

# What is an ethnic dialect?

LINGUIST 159 - American Dialects

October 28, 2014

# Joseph Fruehwald on *Slate*

## What's wrong with "America's ugliest accent"

- What *is* wrong with it?

“It's a working class language, probably, is what it amounts to”

- What's a “standard language ideology”?

“It's the idea that somewhere out there, there's a perfect, unadulterated version of English, and what your everyday person speaks is a poor copy”

- Why does it have to be so nasty?

“It's probably in part because standard language ideology gives us almost no other way to talk about accents but negatively.”

# Who won?

America's ugliest accent (according to voters on  
Gawker) is..... \*\*drumroll\*\*

# The post-ethnolect era

**Pre-ethnolect → Ethnolect → Post-ethnolect**

**ethnolinguistic repertoire**

(cf. Benor 2010; Becker 2012, 2014)

**ethnicity as stylistic practice**

(cf. Eckert 2008)

# 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)

# Dialect = Variety = Language

Wolfram and Schilling (p. 2):

**Dialect** is a neutral label to refer to any variety of a language that is shared by a group of speakers.

**"A language is a dialect with an army and navy."** – Max Weinreich

Dialects/varieties are fully-fledged language systems, not simply oddities, “broken English,” or “colorful” speech.

# Critique of the ethnolect

Becker (2012, 2014\*)

- This process has led to *a priori* groupings of certain individuals
- The conceptualization of the ethnolect as uniform, both linguistically and socioculturally, is further problematic in perpetuating the ideological contrast between marked ethnic speakers and their unmarked counterparts.
- We rarely talk of regional dialects as white ethnolects (why?)
- Speakers are 'multivalent'

# Critique of the ethnolect

Becker (2012, 2014\*)

- The ethnolect/dialect opposition...further assumes that speakers do not cross these lines (*crossing, Rampton 1995*)
- The supra-regional myth (Wolfram 2007)
- Ethnicity trumps all other factors, so we're always talking about *convergence* or *divergence* from these two fixed –lects.



# Are ethnolects even necessary?

African American (Vernacular) English:  
“Paradigmatic case of ethnicity-based language  
diversity” (Wolfram and Schilling)

# Naming an ethnolect

Negro Dialect

Non-standard Negro English

Black English

Vernacular Black English

Afro-American English

Ebonics

African American (Vernacular) English

African American Language

# Seminal Pre-ethnolectal texts

Turner, Lorenzo Dow (1941, 1949) – Connection between Gullah and African languages

McDavid, Raven (also with Virginia McDavid) (late 1940s- 1970s) – Relationship between Negro speech and Southern white speech, dialect prejudices, correlates with social class

Critical of the “deficit” view of African American language

Largely descriptive – focus on de-stigmatizing and educating an as-yet biased linguistics readership.

# Pre-ethnolect era

What are they responding to?

McDavid, Raven. (1951). The relationship of the speech of American Negroes to the speech of whites. In: *Dialects in Culture: Essays in General Dialectology*.

# AAVE as an ethnolect

**African American English:** The variety of American English spoken by some people of African descent in the US. Often abbreviated AAE. (Wolfram and Schilling, glossary)

## Seminal studies:

Wolfram (1969) – Detroit

Labov (1972) – NYC

Fasold (1972) – Washington, DC

Baugh (1979) – Los Angeles

Rickford (1974, 1975) – Philadelphia, South Carolina

Bailey (and Maynor, Cukor-Avila)) (1980s) – Northern Texas

Rickford (1990s) – East Palo Alto

Wolfram and Thomas (2002) – Rural North Carolina

# AAVE as an ethnolect

## [Features of AAVE](#)

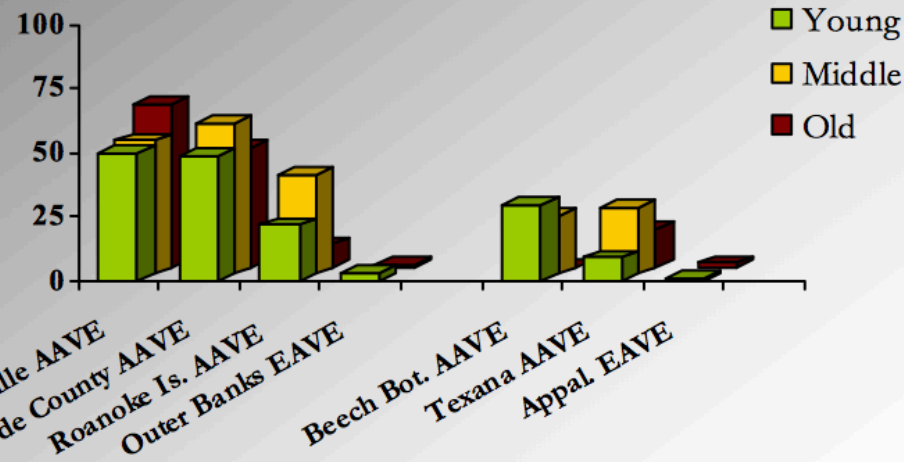
[http://web.stanford.edu/~jmvanhof/research\\_files/DDM\\_Handout.pdf](http://web.stanford.edu/~jmvanhof/research_files/DDM_Handout.pdf)

