

# The effect of linguistics instruction on undergraduates' linguistic attitudes

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# Linguistics and attitudinal assumptions

- › Linguists make assumptions about language
  - › There are several of these
    - › One naturally occurring variety is not inherently better than another
    - › No language or variety is more primitive than another
    - › Language change is natural and doesn't signal decline
  - › Many of these are not widely held by non-linguists
- › Linguists use some terms in unusual ways
  - › (Un)grammatical
  - › Dialect

# Attempts to bridge the gap

- › Books directed toward non-linguists
  - › Laurie Bauer & Peter Trudgill's *Language Myths*
  - › Donna Jo Napoli's *Language Matters*
  - › Several books by David Crystal
- › Some television programs and films
  - › *Do You Speak American?*
  - › *American Tongues*
- › Introductory textbooks
  - › William O'Grady *et al.*'s *Contemporary Linguistics*
  - › The Ohio State University's *Language Files*

# Study site: University of Central Florida

- › The university
  - › Very large public doctoral-granting university
  - › Over 50,000 students, ca. 85% undergraduate
  - › Most students are from Florida, especially Central Florida
  - › No linguistics department or linguistics major
  - › Offers minors in linguistics and cognitive science
- › Linguistics courses
  - › Very few regularly offered linguistic courses
  - › Most linguistics courses are based in the English Department
  - › Some related courses offered in allied fields
  - › Courses are often used for multiple purposes

# Study site: University of Alaska Anchorage

- › The university
  - › Medium-sized public doctoral-granting university
  - › About 14,000 students (main campus), ca. 93% undergraduate
  - › Most students are from Alaska, especially Southcentral Alaska
  - › No linguistics department or linguistics major
  - › Offers minor in (English) linguistics
- › Linguistics courses
  - › Very few regularly offered linguistic courses
  - › Most linguistics courses are based in the English Department
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# The survey: Overview

- › Given in my undergraduate classes since Fall 2006
  - › University of Central Florida Fall 2006 to Spring 2009
  - › University of Alaska Anchorage Fall 2009 to present
- › Survey administered at beginning and end of semester
- › Covers attitudes toward language
  - › 23 questions based largely on chapters in *Language Myths*
  - › Topics range from substantive (15) to pure opinion (8)
  - › Questions presented electronically in random order
  - › Ask for level of agreement with claims about language
  - › Responses elicited on a 4-point Likert scale
  - › Respondents could skip questions
- › 564 responses collected to date

# The survey: Substantive prompts

- › 6 on grammaticality
  - › 4 by example (singular *they*, object *who*, final preposition, *it is me*)
  - › 2 direct (both double negatives, separating logic and grammar)
- › 4 on acceptance of language varieties
  - › 2 direct (regional varieties, ethnically marked varieties)
  - › 1 on whether use of non-standard varieties stems from laziness
  - › 1 on whether some languages have no grammar
- › 2 on linguistic security (correctness, accent)
- › 1 on official English
- › 1 on English spelling
- › 1 on language and thought

# But there are problems

- › Overall results
  - › Several significant changes in attitudes
  - › All changes move toward norms generally held by linguists
  - › Most changes have very small effects, some have small effects
- › But there are problems
  - › This comes from a disparate set of classes
  - › Some classes were only offered once
  - › Some classes were only offered at one campus



# Paring down the sample

- › Comparable classes
  - › Offered at both schools
  - › Similar content in all sections
  - › Enough responses to draw valid conclusions
- › 3 class pairs fit these requirements
  - › Principles of Linguistics (UCF)/Nature of Language (UAA)
  - › Modern English Grammar (UCF)/Intermediate Grammar (UAA)
  - › History of the English Language (both schools)
- › Those classes include the majority of respondents (441)

# Principles of Linguistics/Nature of Language

- › Introductory survey of linguistic subfields
- › Primary focus on theoretical linguistics
- › No prerequisites
- › Lower-division course (effectively)
- › Multiple audiences, including general education
- › 127 respondents
  - › 115 responded to the initial survey
  - › 108 responded to the final survey
  - › 97 responded to both surveys
- › “Intro to Linguistics”

