

10 November



Léargas Research Forum 2020

The Impact & Experience
of European Programmes in Ireland



www.leargas.ie



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Léargas Research Forum 2020



Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Erasmus+ experience of students and staff
in Irish HEIs

Dr Magdalena Staniek, Researcher





Objectives of this study

- Main: to examine the effects of Erasmus+ participation on students and staff in Irish HEIs
- Secondary: to identify drivers and barriers to participation



Contributions of this study

- Theoretical – scholarship
- Methodological – natural language processing / computational linguistics
- Empirical – data base



Data and method (I)

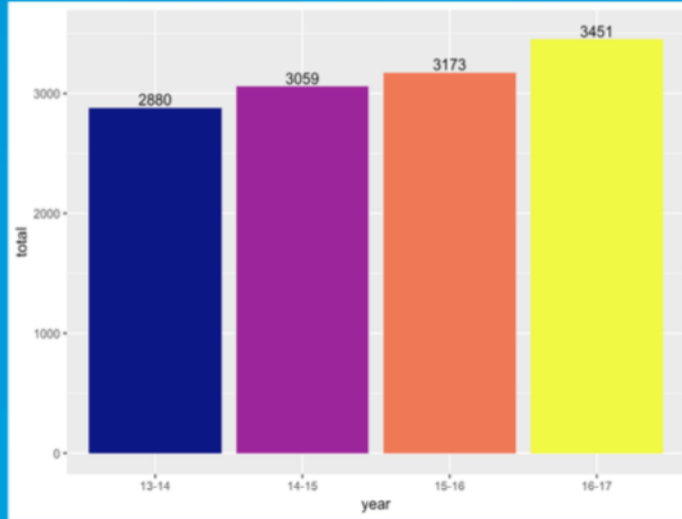
- Focus groups & semi-structured interviews
- April 2017- June 2018
- 86 individuals:
 - 13 HEIs (varying region, size, profile)
 - 53 students (35 – E;18 – NE)
 - 18 staff (11–E;7–NE)
 - 15 IOs



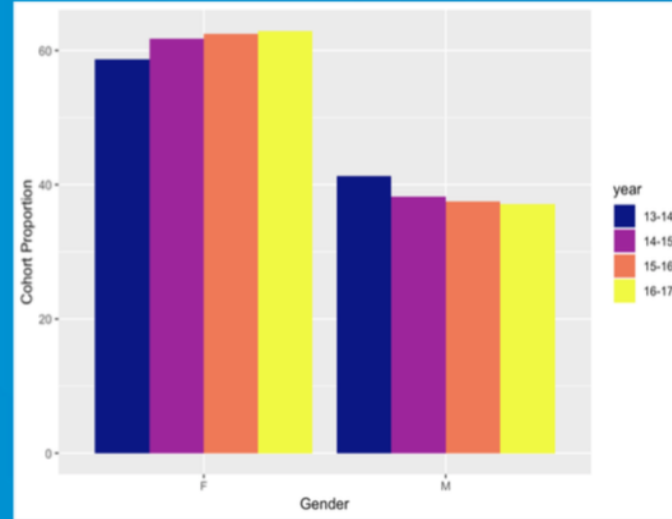
Data and Method (II)

- Profile: descriptive & inferential statistics (quant)
Content: theoretical thematic analysis (qual)
- Students & staff - 3 themes; 5 sub-themes
- IOs – 4 themes
- Natural Language Processing: text mining, word clouds, sentiment analysis, clustering, regression analysis (quant-qual)
- All analysis done in R version 3.5.1