The Uniformity Controversy (Thomas 2007):

- Is there a set of norms for AAE throughout the country to which many or most African Americans are oriented?
- What degree of geographical uniformity does AAE exhibit?
- How dependent or independent is geographical variation in AAE from geographical variation in the white vernaculars of the same region?

# AAVE as an ethnolect

## Comparative Evidence for 3rd sg. -s Absence, by Age in Coastal and in Appalachian Regional Contexts



# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

Benor (2010):

Solves many of the ethnolect problems:

1. Intra-group variation.
2. Intra-speaker variation.
3. Out-group use.
4. Delineating the ethnic group.
5. Delineating 'ethnolect'.



# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

## Benor (2010)

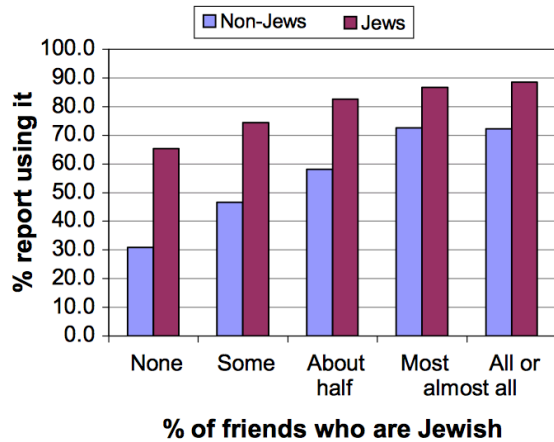


Fig. 2. Respondents who use *shmooze* to mean 'chat.'

**Table 15**

Americans who never lived in NY and whose parents did not grow up there: % who report that they pronounce 'Mary' and 'merry' differently.

Jewish	34 (N = 9127)
Not Jewish	27 (N = 3334)

$p < .001$ .

**Table 16**

Americans who never lived in NY and whose parents did not grow up there: % who report that they pronounce the 'o' in 'orange' as 'are'.<sup>a</sup>

Jewish	20 (N = 9133)
Not Jewish	9 (N = 3346)

$p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup> Findings for 'horrible' and 'Florida' were similar.

# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

Benor (2010):

“...Jews make selective use of elements of the repertoire as they perform their identities along various continua, especially religiosity, textual learnedness, Yiddish-speaking or other ancestry, age/generation, and connection to Israel. The use of linguistic features helps Jews indicate which groups they align themselves with and which groups they distinguish themselves from. And social networks are crucial in the spread and continued use of elements of the repertoire” (p. 152)

# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

What does the ethnolinguistic repertoire gain us?

Becker (2012)

Copula absence - AAE

Raised BOUGHT - NYCE

Coda /r/ - AAE or NYCE?

# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

## Excerpt 2:

1 K: What about you? Do you see yourself staying?

2 L: Yeah. I'm [DC] proud of my neighborhood. I'm [DC] proud to be from here. I could go to the depths  
3 of some crazy mountain in Africa, I could go to some random capricious mountain in fucking  
4 Australia. If I say, "Manhattan," or "New York," People know where I live at. They've heard about  
5 me. They've heard about my neighborhood.

6 K: So what's your identity? Is it Manhattan? Or is it Lower East Side?

7 L: It depends on where I'm [DC] at. It is [DC] so funny, so if I'm [DC] in, I know this because I do this  
8 work nationally. So on the national level, sometimes some people from New York, upstate, and  
9 they all bragging [C] about they from New York [C]. I'm [DC] like, "Eh, Yeah we all from  
10 New York [C]. I'm [DC] from New York City." But then if we farther away [C], like if I'm [DC]  
11 in Panama, South America, and somebody's [C] from New York, now we really together [C]. Like,  
12 "Yeah, we from New York [C]. He's from Syracuse [C], I'm [DC] from New York City, but we're  
13 from New York [C]."

