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# What's on a subjective evaluation of time? Dissociating premotor and motor components in RT task reveals the building blocks of time metacognition

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### Introduction

- Metacognition refers to the subjective evaluation of our own cognitive performances and processes, and can be crucial to regulate behavior.
- Metacognition in the time domain remains poorly investigated even though temporal information is of great importance for appropriate behaviour.
- When we have to act as fast as possible (i.e reaction time situation), time is implicit but largely contributes to the achievement of the goal.
- Previous study (Corallo et al. 2008) showed that on average, participants have a rather good estimation of their reaction times (RTs).

**Question 1 : Is RT estimation really based on temporal information?**

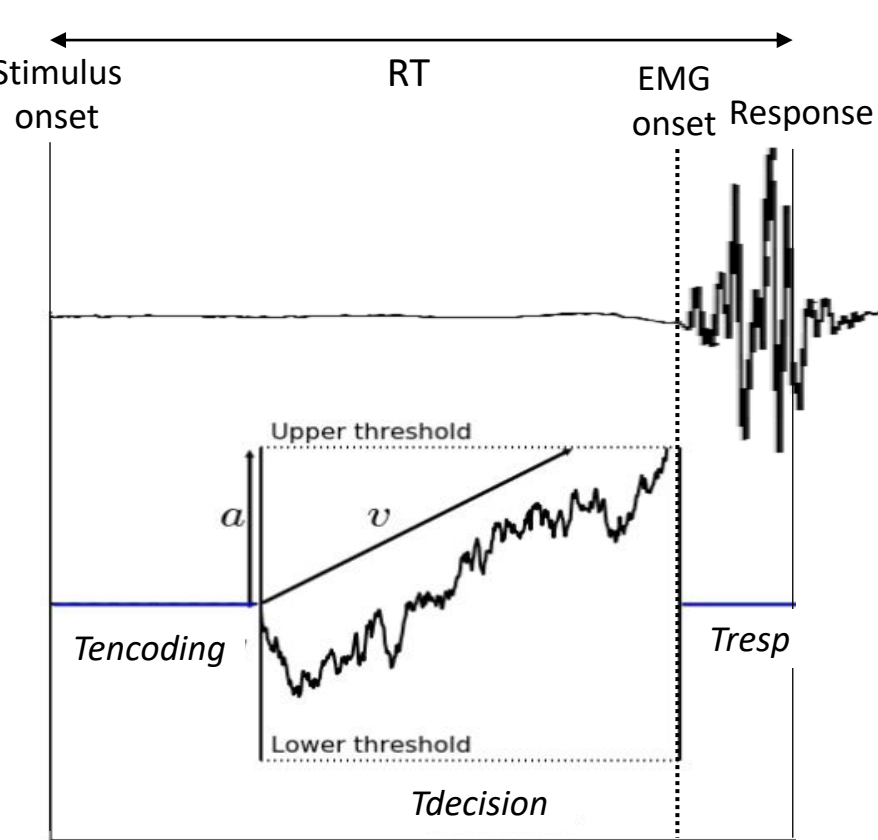


Fig.1 adapted from (Weindel et al. 2021)

