Situational style-shifting in MLE in an all girls homework club

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Multiethnolects & MLE

- Multicultural London English is a new variety of English emerging in London (Cheshire et al. 2011)
  - Spoken in inner-city, multilingual/multiethnic areas
  - Ethnically neutral
  - Involves innovations in morphosyntax and changes in the phonology, especially the diphthongs
- "the multiethnolect is a `vernacular' in Labov's sense, in that it is their `basic', unmarked, unreflecting, unmonitored variety" (Cheshire, Nortier & Adger 2015, p.3)
- At the same time, "speakers have a high tolerance and high use of variation and [...] linguistic norms are flexible" (p.4)

Style-shifting

- "there are no single style speakers" (Labov, 1972): we all change how we speak according to different situations or interlocutors

  → Crucial to uncovering speakers' *vernacular*

  → Careful—casual continuum

- Others models for stylistic variation: audience design & addressee-based style-shifting (Bell 2001; Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994); differentiated repertoire for multilectal speakers (Sharma 2011; Sharma & Rampton 2015)

→ We need data from speakers talking in different situations if possible (Rickford 2014)

Research question

(How) do speakers style-shift with respect to the MLE sound changes?

Methods: the participants (1)

- Interaction of gender/ethnicity differences found by Cheshire et al. (2011)
  - For FACE and PRICE (but not GOAT), 12-13 year old Anglo girls were more conservative than their Non-Anglo peers (p.170)

- Children can style-shift
  - 11 year old school boys in Edinburgh showed Labovian style-shifting for t-glottaling and (ing) (Reid 1978)

- Children are stylistically attuned pre-adolescence (Eckert 1996, 2011)

- Evidence from bilingualism research (e.g. Matras 2009, Lanza 1992)

Methods: the participants (2)

Pseudonym	Best friends	Languages at home	Parents' ethnicities
Deborah	Tiarna	Lingala, Kikongo, French, Portuguese	Angolan, Congolese
Tiarna	Deborah	Broken English (Jamaican Creole)	Jamaican
Sabrina		English, Yoruba	Jamaican, Nigerian
Alexa		English	British, Irish
Riley		(a Nigerian language)	Nigerian

Methods: data collection

Three situations:

- Wordlist (reading individual words aloud)
- Interview, with one friend present
- Playground – self-recorded, using H2 recorder and lavalier microphone

(cf. Reid 1978)

Methods: FACE, PRICE and GOAT

	MLE	Estuary English	RP
FACE	[eɪ, ɛɪ]		[eɪ]
PRICE	[æ, aɪ]		[aɪ]
GOAT	[o] ?		[əʊ]

Sources: Roach 2004; Fox 2015. Thank you to Zoe Adams for use of the recordings.
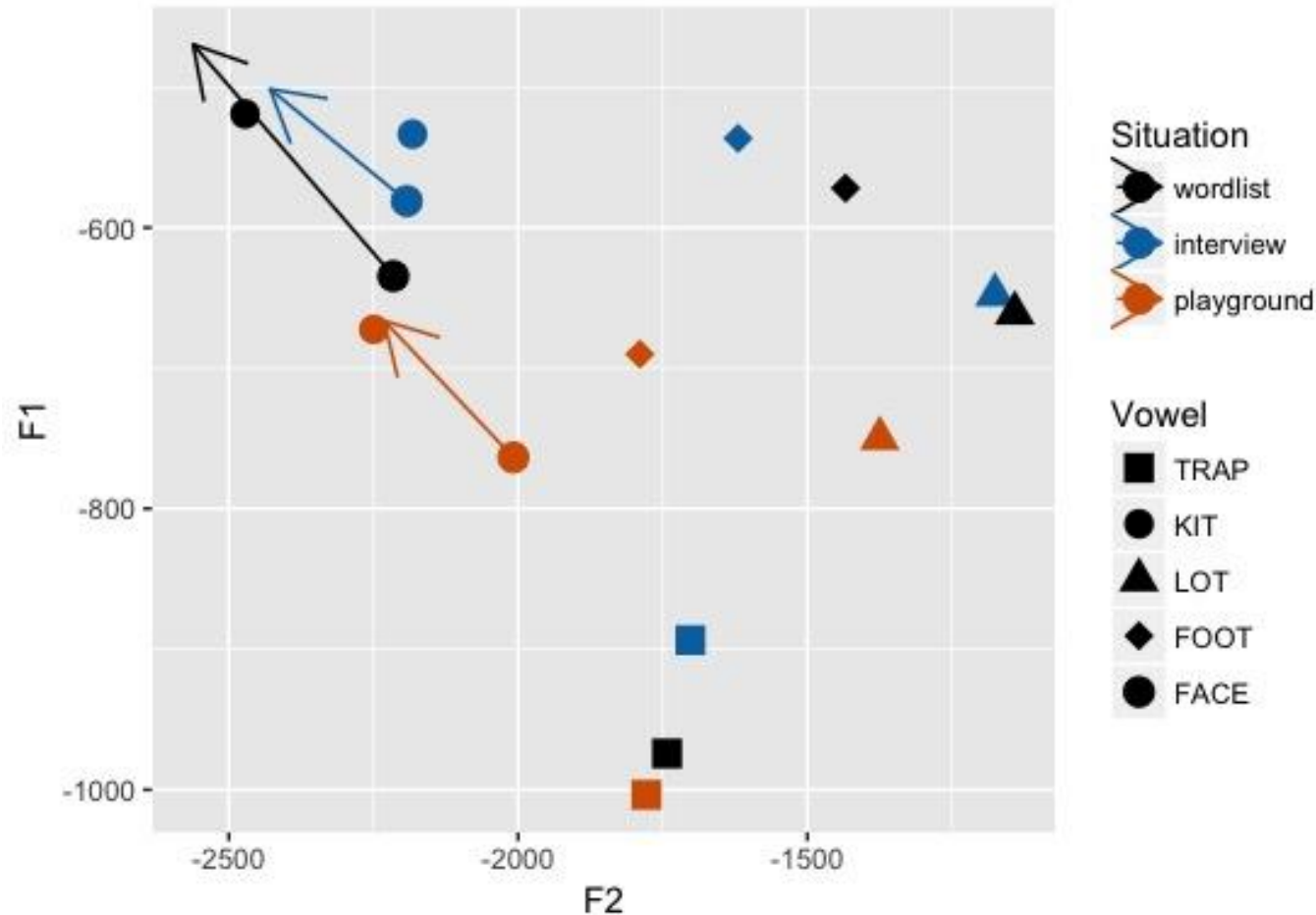
Methods: acoustic analysis

