



Mutual intelligibility of spoken words between Germanic languages: loan words versus inherited words

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7th International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB7)

Utrecht University, July 8 - 11, 2009.

Introduction

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- › Internet experiment involving 7 languages in the Germanic language area
- › Mutual word comprehension



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Research questions

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How well do speakers of various Germanic languages understand each other's vocabularies?

- › How well are **loan words** understood in comparison to **inherited words**?



Loan words versus inherited words

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Loan words are longer than inherited words:

Fr. *strategy*, Du. *strategie*, De. *strategi* ‘strategy’

vs.

Ge. *Weg*, Sw. *väg*, Fr. *wei* ‘road’



Loan words versus inherited words

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Often only the derivational morpheme differs in loan words while the root differs in inherited words:

Ge. *Produkt***ion**, Du. *product***ie**, Fr. *produks***sje**
'production'

VS.

Ge. *Haus*, Du. *huis*, Da. *hus* 'house'



Loan words versus inherited words

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Loans are more recent than inherited words:

Du. *internet* - earliest documentation year **1992**

vs.

Du. *zonde* 'sin' - earliest documentation year **901**



Hypothesis

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- › **Loans** words are easier to understand than **inherited** words



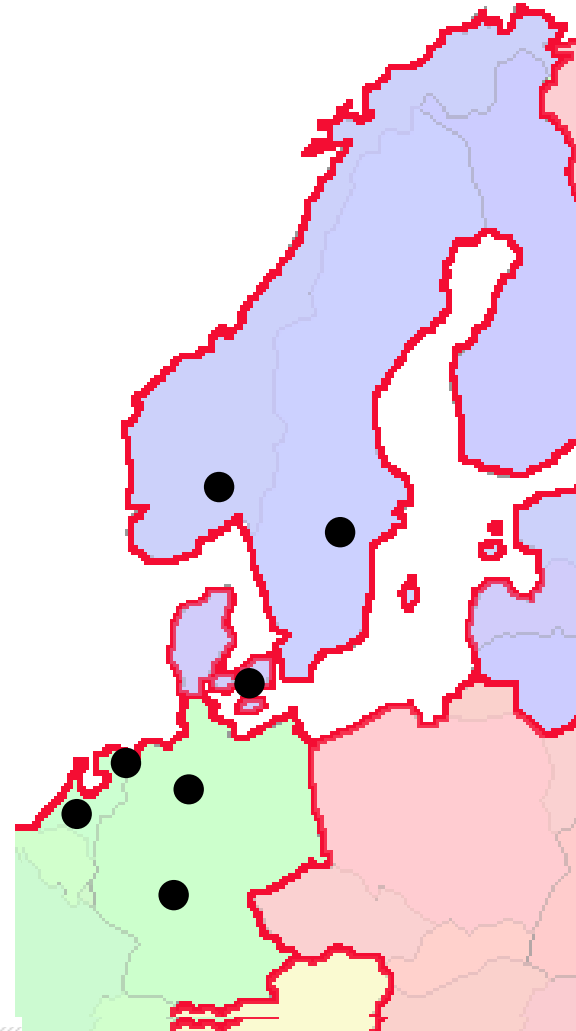
Test words

- › 384 nouns
- › Randomly selected from a list of 2575 highly frequent spoken words
- › Translated into 7 Germanic languages
- › Recordings of standard language speakers



Recordings

- › Danish
- › Swedish
- › Norwegian
- › Dutch
- › Frisian
- › Standard German
- › Low German



Intelligibility experiment

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Listeners	Test language						
	Da	Sw	No	LoG	Ge	Fr	Du
Sw	X		X				
No	X	X					
Da		X	X	X	X	X	X
Fr	X						
Du	X			X	X		



Intelligibility experiment

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Listeners	Test language						
	Da	Sw	No	LoG	Ge	Fr	Du
Sw	X		X				
No	X	X					
Da		X	X	X	X	X	X
Fr	X						
Du	X			X	X		



Intelligibility experiment

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Listeners	Test language						
	Da	Sw	No	LoG	Ge	Fr	Du
Sw	X		X				
No	X	X					
Da		X	X	X	X	X	X
Fr	X						
Du	X			X	X		



