

Form-focused task-oriented dialogues for CALL: A pilot study on German dative



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Motivation

General goal:

Transfer and use findings from second language acquisition in a human-computer setting and for CALL application

Specific Question:

Can computer-based **conversational** focused **tasks** be used to promote acquisition of linguistic forms?

Background

Conversational interaction facilitates L2 learning via **negotiation of meaning** which provides:

- Comprehensible input
- Negative feedback
- Opportunity for the learner to modify their output in response to feedback and produce comprehensible output

Task-based language learning & teaching:

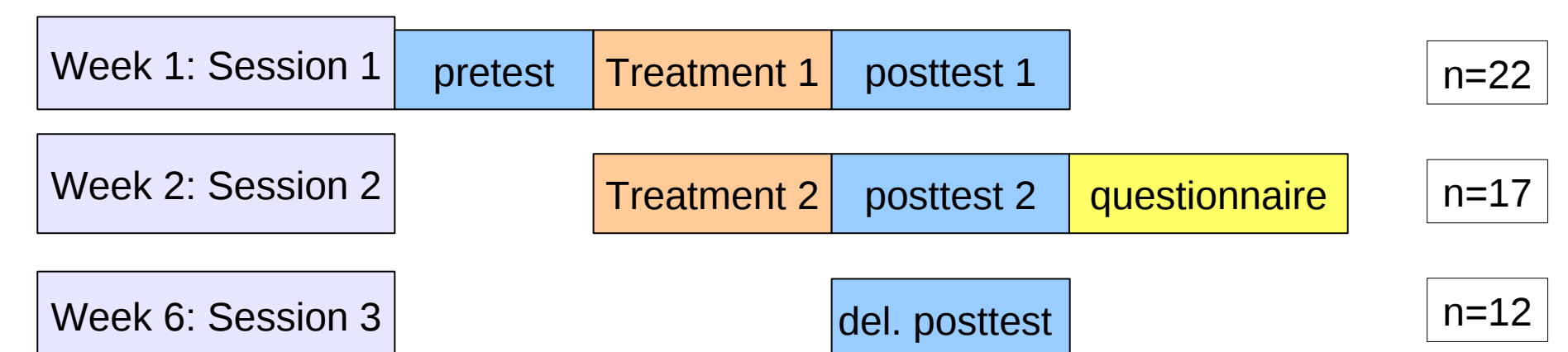
- Primary focus on meaning
- Clearly defined communicative outcome
- Learners are free to choose the linguistic forms they need!

Problem: If teachers want to teach forms, how can they guarantee that learners will use these forms?

Solution: **Focused task**

- Designed such that learners are likely to use a specific form
- Integrate form-focused instruction and communicative approach

Experiment



- Quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest-delayed posttest
- Participants: 22 students enrolled in two German classes at Saarland University (90 minute sessions, twice a week)
- 2 Tests for assessing accuracy of usage:
 - Timed Grammaticality Judgement Test → Implicit Knowledge
 - Untimed Sentence Construction Test → Explicit Knowledge

Treatment: Task-based activities

Type-written dialogue with system to perform directions giving task

Condition A: **Free language production**

- Learner produces input freely
- Errors regarding target form are implicitly corrected by **recasts**

Learner: Hinter **das**_{incorrect} Cafe nach links. (Turn left, past the cafe)

System: Okay, hinter **dem**_{correct} Cafe nach links. (Okay, left past the cafe)

