

## Interpreting *flip-flop* patterns in vowel mergers-in-progress

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### *flip-flop*

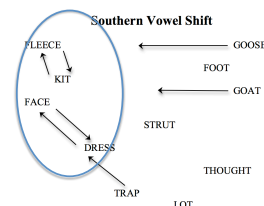
- Given a community undergoing merger-in-progress, occasionally a speaker will exhibit something that looks like the phonological process known as *flip-flop*.
- This Talk:**
  - the community: San Francisco, California
  - the merger-in-progress: LOT & THOUGHT
  - the speaker: 'Mary', Irish American Female, 29 yrs

### *flip-flop*

- flip-flop*:
  - “a process in which two segments exchange position in the phonological pattern.”  
(Chomsky & Halle 1968:355)
  - “when a rule inverts distinctive-feature values in such a way as to change Segment A into Segment B, and vice-versa.”  
(Moreton 1999)

### *flip-flop*

- Non-merger example: SVS  
(Wroblewski et al. 2010; Labov et al. 2006)
- The front vowels involved in the Southern Vowel Shift might be analyzed as undergoing *flip-flop* with respect to peripherality.



### *flip-flop*<sub>2</sub>

- flip-flop*<sub>2</sub>:
  - when **two merging vowels** are produced in such a way that they appear to move *past* the point of coalescence.
  - phonetic difference appears to be *maintained*, but the new vowel quality of each vowel class best approximates the former vowel quality of the *other* vowel class.

### Question

- Is the occurrence of *flip-flop*<sub>2</sub> evidence of hypercorrection?
- (If so, does that suggest that mergers actually can carry social meaning?)

### ‘Hypercorrection’

- “Two different types of prestige which may trigger a style shift that overshoots the norm...
- First, *hypercorrection* or orientation to *overt prestige* refer to a situation in which speakers' style shift is triggered by their **orientation to the standard dialect**.
- Second, *hyperaccommodation* or orientation to *covert prestige* is a type of style shift due to speakers' **accommodation to a local variety**.”

(Di Paolo 1990:267)

### ‘Hypercorrection’ of LOT & THOUGHT

- Bill Peters, 80yrs, Pennsylvania

(Labov, Yaeger & Steiner 1972:235-236; see also Labov 1994)

- “His vowels are distinct in connected speech, but in minimal pairs he seems to be orienting to the younger norm.
- The short-o and long open-o classes are still distinct, even though they are very close and sound ‘the same’ to him.
- Mysteriously enough, Peters can make these two phonemes ‘the same’ and yet keep them apart.”

### ‘Hypercorrection’ of LOT & THOUGHT

- “a speaker may vary in pronunciation from a complete merger to a strong contrast depending on how the speaker assesses the situational context ... Currently, **speakers hypercorrect in some situations by merging the vowels**.”

(Di Paolo 1990:289)

- “Utah speakers can be said to be hypercorrecting toward a ‘false’ standard.”

(Di Paolo 1990:268)

### *flip-flop* of LOT & THOUGHT

- “One of the ... responses to *Don/dawn* can be discounted because the speaker pronounced *Don* as [dɔn] and *dawn* as [dan].”

(Labov 1994:355, reporting on Herold 1990)

