

The Role of Higher Education in Socially-Motivated Change

Hilary Prichard  University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

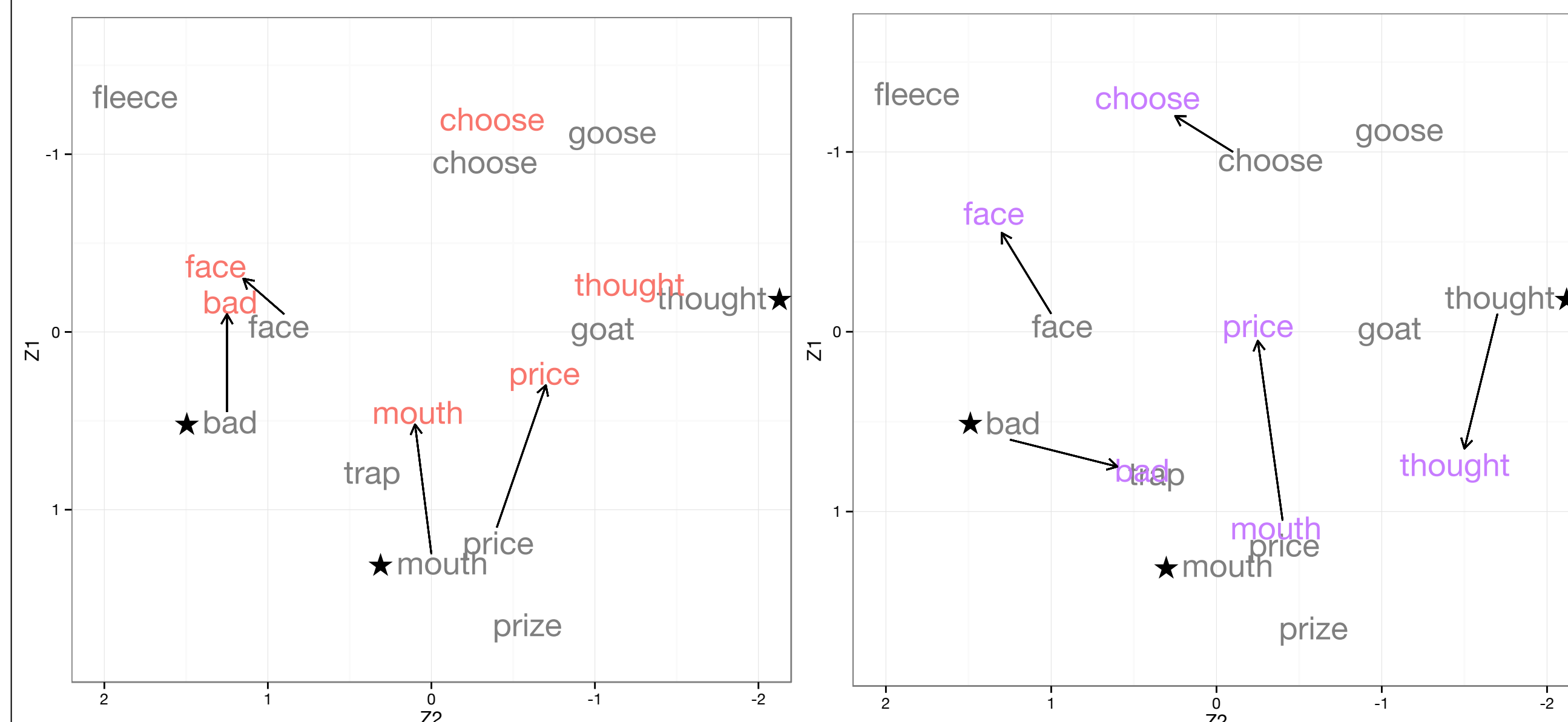
Quantitative sociolinguistic work has tended to either include education as part of a composite SES index, or analyze the number of years of schooling completed.

However, in a sample of eight white upper-working-class Philadelphians, Prichard and Tamminga¹ identified a difference between speakers with only **high school** education, and those with a **local**, **regional**, or **national** university education. University “type” coding was based on student body makeup, and years actually spent in school had no effect. Speakers with regional or national educations corrected away from marked stereotypes of Philadelphia speech, while still participating in changes below the level of awareness.

This study tests the generalizability of these findings by applying this four-way education classification to a large diachronic corpus of Philadelphia speech.

