Mandarin speakers undergoing attrition produce more explicit referring expressions

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INTRODUCTION

- Studies on L1 attrition (changes in an individual's first language due to immersion in a second language) show that speakers of null subject languages (e.g., Italian and Spanish) who are undergoing attrition tend to accept overt pronouns in contexts where monolingual speakers would prefer null pronouns.
- Mandarin Chinese is a radical pro-drop language that permits both subject and object drop. However, the effects of L1 attrition in Mandarin have not been adequately explored.

Continuity Context: Subject

In this given example, the audio description says "Xiaozi [Little Purple] greeted Xiaohong [Little Red]". Participants are prompted to "Please repeat what you heard and then complete the story", positioned above text giving target sentence. Above that is a prompt word, meaning "picked up". In this scenario, we expected the participant to say (in Chinese) something like "Xiaozi greeted Xiaohong, then null/she/ Xiaozi [Little Purple] picked up the backpack".

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Do bilingual Mandarin speakers undergoing attrition in their L1 Mandarin tend to be more explicit in reference?**
- **If so, does the over-explicitness result from cross-linguistic interference?**
- **If so, is there a correlation between their attrition-related changes and language use in their daily lives?**
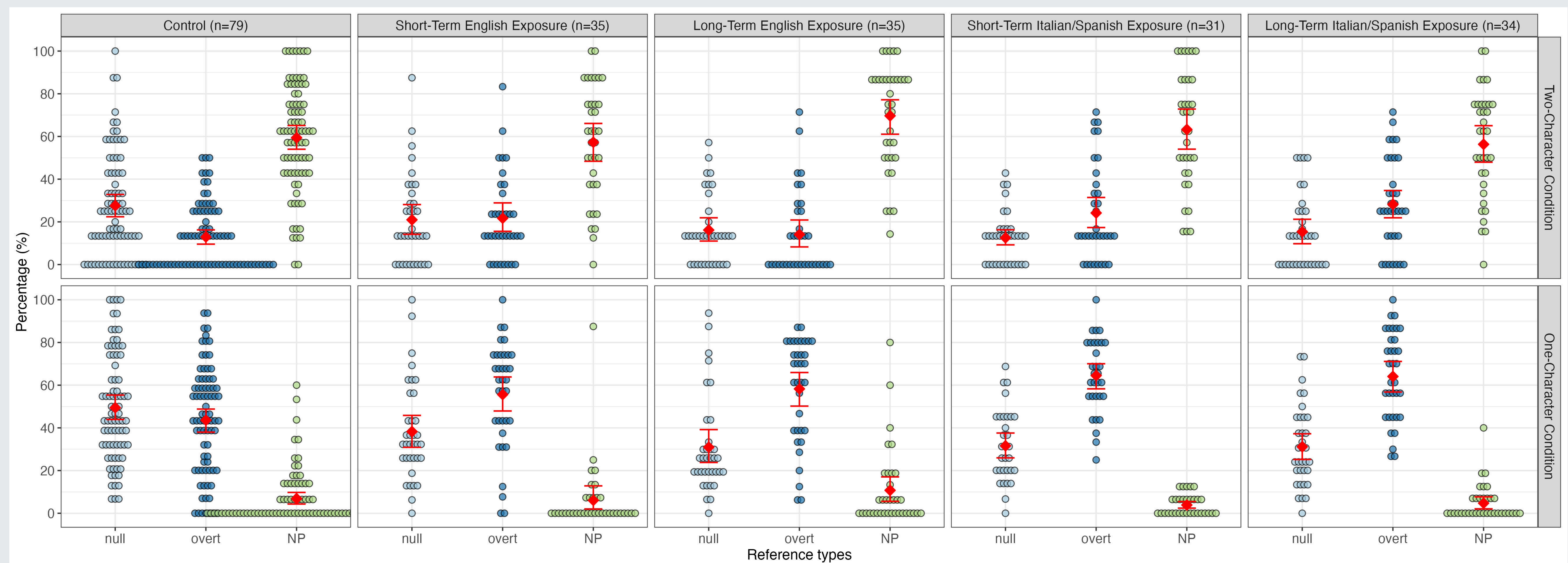
METHODOLOGY

- **Picture Description Task** adapted from Arnold & Griffin (2007) and Hwang (2021)
- **Questionnaire** adapted from the Language and Social Background Questionnaire (Anderson et al. 2017)

RESULTS: PART 1   Reference Production for Subject Referents

- Bi/multilingual speakers show a preference for more explicit forms in both one- and two-character conditions.
- The four groups of more bi/multilingual speakers demonstrate distinct preferences for explicitness in the two-character condition.