- Three vocalic variables: FACE, PRICE, GOAT

- Acoustic analysis in Praat

- Measurements taken at the **20%** and **80%** time points in the segment

- Trajectory = Euclidean distance between the 20% and the 80% points (Di Paolo et al. 2011)

trajectory

F1

F2
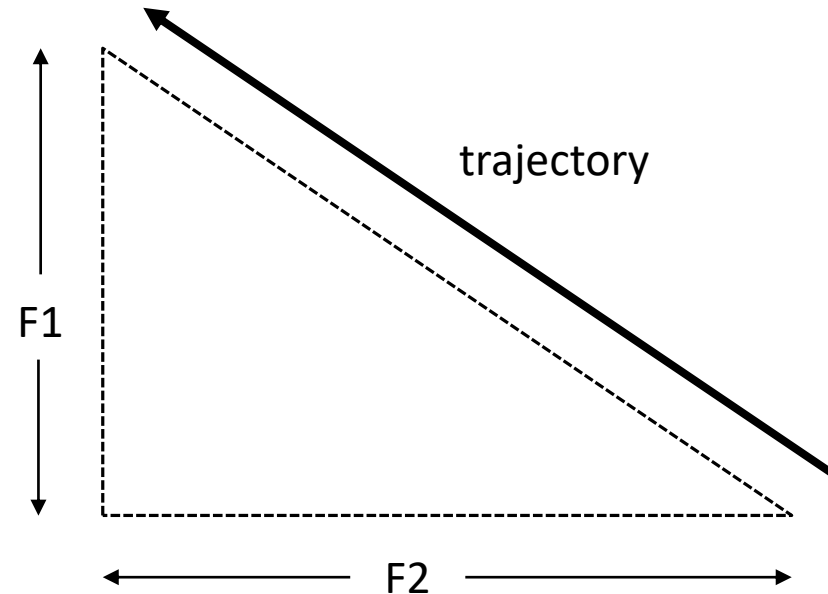
Analysis & discussion

FACE

- The first element of FACE appears more open in playground speech than in the interview and word list
- This is the opposite of what we predicted would happen
- Trajectory length for FACE does not vary greatly by situation – it is generally monophthongal
- Higher F1 = effects of vocal intensity? (Huber et al 1999)
- Or because [e(ɪ)] is used in formal settings, and a more open variant [ɛ(ɪ)] is preferred in playground speech?

