

# **Shifting social meanings in the Southern diaspora: The emergence of a ‘country’ style in California**

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Language Variation and Change in Diaspora Communities  
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# Introduction

Variation studies in context of migration typically focus on *changes in form* induced by contact.

This paper advocates for an approach that additionally attends to *changes in social meaning* that accompany structural change.

Three sociophonetic features of Southern US English in California:

1. PIN-PEN Merger
2. /s/ Retraction
3. Degree of Voicing in /b, d, g/ Closures

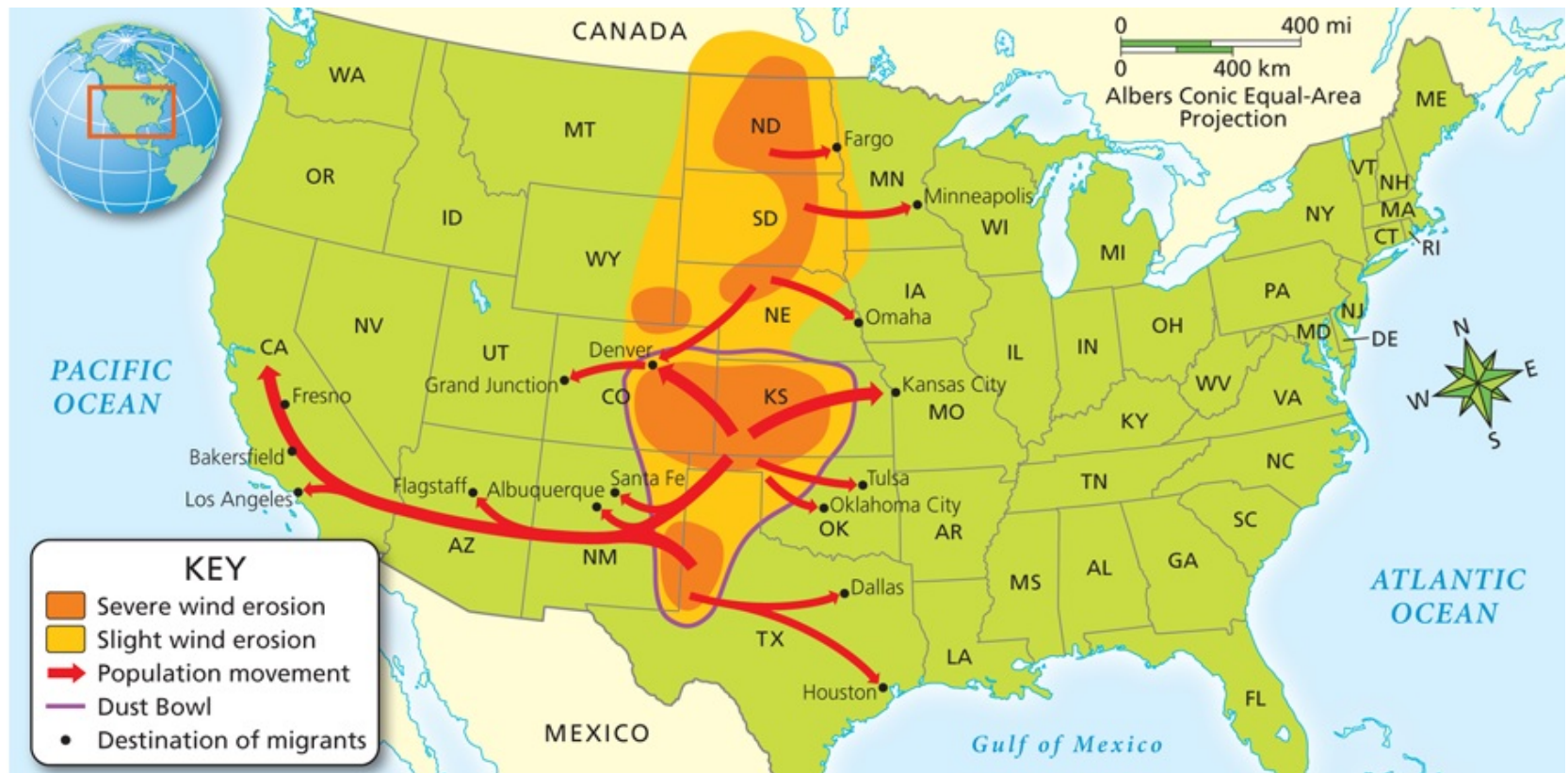
# Outline

1. Dustbowl Migration and Social Meaning
2. Voices of California Project
3. Case Studies
  - PIN-PEN Merger
  - /s/ Retraction
  - Degree of Voicing in /b, d, g/ Closures
4. Conclusion





# Dust Bowl Migration



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## Dustbowl Migration



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We all sound like we're from somewhere else out here.  
Many sound country. Many of 'em sound like they're from the South.  
From the- from the- wherever, but, you hear s- some  
Some they just sound like they come straight out of Oklahoma.  
Born and raised right here in Bakersfield.  
Take 'em up in LA, and they'll swear-  
Everybody in LA'll swear, "Where're you from, man?"  
"Oh, you're from Texas?" (laughter)  
Right here from Bakersfield.  
So many people perceive Bakersfield as a little hole in the wall.

Bakersfield speech is... Southern country not CA/LA

# Social Meaning

The set of inferences that can be drawn based on the use of a variable linguistic form.

form → meaning

HRT → speaker is a Valley Girl  
→ speaker is concerned with being understood  
→ interaction is generally supportive

(Sharma and Sankaran 2011 and Hall-Lew, Cardoso, and Davies forthcoming offer examples of shifting social meanings in diasporic contexts.)

## Approaches to Studying Social Meaning

1. Examining metalinguistic commentary ←
2. Conducting perception experiments
3. Investigating intraspeaker style shifting
4. Situating variation in discourse
5. Observing meaning in ethnographic context ←
6. Triangulating meaning through correlations ←

# Triangulating Social Meaning

## Centralization Index Scores (Martha's Vineyard)

### a. Occupation

	(ay)	(aw)
Fisherman	100	79
Farmers	32	22
Others	41	57

### b. Leaving or Staying

	(ay)	(aw)
Leaving 1	0	40
Leaving 2	0	0
Staying 1	90	100
Staying 2	113	119

### c. Orientation to Island

	(ay)	(aw)
Positive	63	62
Neutral	32	42
Negative	9	8

Labov (1963)

## Orders of Indexicality

linguistic feature

Centralized (ay)

Dust Bowl Speech



n<sup>th</sup> order meaning

Vineyarder

Southern



n+1<sup>st</sup> order meaning

opposition to mainland

‘country’

Silverstein (2003), Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson (2006)

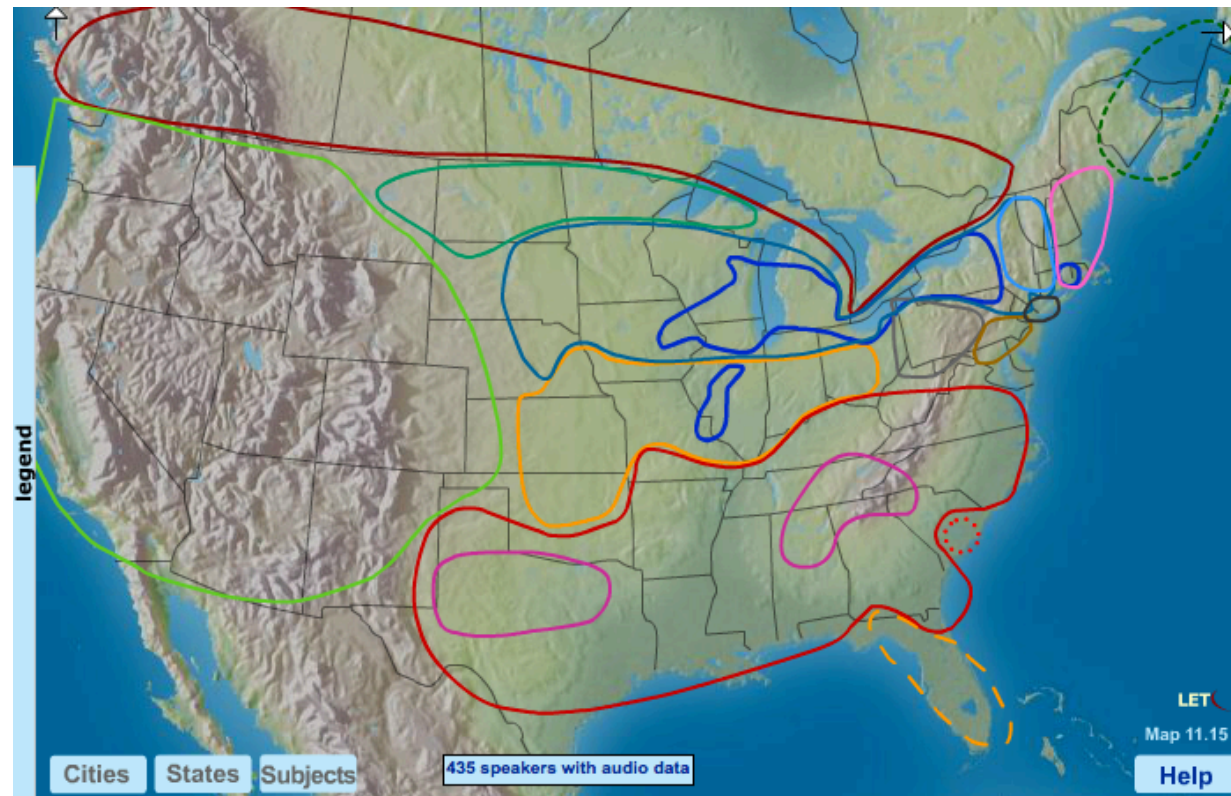
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# Major English Dialect Areas in North America



Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006

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1. 2010: Merced
2. 2011: Redding
3. 2012: Bakersfield
4. 2014: Sacramento
5. 2016: Salinas
6. 2017: Humboldt County
7. 2018: Redlands
8. 2019: Amador County
9. (2018-2019: San Francisco)

# Voices of California Project



## Goals

- Address dearth of work on non-urban, non-coastal areas of CA
- Capture Californians' experiences in their own words

## Data Collection

- 100+ sociolinguistic interviews, word list, map tasks per site (currently nearly 900)
- Scouting trip to make contacts, understand demography
- Nightly meetings to discuss field observations
- Recruitment via (social) media, snowball sampling

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## Data Processing

886 Speakers

# Data Processing

Transcription

886 Speakers

Word Lists

Interviews

886

348

## Data Processing

	886 Speakers	
	Word Lists	Interviews
Transcription	886	348
Alignment	744	223

## Data Processing

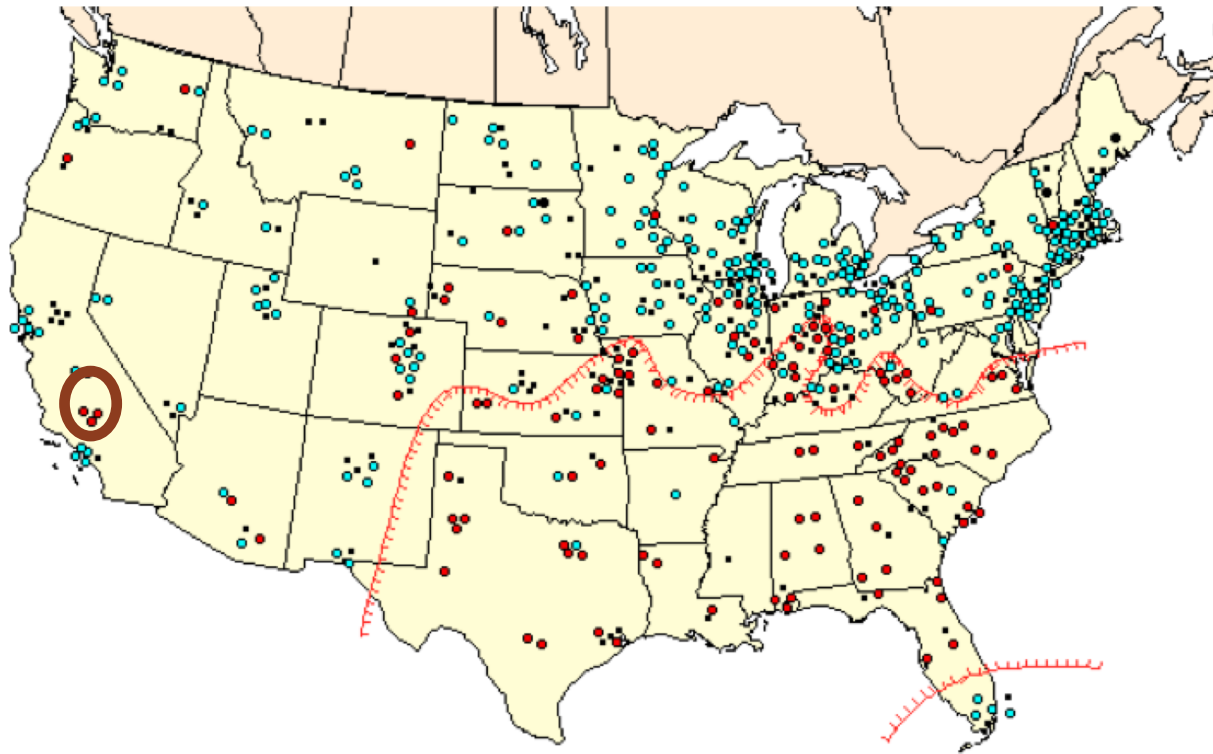
	886 Speakers	
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Alignment	744	223
Acoustic Analysis	744	223

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# PIN-PEN Merger



*tin or ten?*



Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006, Brown 1991, Baranowski 2007

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## PIN-PEN Merger in Social Media

### FIGHTING FINN

MY BLOG, PART DEUX

So I showed up at Bedford Middle School in my camo pants and greenish-brownish down jacket. Thankfully, I had the Cali thing going for me - the mystique of the California girl. Then they found out I was really from Texas and said pin instead of pen and tin instead of ten. Teased unmercifully, I finally eliminated any trace of a Southern accent.

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## PIN-PEN Merger in Social Media



**St. Louis, Missouri:** Truly representative of Americana at its best, **St. Louis** brings out the stars and stripes in its most authentic fashion. Known for its awe-inspiring Gateway Arch, but more for pumping out artists like Chuck Berry and Miles Davis, the city classic in its roots, and its accent is classic in its versatility. Words are full-sounding and a little southern. "To" = "tew", "friends" = "frinds", and "ing" sounds a lot more like "eeng."

## PIN-PEN Analysis

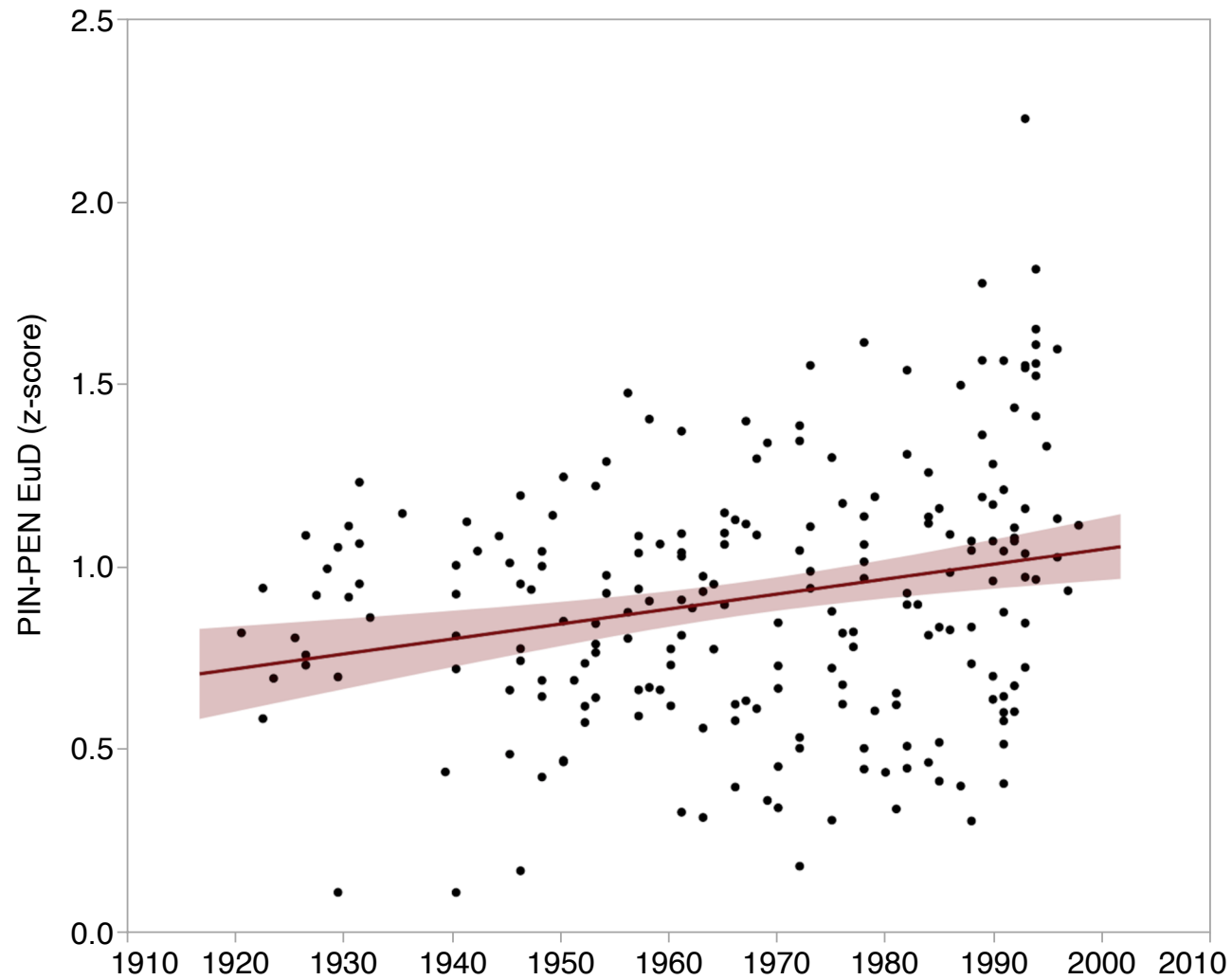
- F1 and F2 for all data normalized using Lobanov's (1971) method

