



NWAV 39 – San Antonio  
Variation and Change in Texas English

# Ethnicity and the Meaning of Sound Change in Central Texas

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# Texas English

- Associated with South Midland and Southern speech (Bailey & Tillery 2006; Bailey et al 1991; ANAE)
- Dallas area distinct - “Texas South” (ANAE)
- Accounts based primarily on Anglo speech
- Dialect features/changes assumed to be Anglo-led (Bailey et al., 1991)



# The Texas English Project: Austin and Central Texas

- Central Texas

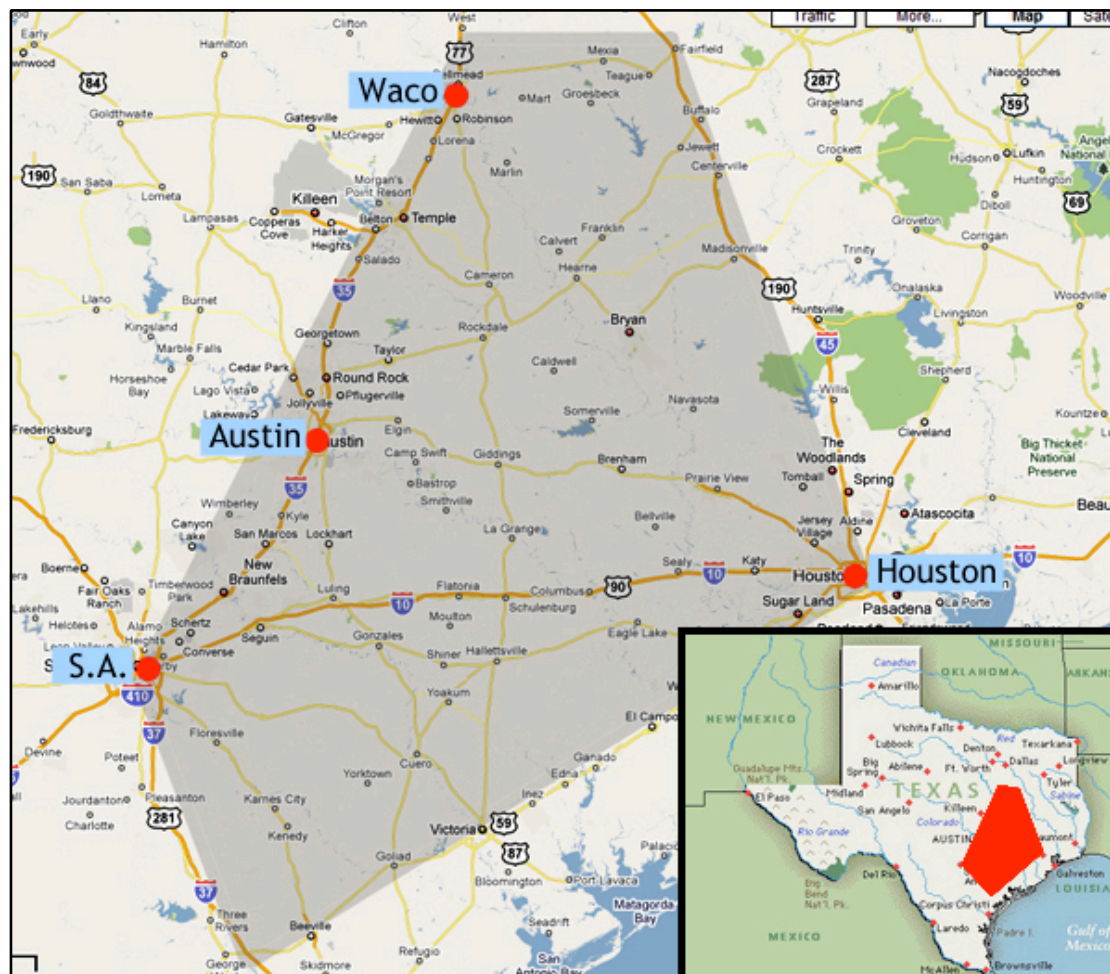
- Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Houston

- Austin, Texas

- Medium-sized urban center (<1 million)
  - In the 1990s, Austin's population grew by 48% and between 2000 and 2006 it was rated as the 3rd most rapidly growing city in America.
  - 65% white, 10% African-American, 30% Latino (53% white, non-hispanic)



# Central Texas (Underwood, 1988)



# Austin, Texas

Fig. 2. Austin, Texas. Downtown Skyline c. 2002.





