

# “If you say /ʃɪkagoʊ/, get the fuck out of my face”: Variable discourses of localized authenticity in the Chicago vowel

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# Authenticating Place Identity

- Processes of authentication used to construct and enforce place identity; necessarily creates patterns of **differentiation** or **distinctiveness** (Irvine & Gal 2001, Bucholtz 2003)
- Though residents of the same urban area may share a semiotic landscape, the utility of semiotic resources depends on a resident's point-of-view and position within the community
- As communities undergo change, residents work to frame themselves and relevant stakeholders as authentic locals (Gal 2016, Regan 2022)

# What's in a Name?

- Phonetic variation in place names can be deployed in the creation of stance and place itself (e.g., Kearns & Berg 2002)
- Often analyzed as shibboleths at the macro, inter-group level (though c.f. Regan 2022)

*How do phonetic productions and meta-linguistic discourses of a local place name vary socially within the same local community?*

*What can these distinctions illustrate about shifting and variable local ideologies of place?*

# The CHICAGO vowel



*“If you say /ʃɪkəɡoo/, get the fuck out of my face. ...which is very weird because our A’s are nasal... so you would think that I’d say, like, /ʃɪkəɡoo/ or /ʃɪkəɡoo/, but it’s /ʃɪkəɡoo/.” – Addison, White, 24*

- Primary stressed vowel in CHICAGO
- Phonemic variation (LOT versus THOUGHT – distinct in Inland North)
- Phonetic variation in context of **Northern Cities Shift**: LOT-fronting
- Meta-linguistic commentary surrounding phonetic manifestation often related to “inaccurate” overgeneralization of NCS

# Methods: Speaker sample and community

- Interviews with 56 lifelong Chicagoans, all from Beverly/Morgan Park who self-identified in open-ended questions as:
  - Black/African-American females (13)
  - White/Caucasian females (24)
  - White/Caucasian males (19)
- Spread of ages from 20-79

