"It doesn't stop, it never, never stops, er, it doesn't stop evolving"



Observing Spoken British English of the past 20 years through apparent and real-time evidence

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Data
Theory
Application

Data

Project: The British National Corpus (BNC) as a sociolinguistic dataset:

Exploring individual and social variation

Funding: ESRC grant no. EP/P001559/1.

Team: Vaclav Brezina (PI), Dana Gablasova (Co-I), Tony McEnery (Co-I),

Miriam Meyerhoff (Co-I), Susan Reichelt (RA)

- Focus on teaching SLX and CL
- Focus on new research investigating social factor age and language change
- Focus on methodology and new ways of analysing variation

 Focus on new research investigating social factor age and language change

BNC spoken/demographic: 1901 speakers ~15 million words



BNC 1994: 1233 speakers ~4 million words BNC 2014: 668 speakers ~11 million words

BNC SDA 500 speakers ~9 million words





subset of the subset "BNCeption"

"(...)for most speakers we do not have combined information about sex, age and social class (...). This should not mean that we cannot use the BNC to investigate sociolinguistic variation, but we should be clear about any shortfalls in terms of representativeness, particularly when we start splitting the corpus up into finer slices."

Baker 2010: 40





2014

1233 speakers 3'942'768 words

speaker with highest word count: ~ 70'000

speaker with lowest word count: 1

668 speakers 10'982'869 words

speaker with highest word count: ~ 351'000

speaker with lowest word count: 18





2014

region:

27 regional codes without clear geographical boundaries or detail on what regional background entails for the individual speaker.

region:

Distinctions between birthplace, current location (and duration of stay) and perceived accent.
Coding follows four levels, from broad (UK, non-UK) to narrow (town)







we follow system by Gerwin (2014), who adjusted the region system in the old BNC to compare to other data sets



Social grades:

AB (upper) middle class
C1 lower middle class
C2 skilled working class
D working class
E not working
(unknown)



2014

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, or 'NS-SEC':

1.1	Employers in large organisations,
	higher managerial occupations
1.2	Higher professional occupations
2	Lower professional and higher technical
	occupations, higher supervisory
	occupations
3	Intermediate occupations
4	Employers in small organisations
5	Lower supervisory occupations, lower
	technical occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations
7	Routine occupations
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed
N/C	Full-time students



Age distribution across 6 groups:

0-14	15-24
25-34	35-44
45-59	60+



2014

Age distribution across 10 groups:

0-10	11-18
19-29	30-39
40-49	50-59
60-69	70-79
80-89	90-99

Theory

Tracking language change as it happens is, according to Chambers (1995:147), "the most striking single accomplishment of contemporary linguistics".

"(....) giving the analysis of variation the status of an in vivo study of historical change" (Eckert 2012: 89)

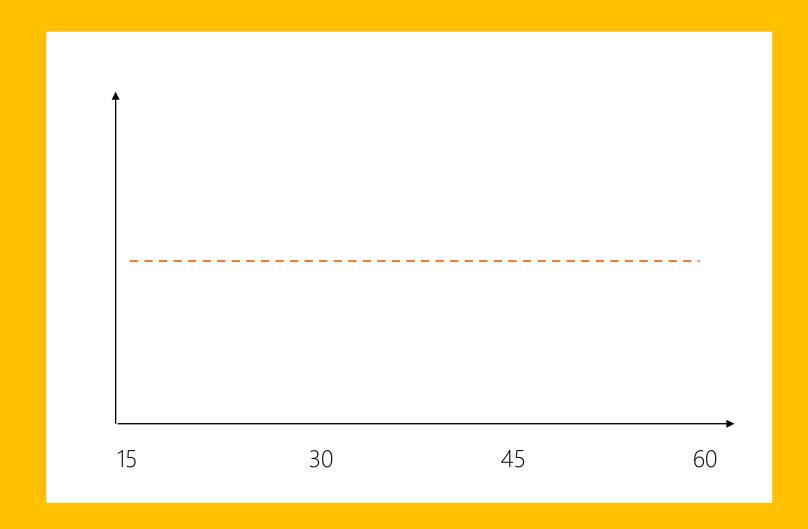
apparent time & real time

Time ...