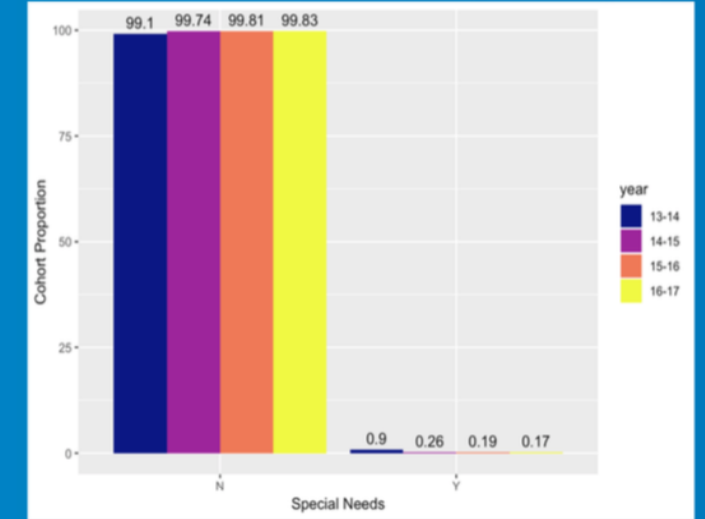
Total outgoing



Gender

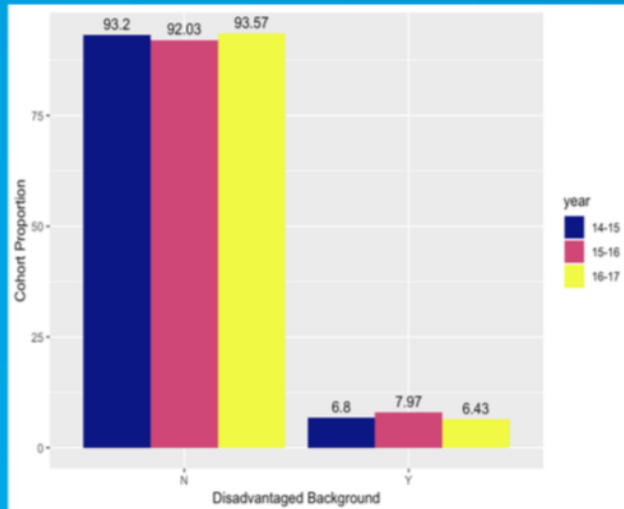


Special needs

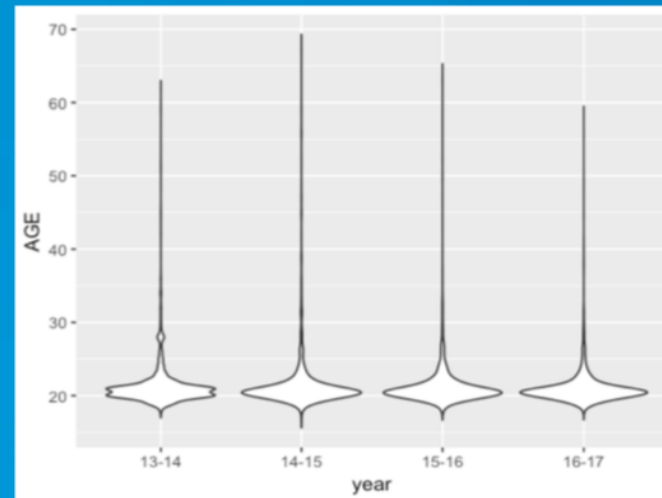


Participants' profile – students

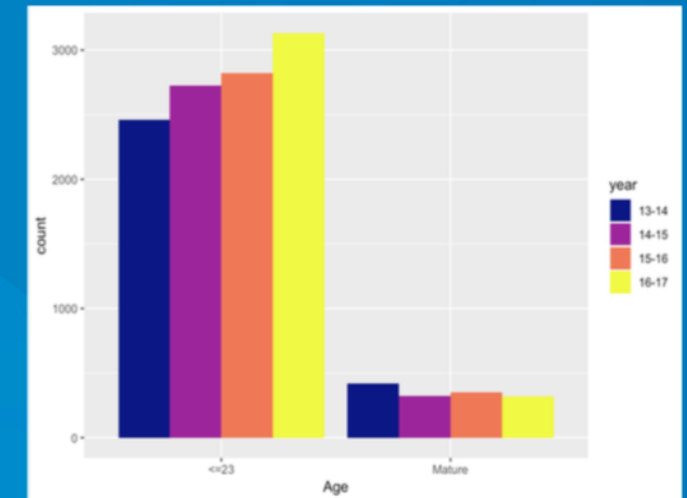
Disadvantaged background



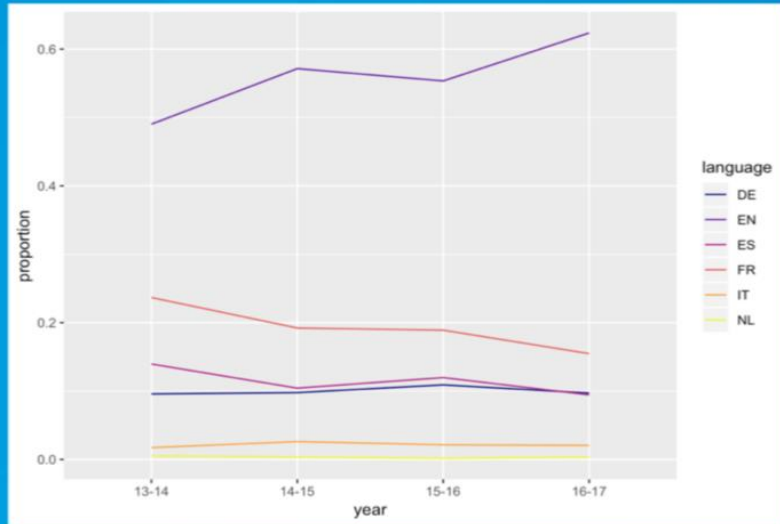
Age



Mature participants



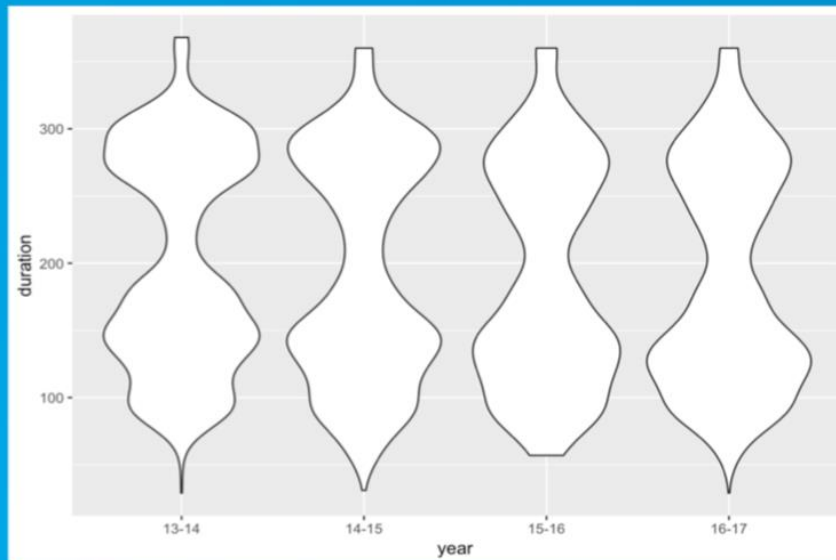
Language of instruction



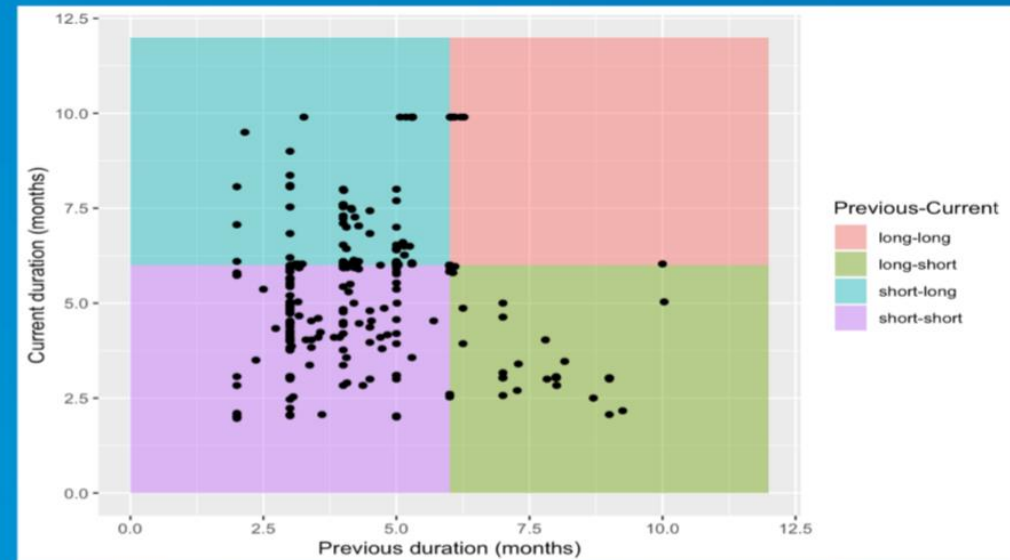
Top destinations

	FR	ES	DE	UK	NL	BE	IT	SE	AT	CZ
13-14	624	367	280	126	136	72	69	93	55	48
14-15	659	507	415	418	215	116	110	112	87	50
15-16	676	566	492	404	237	113	98	91	84	61
16-17	719	580	570	389	254	121	127	99	89	74

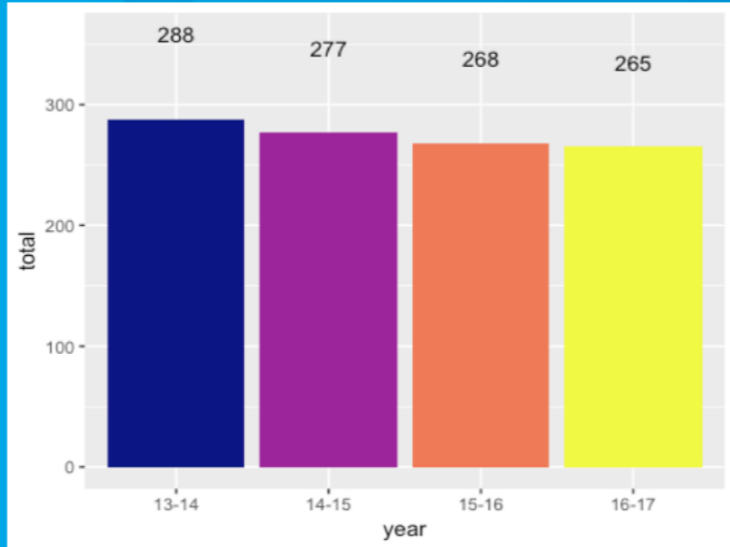
Duration (days)