Intelligibility experiment

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Listeners	Test language						
	Da	Sw	No	LoG	Ge	Fr	Du
Sw	X		X				
No	X	X					
Da		X	X	X	X	X	X
Fr	X						
Du	X			X	X		



Listeners

- More than 1000 high school pupils
- 15-19 years
- Speak standard language at home



Intelligibility experiment

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Procedure

- › Internet-based
- › Subjects listened to 96 words via head phones
- › Translations into mother tongue

- › <http://www.let.rug.nl/lrs>
login: germanic
password: guest



Calculations

Percentage of correctly translated words

- › Ignoring spelling mistakes
ex. Dutch *kultuur* instead of *cultuur* ‘culture’
- › Allowing alternative translations
ex. Dutch *winkel* or *boetiek* for Low German *Laden* ‘shop’

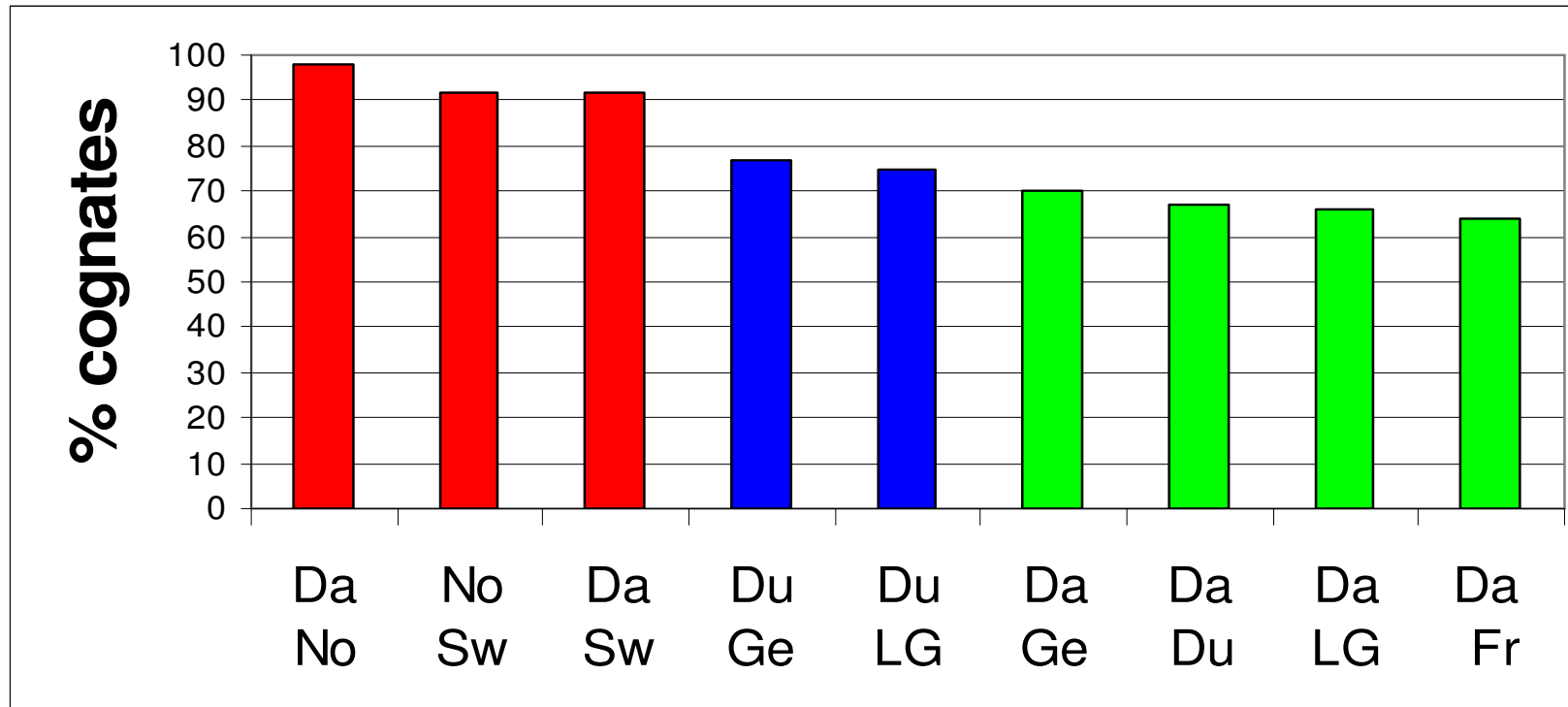


Intelligibility experiment

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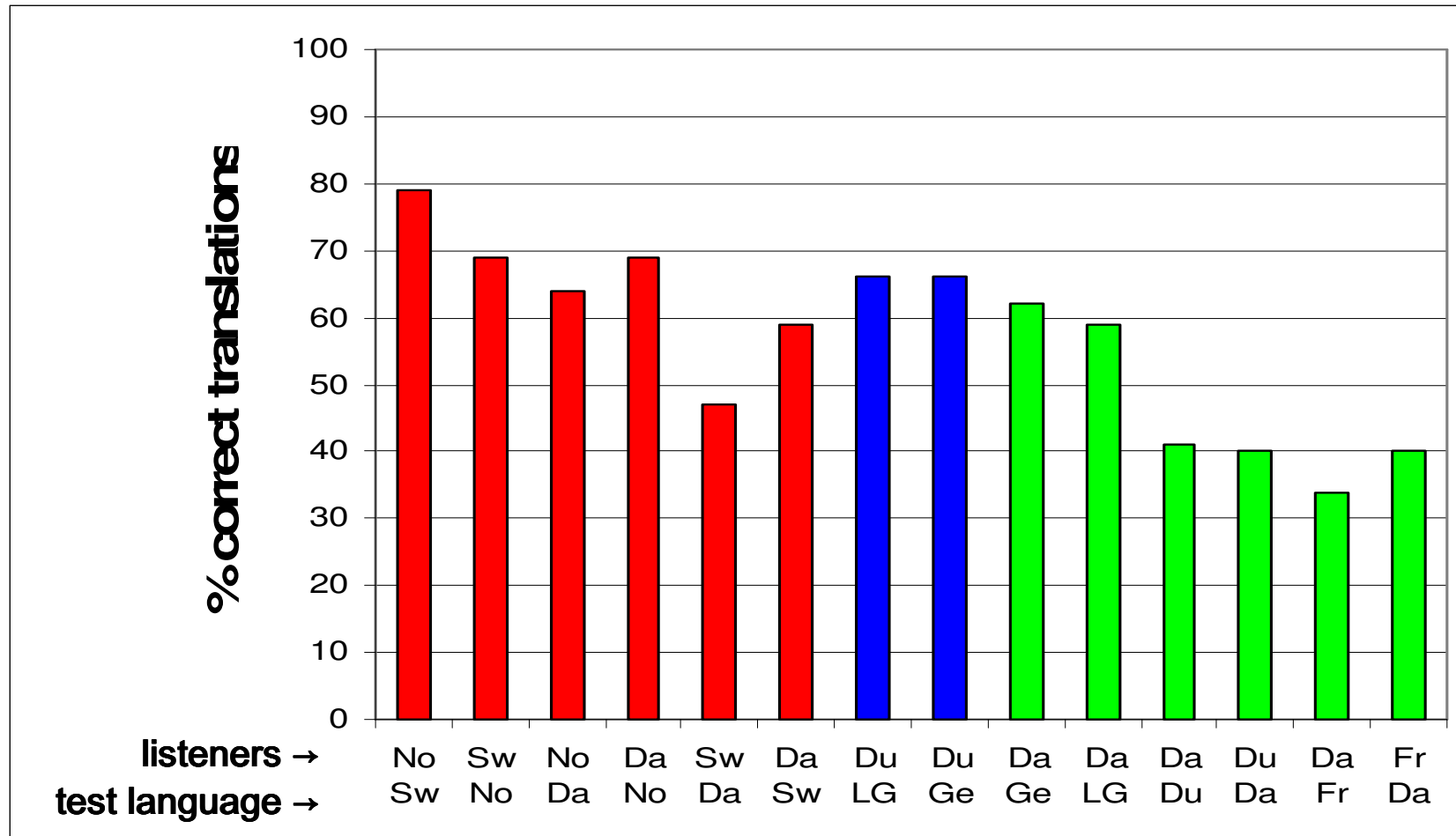
Intelligibility = % correctly translated cognates