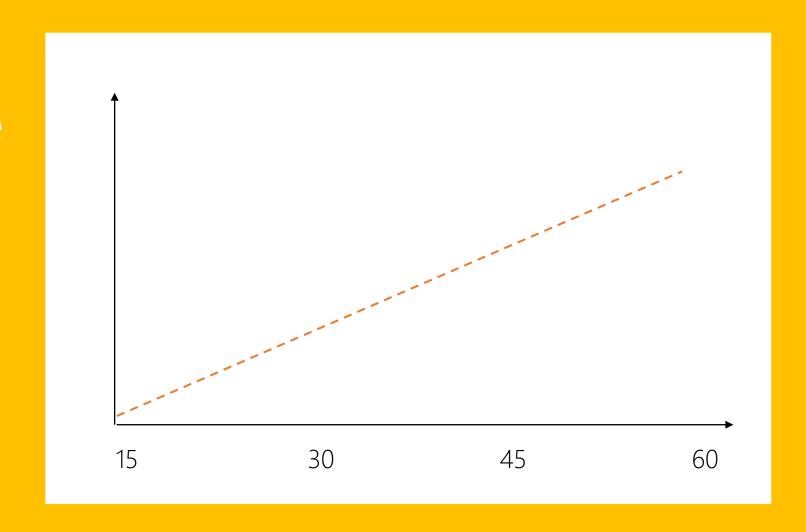
it's more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... timey wimey... stuff.

(Doctor Who, Blink, 2007)