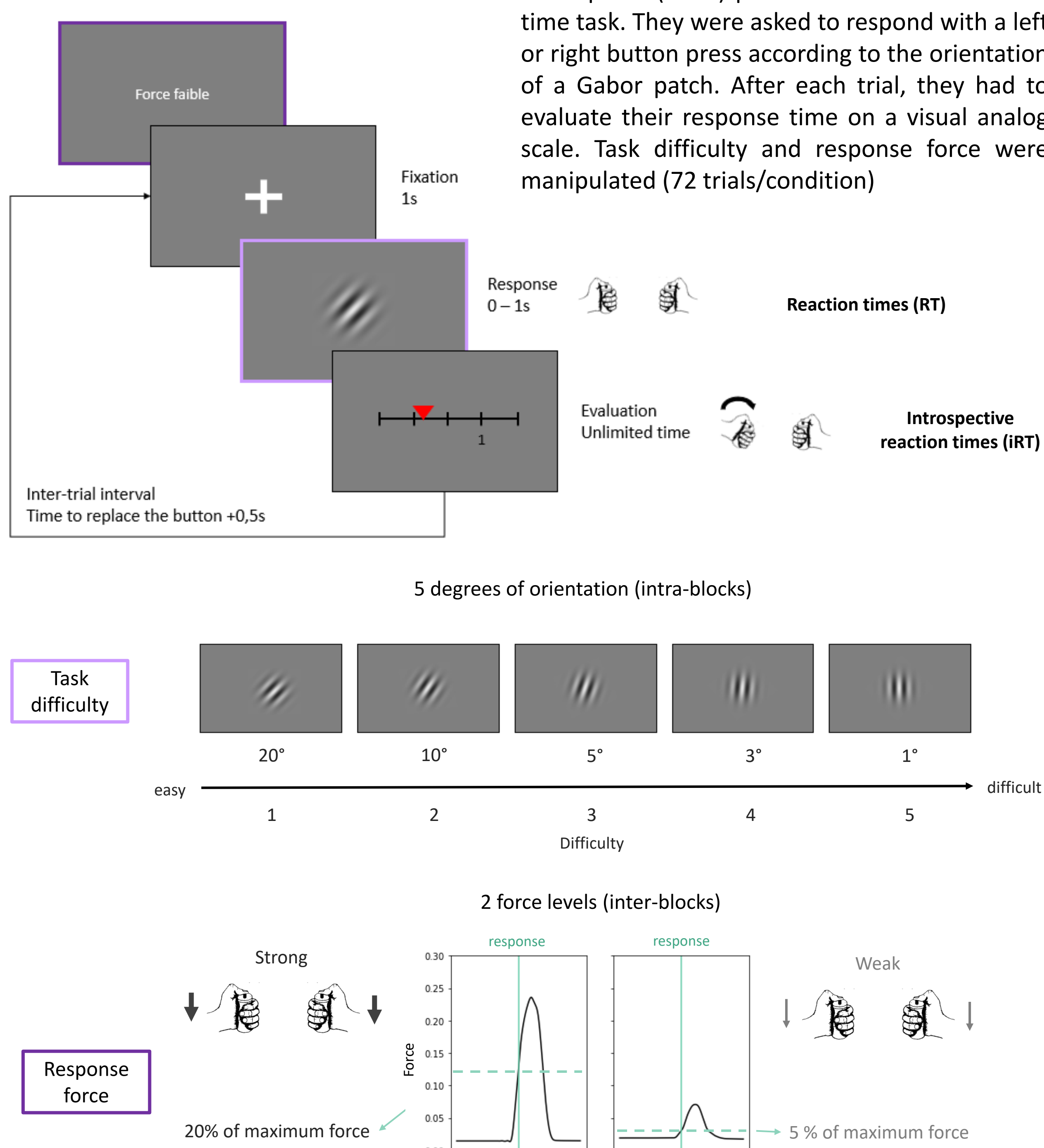
- RTs constitute a widespread measure of the time taken to decide and initiate an appropriate action.
- Many models (e.g. diffusion models) separate RTs into a decision time (*Tdecision*), during which evidence is accumulated until a decision threshold is reached (Fig.1), and a non decision time, composed of encoding time (*Tencoding*) and motor execution time (*Tresp*).
- Motor execution time, which can be measured directly using electromyography (EMG), is almost always ignored even though it is a significant part of RTs variability.
- We do not know if and to what extent this motor time contributes to RTs subjective evaluation.

