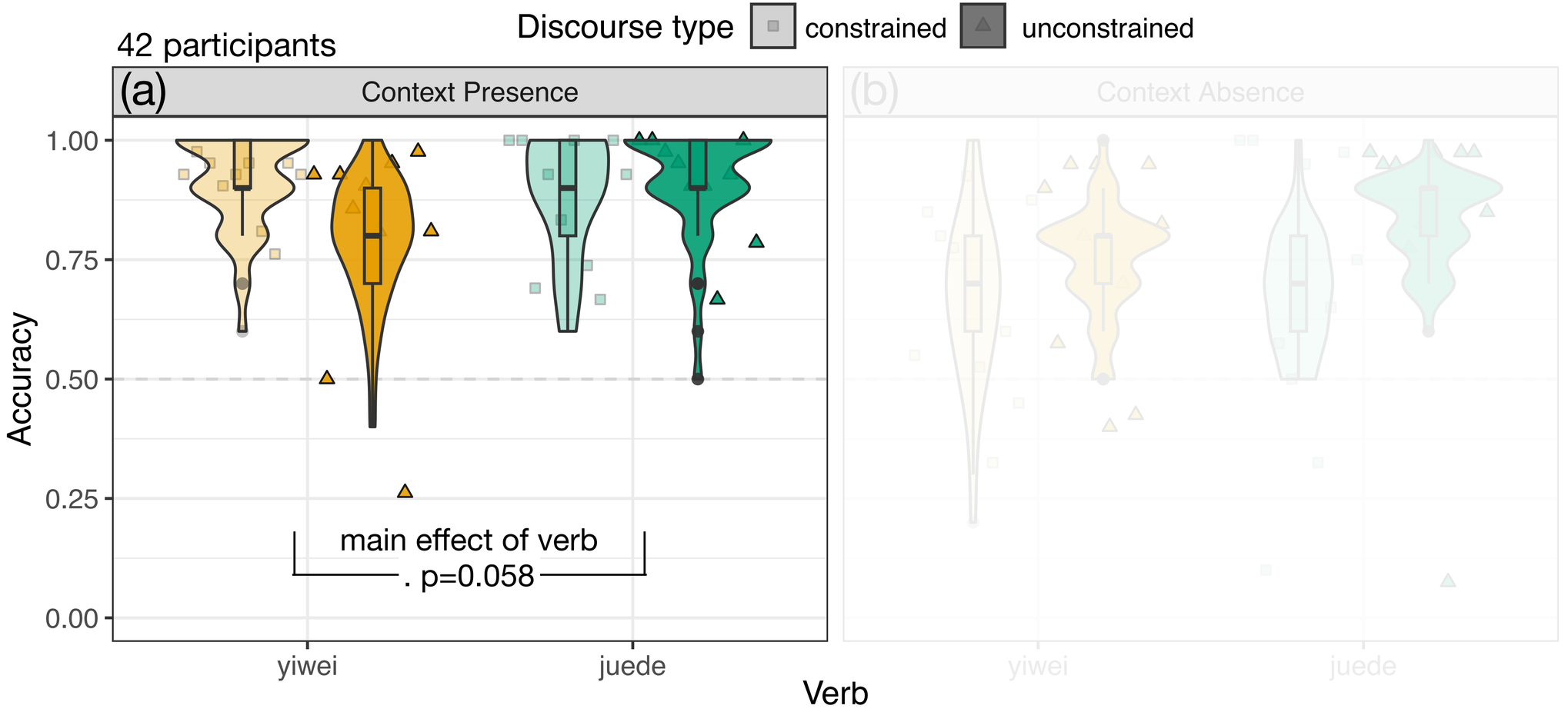
Context Presence

Mom: John ____ it is raining.

