



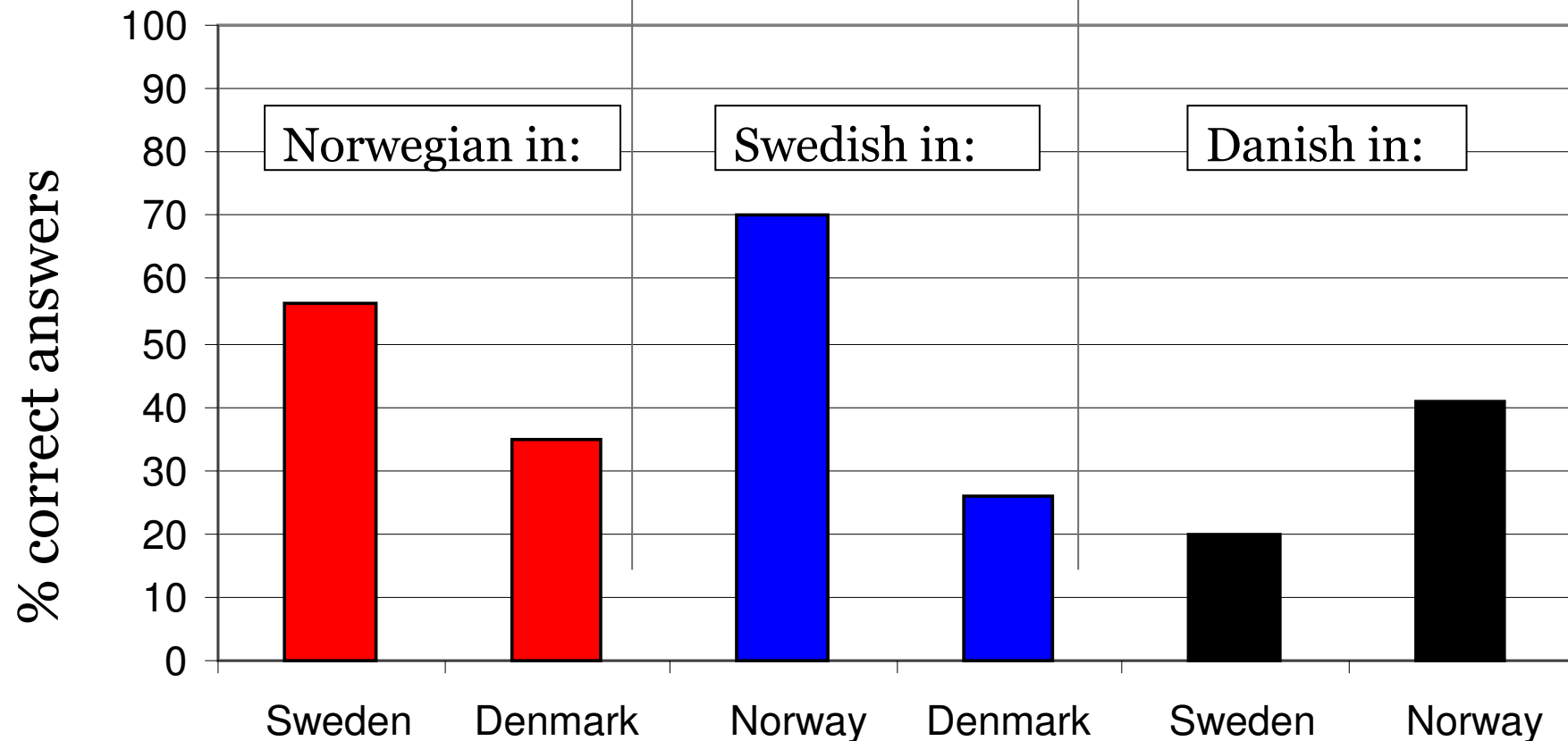
The effect of social factors on the comprehension of a closely related language

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Nanna Haug Hilton

24th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics
University of Eastern Finland, 26 August 2010

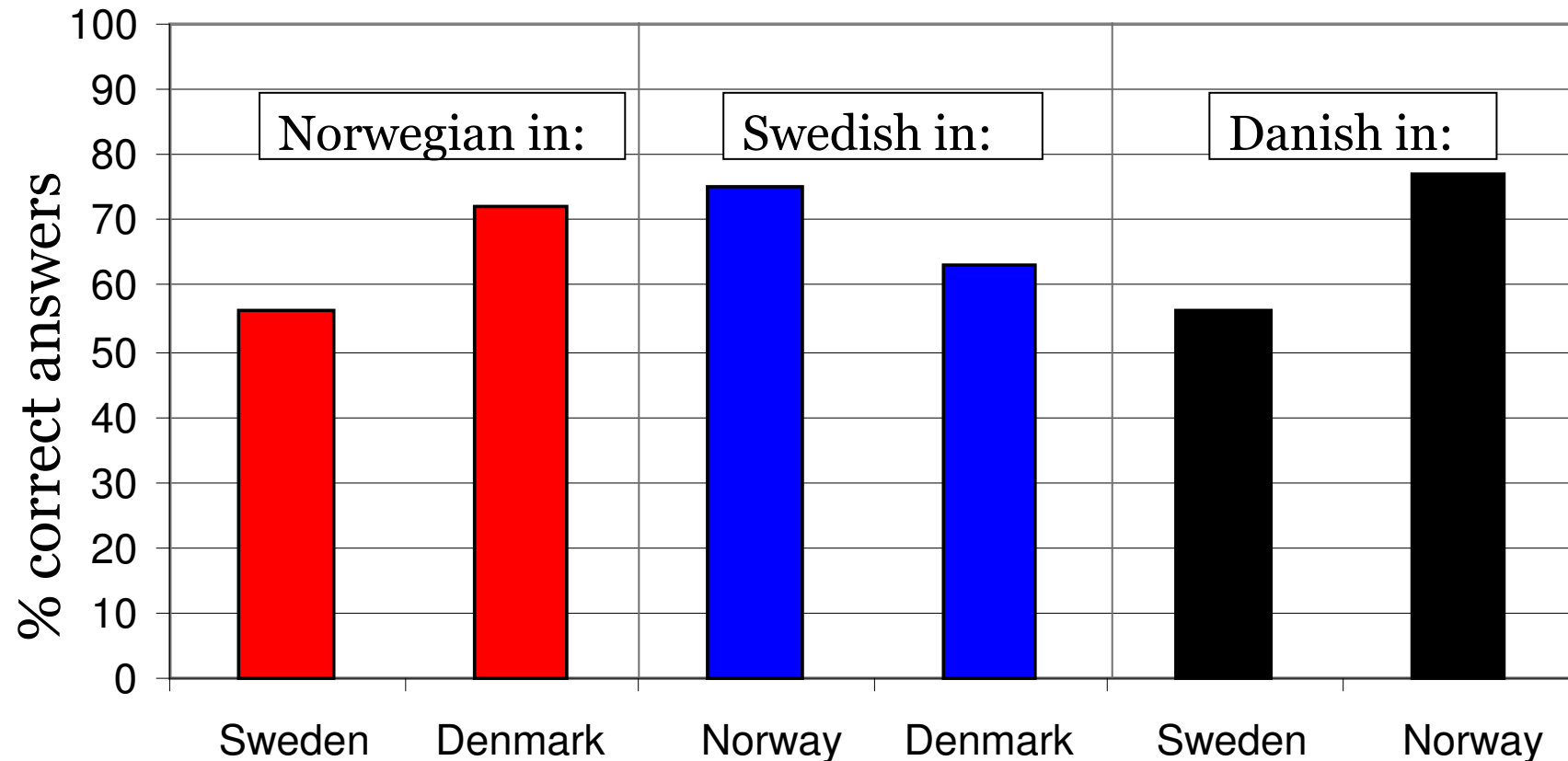
Listening comprehension:



