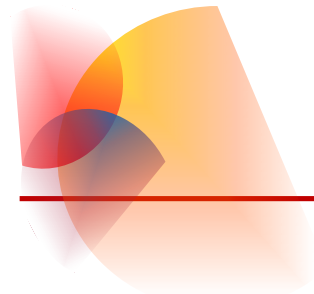


**Surveying dialectal variation  
in Spanish:  
The case of the  
*Focalizing Ser* structure**

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*June, 2018*



# Research topic

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- ❖ In this presentation, I will discuss the perception of the *Focalizing Ser* structure (FS) in Colombian Spanish.
- ❖ FS co-occurs with the more standard alternative, the Pseudo-Cleft structure (PC).



# The standard form

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❖ Pseudo-Cleft (PC):

(1) A: ¿*Qué trajo Julián?*  
‘What did Julián bring’

B:  $[[\underline{Lo\ que} [Julián\ trajo]_{TP}]_{CP} [fue\ \mathbf{vino}]_{TP}]$   
‘What Julián brought was wine’



# The non-standard form

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❖ *Focalizing Ser* (FS):

(2) *Julián trajo fue vino*  
Julián bring.3SG.PRET be.3SG.PRET wine  
'It was wine that Julián brought'

Here there is no  
relative clause!

# Example from an online newspaper

Judicial

Domingo 01 de Marzo de 2015 - 12:01 AM



Sin votos aún

## “Las autoridades de Barrancabermeja están es esperando que me maten”

▶ *Martha Villamizar, una barranquillera de 33 años de edad, no tiene tranquilidad desde que tomó la decisión de separarse de su compañero sentimental, con quien convivió por más de 10 años en Barrancabermeja.*

(3) ...*están es **esperando** que me maten*  
‘It is waiting to kill me that they are doing’

# Example from a political campaign flyer

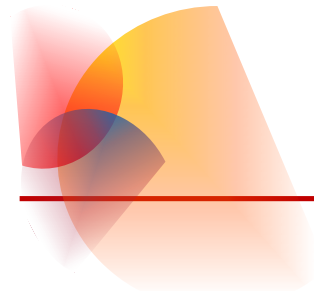
(4) *Colombia va es para adelante*  
'It is forward where Colombia goes'



# Example from Facebook



(5) *Yo te quiero es a ti*  
*'It is you who I love'*



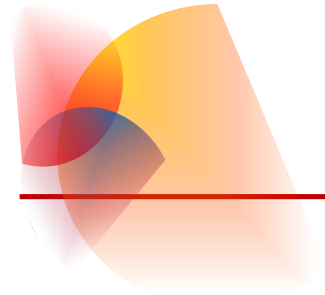
# Important

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- ❖ The syntactic configuration of FS is quite interesting and complex, but due to time limitations, I will not consider it in this presentation.

We can discuss this during the questions session, if anyone is interested 😊

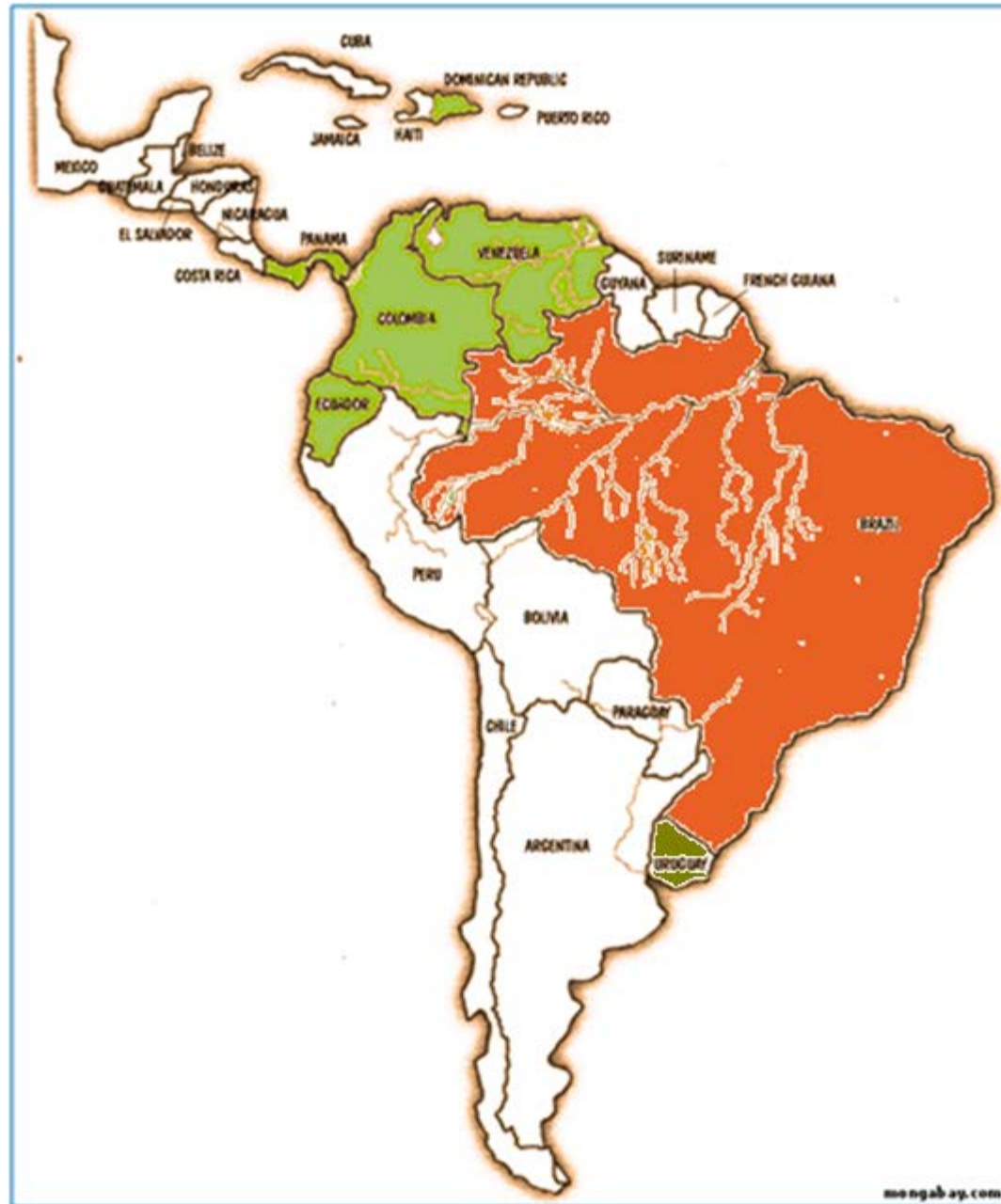


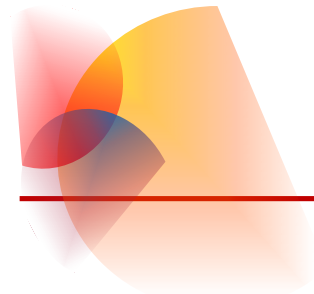


## **Dialectal considerations**

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- ❖ FS is a particular focus construction used in only a few dialects of Spanish: Colombian, Venezuelan, Panamanian, Ecuadorian, and Dominican (Sedano 1990; Bosque 1999).
- ❖ FS has also been reported in Brazilian Portuguese (Kato 2009), Puerto Rican Spanish (Escalante pc), and Uruguayan Spanish (Malcuori pc).





## **Dialectal considerations**

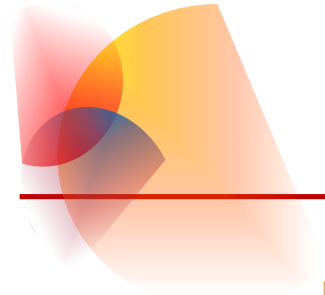
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- ❖ **FS is not stigmatized in Colombia (Escalante & Ortiz 2017), but in Venezuela it is associated with the speech of Colombian immigrants (cf. Sedano 1990).**
- ❖ **Overall, Dominican speakers evaluate the FS structure similarly. However, certain differences can be observed between regional dialects (Méndez Vallejo 2015).**

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# **Methodology**

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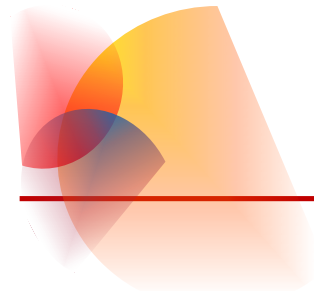
# Participants

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<b>Barranquilla</b>	106
<b>Bogotá</b>	44
<b>Bucaramanga</b>	56
<b>Cali</b>	72
<b>Medellín</b>	93

All **371** participants belonged to various university communities (students, faculty, and staff members.)

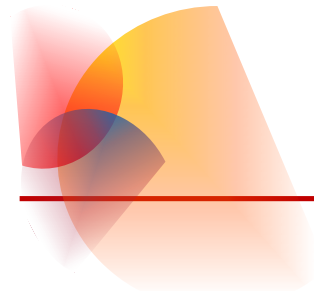




# Instrument

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- ❖ FS occurs frequently in Colombians' speech, but it is difficult to survey a variety of structures from naturally-occurring conversations.
- ❖ Since we are comparing the perception of FS across dialects, we needed to keep control over participants' evaluation of the stimuli.



# Acceptability judgment tests

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- ❖ 128 sentences tested: 86 containing FS.
- ❖ Two versions: audio and written.
- ❖ All sentences were part of small dialogues and they were constructed to test different syntactic configurations. Some of them were modelled from naturally-occurring cases (see examples in handout.)



Ahora escucharás un mini-diálogo. Presta atención a la última oración. ¿Cómo la calificarías?