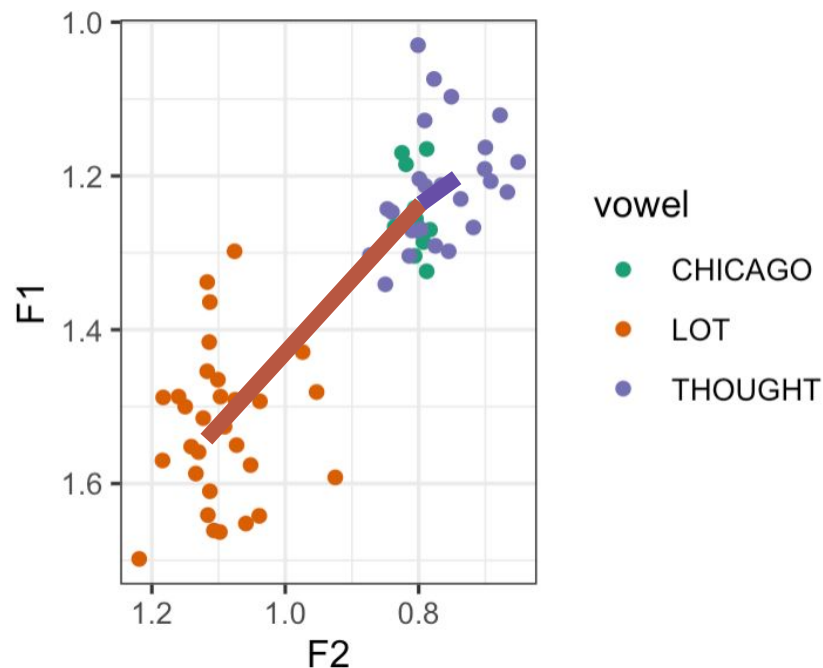


# Methods: Vowel measurement

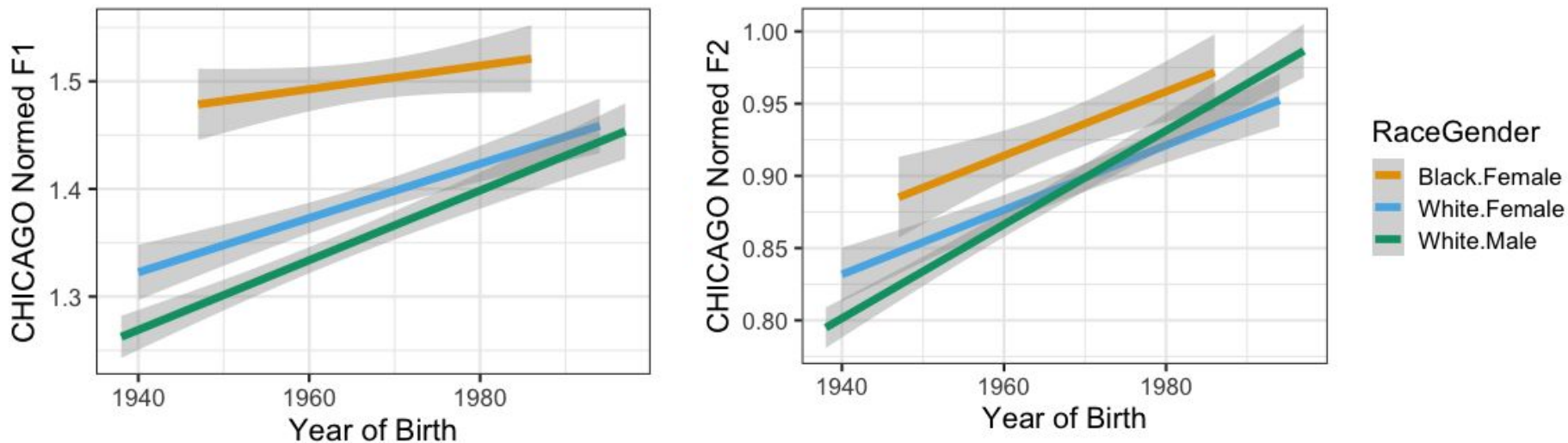
- Every instance of “CHICAGO” extracted from sociolinguistic interview speech, stressed vowel measured for F1 and F2 at midpoint
- Explicitly “performed” or quoted speech tokens removed from quantitative analysis - (analysis TBD!)
- 20-30 additional tokens of LOT and THOUGHT vowels measured, all Lobanov normalized
- Measures submitted to linear mixed effects models with **year of birth** and **race-gender group** as predictors of interest

# Methods: CHICAGO vowel measures

- **F1 and F2**
- Euclidean distance measures:
  - CHICAGO token to LOT mean
  - CHICAGO token to THOUGHT mean
  - **LT Difference:**  
(ED to LOT) – (ED to THOUGHT)
    - 0 = equidistant to LOT and THOUGHT
    - **Positive** = closer to **THOUGHT** than LOT
    - **Negative** = closer to **LOT** than THOUGHT