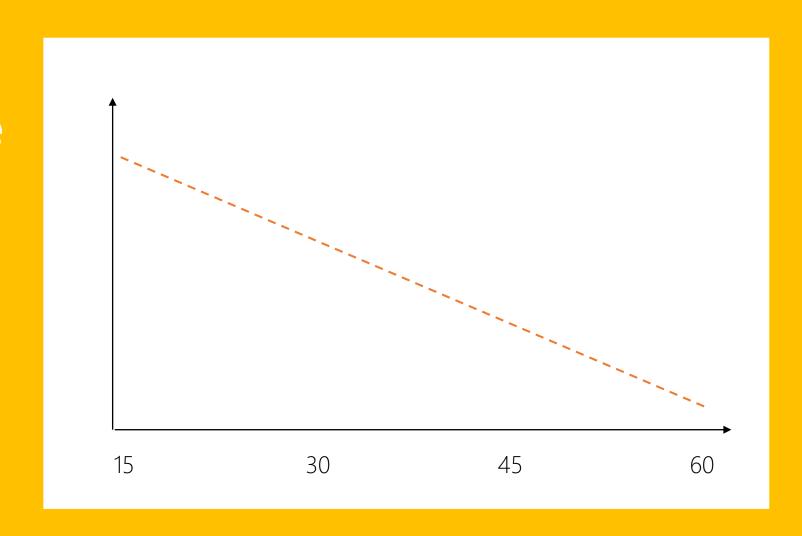
stable feature



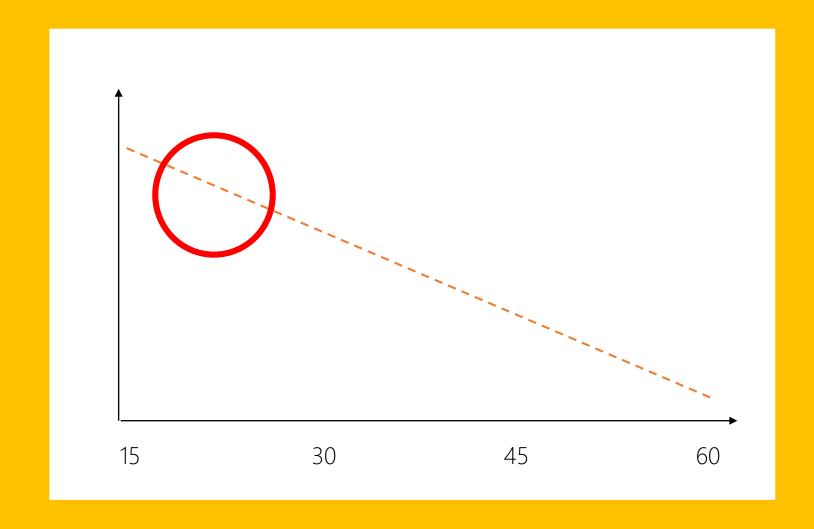
outgoing feature



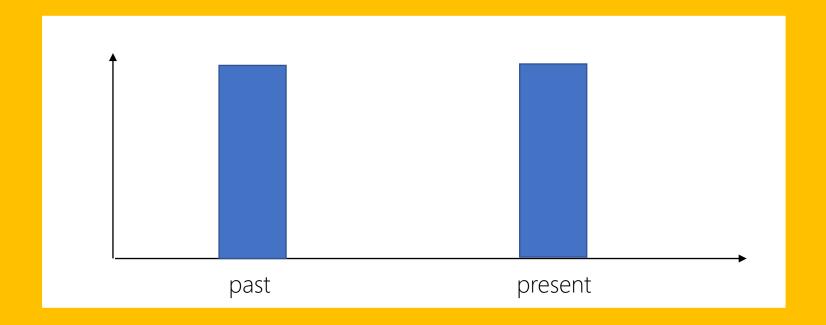
incoming feature



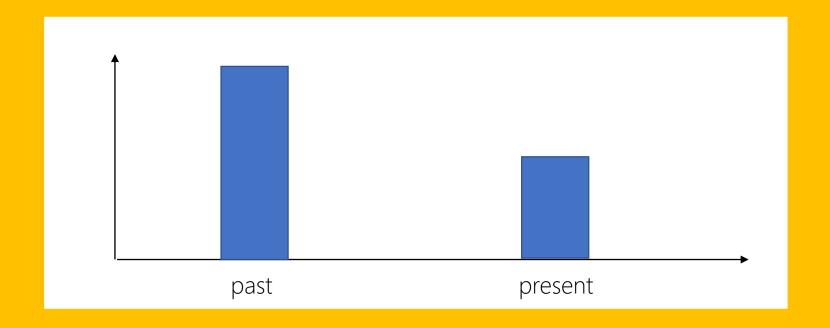
... or maybe age grading?