### *flip-flop* of LOT & THOUGHT

- Speaker 251: Middle class White Female, 16yrs

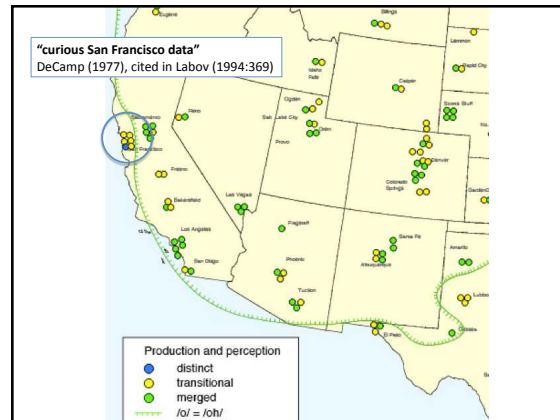
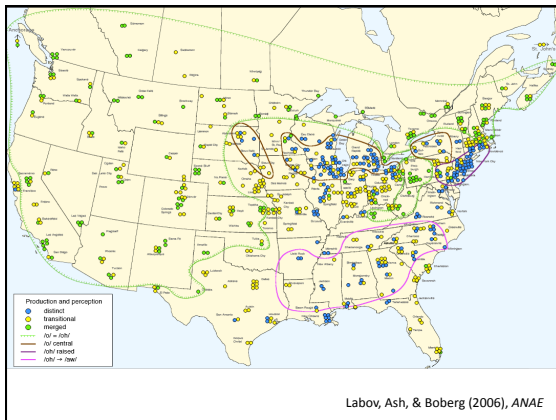
(Di Paolo 1990:281)

- “The means for the onset of F1 indicate that 251 reverses the traditional height distinction between (ɔ) and (a). That is, (ɔ) is a lower vowel than (a) at the onset. ...
- Similarly, the 2.01 dB difference in the VQI between the onset of (a) and (ɔ) is the reverse of what is expected. ...
- **Thus, two of the three acoustic parameters indicate a flip-flop of (ɔ) and (a),** and the third, F2, does not distinguish the two vowels.”

### Phonetic/Phonological Description

- “The coalescence of /a/ and /ɔ/ in all contexts among young speakers points toward **the loss of the /ɔ/ phoneme** in the northern Rockies, as far west as Idaho.” (Pederson 2001:285)
- centralizing, lowering, unrounding, & monophthongization of /ɔ/ (THOUGHT)
- little backing or raising of /a/ (LOT), (cf. Baranowski, this session)

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### Methodology (Hall-Lew 2009)

- acoustic analysis of sociolinguistic interviews with a sample of 30 San Franciscans native to one neighborhood, the Sunset District.
- sample stratified according to age, gender, and ethnicity: European (mostly Irish) American & Asian (mostly Chinese) American.
- all either English monolingual or English-dominant since at least age 5.

### Methodology (Hall-Lew 2009)

- every LOT and THOUGHT token from each speaker's interview with durations > 60ms
- F1 & F2 midpoint & off-glide measurements
  - Bark-converted for all comparisons
  - Lobanov normalized for interspeaker comparisons
- all tokens followed by /l/ or /r/ excluded
- all PALM & CLOTH class tokens excluded

### Multiple Regression Models

- dependent linguistic factor:
  - single numerical representation of the distance between LOT & THOUGHT midpoints, per speaker (both Pillai-Bartlett statistic & average Euclidean distances) (no off-glide data included in statistical tests)
- independent social factors:
  - speaker age (16-76)
  - speaker ethnicity (AsianAm / EuroAm)
  - speaker gender (F / M)

### Results (Hall-Lew 2009)

- San Francisco is a community of *near merger*
  - LOT-THOUGHT is a merger by approximation or drift, not expansion (cf. Herold 1990)
  - Many San Franciscans who do have the LOT-THOUGHT *distinction* still show much *phonetic overlap* between vowel distributions.
  - Many San Franciscans who *cannot perceive* the distinction nonetheless produce a *subtle phonetic difference* between vowel classes.

### Results (Hall-Lew 2009)

- Significant apparent time correlation
  - older speakers had greater distances between vowel classes than younger speakers

### Results (Hall-Lew 2009)

- No significant main effects between merger & ethnicity or merger & gender.
  - **However, apparent time correlations found for Asian Americans**, but not European Americans.
  - **And, apparent time correlations found for Females**, but not for Males.
  - Near-significant apparent time correlation among **Asian American Females**; none among any other social sub-group.