Delsing & Lundin Åkesson 2005



Reading comprehension:



Delsing & Lundin Åkesson 2005



Mutual Intelligibility between Closely Related Languages

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Why do Norwegians understand the neighbouring languages better than Swedes and Danes?

- › Linguistic factors (structural distances)
- › Social factors (e.g. contact, attitude)



What is the role of social factors on mutual intelligibility between closely related languages?

- Delsing and Lundin-Åkesson (2005) found a link between contact, attitudes and sentence comprehension in the Nordic countries
- Difficult to establish causal relationship between attitudes and comprehension (van Bezooijen and Gooskens, 2007)



Research questions

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In comparison to informants who live close to the neighbouring countries, do informants who live far away

- › have less contact?
- › have more negative attitudes?
- › struggle more with comprehension of the varieties spoken there than those who live closer?



Methodology

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- › In-depth contact and attitude questionnaire with 24 informants
 - 14 from northernmost province Finnmark
 - 10 from south-eastern province Buskerud

Honningsvåg, Tana and Alta:
450-650 km to inhabited
Sweden, 2000-2200 km to
Denmark

Hønefoss and
Kongsberg: 150
km to Sweden,
approx 300 km
to Denmark



Methodology

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- › Dialect spoken in the two locations linguistically similar (Gooskens & Heeringa 2005)
- › Contact possibilities extremely different
- › Similar attitudes?



Methodology

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- › Internet word comprehension experiment with 157 Norwegian pupils:
 - 39 from northernmost province Finnmark
 - 118 from south-eastern province Buskerud



Contact questionnaire

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- › questions about:
 - frequency of visits to Sweden and Denmark
 - frequency of Swedish and Danish linguistic input



Contact questionnaire

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Example:

- › How often have you been to Denmark?
 - Never
 - 1 or 2 times
 - 3-5 times
 - More than 5 times