# Austin, Texas

Fig. 3. Austin, Texas. Downtown Skyline c. 2012.



# Sound Change: Ethnolects in Contact

- Importance of minorities' roles in majority sound changes (Fought, 2002)
- Sound change can be either minority- or majority-led
  - Minority speakers assimilate to majority norms
  - Majority speakers adopt minority features for covert prestige (Preston, 1999)
- When sound changes are minority led...
  - Who has “rights” to the older variant?
  - Why does one variant get used instead of another?



# Methodology

- Participants

- Female speakers
- Full adults (older) & emerging adults (younger) (Arnett 2002)
- Anglo, Latino, African American
- Span of classes and educational levels
- Central Texans

- Data

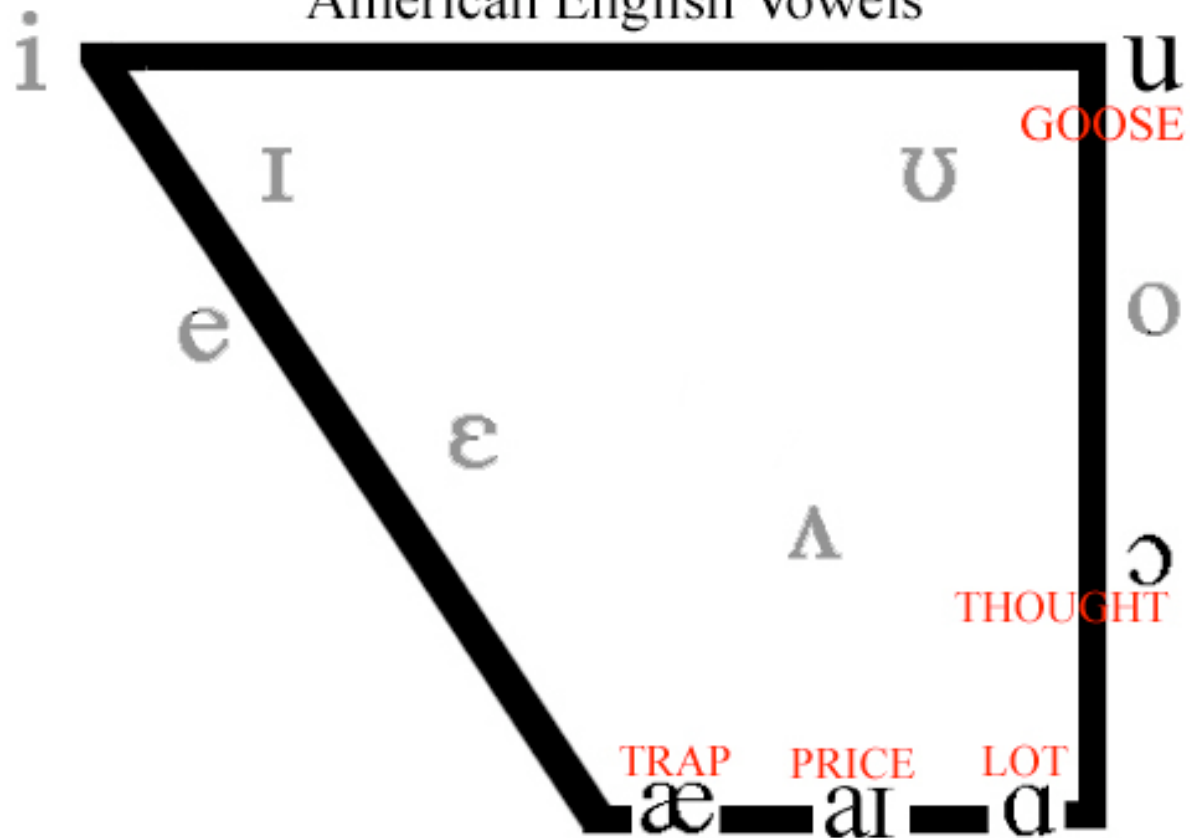
- Vowels: TRAP, PRICE, LOT/THOUGHT, GOOSE
- Word list recitations; interview data
- F1 and F2 measurements at five points
- Speculative statistical analysis