FACE
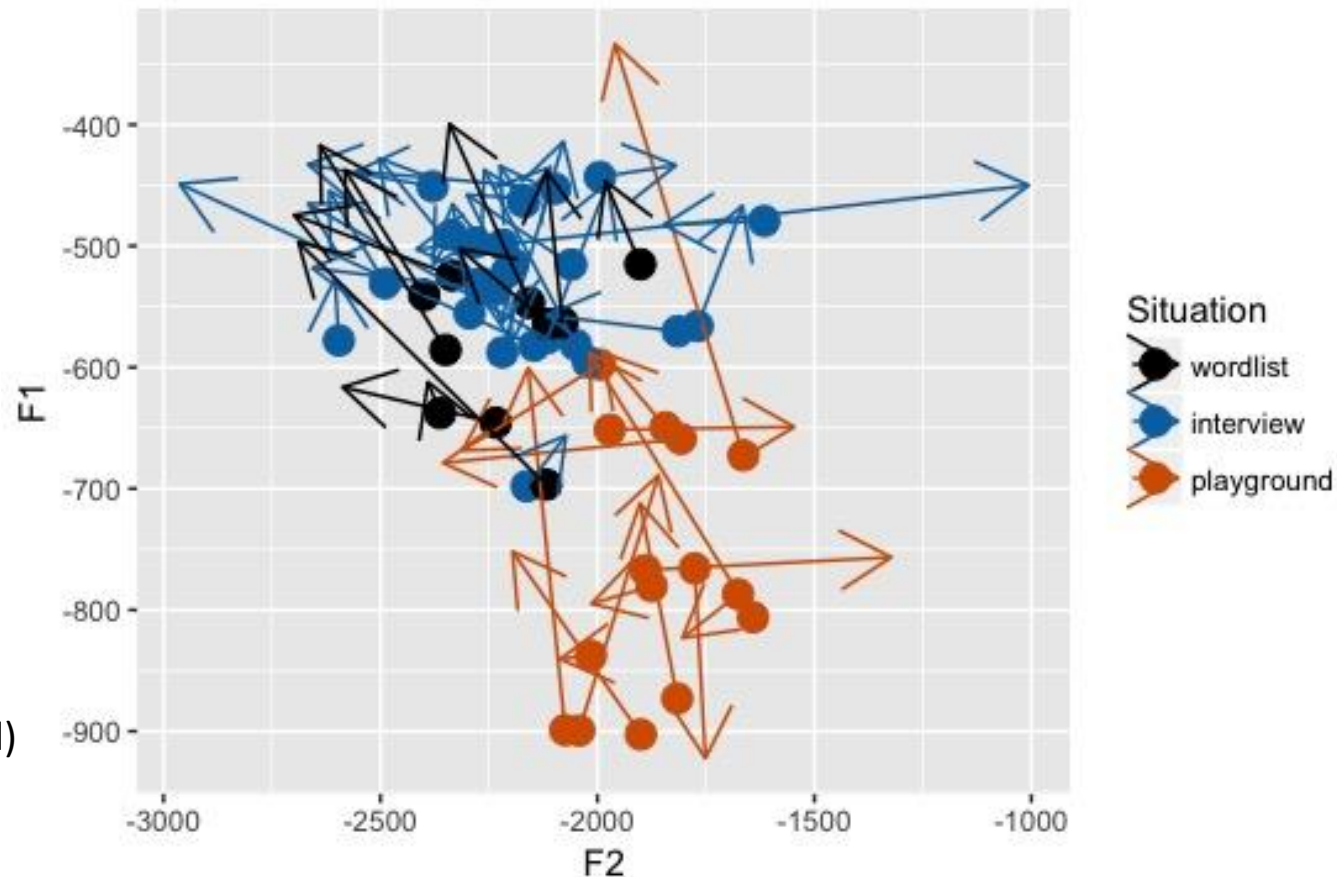
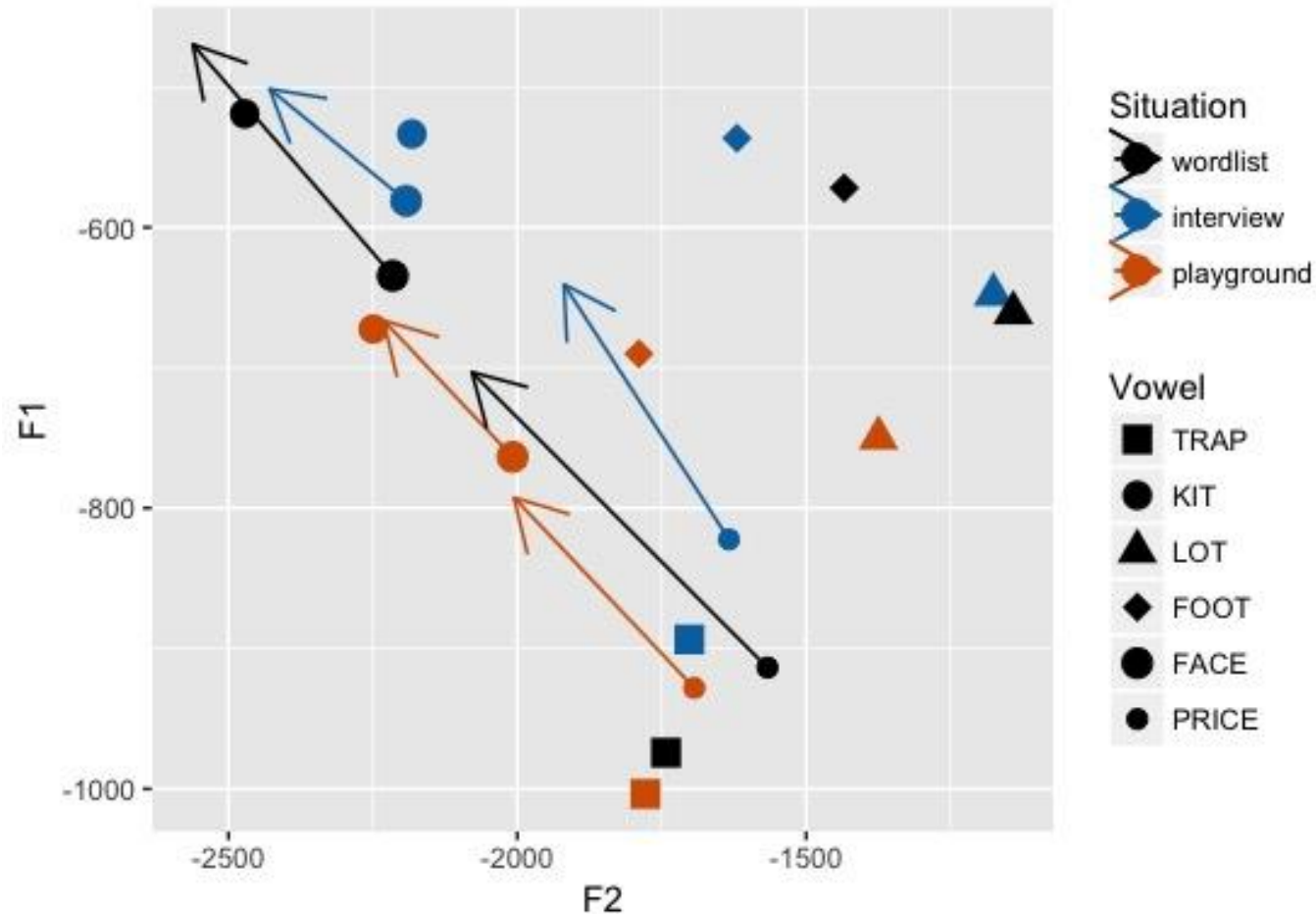"**paper**" (wordlist)

"they **take** out because um" (interview)

"I just don't like the **way** he keeps looking at me" (playground)

"I'm having a **baby** so I need it to monitor my **baby** innit" (playground)

Deborah's FACE tokens

Situation
— wordlist
— interview
— playground

PRICE

- The first element of PRICE does not appear to vary between situations
- The first element is close to TRAP in all situations
- The trajectory appears longest in wordlist speech – this matches our predictions

