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# Language Diversity in the United States

and its Relationship with the **Perceived Social Value of Bilingualism**

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11th **BSI**  
2017 INTERNATIONAL  
SYMPOSIUM ON  
**BILINGUALISM**





Background

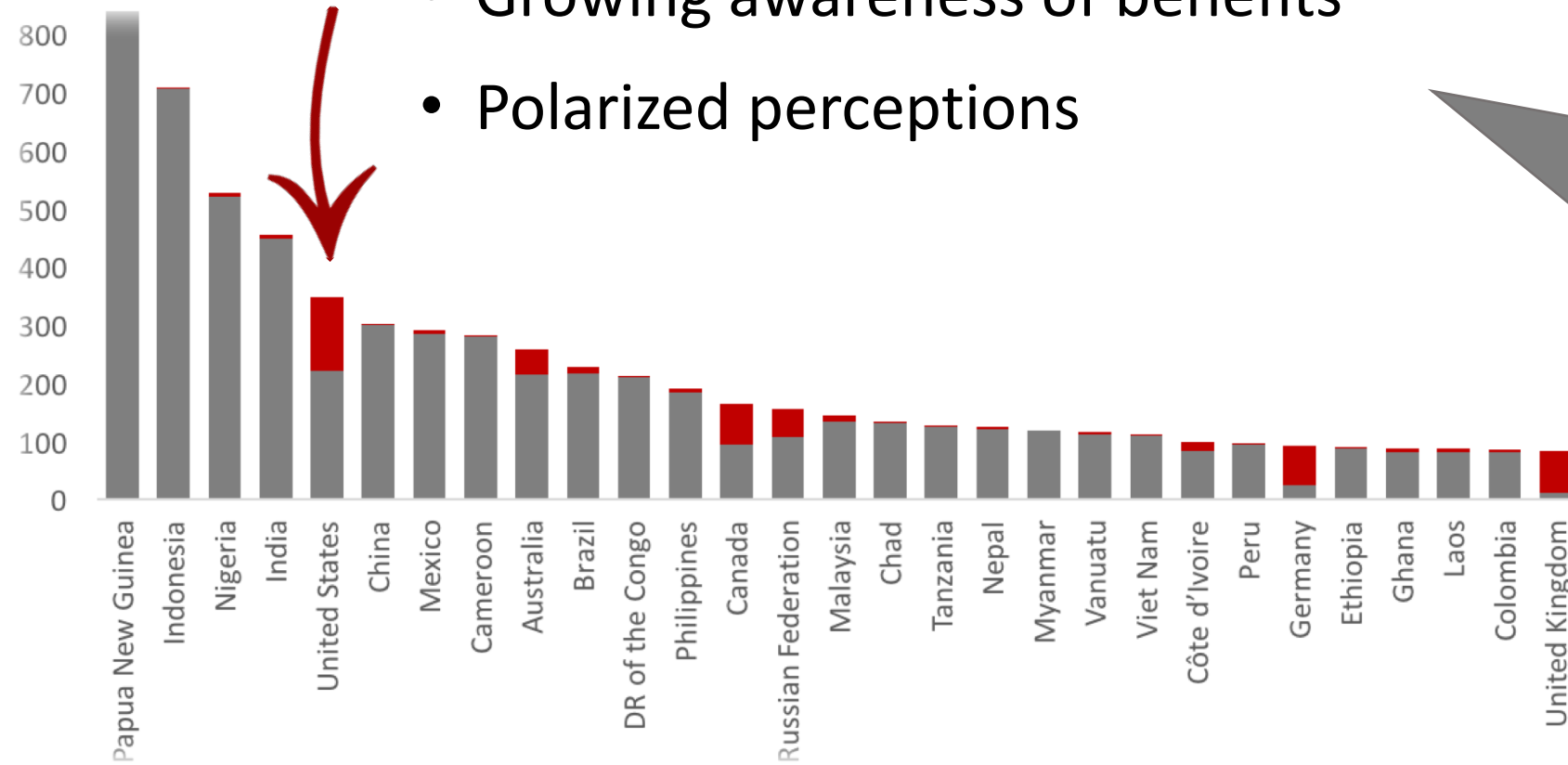
# The United States Context

- Increasing diversity
- Rapid language shift
- Growing awareness of benefits
- Polarized perceptions

“Poor, disadvantaged and deserving of special considerations.”

“Versatile, adventurous and interesting.”

“There seem to be two types. On one side are those whose English is poor and they are portrayed as victims or looked down upon. On the other side, those whose English is good are portrayed as intellectual and to be emulated.”



