



# It's not the **THOUGHT** that counts for a **LOT** of Michigan English sound changes

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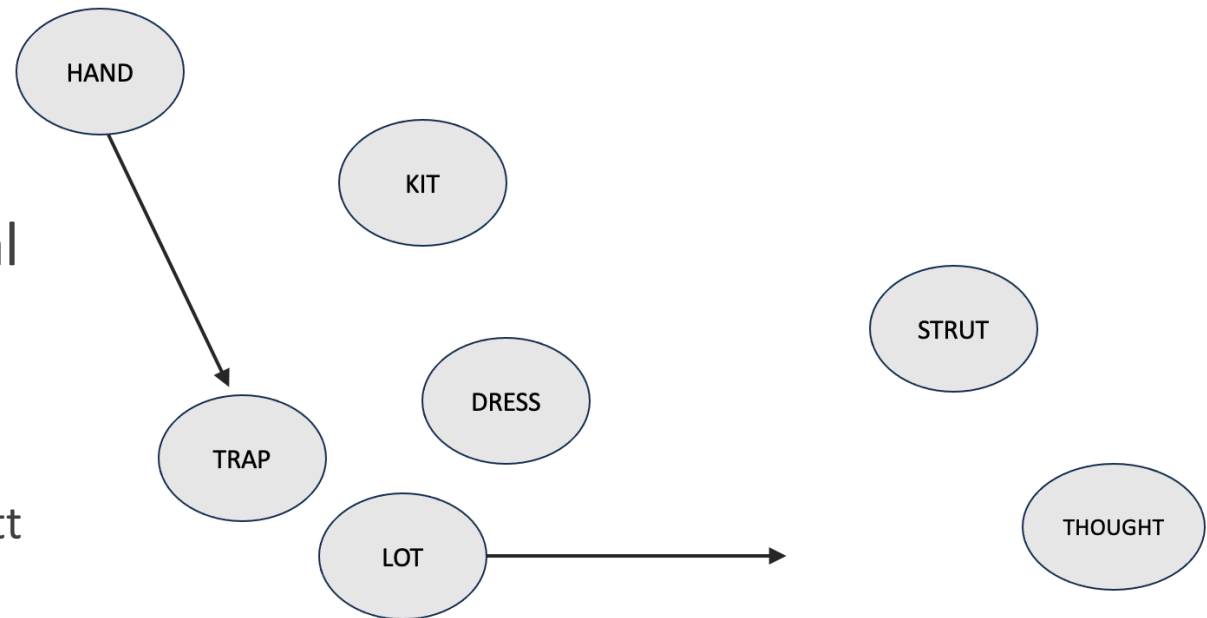
BETSY SNELLER ♦ SUZANNE EVANS WAGNER ♦ YONGQING YE ♦  
ADAM BARNHARDT ♦ JACK RECHSTEINER ♦ CAROLINE ZACKERMAN

@BETSYSNELLER



# MI English vowel changes

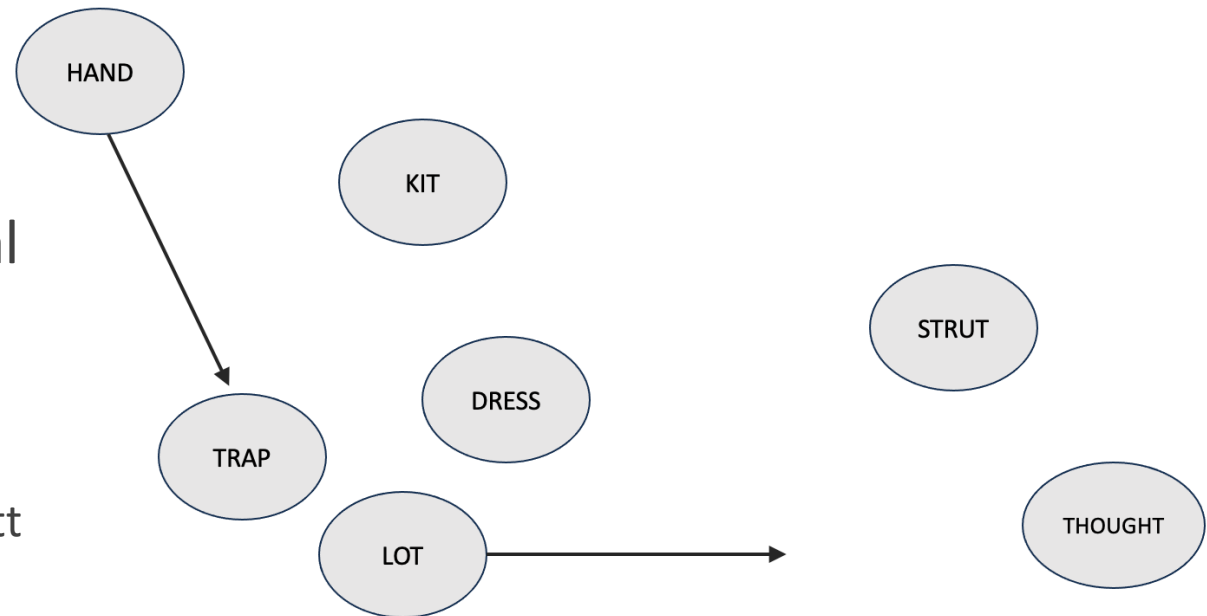
- Michigan = Inland North
  - Northern Cities Shift (Labov et al., 2006)
  - But undergoing recent reversal of 2 salient features:
    - TRAP, which splits by nasal conditioning (Nesbitt, 2019)
    - And LOT (Wagner et al., 2016; Nesbitt et al., 2018)