PRICE

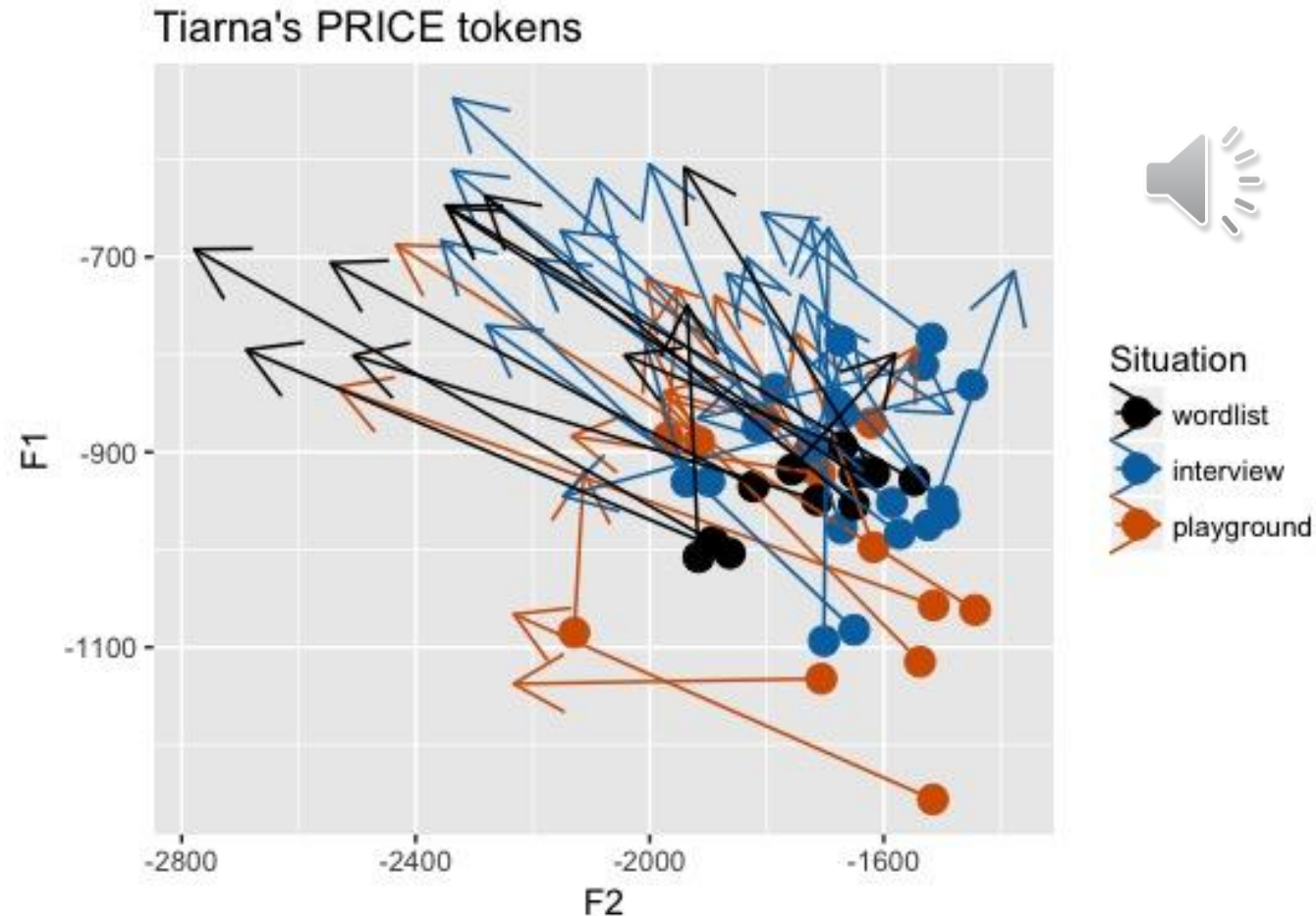" and some**time**s when I watch horrors I start to **cry**" (interview)

"we **might** be going out to Big Ben" (playground)

"Don't **lie**" (playground)

"**ice**" (wordlist)