**Question 2 : What is the contribution of decision and non decision time in RT estimation?**

### Materials and Methods

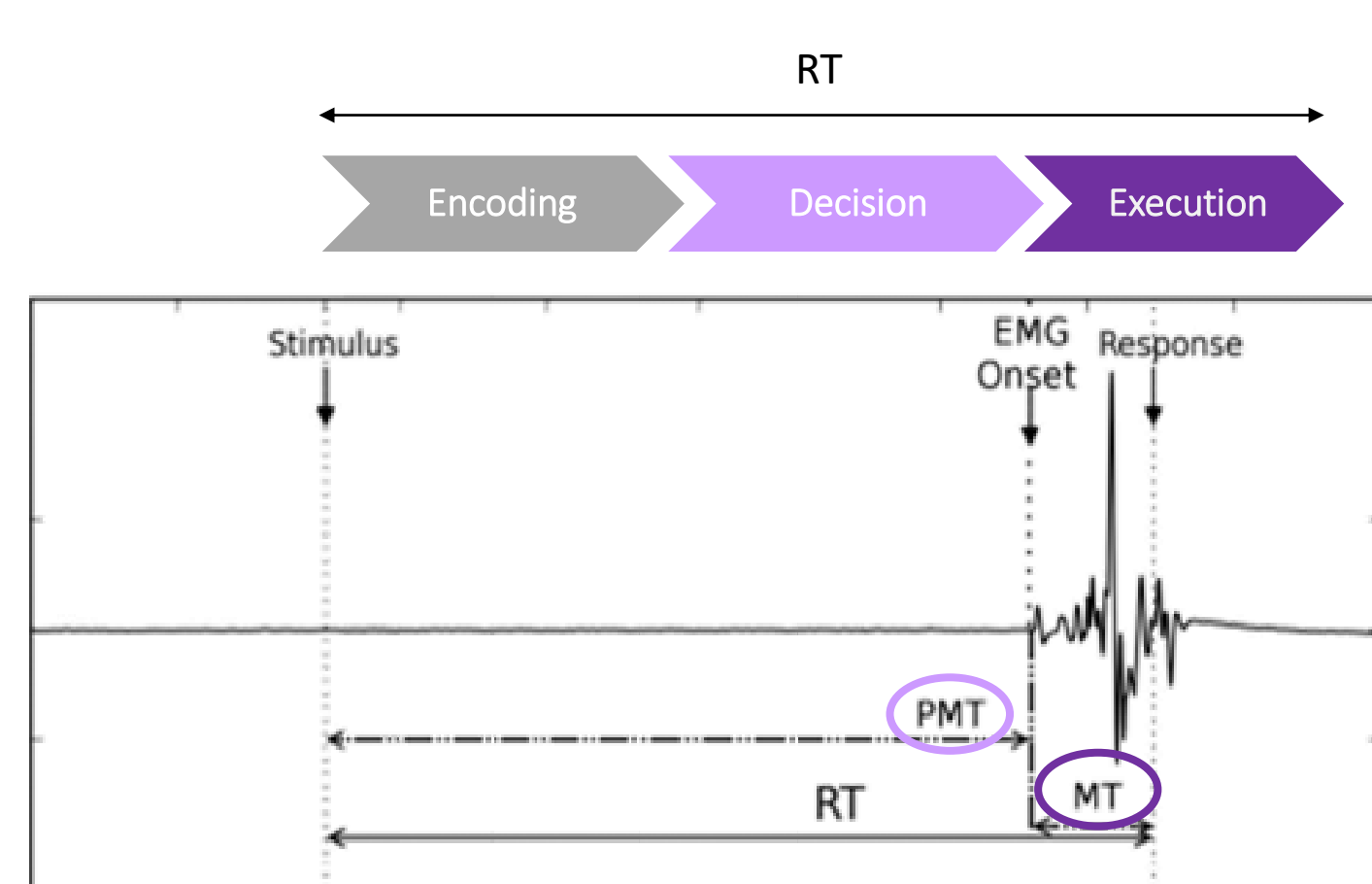
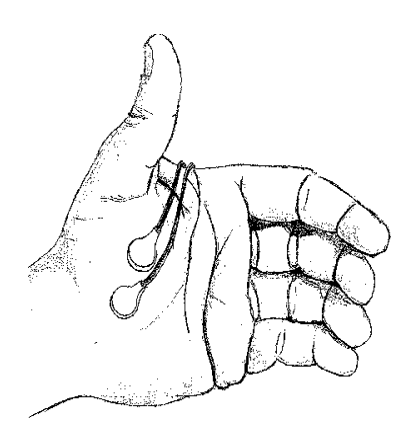
#### Behavioral task

Participants (n=30) performed a choice reaction time task. They were asked to respond with a left or right button press according to the orientation of a Gabor patch. After each trial, they had to evaluate their response time on a visual analog scale. Task difficulty and response force were manipulated (72 trials/condition)