Word list data:                      PIN N = 1,196      PEN N = 1,204

Interview data:                      PIN N = 5,439      PEN N = 12,195

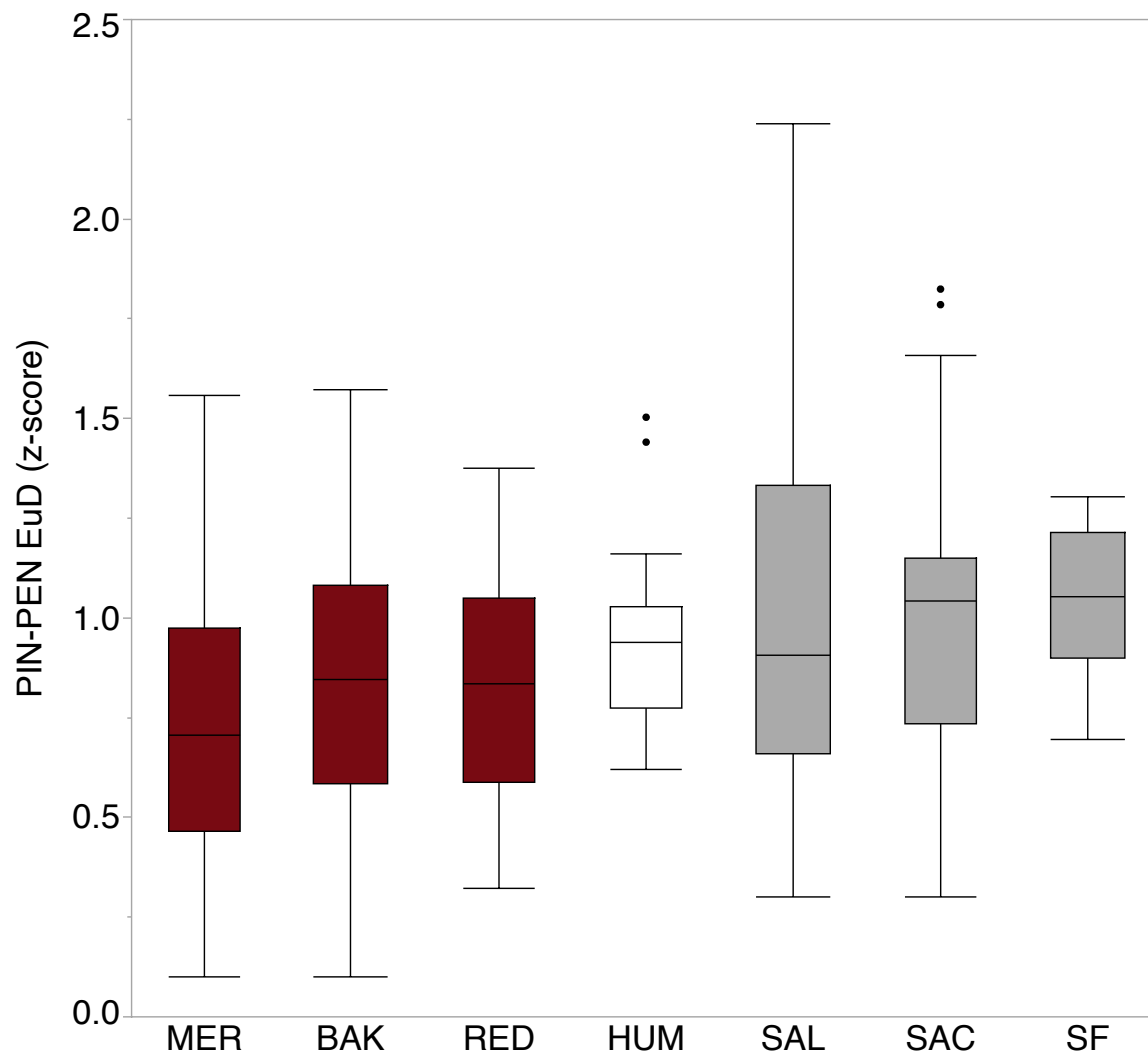
- PIN-PEN merger quantified in terms of Euclidean distance between the mean of PIN and the mean of PEN

Interpretation: greater spectral overlap = shorter distance



PIN-to-PEN  
Euclidean Distance  
by Birth Year  
(Interview Data)

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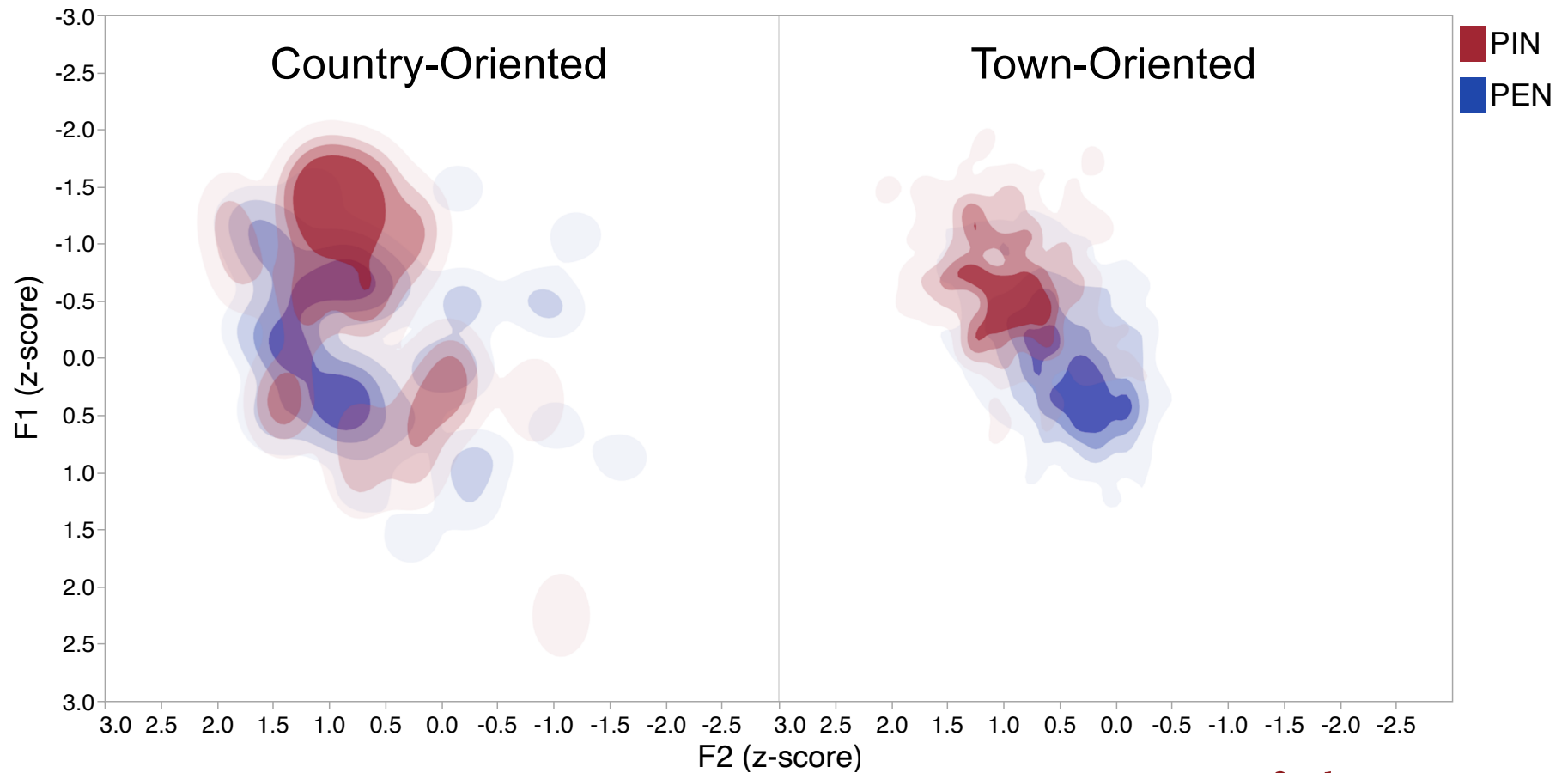