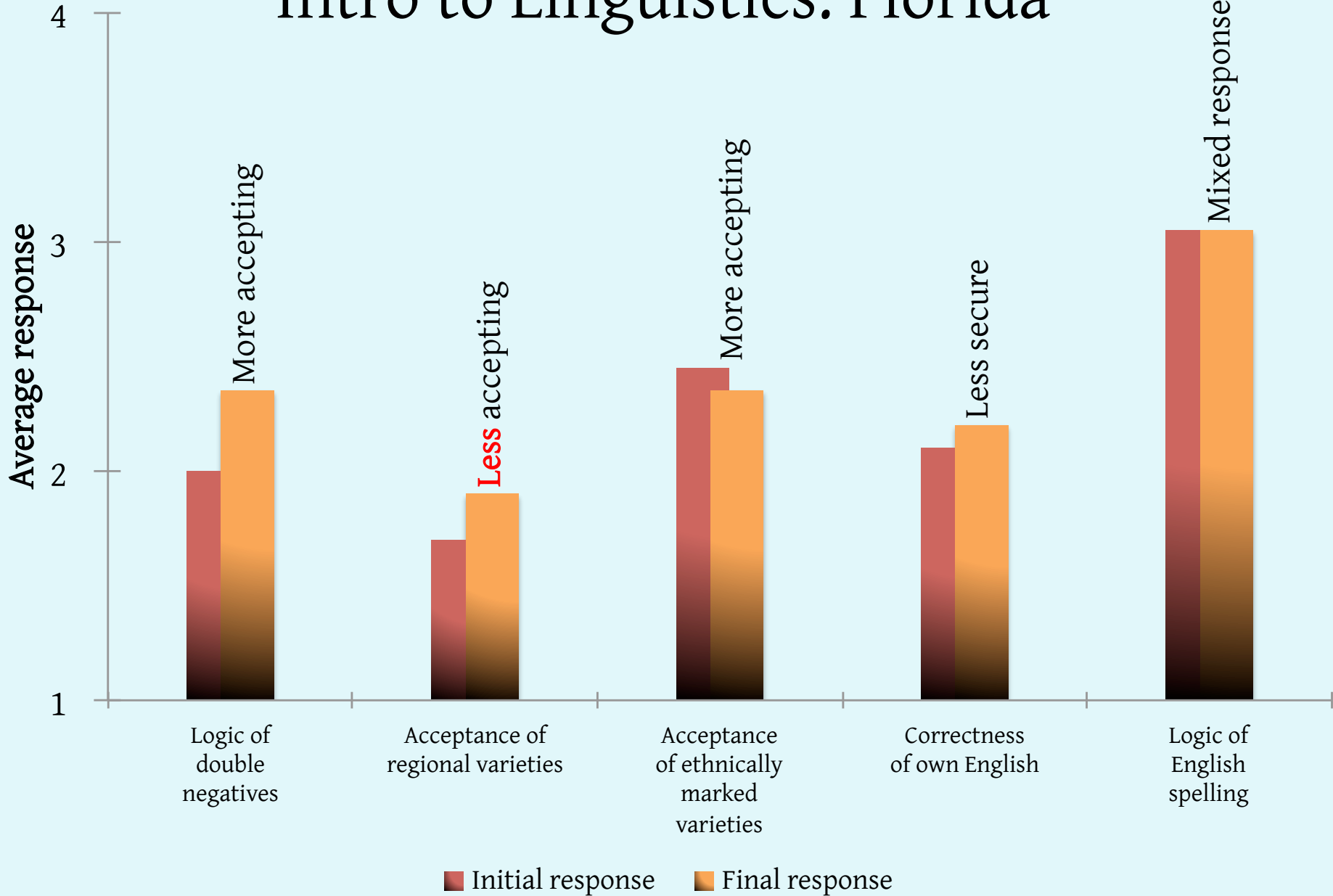
# Modern English Grammar/Intermediate Grammar

- › Introduction to transformational grammar
- › Cross-linguistic with a primary focus on English
- › No/unenforced prerequisites
- › Lower-division course (effectively)
- › Multiple audiences, but largely aspiring English teachers
- › 198 respondents
  - › 184 responded to the initial survey
  - › 145 responded to the final survey
  - › 131 responded to both surveys
- › “Intro to Syntax”

