The social meaning(s) of raised BOUGHT in New York City: a perceptual approach

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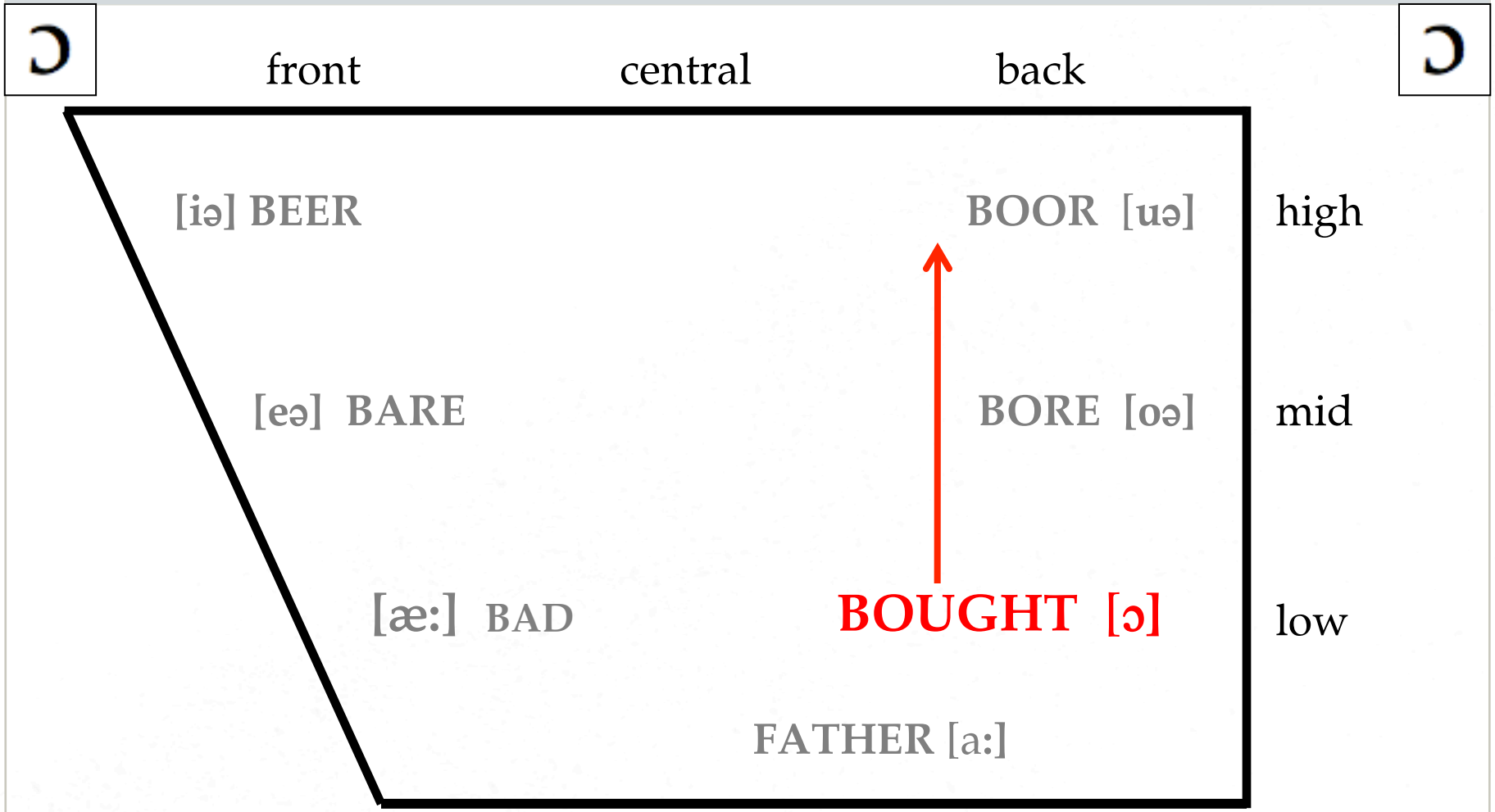
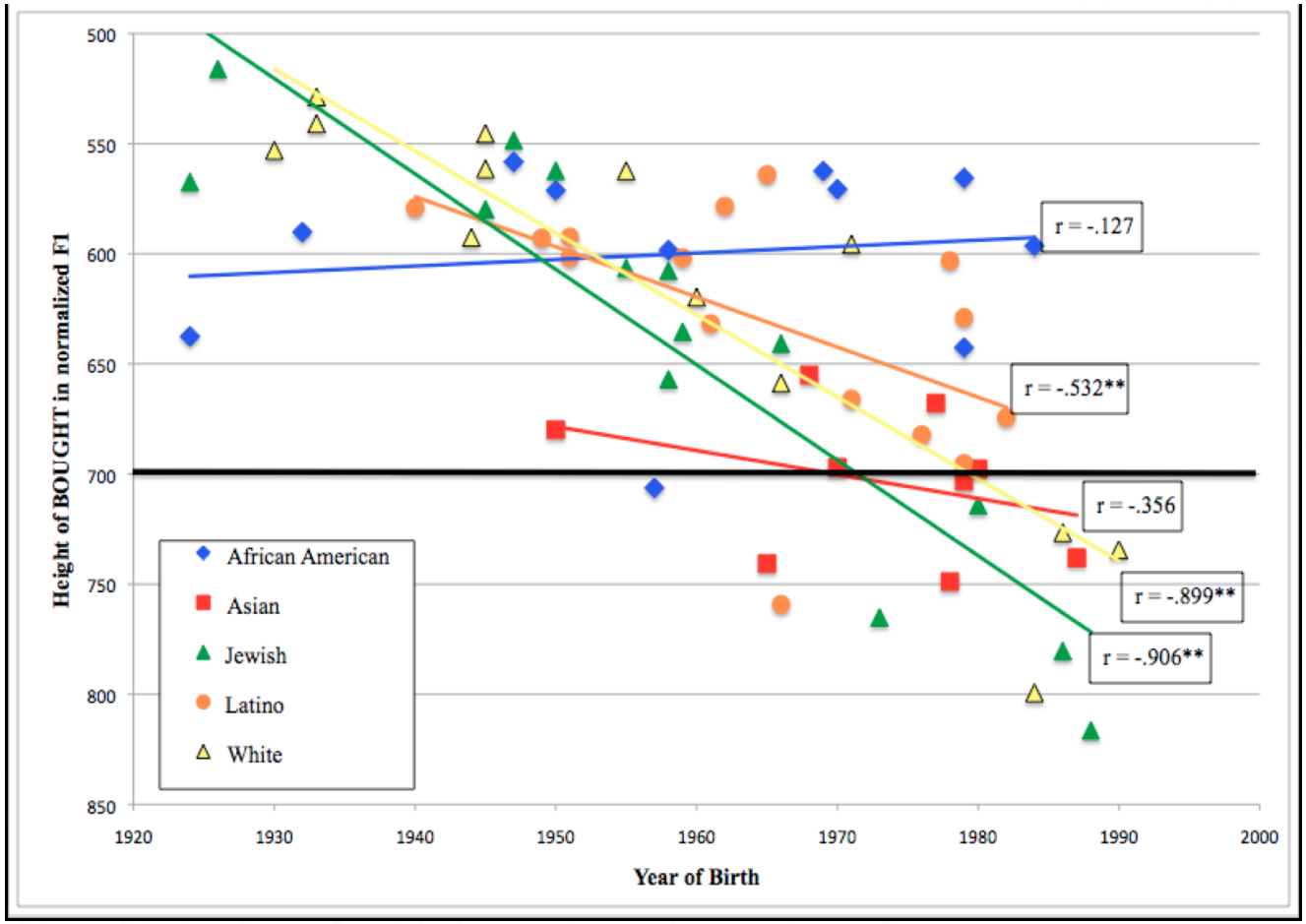
Full set of ingliding vowels in rless NYCE