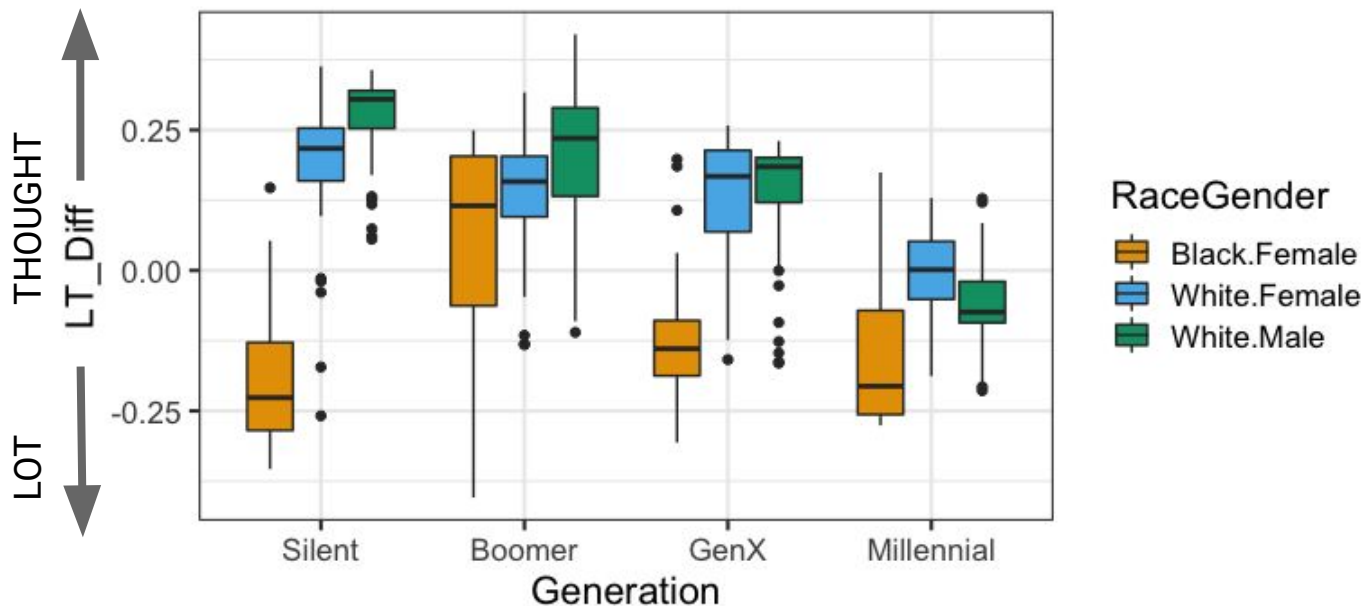


# Results: CHICAGO F1 and F2



- CHICAGO significantly lowering and fronting in apparent time (both  $p < 0.05$ )
- Black women significantly lower ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and fronter ( $p < 0.05$ ) than white speakers

# Results: LOT ED – THOUGHT ED



- **Black females' CHICAGO vowels significantly closer to LOT than White females and White males ( $p < 0.05$ )**
- **Younger = closer to LOT, but only for white speakers (intxn  $p < 0.05$ )**

# Shared Pursuit of Authenticity

- Many speakers show meta-linguistic commentary related to LOT/THOUGHT opposition in production of CHICAGO and insider/outsider status
- Differentiation of insider versus outsider pronunciation occurs in **both phonemic directions**

# THOUGHT as correct, LOT as outsider

- “you can tell you didn’t grow up here if you say /ʃɪkagoʊ/”  
– Maggie, White, 61
- “I hear /ʃɪkagoʊ/ from other people, from outside of the community”  
– Alan, White, 61
- “If you say /ʃɪkagoʊ/, get the fuck out of my face”  
– Addison, White, 24

# LOT as correct (THOUGHT as outsider)

- “some people draw out that C A... and some people put a C A W. Caw. It's /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/. /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/” - Norma, Black, 68
- my mom says /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/, my grandma says /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/, and I don't, cuz it's /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/. And my brother and I are always like, it's /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/. Like, you're saying it wrong. - Rebecca, White, 26

# Erasure in Pursuit of Community

- Most emotional intensity from ideologies that pose THOUGHT as correct
- "THOUGHT = insider" common among older white speakers (though appears from some younger White speaker as well); "LOT = insider" more among Black and younger white speakers
- Insider/outsider or correct/incorrect mapped to various axes of differentiation
  - In-state versus out-of-state
  - City versus suburbs
  - "From community" or "from 'real Chicago neighborhood'" or not
  - Older versus younger