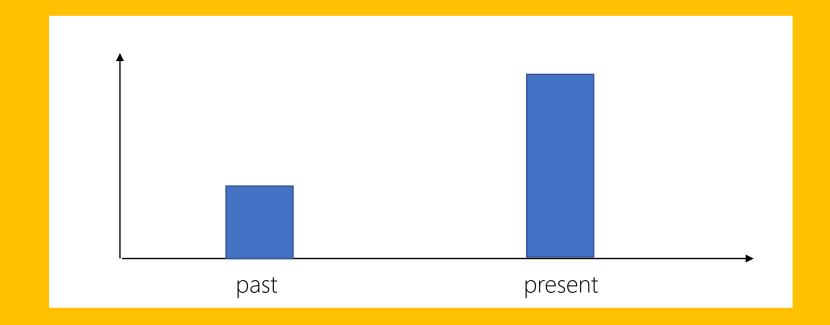
stable feature



outgoing feature

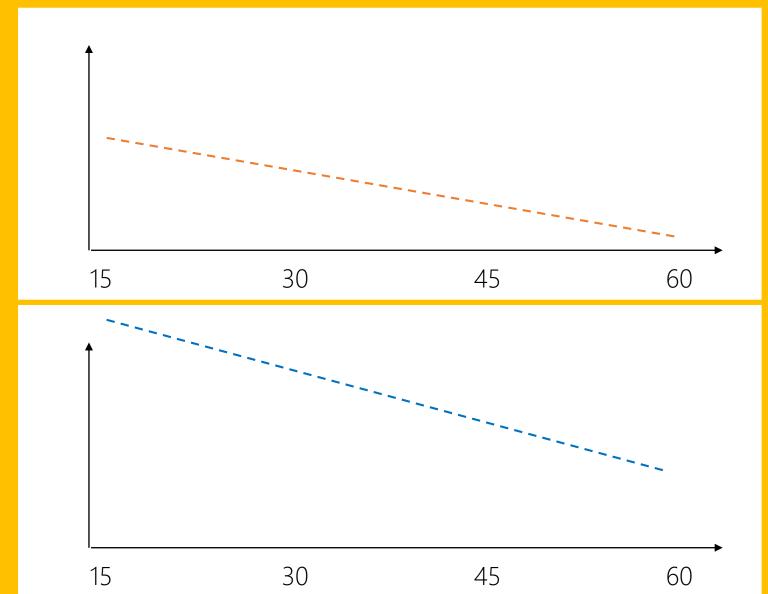


incoming feature



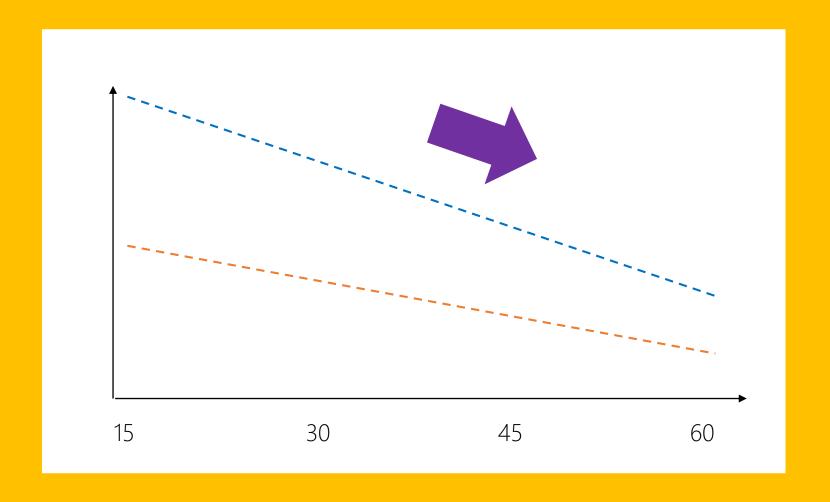
Combination of apparent and real time

ongoing change

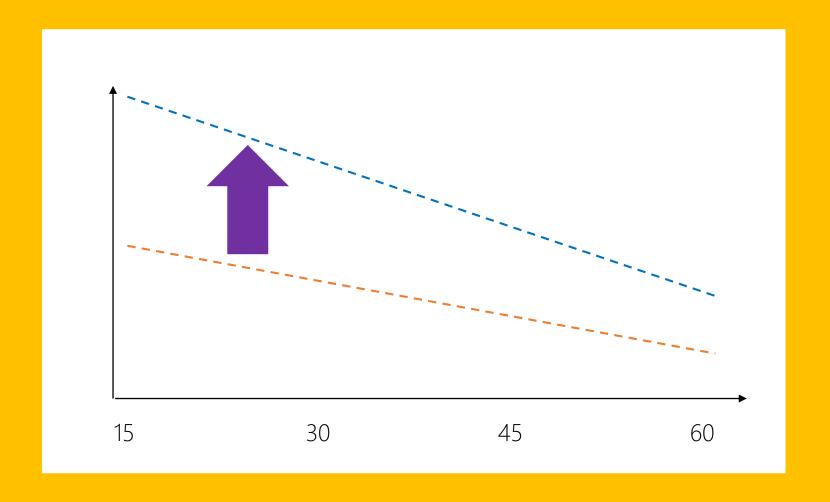


Combination of apparent and real time

ongoing change

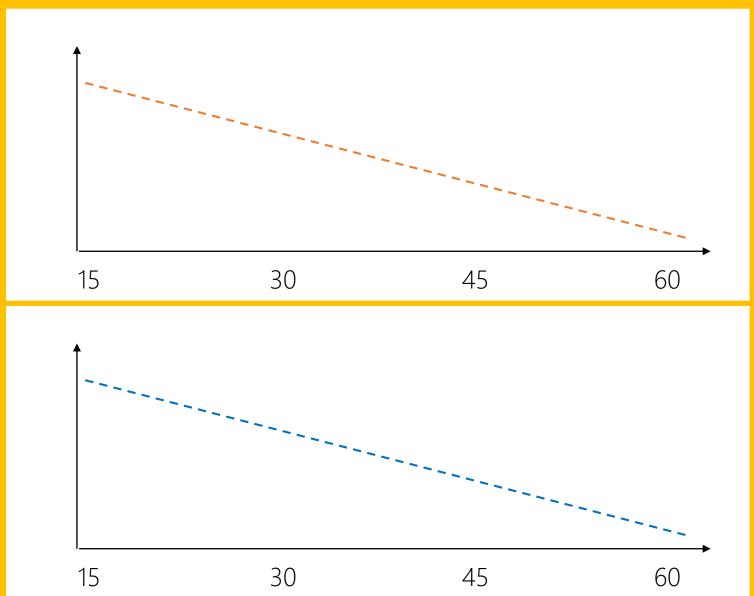


ongoing change