Tiarna's PRICE tokens

Situation
— wordlist
— interview
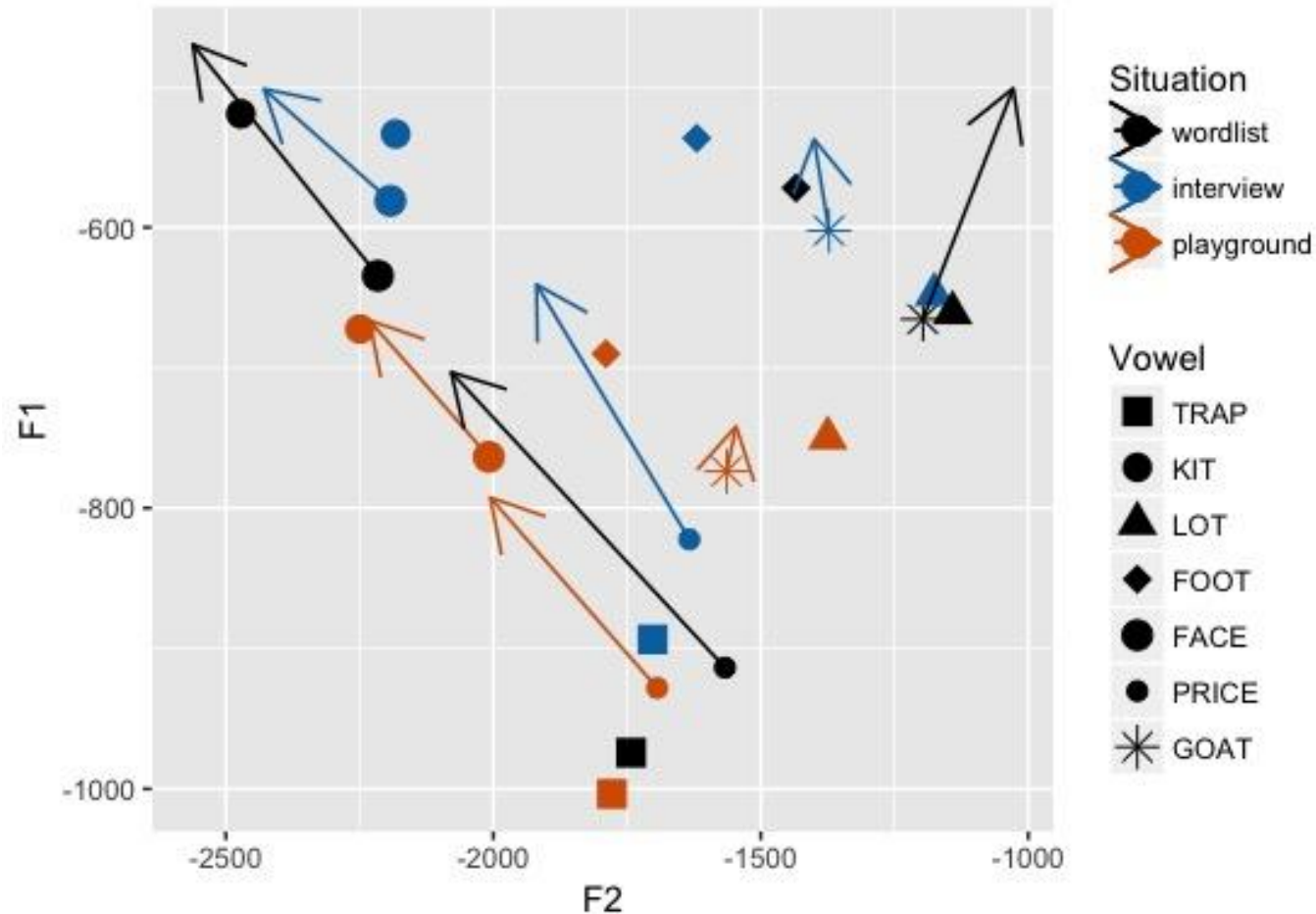— playground

GOAT

- The GOAT onset is more front in interview and playround speech compared to wordlist speech
- This is the opposite of what we predicted
- GOAT appears to be monophthongal in all situations
- As we will see, there is a high degree of intrasituational and intra-individual variability

GOAT

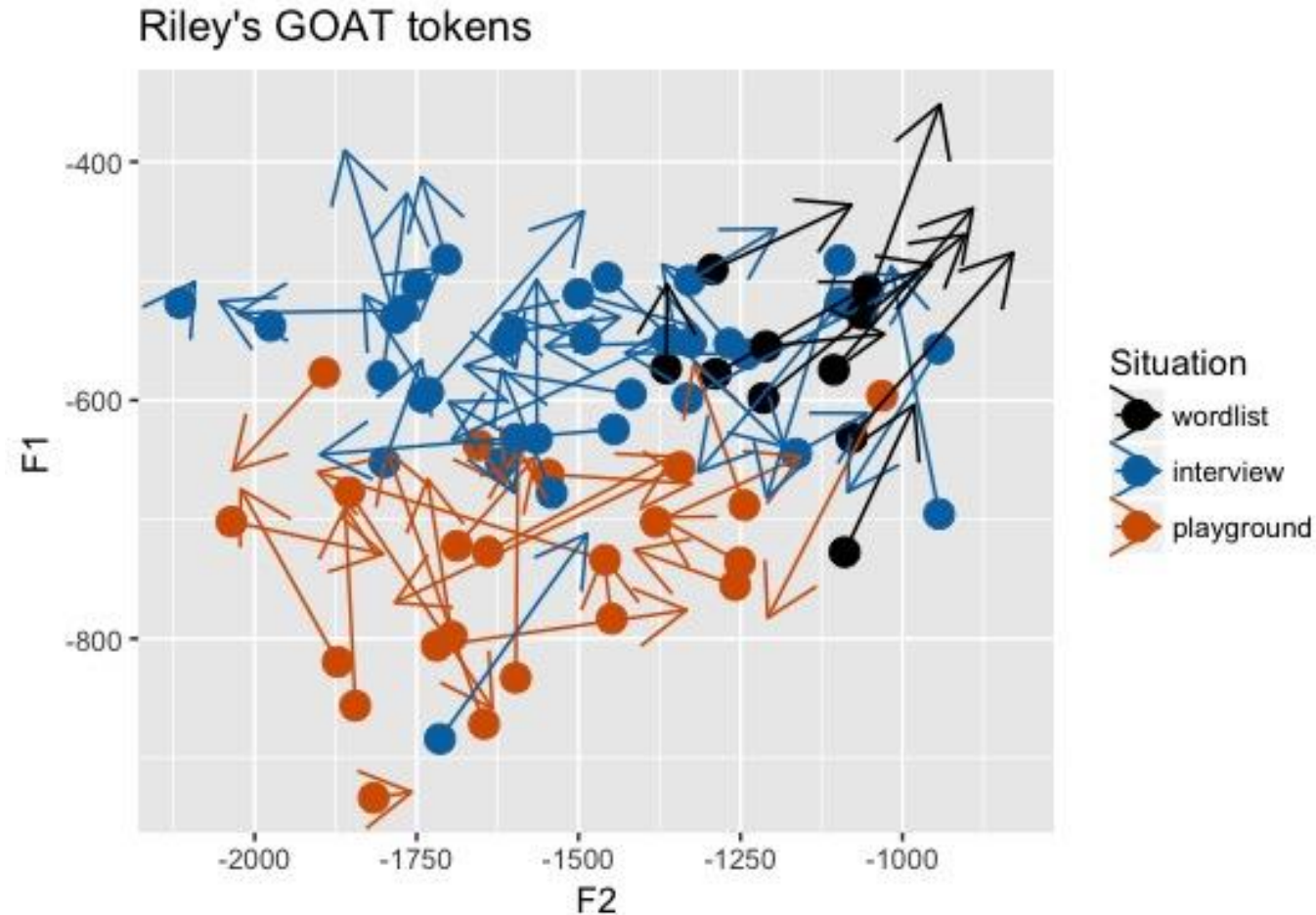"He was **float**ing his boat" (interview)