# Central Texas Vowels

Stylization of  
American English Vowels

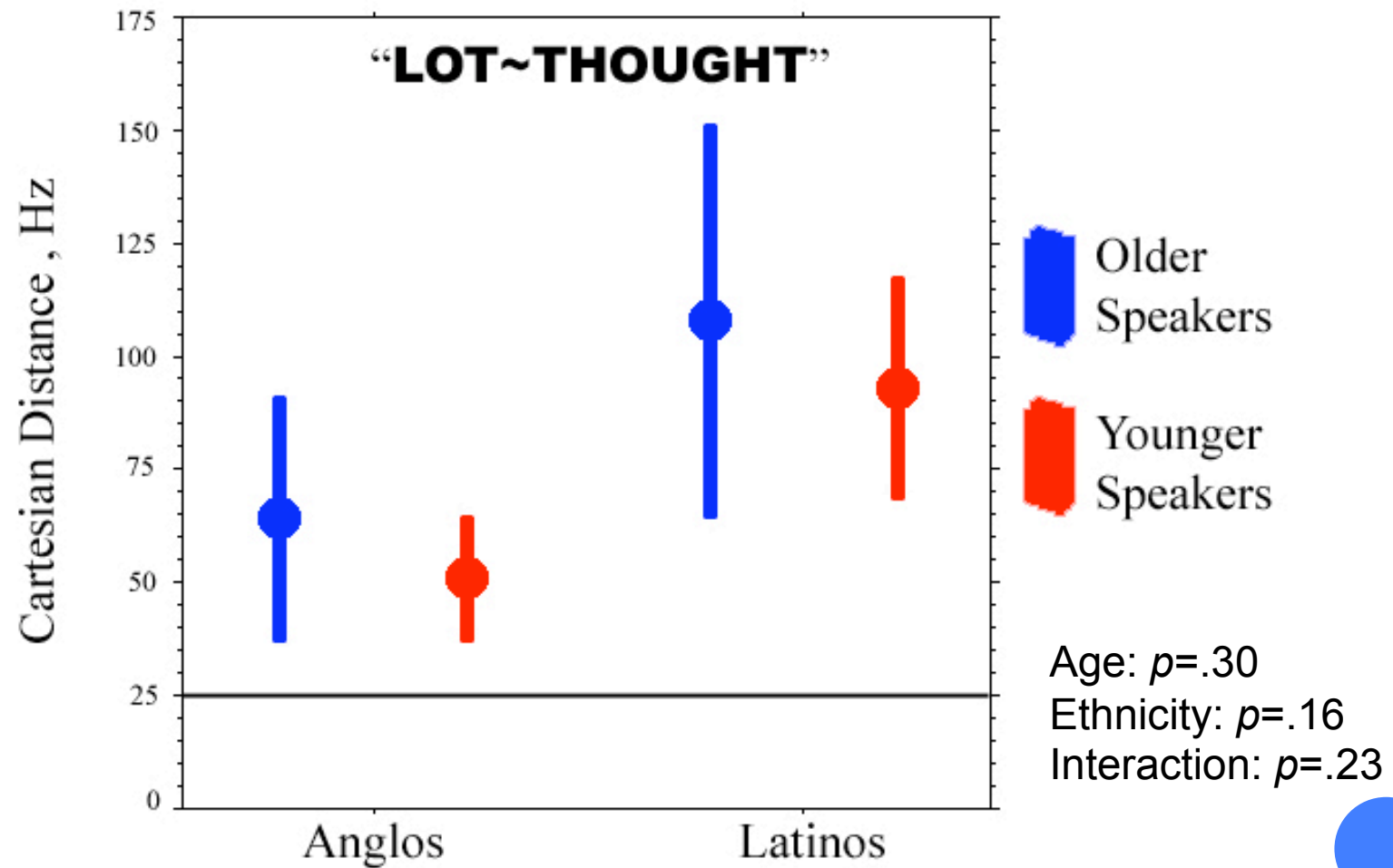


# Vowel Shifts in Central Texas

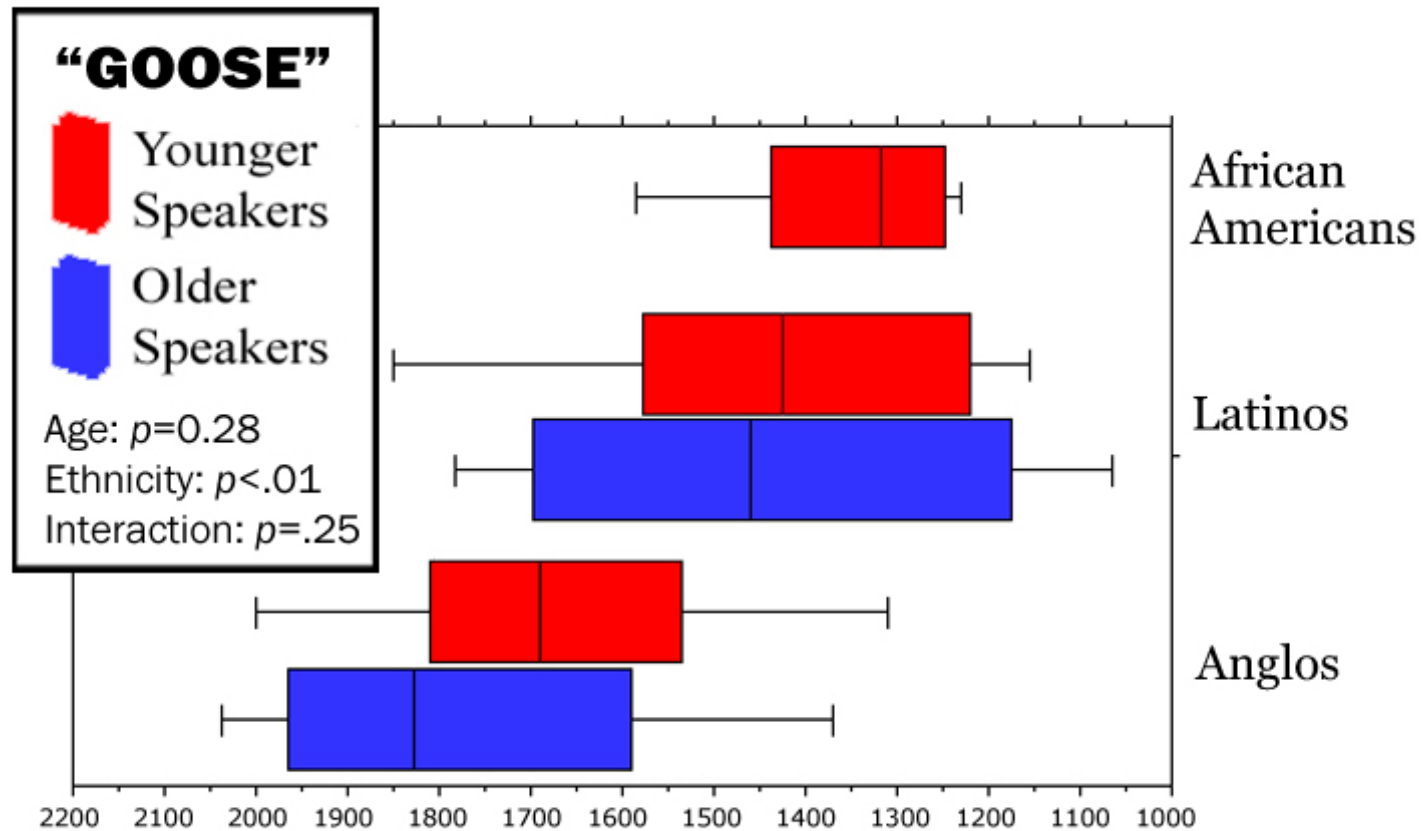
- PRICE, LOT, THOUGHT, TRAP, GOOSE (Wells, 1982)
- PRICE: status of monophthongization
  - No difference among ethnicities; PRICE is now a diphthong
- LOT~THOUGHT: merged or distinct
  - Majority speakers leading the change to merged paradigm
- TRAP: fronting
  - Minority speakers leading the change to fronted TRAP
- GOOSE: fronted variant stability
  - Minority speakers leading the change to backed GOOSE