Change in Progress, Lower East Side



Social meaning and linguistic variables

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Speak Brooklyn-ese? Get Paid for it.

By Tobey, 30 April, 2010, 1 Comment

Need some extra cash and speak the language of Brooklyn? Check out this ad. And we're so not kidding.

Translation company is interested in hearing from speakers of "Brooklyn English", with good knowledge of accent, slang, nuances, etc, to meet the interpreting needs of foreign and out-of-town clients who find it an unexpected challenge.

Retrieved October 2011: http://bococaland.com/blog/2010/04/30/speak-brooklyn-ese-get-paid-for-it/

3 Questions

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1. Does raised BOUGHT carry social meaning? (today)
2. What is that meaning(s)? (today)
3. Could understanding the meaning(s) of raised BOUGHT provide any insight into the current change in progress for raised BOUGHT in New York City? (for later)

The approach: An experimental study of speech perception
(c.f. Campbell-Kibler 2009, 2011, Drager 2010, Levon 2007)

Experimental Design

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- Online survey
- Responses gathered to short audio clips from four female, middle-aged speakers native to the Lower East Side
- Clips selected for synthesizable tokens of BOUGHT
- The F1 of BOUGHT was resynthesized so that each original clip had two versions, where the F1 of BOUGHT was either well below or above the Atlas of North American English's (Labov et al. 2006) cutoff for a raised BOUGHT (700 Hz)
- Listeners recruited who were native to New York City; Total Listeners = 101
- Listeners heard all eight clips (only one version of each raised/lowered pair), plus filler clips
- Listeners provided three types of feedback: 1) open-ended response 2) estimations of speaker age, ethnicity and regional background, and 3) ratings of speakers' affective traits
- Not all Listeners responded to every question

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Speakers	Age	Ethnicity
Grace	44	Latina
Julia	42	white
Leah	49	Jewish
Michel	48	African American