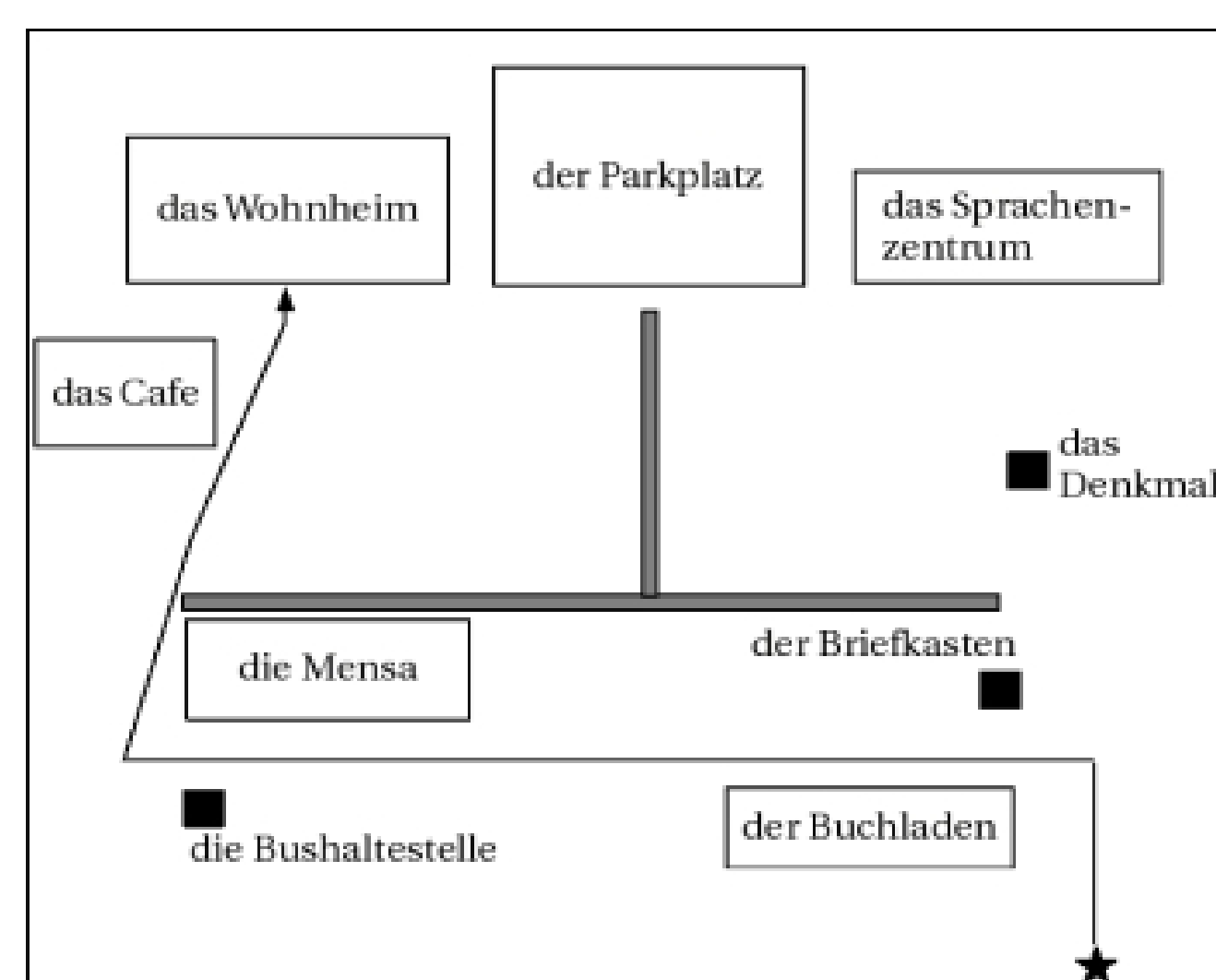
Condition B: **Constrained production**

- Learner supplies target form by filling gap in a pre-scripted dialogue turn
- Instant explicit binary feedback (correct / incorrect)

Target Form and Task Scenario

Task:

Give directions!

