

## 1. THE PROBLEM

Propositions, understood as representational structures, have truth-conditions and serve as the contents of propositional attitudes conceived as mental states. How is that possible? What is responsible for the unity of the proposition?

### Dominant solution ASSERTORIC FORCE & DECOUPLING

Propositions are unified by assertoric force. In non-positing contexts, such as embedded sentences, the force is somehow cancelled or **decoupled**.

#### Objection:

Cancelling assertoric force threatens propositional unity

## 2. THE NEO-HUSSERLIAN ACCOUNT

**Inspiration:** Husserl's *Logical Investigations*

Propositions express primitive propositional intentional acts, distinguished both from nominal acts and from assertoric acts

**Problem:** lack of a positive account of the cognitive commitments involved in propositional acts

#### Proposed solution:

Propositions are neither forceless nor assertive; rather, they involve a primitive, ***sui generis* propositional force**.

This force is understood as the simulation of positive states of affairs corresponding to positive atomic propositions.

To entertain a compound proposition is to simulate all relevant constituent positive states of affairs and to represent them within a quasi-Boolean structure determined by the logical connectives, thereby reflecting the compound conditions of satisfaction.

On this account, entertaining a negated proposition involves the same commitment as entertaining the corresponding positive proposition: the commitment to representing the same positive state of affairs. This commitment is never cancelled or "decoupled", whether under negation or within complex embeddings. It always remains in play and serves as input for higher-level procedures of assertion or rejection.

**Phil-Cog Interface:** The neo-Husserlian account should differ from decoupling-based theories along a cognitively significant dimension. Is this difference empirically testable?

## 3. THE EXPERIMENT: OVERVIEW, MATERIALS & METHODS

### Participants & Procedure

- **Experimental assistance:** Filip Kolasa, Bartosz Młotkowski, Olga Tałasiewicz
- Recruited via Testable Minds, 111 participants total, 51 women, 60 men, aged 18-67
- Online study on Testable; optimized for computers/
- 8 target trials (2 per condition) + 4 training trials
- Stimuli: Sentence alone 1s, then sentence + picture for 1,5s
- Pilot testing used to calibrate stimulus duration: shorter exposure improved concentration and clarified PT<PF pattern, but very short exposure increased errors
- Incorrect responses, RT<500 ms, and RT>5000 ms excluded
- Final PT-PF comparison n=108, final NT-NF comparison n=100

Code	Sentence	Picture	Truth
PT	There is a yellow circle		True
PF	There is a yellow circle		False
NT	There is no yellow circle		True
NF	There is no yellow circle		False

### FOUR EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS:

(PT) a positive sentence verified by the stimulus  
(PF) a positive sentence falsified by the stimulus  
(NT) a negative sentence verified by the stimulus  
(NF) a negative sentence falsified by the stimulus

### DECOUPLING ACCOUNT:

Rejection will always be slower than acceptance since it requires an additional decoupling step: the initial assertion must be cancelled.