"**No** it's um nothing it's" (playground)

"**No** we were just like running cos we didn't wanna miss our um" (playground)

Riley's GOAT tokens

"**goat**" (wordlist)

Situation
— wordlist
— interview
— playground

Summary & conclusions: style-shifting

- Labovian style-shifting is not in evidence among these girls
  - FACE and GOAT show their most MLE-like realisation in wordlist speech – especially GOAT

- Each variable shows a different pattern of variation

- High degree of interspeaker, intraspeaker and intrasituational variability
  - → a qualitative analysis could unpick the meaning in this variation, e.g., use in stance-taking

- Findings reflect that "speakers have a high tolerance and high use of variation and […] linguistic norms are flexible" (Cheshire, Nortier & Adger, 2015, p.4)

- The findings also reflect that "the multiethnolect is a `vernacular' in Labov's sense, in that it is their `basic', unmarked, unreflecting, unmonitored variety" (Cheshire, Nortier & Adger 2015, p.3)

Summary & conclusions: MLE

• FACE seems almost uniformally monophthongal

• Similarly, GOAT varies between a front monophthong and a backed monophthong

• Coexistence of multiple MLE/non-standard variants ([o] and [ø]) for GOAT – potentially also the case for FACE ([e] vs. [ɛ])

Thank you for listening!

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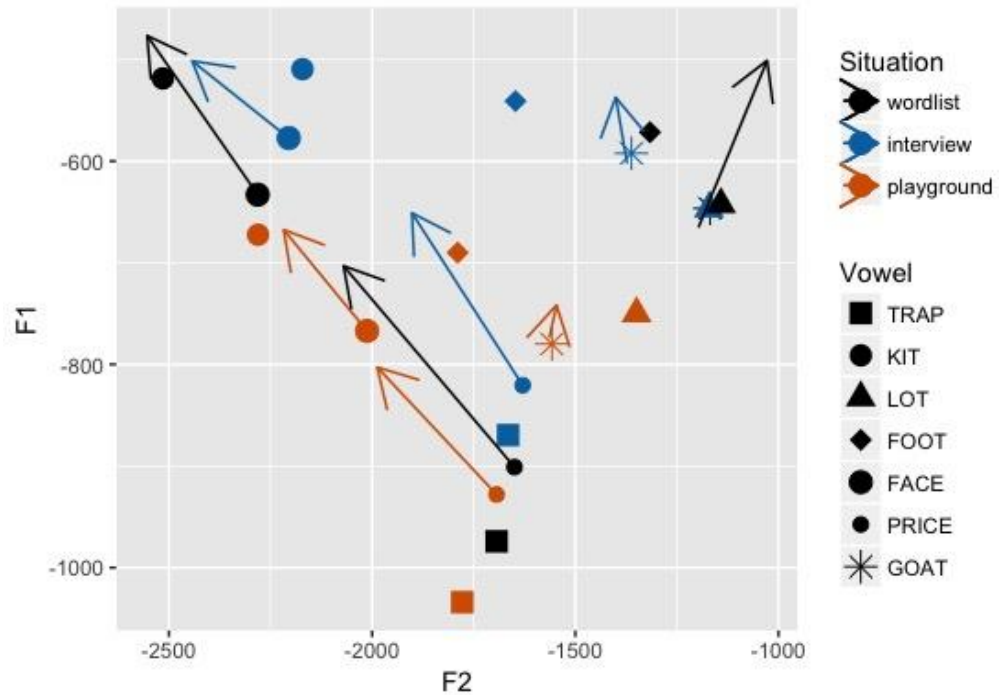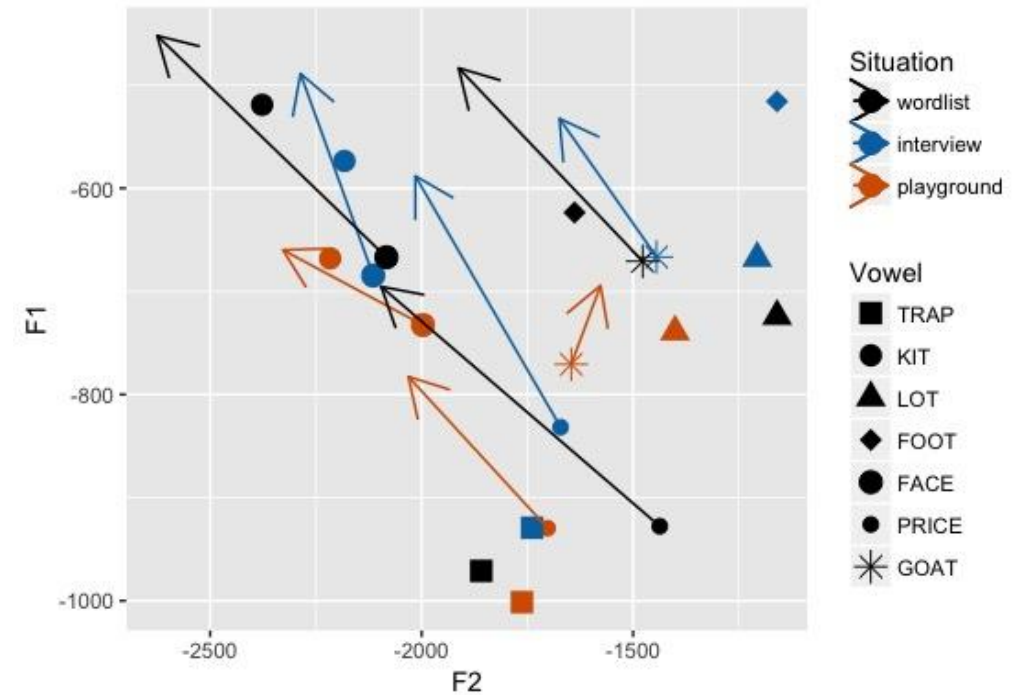
Appendix

