Asian American English

LINGUIST 159 – American Dialects

November 4, 2014

What is an ethnolect?

"Ethnolects are varieties of a language that mark speakers as members of ethnic groups who originally used another language or distinctive variety." (Clyne 2008)

Asian-American Ethnolect

- Substrate influence
- Find features that mark Asian-American identity on a broad scale
- Find features that show assimilation to White Mainstream norms
- Asian American English = White English

Asian-American Ethnolect

"Distinctiveness-centered models of language and ethnicity fail outright when confronted with Asian Americans' speech practices, especially but not only those of the English-speaking generation" (Bucholtz, 2004)

Forever Foreigner Stereotype

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ

Honorary White/Model Minority stereotype

Aug 31, 1987

Erasure

"*Erasure* is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) **invisible**. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go **unnoticed** or get **explained away**. So, for example, a social group or language may be imagined as homogeneous, its internal variation disregarded." (Irvine & Gal 2000)

Problems with ethnolectal approaches to Asian-American English

- Reflections of cultural stereotypes about Asian-Americans

- Assumption of *pan-ethnicity* erases heterogeneity in associated geographical, cultural, and especially **language** backgrounds

- Erases extremely disparate experiences of different waves of immigration from Asia

Asian Immigration to the U.S.: First Waves

- **Chinese** in mid 19th century until Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943)

- **Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos** in mid-to-late 19th century (immigration quotas placed, including Immigration Act 1924)

- World War II: **Japanese-American internment** (1942-1945)

# Asian Immigration to the U.S.: Second Waves

- 1965 Immigration Act re-opened immigration (lifted national quotas)
- Vietnam War: influx to U.S. of displaced people from **Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos**
- 1990 Immigration Act: favoring of Asian immigrants with professional training
- Asian-Americans fastest *growing* non-white population in U.S. in last few decades
- Majority numbers of college and graduate international students from East Asia and South Asia

Heterogeneity in Asian-American Experience

- Degrees of long-standing-ness in Asian American communities

- Socioeconomic and educational opportunity

- Language background and amount of Asian language spoken in the home

- Generation

- Cultural practices and emphases

"Problem" Minority Stereotype

- Some groups of Southeast Asian refugees have settled in impoverished urban areas, participate in gang culture

- Relatively low rates of educational attainment

- Relatively high levels of poverty

Language, Identity, and Stereotype Among Southeast Asian American Youth

The Other Asian

Angela Reyes
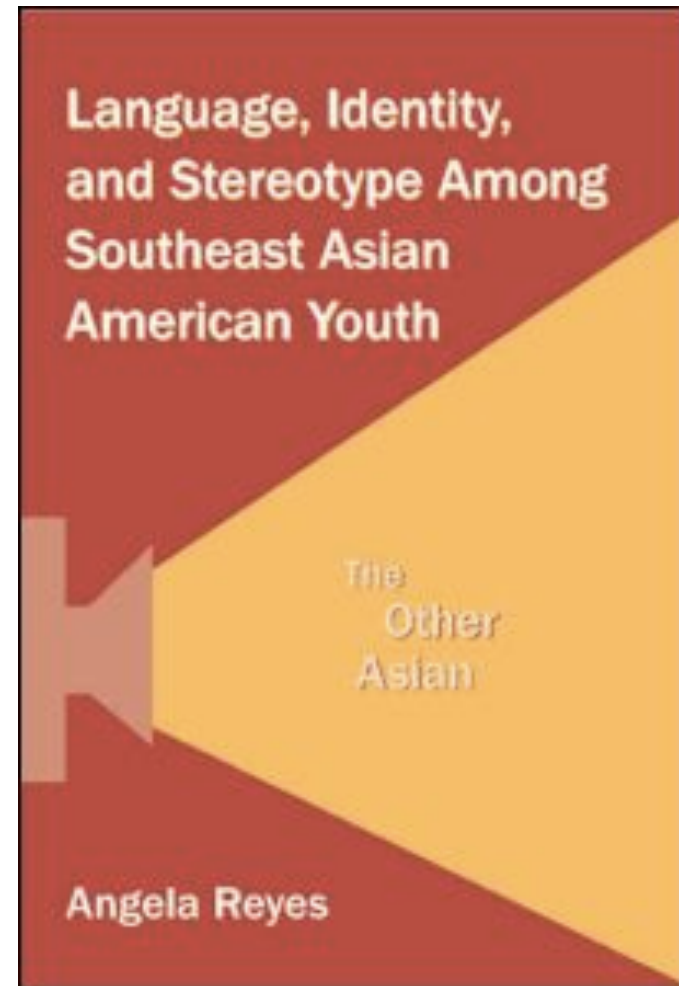
Heterogeneity in Asian-American Experience

"I feel like post-Vietnam wave of immigrant, that we really don't have the Asian American identity that's been identified [as] the Asian American experience... We should be able to identify ourselves and categorize into the "Other Asian"... my kind came here for liberation... to be like free as opposed to come here to see America as a prospect. We're not here to say we want to be a part of this."

-Sokla, from Reyes (2007)

Ethnolinguistic repertoire

"A repertoire approach...views features not as the property of any ethnic group, but as *potential* resources for the conveyance of **indexical** meanings." (Becker 2012)

Indexicality

- Linguistic features (and other signs) **index**, or point to, social meanings

- "Meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a **field** of potential meanings..." (Eckert 2008b, "Variation in the Indexical Field")

Becker (2012)

"Rather than answer the question above – is Lisa's non-rhoticity AAE, or NYCE? I argue that a linguistic repertoire approach both allows for room to identify what non-rhoticity might allow Lisa **to accomplish** and demonstrates the need to move beyond the ethnolect/dialect binary."