K: You're together.

14 L: Yeah, we're together [C]. This is New York [C]. So, I'm [DC] a Lower East Sider. Always. I'm [DC] a  
15 Lower East Sider til I die-er.

# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

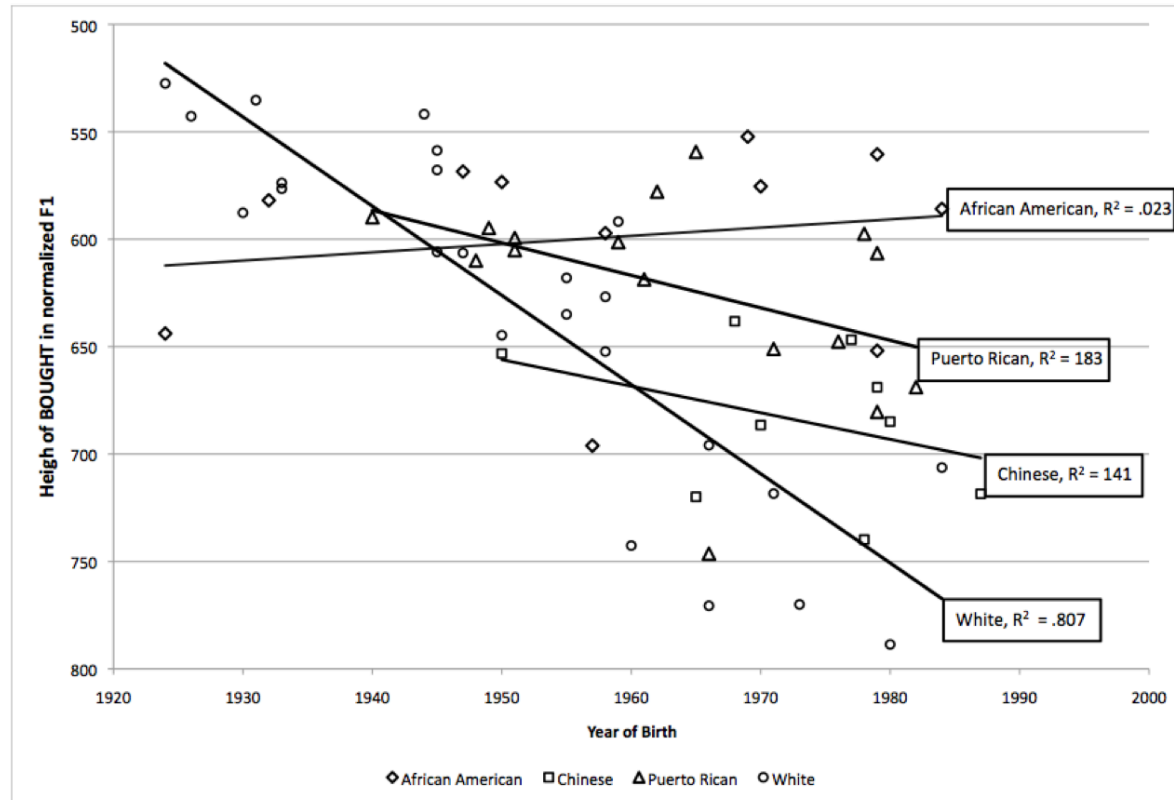


Figure 2. BOUGHT-lowering in apparent time, from Becker (2010)

# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

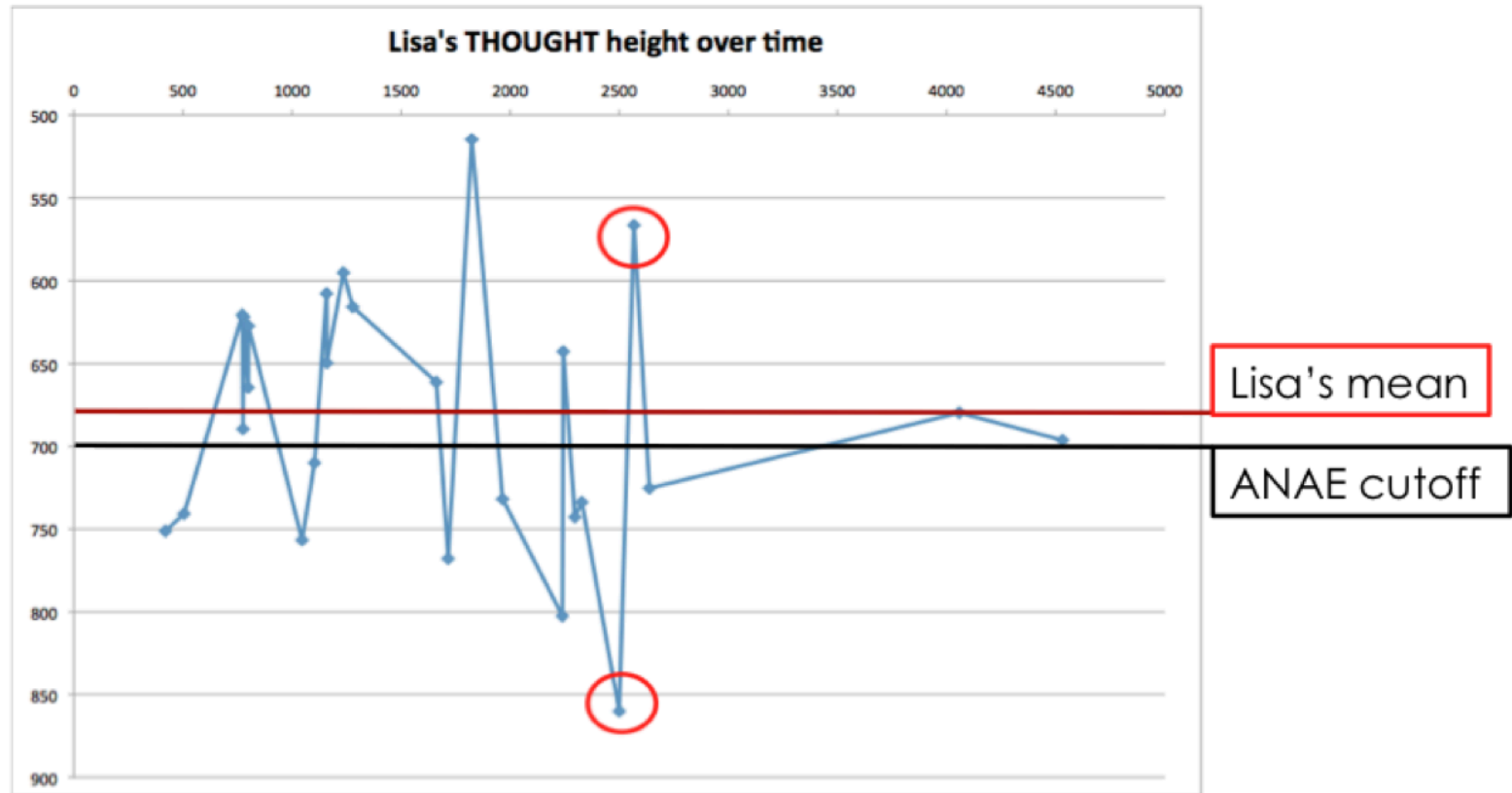


Figure 3. Lisa's BOUGHT height over time

# Ethnolinguistic Repertoire

“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.”

What does Lisa’s non-rhoticity index? Extremely local PLACE identity.

Are ethnolects even necessary?

What does an ethnolectal approach gain us?



# The Longitudinal Study and Database

- Initiated in 1990 by Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute (Chapel Hill, NC). Ongoing; most recent data collection post-secondary (2011-12)
- Longitudinal sample: 88 African American children from 6-12 months (mean 8.1 months); 71% below poverty level; 67 continue in study to present (post secondary).
- Supplemental samples:
  - Caretakers (mother) at ages 6 and 9.
  - Same age/sex peers at 11, 13, 15.
- Data (2400 CDs full)
  - Language samples collected annually or bi-annually (now on [SLAAP](#)).
  - 120 demographic, social, psychological, and educational variables, including all school records, standardized and non/standardized tests, teacher/family info, etc.

# What does an ethnolectal approach gain us?

Provide a “snap shot” of dialect usage at a point in time.