% cognates per language pair:



Results: all cognates

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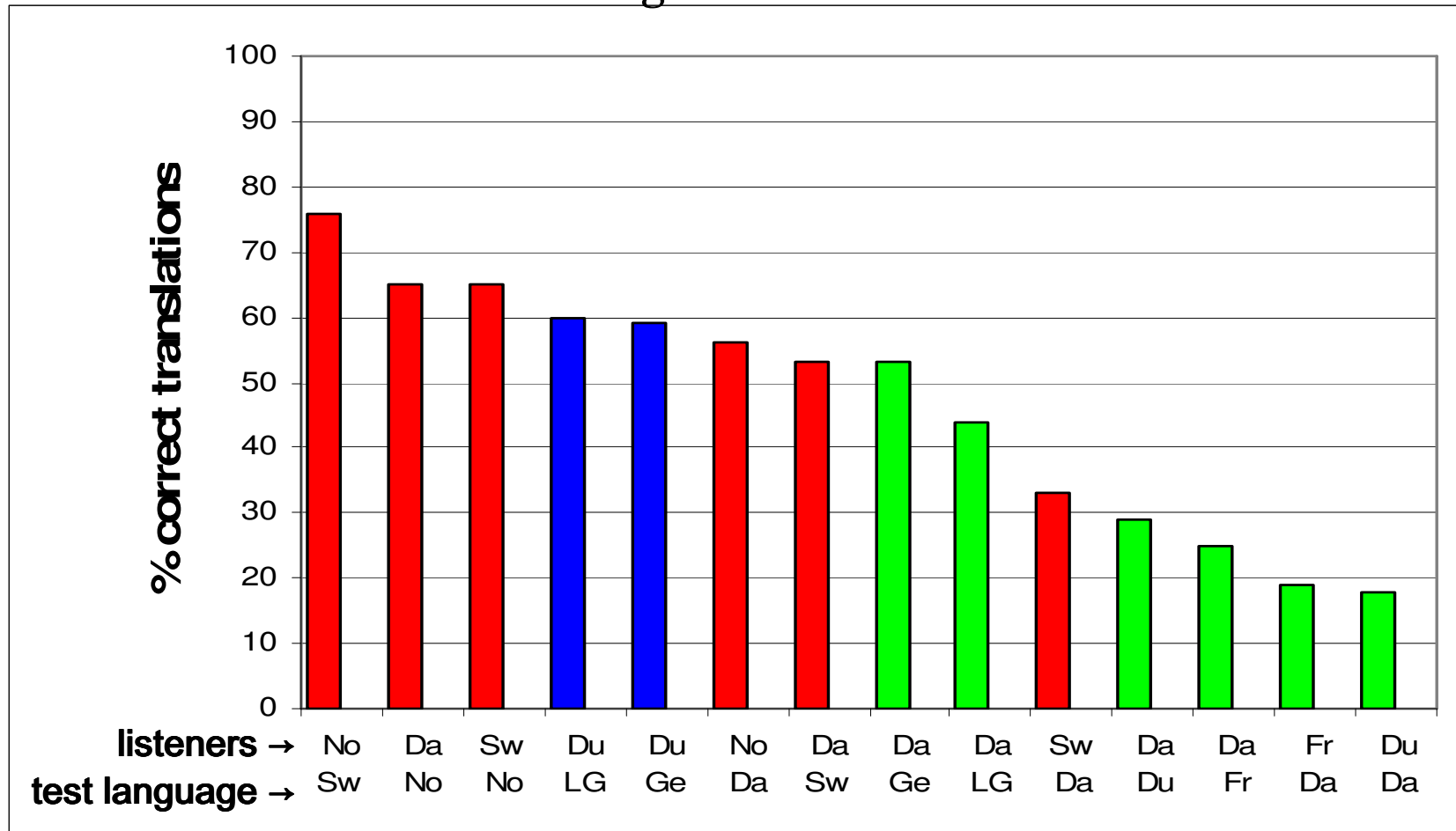


