Awareness of a syntactic change in Shetland

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Motivation

- Age vectors (Labov 2001; Sankoff and Blondeau 2007)

  "The target of language learning for Philadelphia children is therefore not the pattern of their parents but an updated pattern which contains an age vector. How that vector is acquired by 3 year old children is a problem that lies at the forefront of our efforts to understand the mechanism of linguistic change." (Labov 2012, 20)

Awareness of changes

- social commentary on changes is omnipresent

  "Studies of change in progress indicate that speakers do have an awareness of what is old and what is new [. . .] virtually everybody contacted for the Horvath and Guy study (Guy et al. 1986) was aware of the innovative nature of the high-rising intonation in declaratives" (Guy 2003)

- quantitative evidence?

The current project

are speakers aware of apparent time differences in ongoing changes?

- four variables
    - varying with age
        - imperatives
        - yes/no questions
        - wh questions
    - varying with location
        - negation (stable control)
- questionnaire methodology
    - 5 questions
    - about *variable usage rates*
    - 1 minute/variable
    - reliability?
    - low-frequency variable

Questionnaire: Q1+Q2

You are probably familiar with these two ways of asking somebody to do something:

Mak du dy ain denner!   *Du mak dy ain denner!*

▶ estimate 'self' & 'community' usage rates

How much do you use either of these variants?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I use only 'Mak du..'	I use more 'Mak du..'	I use both equally	I use more 'Du mak..'	I use only 'Du mak..'

How much do you think are people around you using either of the variants?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People use only 'Mak du..'	People use more 'Mak du..'	People use both equally	People use more 'Du mak..'	People use only 'Du mak..'

▶ order of variants randomised between individuals

Q3: 'the speaker as linguistic historian'

▶ speakers' beliefs or connotations regarding variant 'age'

Which of the two variants do you think is *older*?

☐	☐	☐
'Mak du..' is older	'Du mak..' is older	People have always used both

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▶ no explicit attention drawn to the change (yet)

Q4+Q5: 'the speaker as sociolinguist'

- ▶ tap into perceived *apparent time differences*

How much do you think *younger speakers* use either of the variants?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
younger speakers use only 'Mak du..'	younger speakers use more 'Mak du..'	younger speakers use both equally	younger speakers use more 'Du mak..'	younger speakers use only 'Du mak..'

How much do you think *older speakers* use either of the variants?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
older speakers use only 'Mak du..'	older speakers use more 'Mak du..'	older speakers use both equally	older speakers use more 'Du mak..'	older speakers use only 'Du mak..'

- ▶ order of questions randomised between individuals

Five questions × four variables

You are probably familiar with these two ways of asking somebody to do something:

Mak du dy ain denner!   *Du mak dy ain denner!*

You are probably familiar with these two ways of negating a sentence:

He didnoo go   *He didna go*

You are probably familiar with these two ways of asking somebody a question:

Kens du Sarah?   *Does du ken Sarah?*

You are probably familiar with these two ways of asking somebody a question:

Whit gae du him?   *Whit did du gie him?*

Results: method & hypotheses

- ordinal data

1. classification and regression trees
   - recursive binary partitioning
2. ordered logistic regression
   - effect sizes

- expected effects
  - perception of apparent time differences?
  - gender? (Trudgill 1972)

Data collection

- balanced sample (N=24)
    - paper-based questionnaires filled out on-site
    - *following* an hour-long interview on the syntactic variables
        - $\rightarrow$ heavily conditioned?
- convenience sample (N=53)
    - online version of the questionnaire (IBEX)
    - http://spellout.net/ibexexps/kstadler/shetland/experiment.html
    - distributed via social media
- all speakers from & currently living in Shetland

Results: estimated own usage
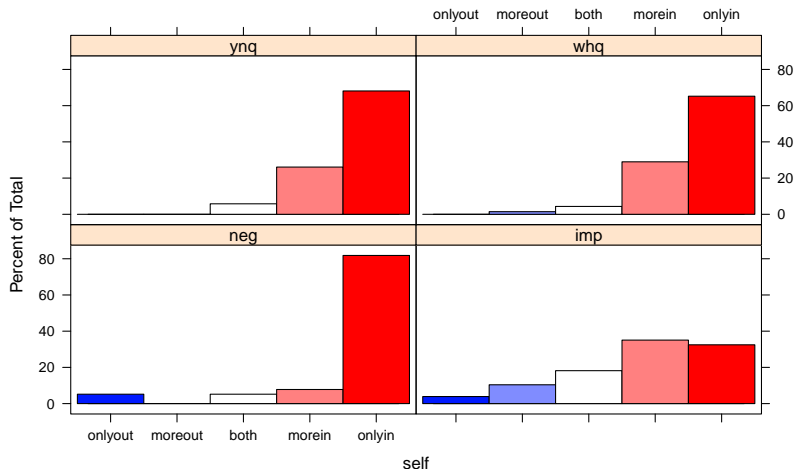
▶ consistent with acceptability judgment data