Source: Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2017). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world* (20th ed.). Dallas, TX: SIL International. Retrieved from <http://www.ethnologue.com>

# The Current Study

- Where do these perceptions come from?
- Does local language diversity play a role?
  - Increased contact -> more favorable perceptions? (Pettigrew, 1998)
  - Increased contact -> resentment -> less favorable perceptions?
- Previous studies have explored...
  - Attitudes towards specific minority languages (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Sharp, 1973; Velázquez, 2009)
  - Teachers' beliefs about linguistic diversity (Byrnes, Kiger, & Lee Manning, 1997)
- The purpose of the current study was to measure **perceptions of the value of bilingualism** across language backgrounds.

# Research Questions

# Hypotheses

1 How do **Perceptions of Bilingualism** vary by individual **language background** and language learning experience?

More experience using multiple languages will be associated with more positive perceptions.

2 Does **local language diversity** explain additional variation in perceptions, and does this differ by **language background**?

Living in a more linguistically diverse area will be associated with more positive perceptions, and may matter more for monolinguals than bilinguals.





methods

# Method: Online Survey

## Perceptions of Bilingualism (POB)

attitude scale

(adapted from Byrnes & Kiger, 1994)

## Language experience

(adapted from the LSBQ, Luk & Bialystok, 2013)

## Demographic background

## Optional open response items

### Sample 1 (n=209)

- Recruited via Qualtrics Panels
- Adults 18 and over living in the U.S.
- Nationally representative (education, race, region)
- Oversampled Spanish-English bilingual parents of toddlers

### Sample 2 (n=208)

- Recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)
- Parents of children under 7 living in the U.S.

Survey was available in English & Spanish

# Participant Demographics

		Sample 1 (n=209)	Sample 2 (n=208)	Combined (n=417)
Female		64%	60%	62%
Age	18-34	45%	64%	55%
	35-54	27%	35%	31%
	55+	28%	1%	14%
Education	High School or less	37%	13%	25%
	Some college credit	26%	25%	26%
	College graduate	27%	45%	36%
	Graduate degree	10%	17%	14%
Born outside the U.S.		14%	10%	12%