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Results: inherited words

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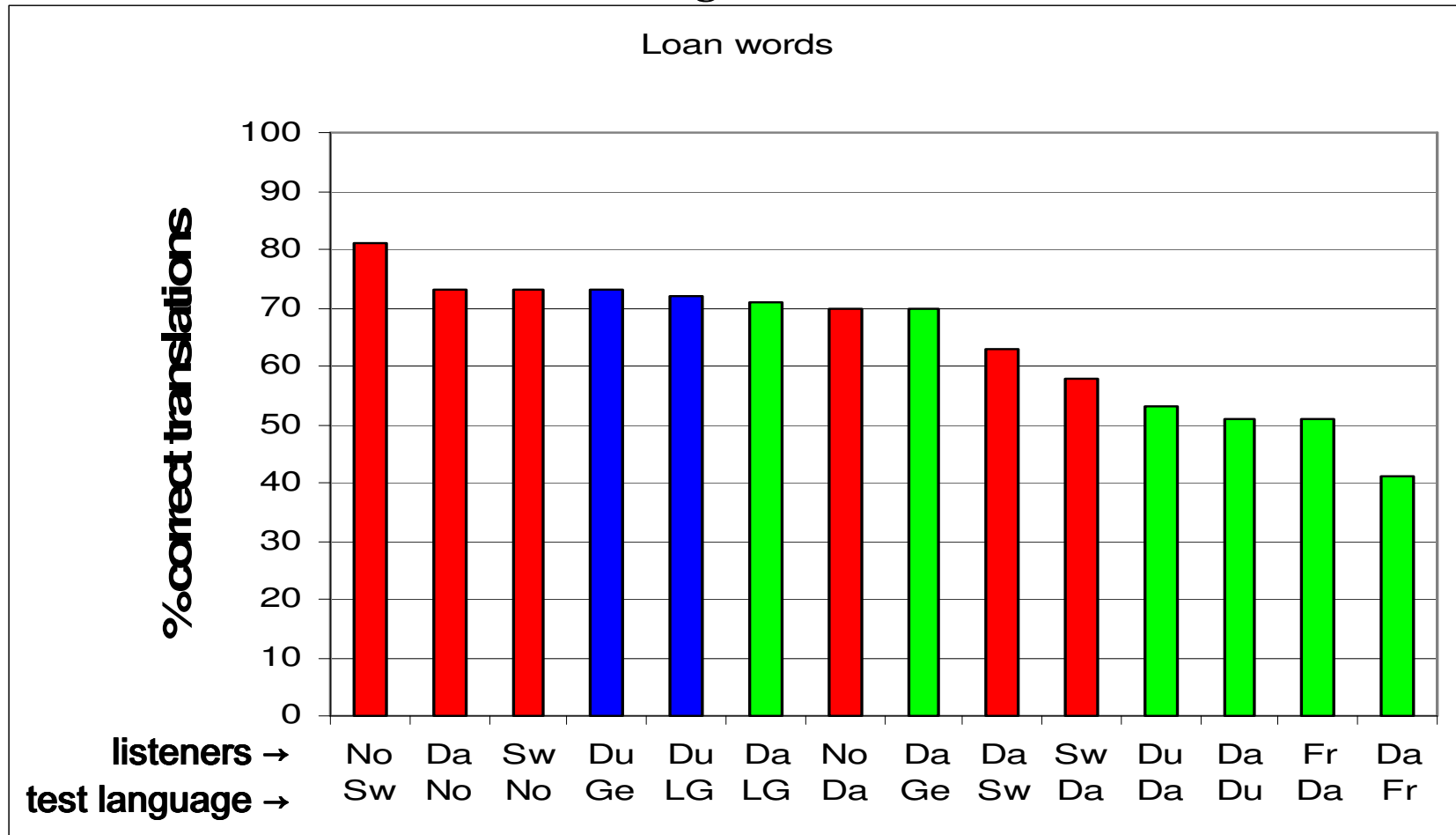
From small to large % correct inherited words