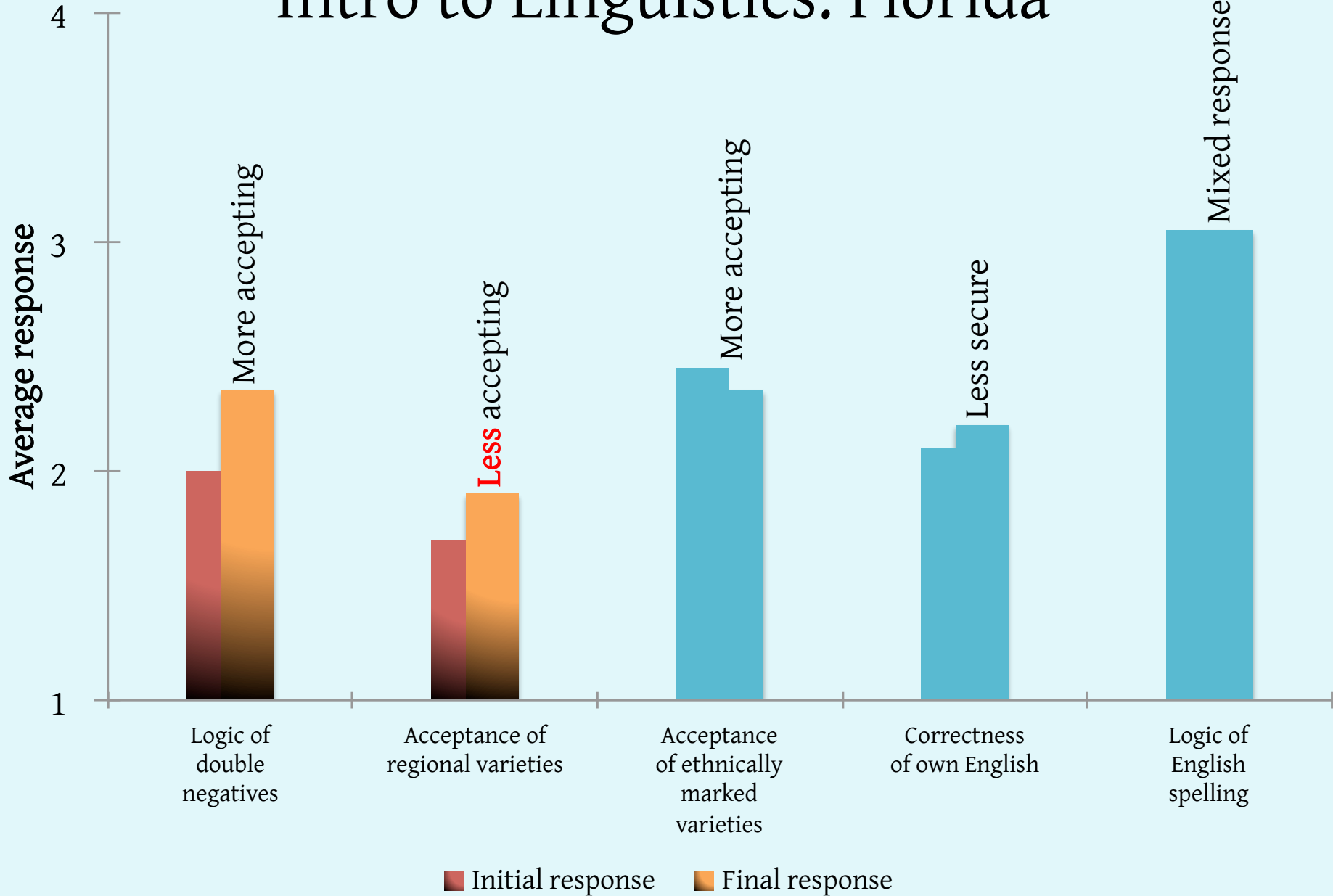
# History of the English Language

- › Overview of historical change in English
- › Covers phonetics and historical reconstruction
- › Minimal prerequisites
- › Upper-division course
- › Multiple audiences, but largely English majors
- › 115 respondents
  - › 110 responded to the initial survey
  - › 86 responded to the final survey
  - › 80 responded to both surveys
- › “History of English”