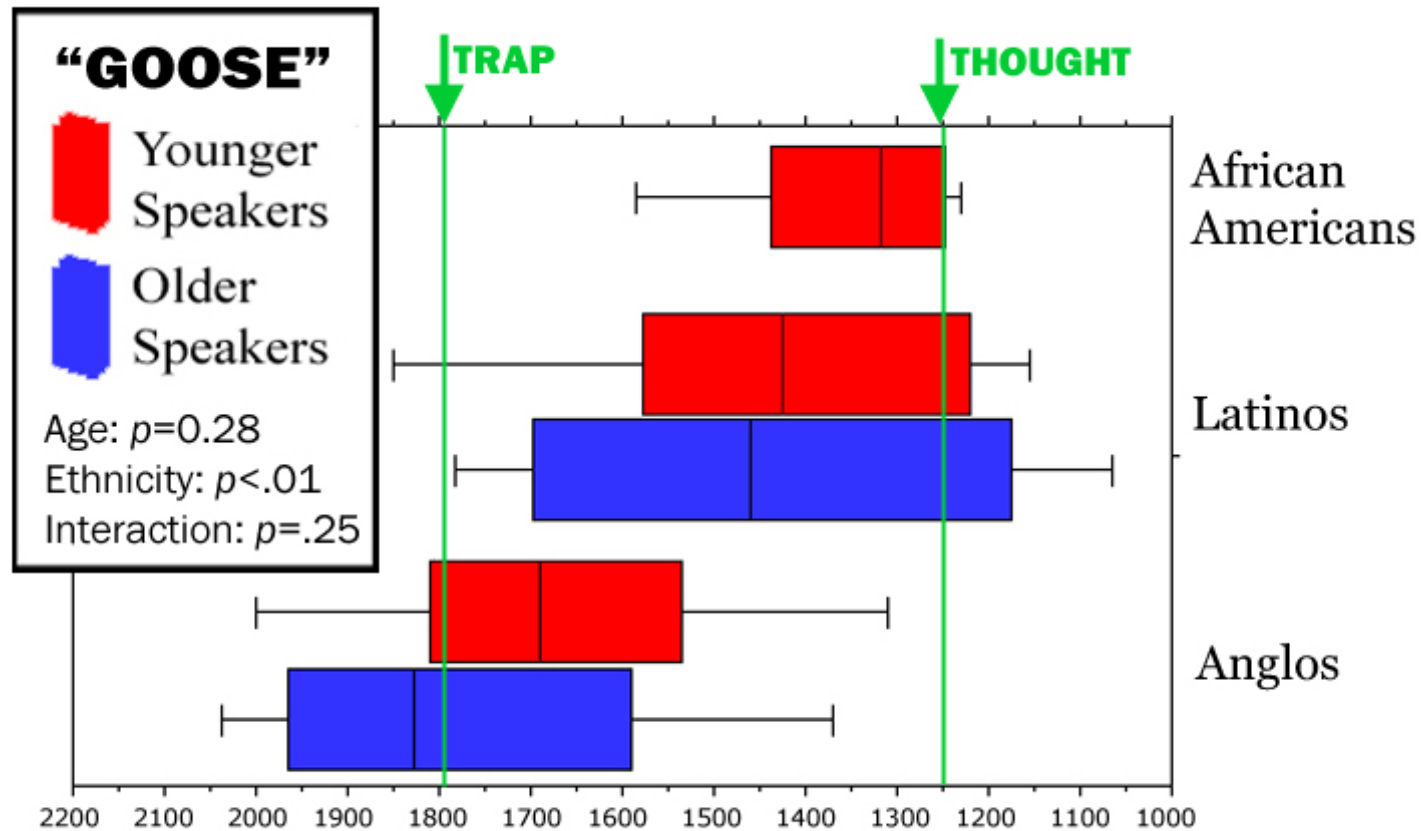
# LOT~THOUGHT merger



# GOOSE backing



# GOOSE backing



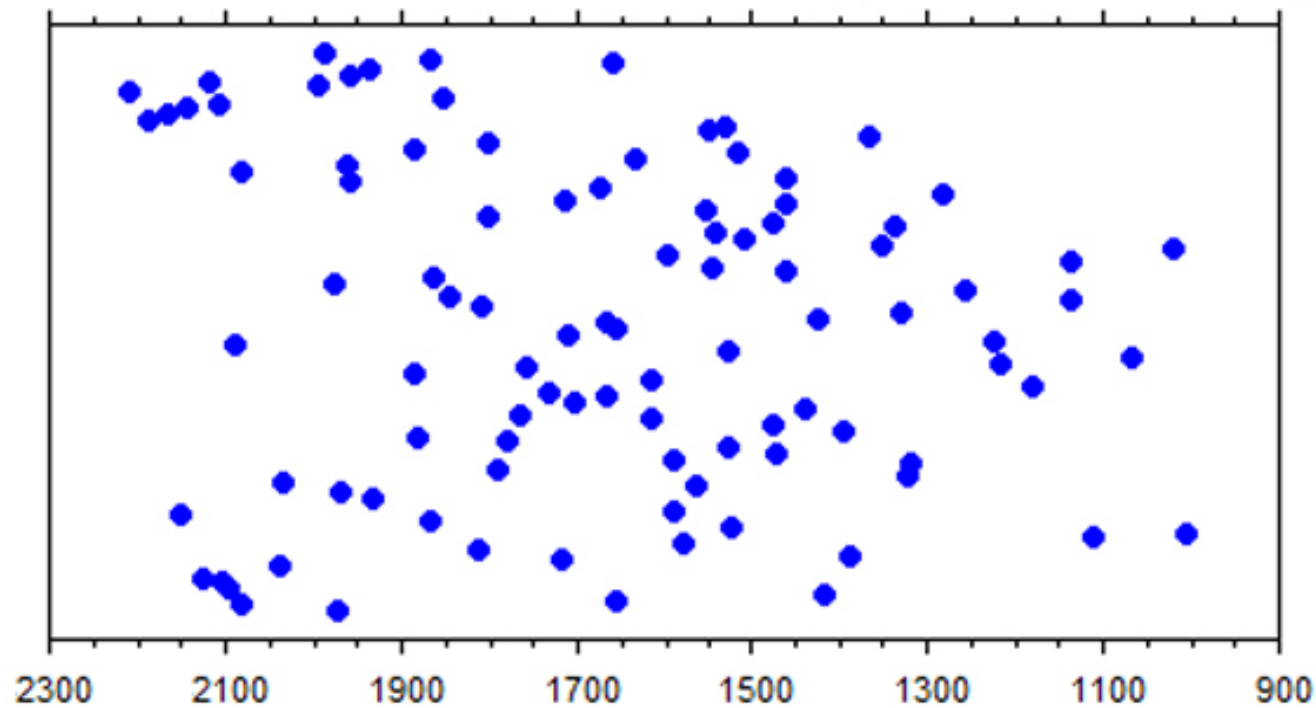
# Variation in the GOOSE vowel

- Fronted GOOSE
  - Traditional, older, stereotypically ‘Texan’ variant
- Backed GOOSE