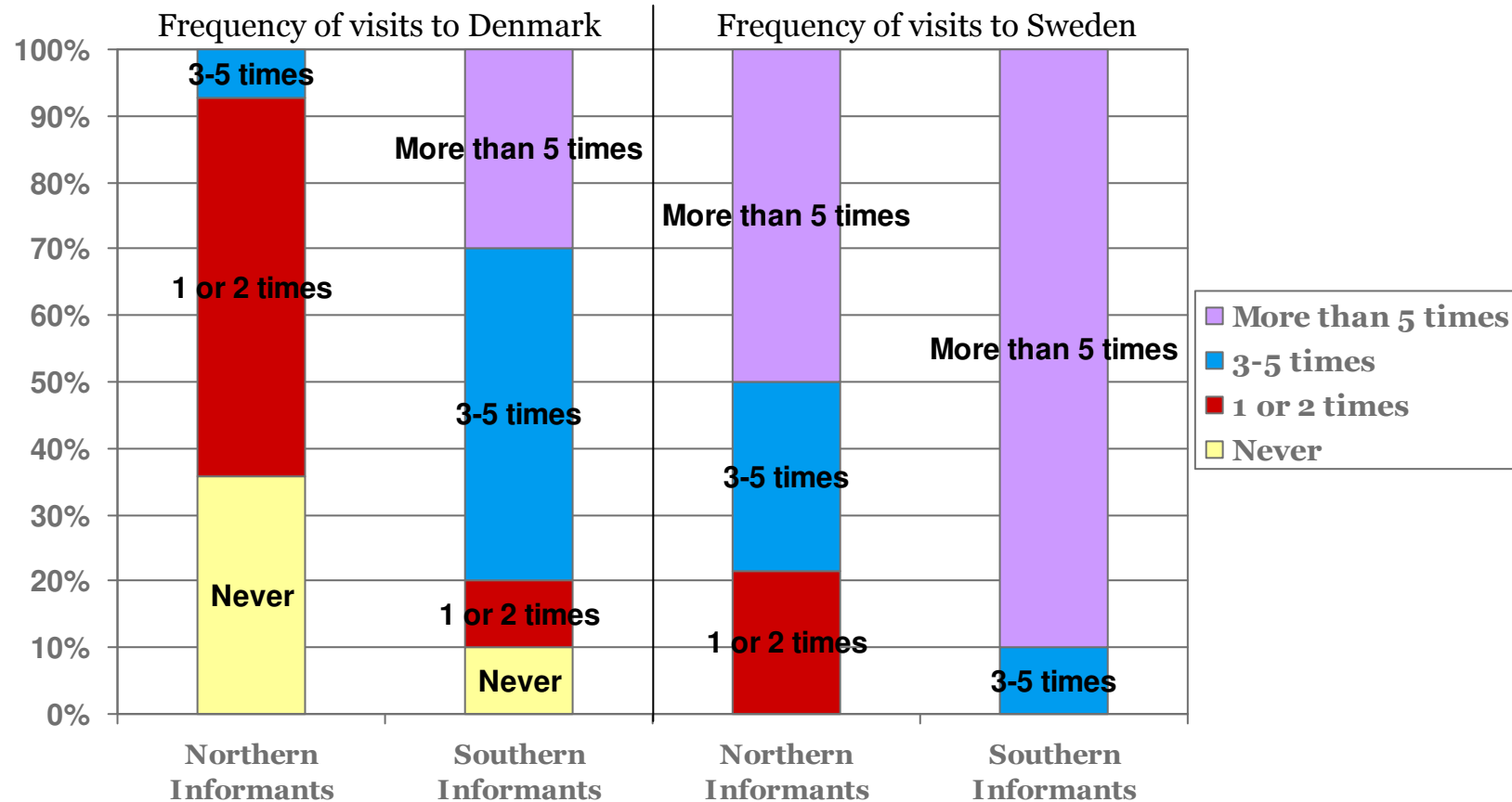


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Results contact questionnaire

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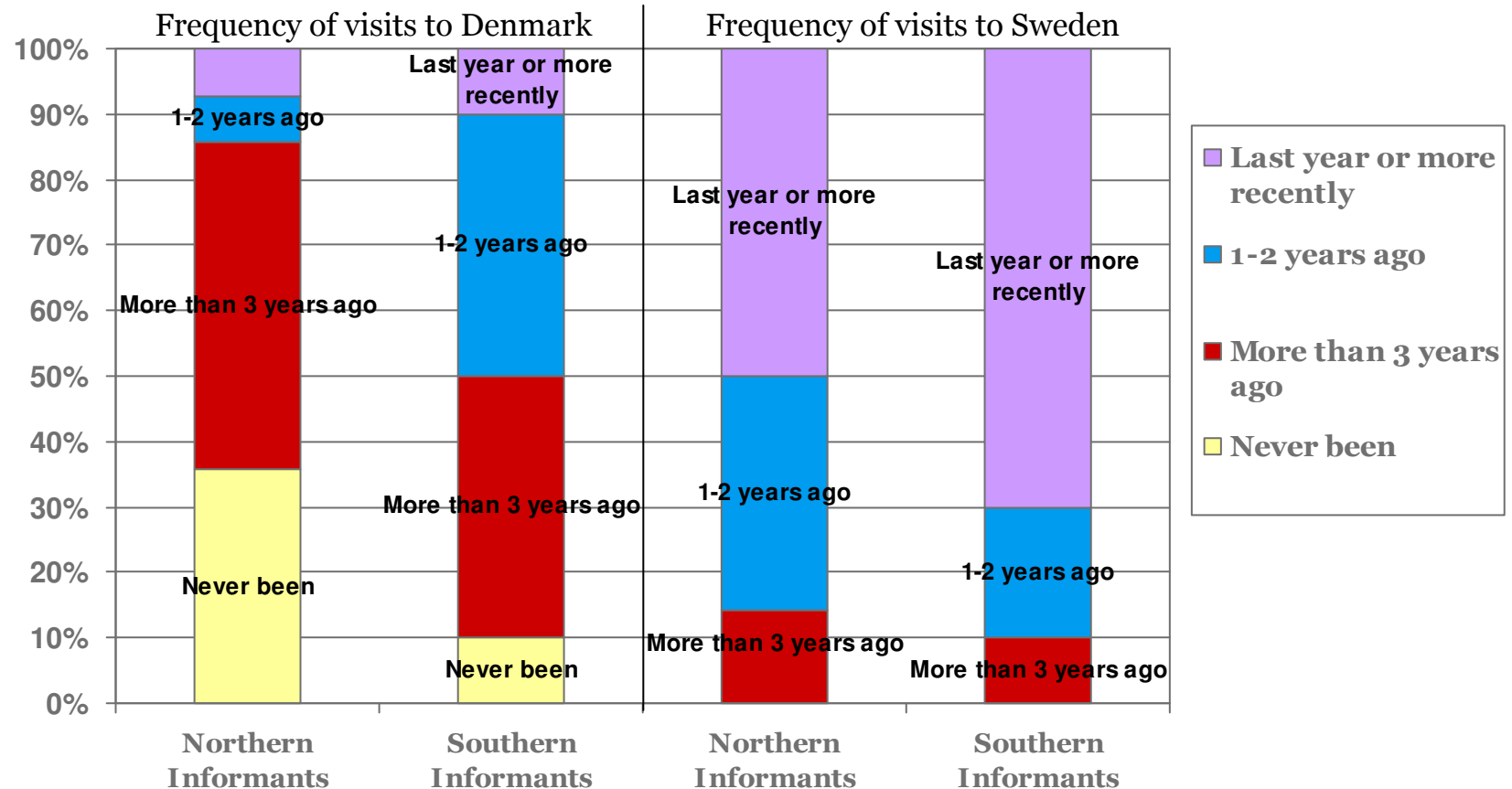
How often have you visited the neighbouring countries?



Results contact questionnaire

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When did you last visit the neighbouring countries?