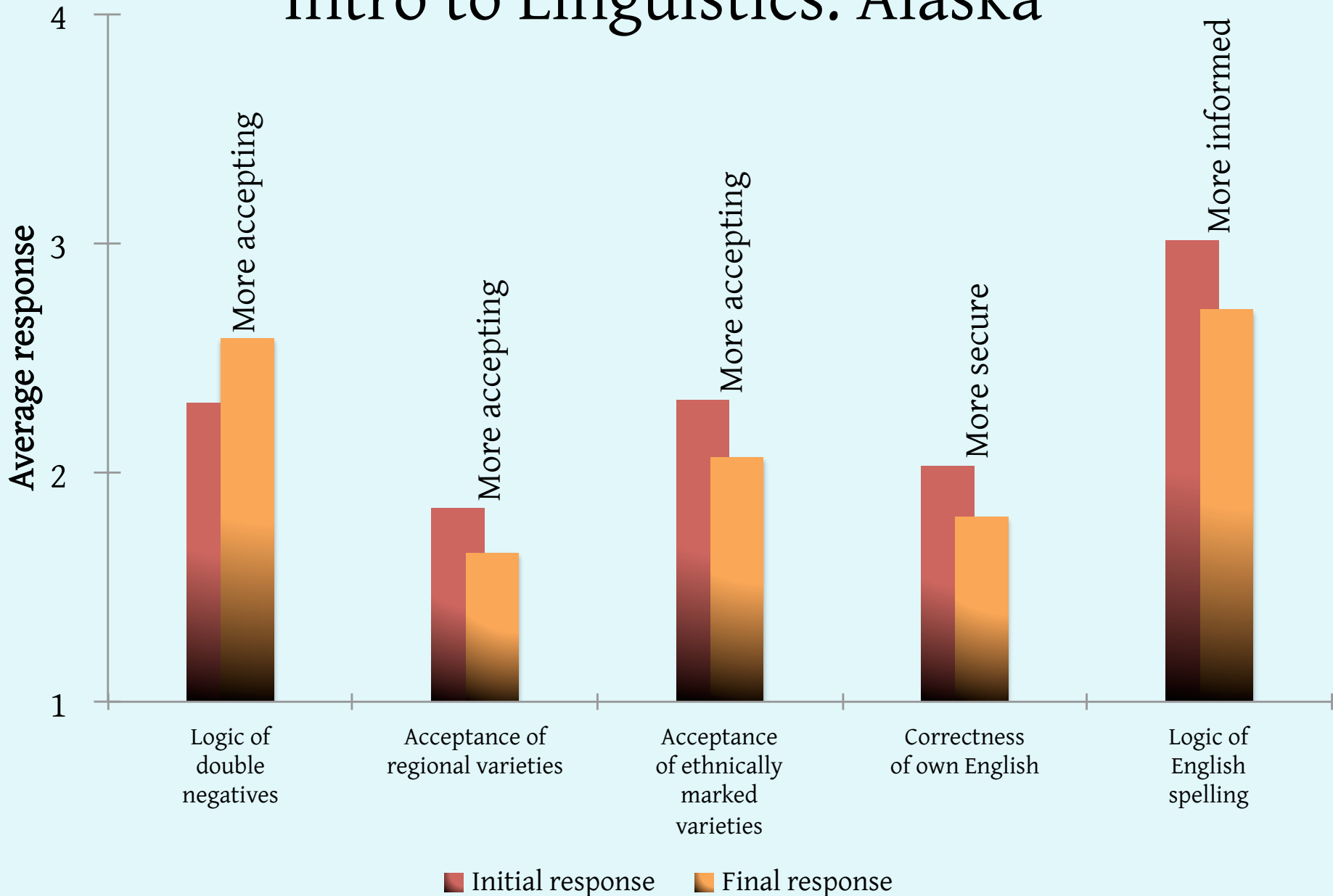
# Intro to Linguistics: Florida



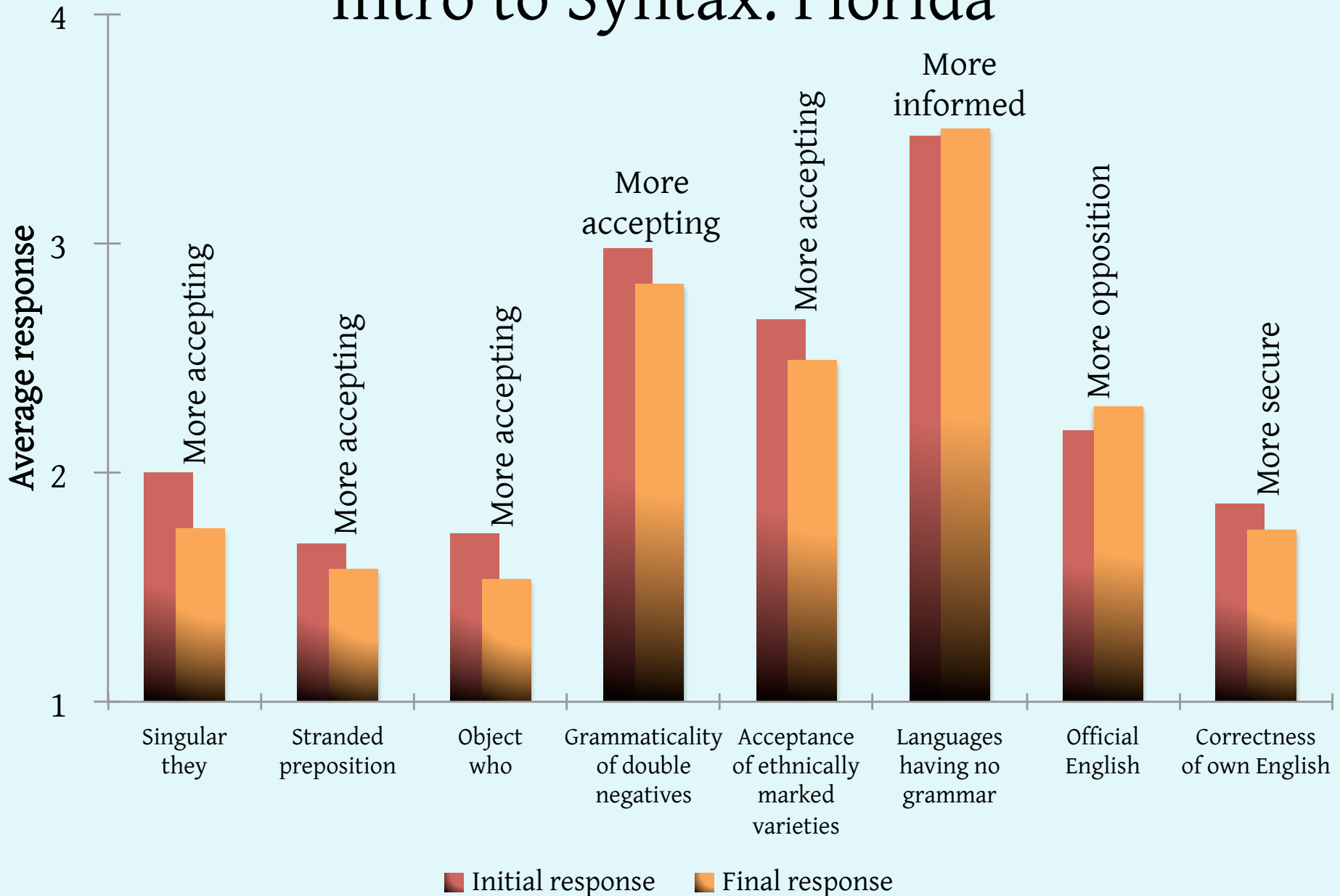
