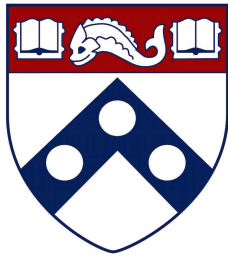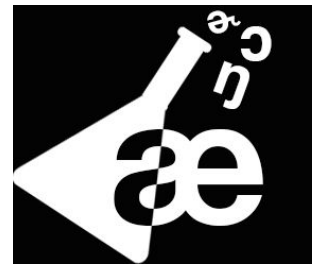# Empathy, flexibility, and conformity in a sound change in progress

Meredith Tamminga

University of Pennsylvania

Personality in Speech Perception and Production
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Who leads language change?

"The basic strategy of this pursuit of the causes of change is to identify the leaders of change in progress; in place of the question 'why?' I substituted the question 'who?'."

Labov 2001: 90

Who leads language change?

- Reflects relationship between the key role of the speaker-hearer as the agent of sound change and the need to identify change at the community level

- Empirical evidence on this relationship has come from both laboratory experiments and sociolinguistic fieldwork
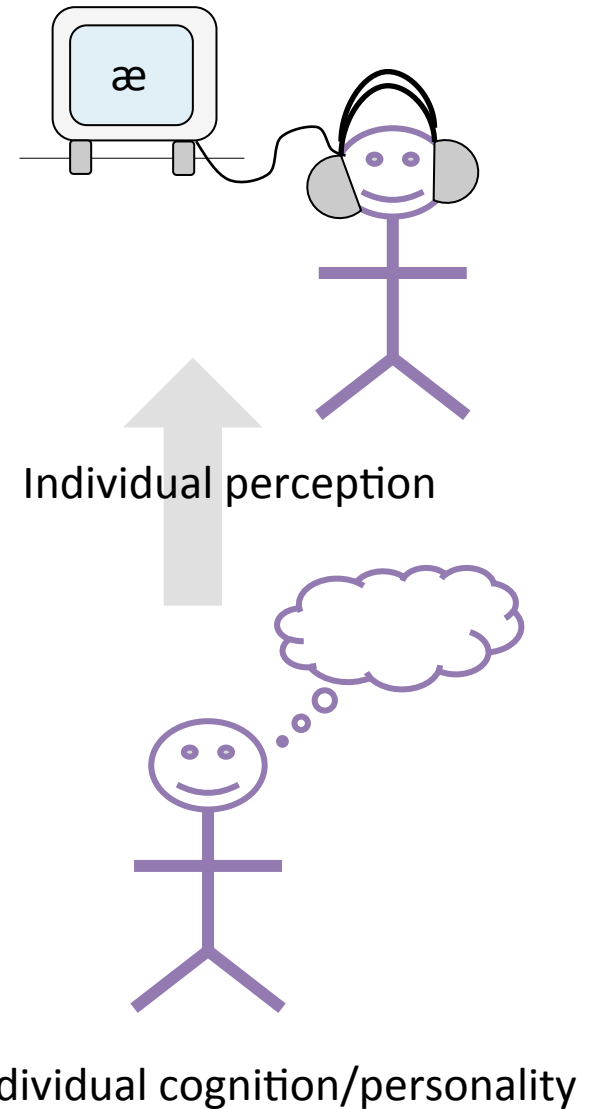
Sociolinguistic fieldwork