### Analysis (Hall-Lew 2009)

- *Why Asian Americans?*
- *Why Women?*

### Analysis (Hall-Lew 2009)

- The neighborhood's Asian American identity has emerged as the same time that this sound change has.
  - **Asian Americans are more likely to construct their local identity in line with newer social & linguistic resources.**
- European Americans have older linguistic resources for marking their local identity.
  - The older persona/figure of local authenticity was both **European American and Upper Working class male**:
    - a physically tough, upwardly-mobile civil servant; also typically Irish Catholic (e.g., policemen, firemen, construction workers)

### Analysis (Hall-Lew 2009)

- *Asian Americans are perhaps more likely to construct local identity with newer changes:*
  - **merger?**
- *European Americans have older linguistic resources for marking their local identity:*
  - **distinction?**

### Analysis (Hall-Lew 2009)

- But what about the awareness of the merger?
  - “As a rule, mergers and splits have no social affect associated with them.”  
(Labov 1994: 343)
- We don't really have to worry about this here, because the change seems to be, phonetically:
  - *not* the **merger** of LOT and THOUGHT, but
  - the **centralization of THOUGHT**, which then, secondarily, results in a merger with LOT

### Analysis (Hall-Lew 2009)

- *Asian Americans are perhaps more likely to construct local identity with newer changes:*
  - the centralization of THOUGHT
- *European Americans have older linguistic resources for marking their local identity:*
  - the raised, backed, in-gliding THOUGHT

### Analysis (Hall-Lew 2009)

- The vowel quality of THOUGHT carries social meaning in San Francisco's Sunset District community:
  - higher and backer productions index an older local authenticity
  - lower and centralized productions index a newer local authenticity
  - (future research: perception studies)

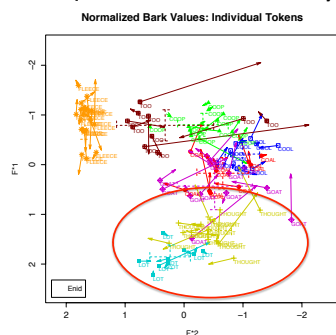
### *flip-flop* & the LOT/THOUGHT merger

- *flip-flop* appears to be a consequence of the over-centralizing of THOUGHT.
- The result is the production of THOUGHT is **lower and/or further front than LOT.**

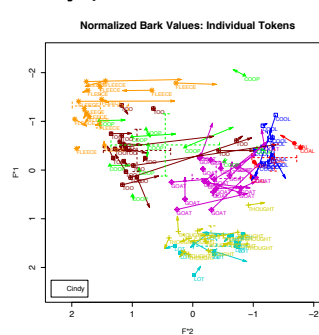
### Mary vs. other San Franciscan women

- Individual vowel plots from interview data:
  - Enid (Chinese American F 76yrs)
  - Cindy (Chinese American F 42yrs)
  - Cheri (Irish American F 65yrs)
  - Amy (Euro American F 39yrs)
  - Abby (Irish American F 30yrs)
  - Mary (Irish American F 29yrs)

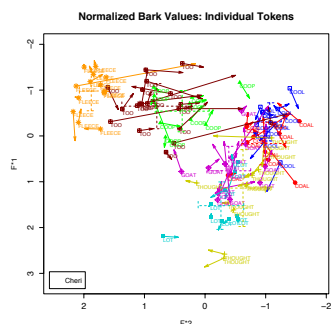
### Enid (Chinese Am, F, 76yrs)



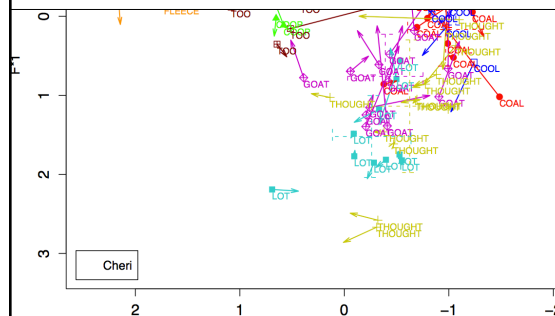
### Cindy (Chinese Am, F, 42yrs)



