



Linguistic markers of England's north-south dialectal divide: An attitudinal study of BATH and STRUT

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1. Introduction

Aim: to investigate perceptual cues in dialect recognition, specifically the indexicality of the TRAP-BATH and FOOT-STRUT distinctions in Southern English

	North	South
BATH -	/a/	/ɑ:/
STRUT -	/ʊ/	/ʌ/

Stimuli: 20 short carrier phrases from northern and southern speakers with either the TRAP, BATH, FOOT, or STRUT vowel in the final position

Data: 46 informants exposed to the stimuli and asked to rate each utterance on a Northern (0) to Southern (100) continuum

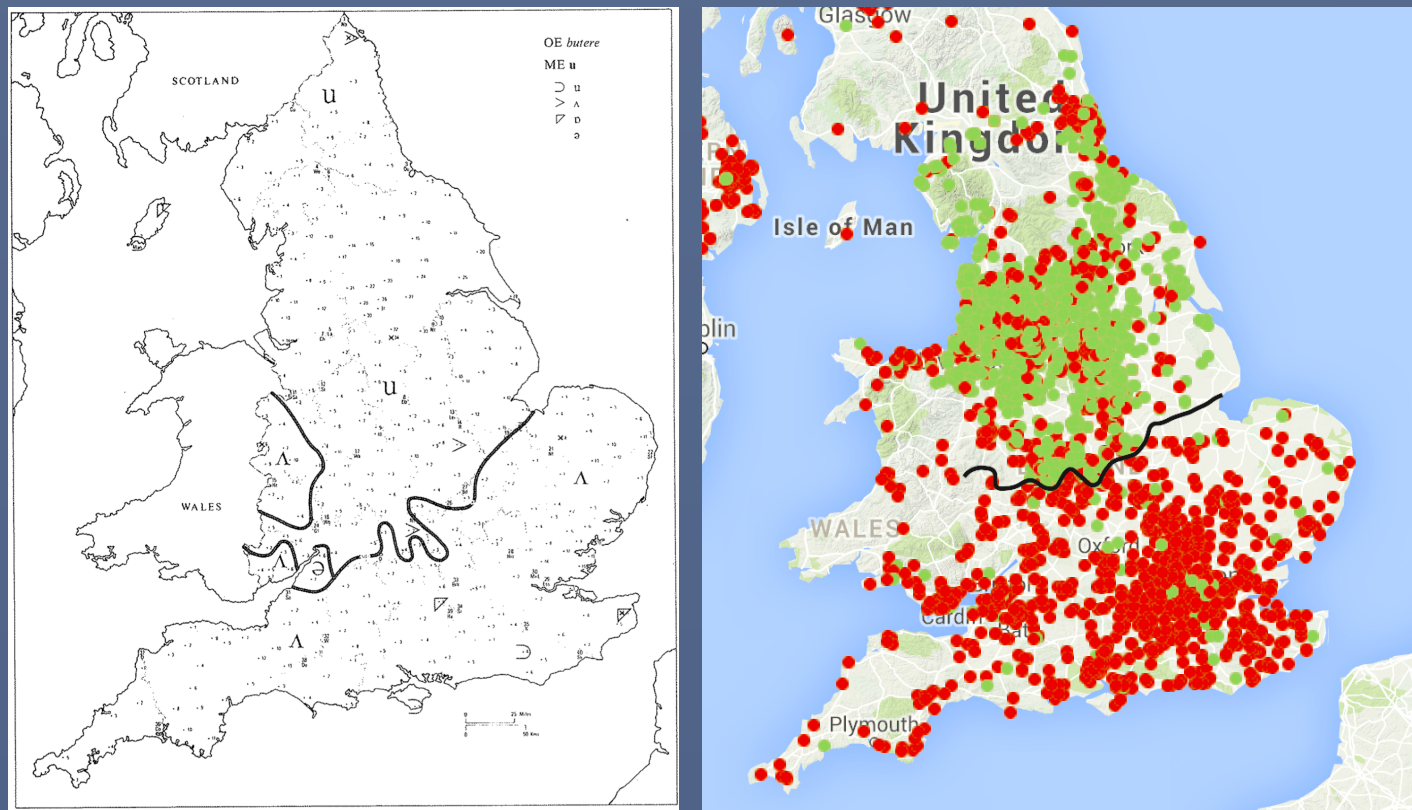
230 measurements of each vowel

2. Hypothesis

The presence of BATH /ɑ:/ will have a higher indexicality of southern dialects than the presence of STRUT /ʌ/

Basis:

- Previous claims that STRUT is not completely restricted to the South (Wells 1982)
- Northerners supposedly only stereotype Southerners as having BATH, with no overt comment on the use of STRUT (Trudgill 1986)
- Recent empirical evidence that the STRUT isogloss could be 'creeping' northwards (MacKenzie et al. 2014)