Raised

Lowered

Leah: *And I thought, this is a really cool thing*

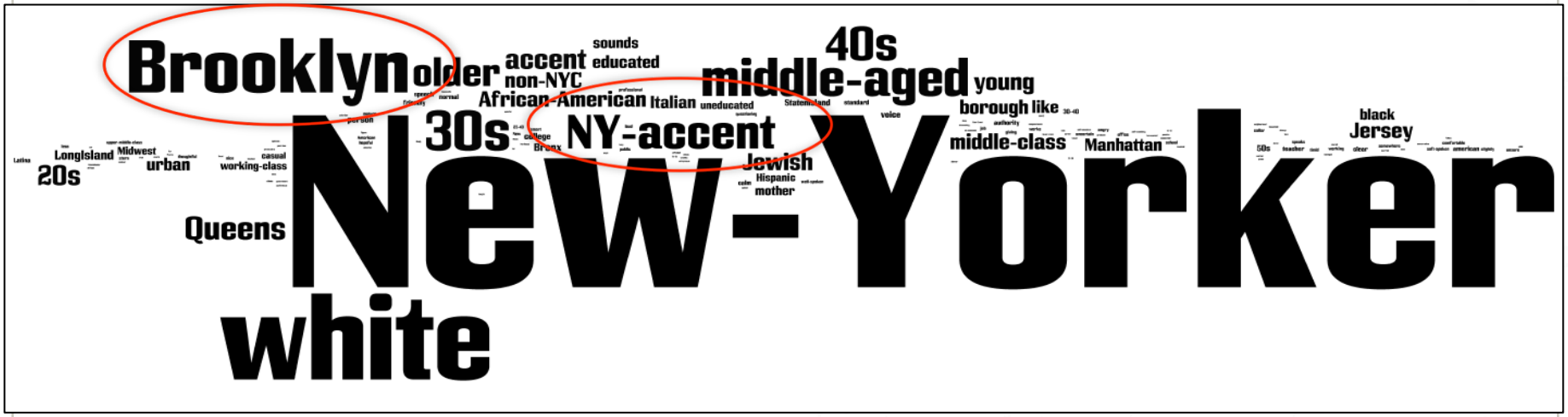
Task 1: Open-ended response

Listen and Describe

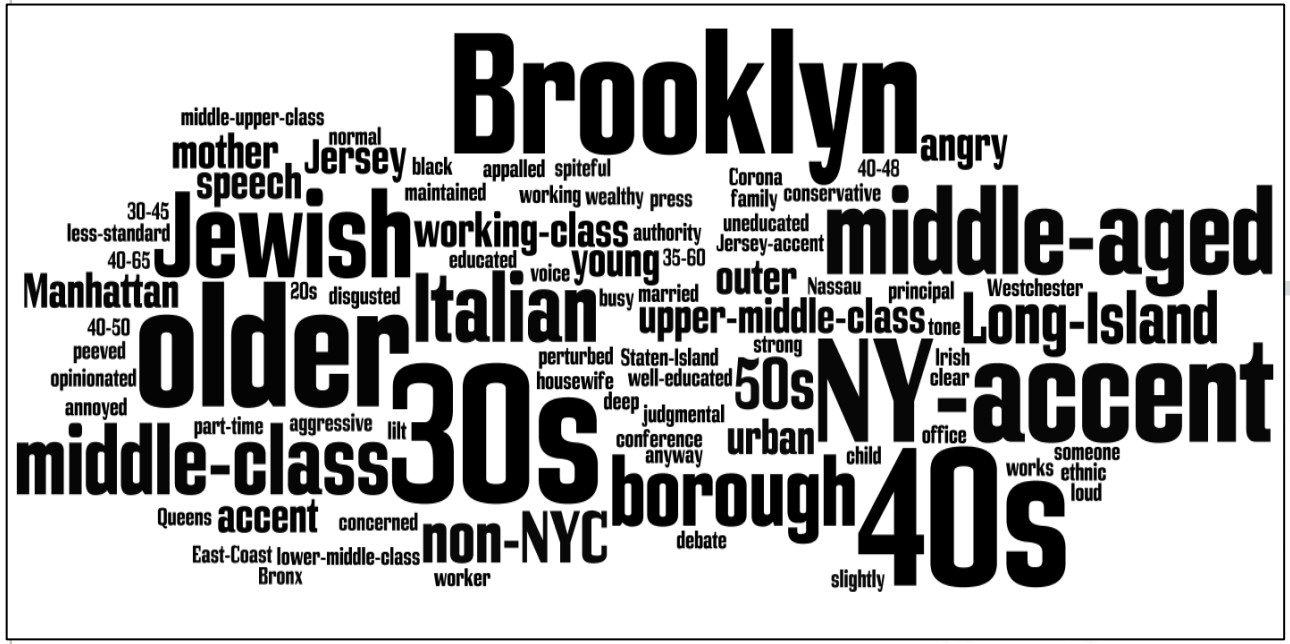
…After listening to the recording, in the space provided, tell us anything you can about your impression of the person in the recording. What do you think this person might be like? What kind of person do you think she is? You may write as much as you like, and listen to each recoding as many times as you like.

- *For some reason I imagine a person in a red sweater, older lady, maybe of Irish descent, and she's talking during a pta meeting. I don't know why I just get that impression*
- *Listened to it 3 times, because the person seems very reserved. Couldn't figure the person out.*
- *Yes! good New Yorker, the beginning of a good story*
- *Nosey*
- *30s, black, skinny female, college degree, upper middle class, married but no child yet*
- *This is difficult, I've worked hard at not making judgments till the, like, 8th time I talk to a person, but here goes: From the way she says 'she used to say' makes me think she's and 2nd generation latina, but then the 'talk' sounds more like... many generations in Queens or something. I think you said all these samples were from women, so I'll guess this is a woman. Other than saying she's between 17 and 65, I really couldn't guess her age. 30's?*
- *A good New Yorker -- with the phrase "took off work" should be a less educated group and a group I associate with an older generation.*

RAISED BOUGHT:

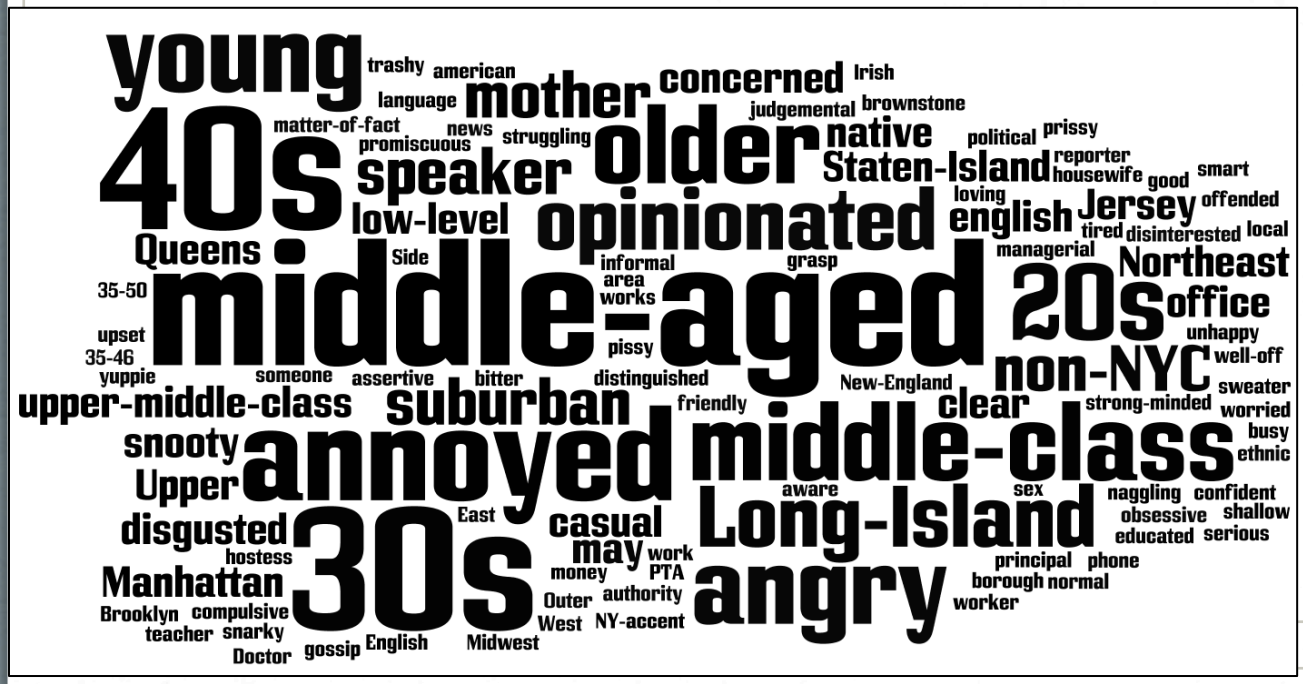


LOWERED BOUGHT:



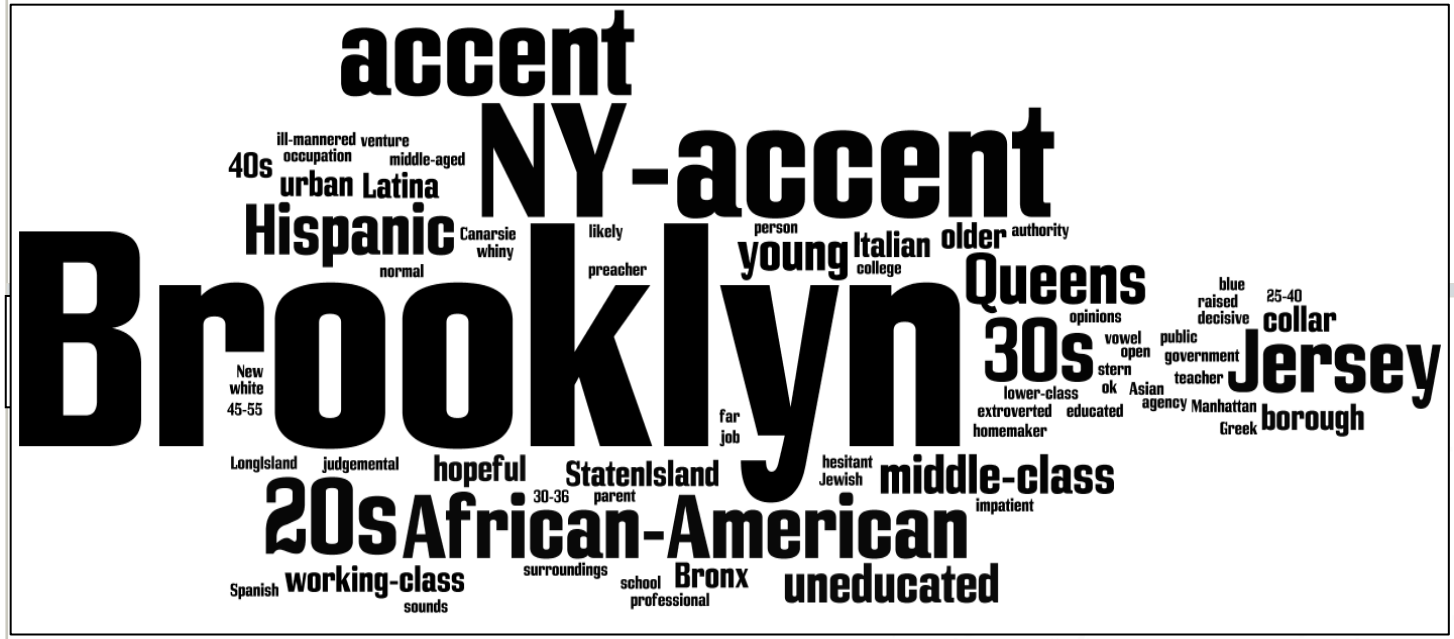
Julia: Raised

(minus "New-Yorker," "white")