1

4

2

3

5

Repetir

Tus iniciales: \_\_\_\_\_

En esta prueba de aceptabilidad vas a encontrar varios mini-diálogos. Lee con atención la última oración, que aparece en “comillas, negrilla y subrayada”. Escoge una calificación de 1 a 5 para cada última oración.

Este es un ejemplo:

José: Ayer vino Manuel a buscar a Patricia.

María: No, “el que la vino a buscar fue Gonzalo”

1      2      3      4      5

En este caso, lo más posible es que tu calificación sea 5.

Este es otro ejemplo:

José: Ayer vino Manuel a buscar a Patricia.

María: No, “el a que vino buscarla fue Gonzalo”

1      2      3      4      5

En este caso, lo más posible es que tu calificación sea 1.

Si tienes preguntas, por favor avísame en este momento. Si estás listo/a para empezar, puedes continuar ahora.



1. Luis: ¿Y Mariana no quería comprarle a Mario una camisa para el grado?

Álvaro: No creo... “lo que quiere es mandarle a hacer unos pantalones”

1      2      3      4      5



# Distribution of participants by test type

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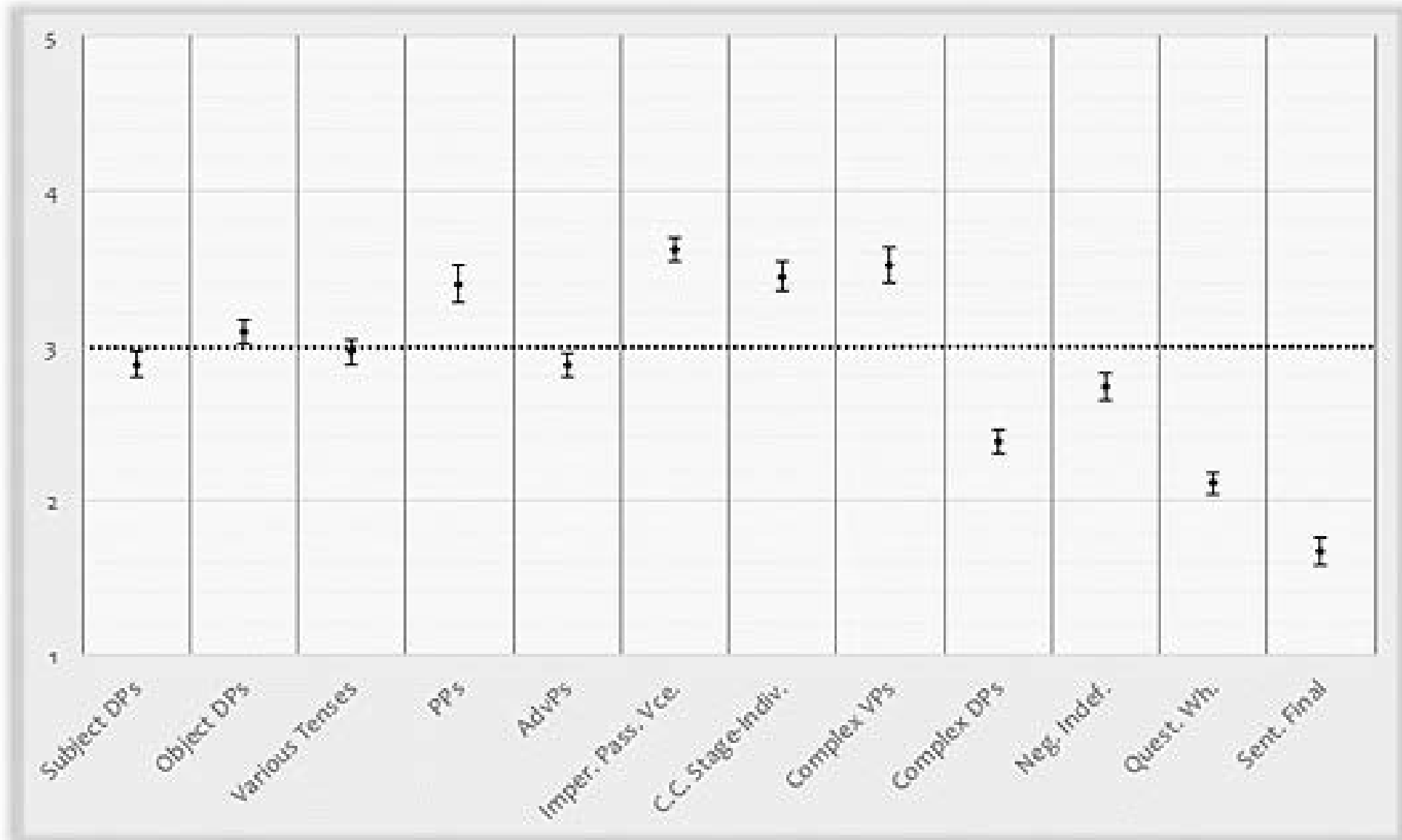
City	AJT-Audio format	AJT-Written format
Barranquilla	51	55
Bogotá	24	20
Bucaramanga	46	10
Cali	32	40
Medellín	38	55
	<b>191</b>	<b>180</b>

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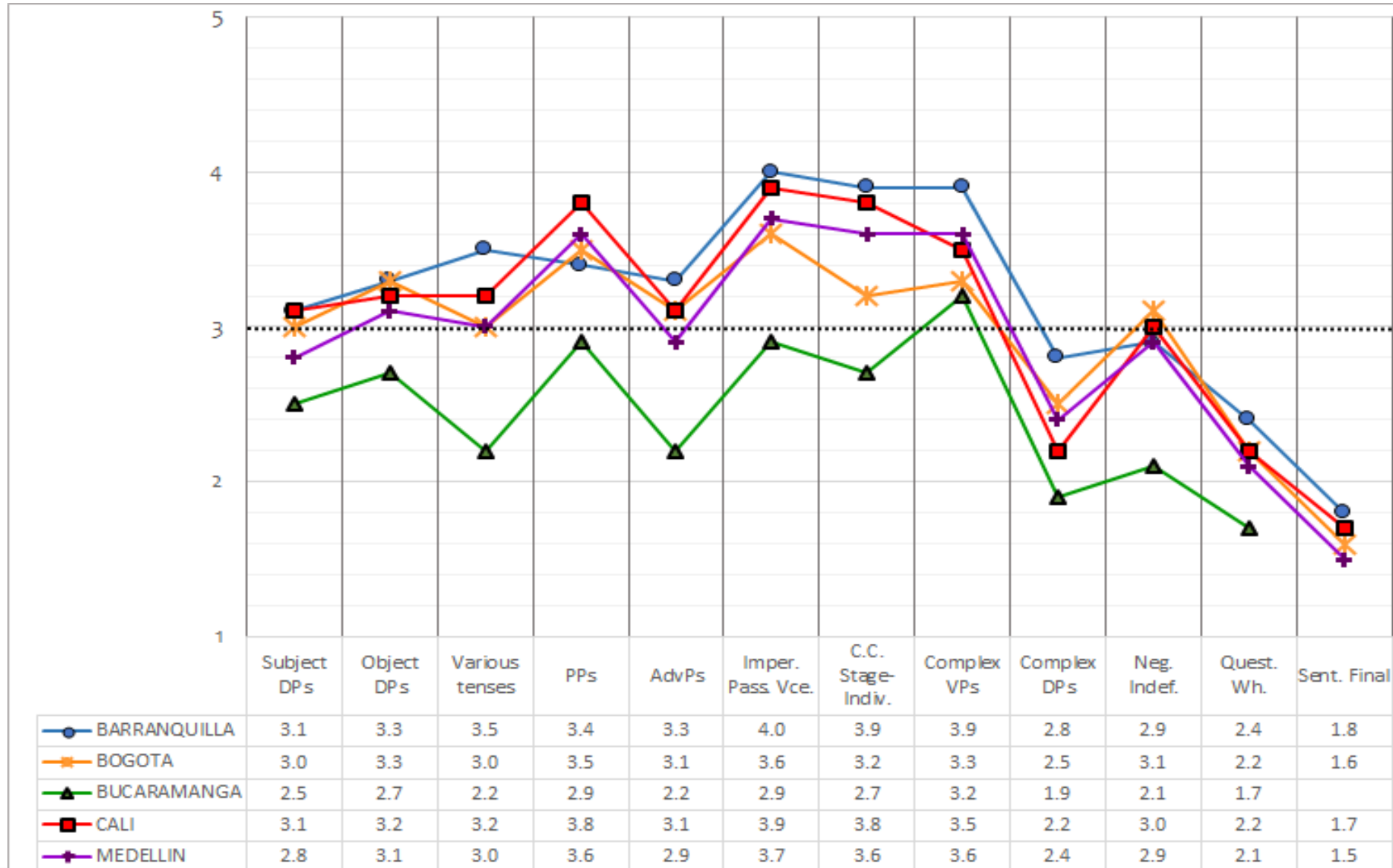
# **Results - Part 1: AJT in audio format**