## PIN-to-PEN Euclidean Distance by Site and Population (Interview Data)

### Population Density

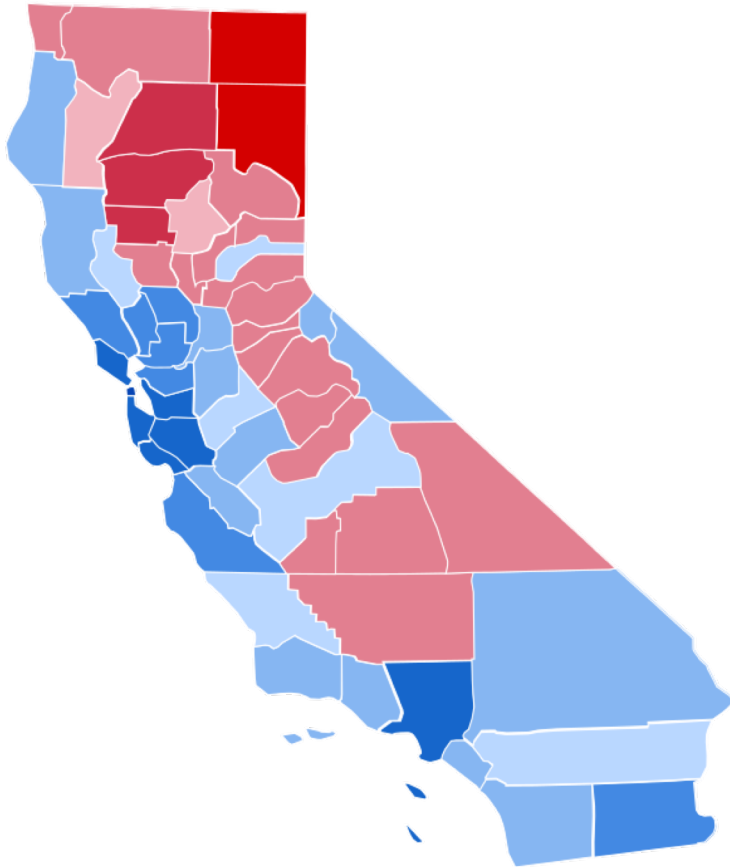
- < 3,600 ppl / sq mile
- > 6,700 ppl / sq mile
- data not available

## PIN-PEN by Orientation (Redding Interview Data)



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## What is 'country'?



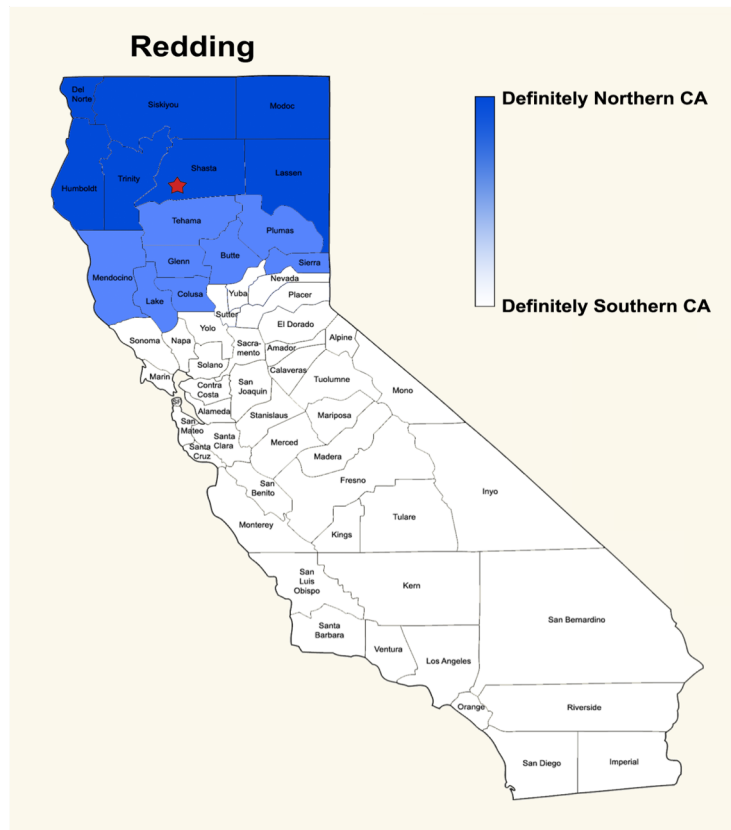
One of the biggest problems is the laws are made to fit a city, and they don't fit here, and they try to run it like a city, and it ain't a city, you know, I mean, and a lot of the laws, you can't even make 'em fit here but yet they still want you to go by 'em. Pretty ridiculous anymore.



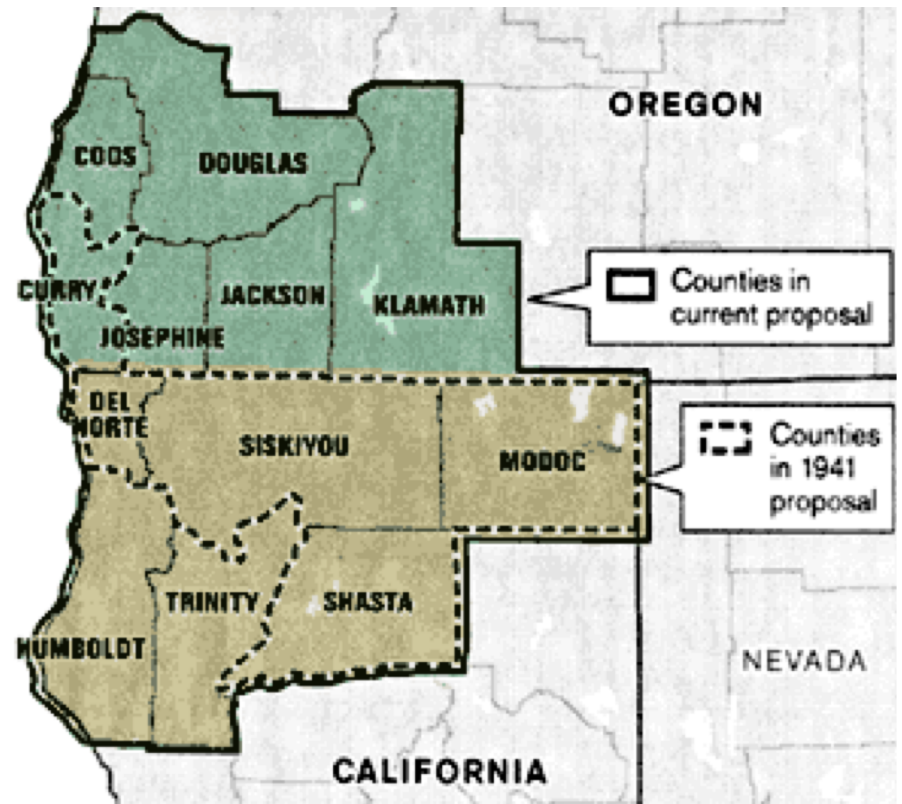
San Francisco ain't Northern California even though they keep callin' it Northern California.