Individual production

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Community change
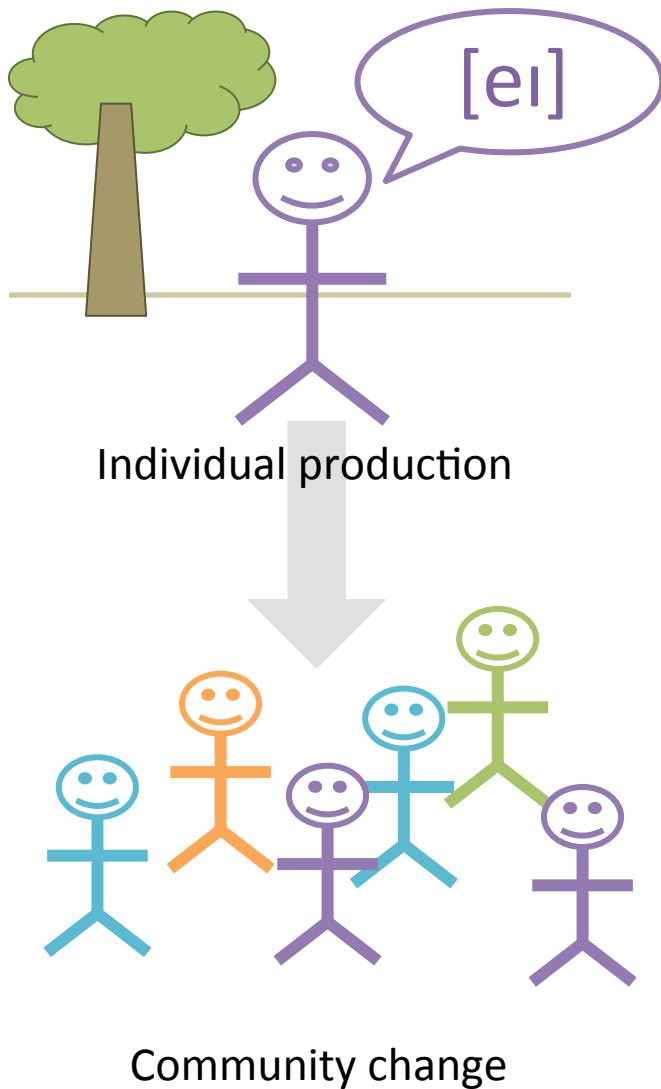
- Demographically, tends to be young women
- Martha's Vineyard, Labov 1972
- "their sociolinguistic position is a display of nonconformity." Labov 2001: 410
- "burned-out burnouts" Eckert 2003
- "exert more influence than they receive" Labov 2001: 410

- Stewart & Ota 2008 – inverse correlation between AQ and Ganong effect
- Yu 2010 – less perceptual compensation by low-AQ women
- See also Lev-Ari & Peperkamp 2014, Baese-Berk 2015, Turnbull 2015, Kingston et al. 2015…
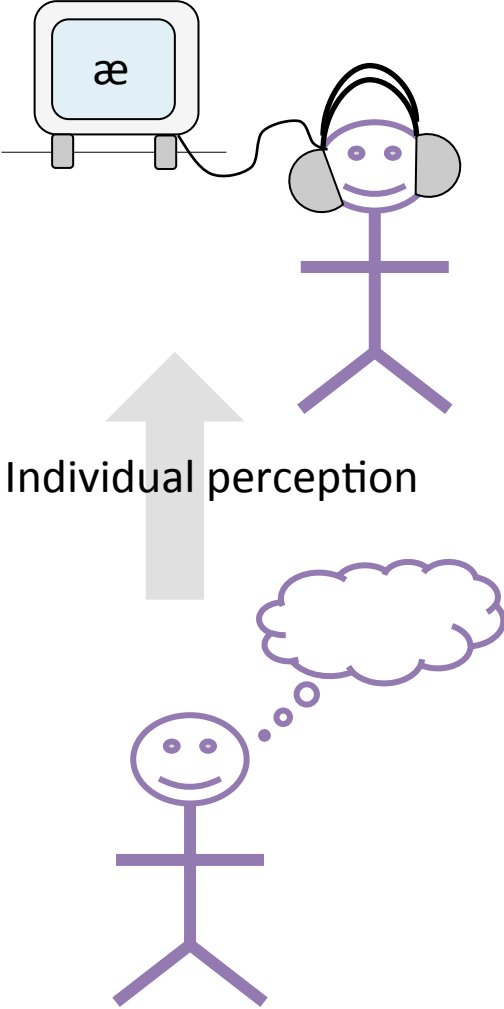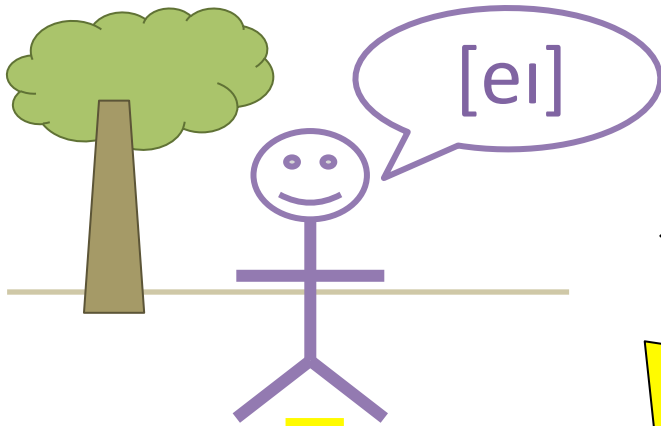- "minimal compensators who are superior empathizers" Yu 2013: 224