Lisa's non-rhoticity serves a purpose by conveying social meanings *in context*.
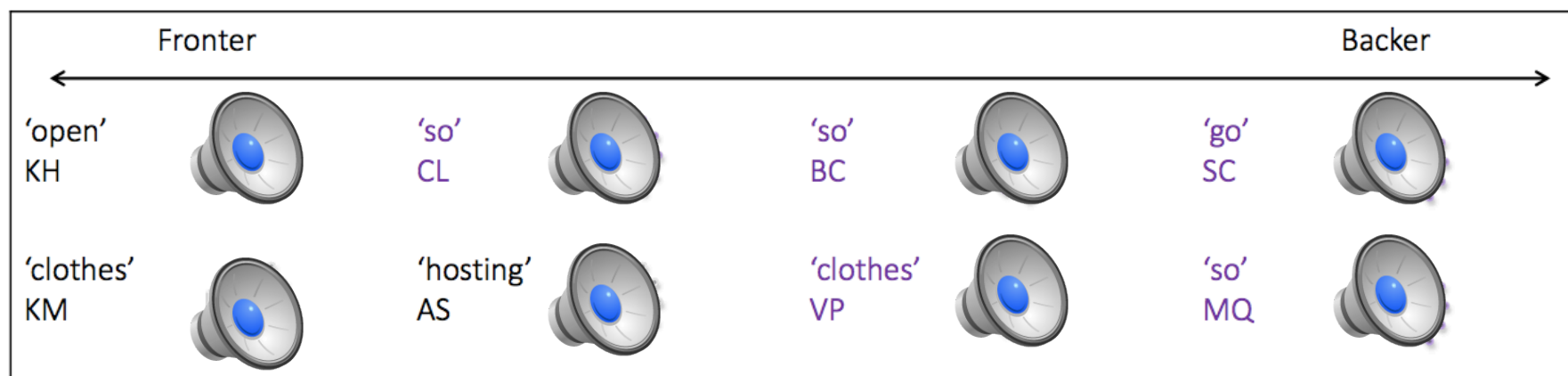
Intersectional Approaches

- Intersection between (for example) **ethnic** and **regional** identities
- Multidimensionality of identity
- Dimensions of identity are interrelated and often inseparable (*intersectionality*)
- Multiple dimensions can be packaged together with the use of a single linguistic feature
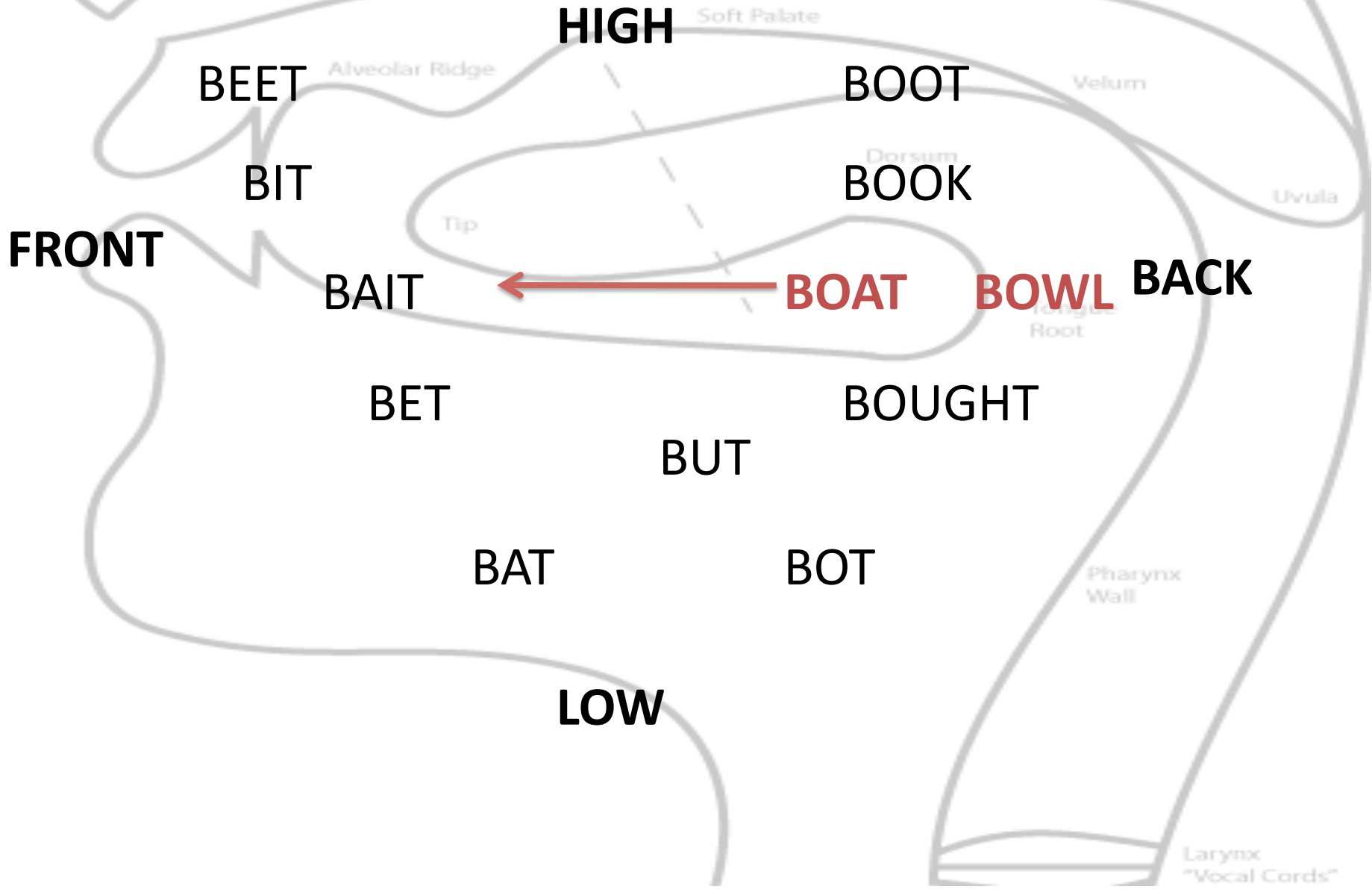- Meanings emerge in context through stylistic practice