Results: loan words

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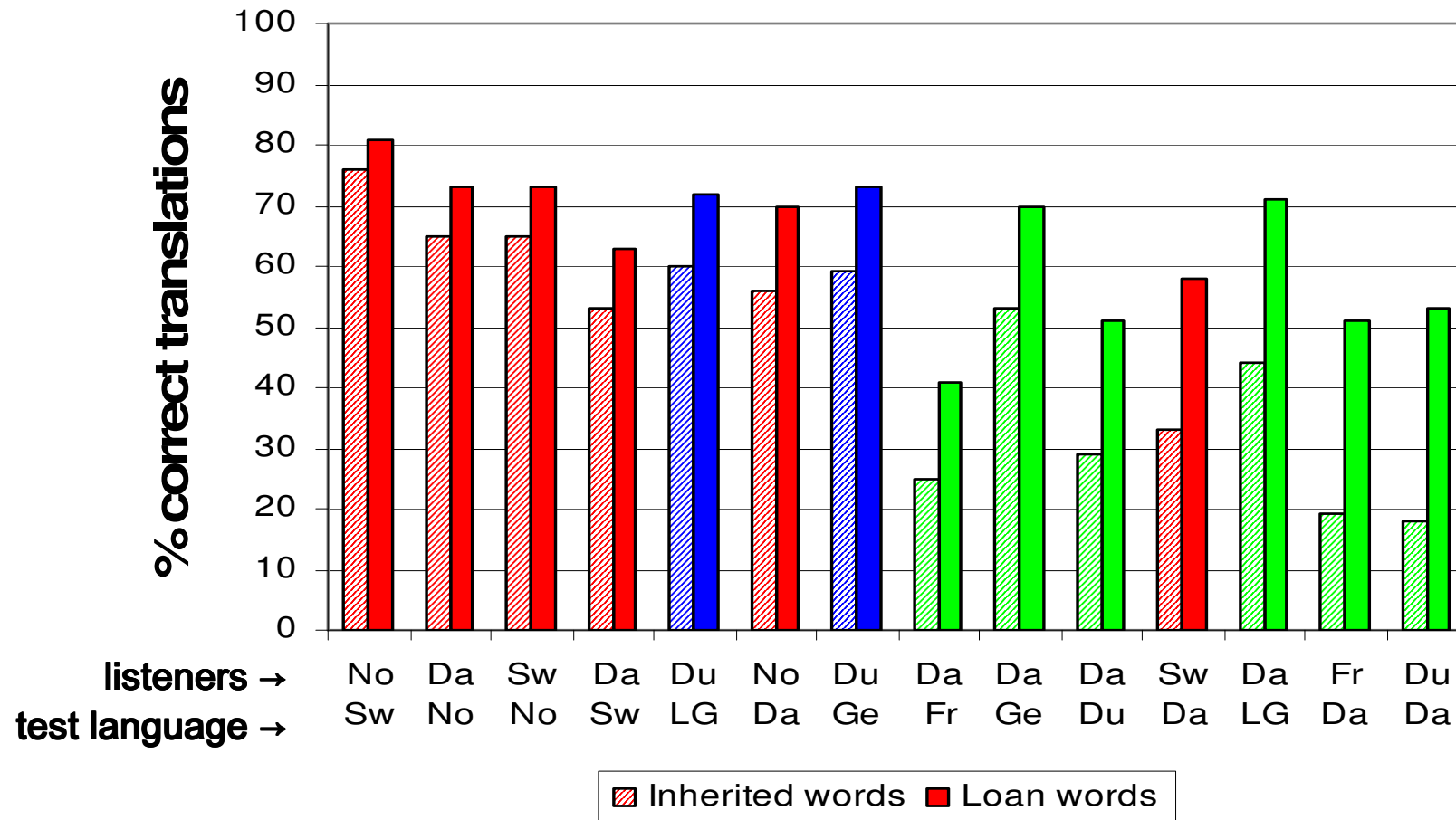
From small to large % correct loan words



Results: loan words versus inherited words

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From small to large difference between inherited and loan words



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Loans words are easier to understand than **inherited** words

- › Effect is small especially in Scandinavia but also in West-Germanic language area
- › Exception: Danish (many reduction processes and sound developments in inherited words)



Future research

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- › Intelligibility of loan words of different origin
- › Spoken versus written language
- › German listeners