Results contact questionnaire

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- › Northern informants have had less contact with Denmark than southern informants have
- › Although the same can be said for contact with Sweden, these differences are small



Attitude questionnaire

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- › questions about:
 - attitudes towards Swedish and Danish language
 - attitudes towards Swedes and Danes
 - Overt attitudes: descriptions on superiority, dynamism and attractiveness dimensions



Attitude questionnaire

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Example:

- › ‘How would you describe Danish? (tick the box next to the characteristics you find fitting)

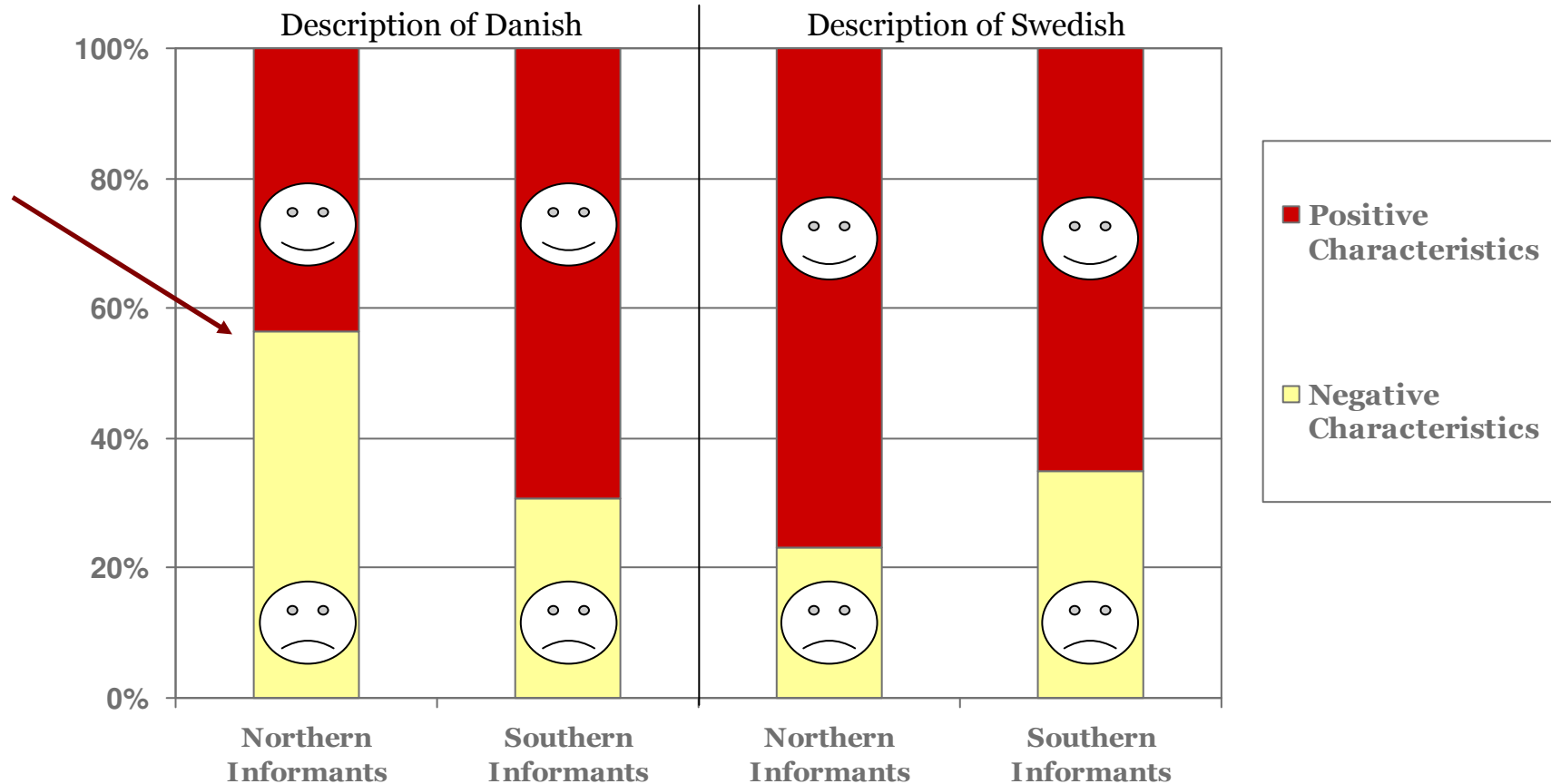
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> pretty | <input type="checkbox"/> attractive | <input type="checkbox"/> incorrect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cultivated | <input type="checkbox"/> nice | <input type="checkbox"/> unalluring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> repulsive | <input type="checkbox"/> beautiful | <input type="checkbox"/> uncool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cosy | <input type="checkbox"/> uncultivated | <input type="checkbox"/> interesting/fun |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unattractive | <input type="checkbox"/> amusing | <input type="checkbox"/> boring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ugly | <input type="checkbox"/> cool | <input type="checkbox"/> sexy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> correct | <input type="checkbox"/> unsexy | |