Bauman (2014)

Variable: /o/ in Mid-Atlantic U.S. Asian-American versus White female college students from Mid-Atlantic
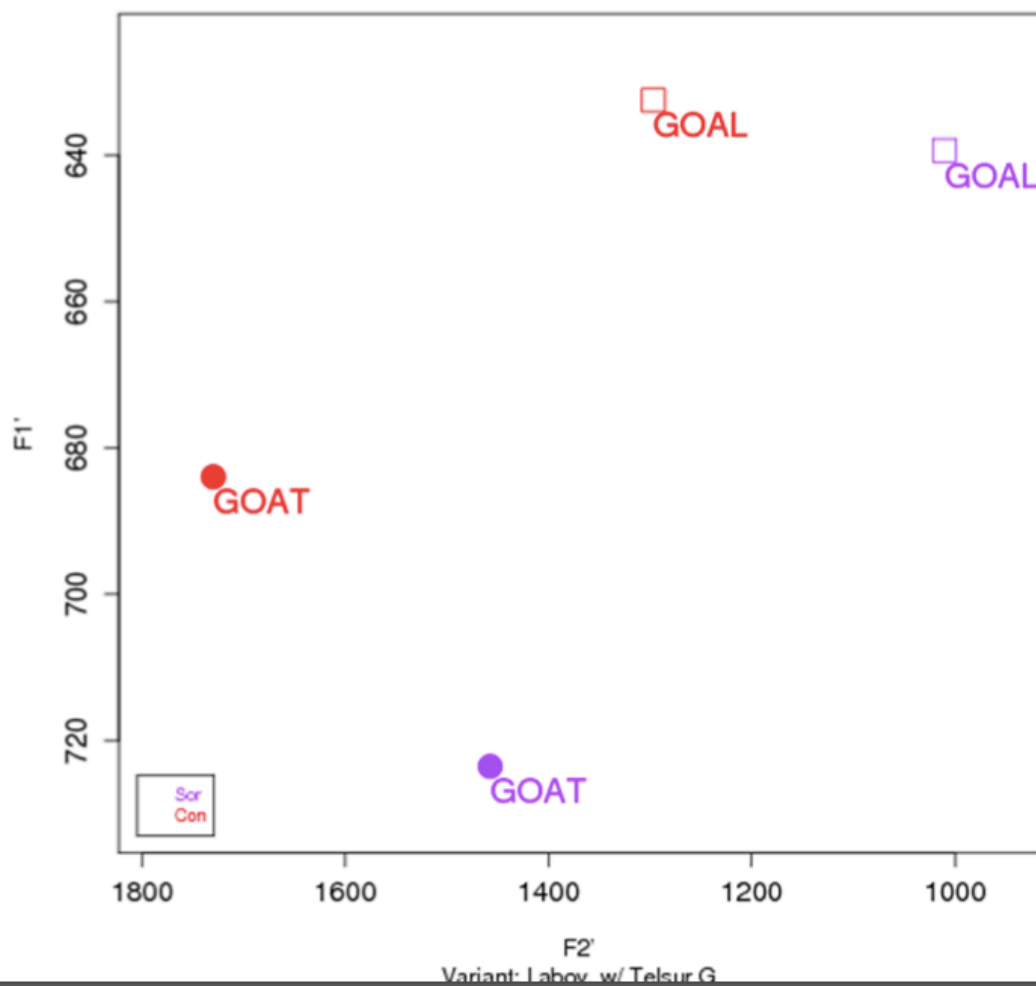
What's it sound like?