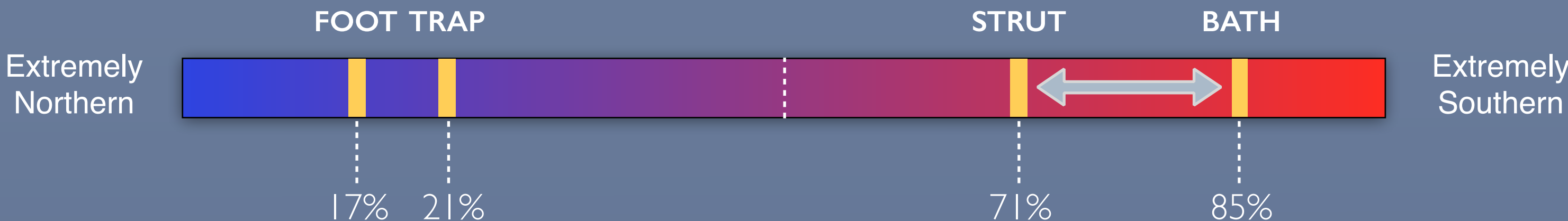


left: 1950s isogloss from Orton et al. (1978) right: 2010s isogloss from MacKenzie et al. (2014)

3. Results

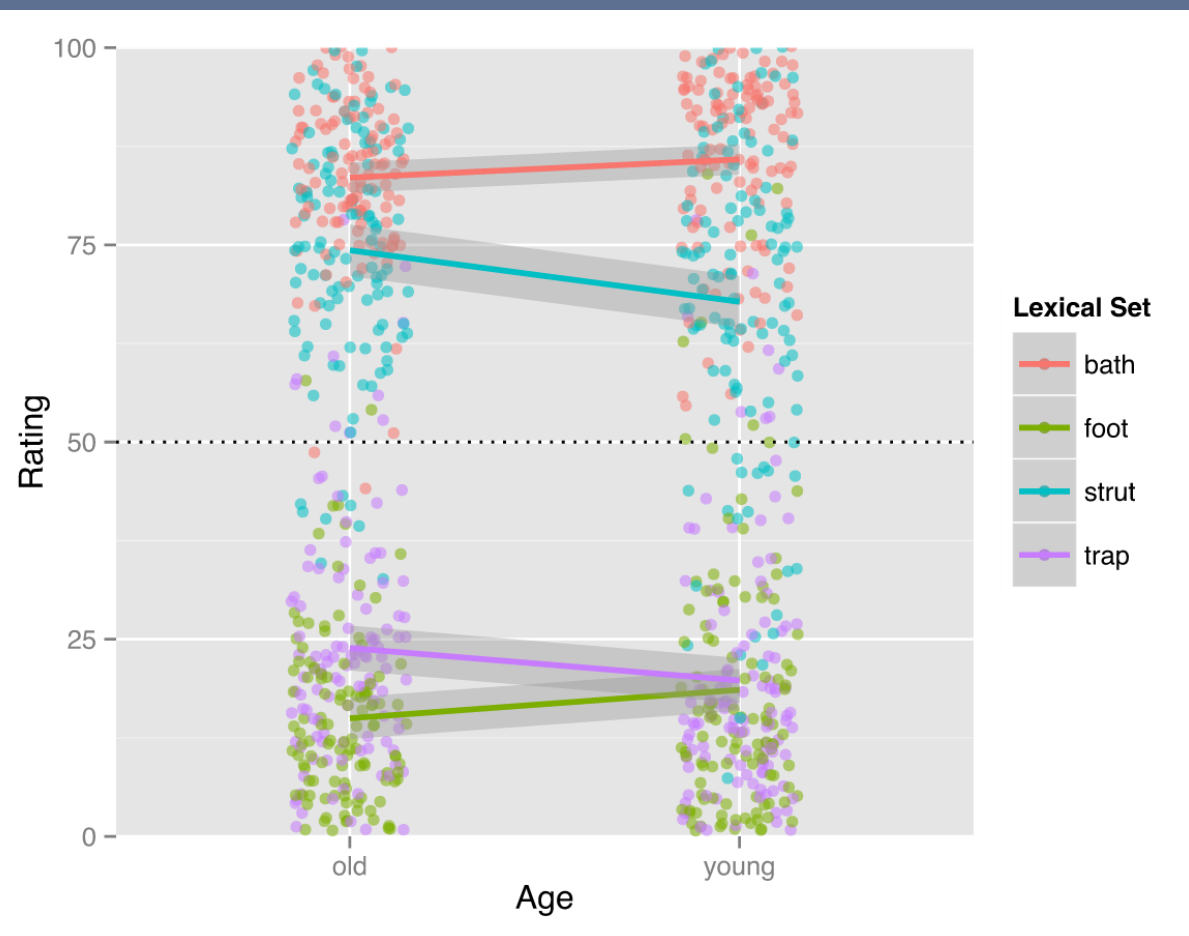
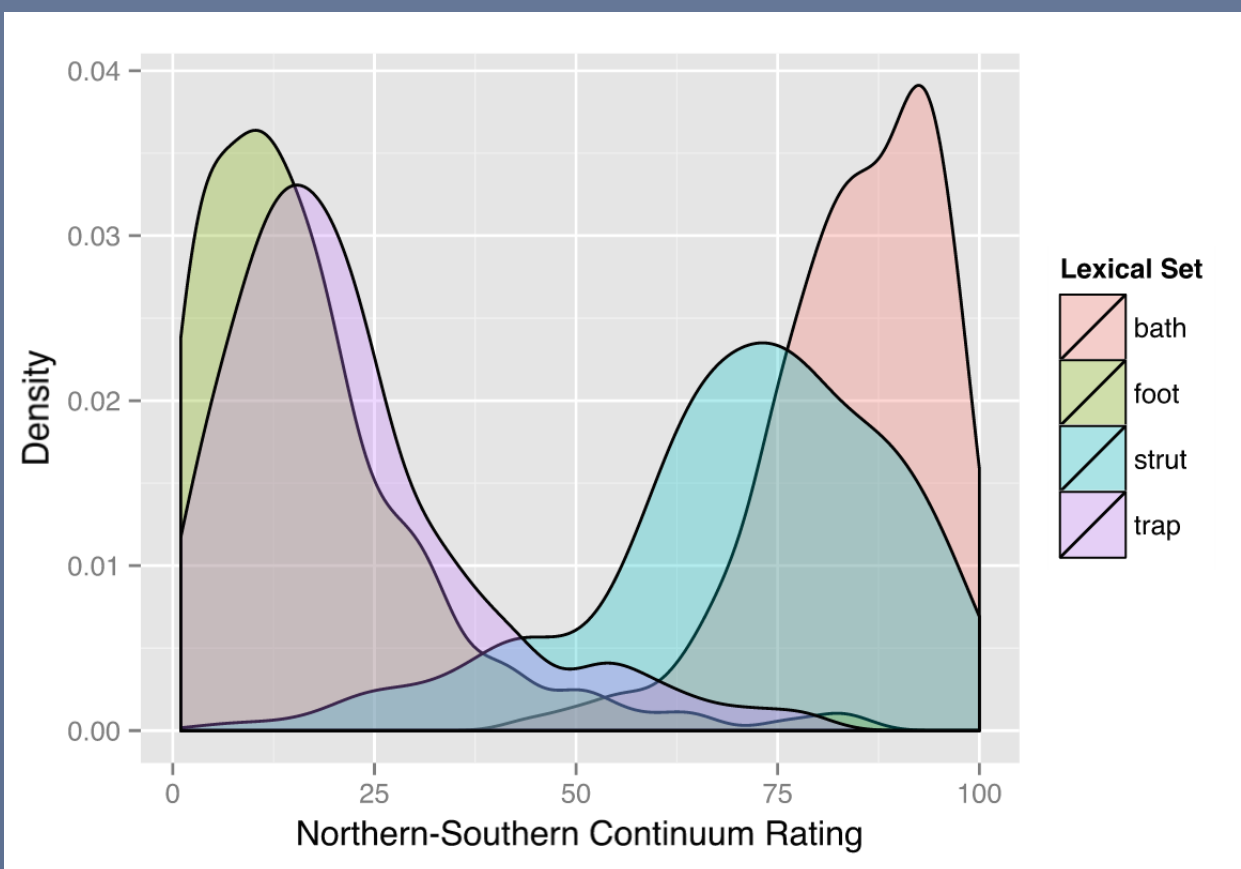
As expected, the average evaluations of FOOT and TRAP are located on the northern half of the continuum, while STRUT and BATH are placed on the southern half

- crucially, there is also a clear difference in how STRUT (71%) and BATH (85%) are evaluated