# MI English vowel changes

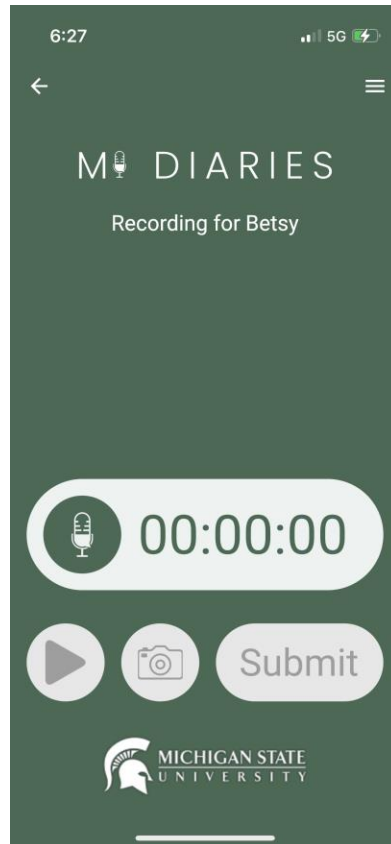
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- Today:
  - What's the state of NCS in MI? How is it changing across generations?
  - Are LOT and THOUGHT merging (low back merger shift (Becker 2019))?



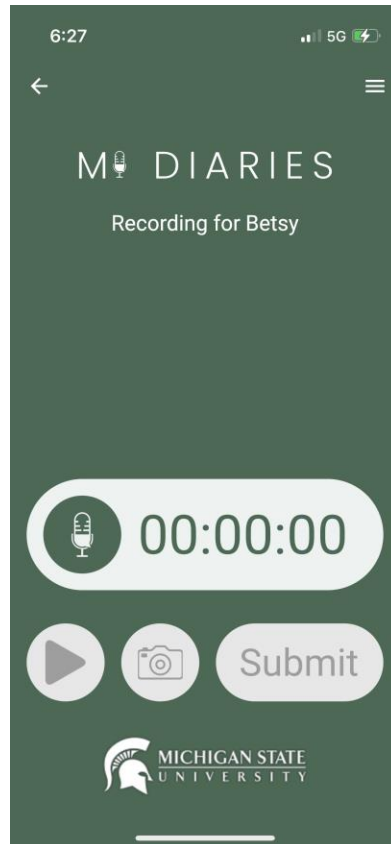
# MI Diaries (Sneller, Wagner & Ye, 2022)



- Self-recorded “audio diaries” collected between 2020 – 2023
- 67 white speakers born and raised in Michigan
  - **10** Boomers (1952 – 1964)
  - **8** Gen X (1965 – 1980)
  - **22** Millennials (1981 – 1996)
  - **20** Gen Z (1997 – 2009)
  - **7** Gen Alpha (2010 -- )
- 42 women, 25 men (binarily coded)