RESULTS: PART 2   Referential Over-explicitness and the Use of L1 & L2 (& L3)
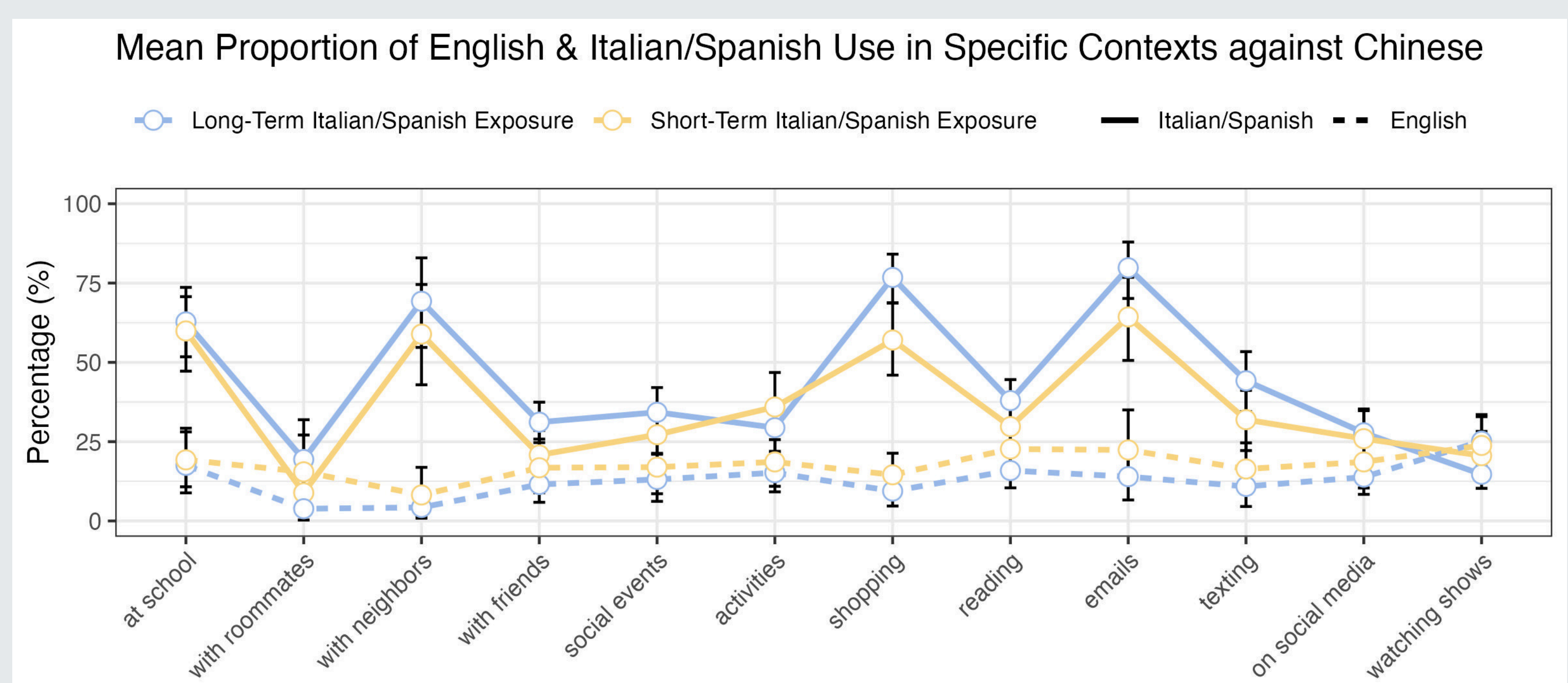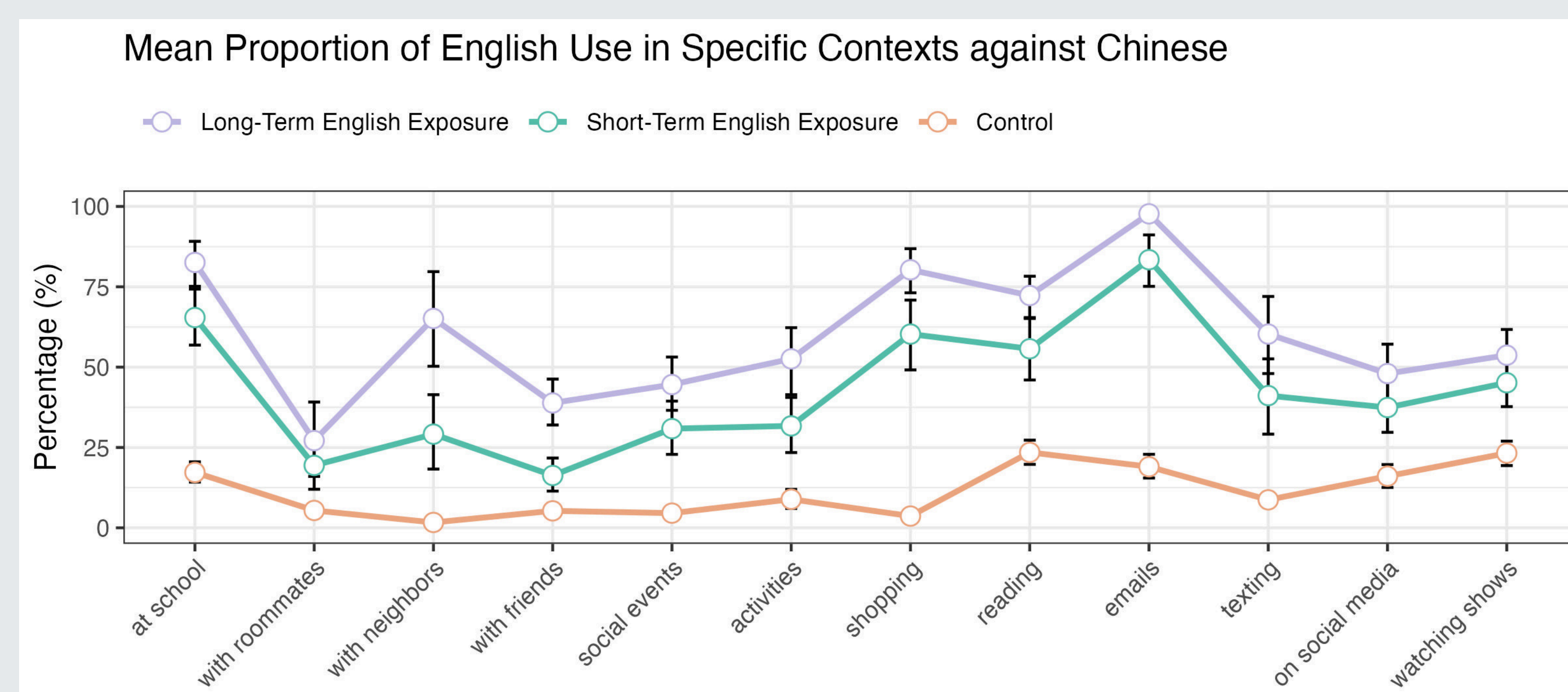
- Using more L2 (English) or L3 (Italian/Spanish) and less L1 (Mandarin) deepens the attrition process.

REFRENCE

[1]Anderson, J. A. E., Mak, L, Keyvani Chahi, A., & Bialystok, E. (2017). The language and social background questionnaire: Assessing degree of bilingualism in a diverse population. Behavior Research Methods, 50(1), 250–263. [2] Arnold, J. E., & Griffin, Z. M. (2007). The effect of additional characters on choice of referring expression: Everyone counts. Journal of Memory and Language, 56(4), 521–536. [3] Hwang, H. (2021). Avoidance of gender-ambiguous pronouns as a consequence of ambiguity-avoidance strategy. Discourse Processes, 58(3), 251–259.

FUTURE WORK

Why does attrition result in the particular pattern of reference use?
- Impact of Cogntive Load?
- Ambiguity Avoidance?