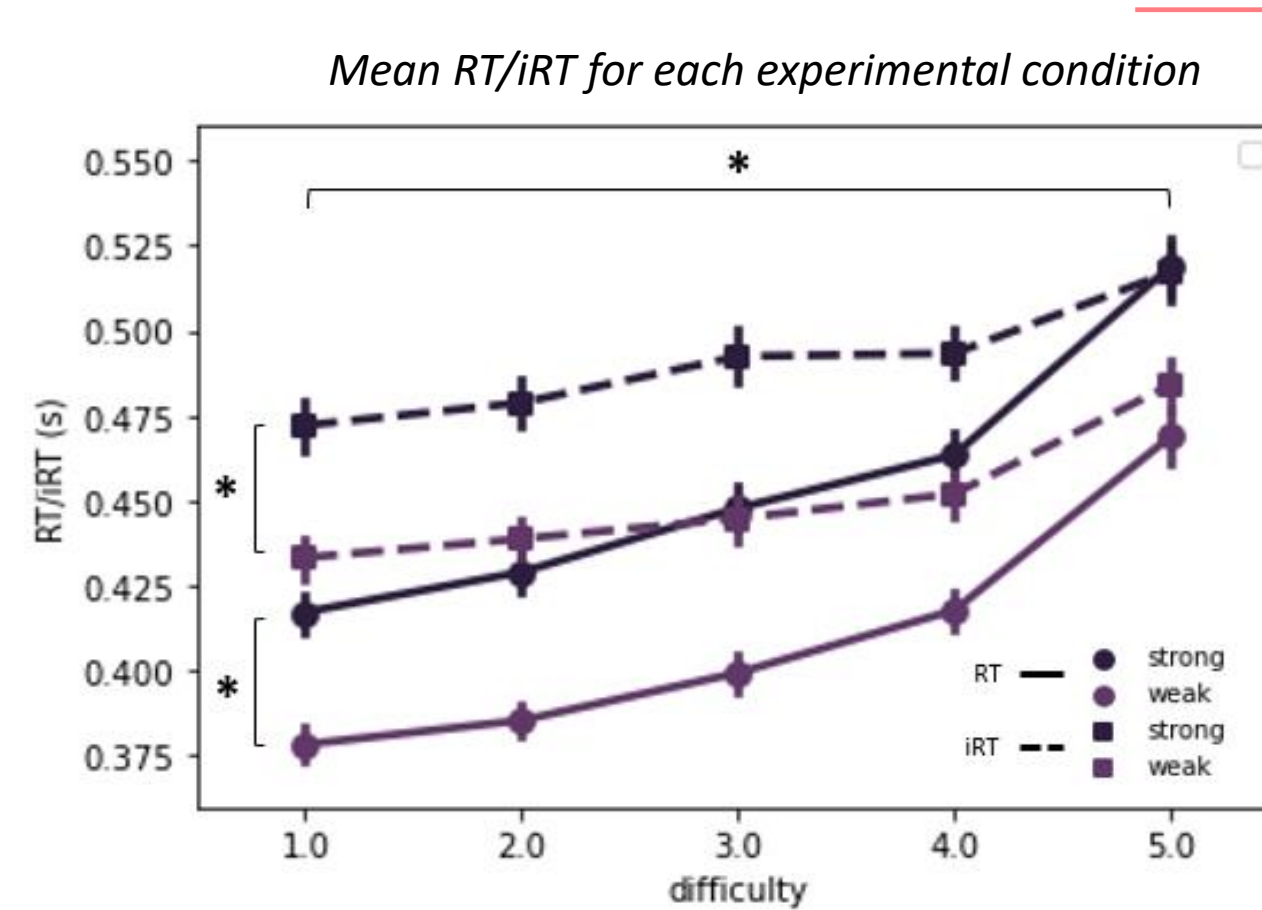
#### EMG recording

EMG was recorded from *flexor pollicis brevis* of both hands. It allowed to fractionate reactions times into premotor (PMT) and motor (MT) times, reflecting respectively the decision and the motor execution processes.



