

STYLE-SHIFTING, BILINGUALISM, AND THE KOREATOWN ACCENT

{ ANDREW CHENG } UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY andrewcheng@berkeley.edu



ETHNOLECTS & SOUND CHANGE

Back vowel monophthongization and fricative fortition are two phonetic characteristics of Korean L1 speakers of English (adult learners). However, **US-born Korean Americans (KAs)**, who are often natively bilingual, vary in their use of these characteristics. Asian Americans tend to eschew socio-phonetic variables that index regional identity (e.g., cot-caught merger), though sometimes lead ongoing sound changes (e.g., California Vowel Shift, or CVS). This study asks three questions of a specific group, Korean Americans who grew up in Korean-majority communities in California:

1. Do they participate in or resist CVS?
2. Does Korean phonology influence their English vowel system?
3. Are their vowel spaces consistent throughout their speech?

METHODS

- 13 US-born Korean Americans living in California sat for a bilingual interview about childhood and present-day language use
- Interviews transcribed and force-aligned; F1 and F2 normalized by speaker and averaged over duration of vowel

VOWELS

Speakers' pooled vowel spaces reveal fronted /u/ ("UW") and fronted /ou/ ("OW") for males only.

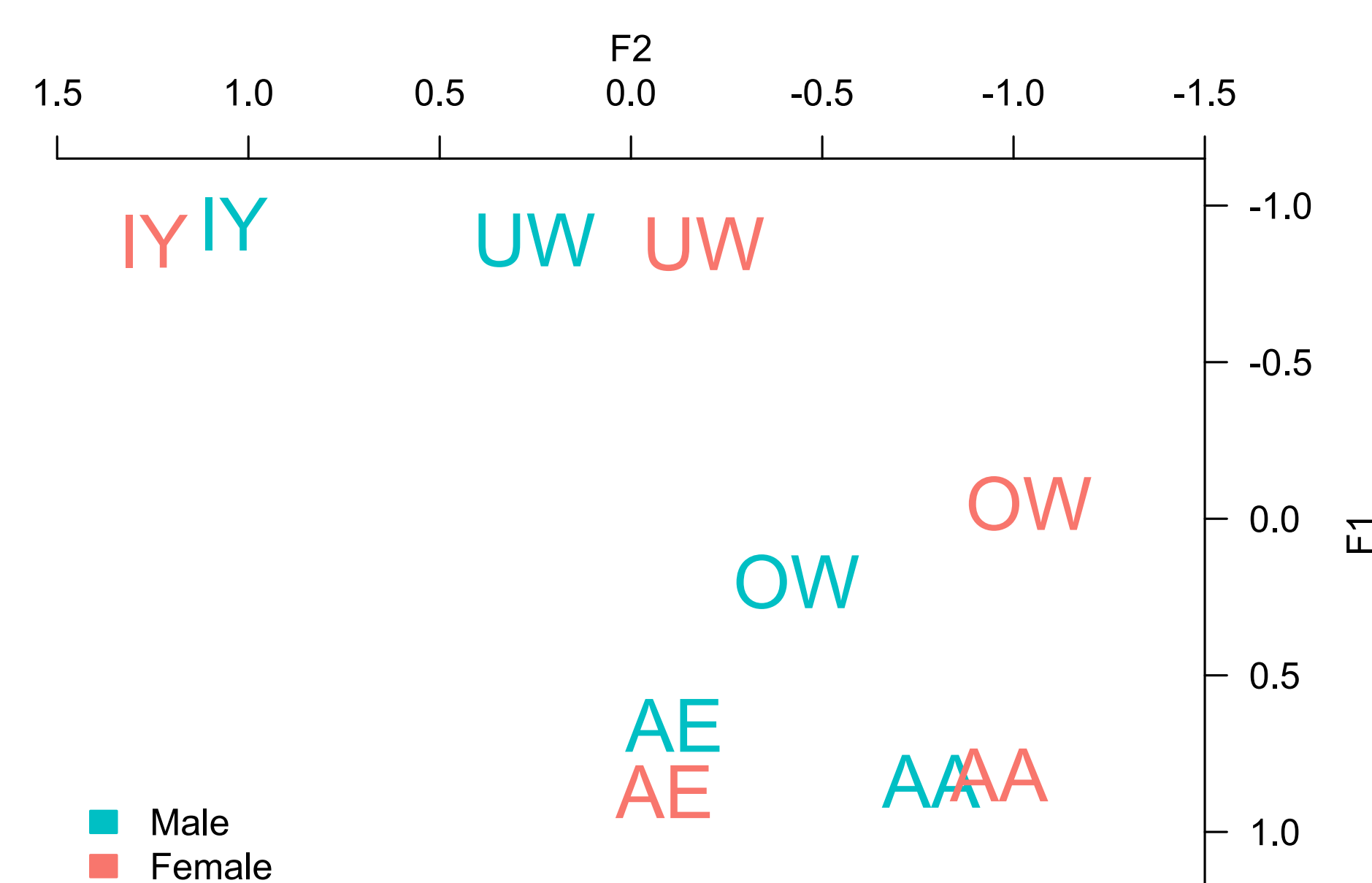


Figure 3: Normalized vowel spaces by gender

BACK VOWEL FRONTING

Back vowel fronting was determined by difference in normalized F2 of /i/ and /u, ou/. Lower scores indicate more fronting. **All subjects fronted**; a selection of 6 consultants' /u/ is shown in Fig. 1 to demonstrate individual variation.