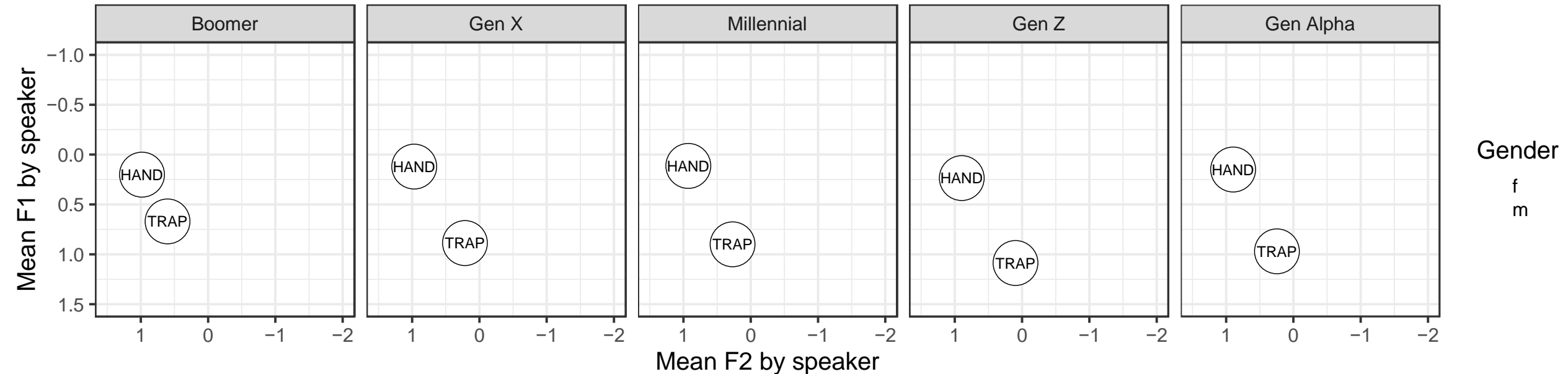
# MI Diaries (Sneller, Wagner & Ye, 2022)



- Data auto transcribed with Google ASR, hand corrected by RAs
- Force-aligned with MFA, extracted with FAVE-extract