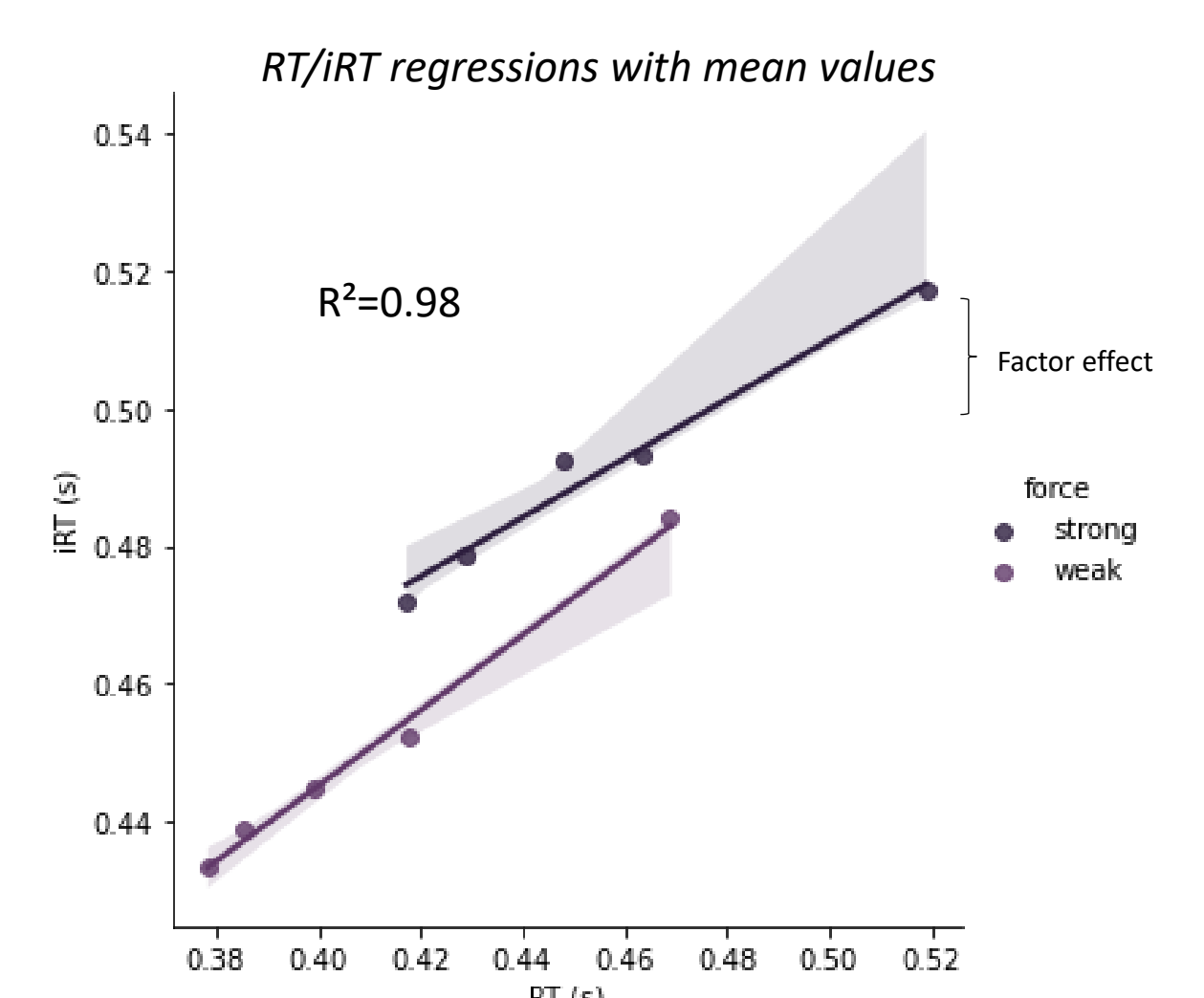
### Results

#### Behavioral results



Same modulation of RT and iRT by experimental conditions

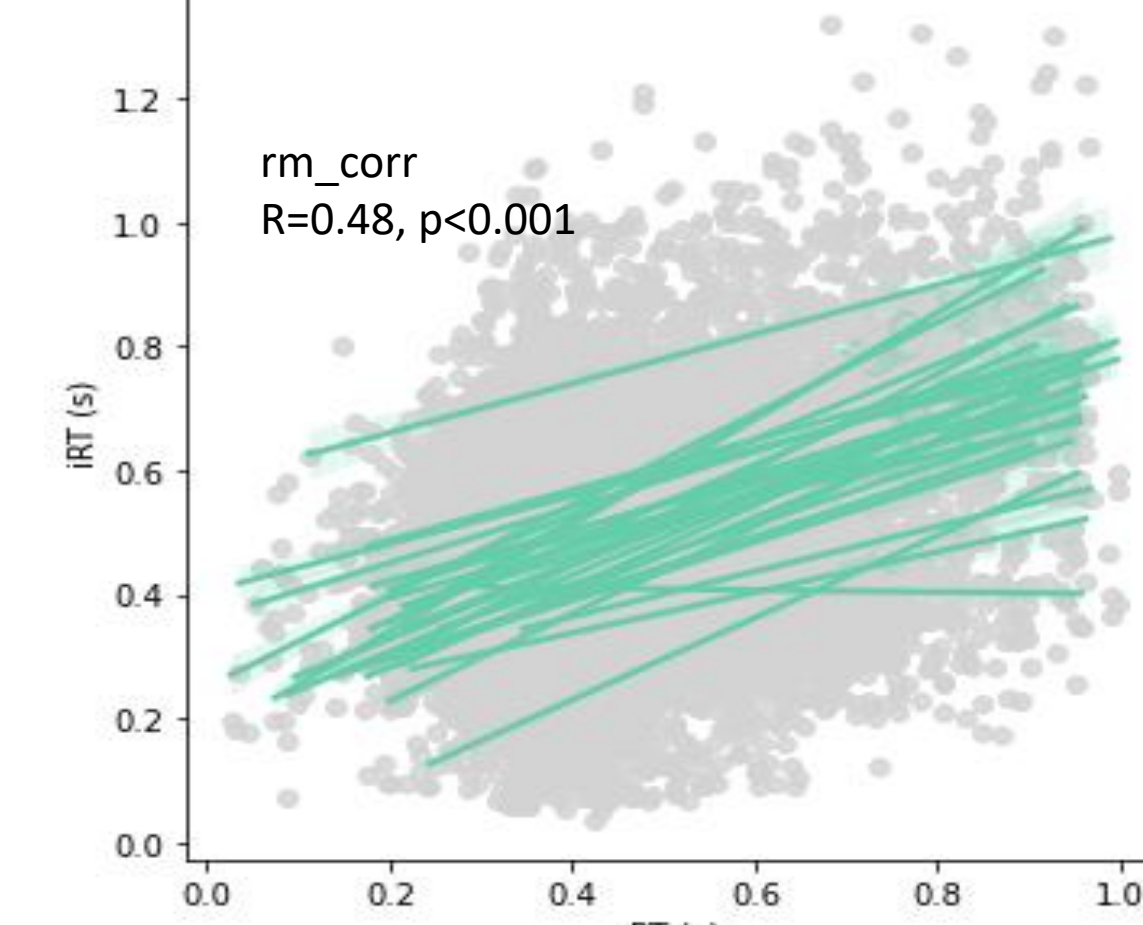
force x difficulty ANOVAs  
RT : force ( $F(1,29)=53.46, p<0.001$ ), difficulty ( $F(4,116)=140.54, p<0.001$ ), no interaction  
iRT : force ( $F(1,29)=16.33, p<0.001$ ), difficulty ( $F(4,116)=21.72, p<0.001$ ), no interaction