Laboratory experiments
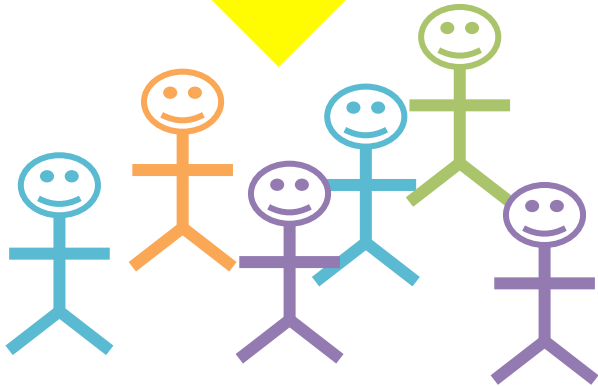
Individual perception

Individual cognition/personality

Sociolinguistic fieldwork

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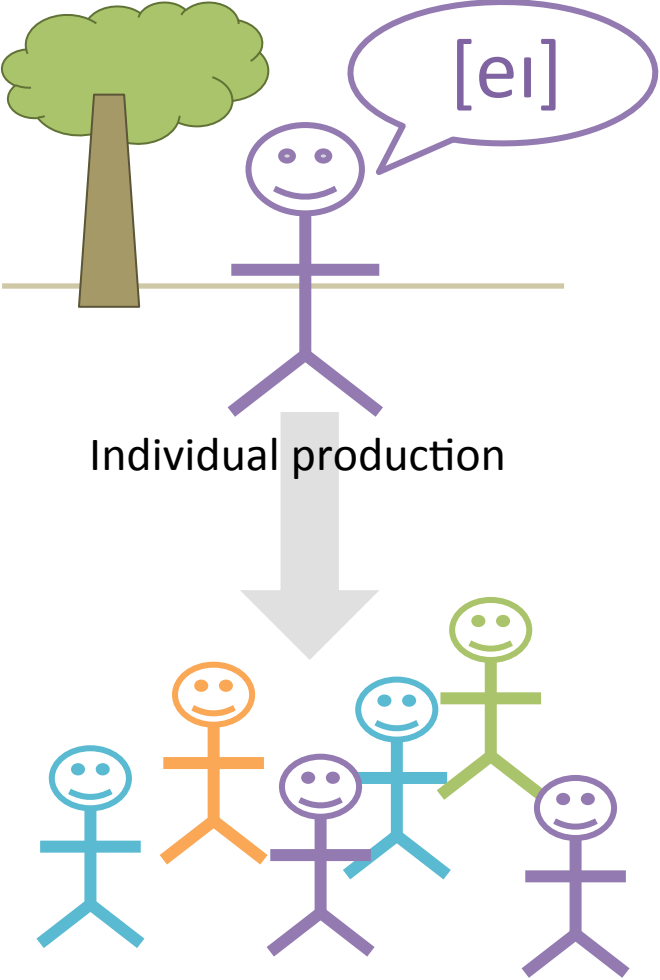
Individual production

Community change

Laboratory experiments

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Individual perception

Individual cognition/personality

Sociolinguistic fieldwork

Laboratory experiments

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Individual production
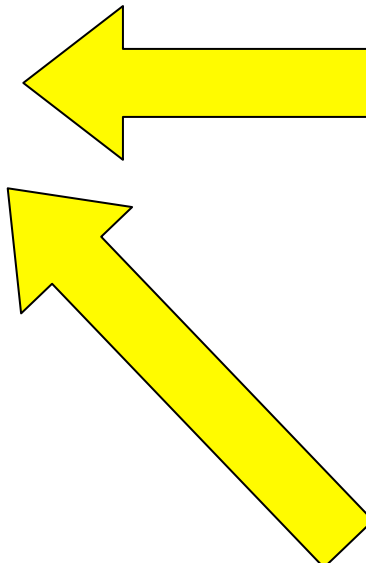
Individual perception