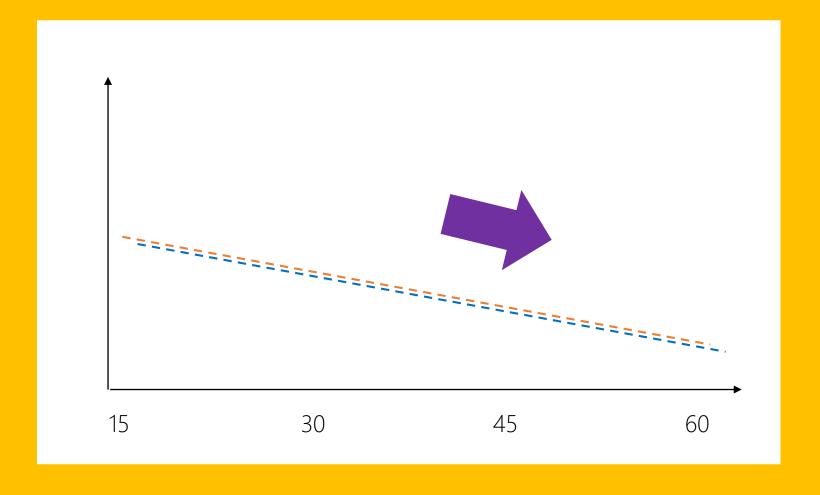


Combination of apparent and real time

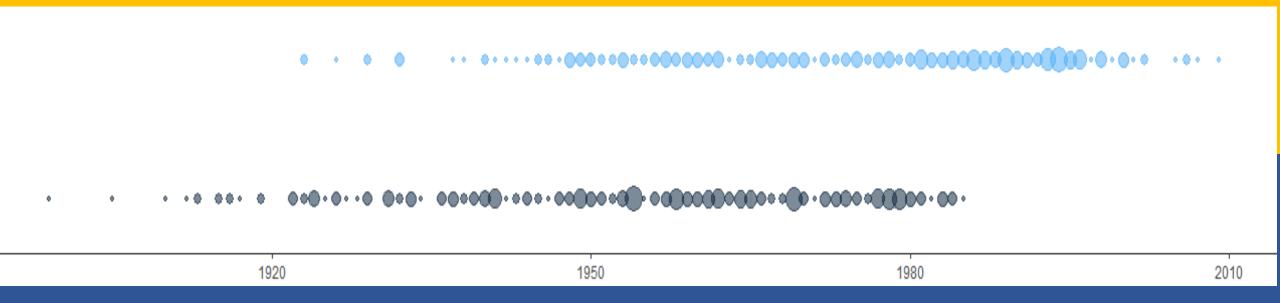
age grading



age grading



"In the best of circumstances, of course, researchers will be able to combine apparent-time data with real-time evidence, with the relative strengths of one approach offsetting the weaknesses of the other" (Bailey, 2008:330)



What can time tell us, then?