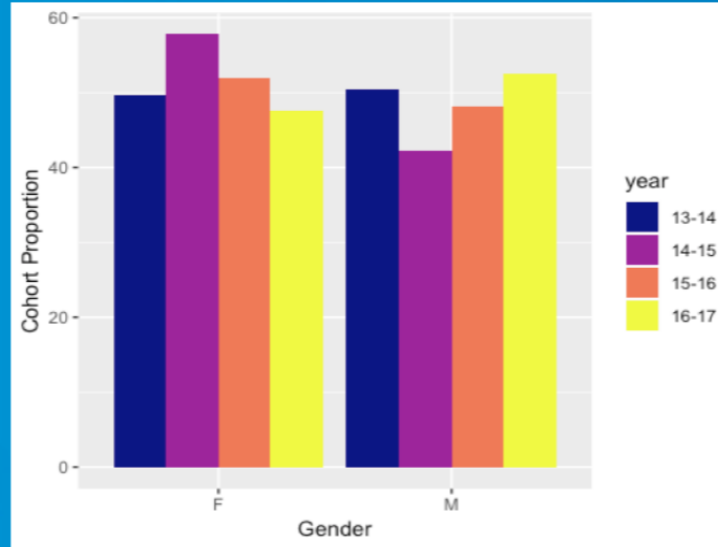
Duration: current vs. previous



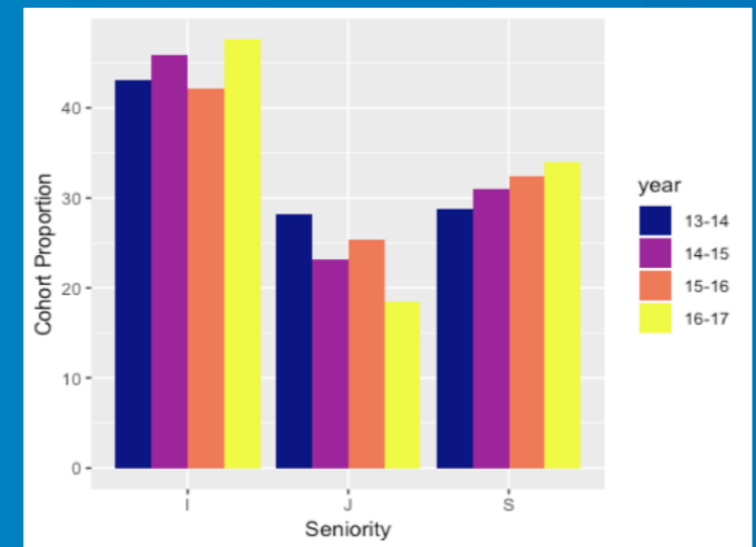
Total outgoing



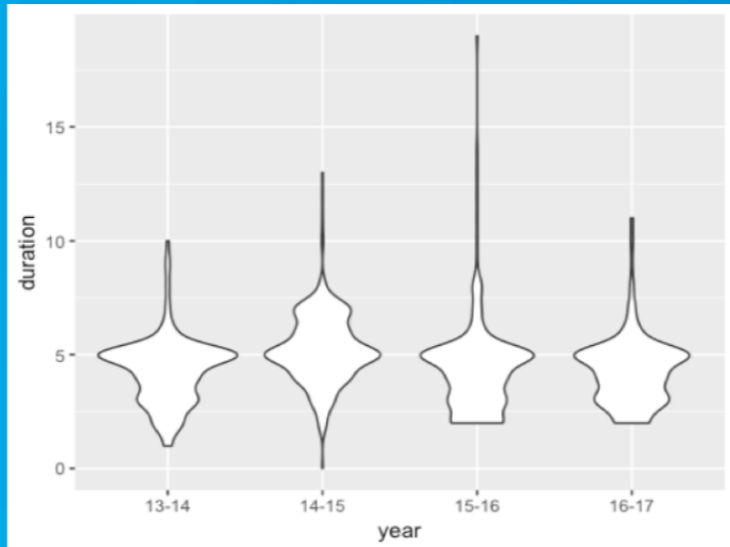
Gender



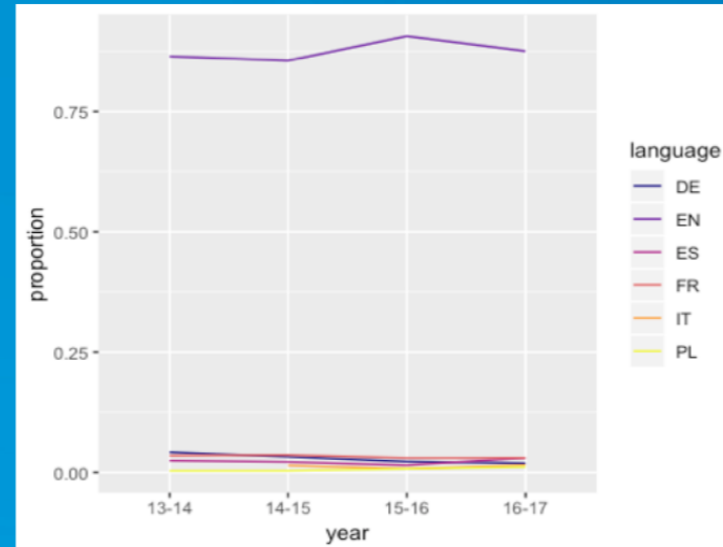
Seniority status



Duration (days)



Language of instruction



Participants' profile

Staff



Interview topics (staff & students)

Main:

- European identity (E & NE)
- Foreign language (E & NE)
- Impact of going (E) / not going (NE)

Sub-topics:

- Prior international exposure (E & NE)
- Interaction with people while abroad (E & NE)
- Reasons for going (E) / not going (NE)
- Knowledge about Erasmus+ mobilities (NE)
- Problems & challenges (E)