Results attitude questionnaire

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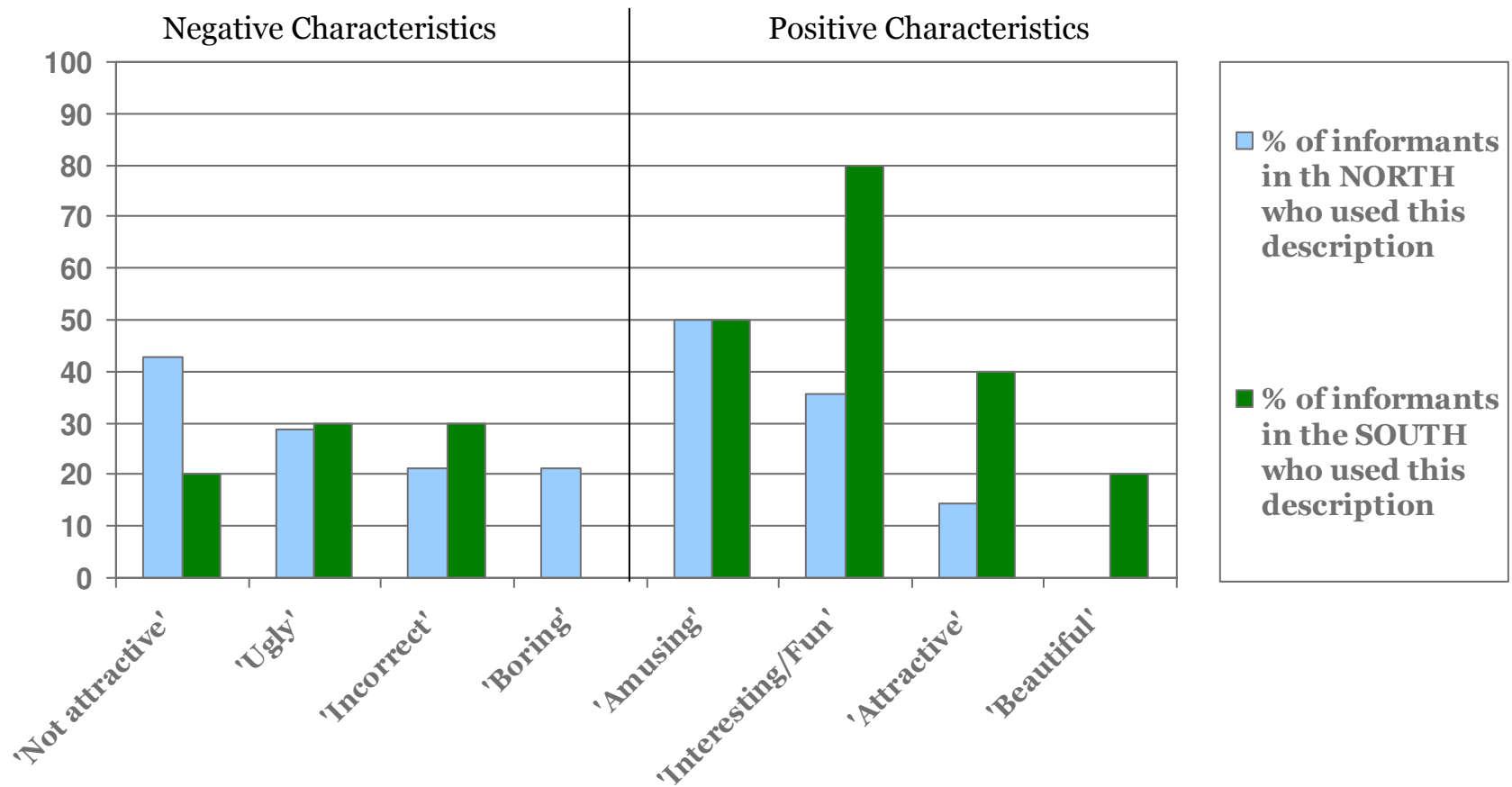
How would you describe the neighbouring languages?



Results attitude questionnaire

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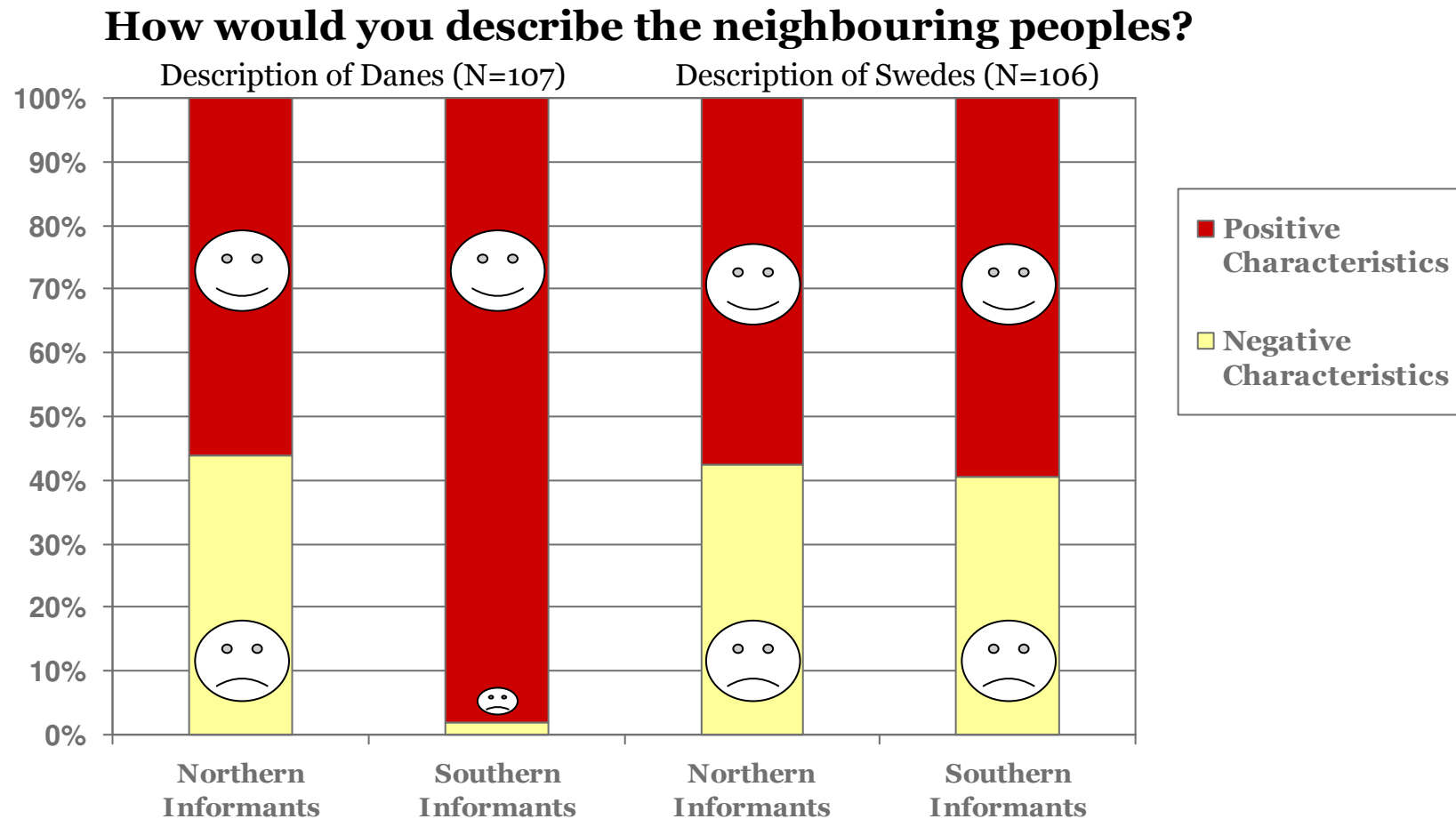
How would you describe Danish?