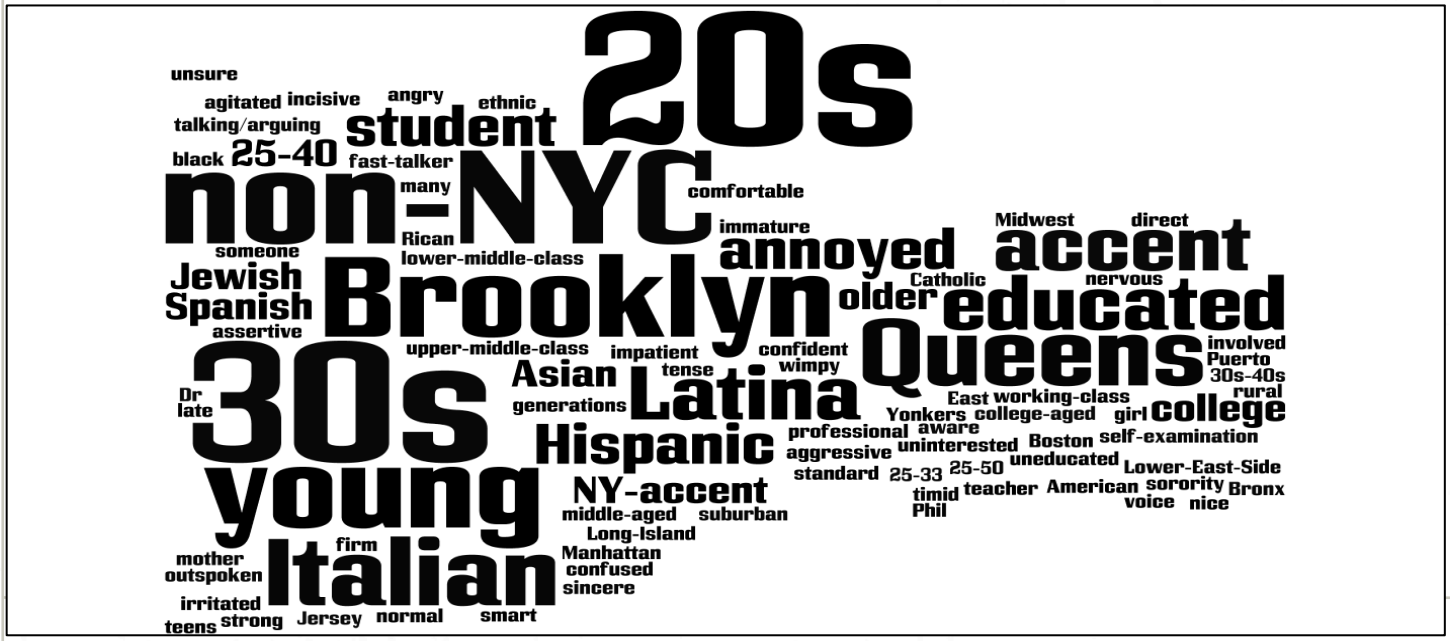


Julia: Lowered

(minus "New-Yorker," "white")



Grace: Raised (minus "New-Yorker," "white")



Grace: Lowered (minus "New-Yorker," "white")

Tasks 2 and 3

Attributes

Age: How old do you think this person is?

Ethnicity: What do you think the ethnicity of this person is?

Region: Where do you think this person is from? Be as specific as you can be.

Ratings

Rate this person on the following scale:

Kind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	mean
Greedy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	generous
Hardworking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	lazy
Aloof	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	friendly
Genuine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	fake

Age, Region, and Ethnicity

Mixed-Effects models.