Erasmus

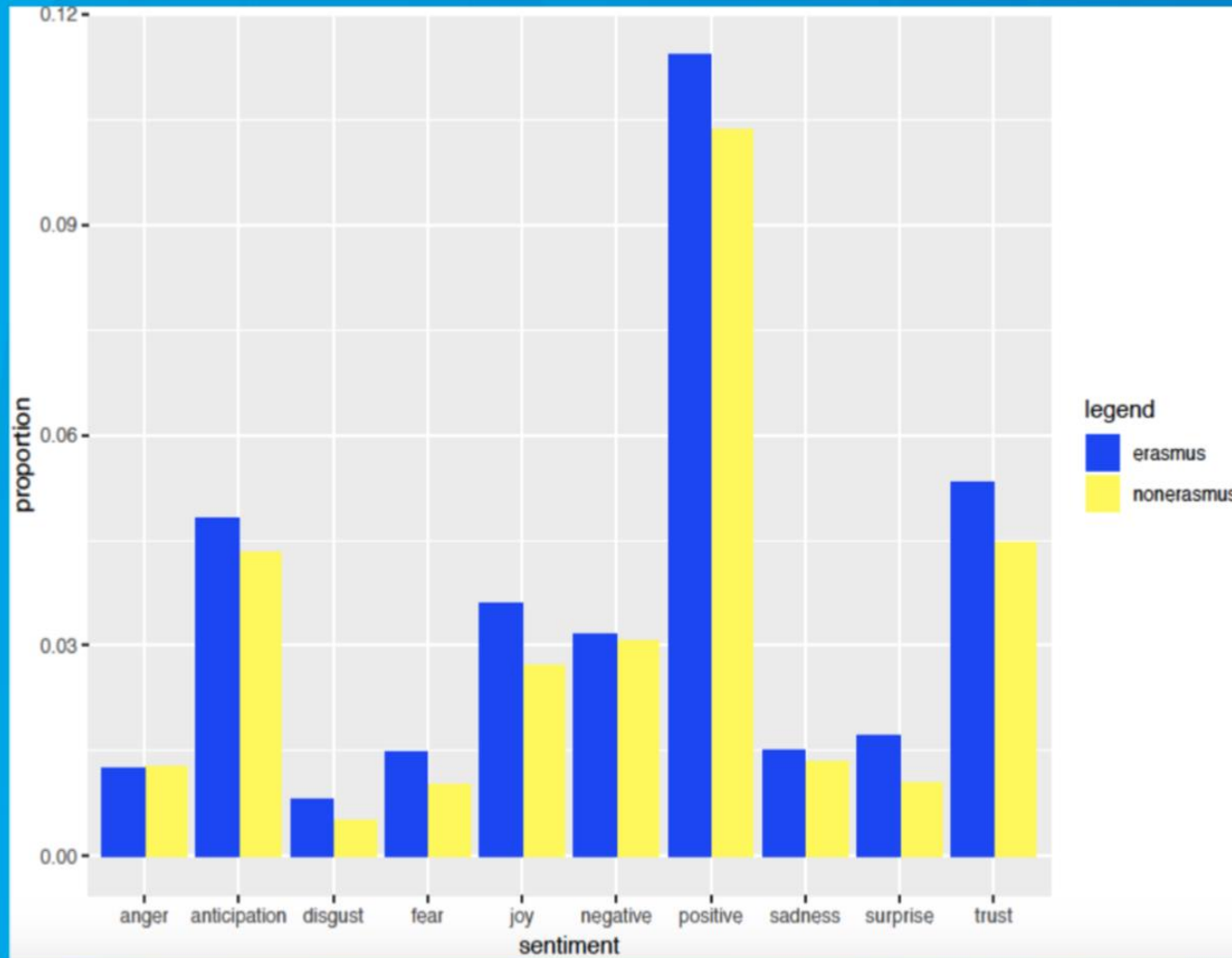


Non-Erasmus



Results: Sentiment Polarity among Students

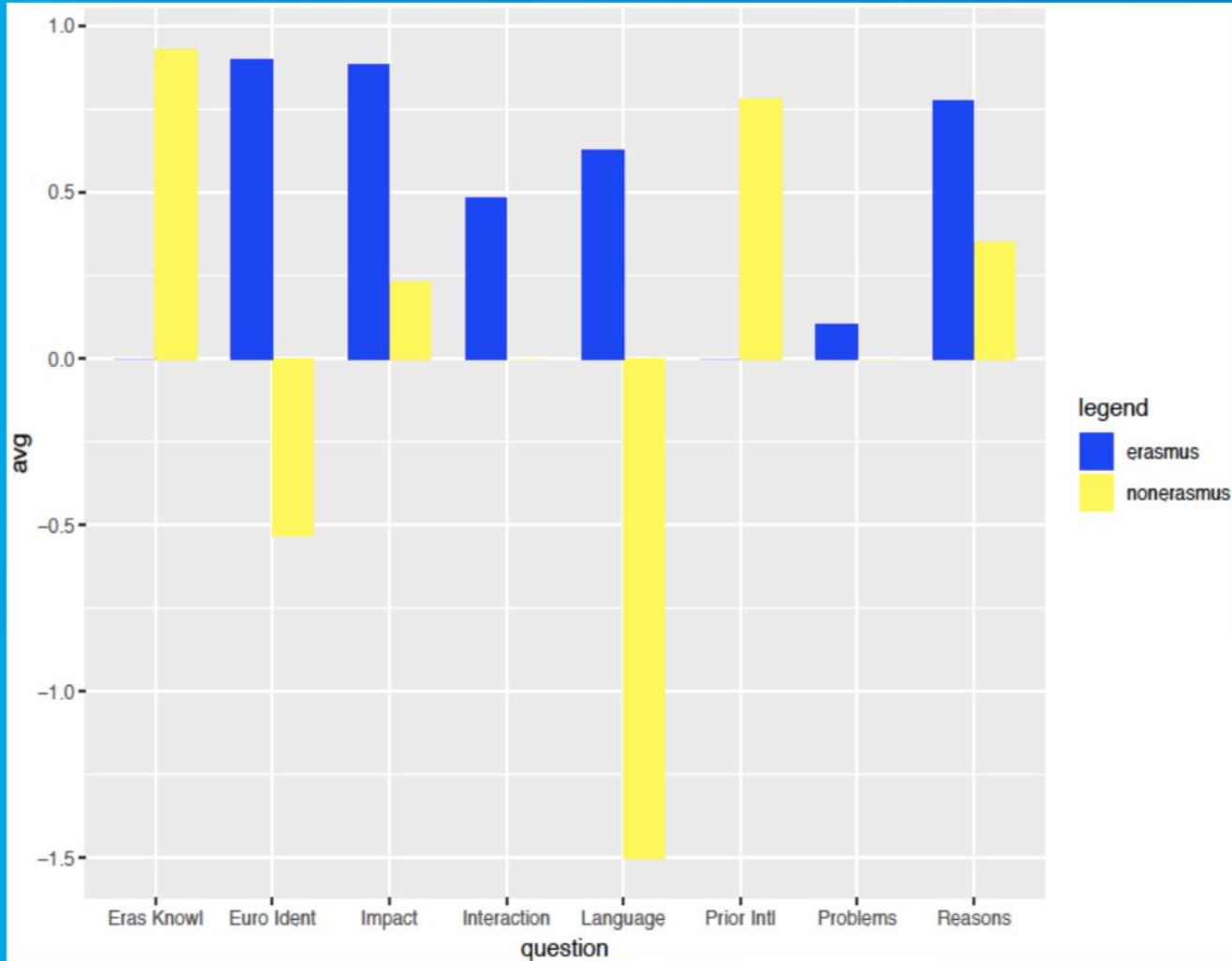
Sentiment affinity: E – blue, NE - yellow



Erasmus participants tend to use more emotive language overall than non-participants. Across all responses, Erasmus participants express more positivity, trust, joy, anticipation, and surprise; however, they also express more sadness and disgust - these feelings are associated with some negative Erasmus experiences and 'post-Erasmus depression.'

Results: Emotional Loading among Students (cumulative)

Sentiment affinity: E – blue, NE - yellow



Emotional loading per topic shows the most pronounced differences in the 'language' and 'European identity' responses: non-participants are decidedly more negative in their knowledge of and attitude toward foreign languages and European identity. They are also considerably less positive about the consequences / impact of not going on Erasmus mobility than Erasmus participants are about the impact of going on Erasmus mobility. Nb. non-participants feel highly positive about their prior international exposure and knowledge about the Erasmus programme, while Erasmus participants feel decidedly more positive about interaction with people from the host countries.

Results: Emotional loading among Students (topical)



Erasmus

“Before I went on Erasmus, I only considered myself Irish, now I consider myself as EU.”

“Probably less [European] because we’re an island.”

“I do feel more European but when I went on Erasmus I was treated more Irish than I feel here. You’re representing your culture more when you’re away.”

“For me, it’s always Irish first.”



Non-Erasmus

“I don’t feel like a European citizen, I’m an Irish citizen”

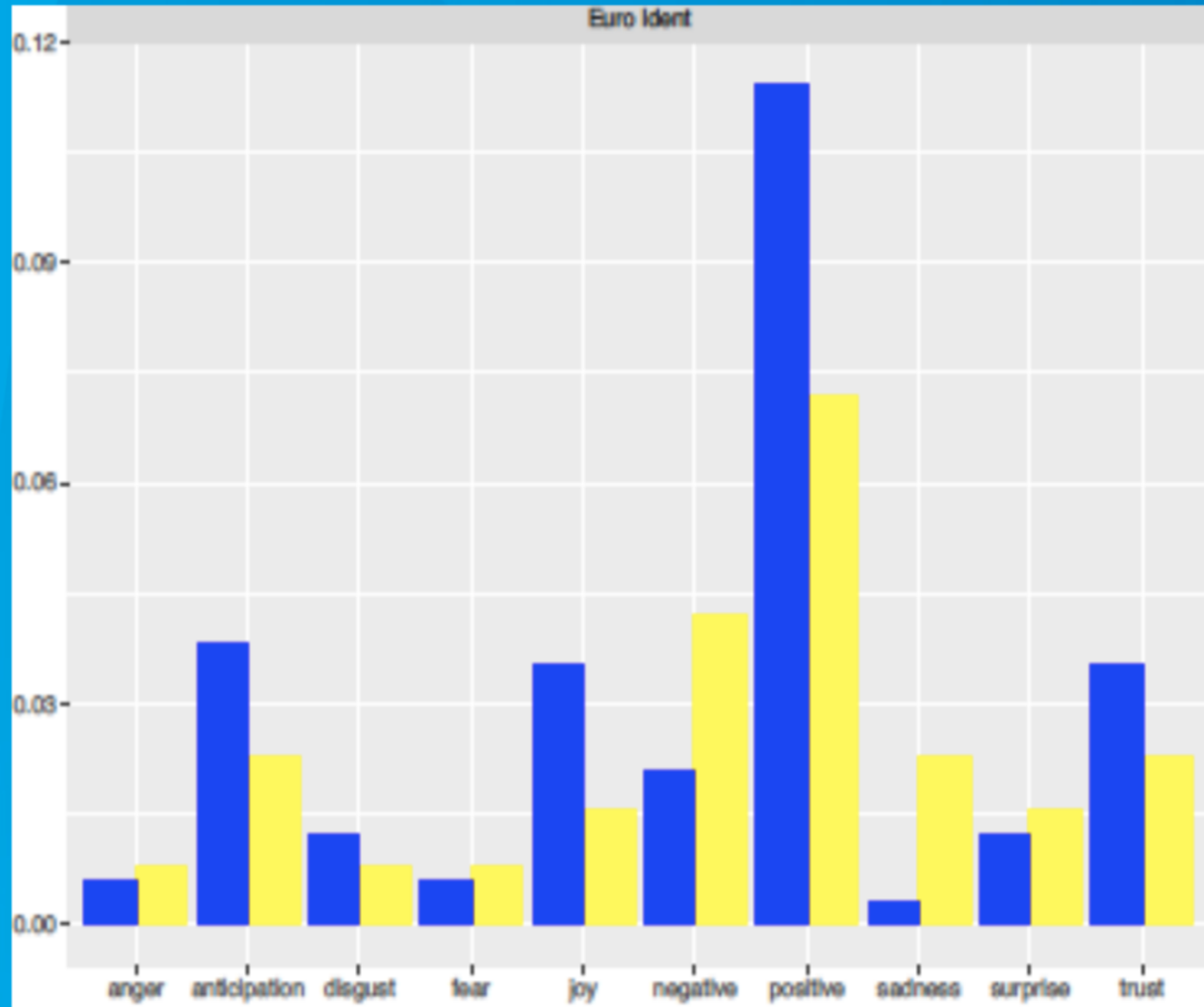
“I think being an island makes it a bit more defined for us. I think also being English speaking, we’re kind of between two worlds. We feel closer to America than most Europeans.”