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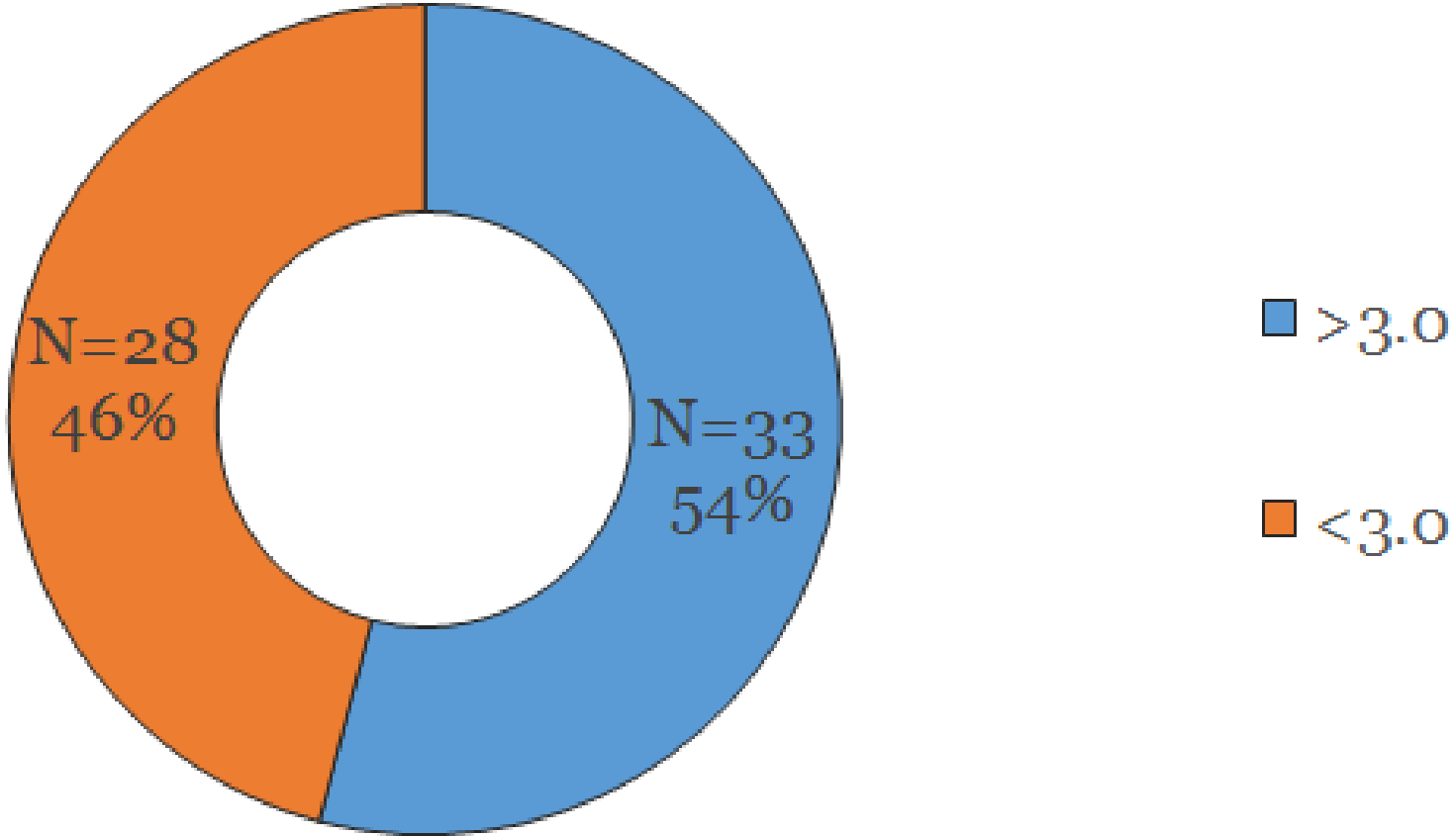
# Overall mean scores: 61 FS sentences



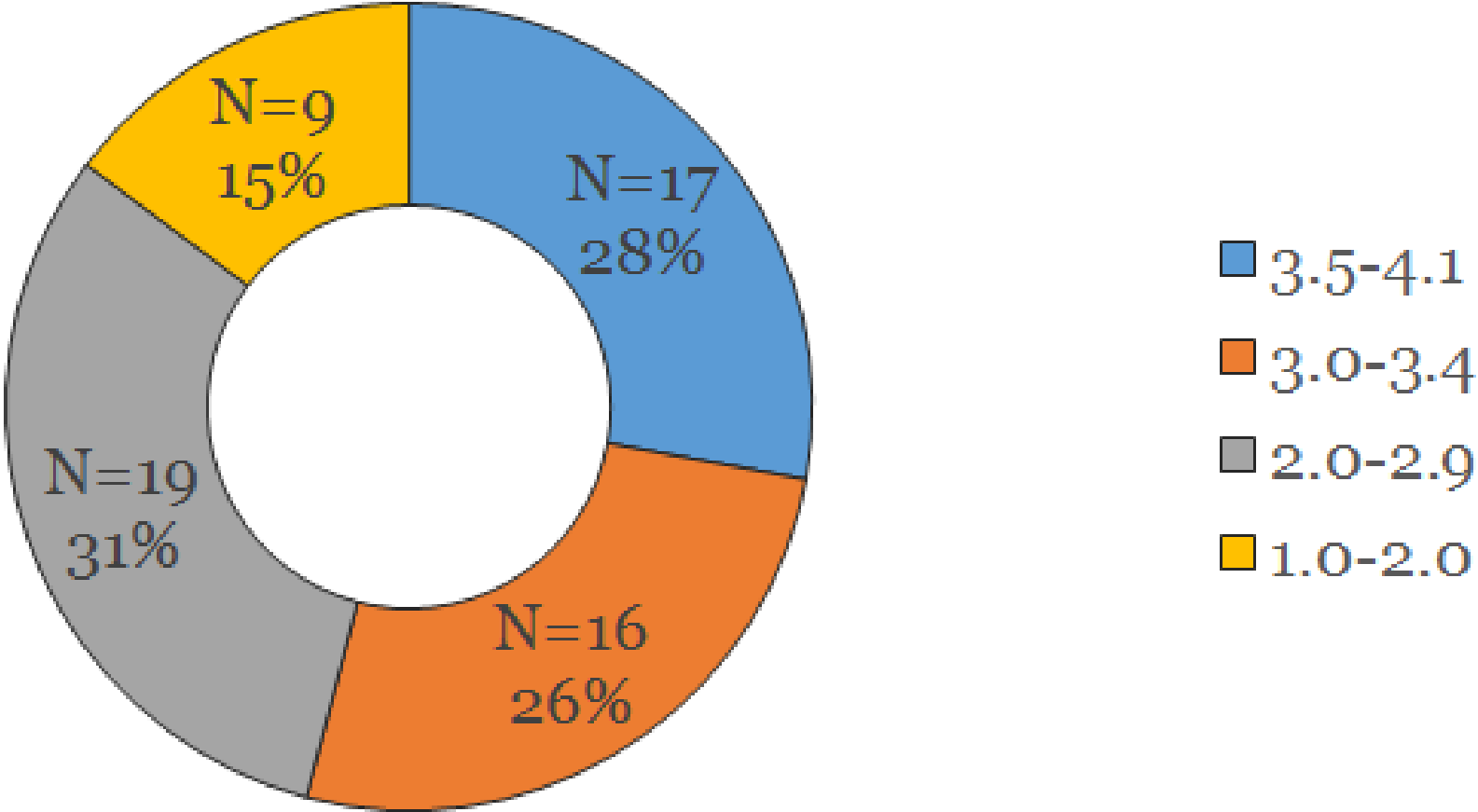
# General results per city



# Distribution of acceptance rates



# Distribution of acceptance rates







## Examples of most accepted cases

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- (6) *Salió fue Lucía* 4.1  
'It was Lucía who left'
- (7) *Toca es estar pendiente* 4.0  
'It is alert that we have to be'
- (8) *Me trajeron una torta fue para mi cumpleaños* 4.0  
'It was for my birthday that they brought a cake'

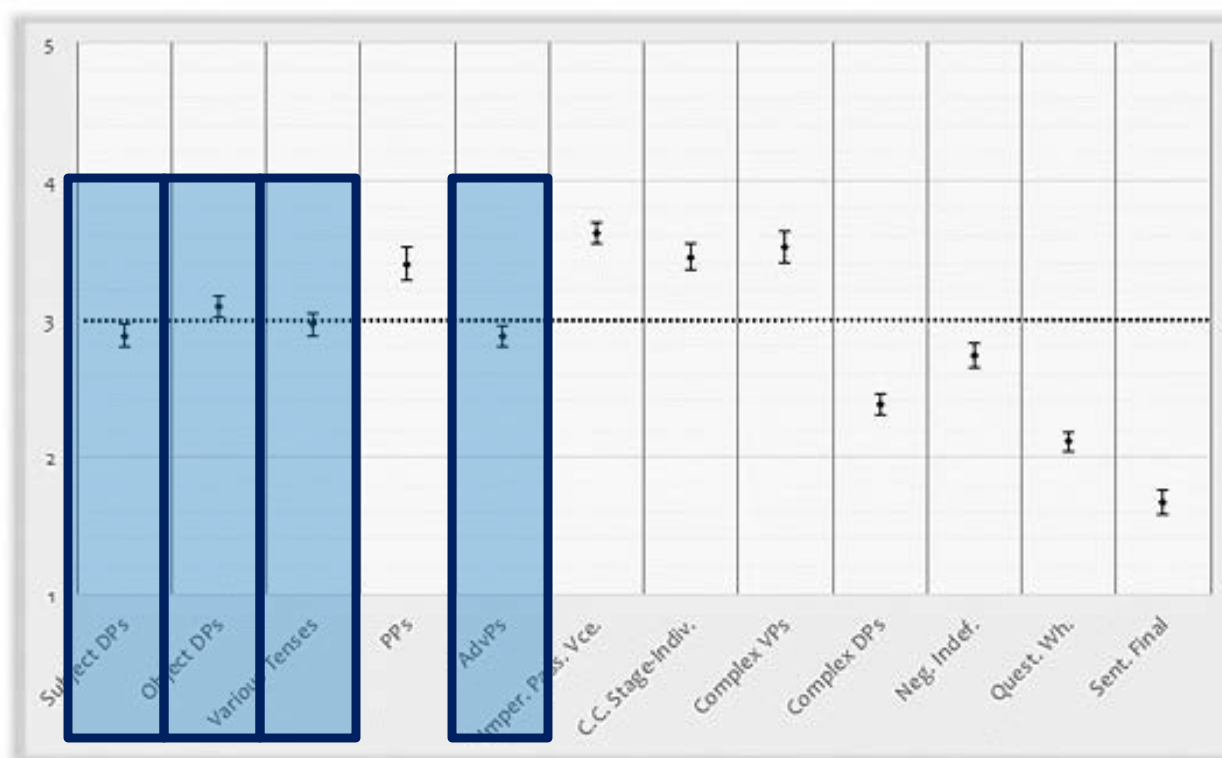
# General observation

- ❖ 12 of these 17 highly accepted sentences belong to the categories with the best acceptance rates in all cities.