Community change
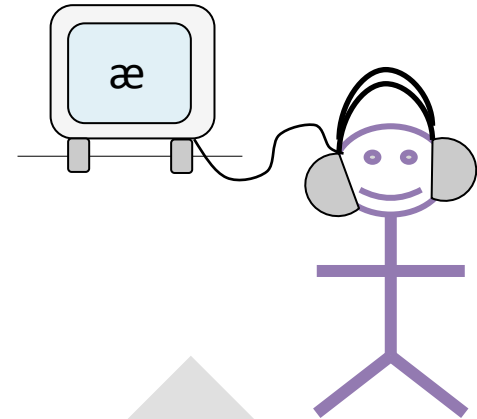
Individual cognition/personality

Who leads language change?

- Need to connect what we know about leaders of language change from sociolinguistic fieldwork perspective and laboratory experimental perspective

- New project to combine data from spontaneous speech and experimental performance by same individuals

Change from below in /eyC/
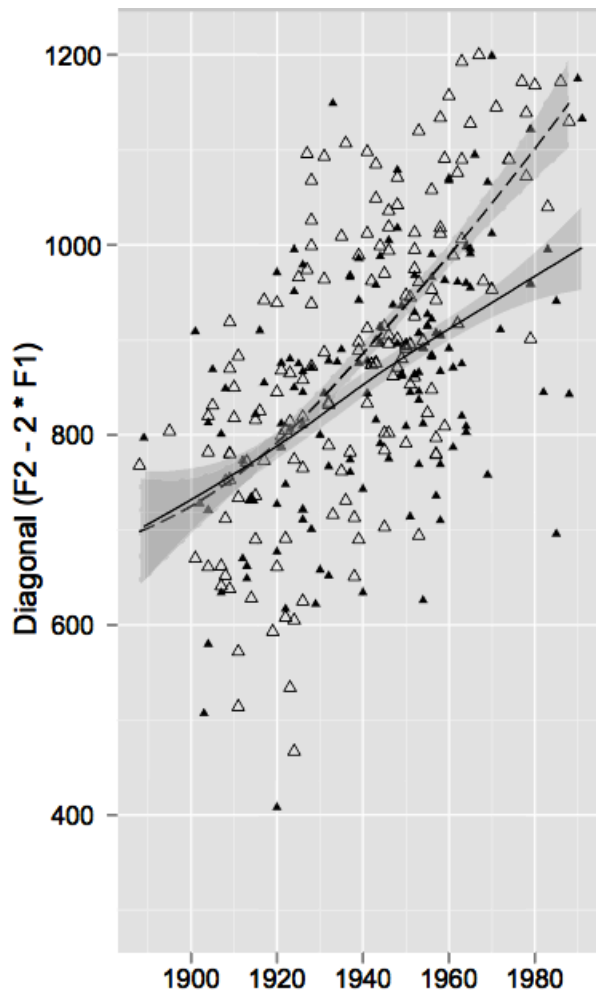
from Labov et al. 2013

- Raising of /ey/ ("plate") before consonants
- Does not reverse mid-century like other Philly sound changes (Labov et al. 2013)
- Does not show educational stratification (Prichard 2016)
- Never mentioned in meta-discussion of Philly accent

Pilot with Philadelphian women

- 20 young women recruited in friendship pairs

- 30 minute dyadic conversation without interviewer present

- Individual differences experimental battery

- F1 of /eyC/ tokens measured by hand in Praat

- Pilot data relating to hypotheses about empathy, linguistic flexibility, and conformity

Pilot with Philadelphian women

- Are the young women with the most innovative /eyC/ production in conversational speech…

  1. More empathetic?

  2. More linguistically inflexible?

  3. More nonconformist?

Are the leaders more empathetic?

- Empathic Concern subtest of Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis 1983)

- 28-item self-reported questionnaire

- Assesses "feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others" (Davis 1983: 114)

- Hypothesis: Empathic concern will correlate positively with /ey/-raising

Are the leaders more empathetic?