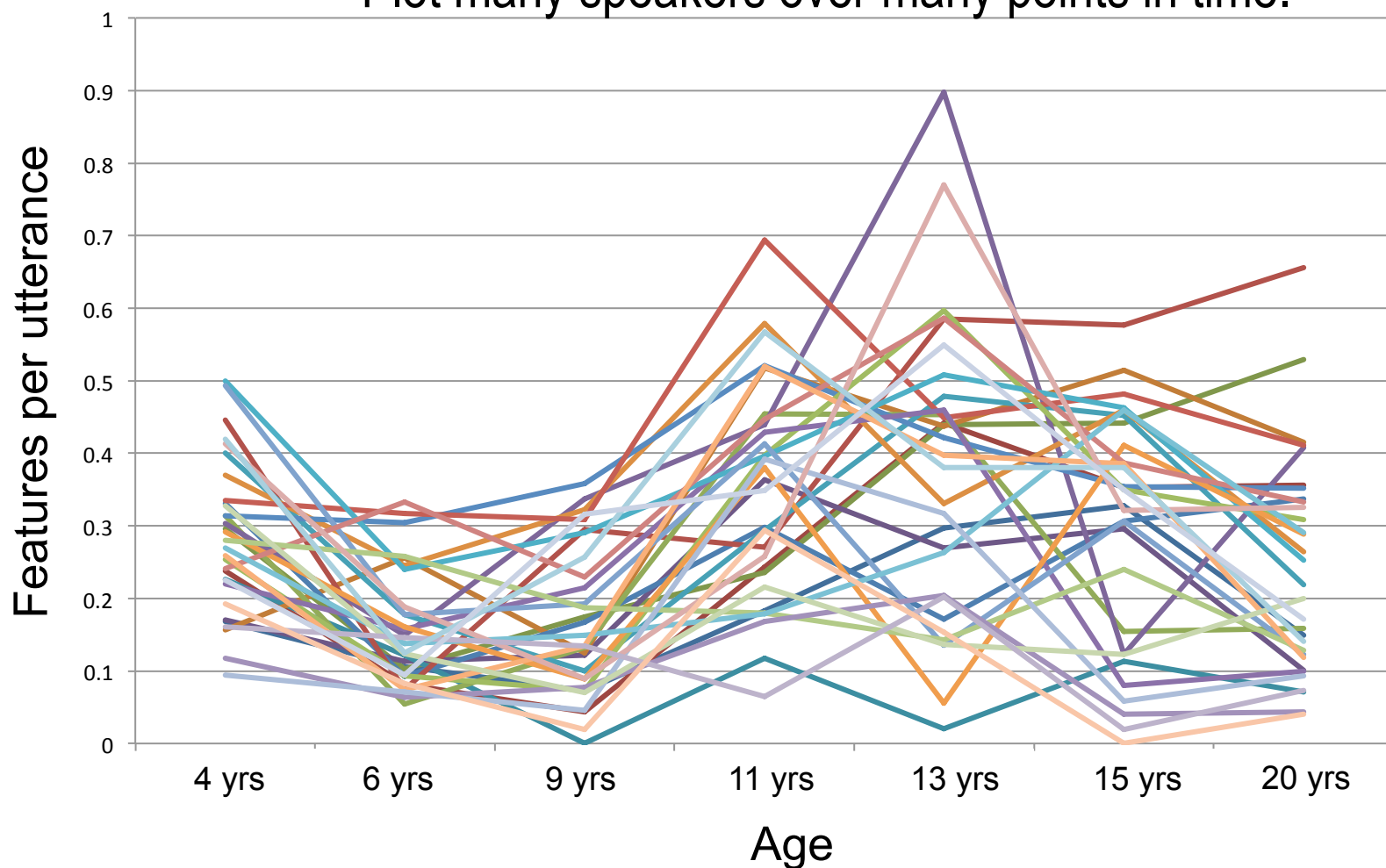


Jared

<u>Age</u>	<u>DDM</u>
4 years	0.28
6 years	0.26
9 years	0.19
11 years	0.18
13 years	0.14
15 years	0.24
20 years	0.13