application

Adjective intensification in Spoken British English: the past 20 years

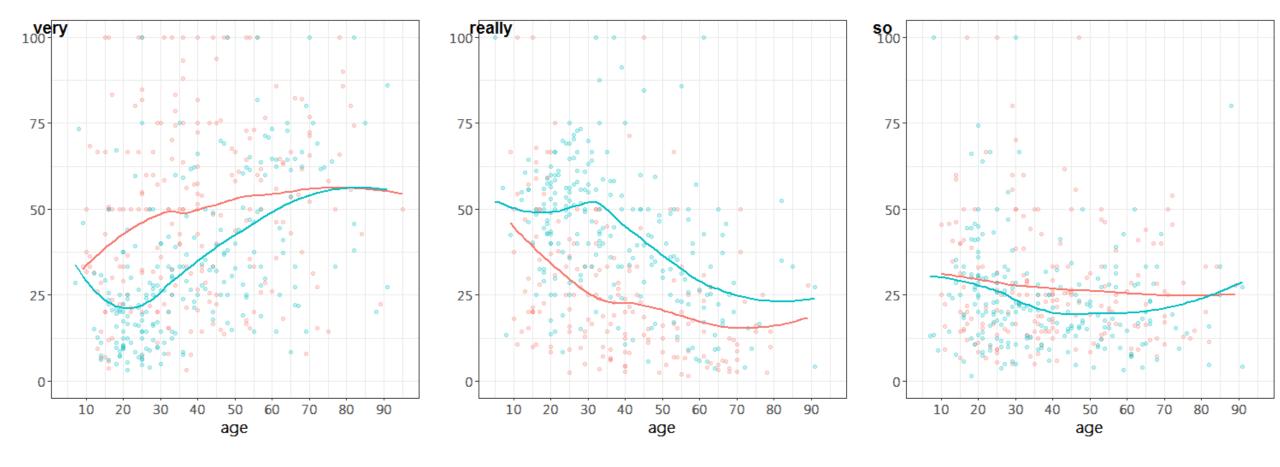
They'revery nice.
She's so thoughtless.
That'sreally cheap.

Included: all items that amplified a following adjective

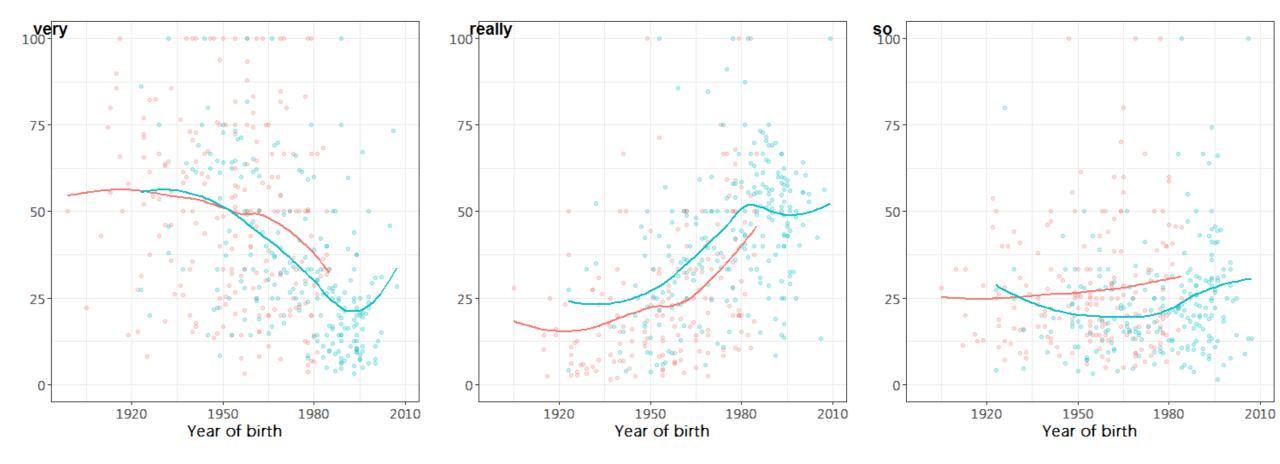
The variable set includes a great number of variants with the most common intensifiers (*very*, *really*, *so*) representing approx. 90% of the results.

