

## Adult linguistic stability and the gathering of linguistic evidence

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### METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN LINGUISTICS

- ▶ Certain methodological assumptions must be satisfied
- ▶ Many of these are so obvious they remain unstated
- ▶ Two examples
  - ▶ Grammaticality judgments must use native speaker intuitions
  - ▶ A sociolinguistic study of a variety must use examples of that variety
- ▶ Other assumptions are less obvious

### THE ASSUMPTION OF ADULT LINGUISTIC STABILITY

- ▶ Grows out of the apparent time construct
- ▶ Claims that speakers remain essentially linguistically stable
  - ▶ Limited to adult lifespan
  - ▶ Assumes no significant external pressure on the linguistic system
  - ▶ Incompletely tested
- ▶ Studies have come to conflicting conclusions
- ▶ May be limited to core systems (e.g., phonology, not lexicon)

### TESTING THE ASSUMPTION

- ▶ Two studies of Waldorf, Maryland
- ▶ Study of /aɪ/-monophthongization
  - ▶ Builds on earlier apparent-time analysis
  - ▶ Adds data from an oral history archive and the LAMSAS survey
- ▶ Study of intraspeaker variation
  - ▶ Uses data from three speakers, each interviewed twice
  - ▶ Interviews occurred just under 1½ years apart
  - ▶ Nobody (interviewer or interviewees) knew they were re-interviews

### WALDORF

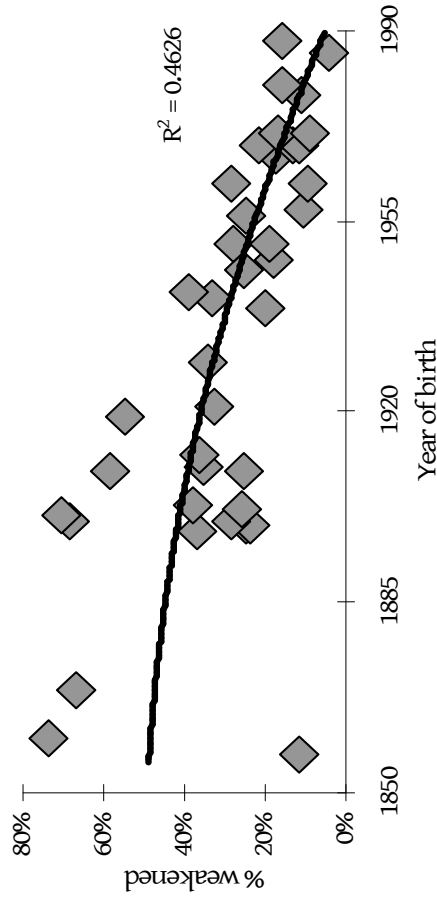
- ▶ Medium-sized city (population 55,691) in Maryland, USA
- ▶ Located 23 miles south-southeast of Washington DC
- ▶ Several Southern American English features present

### /aɪ/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION DATA

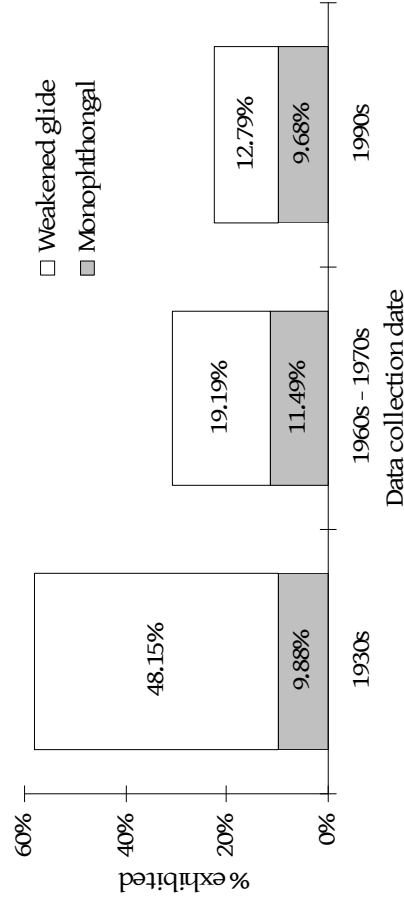
- ▶ My earlier apparent-time analysis (collected 1990s)
  - ▶ 25 speakers born 1909 to 1980
- ▶ Southern Maryland Studies Center oral histories (collected 1960s/1970s)
  - ▶ 9 speakers born 1898 to 1912
- ▶ LAMSAS survey data (collected 1930s)
  - ▶ 5 speakers born between 1857 and 1901