# Northern California

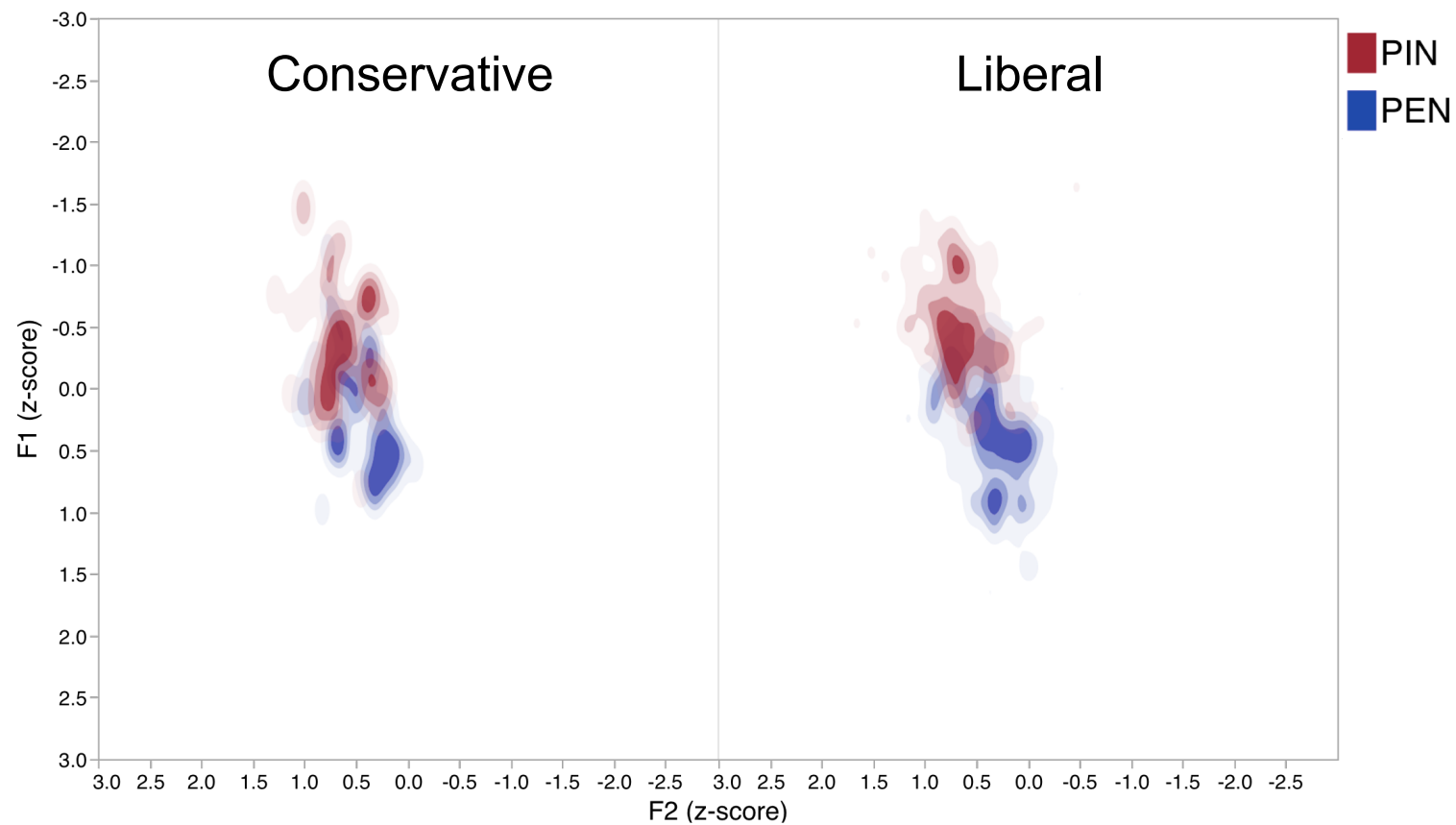


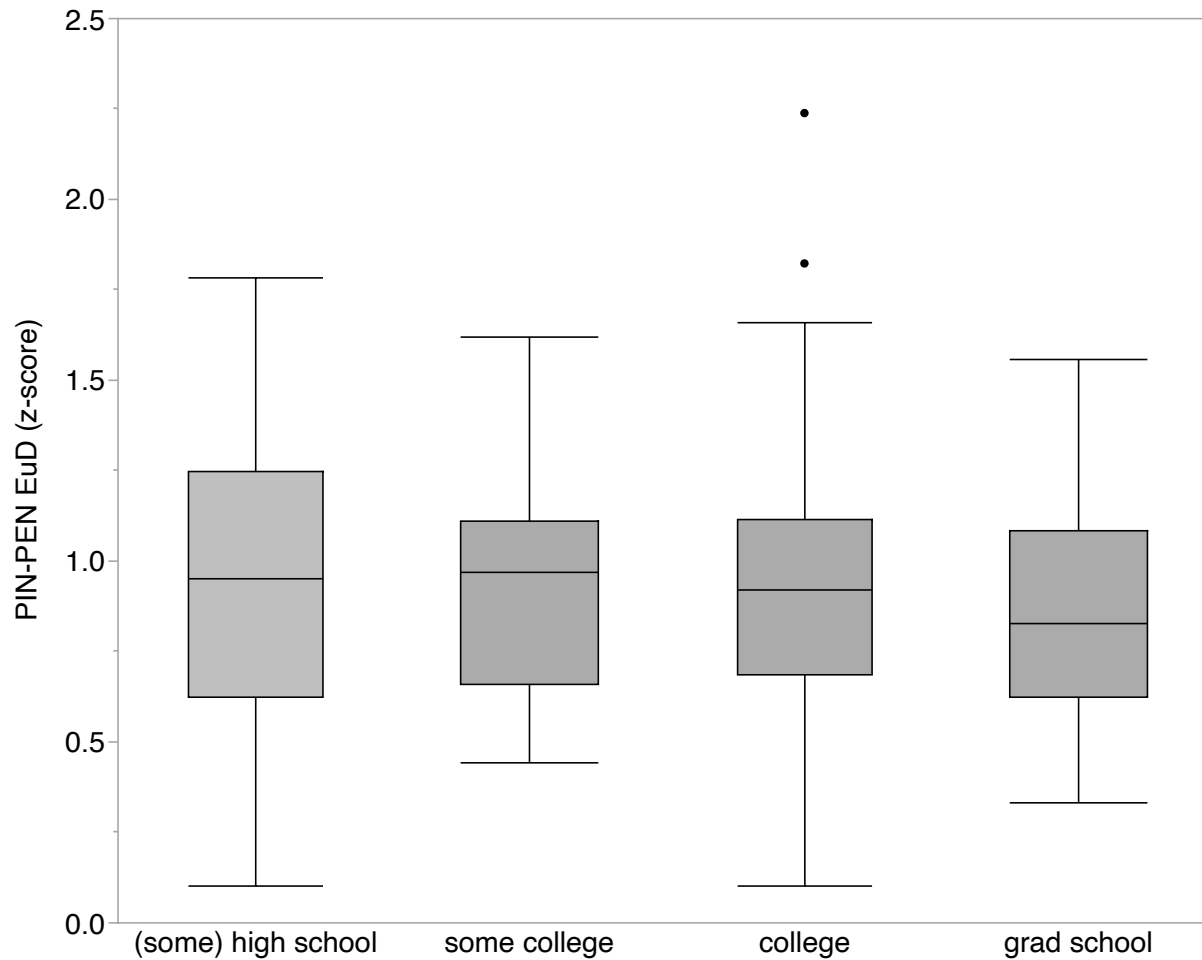
## State of Jefferson



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## PIN-PEN by Political Orientation (Humboldt Word List Data)





## PIN-PEN by Education (Interview Data)

PIN-PEN merger  
does not index  
education (class).



Geenberg (2014)

Trinity County

‘outdoorsy’ – people who “pride themselves on their ability to farm, fish, hunt, ranch, and generally make it on their own”

PIN-PEN merger and DRESS raising/fronting (both features of Southern US English) predicted by outdoorsiness, but not Okie heritage.

PIN-PEN merger does not strongly index ‘Southern’ or ‘Okie’.

## Triangulating 'Country'

Correlates of PIN-PEN merger:

- ✓ low population density
- ✓ holding conservative views
- ✓ being oriented to the country
- ✗ lower education level (class)
- ✗ Southern/Okie heritage



### Grit

49 up,

buy grit mugs, tshirts and magnets

1. An unsophisticated person
2. Someone from the rural district and/or talks with a drawl
3. A red-neck

*He is such a grit, he says pin instead of pen.*

rural unsophisticated red-neck hick drawl

by JustBeingMe Jan 16, 2007 share this

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## Retracted /s/

*dance*



*sand*



*sat*



*sad*



### ‘Southern’ and ‘country’

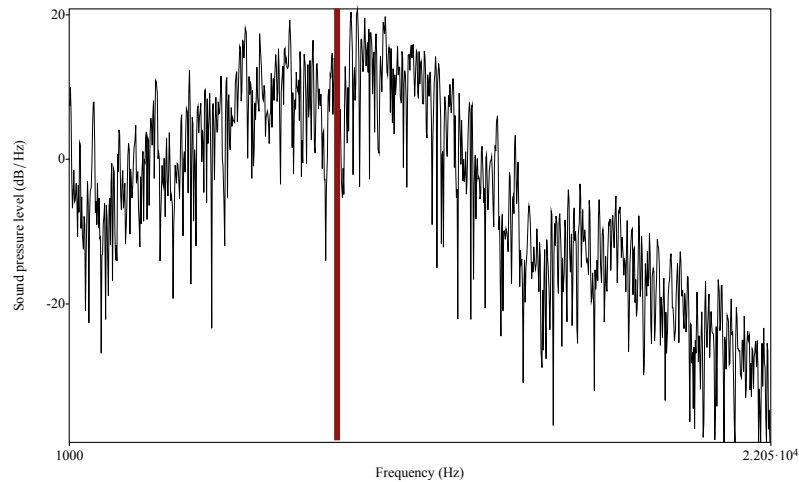
- Campbell-Kibler (2011) – retracted /s/ evaluated as Southern, country

### Gender, sexuality, class

- Retracted /s/ also a resource for constructing gender and sexuality in class-specific ways (e.g., Stuart-Smith 2007, Levon and Holmes-Elliott 2013, Podesva and Van Hofwegen 2016, Zimman 2017)