“I would have always said, more Irish than European, but in the wake of Brexit, I feel more European (...) I definitely feel stronger ties to Europe than I did before.”

“I generally define myself as quite international (...) I consider myself to be a world citizen.”

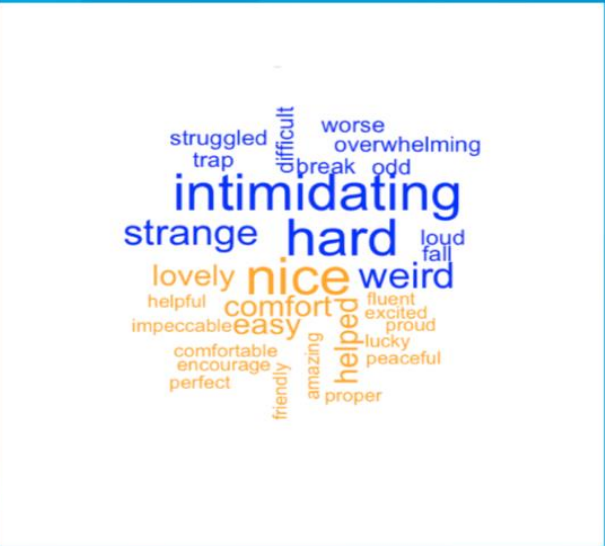
Results: Theme 1 European Identity among Students

Sentiment affinity: E – blue, NE - yellow



Erasmus participants are significantly more positive about their European identity and significantly less negative than non-participants. Their responses also contain more feelings of trust, joy and anticipation, whereas non-participants' responses contained more feelings of sadness, and marginally more surprise, fear, and anger.

Results: Theme 1 European Identity among Students



Erasmus

“I found it really intimidating doing proper German lectures with all other German students (...) the two of us [Erasmus students] sitting in a literature seminar, it was really intimidating.”

“I didn’t learn any [French] over there. I was living with other Irish people and few other nationalities but they all spoke English with us.”

“In Amsterdam everybody spoke English so it was hard to learn any Dutch at all.”

”I can speak three languages: Malay, Chinese, and English and I am studying Spanish (...) people in the shop only spoke Spanish so it was hard but a good experience.”



Non-Erasmus

“I think when push came to shove, I would be intellectually too lazy to pursue a language.”

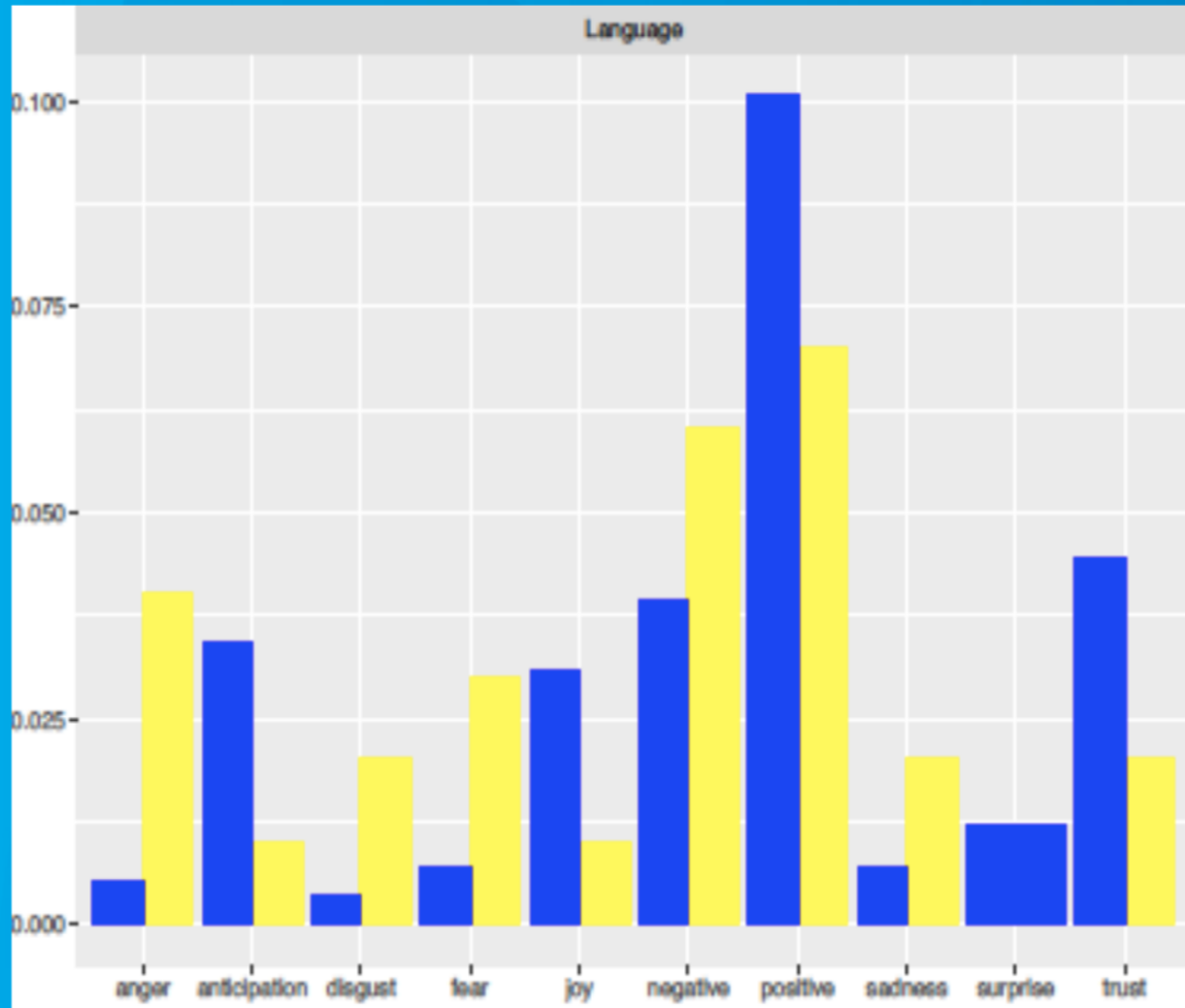
“Since I can’t do Erasmus in my Masters, I didn’t think it was necessary [to learn a foreign language] and I just need English because I can go to America, Australia, or Canada.”

“I have reasonable Spanish, some Dutch, some French, small smattering of Polish.”

“I did business German (...) I’d know how to write a letter as opposed to talk to someone in a pub.”