# Intro to Linguistics: Florida



# Intro to Linguistics: Alaska

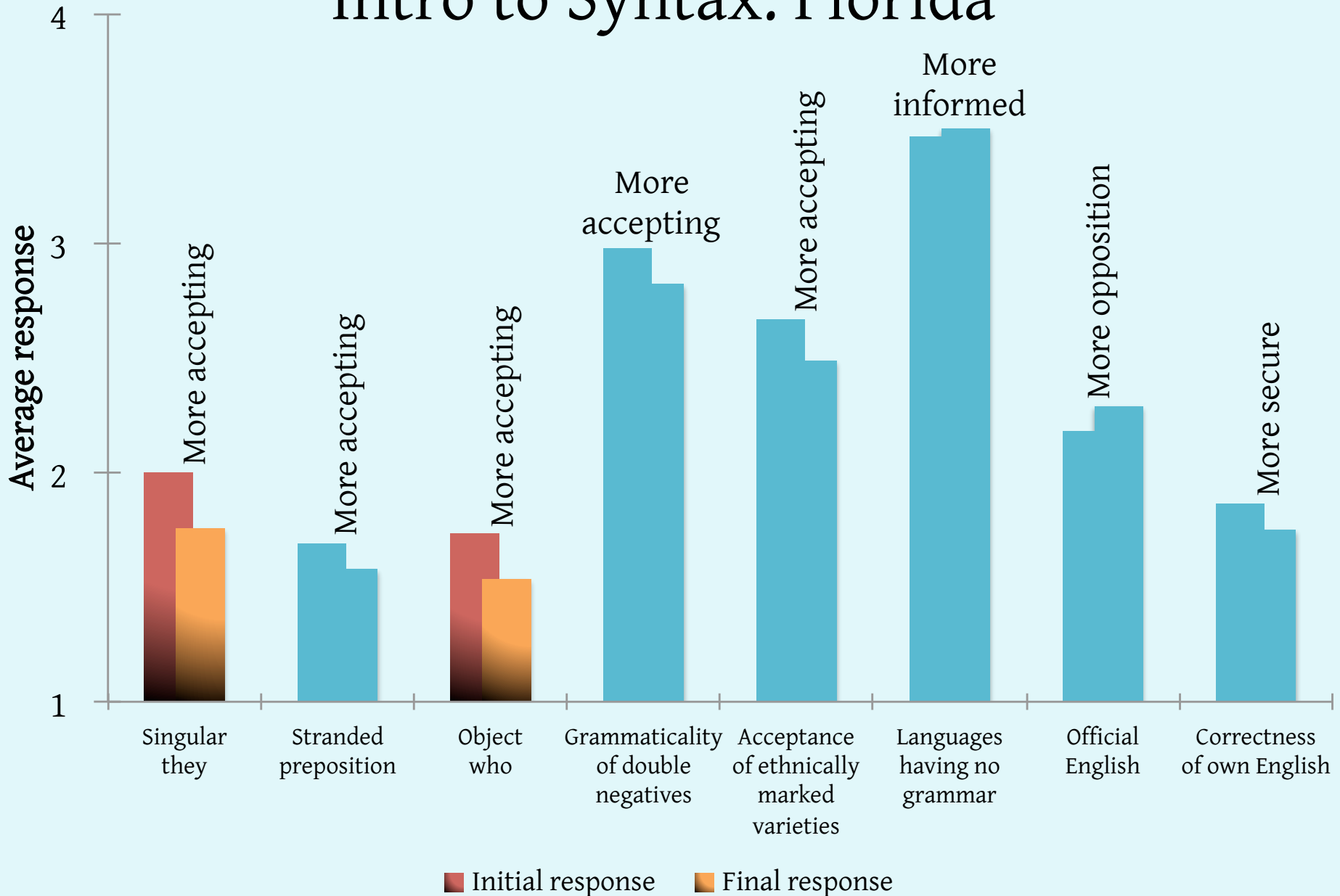