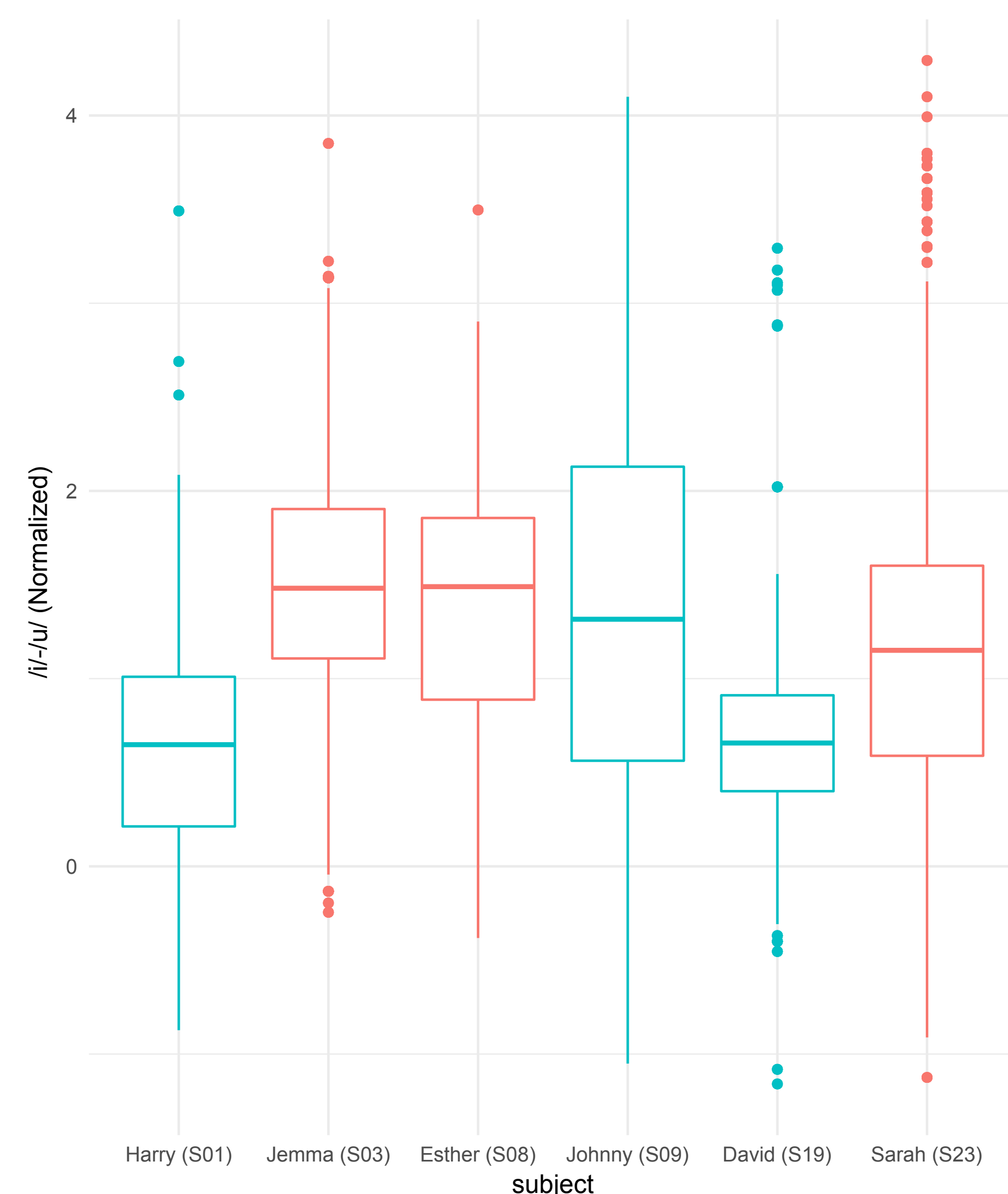


Figure 1: /u/ fronting scores for 6 consultants

INFLUENCE OF KOREAN

No correlation between fronting scores and English dominance, Korean use, or age of English acquisition. The only significant factor was **gender** ($F(1,14)=56.843, p<0.001$), indicating that female /ou/ that resists fronting is not related to the speakers' bilingualism. Potential counter to traditional "female-led sound change" hypothesis, as female speakers demonstrated less fronting.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Sound files accompany this poster! Scan this QR code to access electronic version of poster and additional figures.



TOPIC-BASED STYLE SHIFTING

Individual variation means that a speaker demonstrates more or less fronting at different times and contexts. Phonological context is a dependable factor: e.g., pre-velar or pre-lateral /u/ (as in "school") will not be fronted, while post-palatal ("you") will. But **topic and stance** (attitude toward Korean language and culture) may also predict fronting.