Acoustic analysis
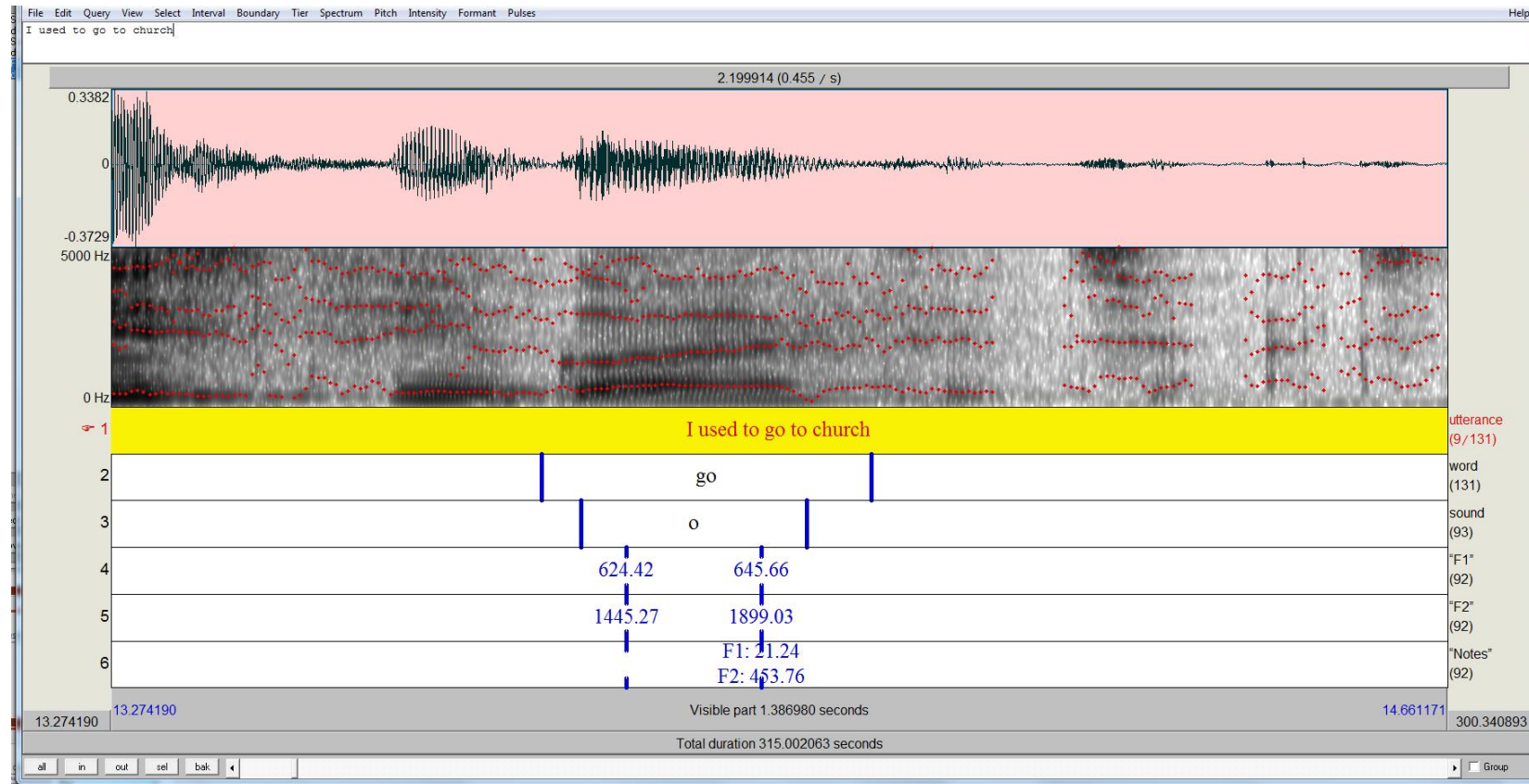
Non-Anglo vs. Anglo vowel system
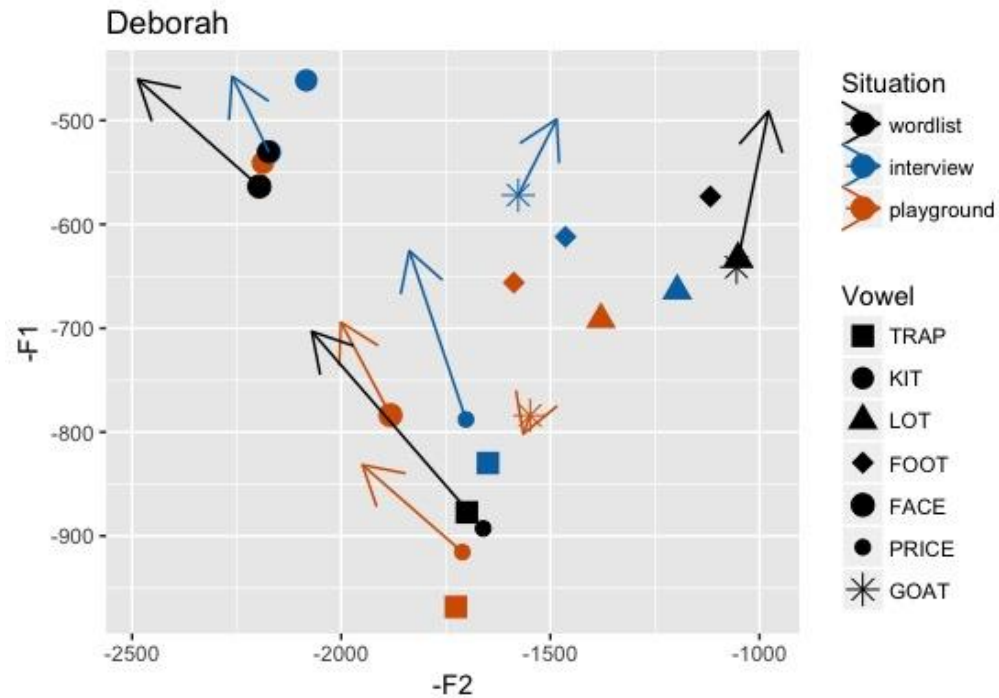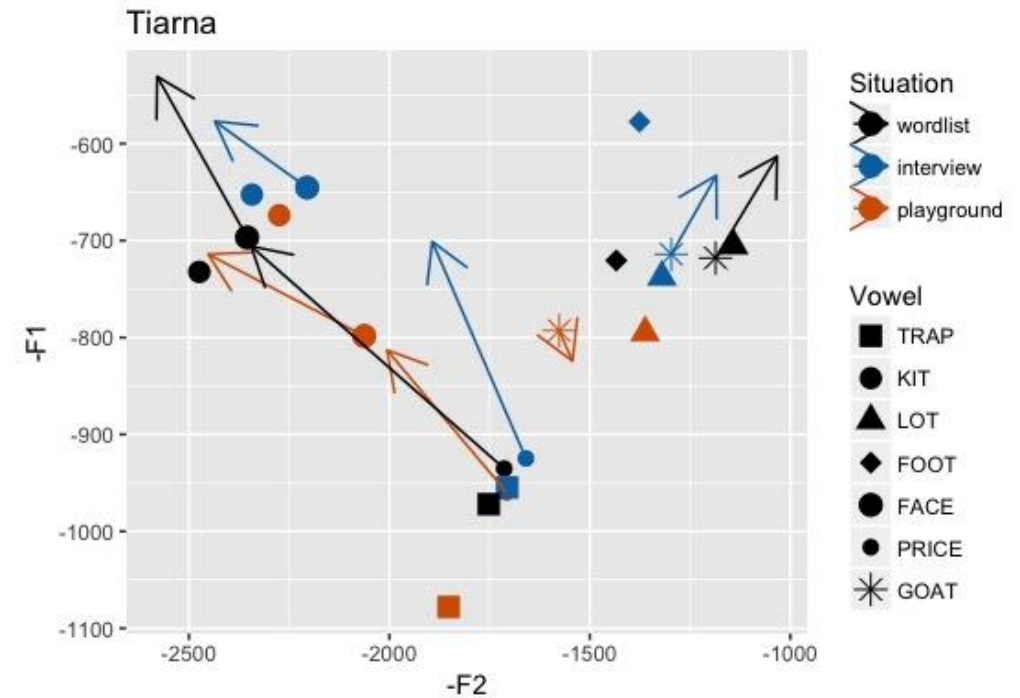