Results Theme 2 Foreign Languages among Students

Sentiment affinity: E – blue, NE - yellow



Erasmus participants are decidedly more positive in their responses about their knowledge of and attitude toward foreign languages, while non-participants are decidedly more negative. Feelings of joy, trust and anticipation is also more pronounced among Erasmus participants than non-participants, while feelings of sadness, fear, disgust, and anger are more pronounced among non-participants.

Results Theme 2 Foreign Languages among Students

Erasmus



"I loved it, I loved every minute of it, I'd definitely do it again (...) It kind of sets you up for future and you know you are going to manage on your own."

"I live at home, so it's like jumping into the deep end (...) Before you go, it seems scary, but afterwards, you think 'why did I even debate the option.'"

"I'm actually considering doing Masters abroad since the Erasmus programme. I think it's better done abroad."

"I didn't really know how well it would look on my CV until I got a job interview and they rang me back and said 'oh, you're just back from Italy?' and I was shocked because straight away it affected my work."

"I feel more comfortable around people from different cultures (...) I got used to talking to people who don't speak the same language as me so now I am more confident to try to talk to anyone."

Non-Erasmus



"I think I've definitely had exposure to other cultures so I really don't feel like I've missed out (...) and I don't have the money to go away and not work."

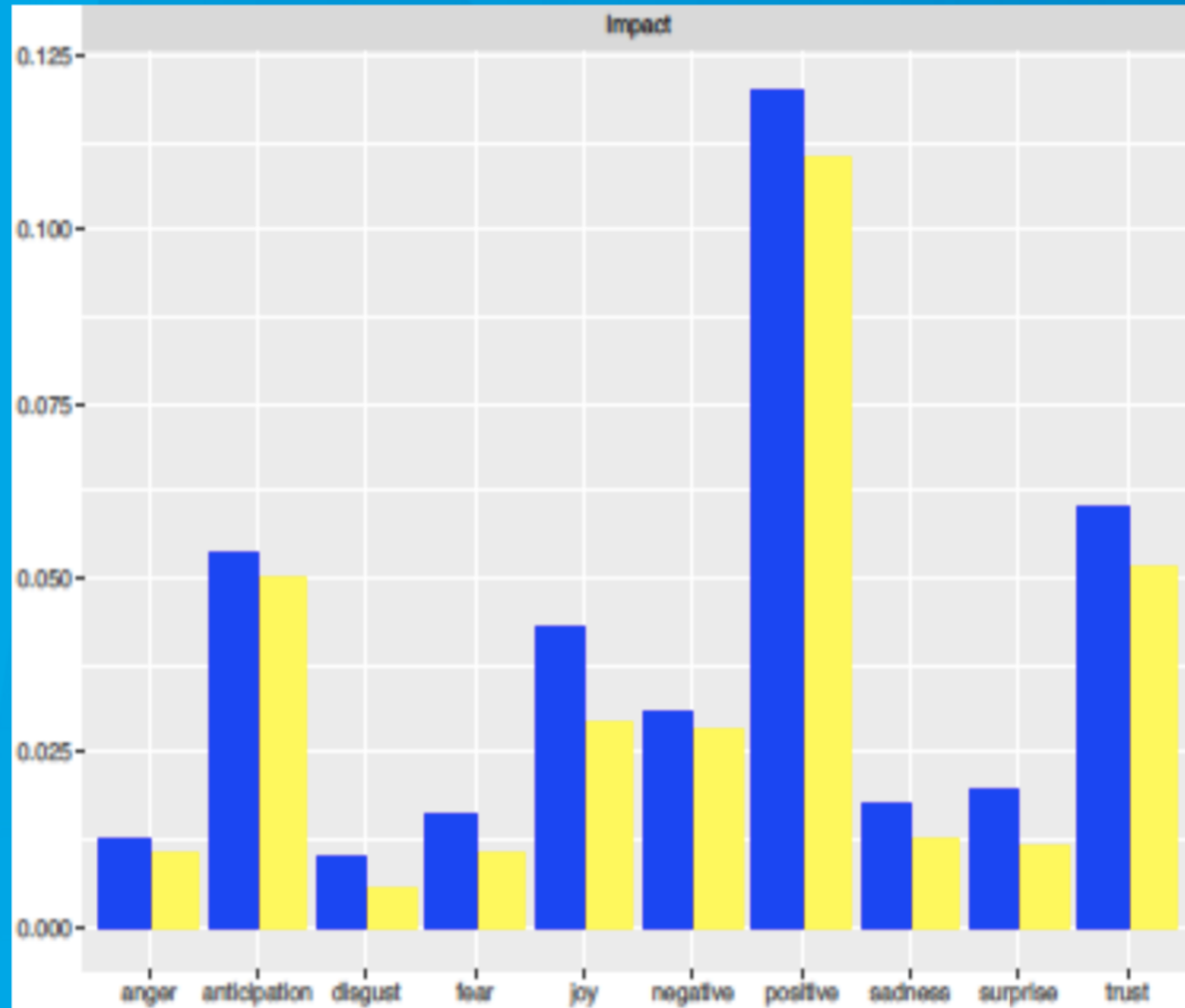
"Working is the big thing. Erasmus was never an idea, it made no economic sense."

"I really would have liked to have gone (...) I think it would have been good for me to get a bit more independent."

"I do feel like I missed out a little bit but not as far as my degree. It wasn't part of my degree and it just wasn't the right time to take a year out."

Results Theme 3 Overall Impact among Students

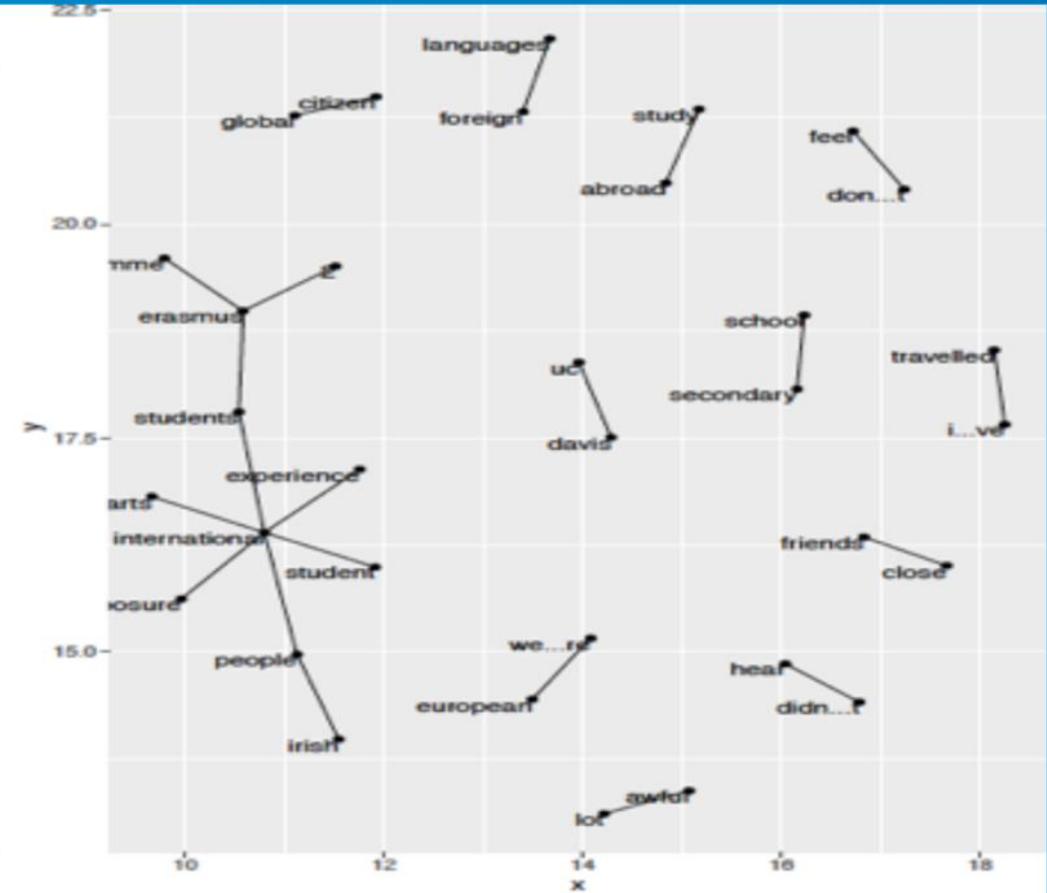
Sentiment affinity: E – blue, NE - yellow



Erasmus participants tend to use more emphatic language in all emotion categories. Most notably, their responses about the impact of Erasmus mobility on their personal development, career prospects, etc., contain more positivity, joy, surprise, anticipation, and trust than the responses of non-participants about the impact of not going on Erasmus. But Erasmus participants also express marginally more negative emotions and anger, sadness, fear, and disgust than non-participants. However, these negative sentiments are proportionally far smaller than positive sentiments, and in the case of Erasmus participants they are related to financial struggles, worries about fitting back in, missing out on course content, and difficulties finding a job upon return.