# Intro to Syntax: Florida

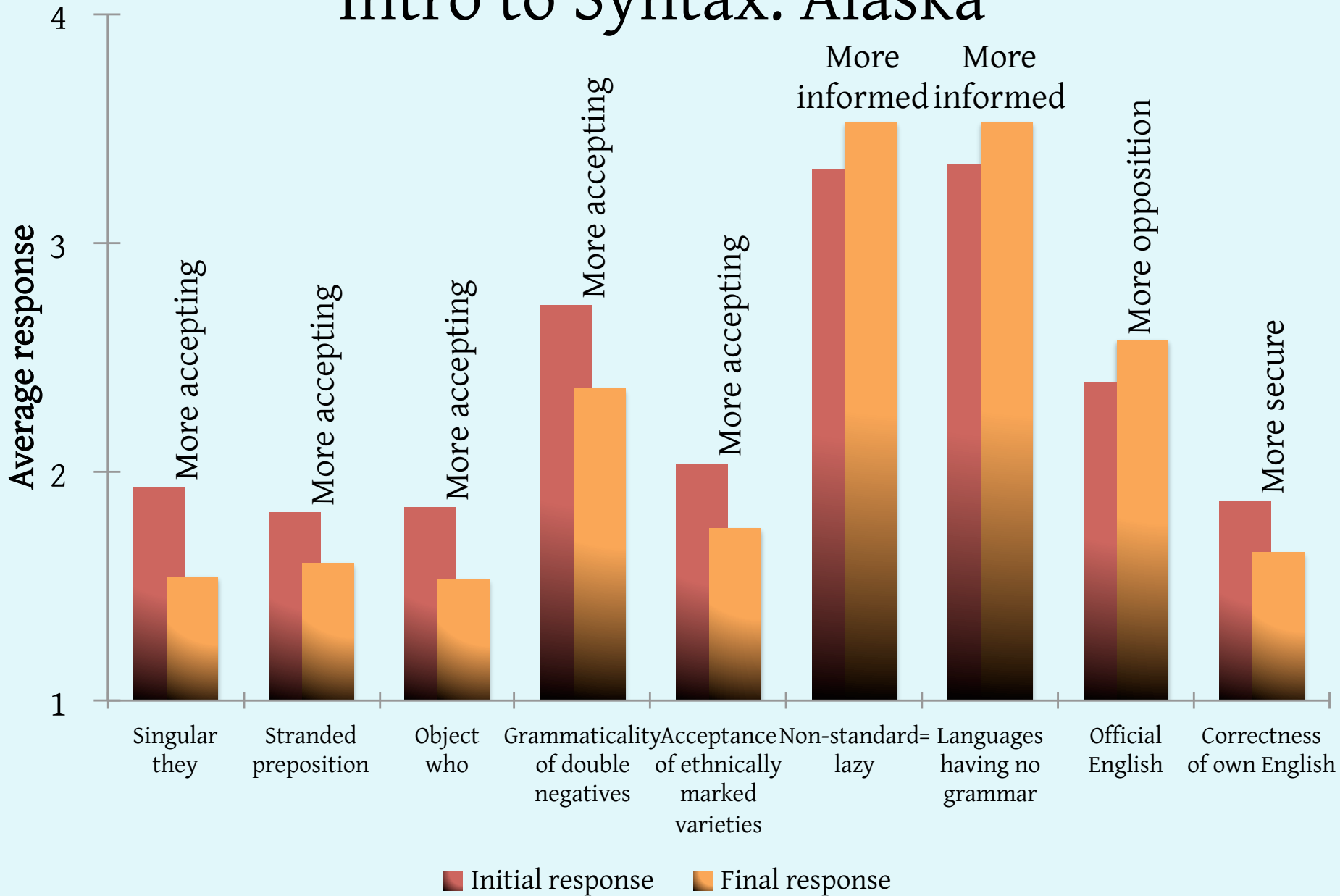




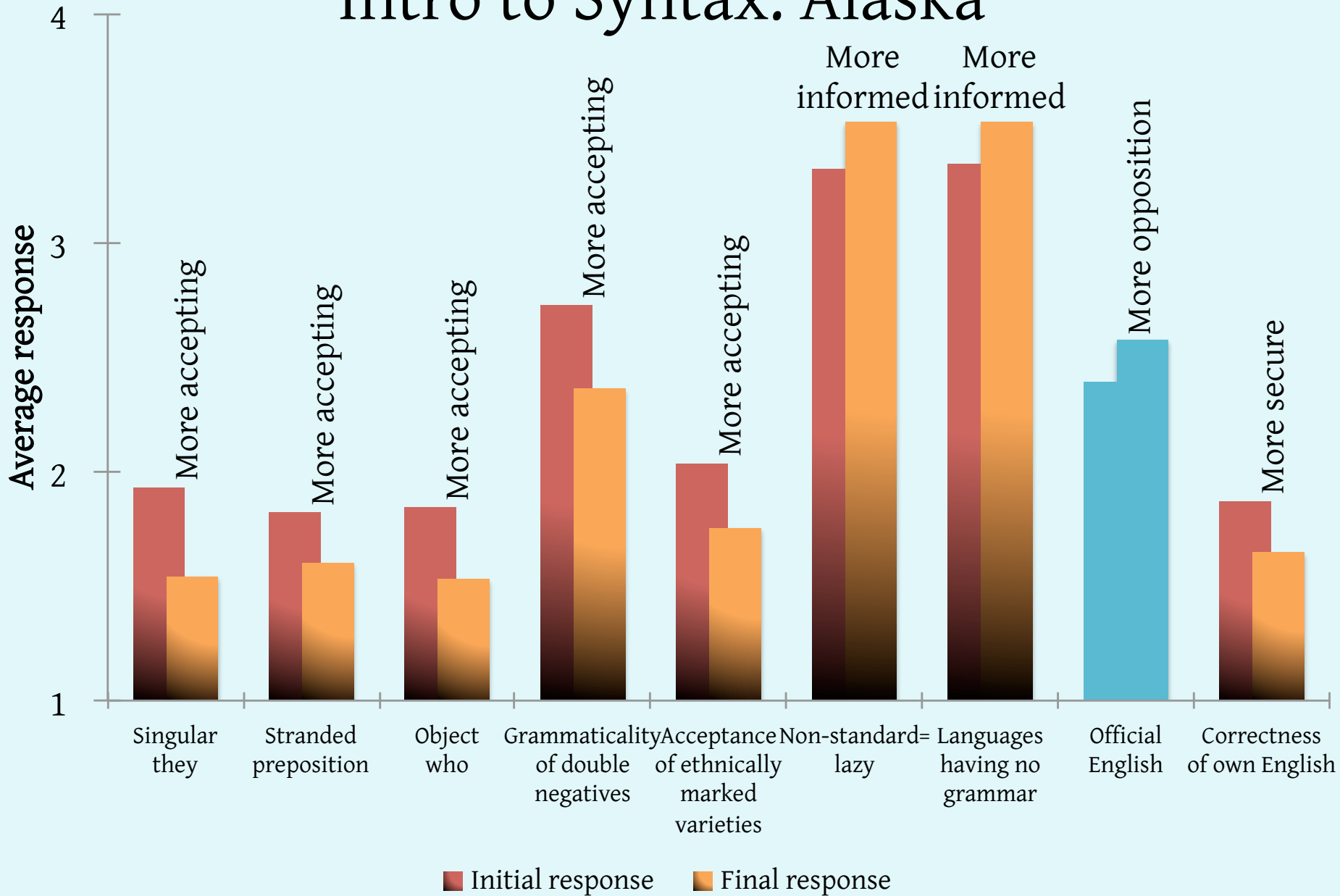