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Results attitude questionnaire

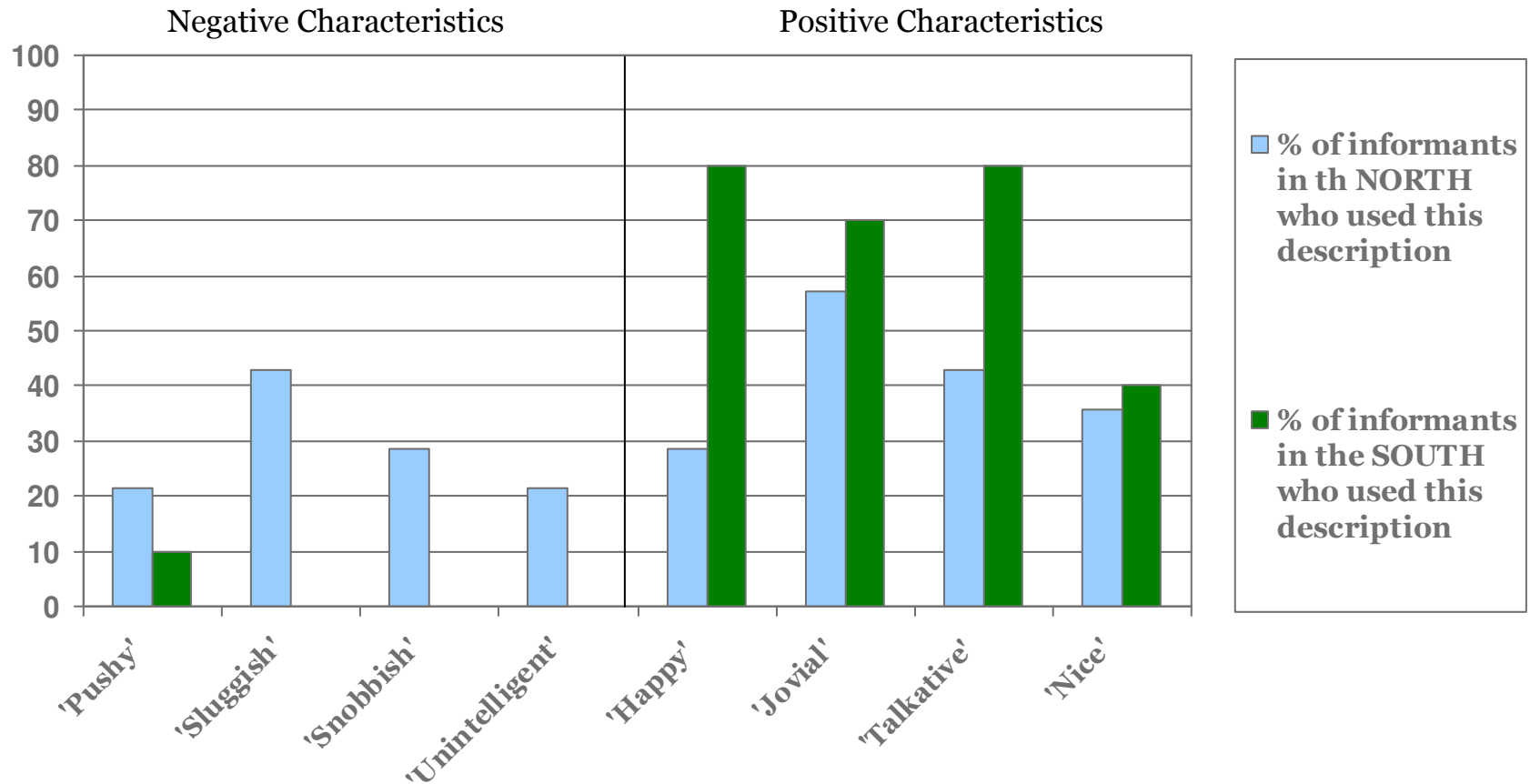
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Results attitude questionnaire

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How would you describe Danes?



Results attitude questionnaire

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- › Southern informants have a higher proportion of positive attitudes towards Danish and Danes than northern informants do



Intelligibility experiment

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Test words:

- › 384 frequent nouns
- › recordings of standard Danish and Swedish speakers



Intelligibility experiment

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Procedure

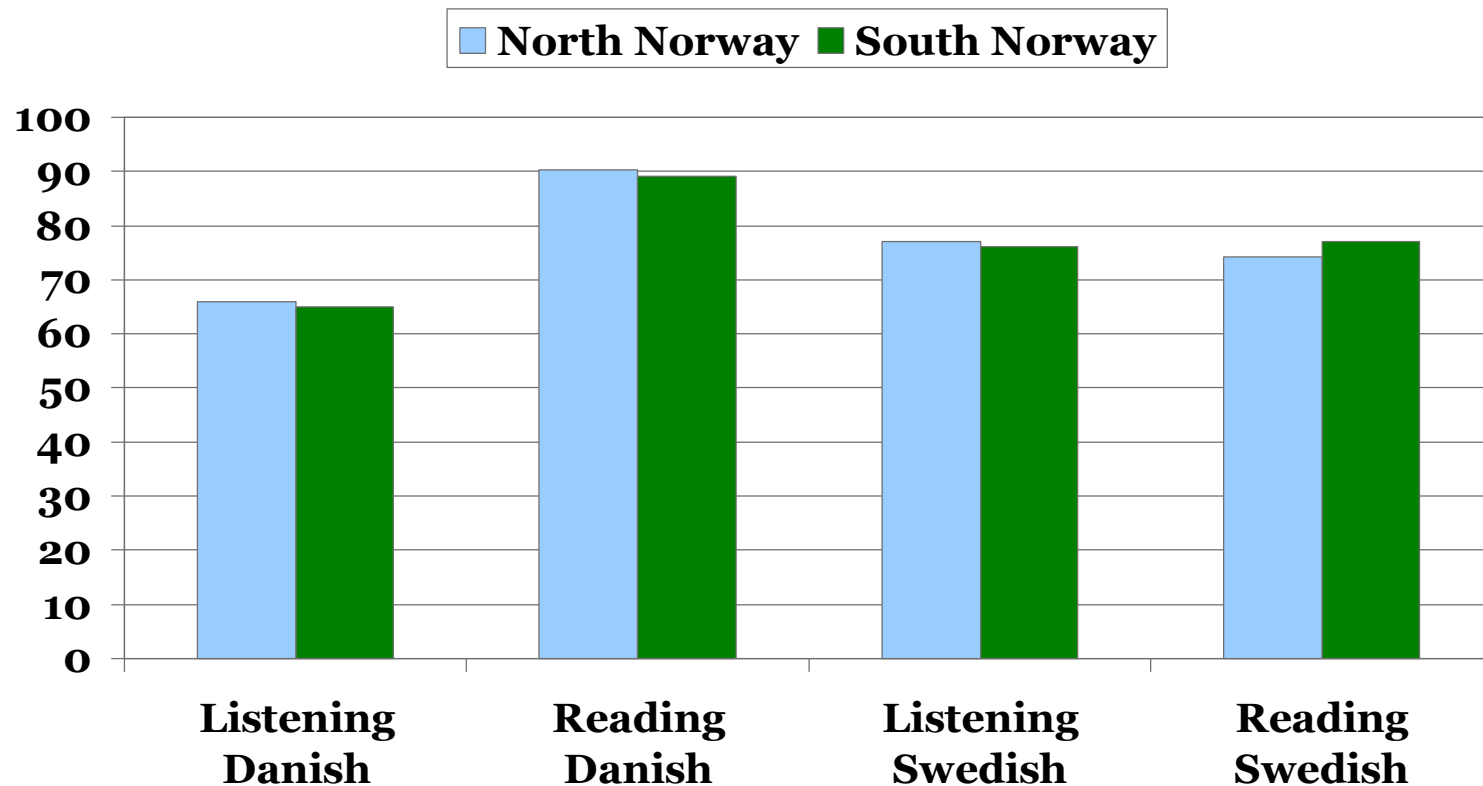
- › Internet-based
- › Pupils in upper secondary schools (16-19 years old)
- › Subjects listened to words via head phones and read words on the computer screen
- › Translations into mother tongue
- › <http://www.let.rug.nl/lrs>
login: germanic
password: guest



Results: Word Comprehension North and South Norway

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% of correctly translated words: two groups of informants



Results: Word Comprehension North and South Norway

13-9-2010 | 25

- › % of correctly translated words:
 - no significant differences between the informants who live far away from Sweden and Denmark (North) and those who live much closer (South)



Results: Contact and Attitude Questionnaire

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- › Is there a correlation between attitudes and word comprehension?
- › **No** significant correlations between number of positive or negative characteristics given by informants and their word comprehension scores



Conclusion

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- › No indication that there is a link between language social factors (contact and attitude) and word comprehension (getest???)
- › A possible relationship between geography (or higher contact frequency) and overt language attitudes (getest???)
- › Same Swedish and Danish word comprehension scores among Norwegians from the north and the south



Thanks!

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- Pupils at Tana VGS, Alta VGS, Nordkapp VGS, Hønefoss VGS and Kongsberg VGS