# General observation

- ❖ The remaining 5 sentences belong to categories with marginal acceptance rates.





## Interesting marginal case: *Various Tenses* category

---

❖ Tense disagreement between FS *ser* and the main verb:

(9) *Ellos eran*                    *es*                    *buceadores*                    **2.8**  
They be.3PL.IMPERF    be.3SG.PRES                    divers  
'It was divers that they were'

❖ A more “grammatical” version may be less favored due to phonetic reduplication:

(10) *Ellos eran era/eran buceadores*



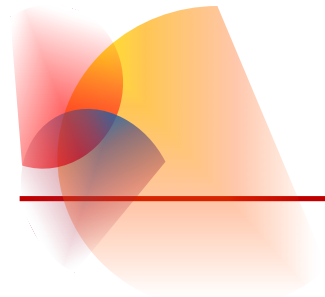
## Interesting marginal case: *Various Tenses* category

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- ❖ Although Escalante (2015) documents cases of phonetic reduplication in Barranquilla, our participants reject it:

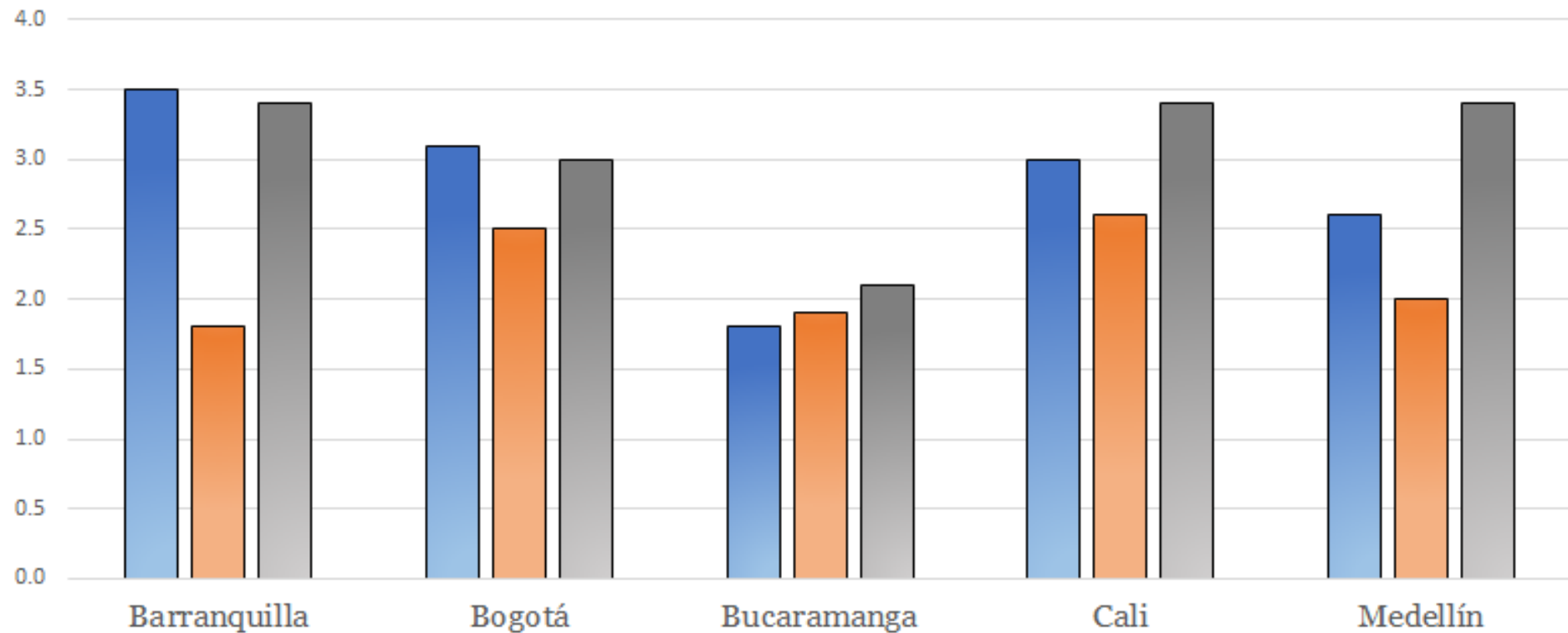
(11) *Mariana es es alta* 2.2  
Mariana be.3SG.PRES be.3SG.PRES tall  
'It is tall that Mariana is'

- ❖ However, in line with Escalante & Ortiz (2017), the agreement restrictions of FS *ser* may be stabilizing towards a default form (3SG).



# Interesting marginal case: *Various Tenses* category

- Ellos eran es buceadores
- Mariana es es alta
- El comité había premiado es a los atletas irlandeses

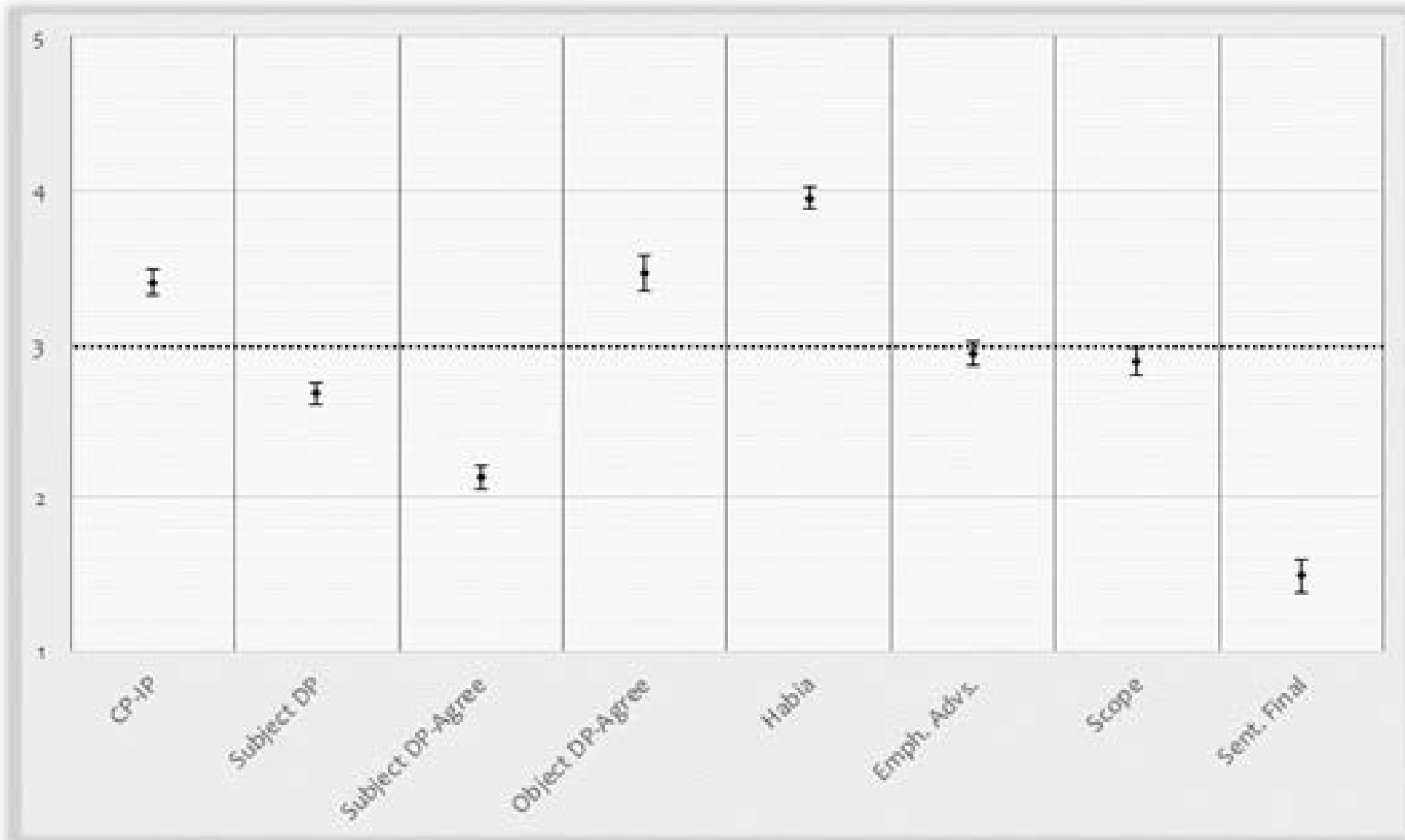


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# **Results - Part 2: AJT in written format**

