

How does Adversative Conjunction Improve One's Impression? The Specificity of Discourse Focus Effect

Ryuta ISEKI* and Tadashi KIKUCHI

University of Tsukuba, Japan

(*Since 2009, Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science/
Kyoto University, Japan. e-mail: riseki@educ.kyoto-u.ac.jp)

BACKGROUND

> **Discourse Focus:** People do not attend to all information during reading. Some features of sentences (e.g., subject, proper name, and first-mentioned entity) tend to capture one's attention (e.g., Sanford & Garrod, 1998).



> **Effect of Focus:**

- Entity in focus is more interpreted as subject than in entity in non-focus (Gordon et al., 1993).

- Factual error is more detected when it was mentioned in focus clause than in non-focus clause (Baker & Wagner, 1987).

However, how are information in non-focus processed?

> **Purpose of the Study:**

- To establish that processes of non-focus information can be changed by discourse focus.

- To examine the specificity of the effect of focus on impression.

> **Overview of Experiments:** Impression formation for fictional persons are required. Discourse focus is manipulated by using different conjunctions.

- **Experiment 1:** Likability of characters is rated.

- **Experiment 2:** Likability of specific traits is rated.

METHOD

> **Participants:** Japanese 24 graduates and undergraduates participated for each experiment.

> **Design:** 2 (personality trait: positive or negative) x 2 (type of conjunction: adversative or coordinate) x 2 (position of trait: before or after) within participants design.

> **Material:** 56 sentence sets consisting of valence and neutral traits (below, valenced traits are colored).

< Sample Set >

[Positive trait]

■ **adversative-before:** "Kazuya is patient, but he is unselfish." (和也はがまん強いが, 欲がない。)

■ **coordinate-before:** "Kazuya is patient, and he is unselfish." (和也はがまん強く, 欲がない。)

□ **adversative-after:** "Kazuya is unselfish, but he is patient." (和也は欲がないが, がまん強い。)

□ **coordinate-after:** "Kazuya is unselfish, and he is patient." (和也は欲がなく, がまん強い。)

[Negative trait]

■ **adversative-before:** "Kazuya is know-it-all, but he is unselfish." (和也は知ったかぶりをするが, 欲がない。)

■ **coordinate-before:** "Kazuya is know-it-all, and he is unselfish." (和也は知ったかぶりをし, 欲がない。)

□ **adversative-after:** "Kazuya is unselfish, but he is know-it-all." (和也は欲がないが, 知ったかぶりをする。)

□ **coordinate-after:** "Kazuya is unselfish, and he is know-it-all." (和也は欲がなく, 知ったかぶりをする。)

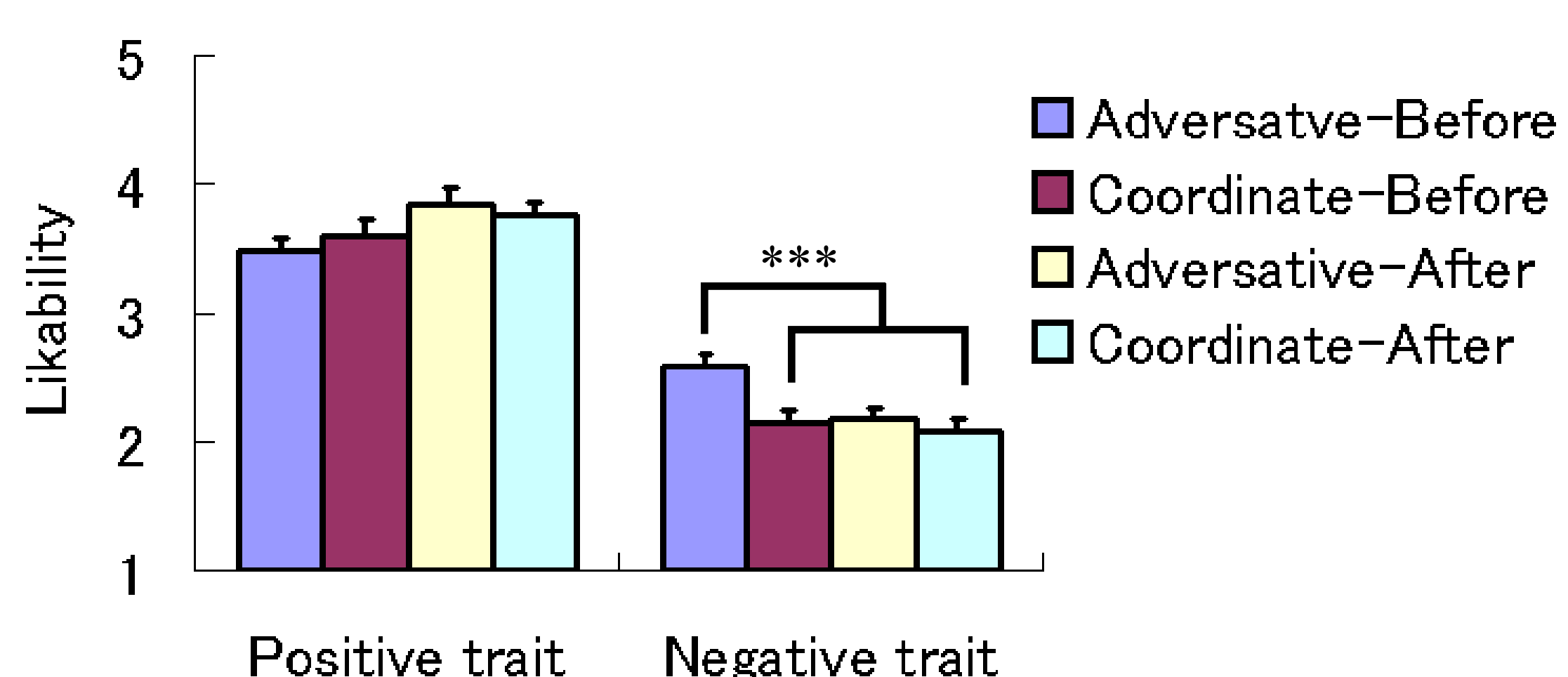
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