yiwei *or* ***juede***

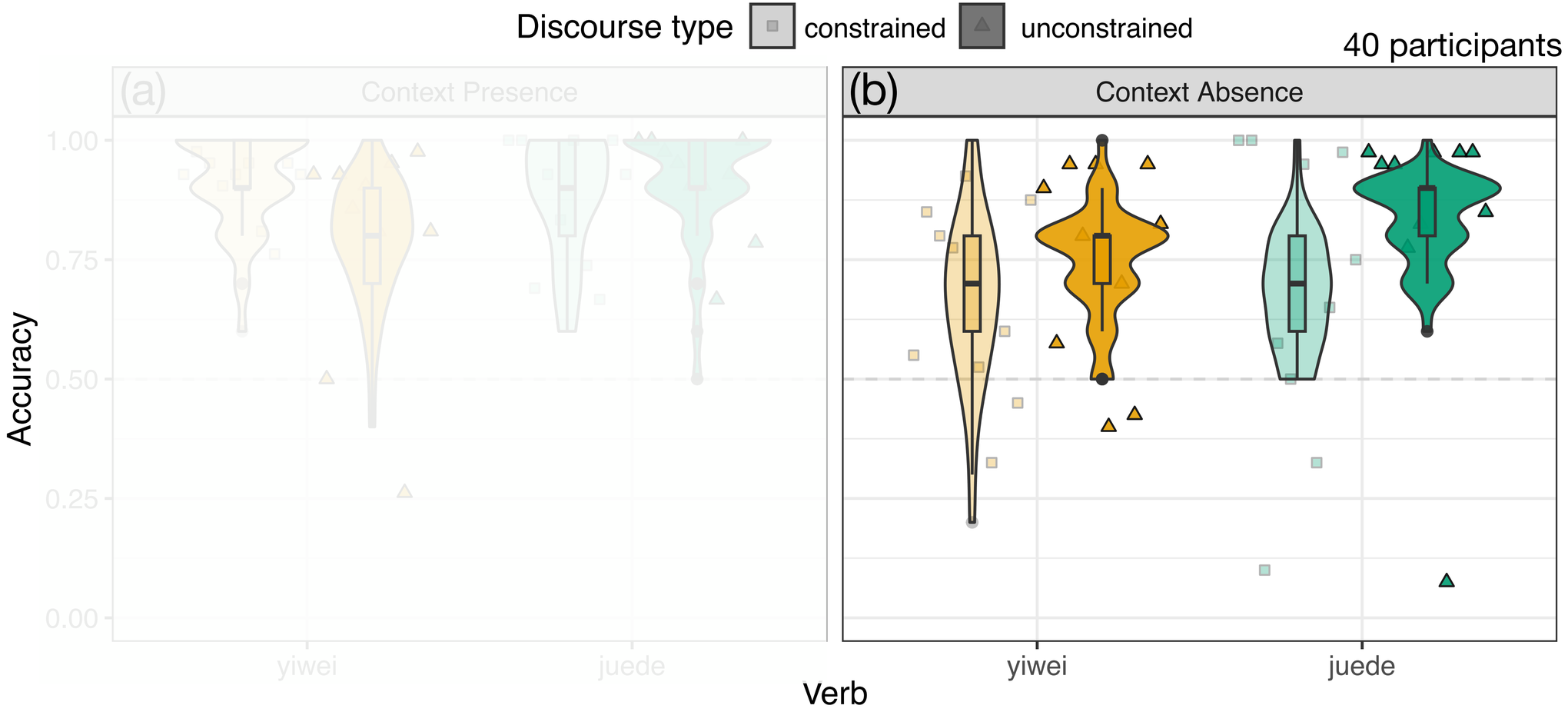
Context Absence

Results



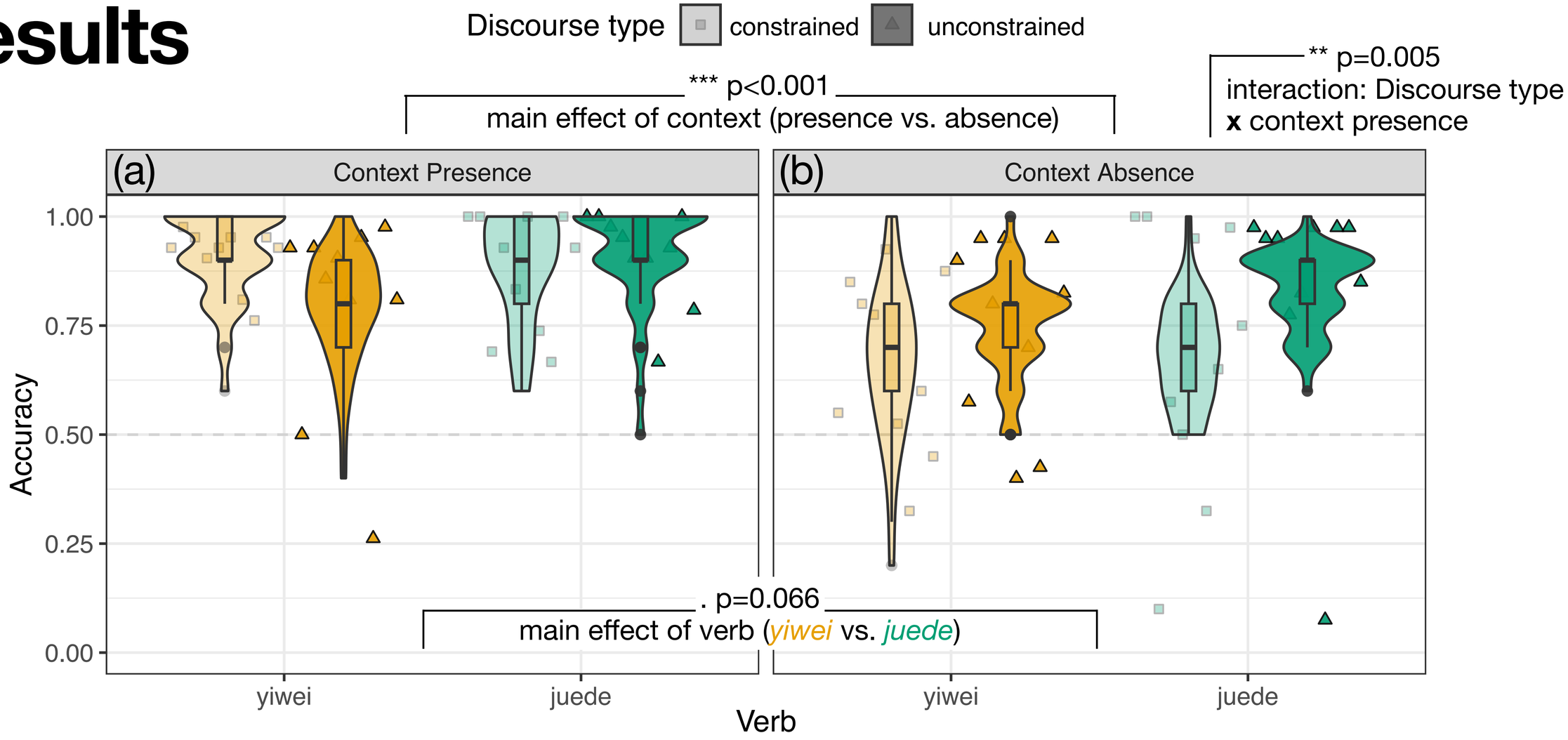
- Accuracy of *juede* was marginally higher than *yiwei*.
- Effect of discourse type and the interaction were not significant

Results



- Neither the two main effects nor their interaction was significant.

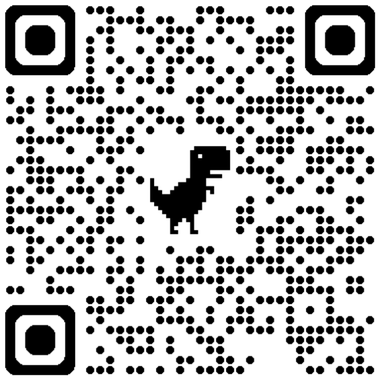
Results



- Overall, *juede* had marginally higher accuracy than *yiwei*, potentially due to its high frequency.
- The context manipulation was effect, but there was a ceiling effect, potentially due to the experimental design.

How do children learn *yiwei*? Maybe the **discourse**! ✅

- **Discourse context** is an effective cue for the acquisition of *yiwei*
  - especially when the context is **available** and provides the **constraining** information



preprint

If you *juede*/think this is interesting or want to chat more about think and *yiwei*:
dipan@ucsd.edu