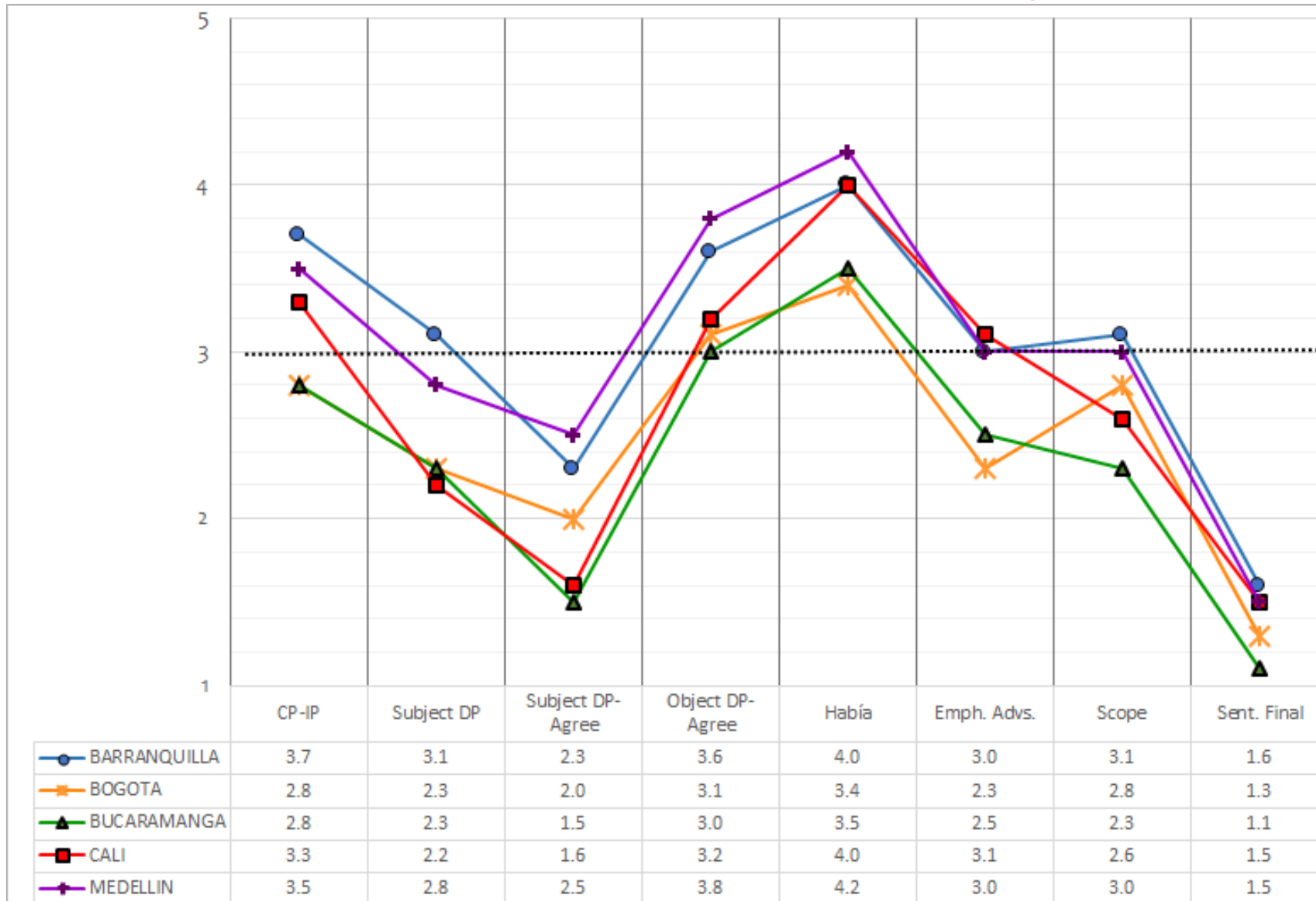
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# Overall mean scores: 25 FS sentences