[Experiment 1: Likability of characters]

> **Procedure:** Participants were required to read sentences and to rate the likability of characters described by them in 5-points scale (1 = not likable to 5 = very likable).

e.g.) "How likable do you feel the characters?"

> **Results:**



Two-way interaction is significant, $F(1, 23) = 9.87, p = .005$, reflecting that impression of negative trait was diminished by adversative conjunction.

> **Discussion:**

- **Adversative conjunction** changed the impression of negative trait described in non-focus clause.

- Is this effect caused by the change of evaluation to negative trait itself? (This question was investigated in Experiment 2.)

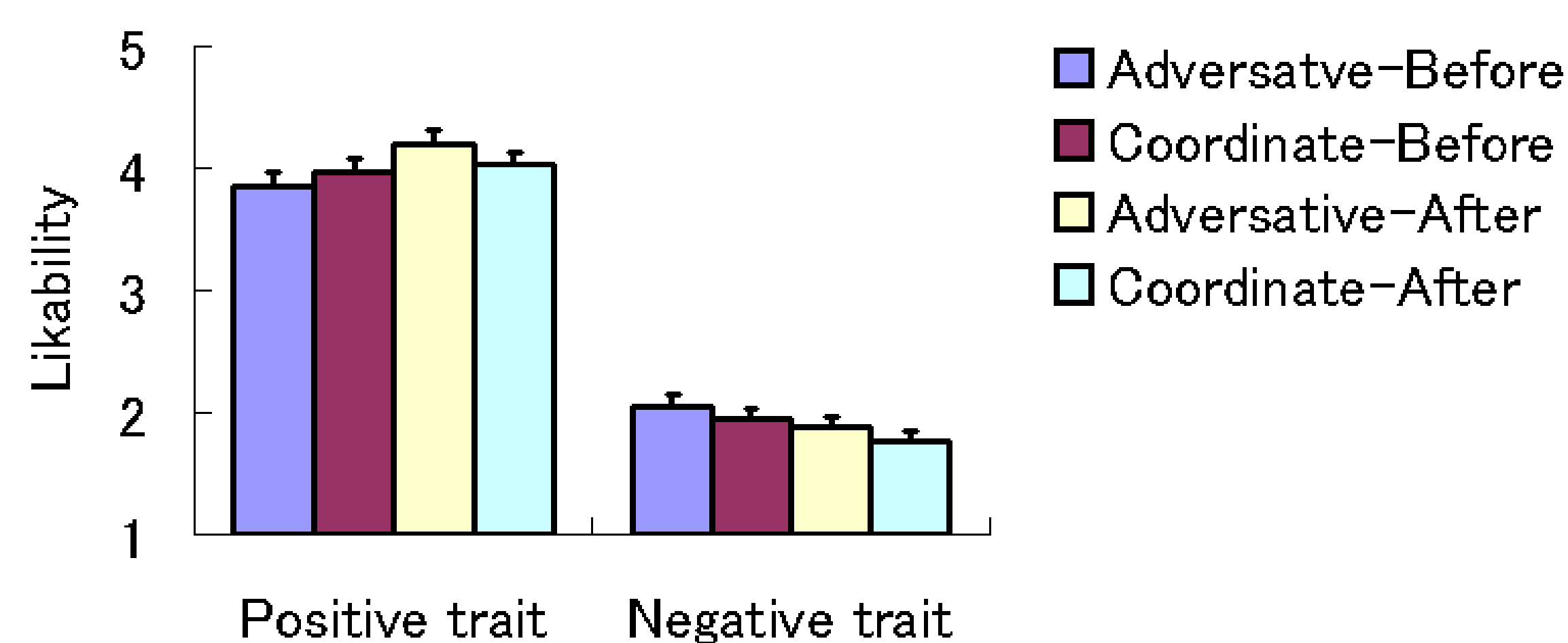
[Experiment 2: Likability of specific traits]

> **Procedure:** Participants were required to read sentences and to rate the likability of specific traits described by them in 5-points scale (1 = not likable to 5 = very likable).

e.g.) "How likable do you feel that Kazuya is know-it-all?" (和也が知ったかぶりをするをどのくらい好ましく

思いますか?)

> **Results:**



Two-way interaction is not significant, $F(1,23) = 1.85, p = .19$, and rating scores were not different in adversative-before and coordinate-before conditions for negative trait.

> **Discussion:** Evaluation for specific traits seemed not to be changed by discourse focus. It suggested that impression of neutral traits might be changed or impression might be created in terms of whole sentences.