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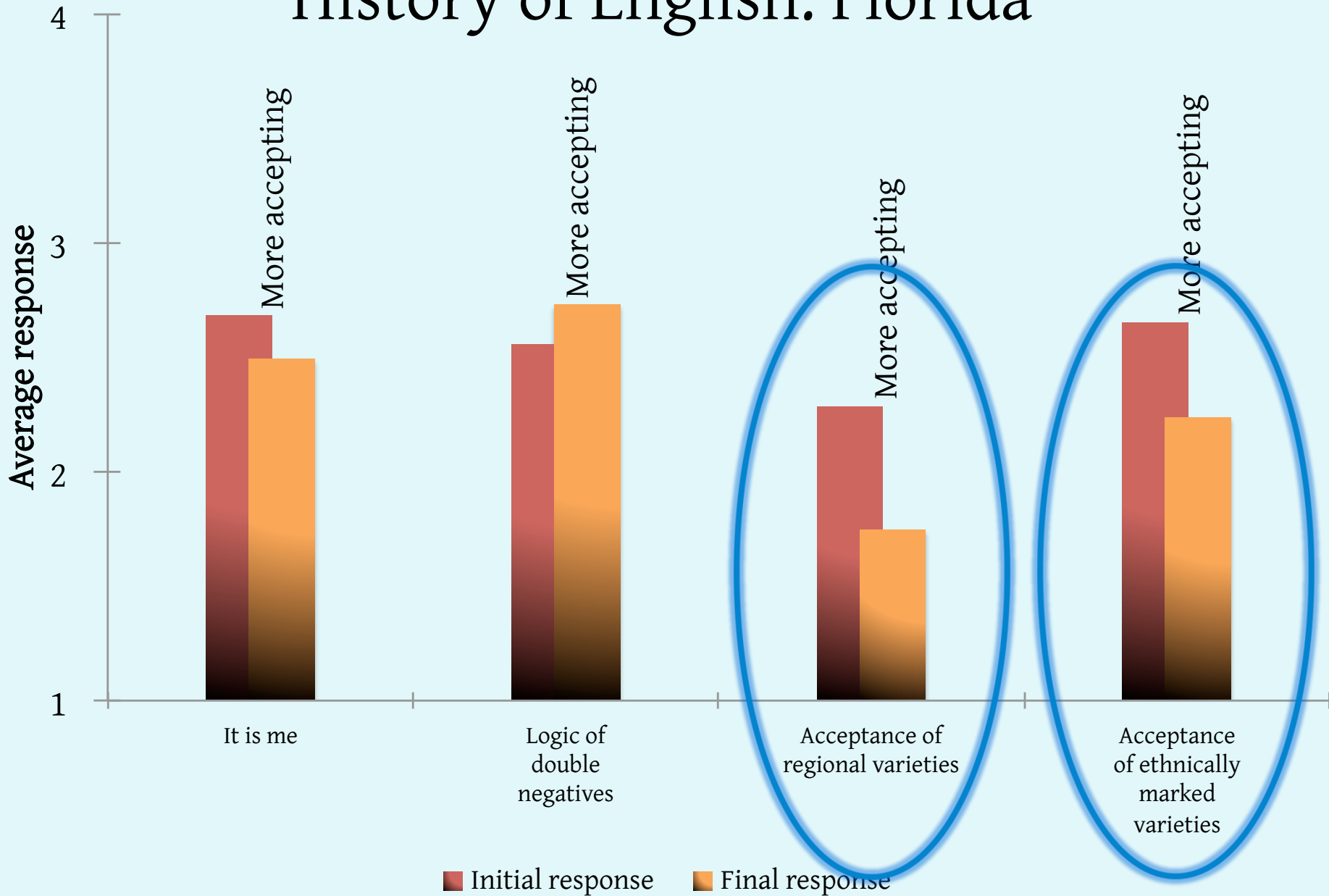
# Intro to Syntax: Alaska