Age, Region and Ethnicity: Response variables

Fixed effects: Speaker (Leah, Michel, Grace, Julia) + Vowel Condition (Token Raised or Lowered)

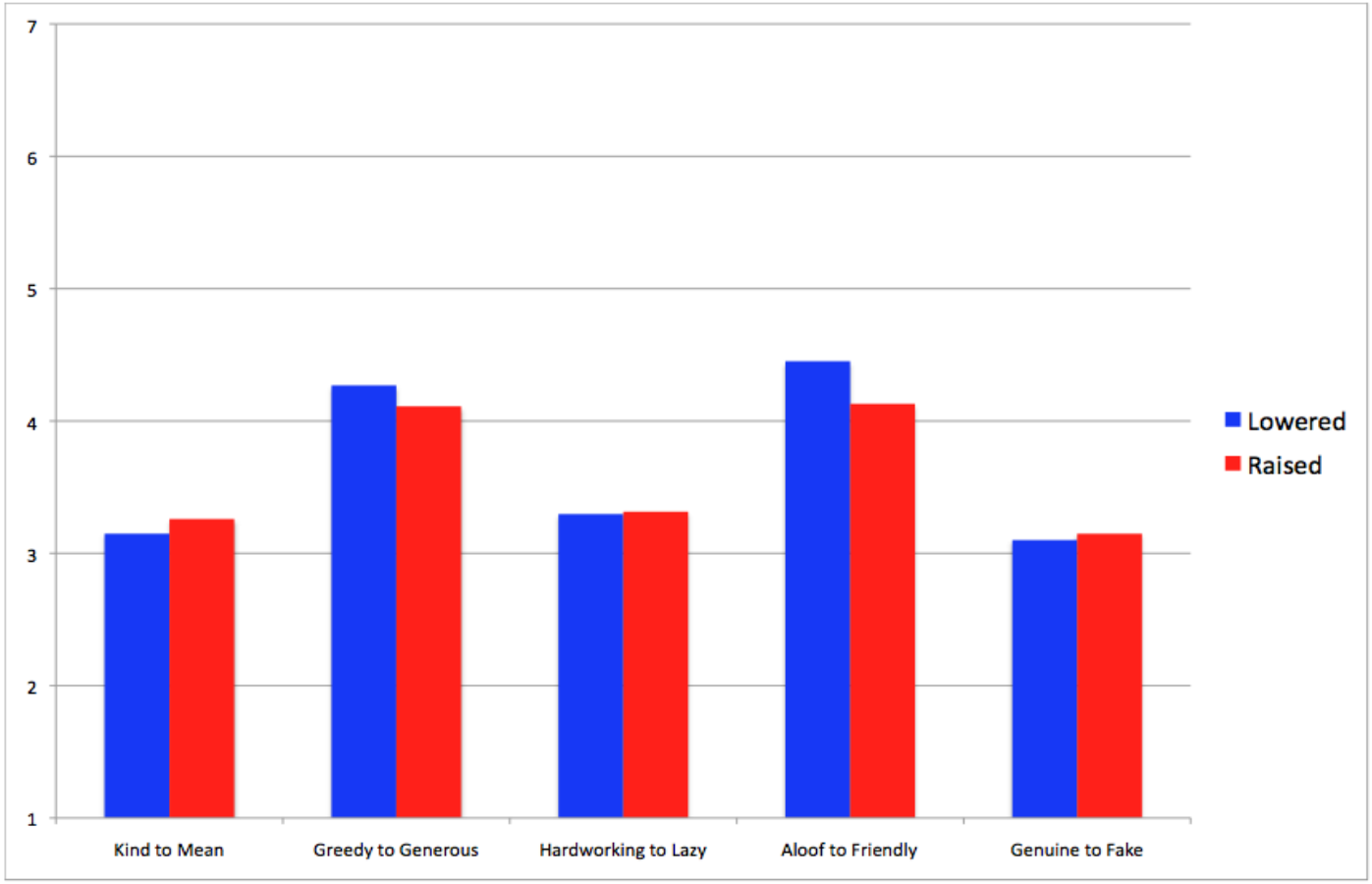
Random Effect: Listener

Age. A speaker is more likely to be perceived as older if the token is raised.