/o/-fronting

HIGH

Soft Palate

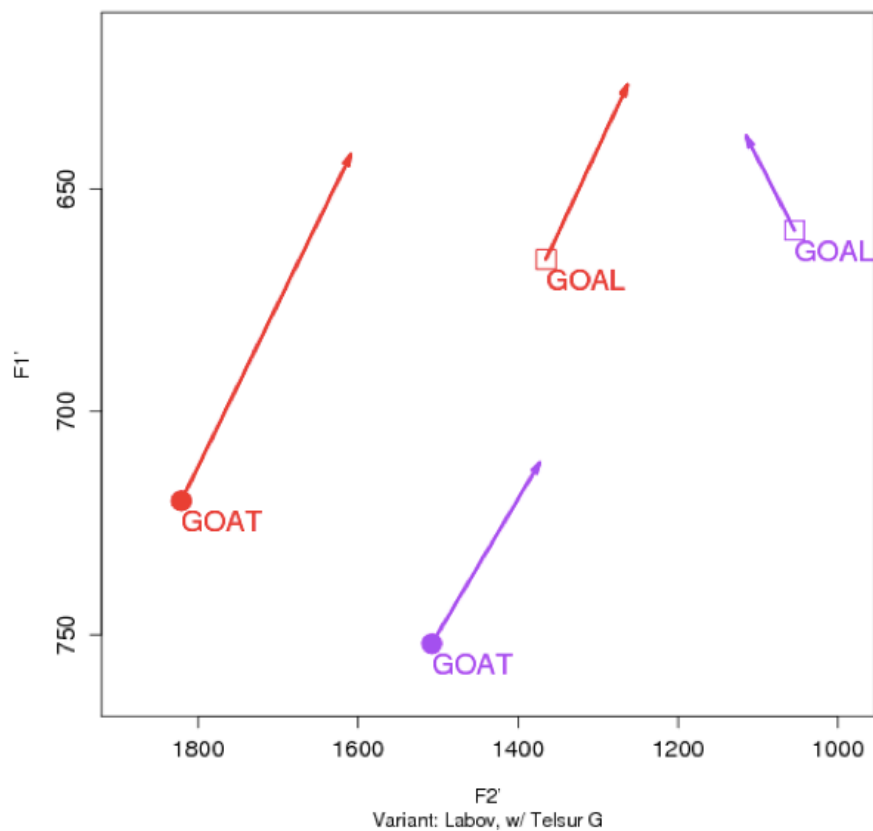BEET

Alveolar Ridge

BOOT

Velum

BIT

BOOK

Dorsum

Uvula

FRONT

Tip

BAIT

BOAT   BOWL **BACK**

Tongue
Root

BET

BOUGHT

BUT

BAT

BOT

Pharynx
Wall

LOW

Larynx
"Vocal Cords"

Bauman (2014)

Group averages

Group	Vowel	N	F1'	F2'
Sor	GOAT	528	724	1457
Sor	GOAL	32	639	1010
Con	GOAT	56	684	1730
Con	GOAL	32	633	1297

GOAT
$F(1, 582) = 66.2, p < .001$

GOAL
$F(1, 62) = 20.9, p < .001$

Bauman (2014)

Mono-/diphthongal quality

On average, AsAm speakers (M = -104.8) show about 30% less movement in GOAT than non-Asian speakers (M = -149.5).
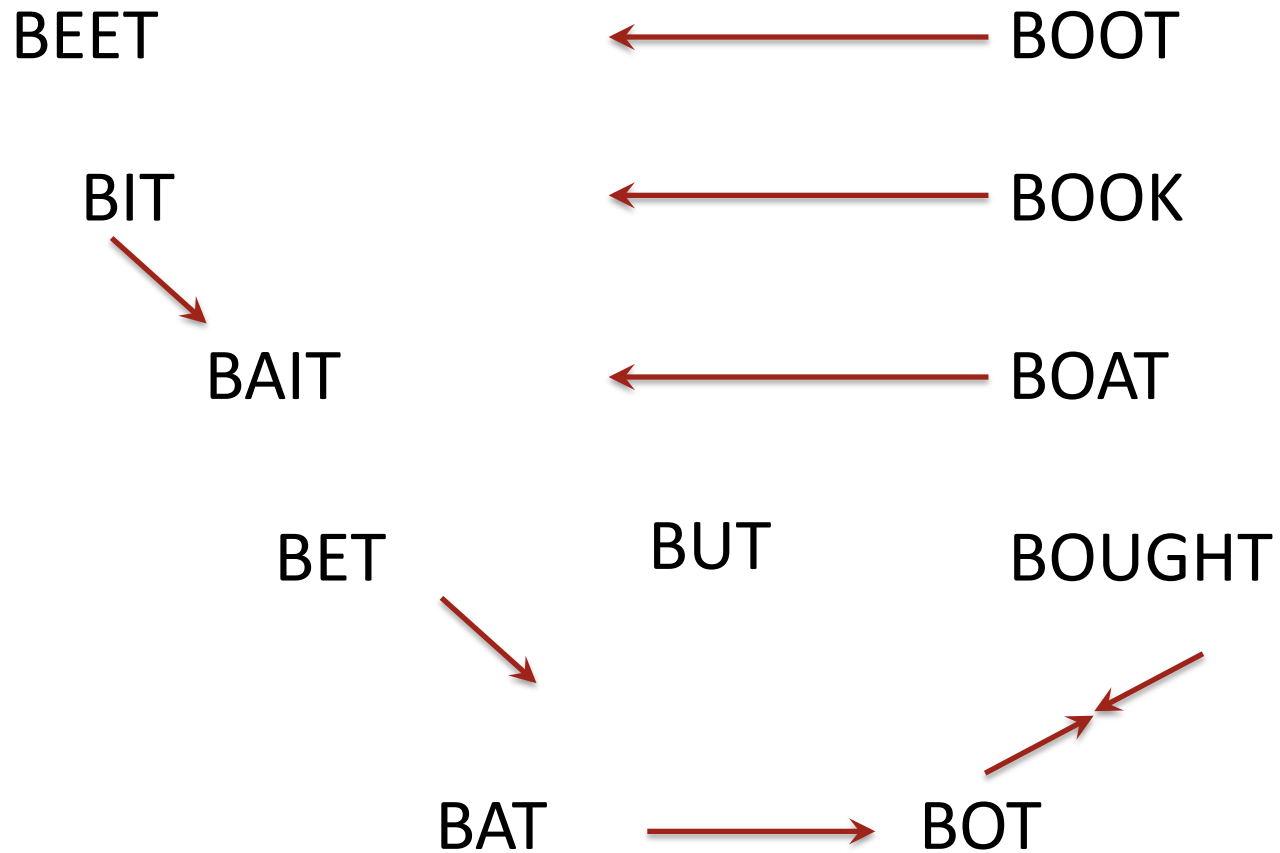
$F (1, 646) = 5.4, p = .02$