Data extraction & coding





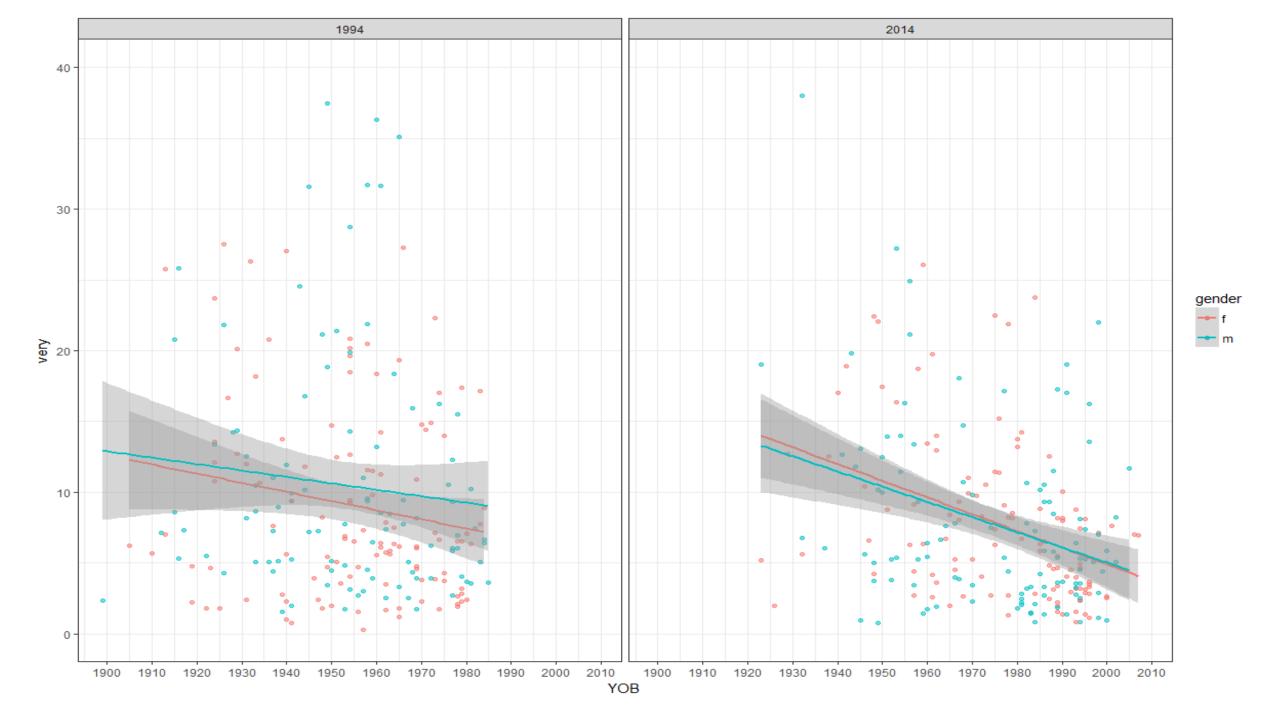
CORPUS BNC1994 BNC2014

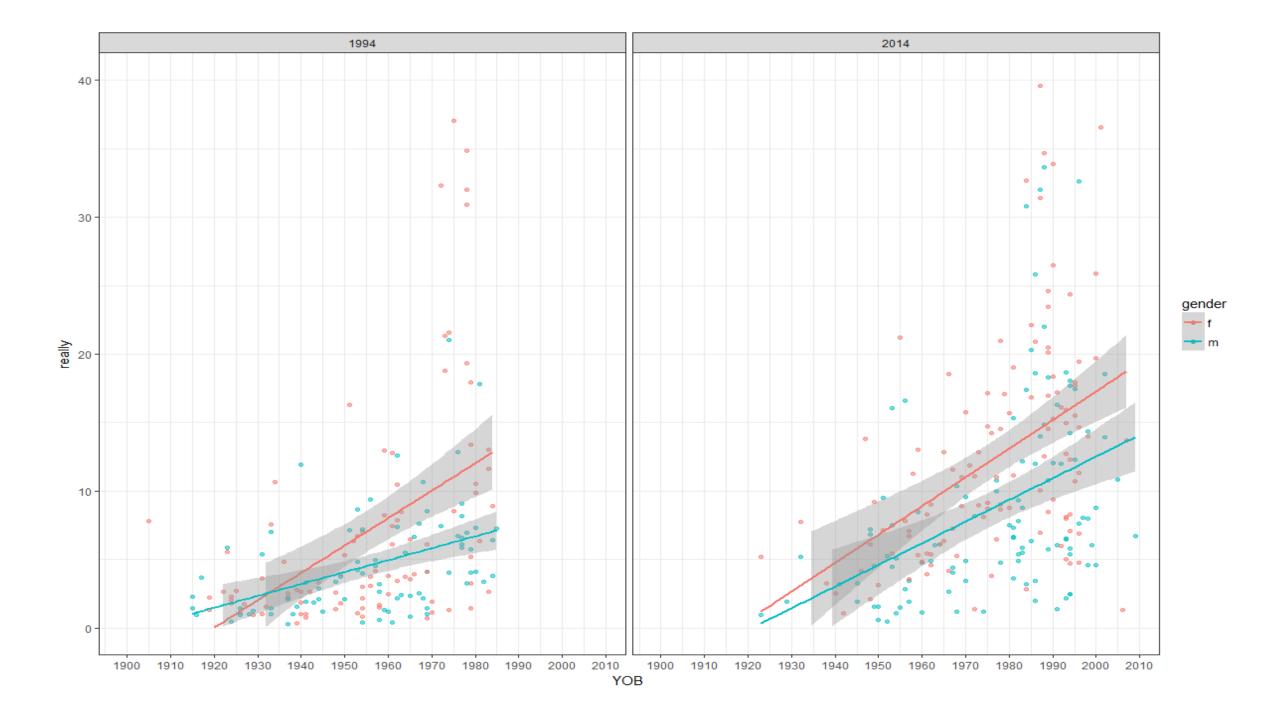


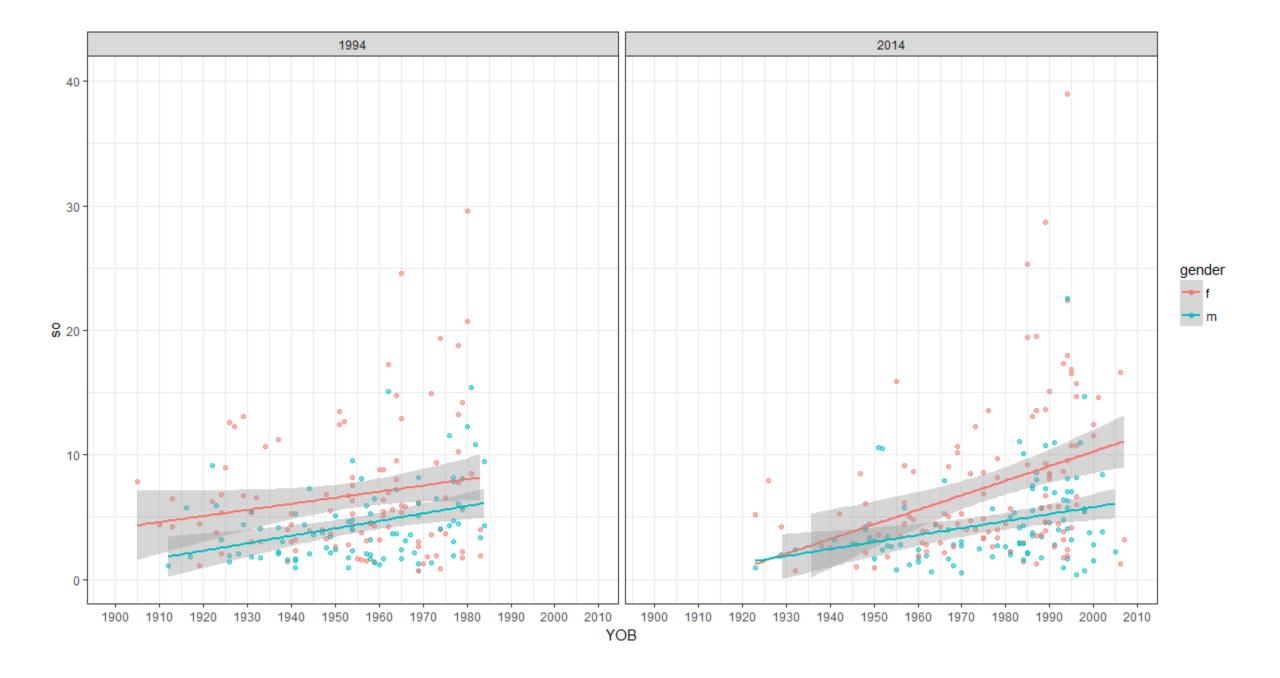
CORPUS - BNC1994 BNC2014

What does the BNC subset study offer in terms of new insights?

A side-by-side investigation of apparent time and real time (trend) which adds detail to our interpretations of language change and who is involved in what type of change.







Thank you

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