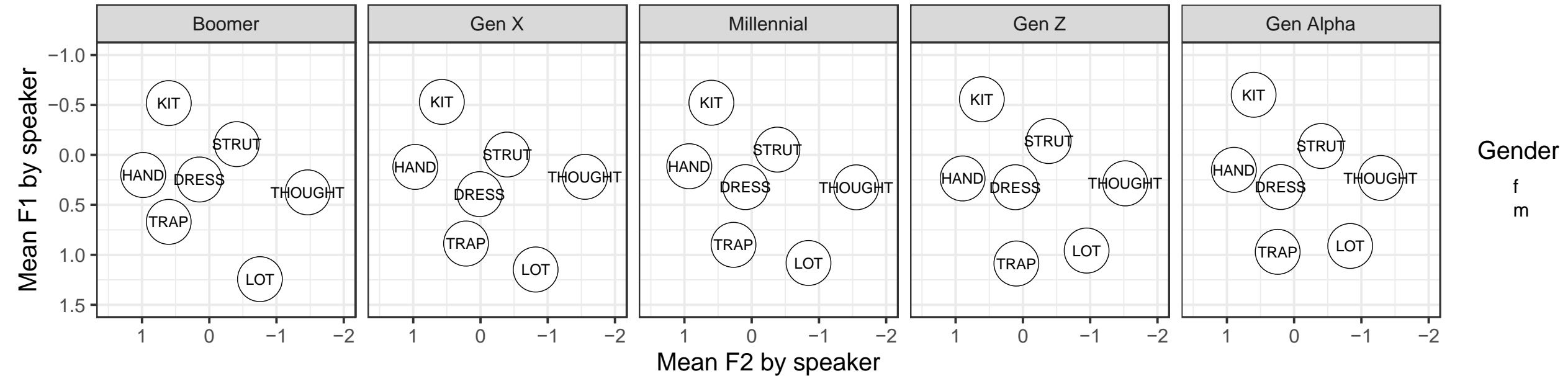
# Findings

# TRAP is splitting and reversing across apparent time



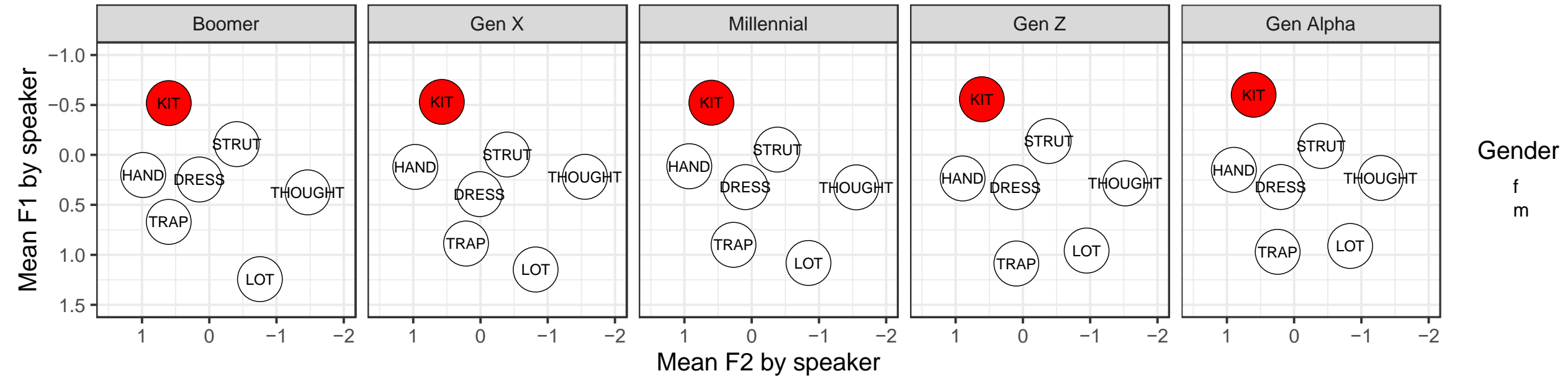
- Emergent HAND-TRAP split (following Nesbitt, 2019)
- Gen Alpha not as strong as Gen Z - expected (Labov, 2001; Denis et al., 2019)