Hall-Lew (2009)

- **Variables:** California Vowel Shift features
- Chinese-Americans and European-Americans in San Francisco's Sunset District; a "New Chinatown" neighborhood

Figure 3.1: View of the Sunset District from Grand View Park. Photo by Lauren Hall-Lew, 2008

California Vowel Shift

Hall-Lew (2009)

- **BOOT fronting**
  - Rate of fronting did not differ by ethnicity or immigrant generation
  - Younger speakers fronted significantly more
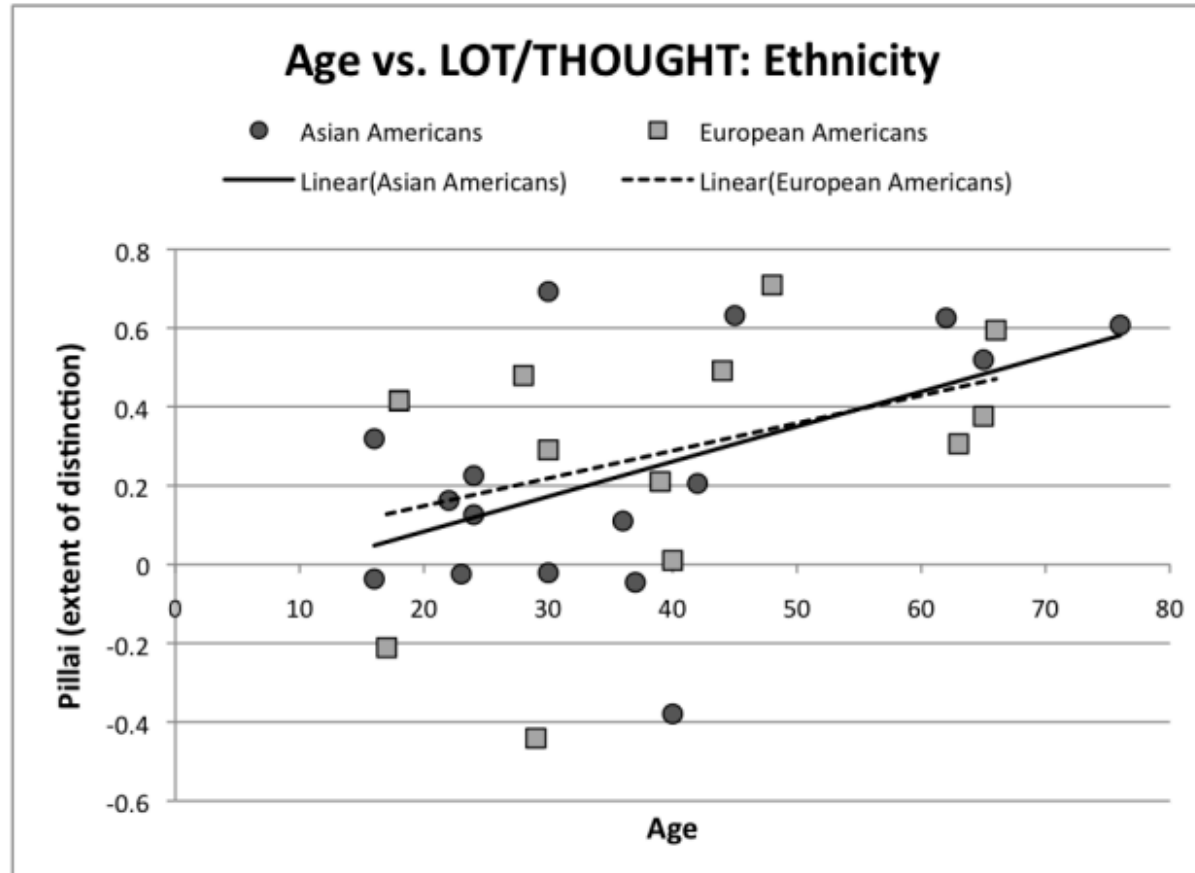
Hall-Lew (2009)