Data

- Subset of the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus²
- 195 white adults, aged 18 – 93, born 1889 – 1992
- Vowel tokens automatically aligned and extracted using the FAVE³ suite, with Lobanov (z-score) normalization
- Six vowel features studied, three marked (★), three not:

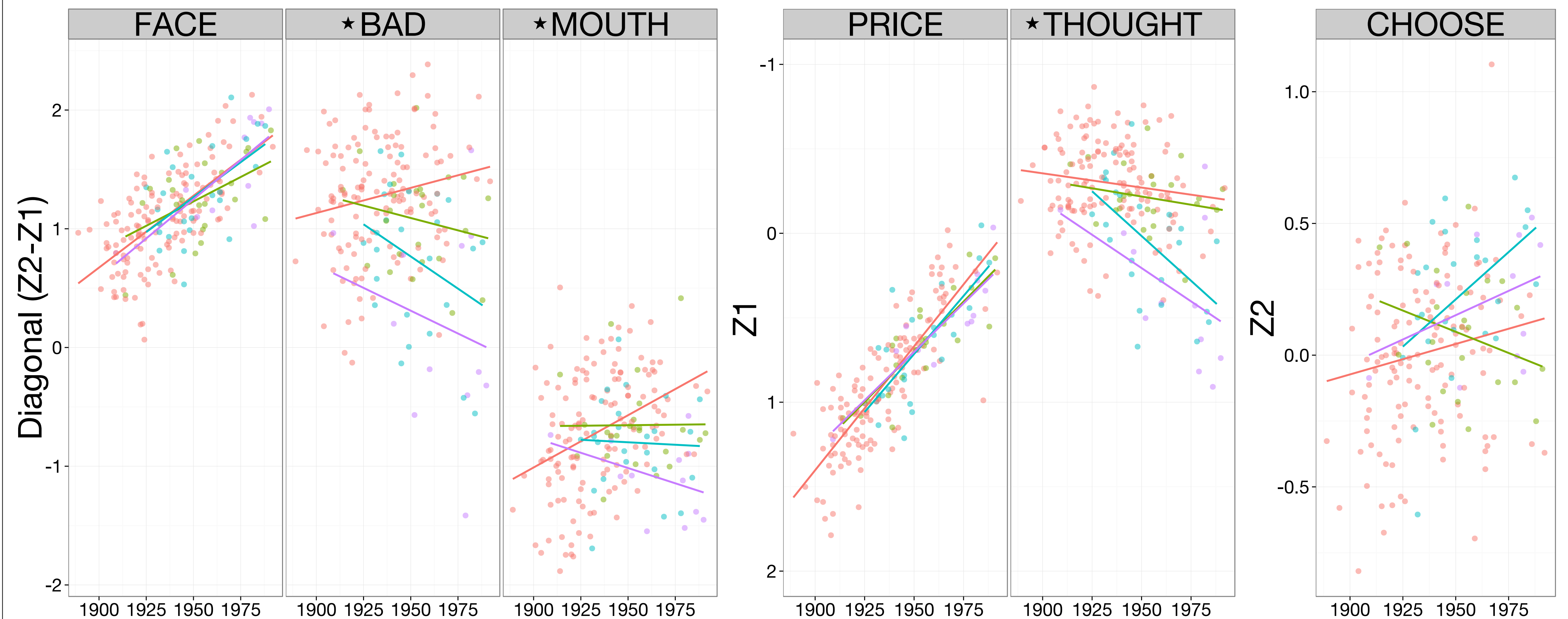


Grey vowel means from oldest high school educated speaker, Ed D.: male born 1889

Red vowel means from youngest **high school** speaker, Spaz A.: male born 1992

Purple vowel means from youngest **national** college speaker, Michael A.: male born 1990

Results



Speaker means by date of birth for six Philadelphia vowels.

Conclusion

- The community is moving in lockstep for two of the changes in progress which are below the level of awareness, FACE and PRICE raising, while national speakers seem to be leading GOOSE fronting.
- Speakers educated at national universities are leading the change away from two stereotyped features, tense BAD and THOUGHT, as well as raised MOUTH, which Labov et. al⁴ suggest has a lesser degree of social awareness.
- Lack of uniform retreat from all local Philadelphia features by national speakers decreases the likelihood that this is purely the result of accommodation or convergence.
- Hence it is not simply years of education which predicts speakers’ use of Philadelphia vowel features, but the type of college attended and the social salience of the vowel. This favors a social motivation for these changes.

References

1. Prichard, H., and M. Tamminga. 2012. The impact of higher education on Philadelphia vowels. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 18.2.
2. Labov, W., and I. Rosenfelder. 2011. The Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus.
3. Rosenfelder, I., J. Fruehwald, K. Evanini, and J. Yuan. 2011. FAVE (Forced Alignment and Vowel Extraction) Program Suite. <http://fave.ling.upenn.edu>.
4. Labov, W., I. Rosenfelder, and J. Fruehwald. 2013. One hundred years of sound change in Philadelphia: linear incrementation, reversal and re-analysis. *Language* 89(1): 30-65.