R = -.40, p = .077

more innovative in ongoing change

higher empathic concern score

F1 /eyC/ (Hz)
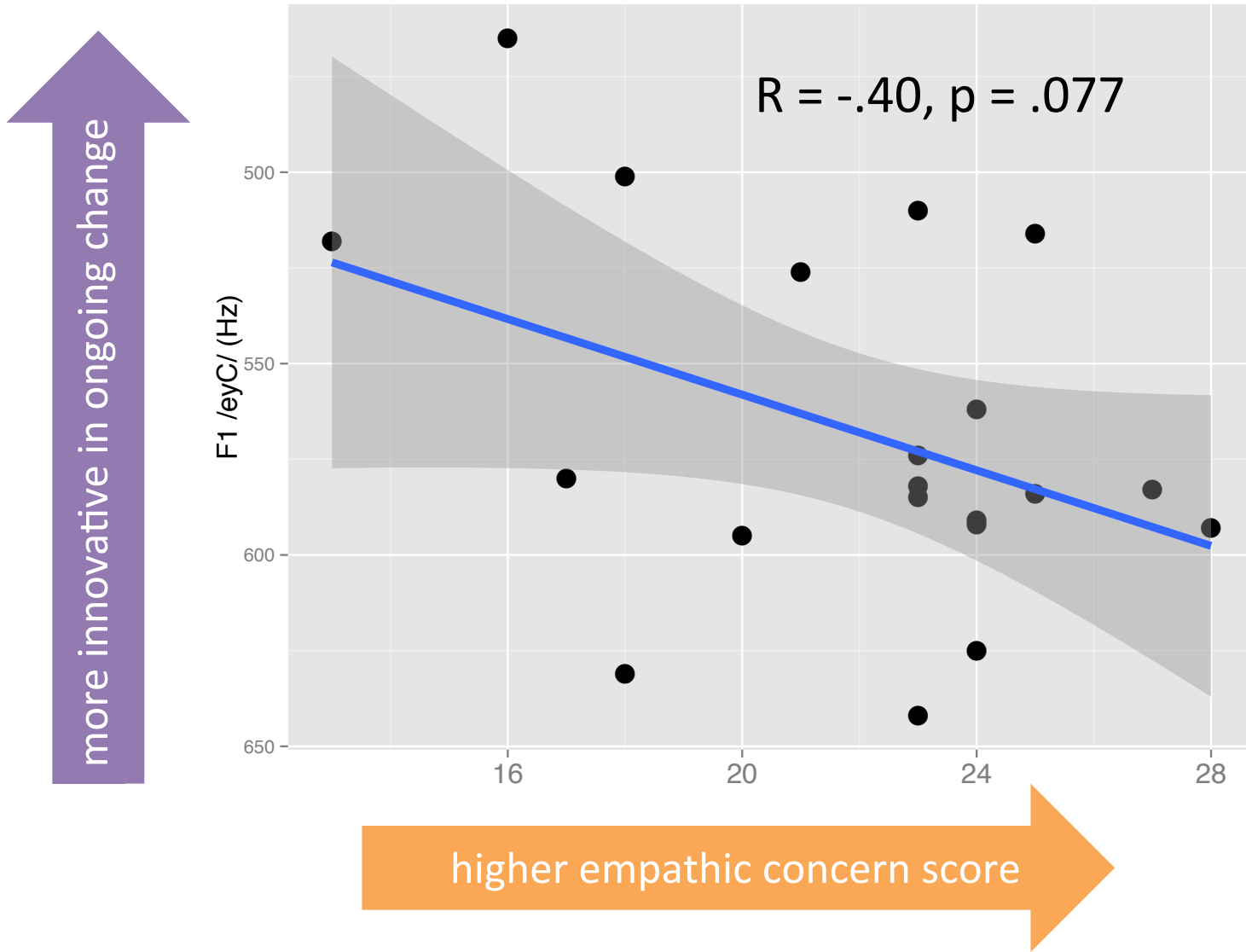
Are the leaders less linguistically flexible?