  - Newer, minority-led, younger variant
- But there’s a huge range of variation within individuals!



## Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic

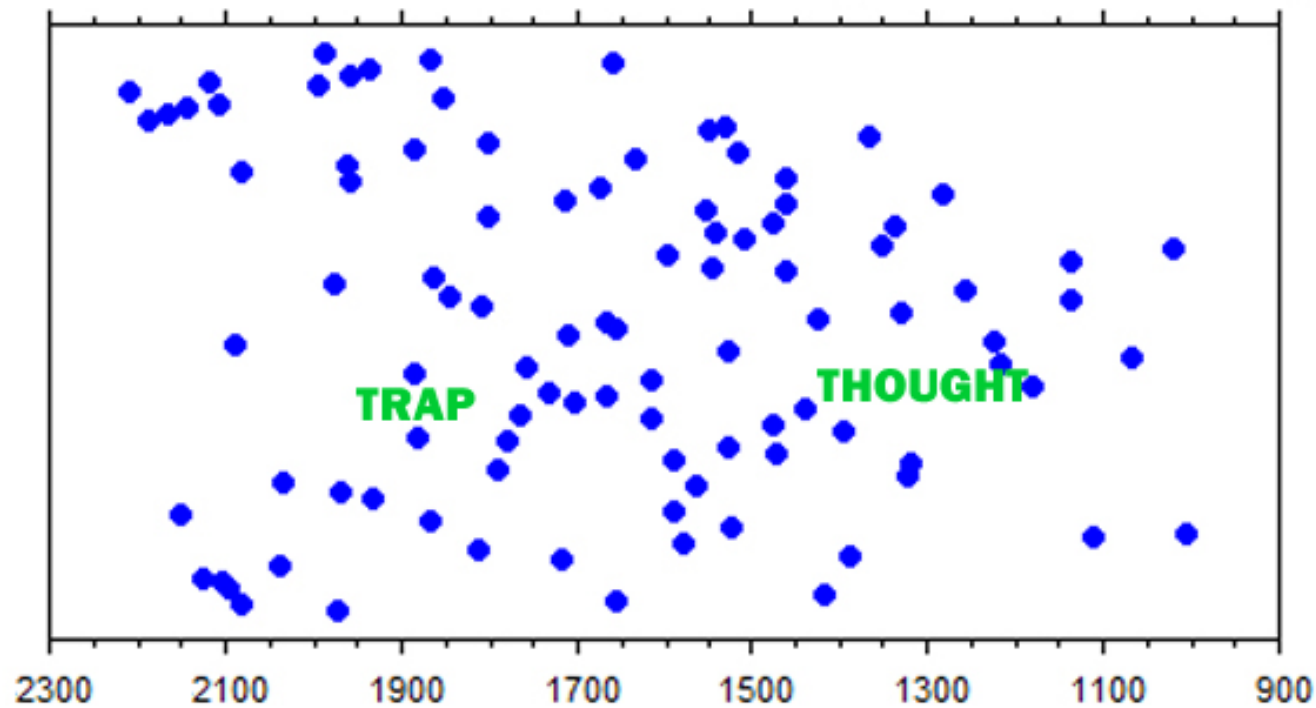
**F2 of “GOOSE” tokens (interview data)**





## Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic

**F2 of “GOOSE” tokens (interview data)**



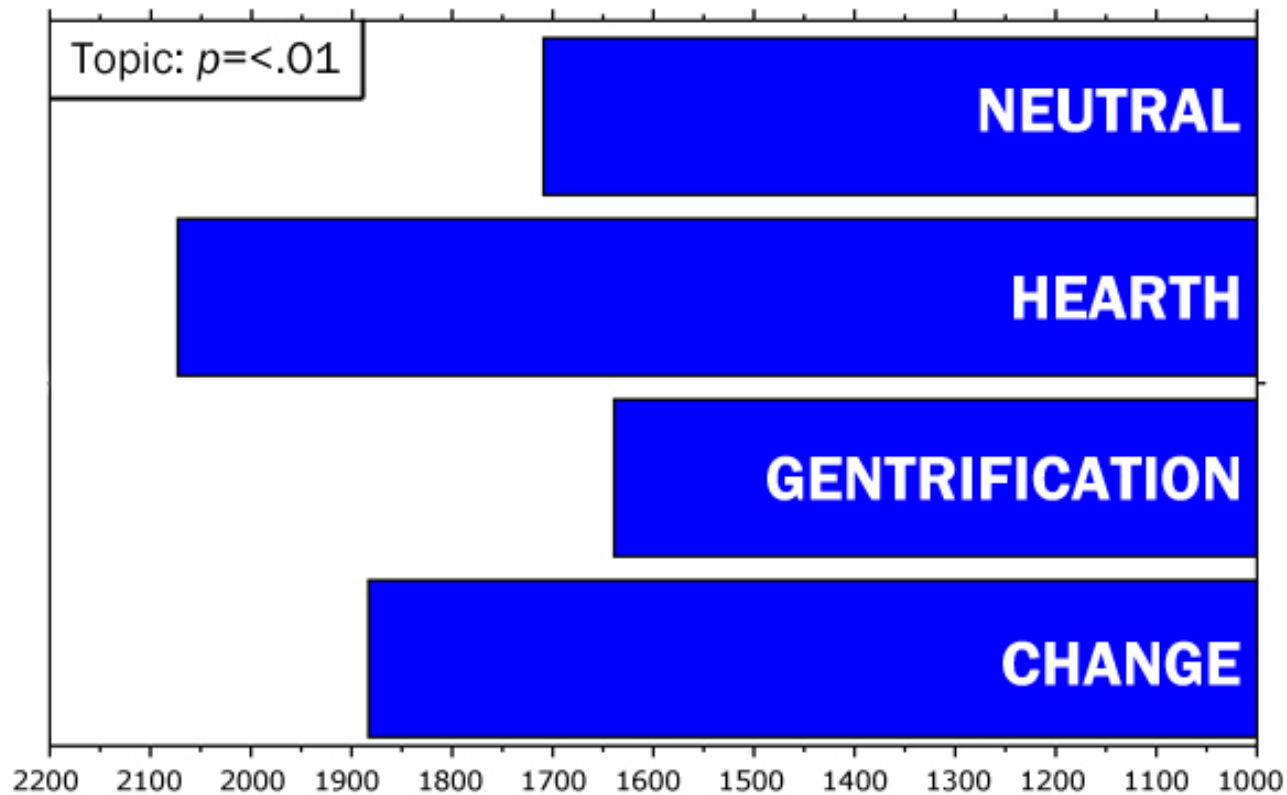
## Is this variation indexical?