RT and force predict iRT

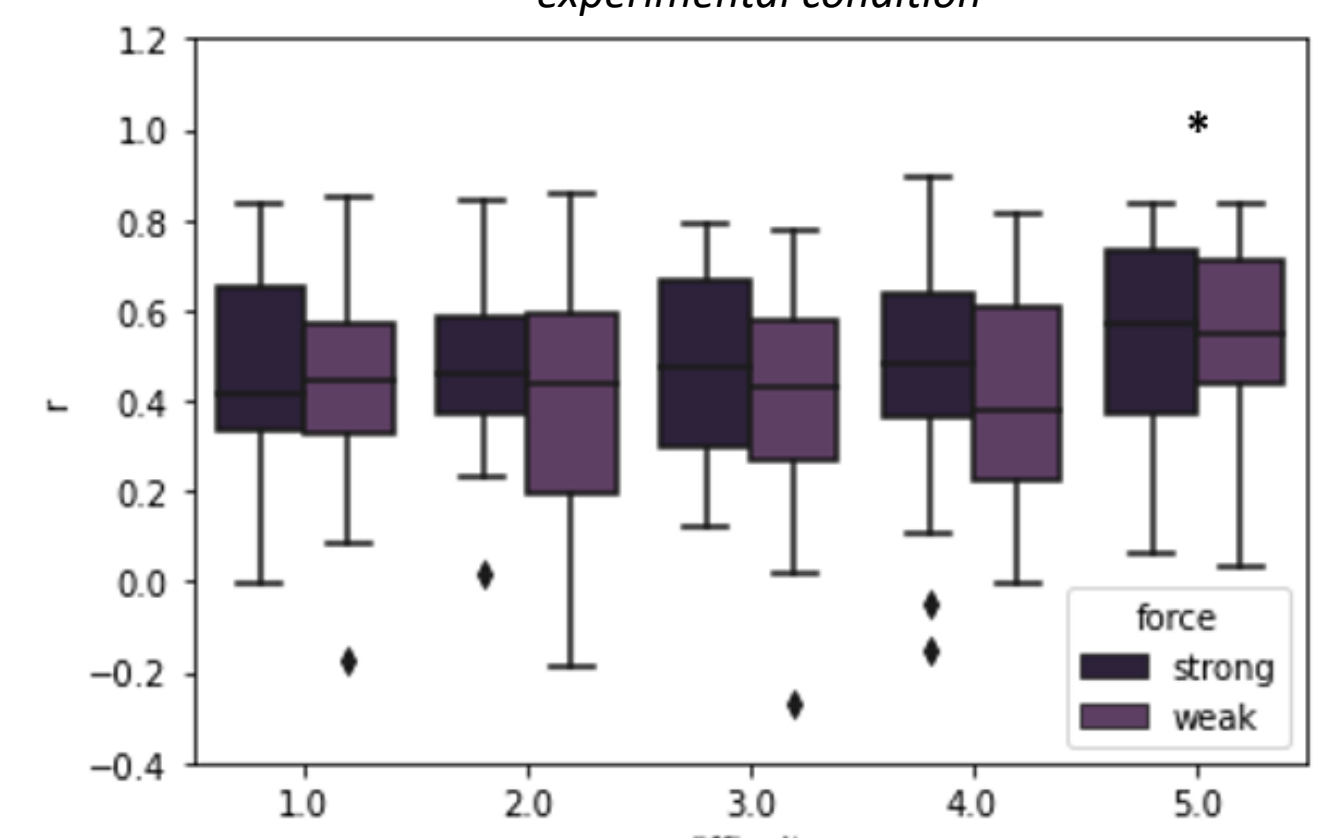
Linear regression model  
RT :  $\beta = 0.45, p<0.001$ , Force :  $\beta = -0.07, p<0.05$ , no interaction

#### Individual RT/iRT regressions



The vast majority of subjects have a positive correlation between RT and iRT  
range=-.02-.80, M=0.51, SD=0.17