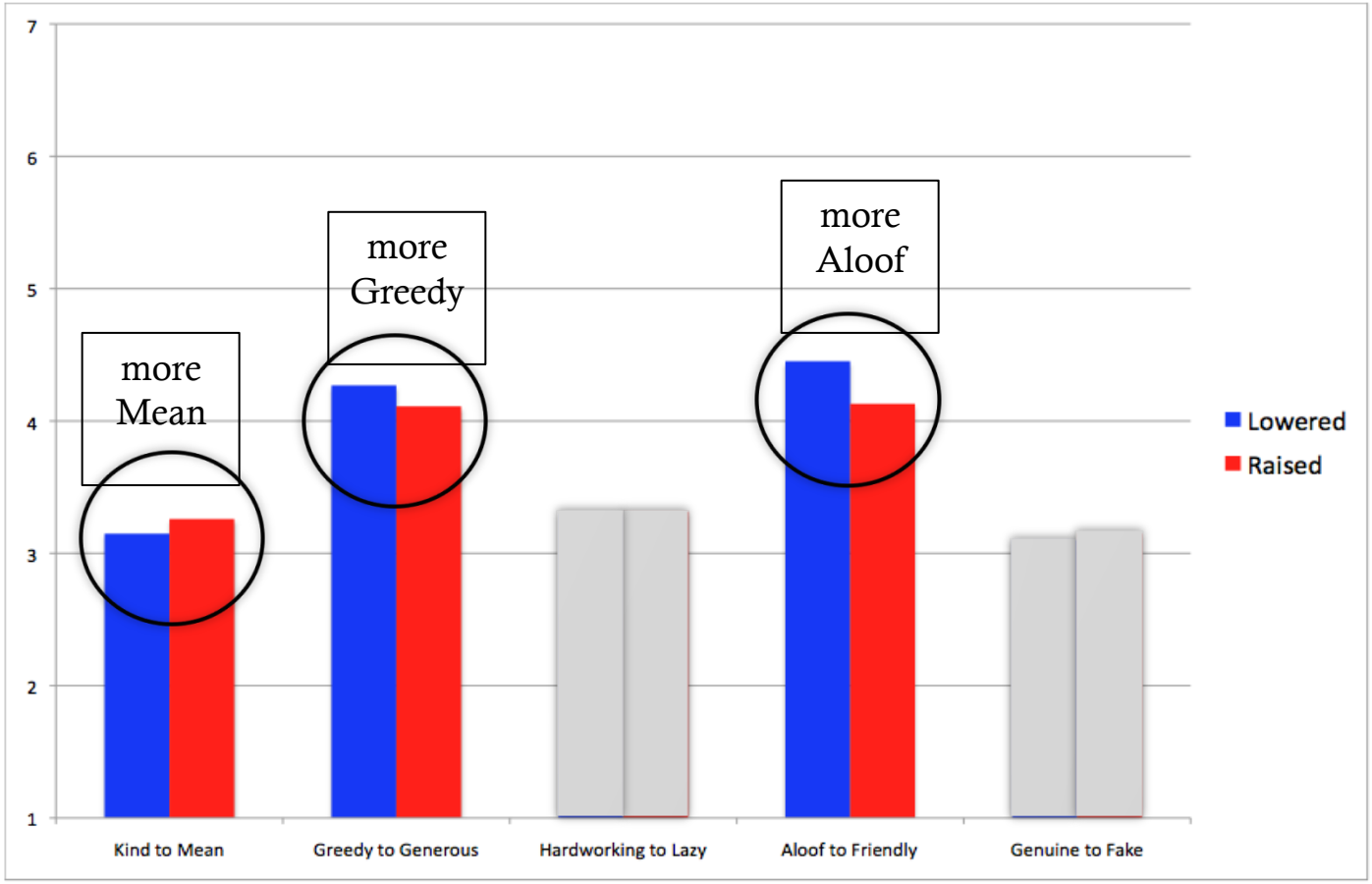
Region. A speaker is more likely to be perceived as from New York if the token is raised ($p < .022$). Michel is more likely to be heard as non from New York. ($p = .003$).

Ethnicity. A speaker is NOT more likely to be perceived as white if the token is raised ($p = .904$). But Leah ($p < .001$) and Julia ($p < .001$) are perceived as white.

Affective Scale Ratings



Affective Scale Ratings



Conclusions

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Raised BOUGHT *does* carry social meaning. Speakers are perceived as:

- New Yorkers
- Older
- A bit mean, a bit greedy, a bit aloof

These social meanings point to a holistic style, something like "classic New Yorker."

If the "classic New Yorker" (one who uses raised BOUGHT) is not just older, local (and white), but a person with negative personality characteristics as well, could this mean raised BOUGHT contributes to the negative stigma of the NY accent?

Could these types of meanings help us understand the change in progress away from raised BOUGHT on the Lower East Side?

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Please contact me at kbecker@reed.edu for questions or for a copy of these slides