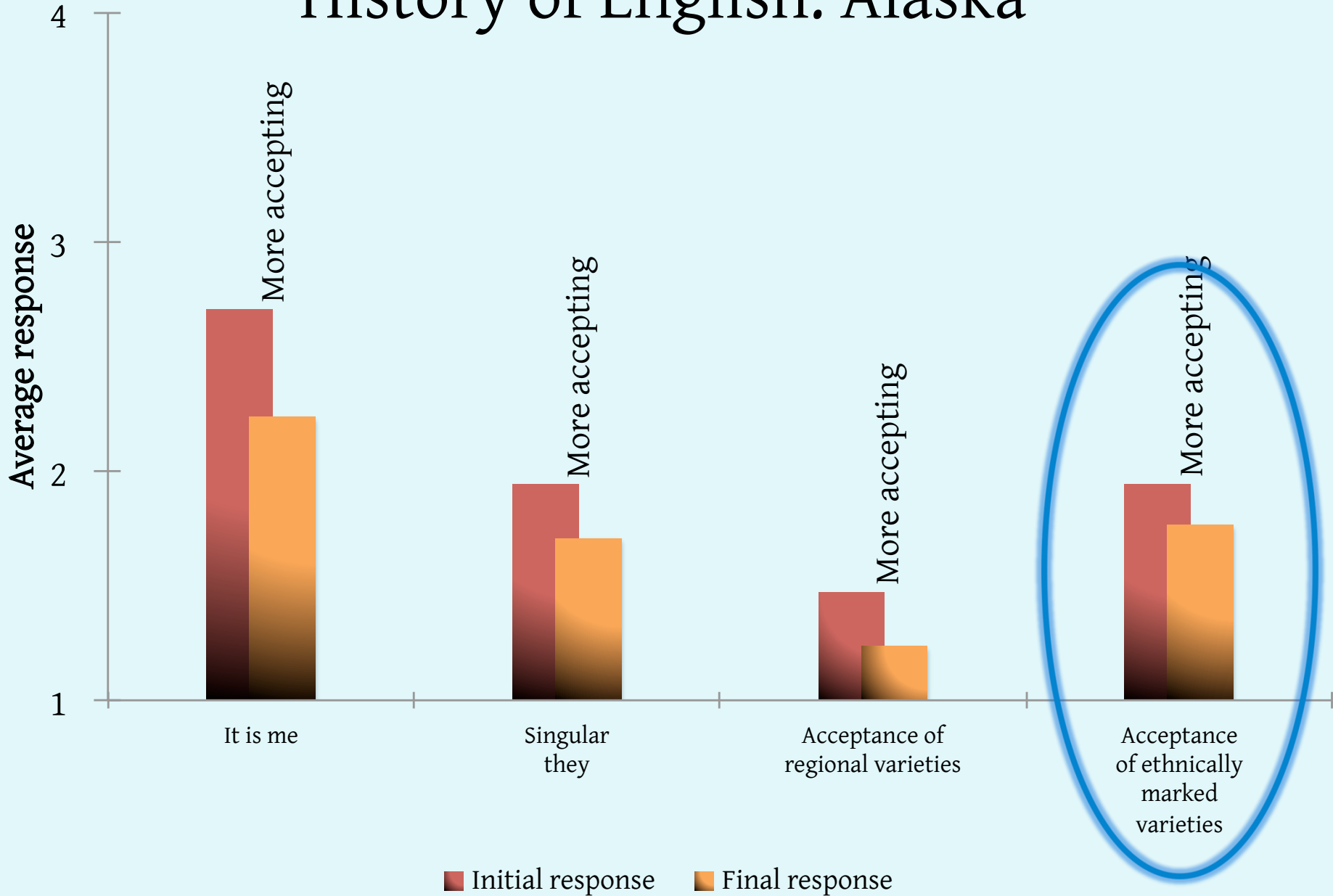
# Intro to Syntax: Alaska



# History of English: Florida



# History of English: Alaska



So what?

# So what?

- › Undergraduates' attitudes do change from coursework
  - › These changes are nearly all quite small
    - › No large-sized effects found
    - › History of English led to fewer but larger effects
  - › Changes are nearly all toward linguists' norms
- › Different attitudes are affected by different courses
  - › Nearly all courses led to acceptance of nonstandard varieties
  - › Grammaticality judgments most affected by direct instruction
    - › May be a matter of defining terms
    - › Unclear if social evaluations of specific nonstandard forms change
  - › Global attitudes may be changed more by indirect instruction

Thank you