Figure 4.2: Speaker age versus extent of low back merger, represented by Pillai score, for 29 speakers, divided according to broad speaker ethnic category: 'Asian American' versus 'European American'.
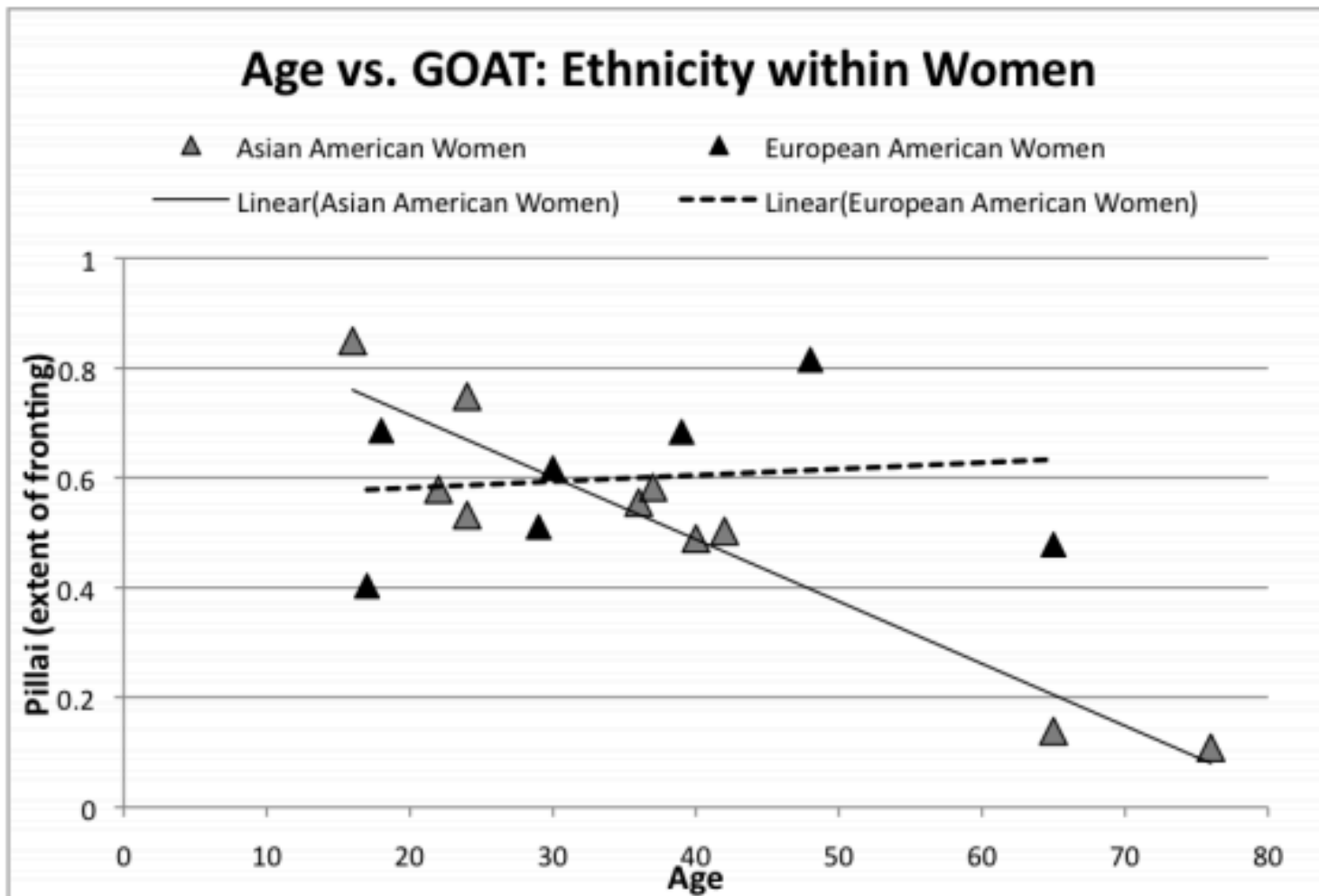
Hall-Lew (2009)

Figure 5.12: Speaker age and GOAT fronting score, among women.

Reyes (2004)

- **Variable**: use of *aite* and *na mean*
- Southeast Asian American high school students in Philadelphia
- Practices associated with African American youth culture reshaped to index Asian-American-ness: hybrid of AAVE and features of Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao
- Use of AAVE slang to fashion "Other Asian" urban youth identities

Shankar (2008)

- Desi teens in Bay Area high school
- Opposition between FOB and "popular" Desi identities (both in contrast to non-Desi teen identities)
- Use of Punjabi-English code-switching, Desi-Accented English used by FOB males to distinguish themselves from "popular" Desi teens
- Hip-hop language and California slang used by "popular" Desi teens

Asian-American Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

- What types of factors should be considered in an analysis of Asian-American English repertoires?

- How do we…
  - Select groups to compare?
  - Pick variables to investigate?
  - Connect regional dialect features with other aspects of identity?
  - Ascertain social meanings associated with ethnicity?