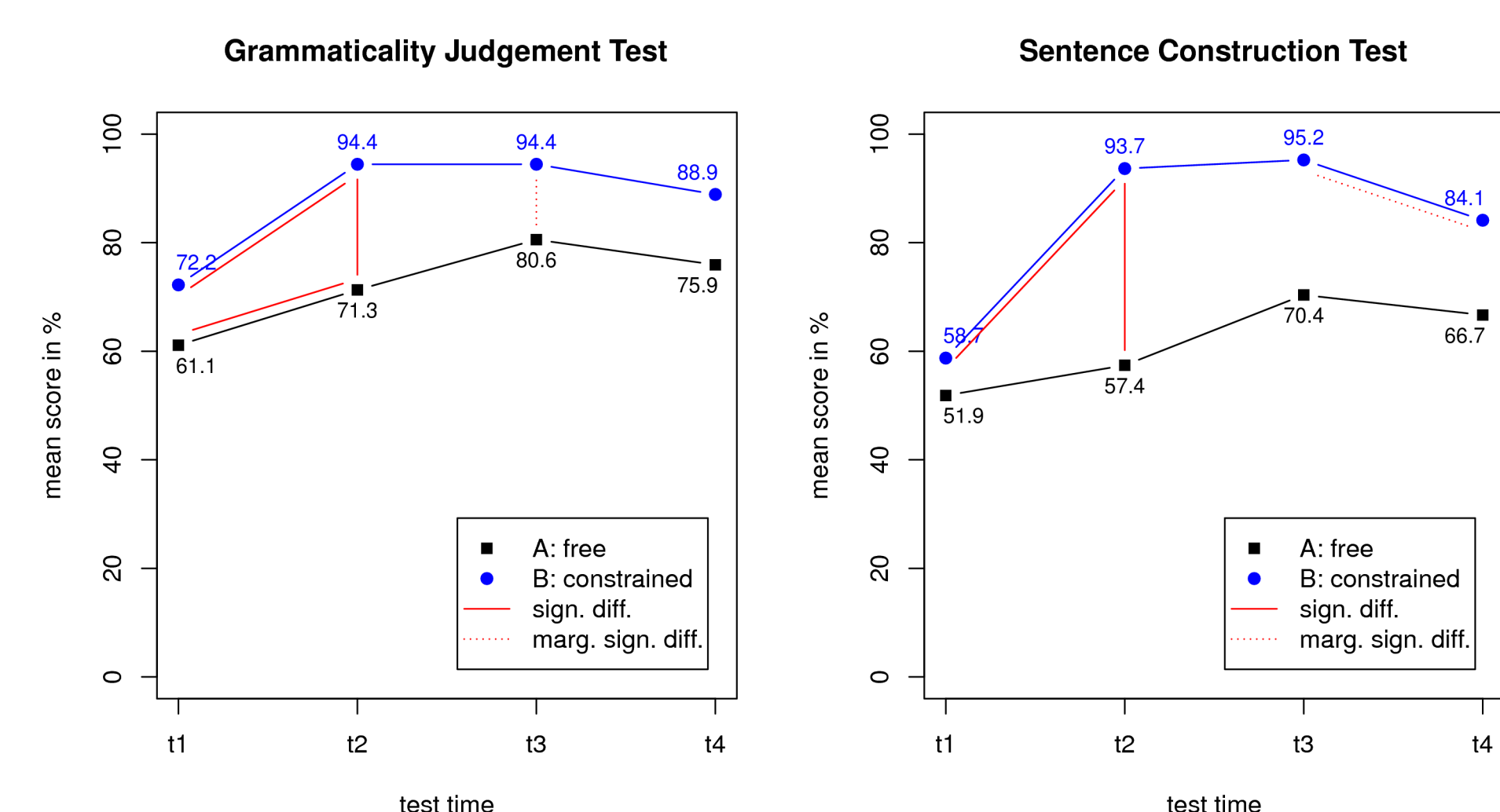


Target form: Dative case in locative prepositional phrases

- Locative prepositions for describing static spatial relations (**hinter** - behind, **vor** - in front of, **neben** - next to, etc.) require dative case in object position
- Directional preposition **zu** – to/toward also requires dative
- Case is marked morphologically on the determiner of a noun phrase
- German determiners are gender-specific

gender	nominative	dative pp	translation
masc	der Laden	hinter dem Laden	behind the shop
fem	die Mensa	hinter der Mensa	behind the canteen
neut	das Cafe	hinter dem Cafe	behind the cafe

Results & Discussion



- Immediate effect of treatment: most effect between pretest and first post-test
- Constrained production (stronger form focus) shows stronger effect
- Learning in free production seems slower
- Free production achieves more results on implicit knowledge tests than on explicit knowledge tests
- Caution: sample size very small and skewed by outliers

Future Work:

- Examine effect of treatment on conversational skills
- Examine effect of more explicit system feedback in free production