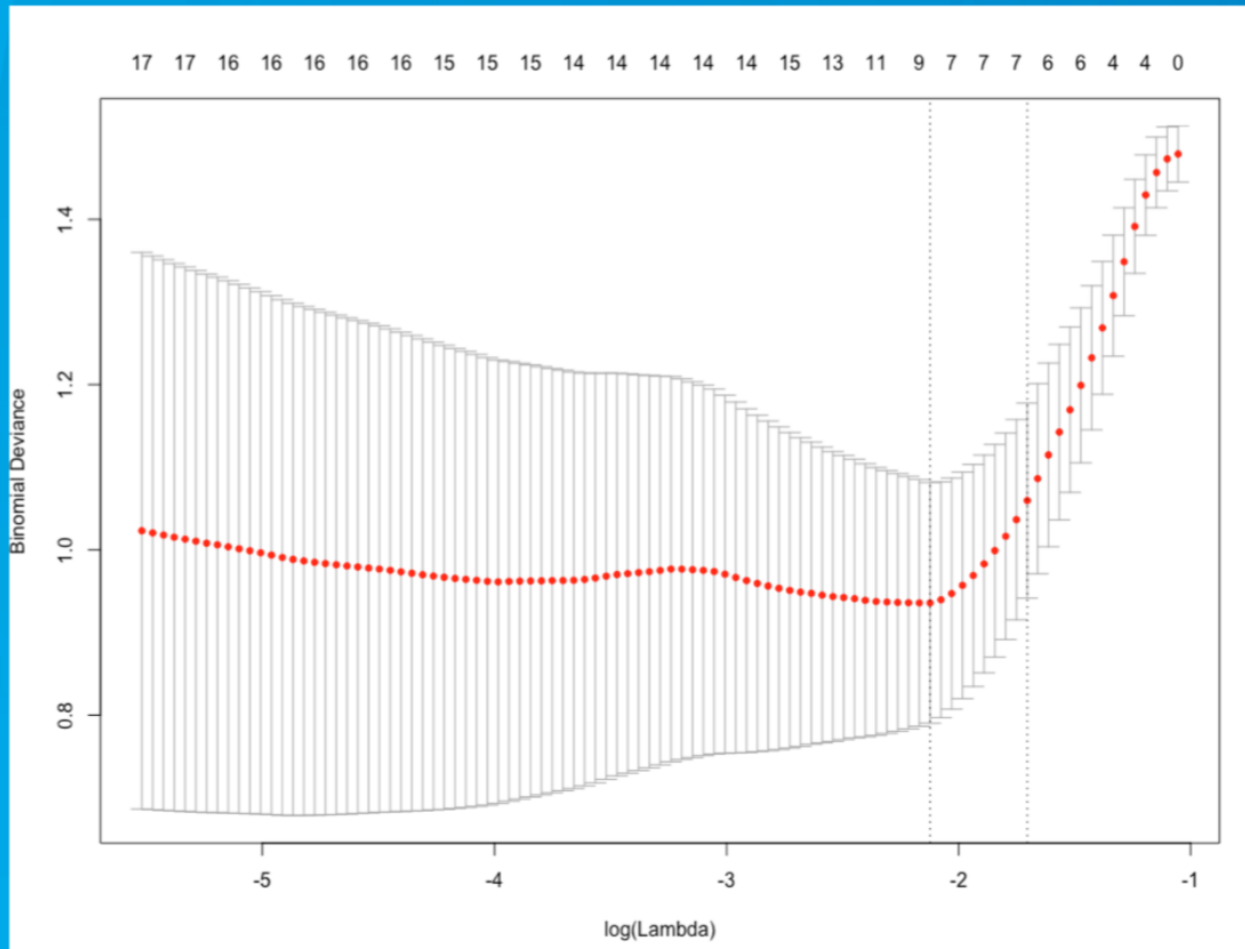
Results Theme 3 Overall Impact among Students

Non-Erasmus



Results Text Structure in Student Interviews

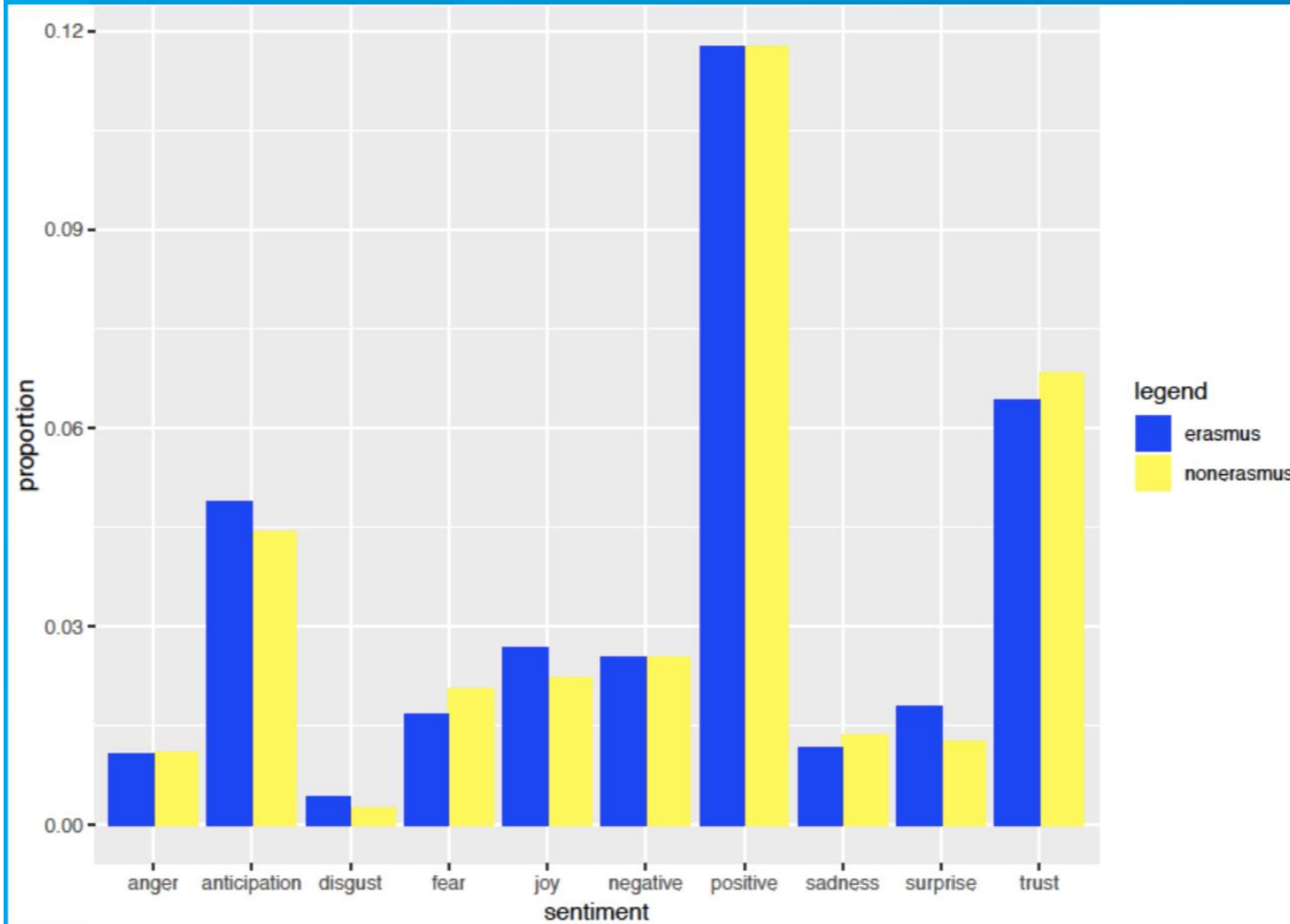
Lasso Regularised Bag-of-Words Logistic Regression Model



Leave-one-out cross-validated lasso regularised logistic regression targeting optimal area under the receiver operator curve for predicting Erasmus vs. non-Erasmus interview texts achieved 77% accuracy. So there is a clear difference in terms of semantic orientation and lexical content between Erasmus participants and non-participants.