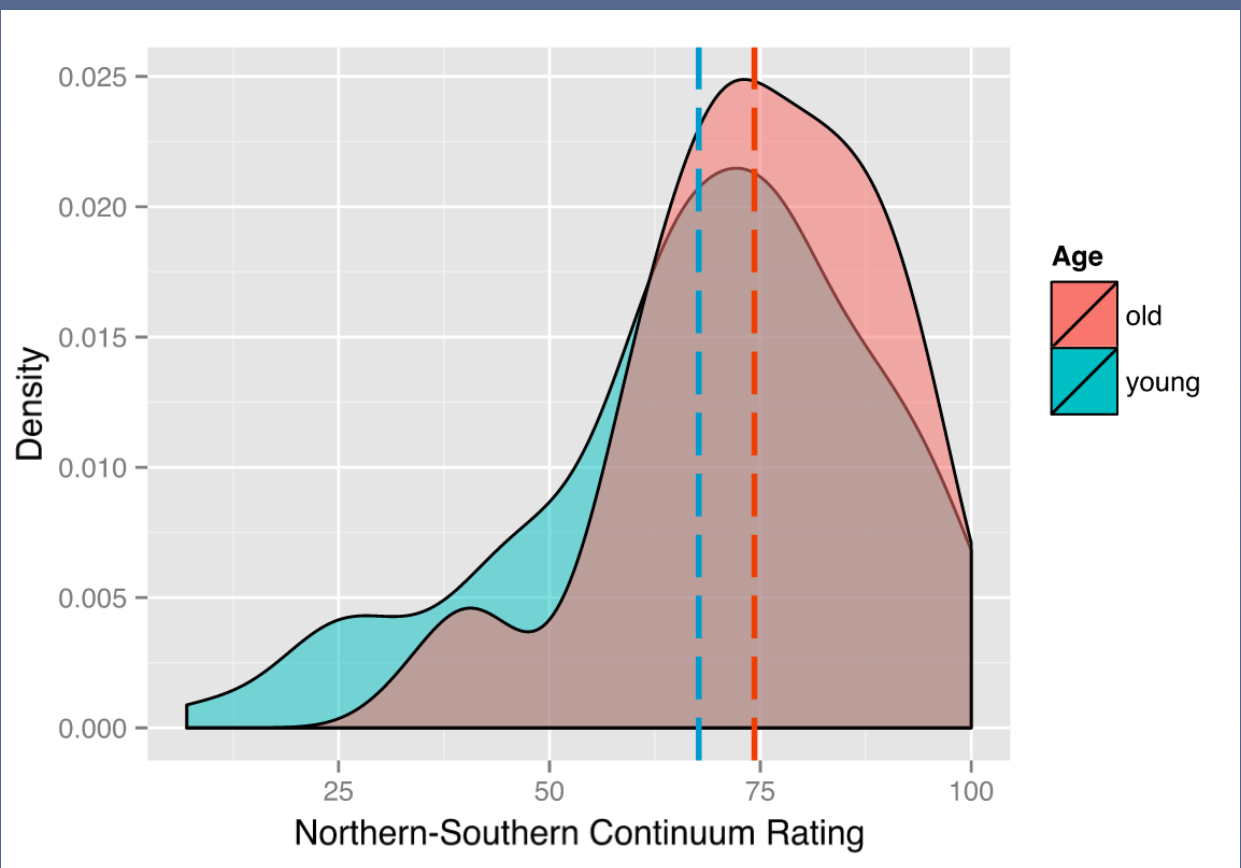
Examining the distribution of ratings for all four vowels confirms the inequality between STRUT and BATH

- whilst they clearly differ with respect to their average rating, STRUT also shows much higher variation in responses
- this is highlighted by the low peak in its probability density plot, and the larger negatively-skewed tail of responses
- also quantified by its standard deviation ($\sigma=18$, cf. $\sigma=10$ for BATH)
- a repeated-measures two-way ANOVA confirms the statistical significance of this difference



An effect of informant age is also present in apparent time, where the extent to which STRUT is assigned extreme southern ratings drops from an average rating of 74% to 67% ($p < 0.01$)

- the other three vowels also show changes over time, though in a more subtle manner
- interestingly, FOOT and STRUT are converging (moving towards the neutral 50% mark), while TRAP and BATH are diverging (moving towards more extreme ratings)



Plotting STRUT's probability density curves separately for young and old informants reveals that much of its variation can be attributed to the younger listeners

- again, this is evident from the larger negative tail, and is quantified by comparing standard deviations ($\sigma=15$ for older informants, $\sigma=21$ for younger informants)

4. Discussion

These results confirm the hypothesis: BATH is rated significantly more southern than STRUT, suggesting a stronger indexicality of this dialect region

- greater variance in the evaluations of STRUT also reflects more inconsistency and disagreement amongst respondents

The change in apparent time, however subtle, seems to reflect the parallel diachronic change in STRUT's geographic distribution

- there is a suggestion that due to STRUT's northern diffusion, its strength as an indicator of southern dialect regions is weakening over time

This could also be motivating the opposite change in TRAP-BATH, although this is more subtle in nature

- evaluations of these forms are diverging, moving towards more extreme ratings
- it is strengthening as an indicator of the North-South dichotomy

5. Conclusion

This study has provided evidence of a perceptual inequality between two major markers of England's North-South divide

- in doing so, it has shown that not all phonological cues are equal in their strength of dialect indexicality
- furthermore, there is a suggestion that this strength can undergo diachronic change parallel to changes in the dialects themselves

References

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