

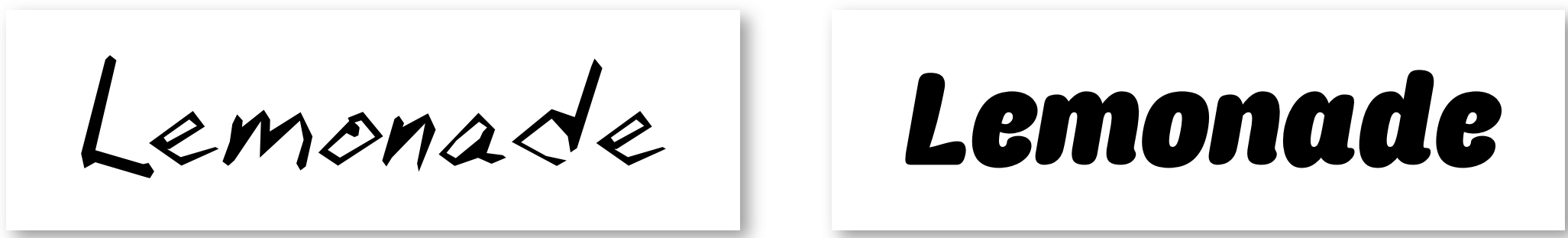
Can fonts affect the meaning of words?

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Introduction

Previous research shows that fonts can add a meaning to what is written. For example, Velasco, *et al.*, (*iPerception*, 6, 1–10, 2015) found that, when labeling food, angular fonts suggest bitter and sour tastes whereas rounded fonts suggest sweet tastes.



Which lemonade would be sweeter?

We have asked whether fonts can directly manipulate the meaning of words.

We explored this using *heteronyms* — words that have more than one meaning: e.g., wound, tear, sewer, etc. Can we influence how these words are read by displaying them in a font consistent with one or other of their meanings? Is a **wound** an injury? Does *wound* mean twisted up?

Method

Participants

- ▶ Data were collected from 96 students enrolled in PSY101 General Psychology.

Materials and Procedure

- ▶ 12 heteronyms were used — each was tested twice in fonts that suggested each of its meanings (see Figure 1.)
- ▶ These were dispersed among 78 distractor words (displayed in randomly chosen fonts) in an online form.
- ▶ Try it here: goo.gl/6Q9oia
- ▶ Participants were randomly assigned to one of two counterbalanced versions of the form.
- ▶ We used a rhyming task to find out how each participant interpreted the heteronyms.
- ▶ They were asked to select the word (from 4 options) that best rhymed with the word in question
- ▶ For the heteronym trials, the rhyming options included rhymes for both pronunciations of the heteronyms.
- ▶ The order of the rhyming options was randomized for each participant

Results

We counted the number of participants who chose each rhyming option for the different font versions of the heteronyms.

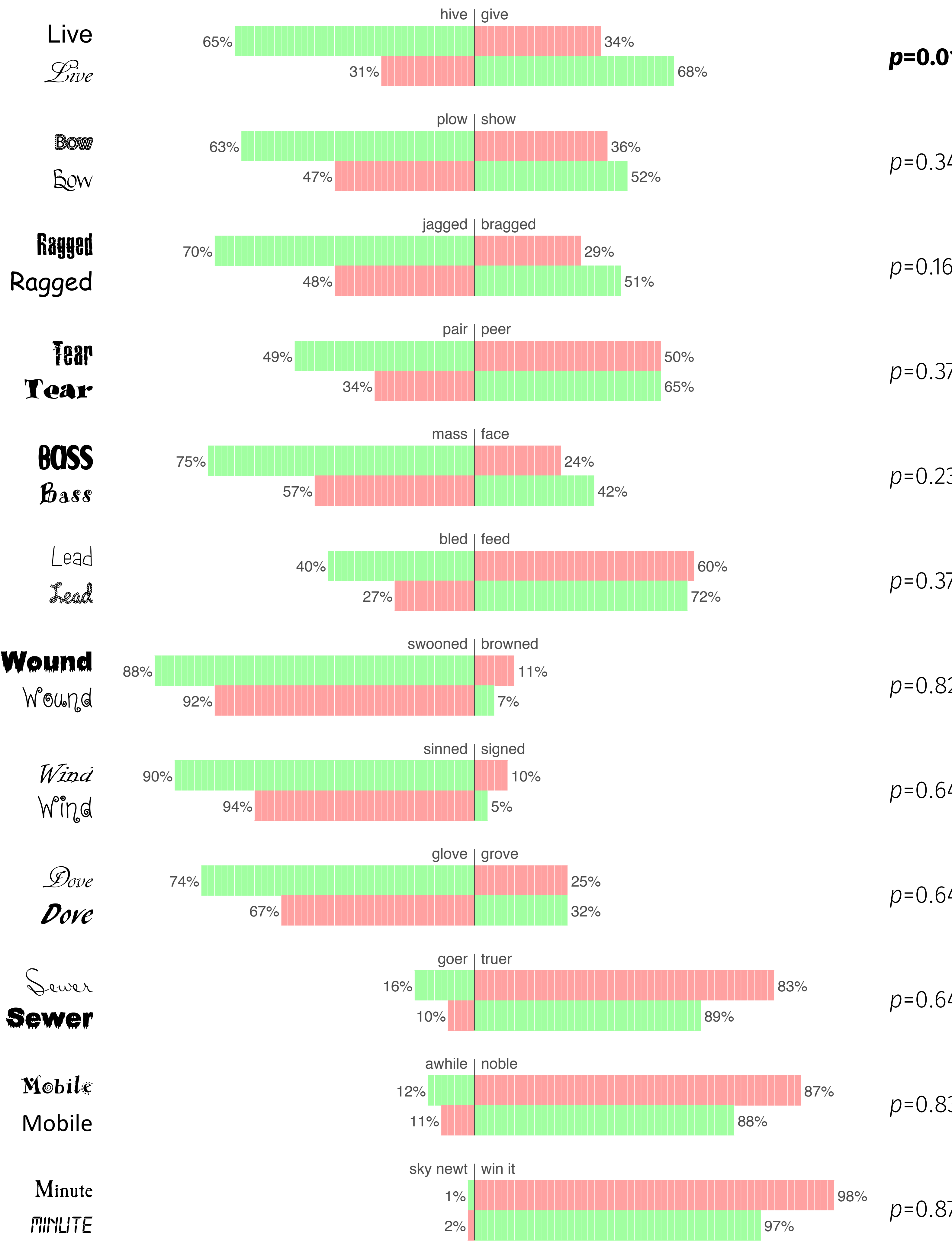


Figure 1. Rhyming choices for the different font versions of each heteronym. Responses in green are consistent with the intended meaning suggested by the font. *P* values have been adjusted for multiple comparisons.

Conclusions

Surprisingly, the different fonts had little effect on the rhyming responses. This suggests that how we understand words during reading is *not* influenced by the font.