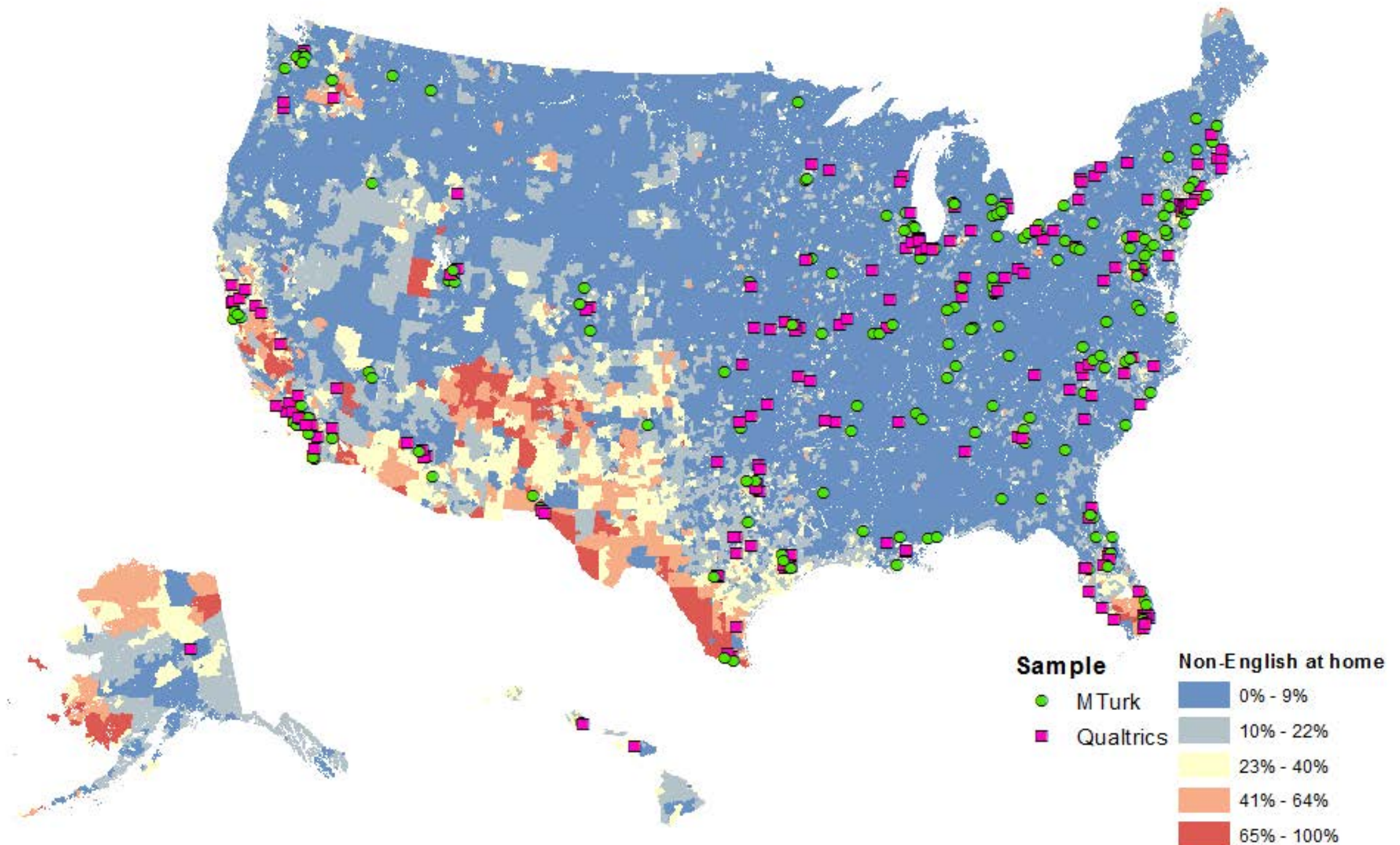
# Language Groups

		Sample 1 (n=209)	Sample 2 (n=208)	Combined (n=417)
Monolingual	L1 English, never tried L2	23%	10%	16%
	L1 English, tried to learn L2	23%	33%	28%
	L1 English, speaks L2	24%	30%	27%
Bilingual	<b>L1 not English or multiple L1s</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>28%</b>

## Local language diversity:

The percentage of non-English speakers in the respondent's zip code area from U.S. Census Data









results

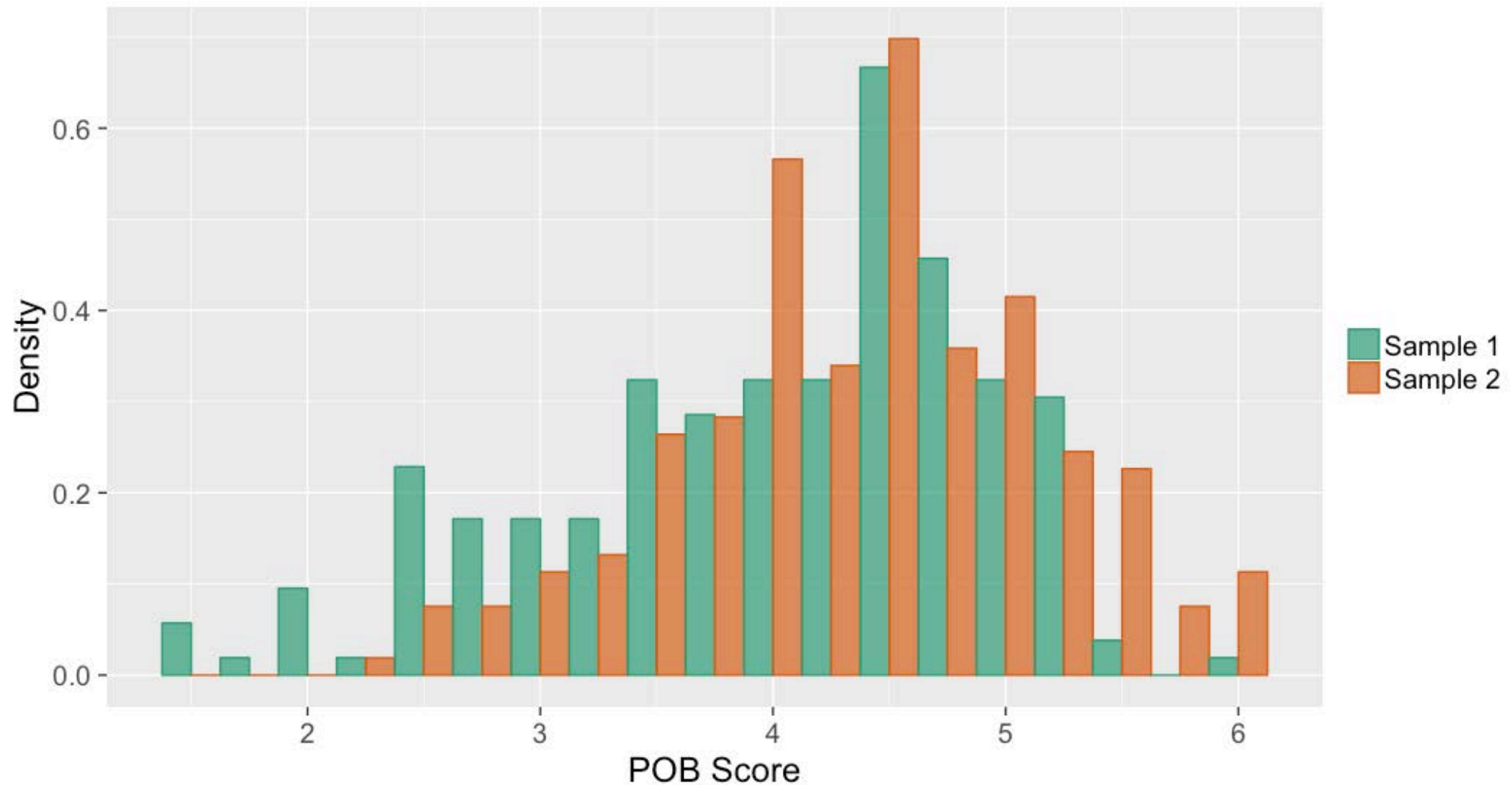


# Perceptions of Bilingualism (POB) Scale

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
To be successful in the United States you need to speak more than one language.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking more than one language helps a person understand people from different cultural backgrounds.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Languages in addition to English should be taught in public elementary schools.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The United States should have <b>more than one</b> official language.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