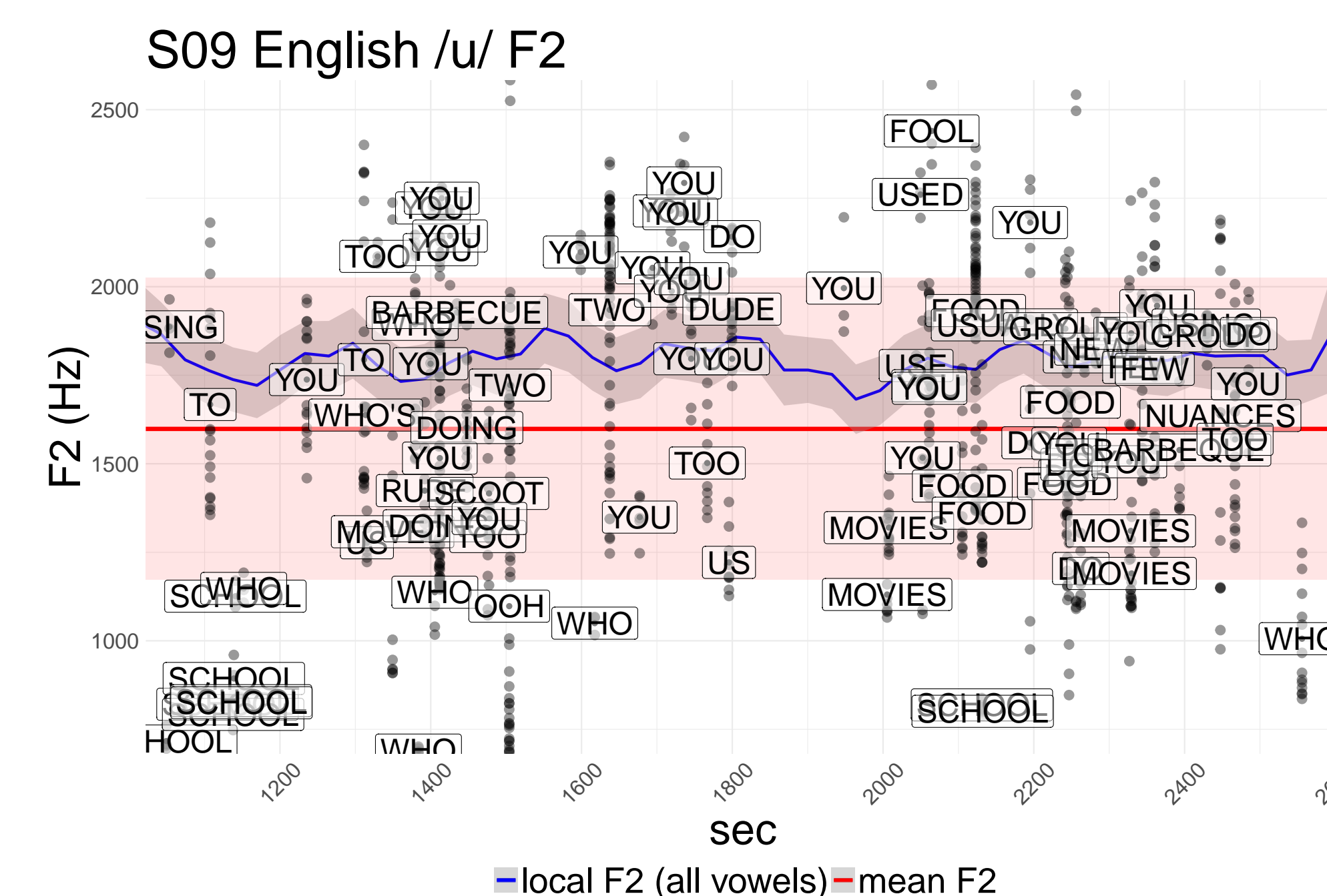


Figure 2: Subject 09's variation in /u/ F2 during an interview

S09 ("Johnny") has a wide range in /u/ F2 (Fig. 1); low F2 in pre-lateral contexts such as "school", with one exception: the word "fool", in reported speech, referencing parents warning him to maintain Korean proficiency (Fig. 2, 2050sec). Between 1950-2200sec, topic switches from Korean movies and television (Korean-oriented topic) to food (non-Korean-

oriented; S09 admits he greatly prefers Mexican food) to use of English among Korean American peers (English-oriented topic and stance). As topic and stance change, **global F2 rises**.

word	F2	context
too	2086	"only because I don't murder the [Korean] accent too much"
fool	2181	"so they're like, 'don't make a fool of yourself'"
who	1148	"there was like no one [in high school] who's Korean"
who	691	"[Koreans are different from] people who were born here"
who	1137	"you kinda have to like respect someone ... who is older"
ooh	1098	" Ooh , probably like a year or two [of Korean school]"
who	1050	"first generation like my mom... who wasn't born here"
movies	1131	"[I watch] not dramas but sometimes movies "

Table 1: /u/ tokens >1sd above and <1sd below mean. In addition, there is one very fronted /u/ token given in a hypothetical on the topic of understanding Korean versus American cultures: "I can just, like, talk to someone about [American traditions]... like, **dude** you know what this is for? (1800sec)"

CONCLUSION

- Korean American speakers of English participate in the California Vowel Shift, but unevenly
- Evidence that gender, not language proficiency, plays a role in /ou/-fronting
- Preliminary evidence that fronting depends on topic and stance as well as phonological context
- One of several phonetic traits of KAs with ties to Korean communities (e.g., Koreatown); some KAs recognize this "K-town accent"
- Planned research: quantify "topic and stance"; examine fricatives, sibilants, and phrase-level intonation

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