Results: estimated own usage - model

```
formula: self ~ age
data:    changing

 link  threshold nobs logLik  AIC    niter max.grad cond.H
 logit flexible  215  -234.95 479.90 5(0)  7.68e-08 7.4e+04

Coefficients:
    Estimate Std. Error z value Pr(>|z|)
age -0.026017   0.008959  -2.904  0.00368 **

Threshold coefficients:
onlyout|moreout   moreout|both    both|morein    morein|onlyin
      -5.301          -3.855          -2.715          -1.141
```
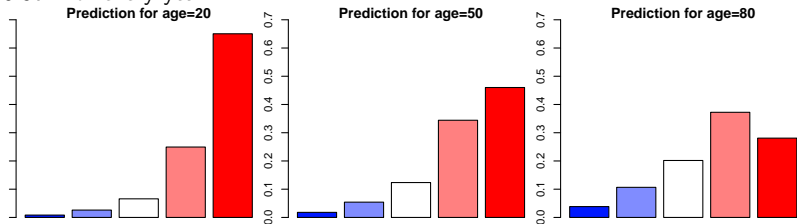
$-0.0260174 \rightarrow$ probability of selecting the same or a higher category multiplied by 0.974 for every year

Results: estimated own usage - model

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Threshold coefficients:
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        -5.301          -3.855          -2.715          -1.141
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-0.0260174 → probability of selecting the same or a higher category multiplied by 0.974 for every year

Results: estimated 'community' usage
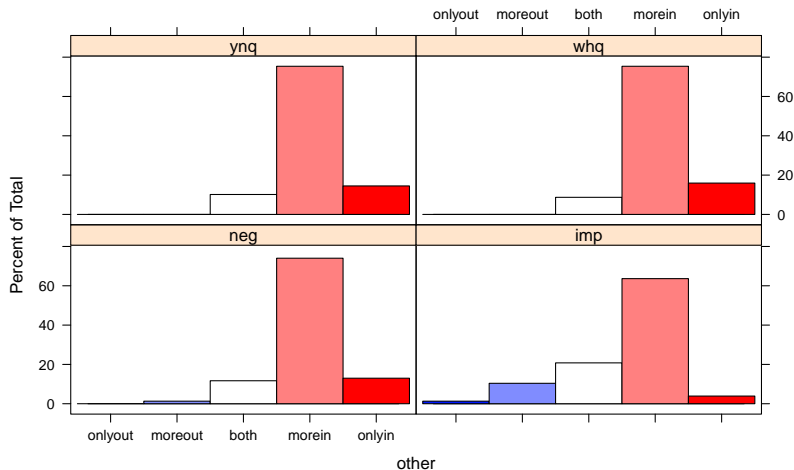
- only measure where gender is significant
  - females report higher community usage of incoming variants

Results: difference between own & community usage

- *derived* measure
  - number of ordinal categories between Q1 & Q2 answers
  - where people see themselves relative to community
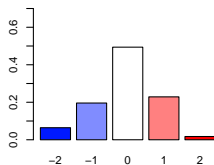
- age is a significant predictor
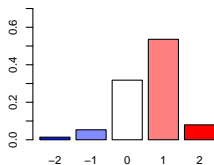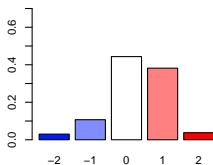
Results: variant 'age'

"Which of the two variants do you think is *older*?"
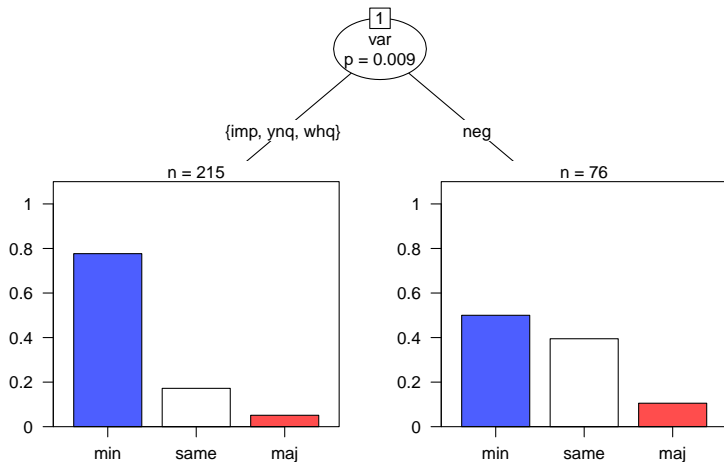
- people 'know' what the outgoing variants are
- (local) minority negation still often identified as 'older'?
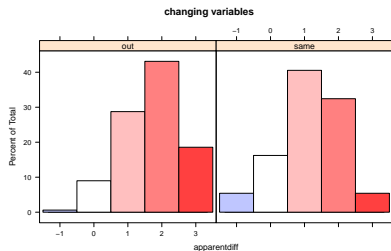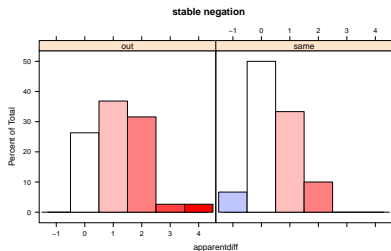
Results: apparent time differences