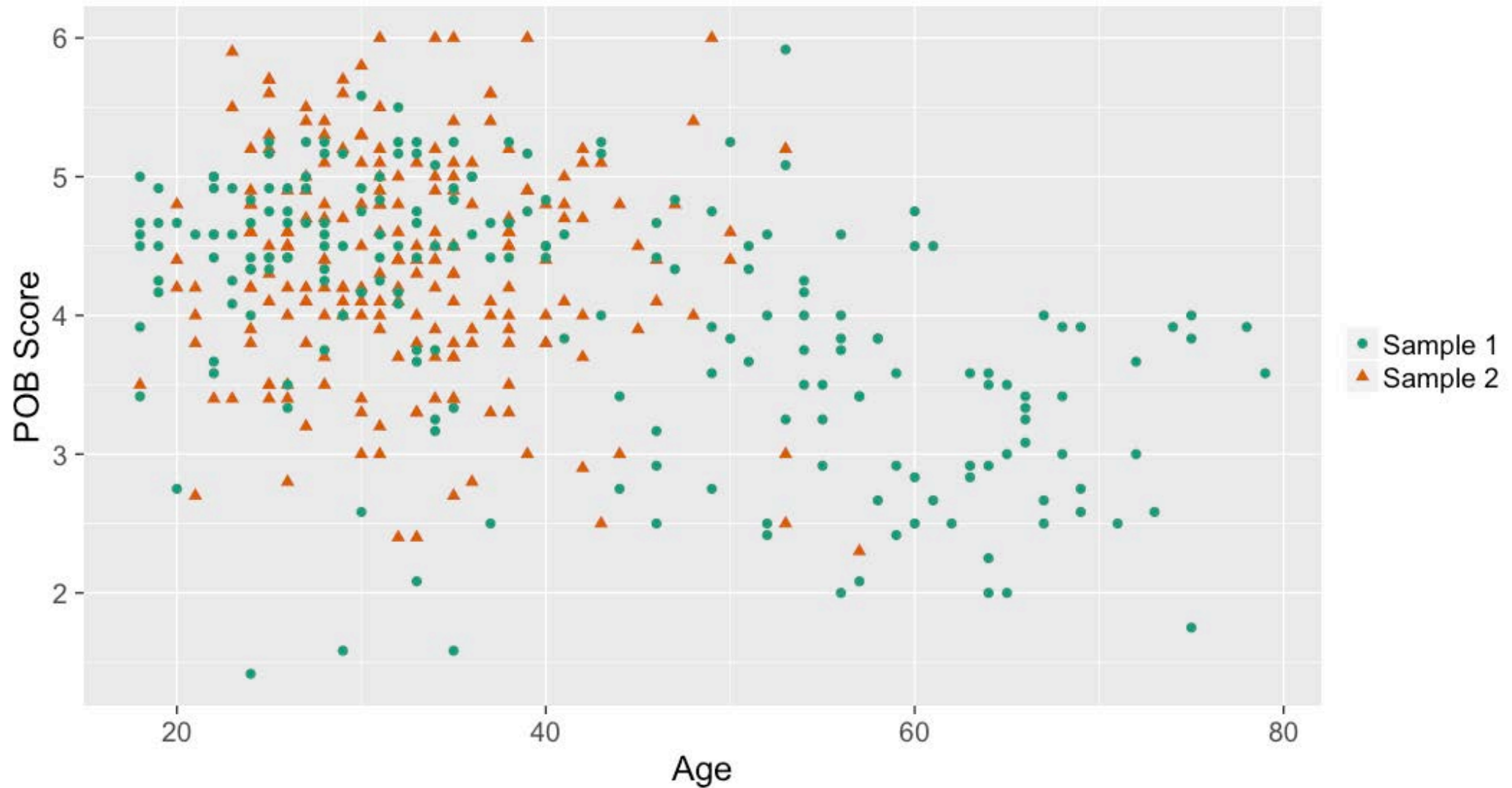
- 12-item scale
- Cronbach's alpha = .84
- 2 items reverse coded
- POB score is average of 12 items
- Mean = 4.18  
(Somewhat agree)