- 2 Hispanic women, mid-50s, from East Austin
- GOOSE tokens come from interview data
- Does their GOOSE variation index meaning?
  - YES!
- F2 of GOOSE correlates to Conversation TOPIC



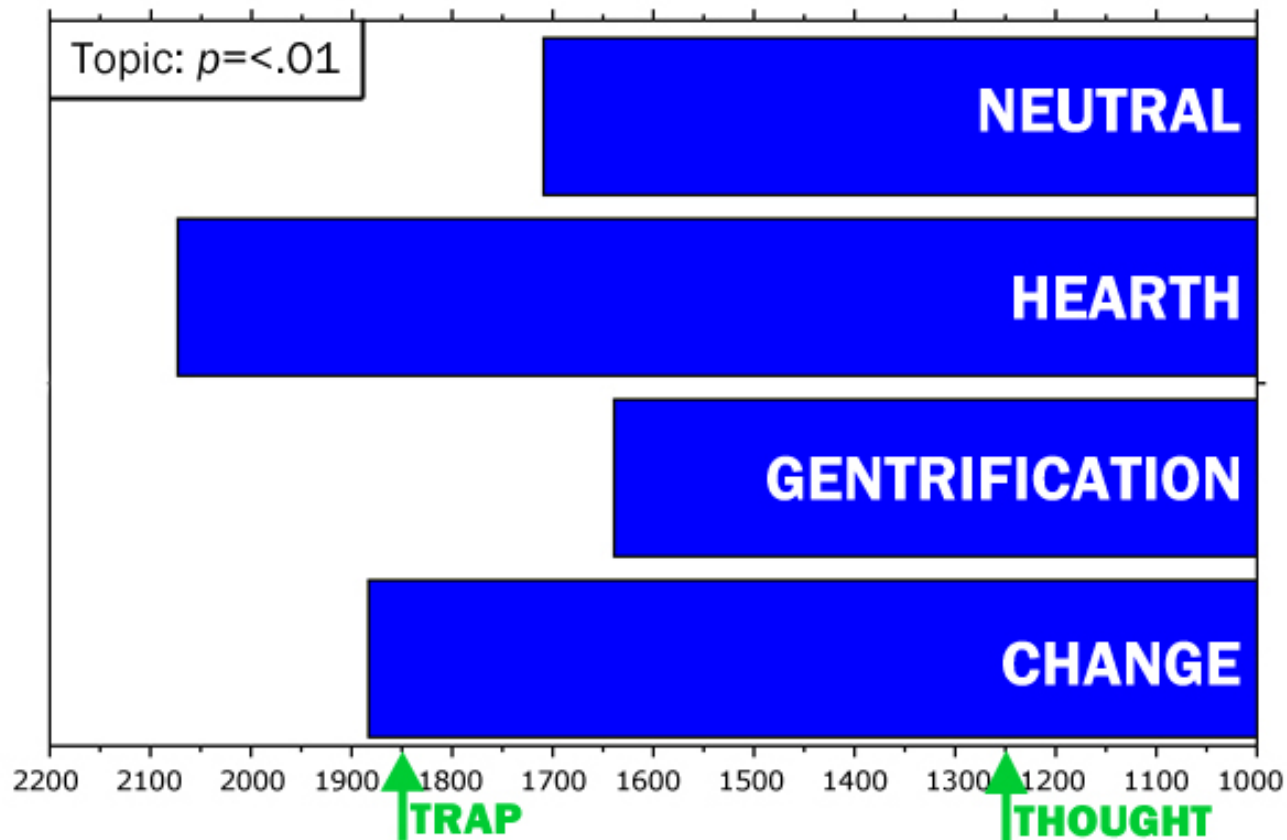
## Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic

**Mean F2 of “GOOSE” (interviews)**



## Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic

**Mean F2 of “GOOSE” (interviews)**



## Questions remain...

- Older, fronted, “traditional” variant = timeless topics
- Newer, backed, “young” variant = modern topics
- Reallocation of the fronted GOOSE variant?
  - I’m a True Texan, too!
- How are backed GOOSE variants perceived?



# The End.

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