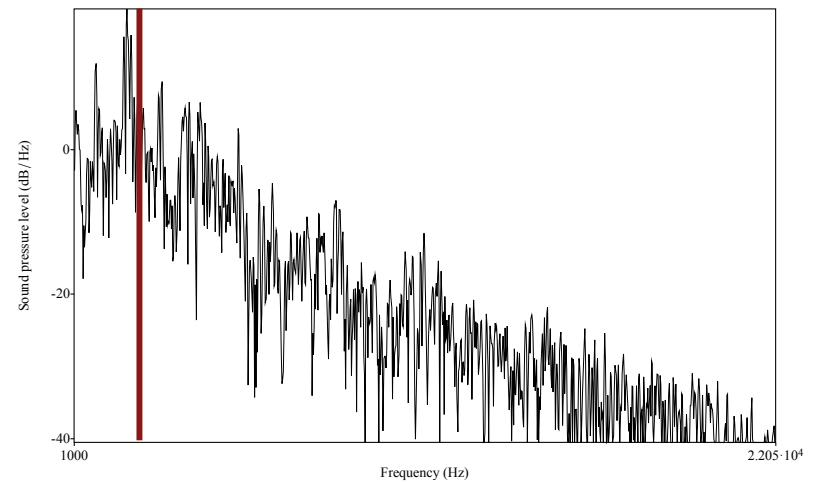
## /s/ Analysis

FRONTED  
*see*



COG (Hz) = 9008

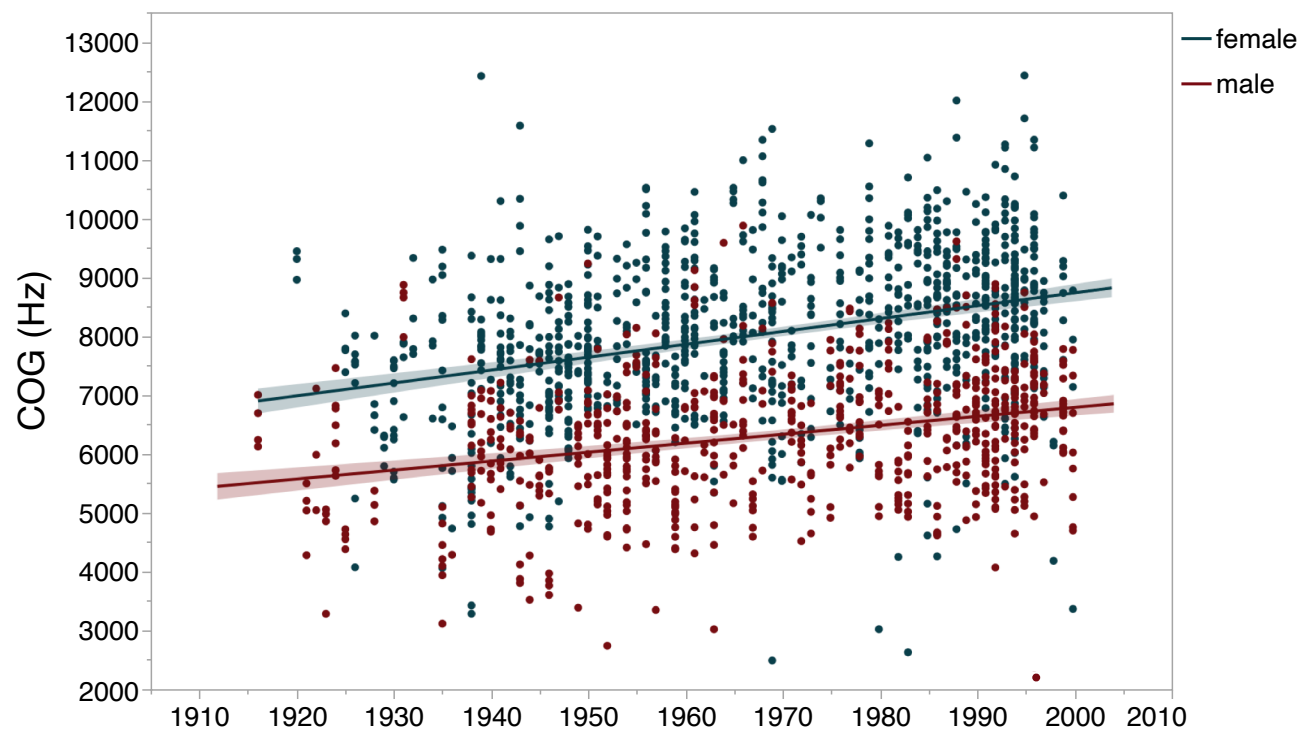
RETRACTED  
*seven*



COG (Hz) = 2892

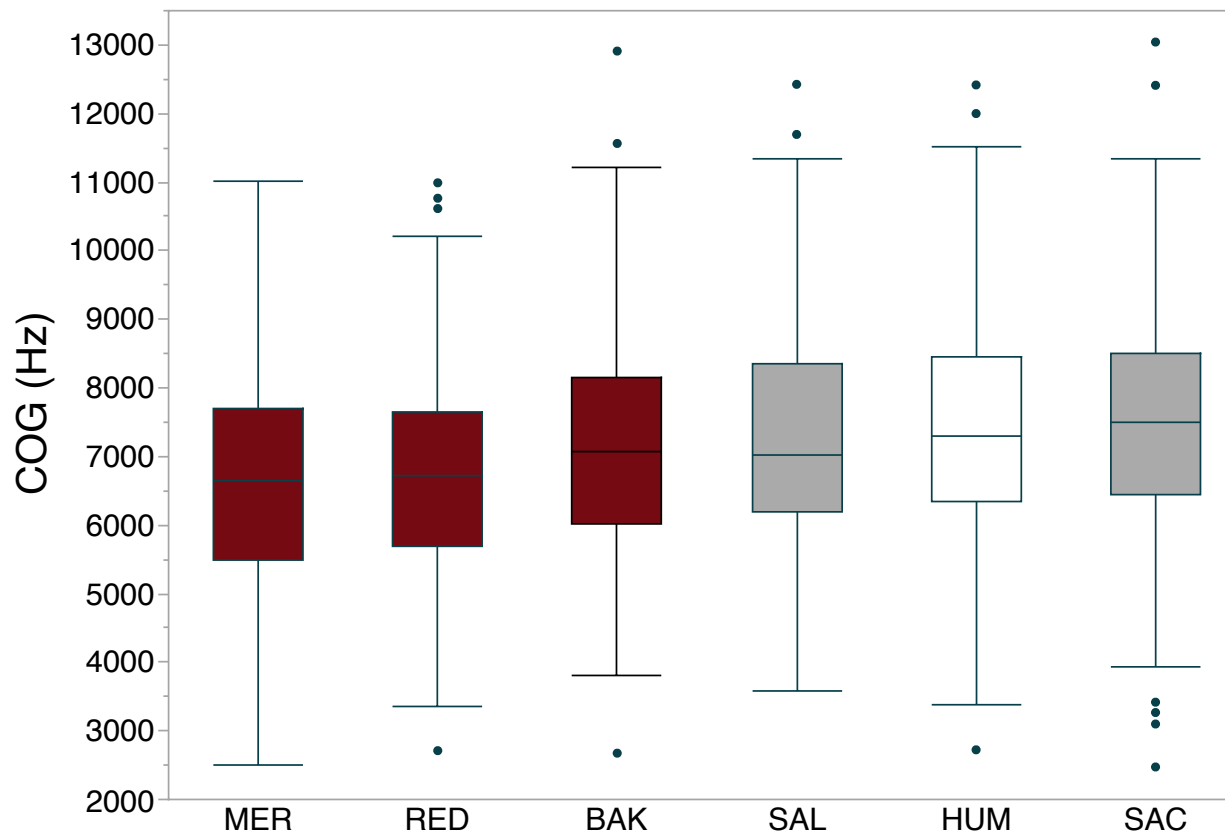
Word list data: N = 2,414





/s/ COG  
by Birth Year  
(Word List Data)