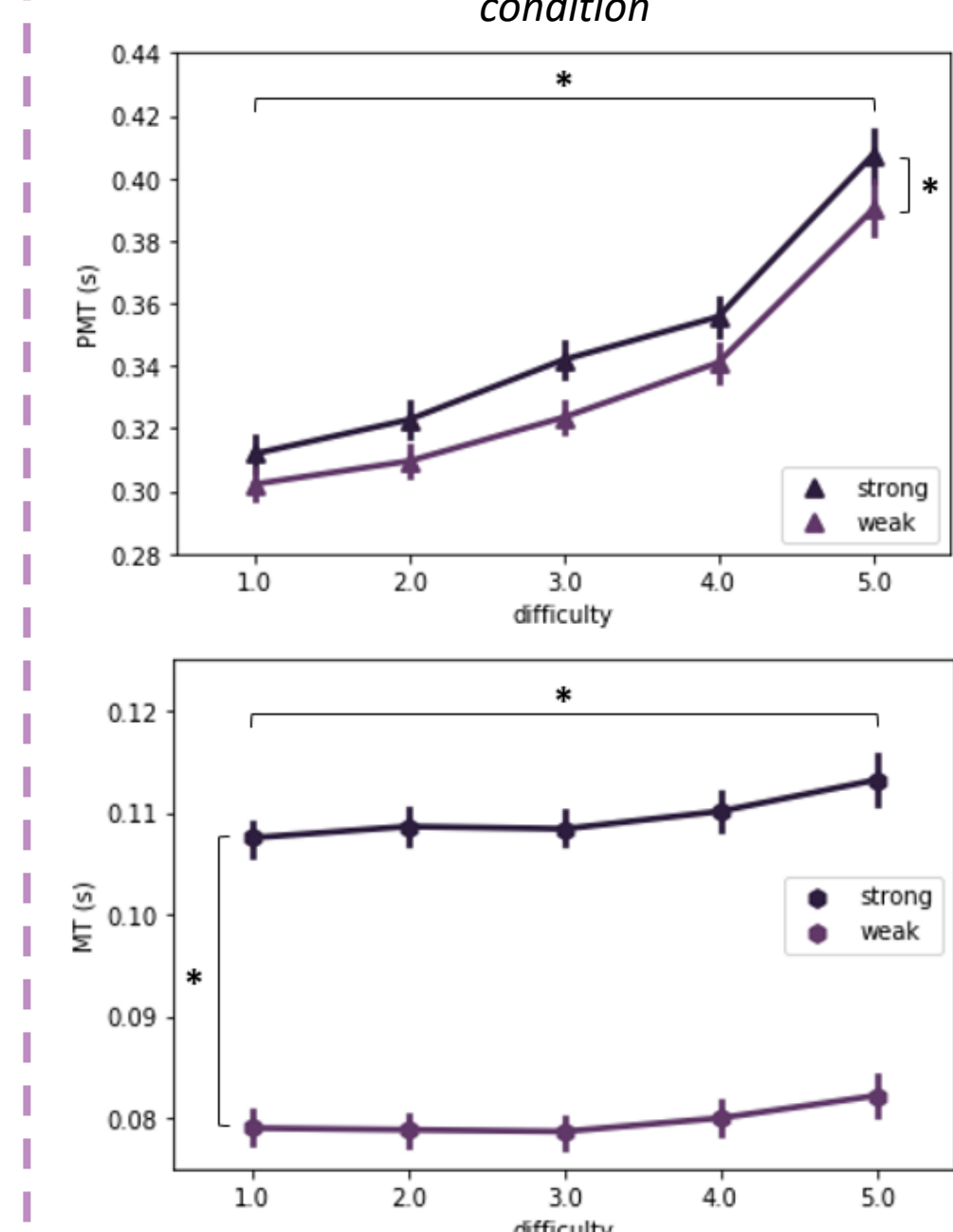
#### Mean correlation coefficients for each experimental condition



Positive correlations between iRT and RT within each experimental condition  
range=-.27-.90, M=0.46, SD=0.22