# Perceptions of Bilingualism (POB) by sample



# POB by Age

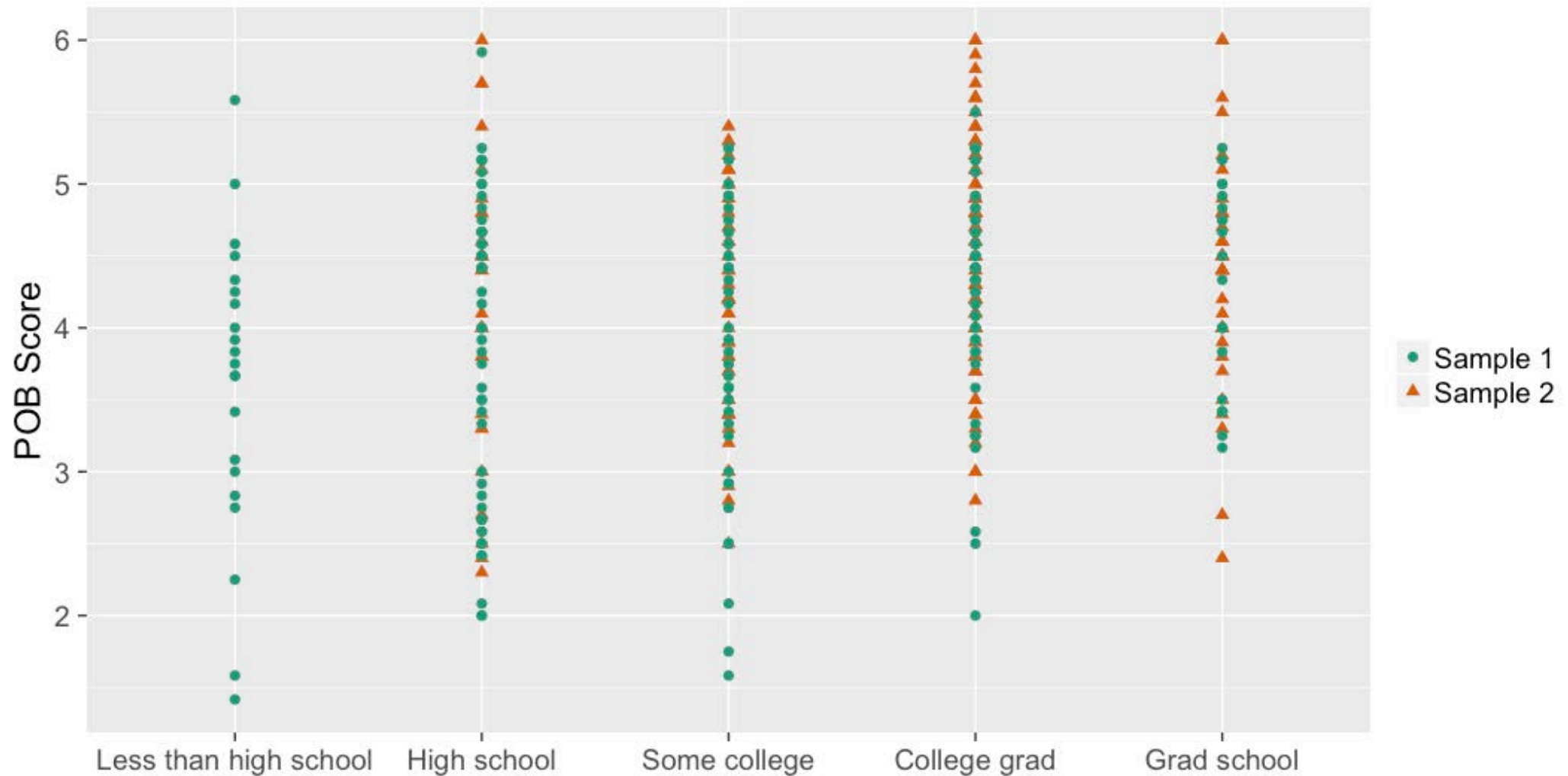
$r(417) = -.41, p < .0001$





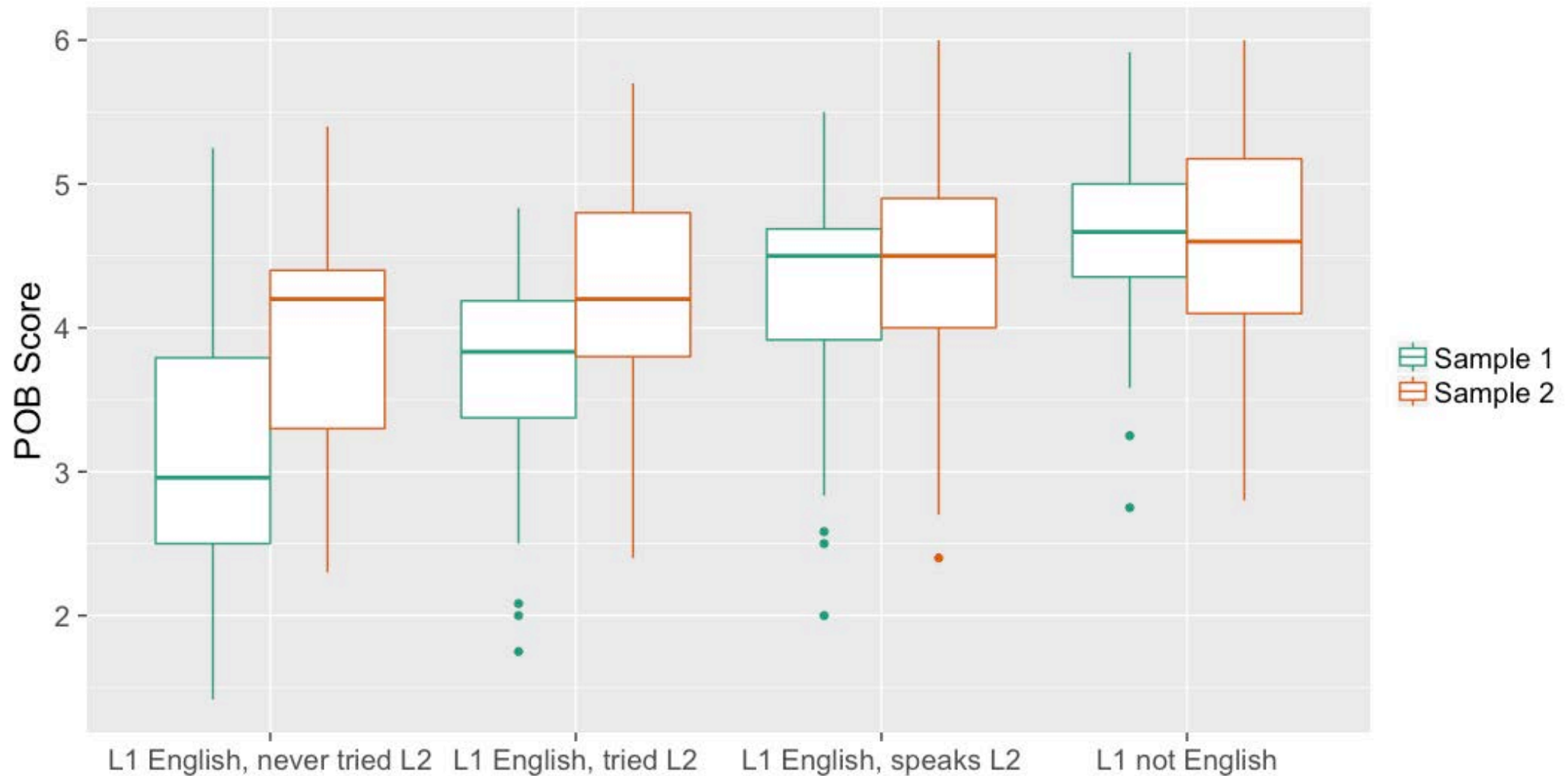
# POB by Education

$r(417) = .25, p < .0001$



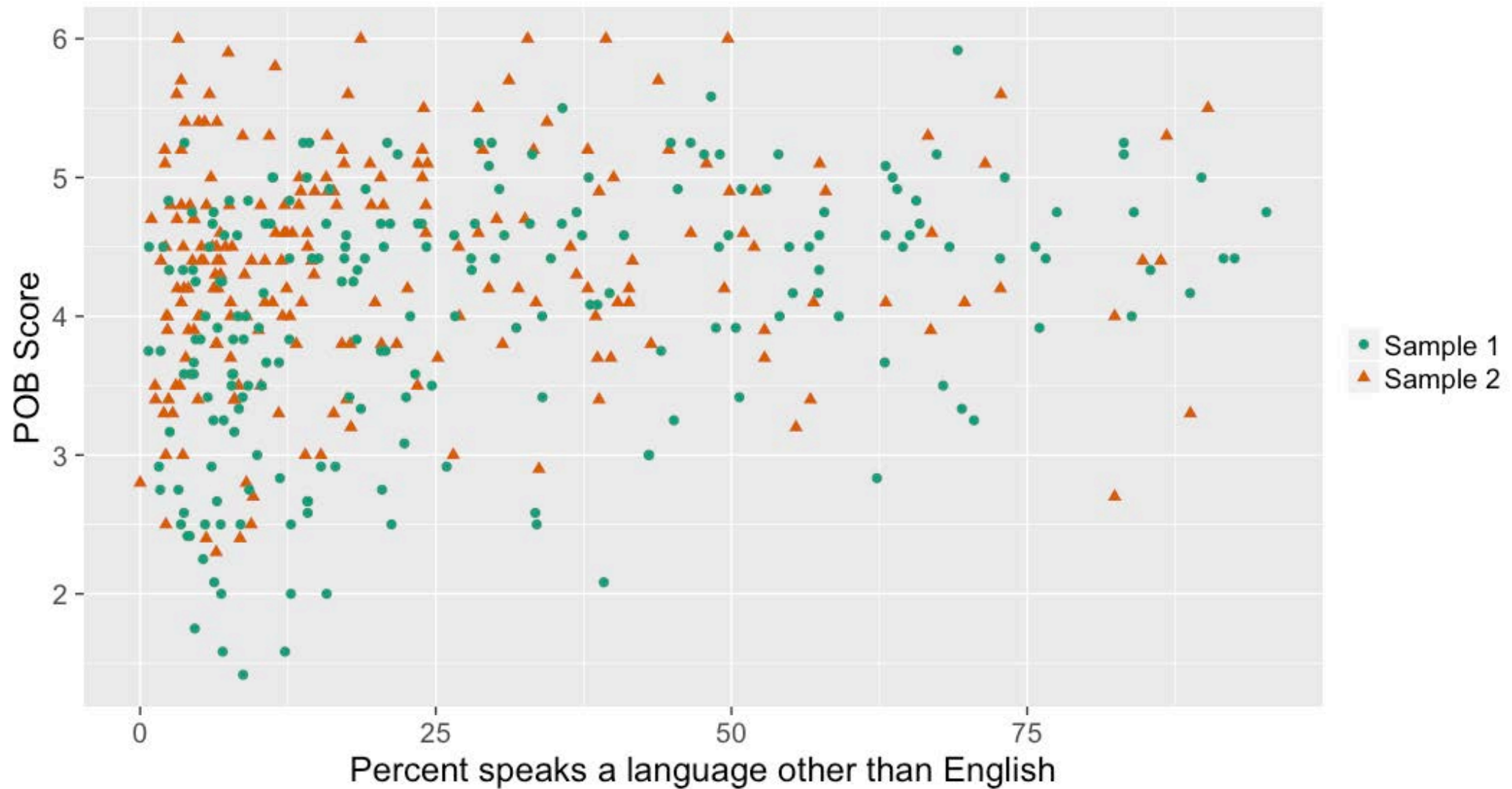
# POB by Language Groups

$r(417) = .45, p < .0001$



# POB by Language Diversity

$r(417) = .22, p < .0001$





# Modeling POB

	$\beta$	(SE)
<b>Age</b> (reference: 18-34)		
Age 35-54	-0.04	(0.08)
Age 55+	-0.83***	(0.11)
<b>Education</b> (reference: High School or less)		
Some college credit	-0.03	(0.10)
College graduate	0.19	(0.10)
Graduate degree	0.15	(0.12)
<b>Local Language Diversity</b> (z-score of % speak a non-English language)	0.29**	(0.10)
<b>Language Groups</b> (reference: L1 English, never tried L2)		
L1 English, tried L2	0.33*	(0.13)