- another derived measure
  - relative difference of 'younger' minus 'older' usage
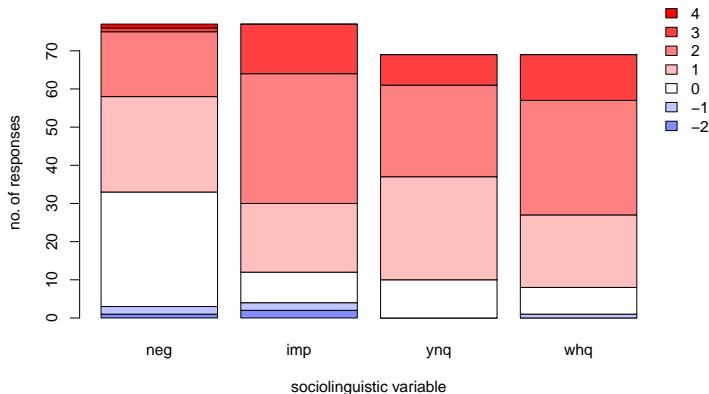
- negation?

Apparent time differences vs. variant 'age'

- ▶ answers highly correlated
- ▶ 'age connotation' question precedes 'apparent time' question
- ▶ apparent time differences reported for negation?
  - ▶ 'local' > dialectal > old-fashioned > older speakers?

Conclusions

- simple questionnaire methodology
- self-reported usage levels
    - consistent with (& complementary to) acceptability judgments
    - age-dependent positioning ahead of/behind the community
- people have (correct) beliefs about
    - the 'age' of syntactic variants
    - apparent time differences (?)
- control for social connotations/indexicality?
    - randomise order of questions 3 vs. 4+5

Conclusions

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Thank you!

Estimated usage rates <> acceptability judgments

- 'acceptability' of *individual* variants
  - based on active production and/or passive perception
- present methodology directly opposes the competing variants
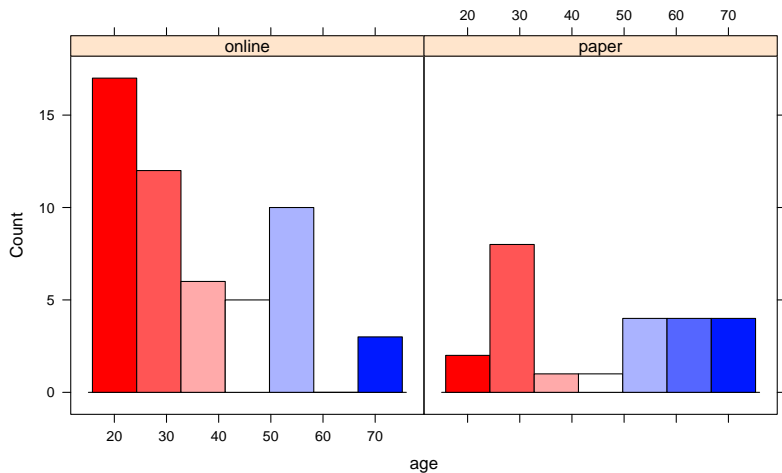 - disentangles production & perception
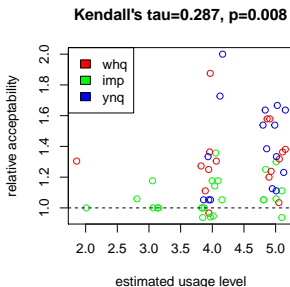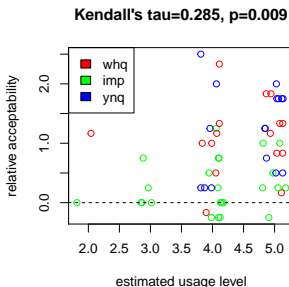
- divergence in acceptability of the incoming+outgoing variants
  - → indicative of a change *near completion*?

Demographics: gender + location
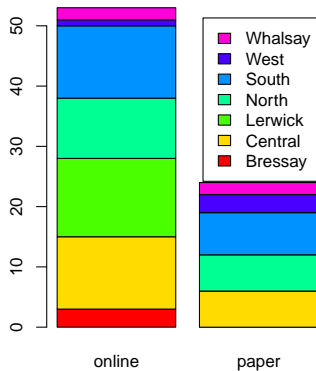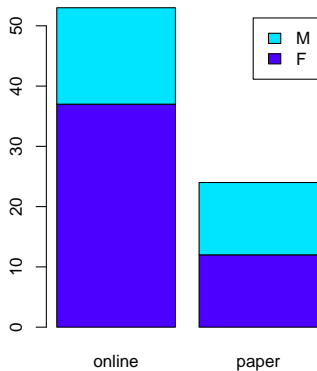
Demographics: age

- mean age 36/45, median age 30/47.5

References

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Sankoff, Gillian, and Hélèn Blondeau. 2007. "Language change across the lifespan: /r/ in Montreal French." *Language* 83 (3): 560–88. doi:10.1353/lan.2007.0106.

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