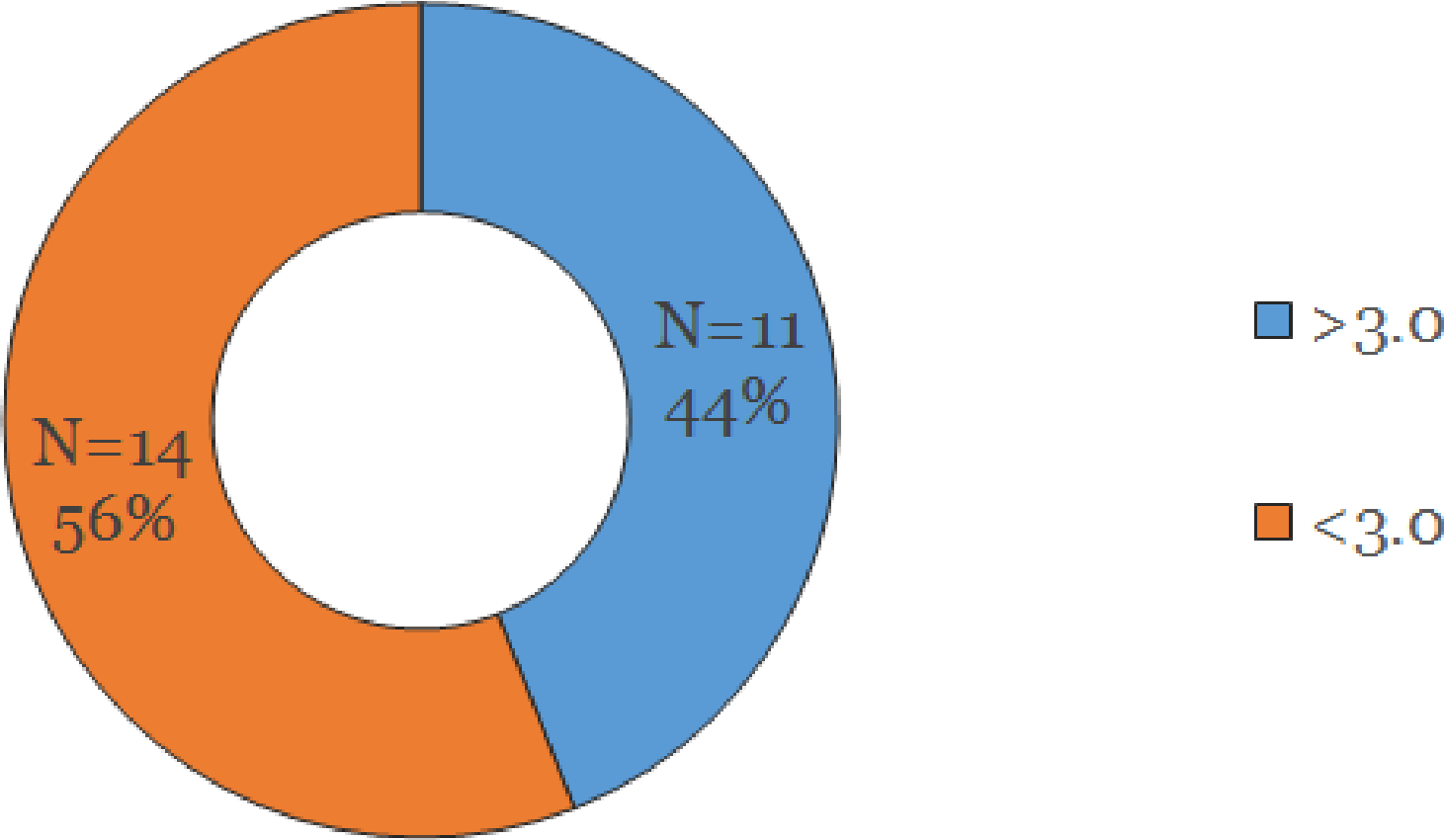




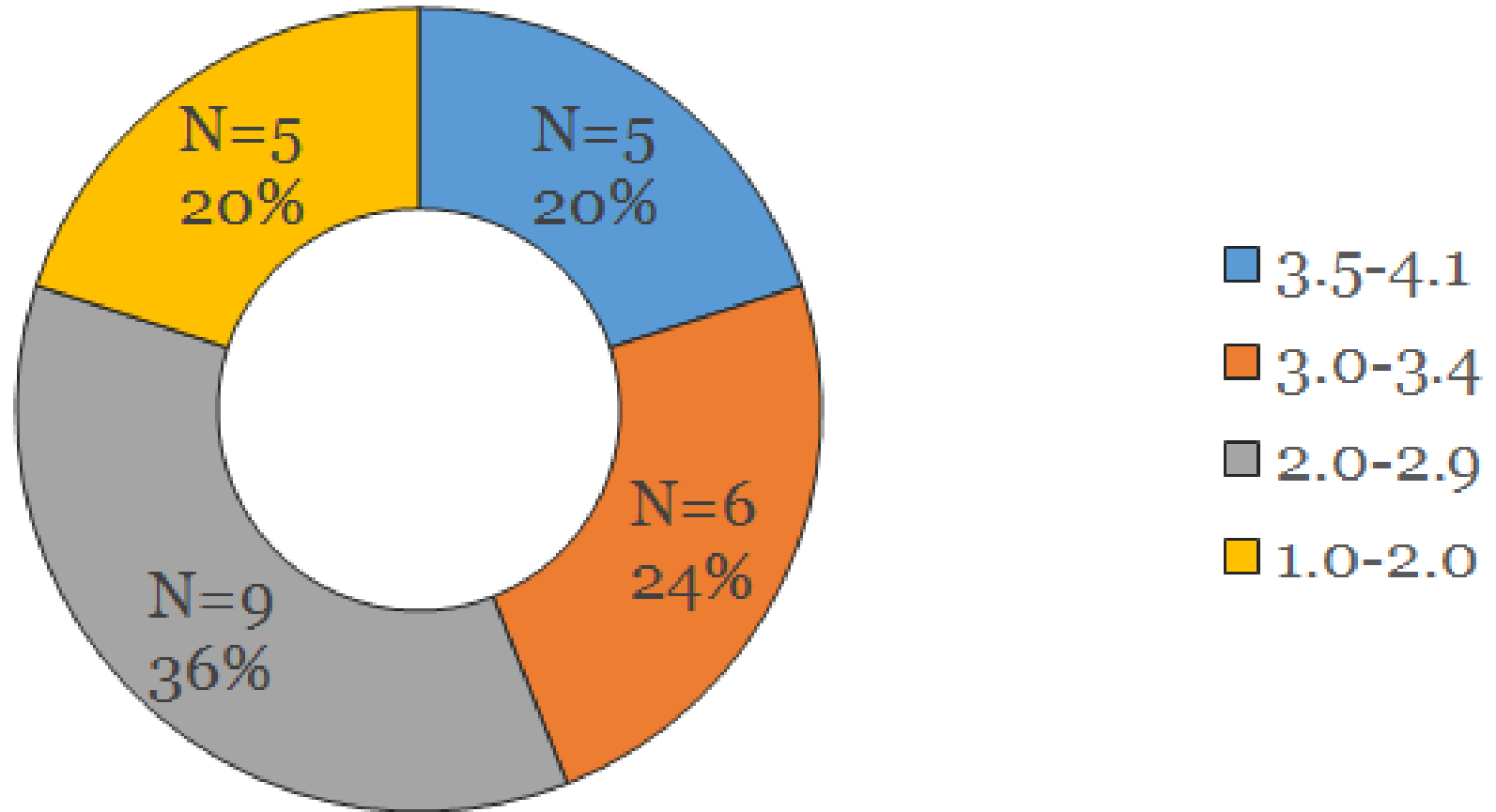
# General results per city



# Distribution of acceptance rates



# Distribution of acceptance rates





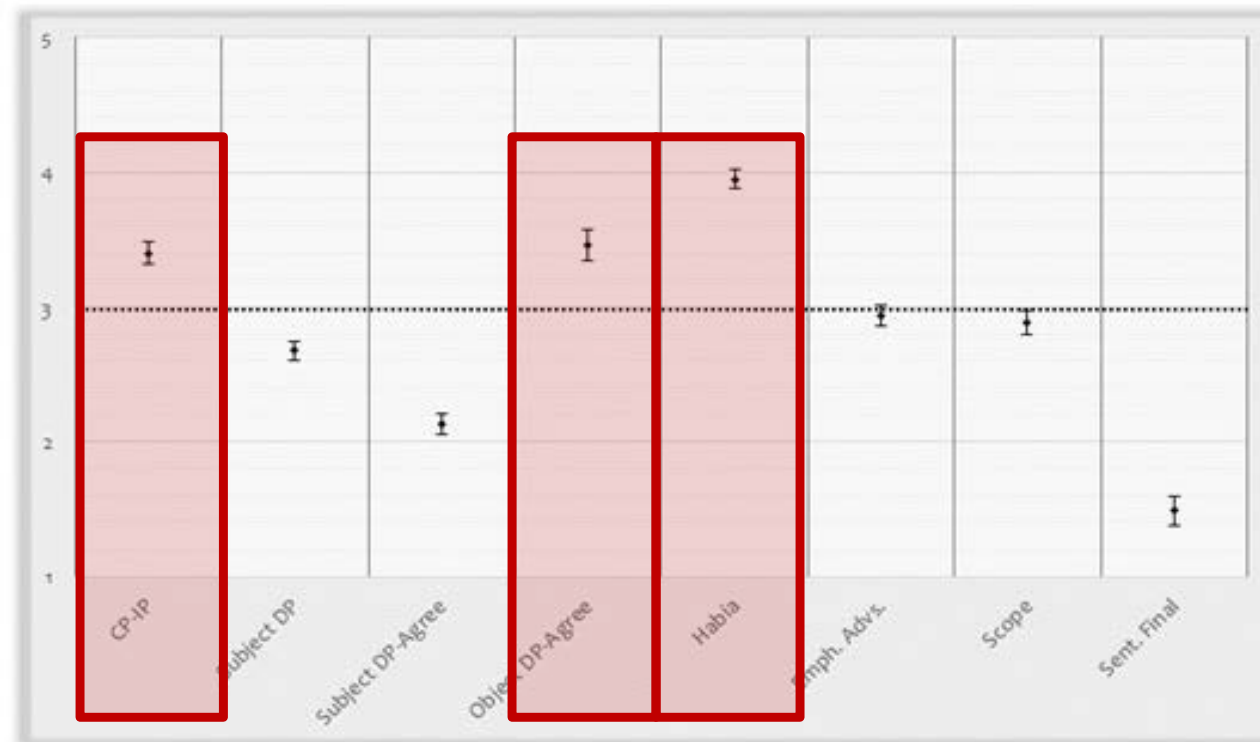
## Examples of most accepted cases

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- (12) *Empezaron fue a tirar piedras* **4.0**  
'It was throwing rocks that they started doing'
- (13) *Había era una cama vieja* **3.8**  
'It was an old bed that we had'
- (14) *Ella trataba era de imponerle todo* **3.7**  
'It was imposing everything that she tried doing'

# General observation

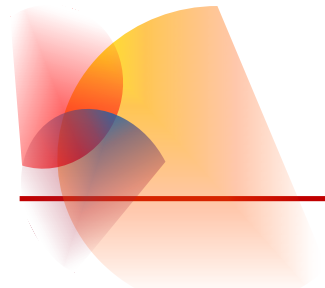
- ❖ All the highly accepted sentences belong to the categories with the best acceptance rates in all cities.



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# **Acceptability of FS in Colombian Spanish**

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## FS as an accepted structure

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- ❖ Our study shows that Colombian speakers generally perceive FS as an acceptable structure, regardless of their place of origin.
- ❖ We find similar acceptability tendencies across tests:
  - 😊 PPs, CPs&IPs, Complex VPs, object DPs, *haber*
  - 😐 Subject DPs, Adverbs
  - 😞 Sentence-final



## Cases with marginal acceptability

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- ❖ The order of the constituents and the inherent semantic properties of the focused elements may alter speakers' perceptions of FS.

(15) *Vino fue sólo él* 3.1

'It was only he who came'

(16) *Vino sólo fue él* 1.9

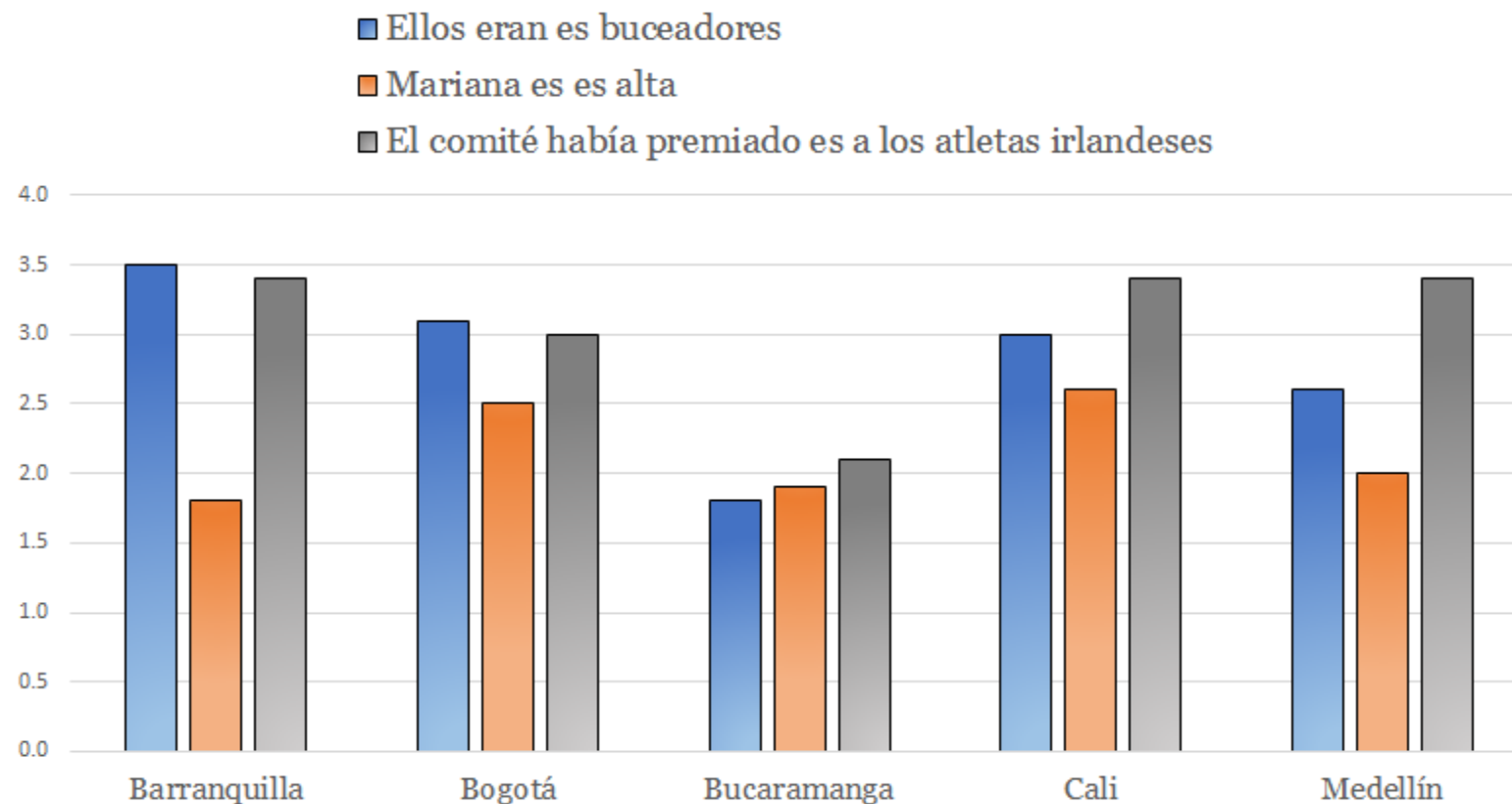
'It was only he who came'