L1 English, speaks L2	0.60***	(0.12)
L1 not English or multiple L1s	0.69***	(0.13)
<b>Interaction of Language Diversity X Language Groups</b>		
Diversity X L1 English, tried L2	-0.17	(0.15)
Diversity X L1 English, speaks L2	-0.28*	(0.13)
Diversity X L1 not English or multiple L1s	-0.24*	(0.12)
<b>Constant</b>	3.80***	(0.12)

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

$R^2 = .34$



conclusions & future directions

# Summary of Findings

- **Perceptions of Bilingualism scale** showed strong internal reliability.
- More positive perceptions were associated with
  - Under age 55
  - More education
  - More experience learning and using multiple languages
- Controlling for age, education, and language background, **local language diversity** explained additional variation in perceptions.
- The interaction between **local diversity** and **language background** suggests that monolinguals' perceptions *may* be positively influenced by contact with speakers of non-English languages.



# Future Directions


- Adapting the survey for international comparisons
- Dimensionality of perceptions of bilingualism
- Parents' perceptions -> home language usage and decisions about their child's formal education
  - Interviews with parents of 3 to 4-year-olds
  - Lab-based study with 4-5 year-olds
- Implications for supporting bilingual development at home and school
- For more from our lab:
  - Tuesday 3-4pm in A1053, Veronica Whitford, *The complexity of bilingualism in U.S. education: Embedded heterogeneity in English-proficient students*

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# Thank you!