# But there's not much movement in apparent time in any of the other NCS vowels!

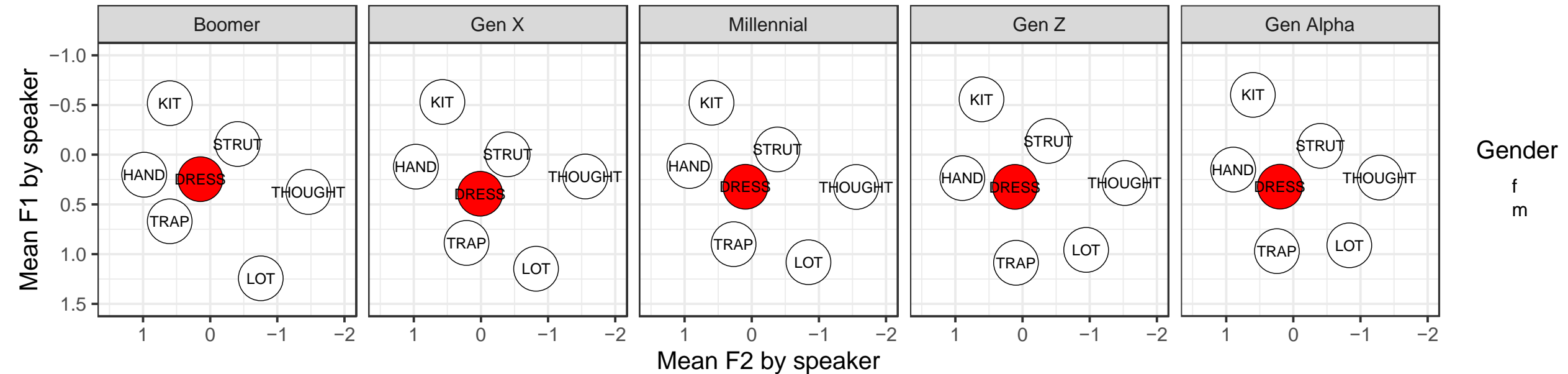




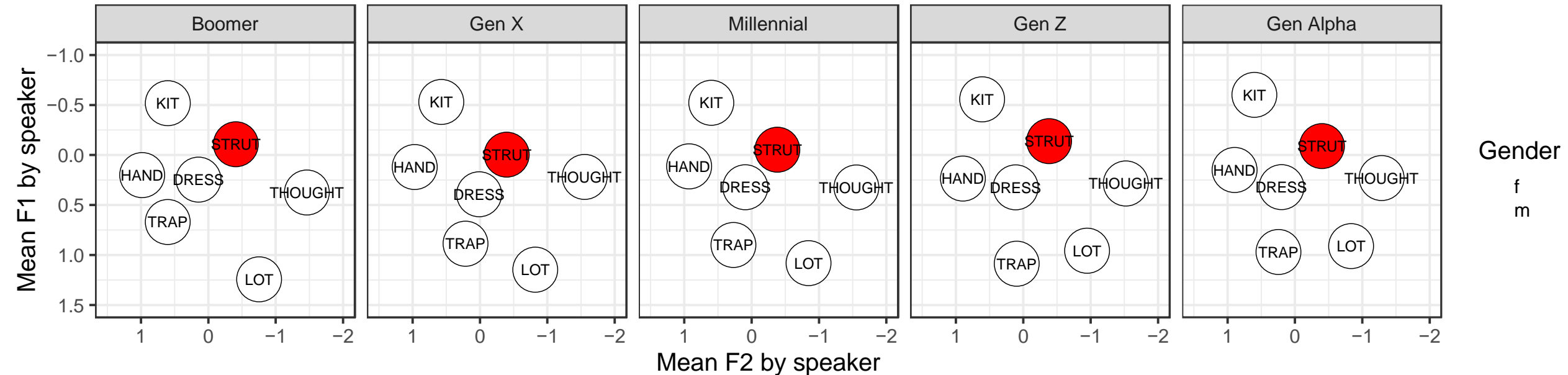
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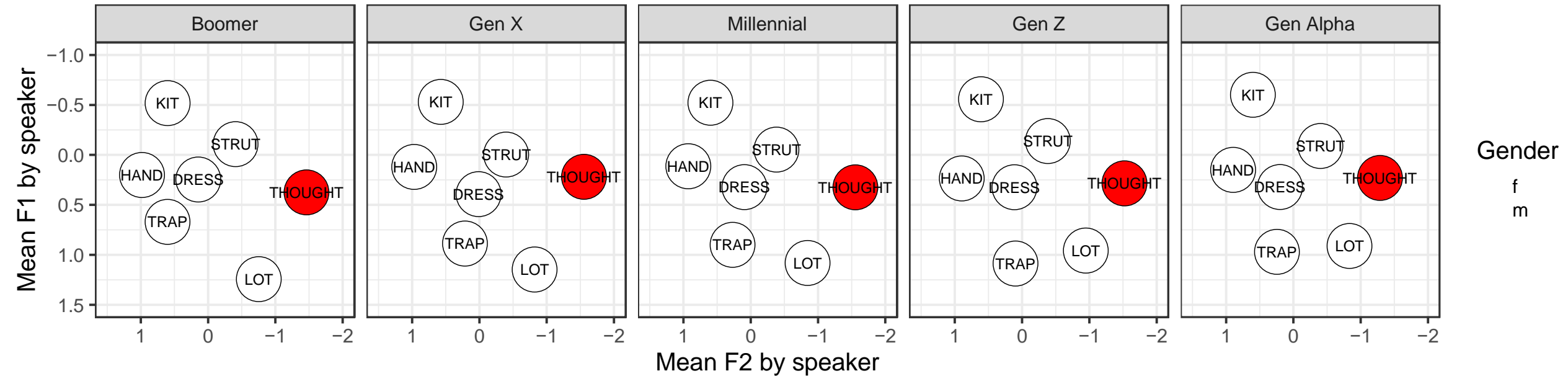
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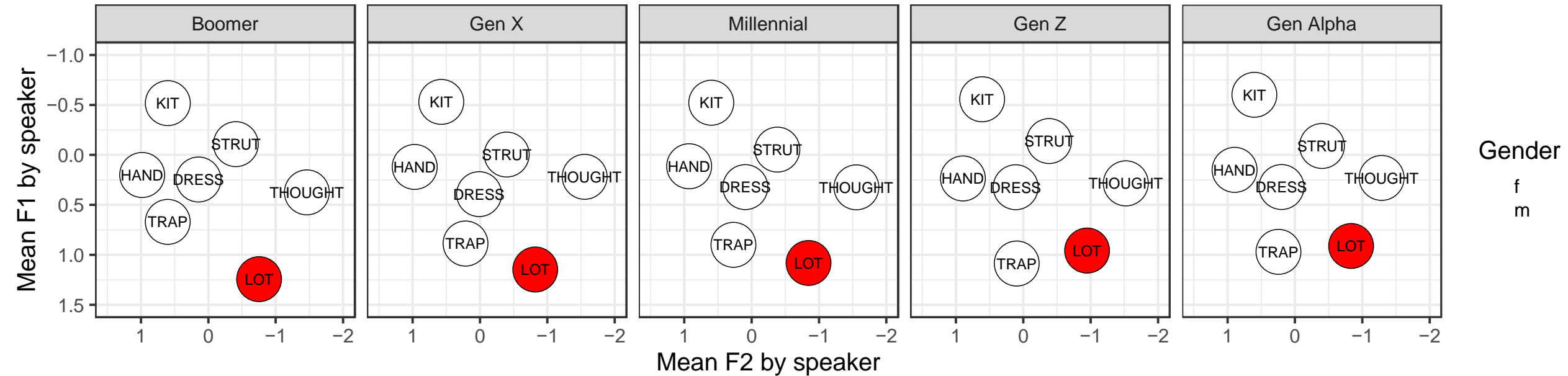