### Cheri (Irish Am, F, 65yrs)



### Cheri: Older local authenticity



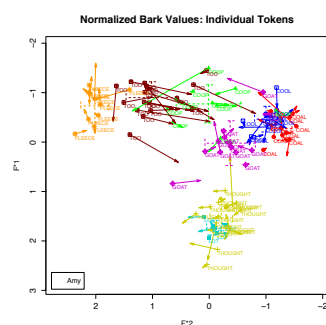
### Cheri, Irish American, 65yrs

*Uh yes, yes. Uh **native San Franciscans** have— either a **Bostonian** or:: a combination **Bostonian/New York** uh accent and you d— you will tell a **real native**— My son doesn't, so to speak? But yes, they've commented, they go "**Where are you from.**"*

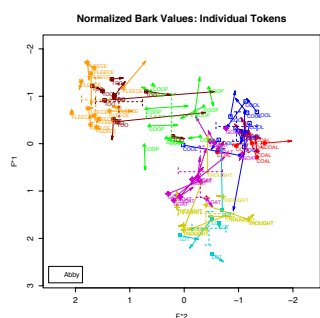
(L: Who's 'they'?)

*Just people! Just people that I, that I talk to.*

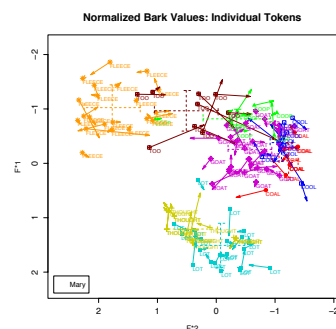
### Amy (Euro Am, F, 39yrs)



### Abby (Irish Am, F, 30yrs)



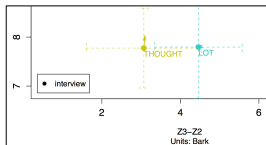
### Mary (Irish Am, F, 29yrs)



### Mary: interview (*flip-flop*)

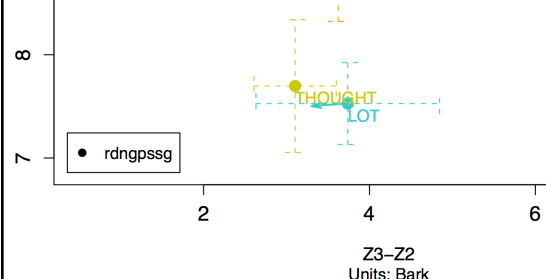
- **NB:**

This is not exactly *flip-flop*; the LOT vowel isn't moving. Rather, the THOUGHT vowel has 'flipped' over it.

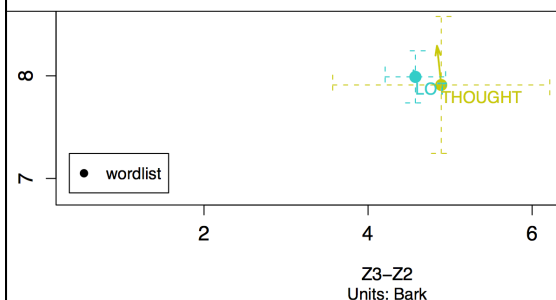


- Di Paolo's "speaker 251" *flip-flopped* with respect to F1 and not F2; Mary is showing the opposite.

### Mary: reading passage (*flip-flop*)



### Mary: minimal pairs (merged)



### Minimal Pair Word List Productions

- **Mary**

– Dawn Don

- "...that's one that I always get caught(?) on the East Coast, *Erin and Aaron* are the same name and *Dawn and Don* are the same name"

– cot caught

- *followed by laughter*

– stalk stock

– dot daughter

### The Complication

- "in spite of the fact that most of them might consciously say that (ɔ) and (ɑ) are one word class ...
- they must be able to recognize that there were two word classes, (ɔ) and (ɑ), present."