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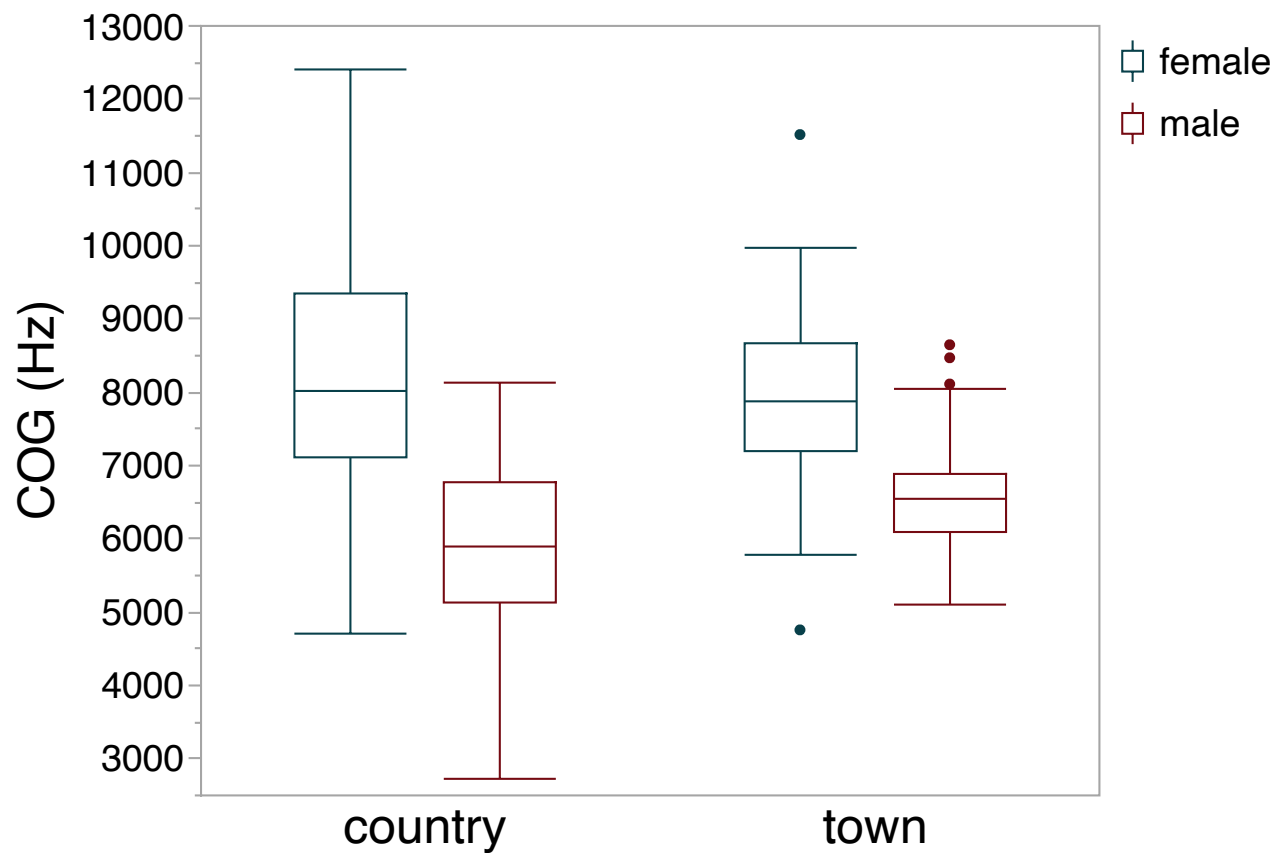


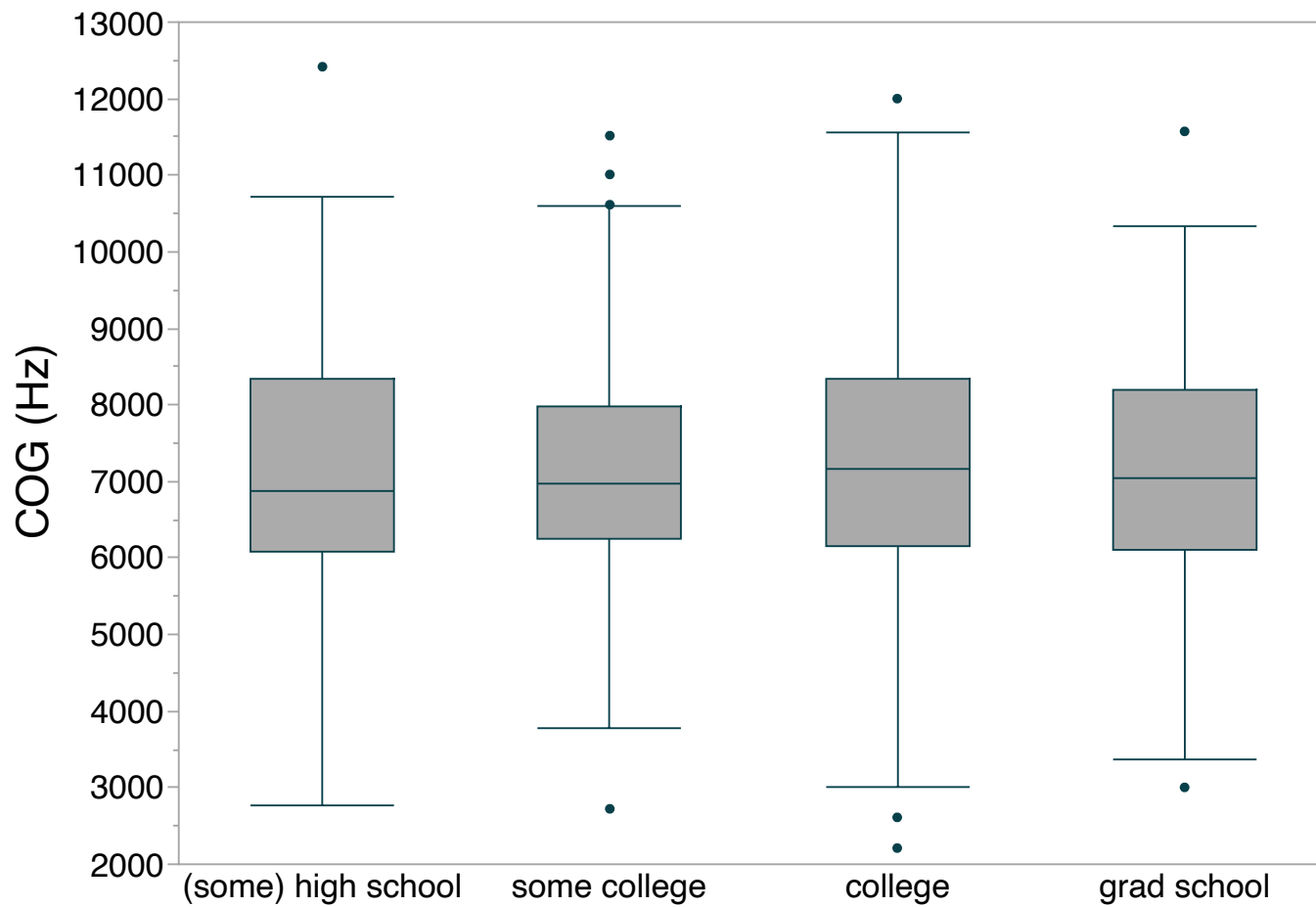
## /s/ COG by Site and Population (Word List Data)

### Population Density

- < 3,600 ppl / sq mile
- > 6,700 ppl / sq mile
- data not available

## /s/ COG by Orientation (Humboldt County Word List Data)





## /s/ COG by Education (Word List Data)

Retracted /s/  
does not index  
education  
(class).

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## Triangulating 'Country'

Correlates of /s/ retraction:

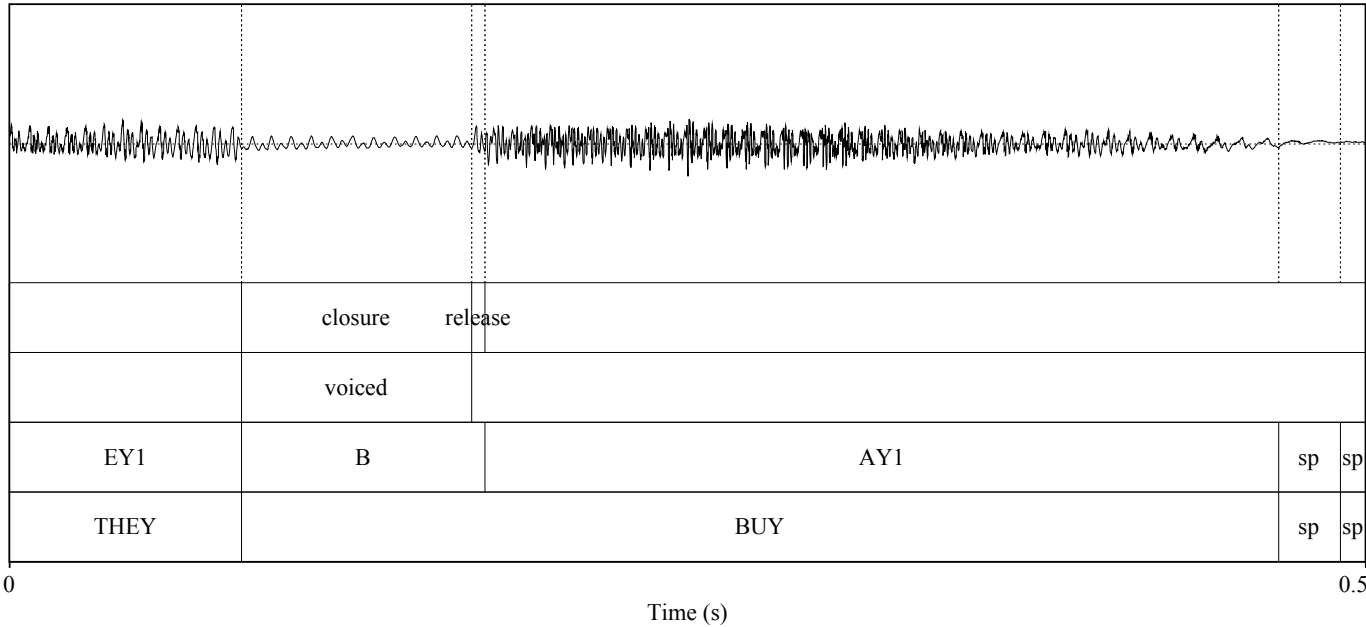
- ✓ low population density
- ✓ being oriented to the country  
(male speakers)
- ✗ lower education level (class)