# Conclusions

- Sociolinguistic variation in CHICAGO production patterns with macro-social categories within diverse, shifting community (race, age)
- Erasure of within-community variation in discourse, excludes authenticating certain community members
- “Insider” status at stake for all in establishing place-identity: same linguistic contrast can be projected onto same axis of differentiation in varied and even opposing ways with respect to form
- Differences in use of same semiotic contrast reflect different positionalities and conceptions of what constitutes “belonging” to a place

# Thank you!

## Questions?

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# Vocalic variation in Beverly & Morgan Park

(D'Onofrio & Benheim 2019; D'Onofrio, Benheim, Foster & King under review)

- Older White speakers display Northern Cities Shifted features, ideological links between NCS and Catholicism; “symbolic White flight”
- Black speakers show vowel spaces more consistent with Southern Vowel Shift (commentary about Southern family history/identity)
- Community-wide apparent time **reversal** of NCS in salient features (TRAP, LOT), in parallel across racialized groups:
  - Fronted LOT backing in apparent time, THOUGHT generally stable, LOT-THOUGHT distinction maintained

# Erasure in Pursuit of Community

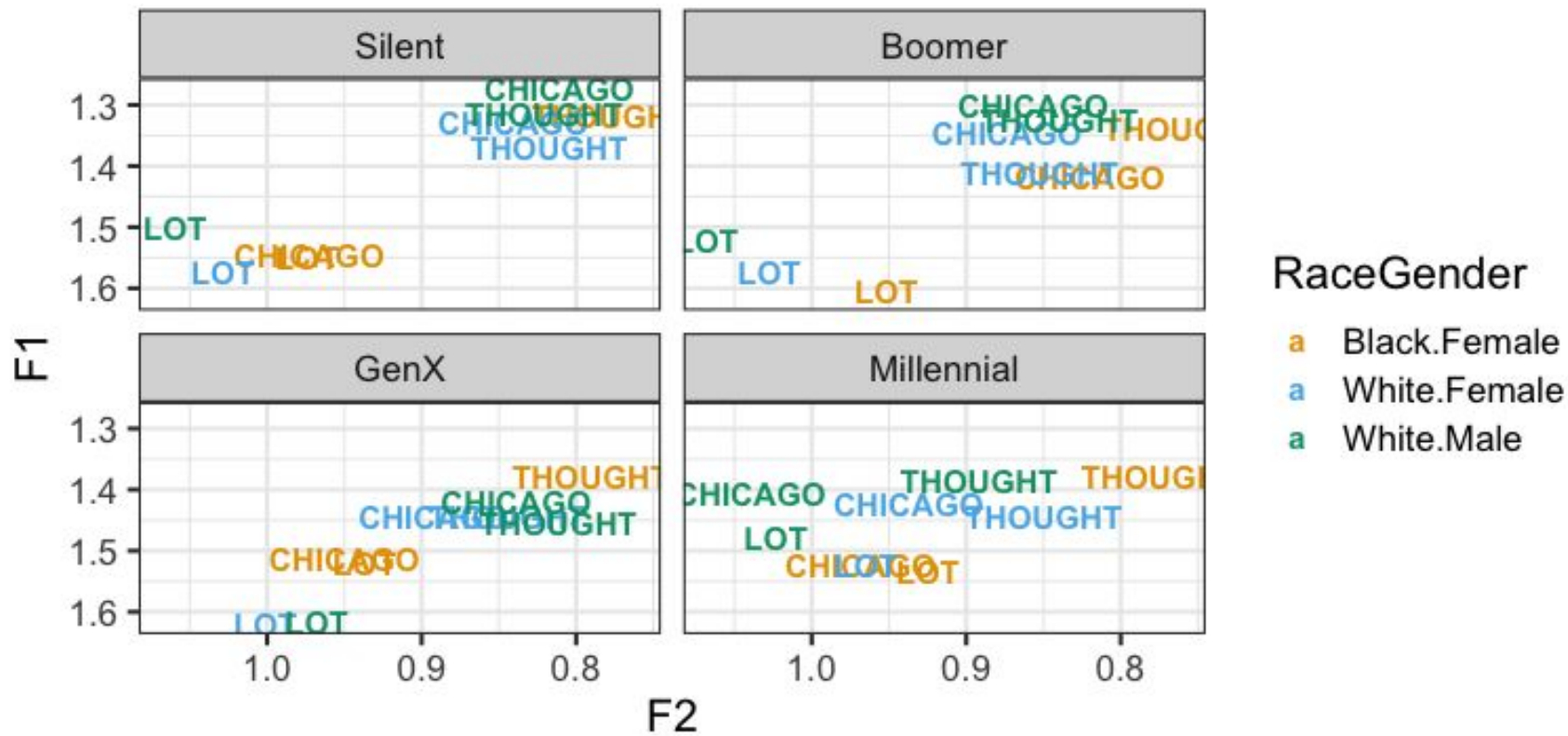
- Variation in production of highly meaningful place name *within* community
- Most residents exhibit a positive affiliation with the community area, desire to display “rootedness” (Reed 2018, Carmichael 2018) in locale
- To deploy this identity, residents must establish themselves as insiders
  - Requires an “other” to construct oppositional identity
  - Mapped onto existing linguistic contrast in place name production, but always in direction that poses speaker’s production as “correct”
- Older white residents locate authentic “Chicagoan” as those that use THOUGHT, excludes authenticating residents that produce LOT-like vowels