(Di Paolo 1990:289, reporting on language attitudes results that showed that listeners rated the merged speaker more favorably than the non-merged speaker)

### There's something about Mary

- Born & raised in the Sunset District
  - Her only time away was college at Cornell
- Her father is 3<sup>rd</sup>-generation San Francisco Irish
  - NB: San Francisco incorporated in 1850
- She attended both public *and* private school
  - Giannini, a multiethnic public middle school
  - St. Ignatius ('S.I.'), a private Irish Catholic high school

### comments from Mary's mother

"[My children] had a pretty multiethnic friendships. **[Mary] particularly had, um, friends that were not Caucasian.**

When she was at that school her group of choice was Black girls, but that didn't last very long. They wouldn't, um, take her in, if that makes any sense."

### comments from Mary's mother

"Her Black friends got in trouble because they were hanging out with *her*.

And the same thing happened; Asian...

[Mary] would be disturbed to loose certain friends because, because it became too painful for them to cross that line."

### comments from Mary's mother

"What is it, *Fresh Off the Boat*? That's what [Mary] would say. **Some of her friends changed their clothing habits to look like they were *Fresh Off the Boats* ... they're Asian American, but they changed their language and their clothing in order to associate with the new Asian community.**"

(cf. Hall-Lew & Starr 2010)

### Mary

"you know and there's um there, there's a lot more like *Fresh Off the Boat*, kind of, you know there's like the *Russian posse* and there's the [.hh] everything, you know there's all kinds of things, and there was a, the *FOBs* when I was there, um, which was the **reappropriation of *Fresh Off the Boat* and was *Fresh Oriental Boys*** [hhh] and then we had like *housers* which were mostly Filipino like breakdancers."

### Mary

"you get to pull like, anything you want out of the different influence[s] you had growing up, and it comes off natural. I, you know, I went to Cornell, um, after having gone to S.I., you know I was about as cartoonishly, you know, upwardly-mobile White girl as you get, but I slip into how I talked when I was in middle school and people were like '**Whoa, how do you know how to talk like that?**' you know and I was like '**Oh [hhh] all I wanted to be when I was 13 was a 5-foot-tall Asian girl who could breakdance!**'"

### Analysis

- Mary is particularly tuned into the symbolic capital of both levels of her community. She constantly negotiates between:
  - her immediate heritage community, where everyone has a backed, raised THOUGHT vowel.
  - her wider community, where everyone is moving towards a centralized THOUGHT vowel.



## Analysis

- Mary's *flip-flopped* production of THOUGHT may reflect her social position as:
  - ✓ a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Irish American,
  - ✓ in a neighborhood that used to be proudly Irish,
  - ✓ but which rapidly shifted to being proudly Asian,
  - ✓ at exactly the time when Mary was growing up,
  - ✓ creating a social situation in which she struggled to find a balance between these two rapidly changing sources of local authenticity & prestige.

## Question

- Is the occurrence of *flip-flop*<sub>2</sub> evidence of 'hypercorrection'?

## Analysis

- In this community, social norms have changed very rapidly & dramatically.
- There appears to be more than one source of overt prestige, depending, among other things, on a speaker's age, ethnicity, gender, & network.
- Both 'hypercorrection' & 'hyperaccommodation' are concepts that are difficult to apply here.
- But perhaps we can think of 'hypercorrection' more broadly...

## Proposal

- Speakers can orient to newer San Franciscan identities by employing the newer linguistic sound changes that index those identities.
- A lowered, centralized production of the THOUGHT vowel is one such resource.
- **LOT-THOUGHT *flip-flop* may be one extreme consequence of this self-styling.**

## Implications

- *flip-flop* may be a particularly revealing phenomenon of merger-in-progress:
  - *linguistically*, it may indicate a precise turning point in the trajectory of a change, marking the time period during which prestige shifted.
  - *socially*, it may help to unpack the identity-based motivations that are coinciding with, or perhaps driving, that change.

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