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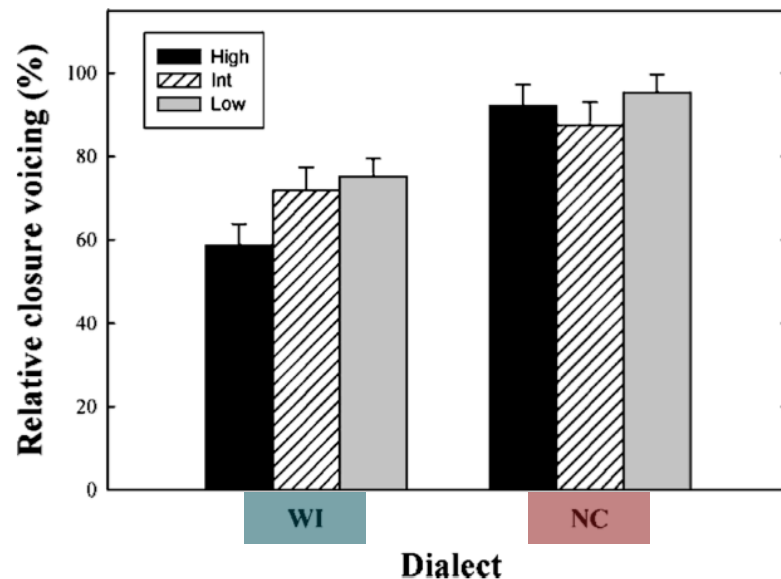
# Strongly Voiced Stop Closures

they [b]uy



## Strongly Voiced Stops as ‘Southern’

Jaciewicz, Fox, and Lyle (2009: 324)



**Figure 6** Proportion of voicing in the closure for each of the three positions of word emphasis produced by Wisconsin and North Carolina speakers.

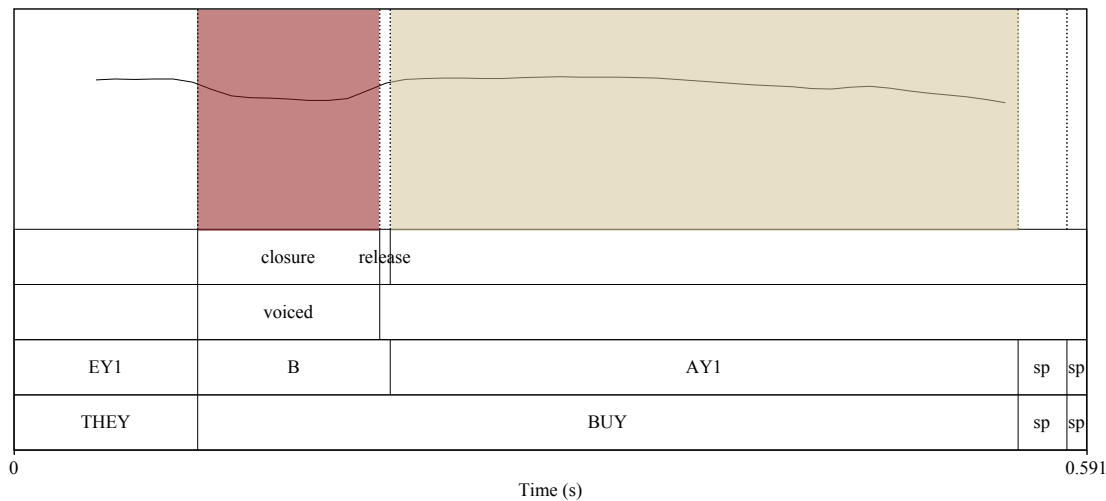
Women (51-65 years old) from **North Carolina** (N=10) exhibit greater degree of closure voicing for word-initial /b/ than women from **Wisconsin** (N=10) in lab speech.



# Voiced Stop Analysis

$$\text{vowel\_to\_closure\_intensity} = \text{mean intensity of vowel} - \text{mean intensity of closure}$$

Interpretation: lower numbers = greater voicing

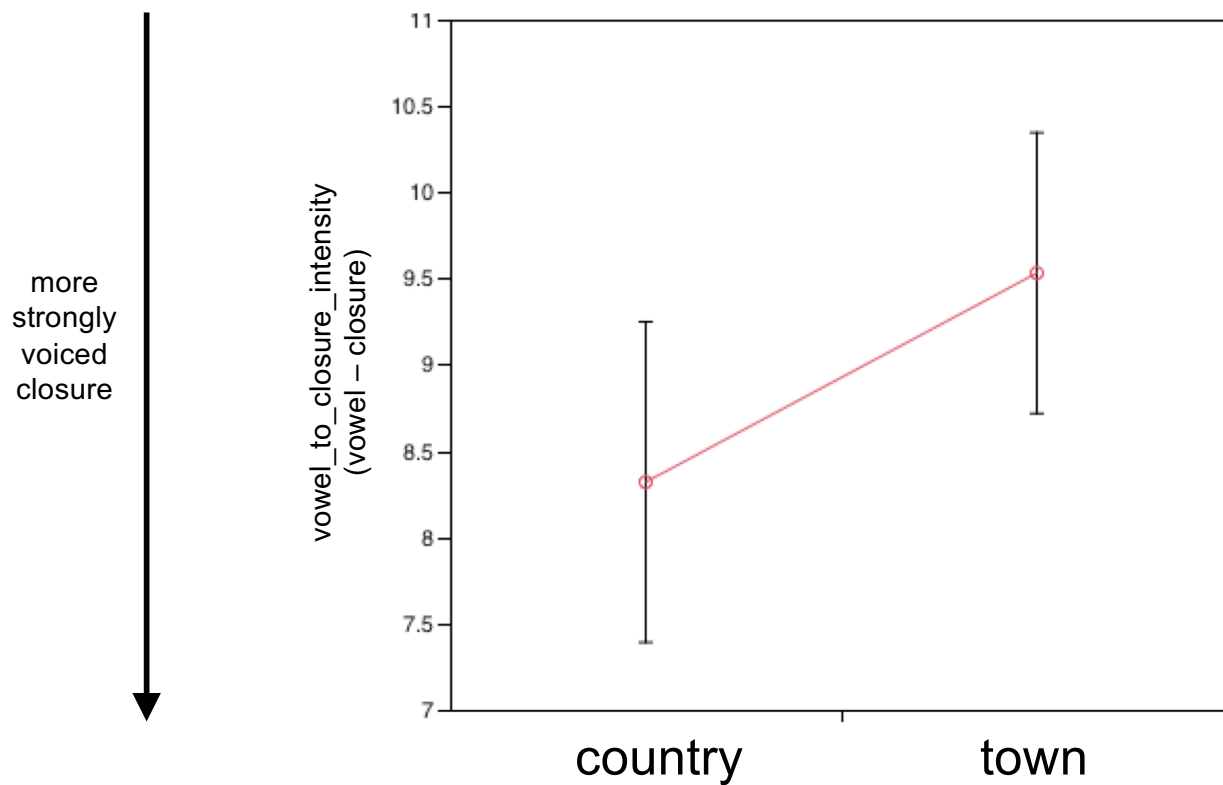


## Hand-annotated data:

- 62 speakers, diverse in age, gender
- 3 field sites: BAK, MER, RED
- 15 tokens/speaker for each of /b, d, g/
- N = 2,700

(adapted from Stoel-Gammon et al. 1994, Jongman et al. 1985)

## Degree of Closure Voicing by Orientation (Interview Data)





## Social Factors with No Observed Effect

- Age** Variation in degree of stop voicing reflects stable variation.
- Site** All 3 communities were small and sparsely populated; predict weaker closure voicing in larger communities
- Education** Degree of stop voicing does not straightforwardly correlate with class.

## Triangulating 'Country'

Correlates of strongly voiced stop closures:

- ? low population density
- ✓ being oriented to the country
- ✗ lower education level (class)

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## Conclusion

Features that once indexed 'Southern' have come to mean 'country', a shift in social meaning precipitated by a contact situation.

	PIN-PEN merger	/s/ retraction	stop voicing
Country orientation	✓	✓	✓
Low population density	✓	✓	?
Conservative politics	✓		
Lower education level (class)	×	×	×
Southern/Okie heritage	×		

## Why Center Meaning?

Social meaning can provide explanations for why individuals diverge from expected patterns.

To offer more precise accounts.

- Previous work (Hall-Lew and Stephens 2012, Campbell-Kibler 2011, Podesva and Van Hofwegen 2016) has taken for granted the tight connection between Southern identity and country ways of being.
- But ‘Southern’ can be productively disentangled from ‘country’



# Thank you!

Eva Kuske

Stanford University and the Richard Karp Foundation

Voices of California Project Interviewees and Researchers

Stanford University