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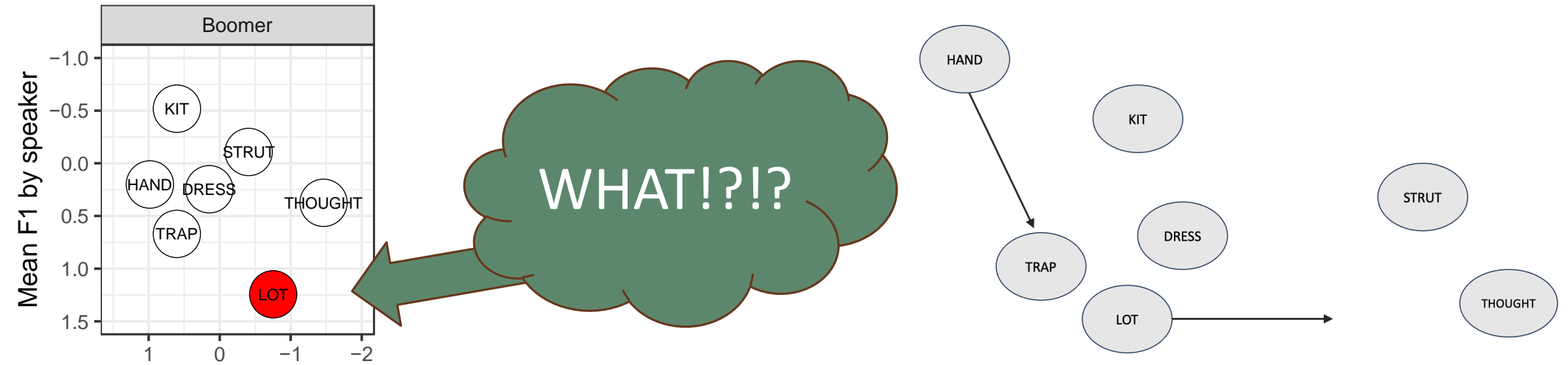
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- NCS was rapidly advancing for Boomers and Gen X (Eckert, 1988)
- The reversal is fairly recent – first described in the mid 2010s, for speakers born in the 1990s (Wagner et al., 2016; Driscoll et al., 2015)
- So why do our Boomers show such a backed LOT?