#### EMG results

##### Mean PMT and MT for each experimental condition

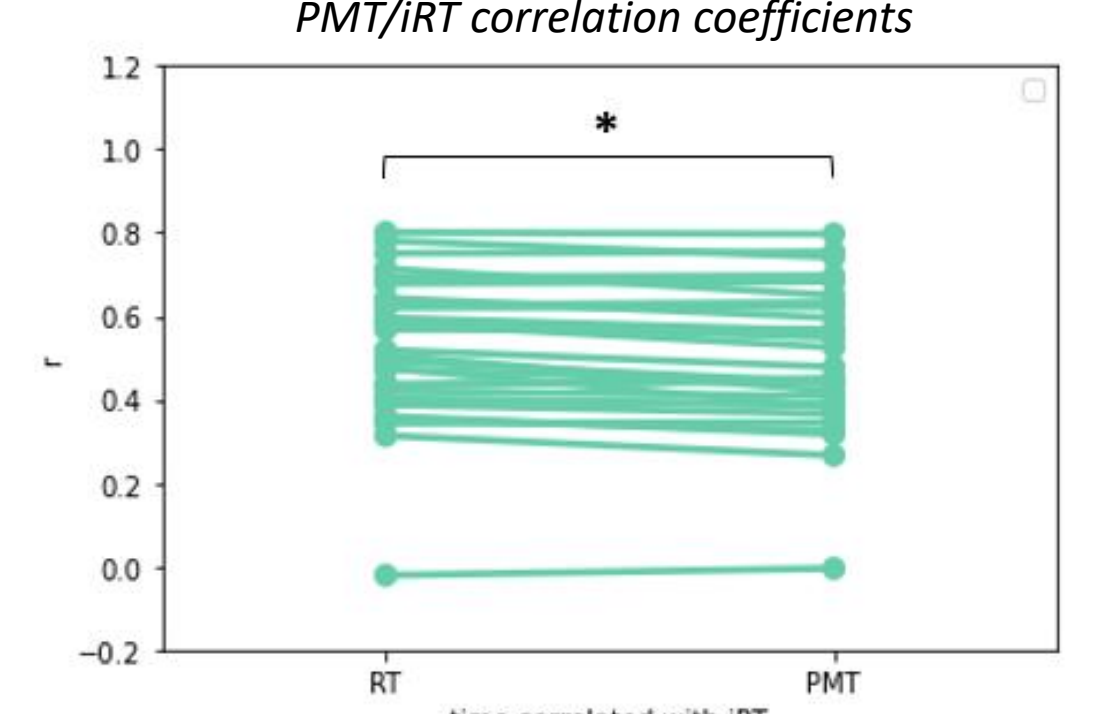


Force x difficulty ANOVAs

PMT : force ( $F(1, 29)=10.39, p<0.05$ ), difficulty ( $F(4, 116)=131.6, p<0.001$ ), no interaction

MT : force ( $F(1, 29)=123.40, p<0.001$ ), difficulty ( $F(4, 116)=10.82, p<0.001$ ), no interaction

##### Individual differences between RT/iRT and PMT/iRT correlation coefficients



Better correlation of iRT with RT than with PMT  
Paired t-test on z transformed r values ( $t(29)=4.26, p<0.001$ )

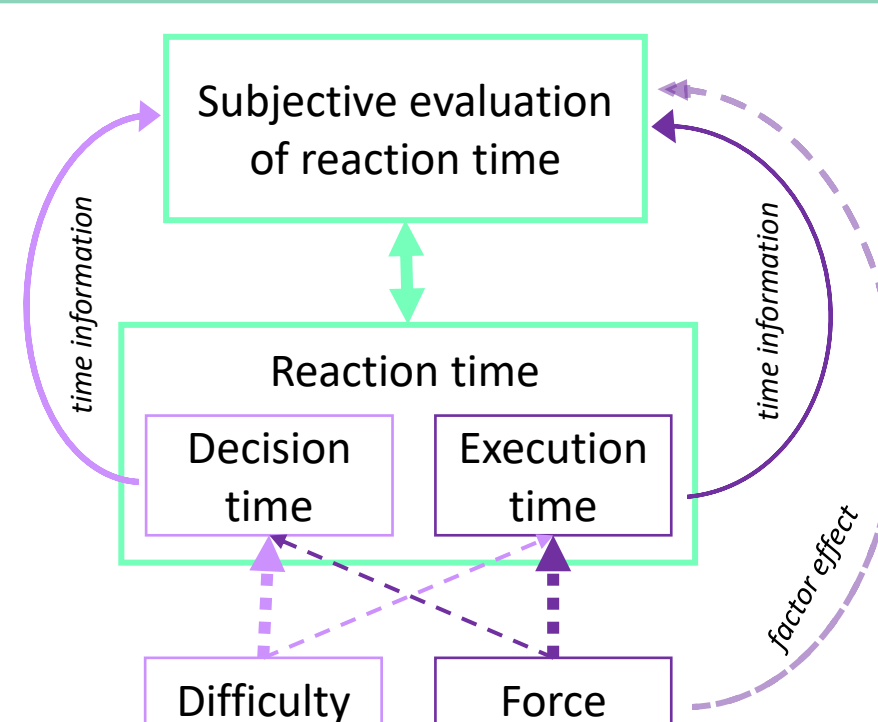
##### Regression models results

iRT ~ PMT	$R^2= 0.133$	PMT $\beta = 0.42^*$	AIC = -1.975e+04
iRT ~ PMT + MT	$R^2= 0.147$	PMT $\beta = 0.42^*$ MT $\beta = 0.45^*$	AIC = -2.006e+04

Better prediction of iRT with PMT + MT than with PMT only

### Conclusion

- We show that iRT is sensitive to both decisional and non decisional experimental manipulations (e.g. difficulty and force) in the same way as RT.
- RT evaluation was biased by force, meaning that part of this effect is a factor effect.
- But, overall, positive correlations between trial-by-trial RT and iRT show that **participants can reliably estimate their RTs** independently of information linked to experimental conditions.



- RT and iRT increased the same way with force, a factor mainly affecting MT.
- The correlation between RT and iRT was degraded when MT was not taken into account.
- These observations suggest that **non decision time** (at least motor execution time) **also contributes to the subjective evaluation of RT.**