Results Semantic and Lexical Variation in Student Interviews

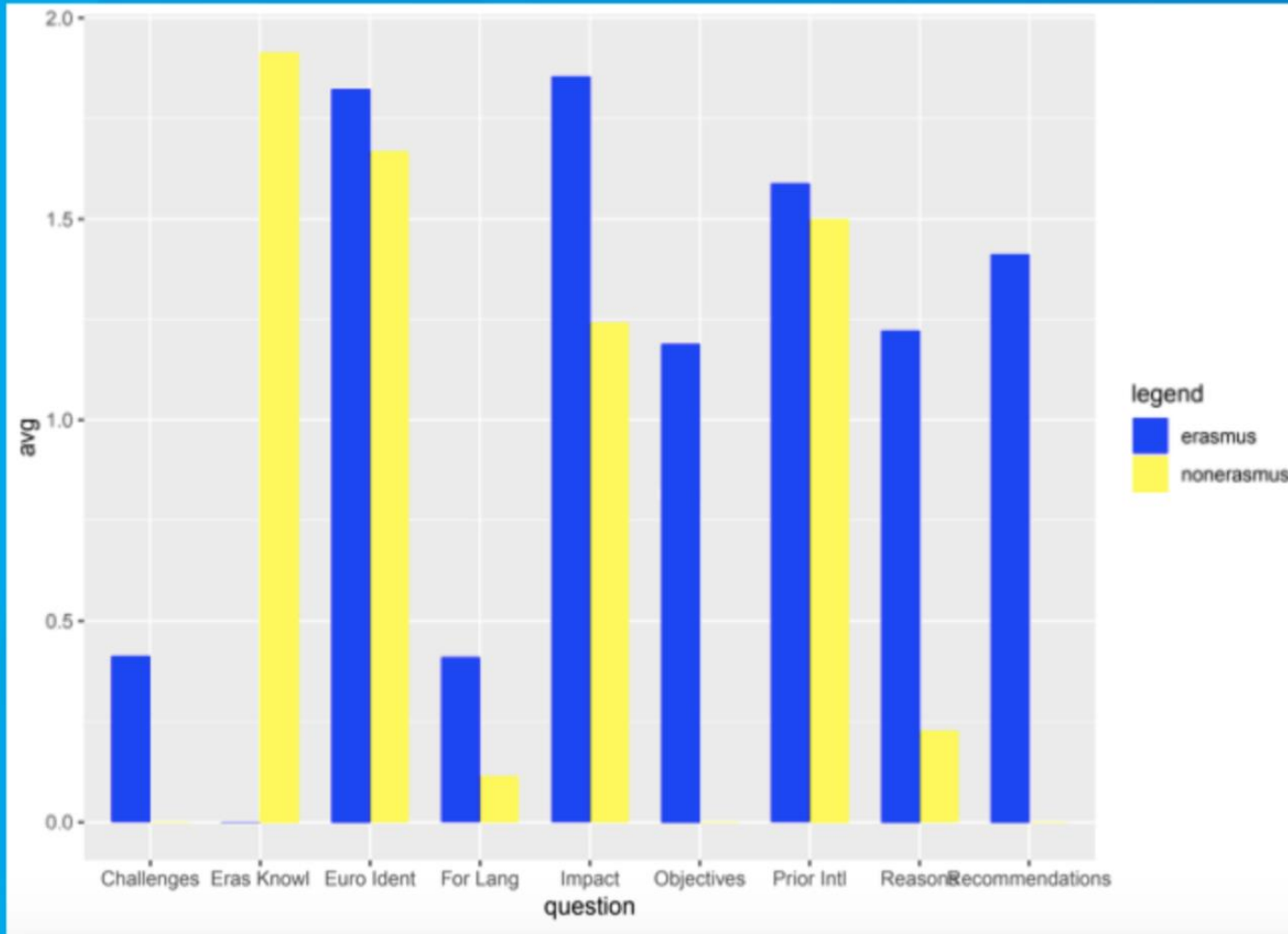
Sentiment affinity: E –blue, NE - yellow



There are only marginal differences between Erasmus participants and non-participants in aggregate emotional loading across all interview topics. The most prevailing feelings are positive, with non-participants exhibiting slightly more trust but also more sadness and fear, while Erasmus participants show slightly more surprise, joy and anticipation than non-participants.

Results Emotional Loading among Staff (cumulative)

Sentiment affinity: E – blue, NE - yellow



Emotional loading per topic indicates that Erasmus participants feel more positive about their European identity, foreign languages, and their prior international exposure than non-participants. The most pronounced and noteworthy differences in sentiment between the two cohorts pertain to reasons for going / not going on Erasmus and the overall impact of going / not going on mobility on their personal and professional trajectory.

Results Emotional Loading among Staff (topical)

Léargas Research Forum 2020



Summary of findings: Students

E: feel stronger national identity (primary identity); NE: feel almost equally Irish and European. But E: much more positive about European identity

E: far more positive about foreign languages; NE vastly negative

E: overall impact highly positive, areas of greatest impact: growing self-esteem, improving job prospects, maturing, acquiring new language, feeling more positive about Europe, gaining skills / work experience, gaining new friends

NE: approx. equally split: 50% regret & feelings of missed opportunity, 50% no regret & feel no tangible negative effects → feel they already had / will have other opportunities to travel abroad & non-participation in Erasmus will not affect their job / career prospects.

Most have travelled / studied outside of Europe

Primary drivers of mobility: gaining international experience, course requirement, securing a job after graduation / increasing employability, adventure

Primary barriers to mobility: cost, language, duration of the mobility (related to fear of losing accommodation and/or work), course structure, reluctance or inability to leave family / friends behind, lack of motivation

Main challenges: finding accommodation, lack of support at host institution, inadequate information & guidance, excessive paperwork, demanding workload, post-Erasmus depression, terror attack in Brussels



Summary of findings: Staff

E & NE: feel equally Irish (other nationality) & European, but *all* non-Irish staff feel both European & national, while *some* Irish staff feel primarily Irish. E slightly more positive about European identity NE

Most E & NE staff have lots of prior international experience & approximately 50% are fluent in a foreign language

E: more positive about knowledge & attitude to foreign languages than NE

E: overall impact very positive; main areas of impact: cooperation in research & other forms of professional collaboration, development of new teaching methods & pedagogies, networking, socialising, feeling recharged

E: all achieved their mobility objectives; all interested in participating in future mobilities; all satisfied with level of funding

E: 11/18 feel their participation motivated students to consider going on E+

NE: all claim to have international mindset & support internationalisation efforts in their HEI

NE: far less positive than E participants re. impact on personal / professional trajectory

NE: most report good knowledge about E+ & all are interested possibly applying for E+

Main challenge / barrier to mobility: TIME. (esp. for junior staff) and getting professional recognition for participation



Questions? Comments?

THANK YOU!