Hall-Lew & Wong (2013)

- **Variable:** BOUGHT vowel
- Chinese-Americans in NYC and SF

Hall-Lew & Wong (2013)

- **NYC:**
  - Older speakers: divide between White and Asian very salient, unique Chinese-American identity not as available (many mentioned wanting to identify as *American*); orientation toward v. away from "American"
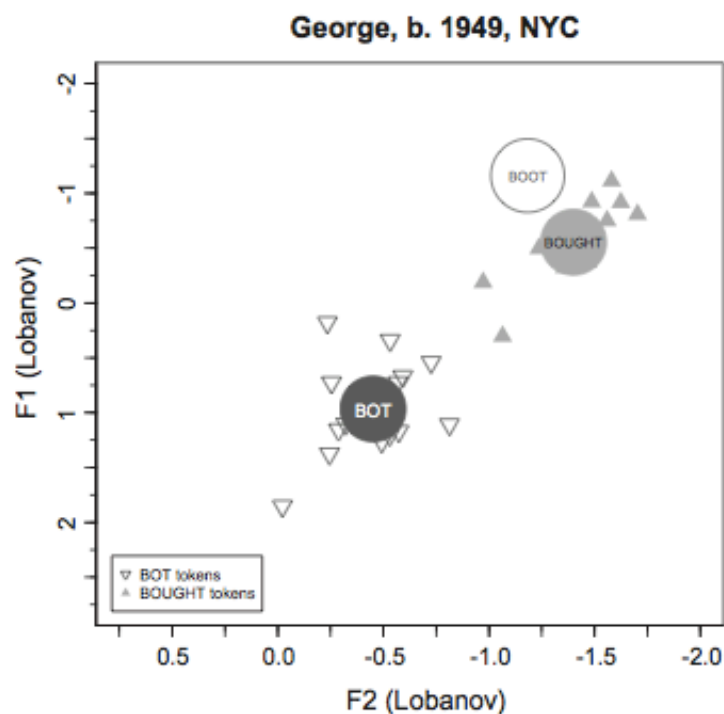

Fig. 4. BOT & BOUGHT vowels of two New Yorkers – George, Male, born in 1
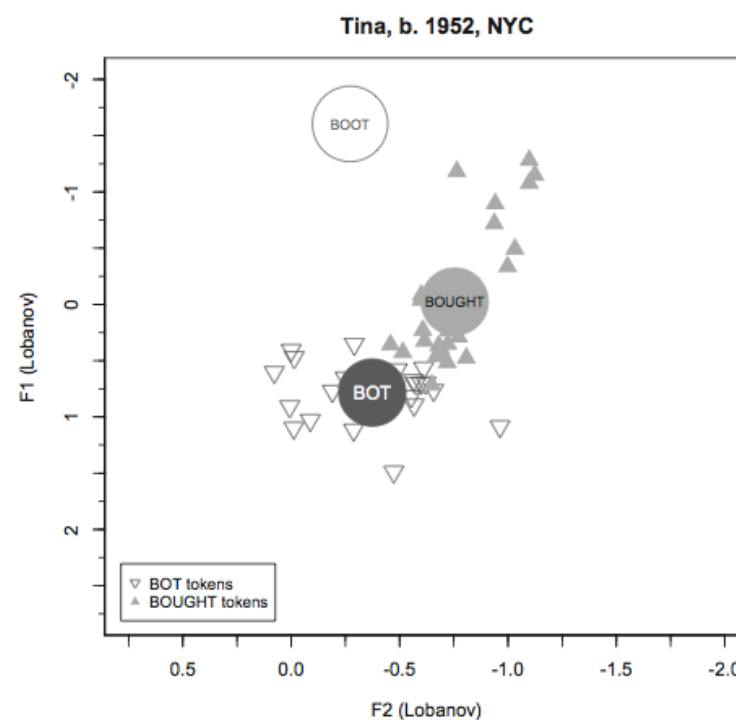
Fig. 5. Tina, Female, born in 1952 (New York City) – BOT & BOUGHT vowels, with BOOT plotted as a reference.

Hall-Lew & Wong (2013)

BOT/BOUGHT Distinction among Chinese Americans
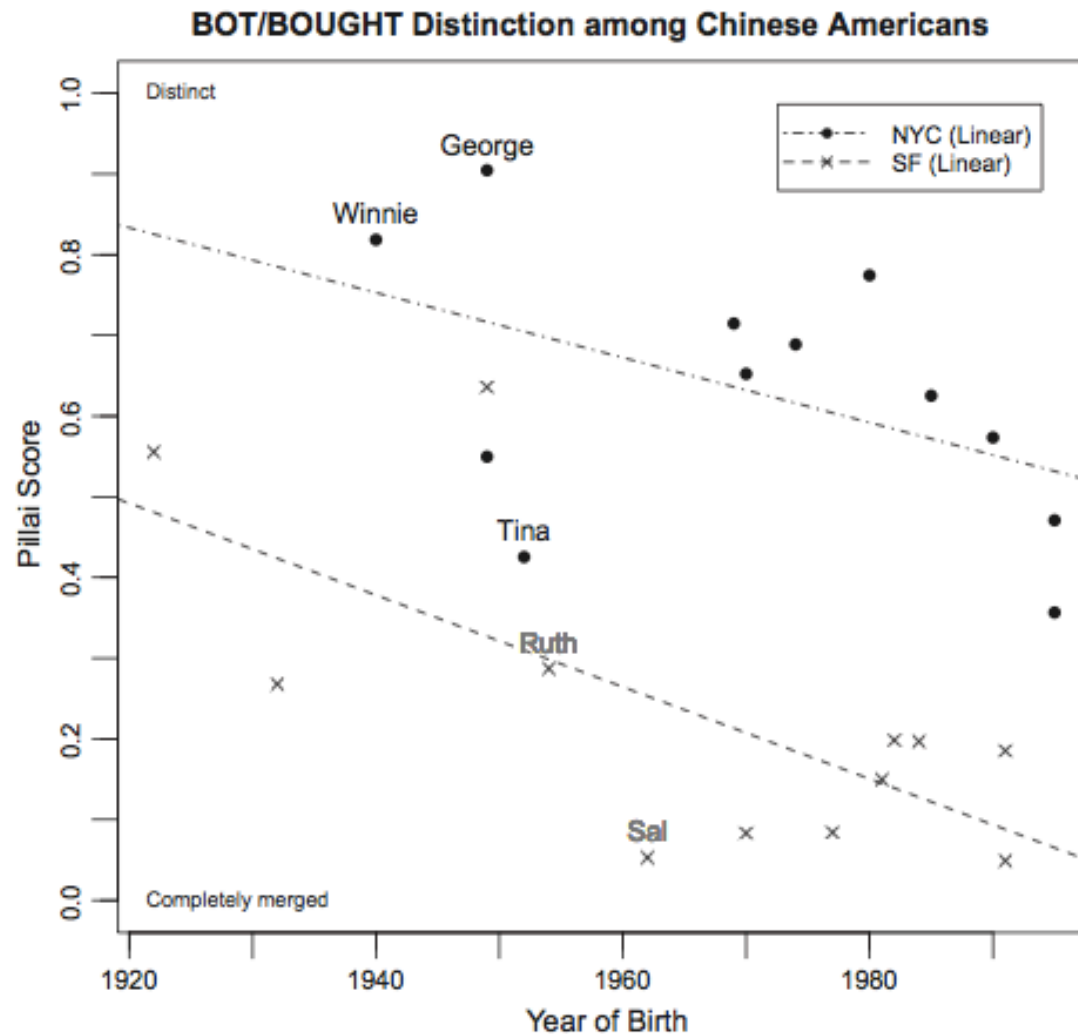
Lower = BOT and BOUGHT more merged