# What does an ethnolectal approach gain us?

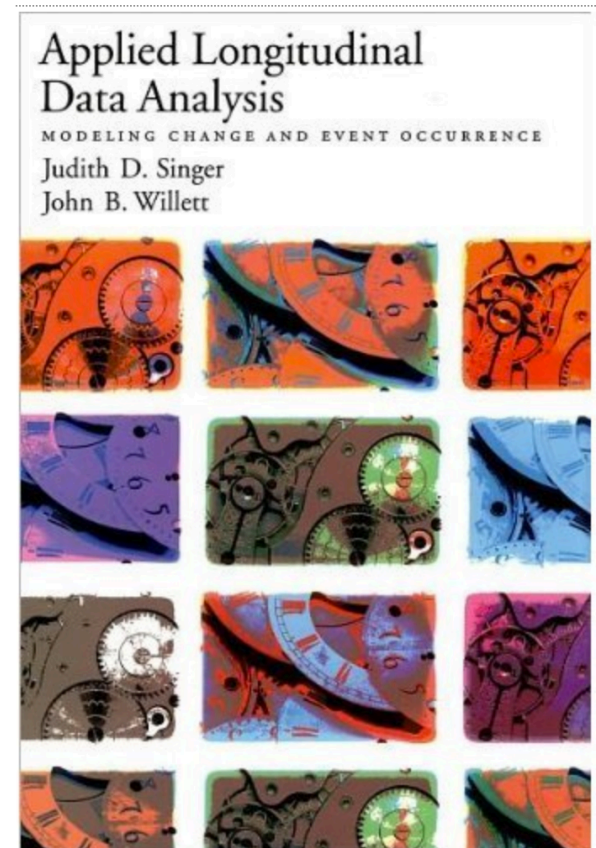
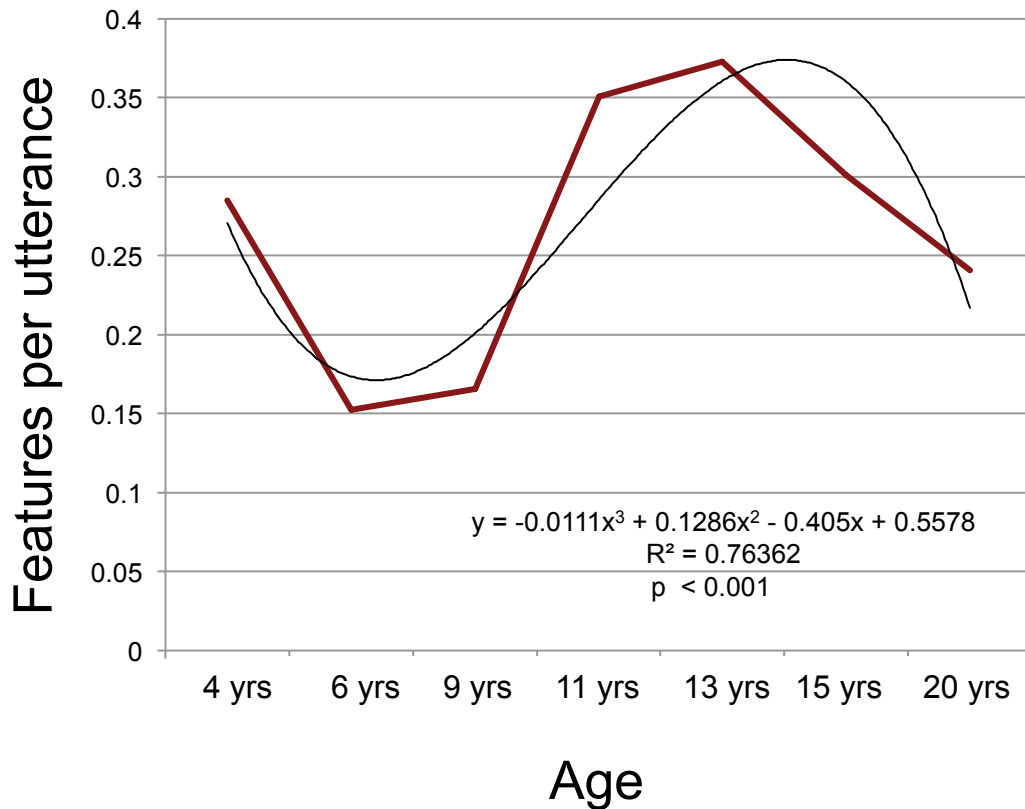
Plot many speakers over many points in time.



(31 speakers from Van Hofwegen & Wolfarm 2010)

# What does an ethnolectal approach gain us?

Use it in statistical modeling



# What does an ethnolectal approach gain us?

You can conduct large-scale quantitative analysis, like:

- Using psycho-social variables as predictors/controls of dialect usage e.g., mother's education, social contacts, school demographics, racial centrality, poverty, other adult in the home, stress, child-parent relationship, friendship quality, self-esteem, social skills, teacher experience (Van Hofwegen & Wolfram 2010; Renn 2010; Van Hofwegen 2011, forthcoming; Van Hofwegen & Stob 2012)
- Comparisons of dialect usage in different language contexts (Renn 2007, 2010; Van Hofwegen forthcoming)
- Comparisons of accommodation in dialect usage (dyadic analysis) (Van Hofwegen 2011; Van Hofwegen forthcoming)
- Using dialect usage as a predictor for other variables (Van Hofwegen & Stob 2012)