# Cases with marginal acceptability

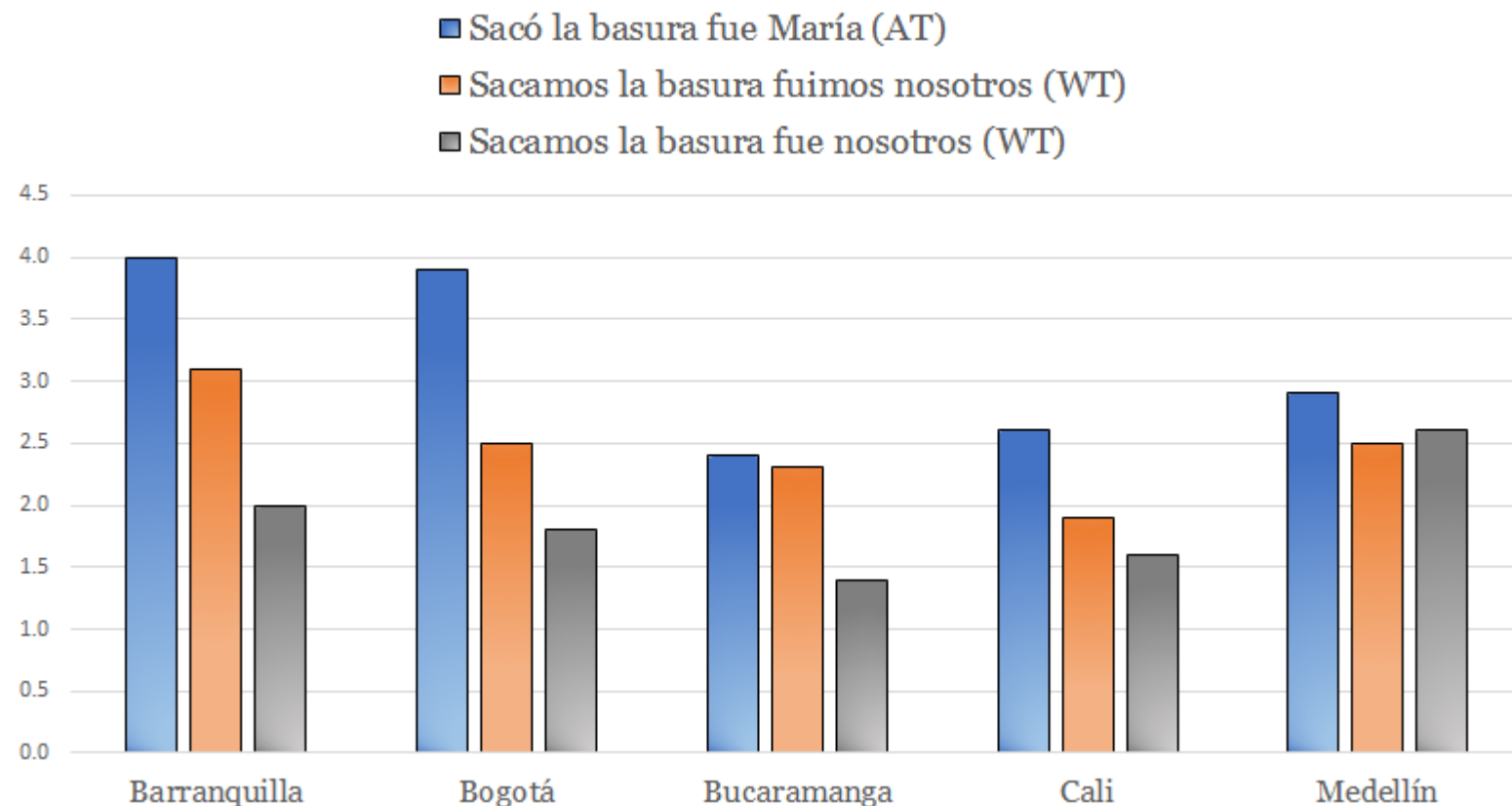
❖ Other cases may be symptomatic of inherent dialectal differences.

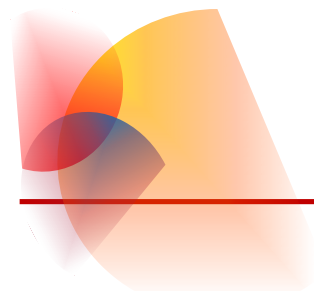




# Cases with marginal acceptability

❖ Other cases may be symptomatic of inherent dialectal differences.



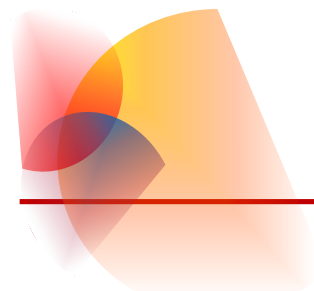


## Unacceptable cases

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❖ Sentence-final FS received the lowest ratings in all dialects, across tests:

- (17) *Llovió en la noche fue* 1.6  
'It was at night when it rained'
- (18) *Quiero irme para el extranjero es* 1.4  
'It is overseas where I want to go'



## Unacceptable cases

---

- ❖ The same sentences received favorable scores in the Dominican Republic (Méndez Vallejo 2015):

- (17) *Llovió en la noche fue* 4.0  
'It was at night when it rained'
- (18) *Quiero irme para el extranjero es* 3.0  
'It is overseas where I want to go'

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# **Final considerations**

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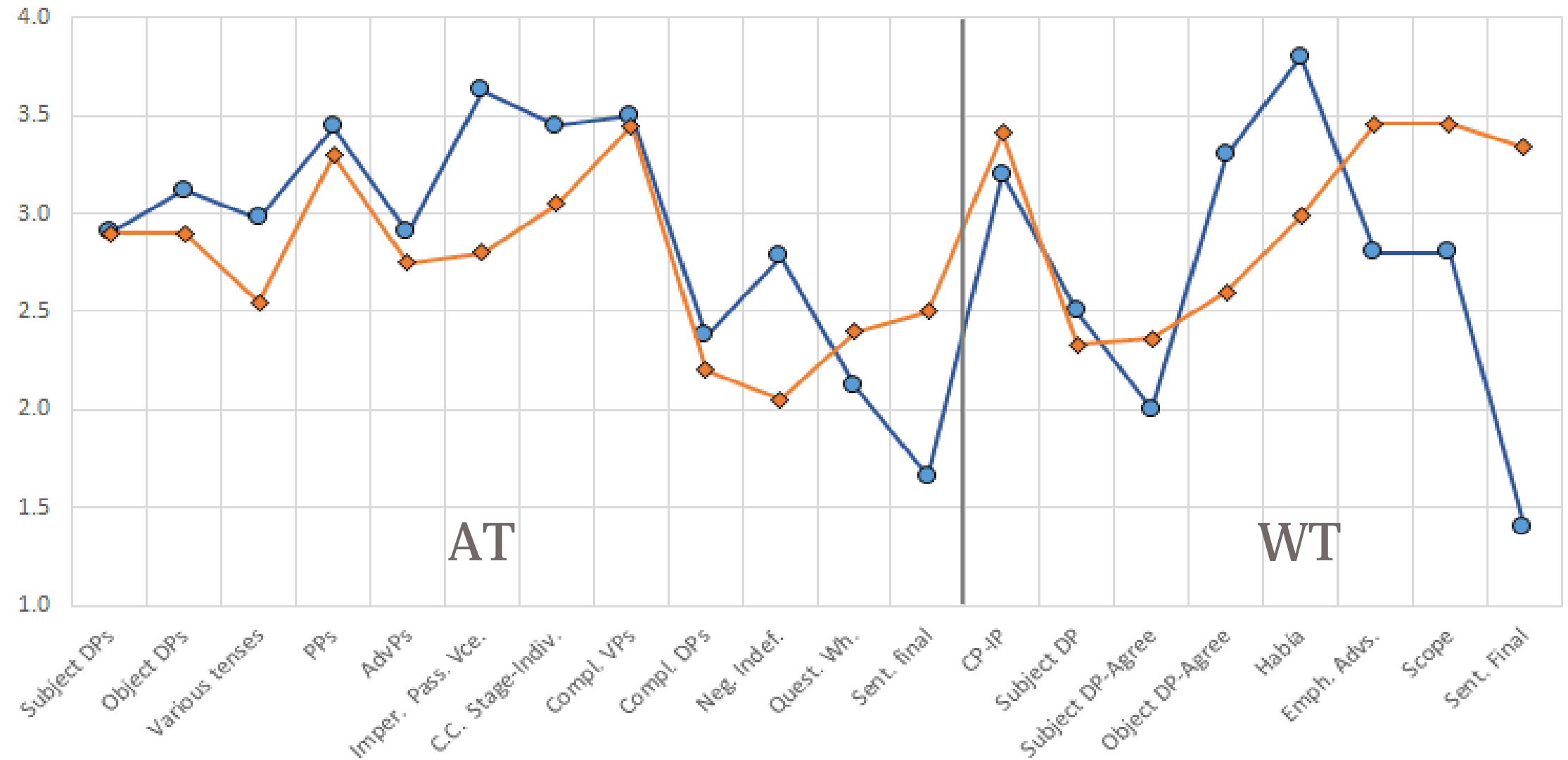


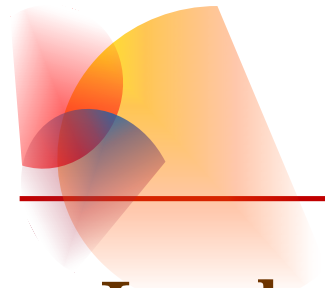
# **Colombia and the Dominican Republic**

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- ❖ The same constraints that allow FS to be more or less accepted within Colombia are also applicable in the Dominican Republic.
- ❖ Certain contexts render consistently acceptable judgments of FS in both macro-varieties, but the occurrence of mixed judgments in other constructions shows a certain degree of variability at the inter-dialectal level.