# LOT isn't fronted, even in the population most expected (Boomer women from Detroit)

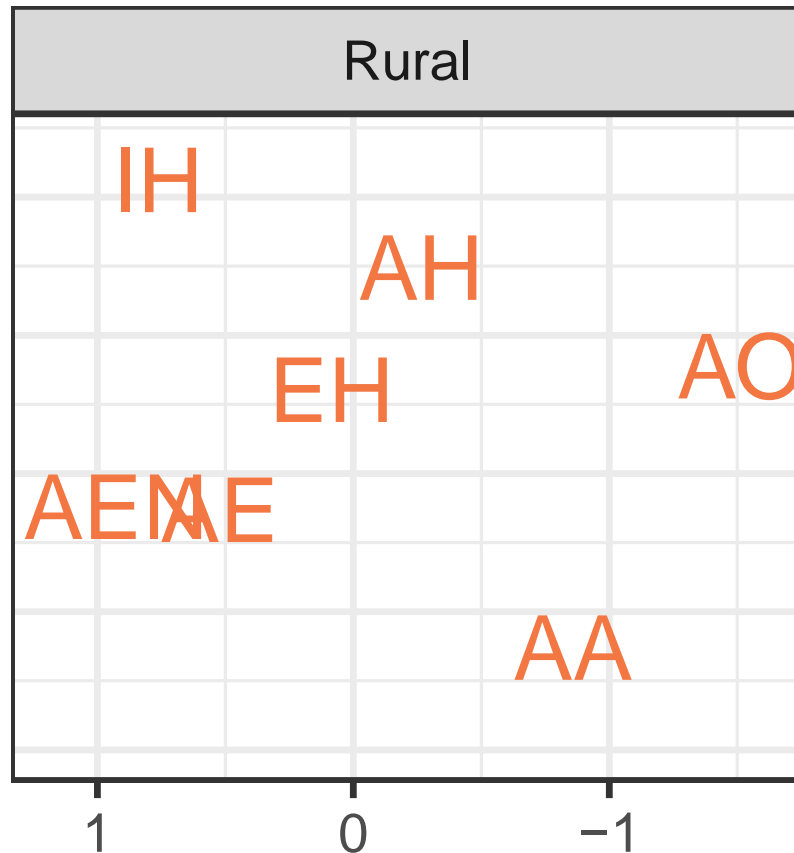
- NCS has always been most advanced in big cities (“cascade model” of sound change; Labov, 2002)
- So maybe our Boomer effect is driven by having many rural speakers?

Boomers by city size





Our claim: Boomer backed LOT is the result of participation in ongoing community level change



**MCD-00003:**

- Raised in a rural area (born 1958)
- Now retired school teacher
- Teaches Driver's Training (regular exposure to teen forms)

"It's not uncommon for me to say to them something like *are you scheduled on the range tomorrow?*

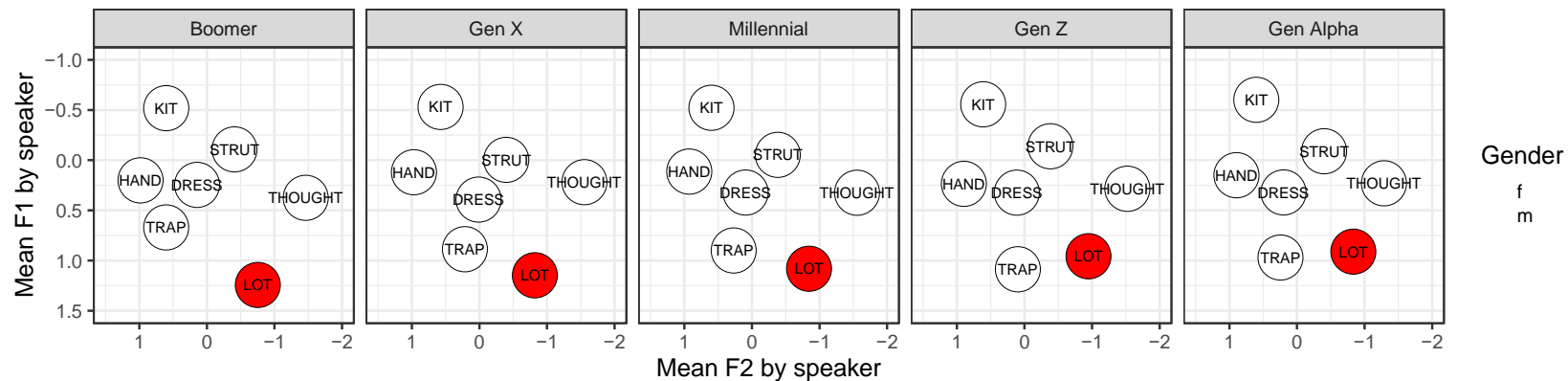
*Tomorrow?* Where'd that come from? It's always been *tomorrow!*"