# Ideologies of the CHICAGO vowel and the social meaning of NCS

(D'Onofrio & Benheim 2019; D'Onofrio, Benheim, Foster & King under review)

- THOUGHT-like CHICAGO vowels tend to be from speakers who are more likely to use NCS-linked features in this community (older white speakers)
- Potential links to symbolic “white flight” given shifts in community ideologies
- THOUGHT-like CHICAGO as marker of specific *type* of Chicagoan/community insider, likely linked with White, blue collar identity
- More LOT-like commentary/productions from those least likely to use NCS with respect to race and age patterns in community – distance from these types, knowledge of community change over time

# CHICAGO, LOT and THOUGHT means



1  2  3 

My, uh, girlfriend from Michigan State that was in my wedding, uh, she would say /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 1, and the best man, like, bit her head off one night. 'It's not /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 2, it's /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 3!' Poor Anne was, like, mortified.

4 

...I mean, to me, it's like, you can tell you didn't grow up here if you say /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 4...

1



2



I think a lot of us sound alike. I don't say /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 1, I say /ʃɪkɒɡoʊ/ 2.

3



4



I think if I was with a bunch of my friends and someone said it very strongly /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 3, people would be like, 'what's that all about?' ...I hear /ʃɪkəɡoʊ/ 4 from other people, from outside of the community.

# Methods: Analysis

- **F1, F2, LT difference (ED to LOT – ED to THOUGHT)** each submitted to linear mixed effect regression models
- Fixed effects:
  - Participant YOB
  - Participant gender/race group (black women, white women, white men)
  - Binary measures of NCS from ANAE, by speaker
  - *for F1/F2, included speaker mean LOT and THOUGHT measurements*
- Random intercept:
  - Speaker

# Summary: Quantitative Results

- White women and men produce CHICAGO backer and higher, closer to THOUGHT; Black women produce CHICAGO lower and fronter, closer to LOT
- Movement away from THOUGHT-like CHICAGO vowel over time amongst younger White speakers across gender groups
- Parallels reversal of NCS with respect to race and age patterns in community (D'Onofrio & Benheim 2019; D'Onofrio, Benheim, Foster & King under review)

# Shared Pursuit of Authenticity

- Speakers reside in a liminal community
  - Suburbia: outsider, wannabe, “fake” Chicagoan
  - Urban center: transient, national, not where “real” Chicagoans live
- Metalinguistic commentary reveals that the LOT/THOUGHT opposition demarcates insider/outsider for the older, white speakers in particular