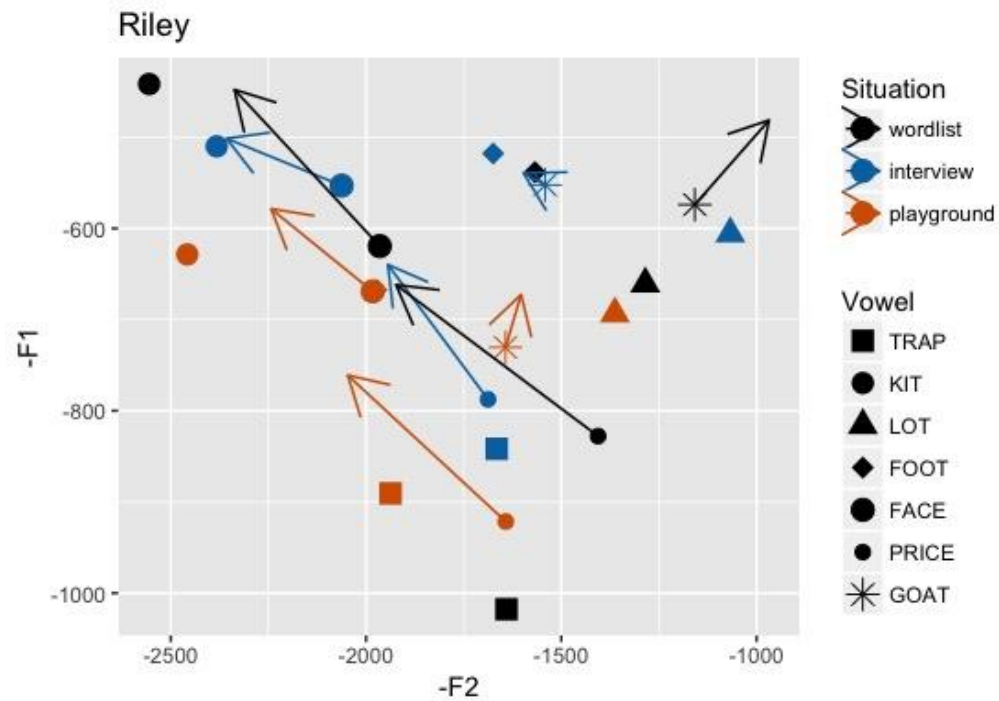
NON-ANGLO

ANGLO (ALEXA)

Comparison of individuals

DEBORAH

TIARNA

Comparison of individuals (2)

RILEY

SABRINA