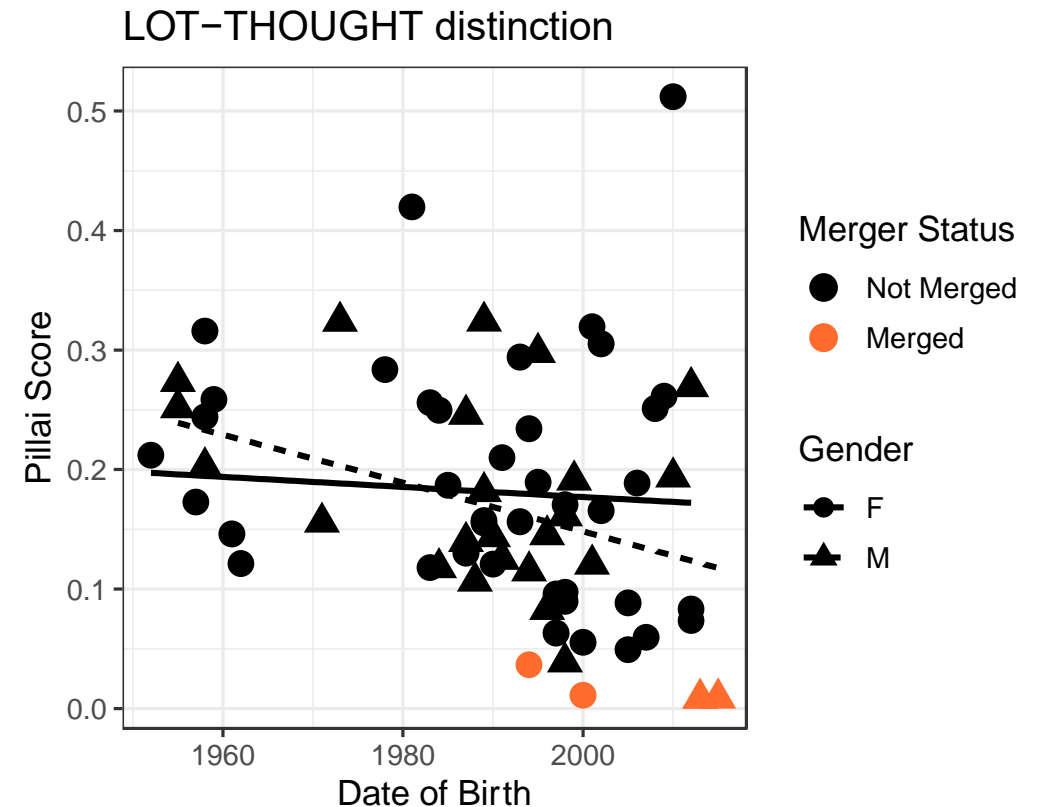
# What about the LOT-THOUGHT merger?

- Older generations are backing LOT in response to changing community norms (which is why they lag behind teens)
- Is LOT-backing driven by LOT-THOUGHT merger for the younger speakers (the predicted trigger of the LBMS)?



# Although LOT is retreating, it's NOT merging with THOUGHT (yet)

- Pillai score measurement, resampled per speaker for comparable sample size (Stanley & Sneller, 2023)
  - Pillai score of 0 = “merged”
- Only 4 speakers produce a merged LOT-THOUGHT!
- LOT-backing is *not* driven by LOT-THOUGHT merger
  - So is Michigan part of the LBMS? Or is this a different underlying process?
- THOUGHT does not stop LOT from backing





NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES



# Thank you!

NSF #BCS-211995 ♦ NEH #HAA-284835 ♦ OUR RESEARCH TEAM ♦ MI DIARIES PARTICIPANTS

# Other cool talks today with MI Diaries data:



Adam Barnhardt

“Not all sound changes in progress are used in early-adolescent stancetaking”

- Results from last year’s Project Launch!
- ACSM 226 10:00

• Yongqing Ye

“Nasalization change over time in Michigan English”

• ACSM 263 10:15





We are still recruiting:  
Students, faculty  
collaborators, community  
partners, and **more diarists!**

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Ask me about:  
**Community Engagement!**

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# Community engagement: giving back and growing

- Community Partners

- **Library of Michigan:** public archives
- **MSU Extension 4-H:** coordinating MI Diaries into existing projects; developing new ideas
- **Individual school districts:** incorporating MI Diaries into high school curricula







# Community engagement: giving back and growing

- Community Partners
- Individual Outreach and Engagement
  - **Youth Interns:** 3-6 high schoolers join our main team meetings for a semester, get hands-on research experience
  - **Public talks and outreach events**





# Community engagement: giving back and growing

- Community Partners
- Individual Outreach and Engagement
- Wider Engagement and Spin-Offs
  - **Other remote history projects** (documenting ASL during COVID; Shtisel Diary)
  - **Using our public archives** (high school theatre class; TESOL classroom activities, etc.)
  - Interested in hearing more!