### /aɪ/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION RESULTS

- ▶ By year of birth (i.e., apparent time)



- ▶ By year of data collection (i.e., real time)



- ▶ Logistic regression shows separate effects of real and apparent time
- ▶ Real time measures have at least as strong an effect as apparent time

INTRASPEAKER VARIATION DATA

- ▶ 3 speakers interviewed as part of a larger study
- ▶ All lower middle-class Euro-American lifelong residents of Waldorf
- ▶ Pseudonyms: Theona (b. 1919), Elise (b. 1946), and Helen (b. 1978)
- ▶ Interviewed 1997 and 1998
- ▶ Initial 10 to 15 minutes of each interview were used
- ▶ All data came from informal chatting and gossiping
- ▶ Every stressed vowel was selected and acoustically analyzed
- ▶ Helen: 605 (1997) and 530 (1998) tokens
- ▶ Elise: 512 (1997) and 442 (1998) tokens
- ▶ Theona: 397 (1997) and 345 (1998) tokens

INTRASPEAKER VARIATION RESULTS

- ▶ All results compare each individual's interview with the re-interview
- ▶ Changed vowel classes marked with ⇄ (p<.01) or ⇄ (p<.001)

▶ Helen	▶ i ⇄	▶ IC	▶ IN	▶ e ⇄
▶	▶ εC ⇄	▶ εN ⇄	▶ æC ⇄	▶ æN
▶	▶ ai	▶ aiT	▶ aiT	▶ a ⇄
▶	▶ oL ⇄	▶ Λ ⇄	▶ o#	▶ oC
▶ Elise	▶ i ⇄	▶ IC	▶ IN	▶ e
▶	▶ εC	▶ εN	▶ æC ⇄	▶ ai
▶	▶ ai	▶ a ⇄	▶ aiR ⇄	▶ oL ⇄
▶	▶ Λ ⇄	▶ o#	▶ oC	
▶ Theona	▶ i ⇄	▶ IC	▶ IN	▶ e
▶	▶ εC	▶ æC	▶ ai ⇄	▶ ai
▶	▶ Λ ⇄	▶ o# ⇄	▶ oC ⇄	▶ oR

- ▶ Changed variables of interest
- ▶ Long-o word-finally vs. word-internally
- ▶ Helen and Theona: Consistently no difference by environment
- ▶ Elise: Change from more word-final fronting to no difference
- ▶ Raising of /ai/ before voiceless obstruents
- ▶ Helen: Change from raising to no raising
- ▶ The *pin-pen* merger
  - ▶ Elise: Change from maintaining distinction to merger
  - ▶ Helen: Consistent maintenance of distinction
- ▶ Raising and fronting of short-*a* before nasals
  - ▶ Helen: Consistent raising and fronting
- ▶ Speakers are inconsistent over even a relatively short period of time

SO WHAT?

- ▶ Adult linguistic production is unstable
- ▶ It is unclear whether production truly changes or is simply inconsistent
- ▶ Data from speakers needs to be viewed with caution
  - ▶ This is equally true for *all* subfields of linguistics
  - ▶ This may be true of perceptual data, as well
- ▶ Data from one individual at one point in time is always inconclusive
- ▶ It is unclear whether averaging behavior over time would be helpful
- ▶ We have very little knowledge of the distribution of linguistic behavior
- ▶ Some crucial needs
  - ▶ A closer investigation of the distribution of linguistic behaviors
    - ▶ At the individual level: From point in time to point in time
    - ▶ At the communal level: Distribution of individuals' behaviors
  - ▶ A comparison of linguistic behaviors
    - ▶ Whether some behaviors are more malleable than others
    - ▶ Whether all linguistic behaviors have similar distributions
- ▶ Fulfilling these needs will allow stronger generalizations
- ▶ Fulfilling these needs will ensure claims more accurately reflect reality

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