● Colombia    ◆ Dominican Republic





# Obstacles

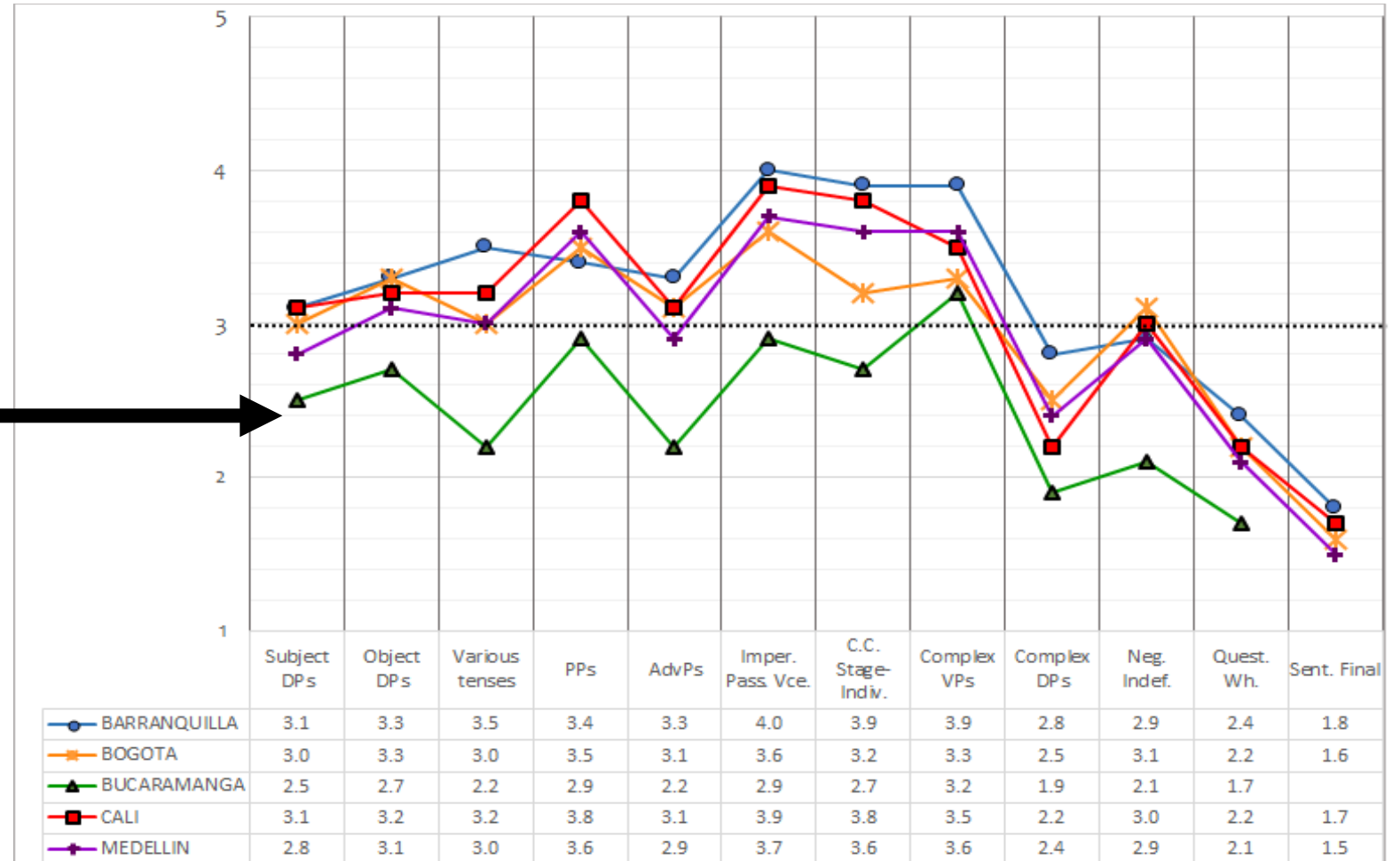
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- ❖ Implementing acceptability judgment tests allows us to examine how speakers' perceive FS in a wide variety of syntactic contexts and enables us to produce reliable data to draw comparisons across dialects.
- ❖ However, it also poses methodological challenges: controlling the surveyed population and the data collection procedures, contextualizing the stimuli appropriately, etc.



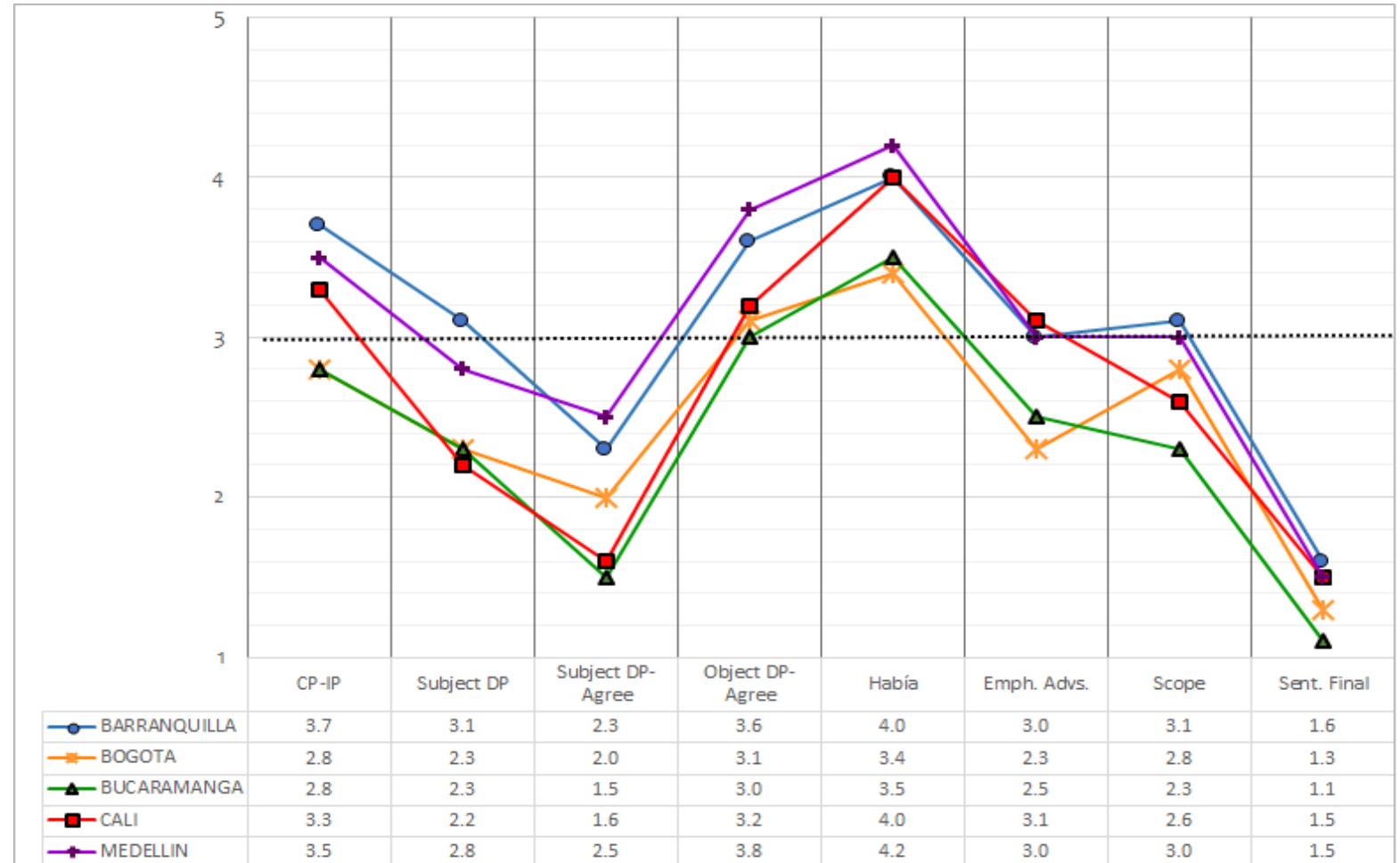
# Bucaramanga speakers in the audio test

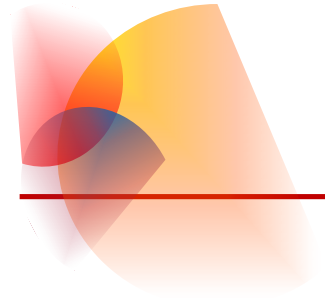
❖ These participants were recruited in 2008, **seven years before the other groups.**



# Bucaramanga speakers in the written test

❖ This was a **smaller** group recruited in 2013, two years before the other groups.





# Future research

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- ❖ We should employ more innovative and precise methodology to compare more accurately data gathered from varieties that have been little explored (Ecuadorian, Panamanian, etc.).
- ❖ To comprehend these acceptability patterns we need a deeper analysis of the semantic, pragmatic, prosodic, and processing factors that restrict FS focus.



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**Thank you!**