Fig. 2. BOT/BOUGHT distinction, represented by Pillai score, for 24 Chinese Americans, plotted by year of birth and region (a higher Pillai score reveals a greater difference between the token distributions of two categories being compared).

Hall-Lew & Wong (2013)

- **NYC:**
  - Raised BOUGHT vowel associated with iconic New Yorkers (white ethnicities)
  - Older White and Chinese American speakers use raised BOUGHT
- **SF:**
  - Historically raised BOUGHT also associated with working-class European ethnicities (e.g. "Mission Brogue"), associated with NYC
  - Older Chinese Americans: no distinctive raising

Hall-Lew & Wong (2013)

- **SF:**
  - Older speakers: uniquely Asian-American identities *did* exist, also, raised BOUGHT less salient as place index
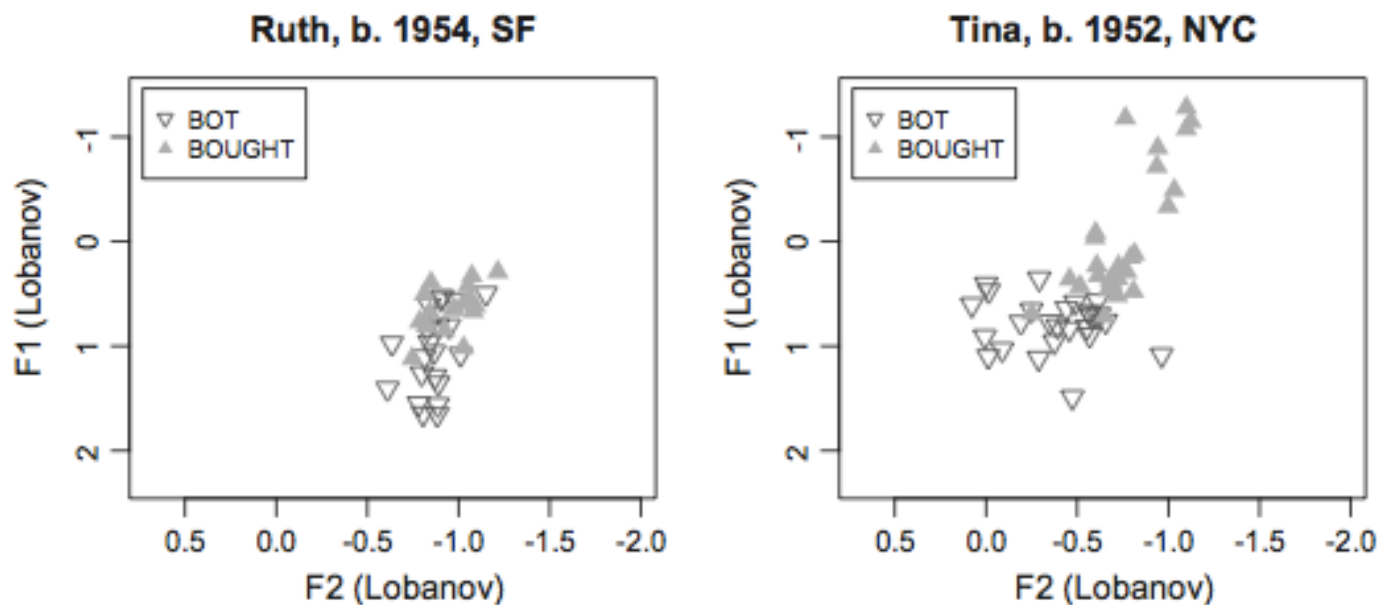

Fig. 6. A comparison of the low back vowels produced by Tina (NY) and Ruth (SF).