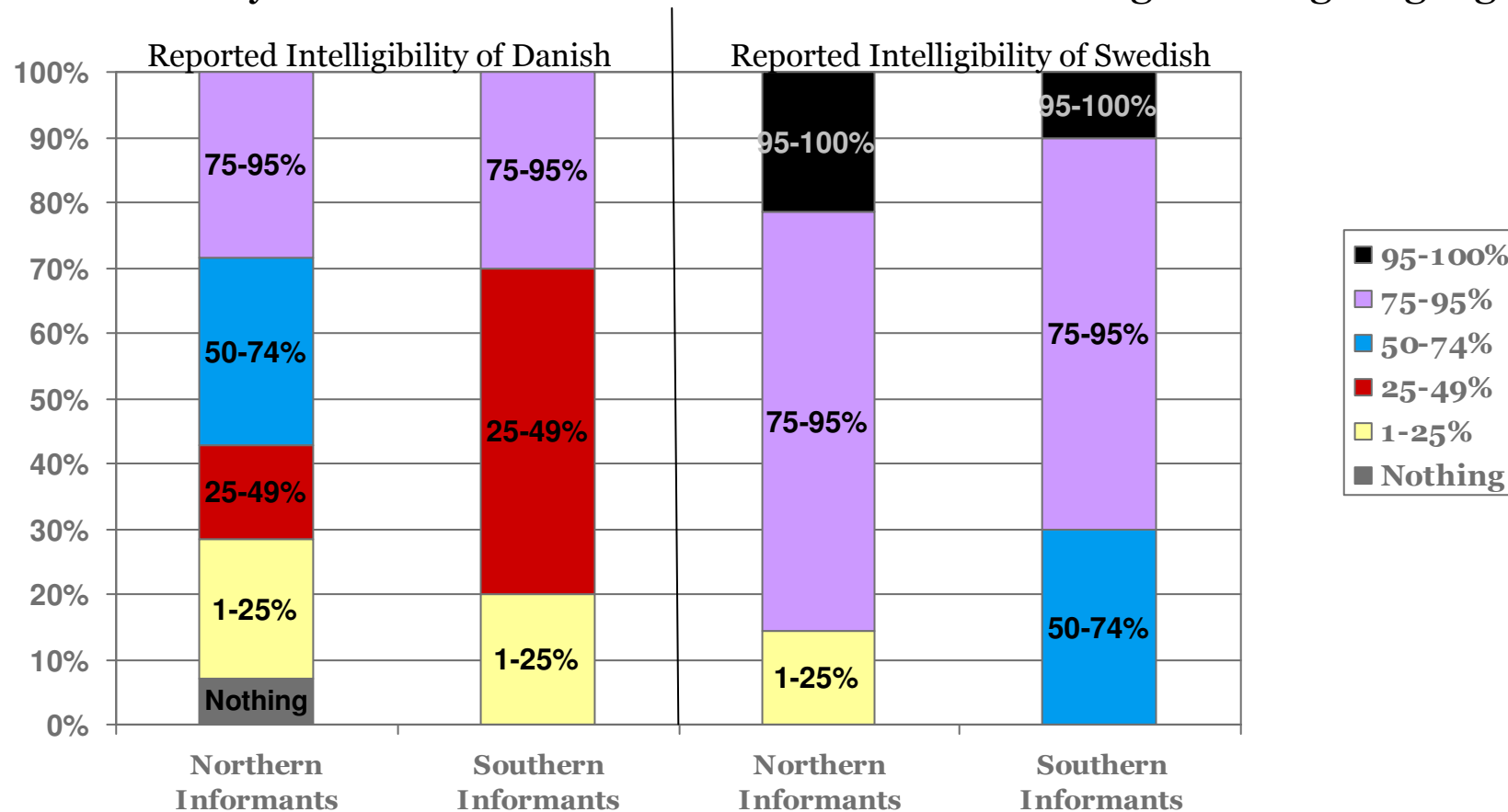


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Results: Attitude and Contact Questionnaire

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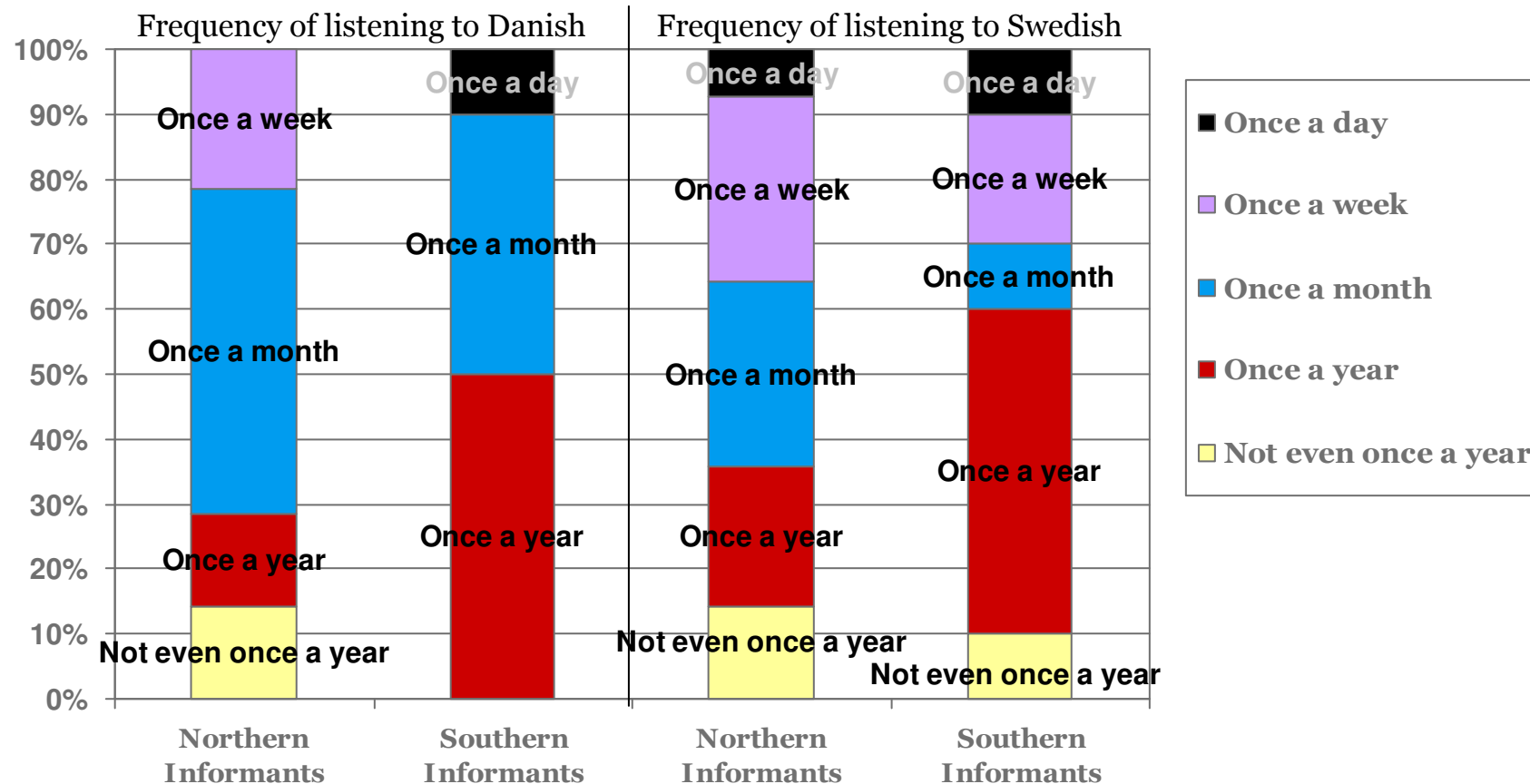
How much do you understand of news broadcasts in the neighbouring languages?



Results: Attitude and Contact Questionnaire

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How often do you hear the neighbouring languages?



Calculations

Percentage correctly translated words

- › Ignoring spelling mistakes
e.g. Norwegian *terasse* instead of *terrasse* ‘terrace’
- › Allowing alternative translations
e.g. Norwegian *lege* or *doktor* for Danish *doktor* ‘doctor’