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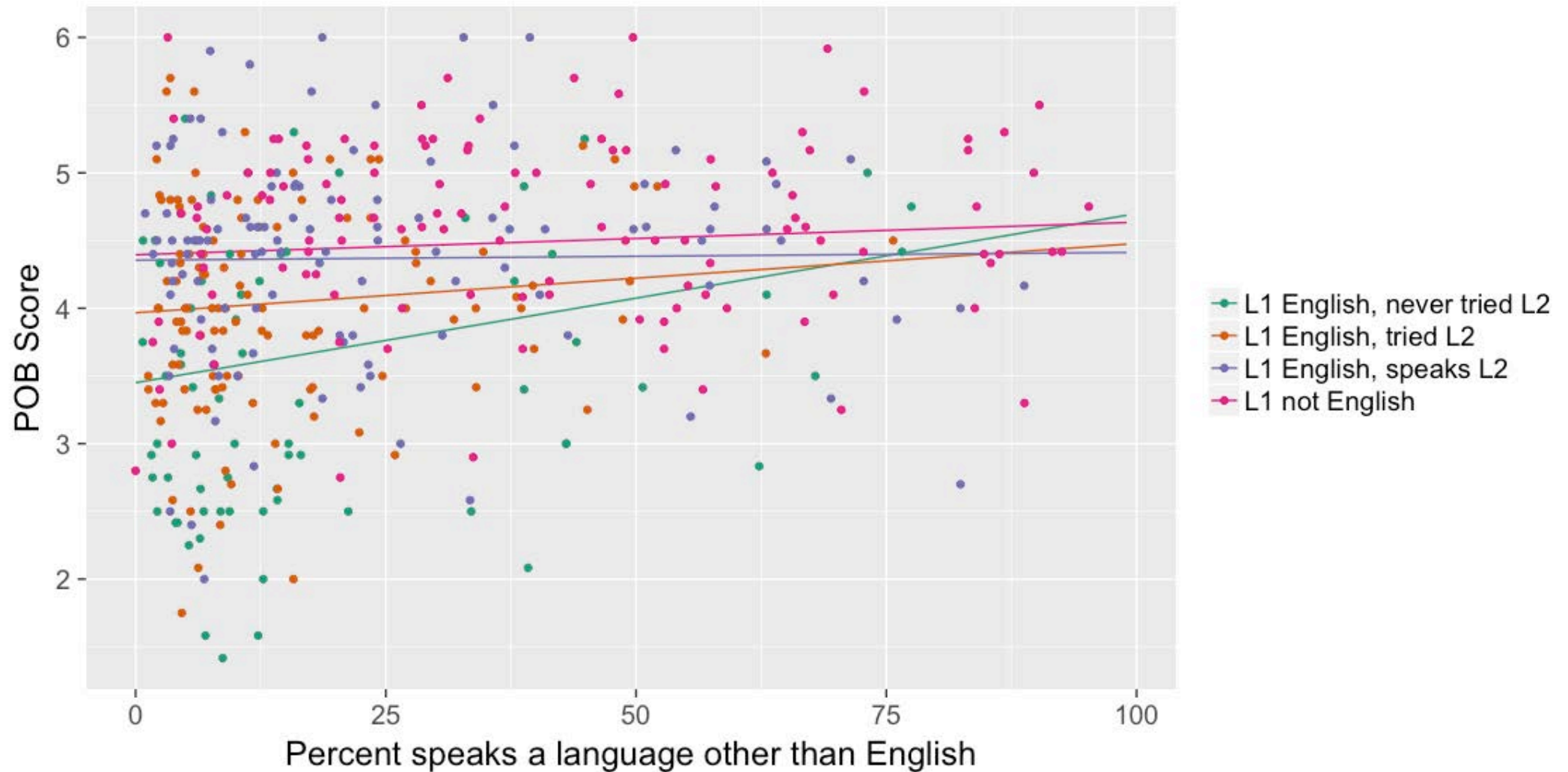


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# Appendices



# Predicted POB for 18-34 year olds with some college credit



# Predicting POB, controlling for gender

	$\beta$	(SE)
<b>Age</b> (reference: 18-34)		
Age 35-54	-0.024	(0.081)
Age 55+	-0.826***	(0.113)
<b>Female</b>	0.253***	(0.074)
<b>Local Language Diversity</b> (% speaks a non-Eng. language)	0.014**	(0.004)
<b>Language Groups</b> (reference: L1 English, never tried L2)		
L1 English, tried L2	0.607**	(0.157)
L1 English, speaks L2	1.011***	(0.162)
L1 not English or multiple L1s	0.998***	(0.181)
<b>Interaction of Language Diversity X Language Groups</b>		
Diversity X L1 English, tried L2	-0.009	(0.006)
Diversity X L1 English, speaks L2	-0.014**	(0.005)
Diversity X L1 not English or multiple L1s	-0.011*	(0.005)
<b>Constant</b>	3.322***	(0.145)

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

$R^2 = .349$

N=417

# 32 Languages spoken by participants

- English
- Spanish
- Mandarin
- Cantonese
- German
- French
- Filipino/Tagalog
- Pampanggo
- Albanian
- Portuguese
- Greek
- Polish
- Arabic
- Hindi
- Tamil
- Gujarati
- Marathi
- Urdu
- Bengali
- Italian
- Malay
- ASL
- Korean
- Ukrainian
- Maori
- Russian
- Vasque
- Catalán
- Chamorro
- Norwegian
- Romanian
- Irish