**Prediction: PT<PF and NT<NF**

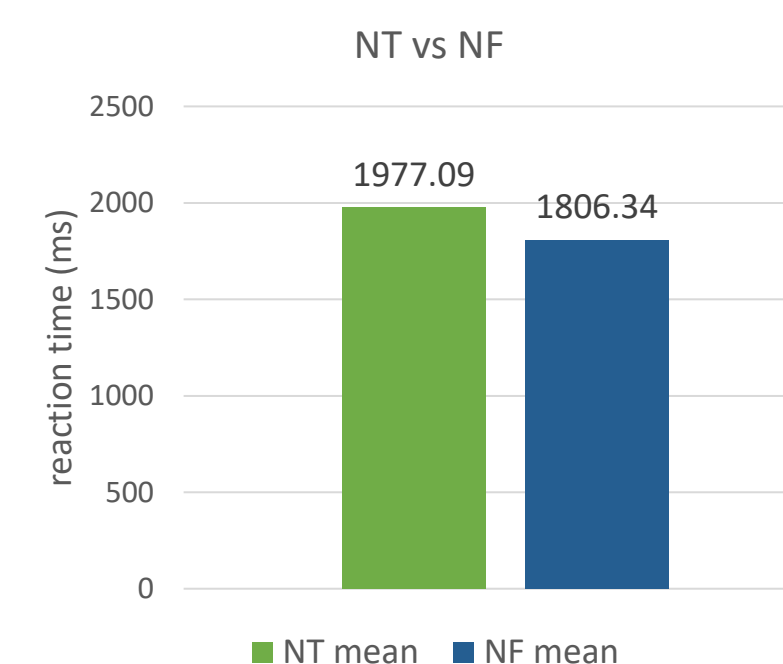
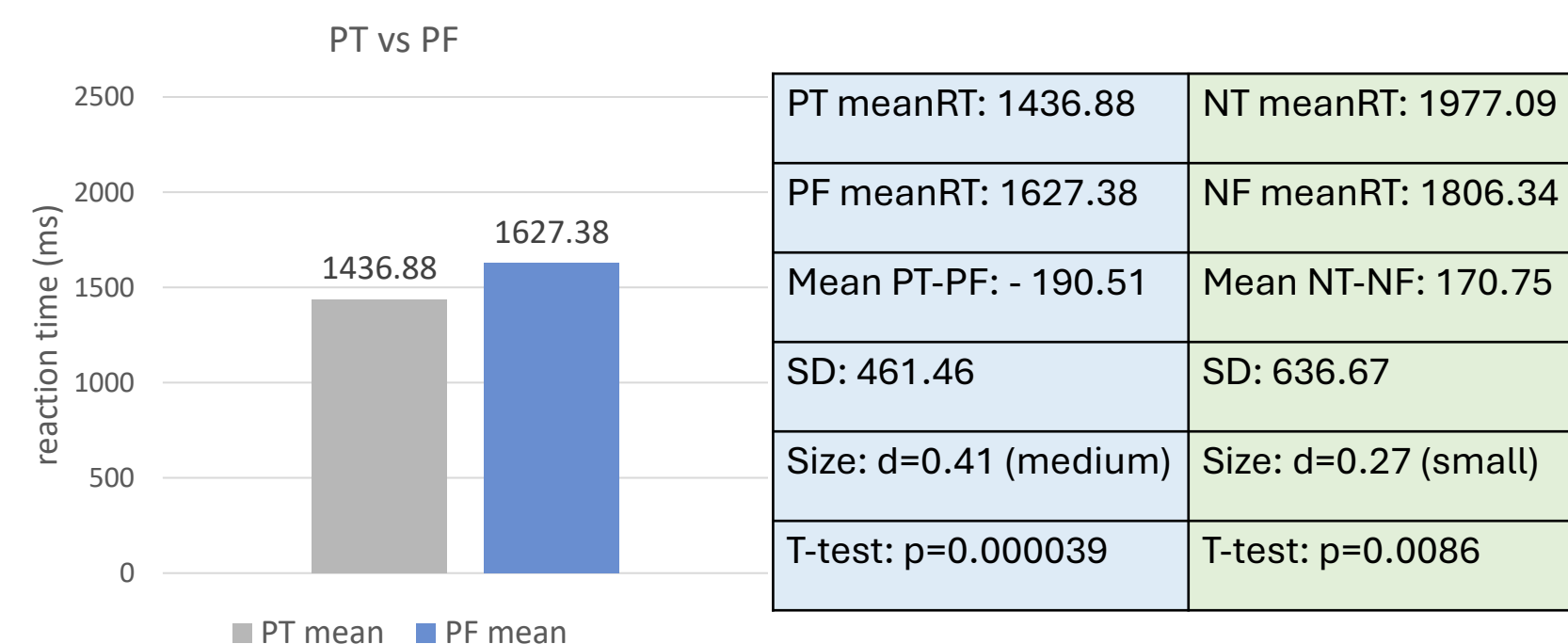
### NEO-HUSSERLIAN ACCOUNT:

Asserting a positive proposition involves recognizing a match between the world and previously generated representation. Rejecting a positive proposition requires detecting a deviation from that representation— cognitively more demanding.

Asserting a negative proposition involves recognizing a deviation from previously generated representation. Rejecting a negative proposition merely requires recognizing that the world matches the positive representation associated with the proposition.

**Prediction: PT<PF but NT>NF**

## 4. RESULTS



m.talasiewicz@uw.edu.pl

52nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology June 17–20, 2026, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

## 5. CONCLUSIONS



PT<PF as predicted on all accounts.  
Medium sized, significant effect.

NT>NF as predicted by the neo-Husserlian account.  
Small but significant effect.

The results favour the neo-Husserlian account over decoupling accounts.

**MAY THE FORCE BE WITH THE PROPOSITION!**

## 6. SELECTED REFERENCES

- Hanks, Peter. 2015. *Propositional Content*. Context and Content. Oxford university press.
- Hanks, Peter. 2021. 'The Varieties of Cancellation'. In *Force, Content and the Unity of the Proposition*, 1st edn, by Gabriele M. Mras and Michael Schmitz. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003105152-5>.
- Husserl, Edmund. 2001. *Logical Investigations*. Edited by Dermot Moran. International Library of Philosophy. Routledge.
- Leśniewski, Stanisław. 1991. *Collected Works*. Edited by Stanisław J. Surma, Jan T. J. Srzednicki, and D. I. Barnett. Kluwer academic publ.
- Recanati, François. 2019. 'Force Cancellation'. *Synthese* 196 (4): 1403–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-016-1223-9>.
- Recanati, François. 2022. 'Understanding Force Cancellation'. *Inquiry*, May 21, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2075920>.
- Reiland, Indrek. 2019. 'Predication and the Frege–Geach Problem'. *Philosophical Studies* 176 (1): 141–59.
- Sheridan, Martin R., and Kenneth A. Flowers. 2010. 'Reaction Times and Deception - the Lying Constant'. *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 2 (2): p41. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijps.v2n2p41>.
- Soames, Scott. 2014. 'Cognitive Propositions'. In *New Thinking about Propositions*, by Jeffrey C. King, Scott Soames, and Jeffrey Speaks. Oxford University Press.
- Tałasiewicz, Mieszko. 2010. *Philosophy of Syntax. Foundational Topics*. Springer, Dordrecht Heidelberg.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my experimental team: Filip & Bartek, my students, and my daughter Olga. Thanks also to Kasia Kuś, head of Kognilab, and to Justyna Grudzińska-Zawadowska, vice-dean of the Faculty, for their encouragement and help.

project page at Kognilab