- Shadowing task with model talker's word-initial voiceless stop VOT extended 100%

- Replication of Shockley, Sabadini & Fowler 2004, Experiment 2

- Participant baseline from reading condition

- Hypothesis: VOT convergence will correlate negatively with /ey/-raising

Are the leaders less linguistically flexible?

more innovative in ongoing change
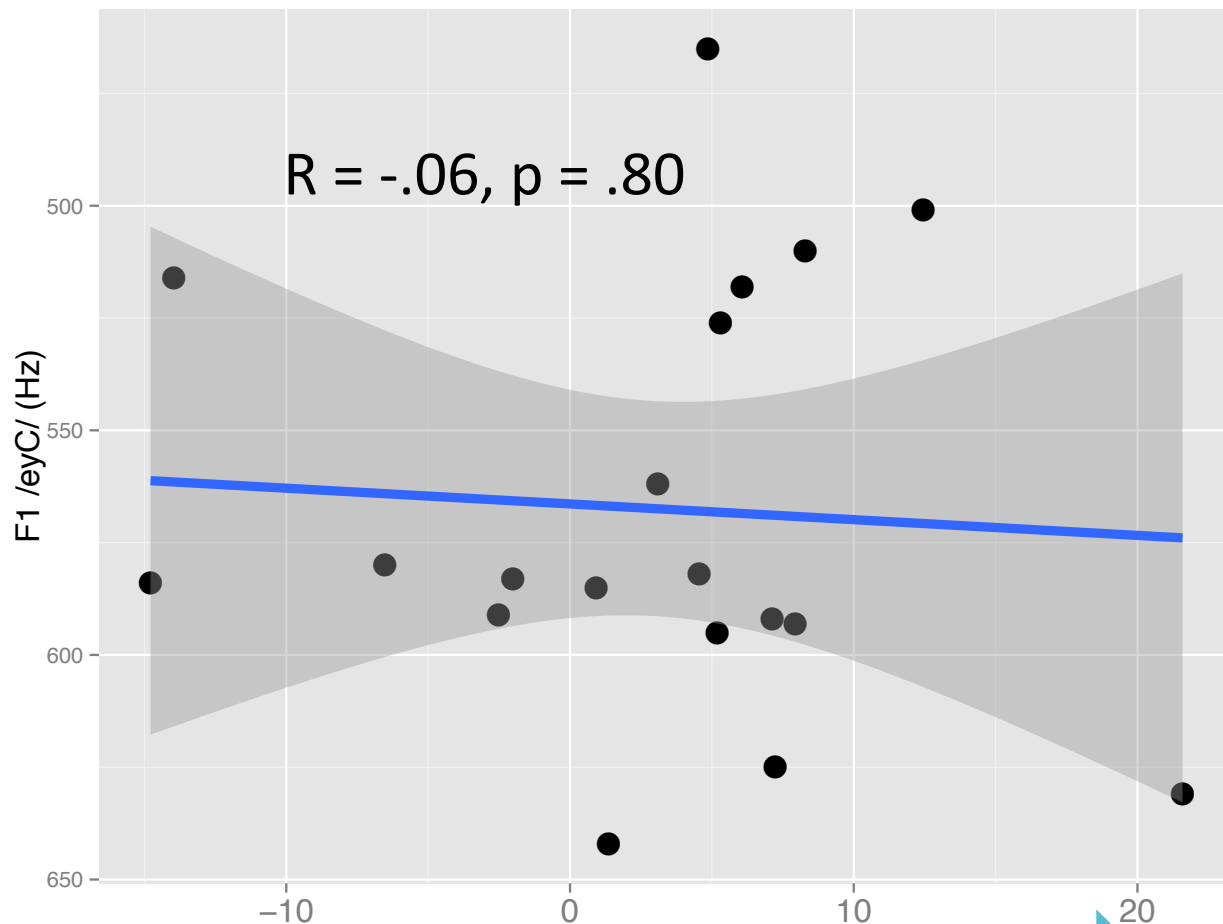
greater VOT convergence in shadowing

R = -.06, p = .80

F1 /eyC/ (Hz)

Are the leaders nonconformist?

- Self Monitoring Scale (Snyder 1974)
- 25-item self-reported questionnaire
- Monitoring of self-presentation out of a concern for social appropriateness
- Hypothesis: SMS scores will correlate negatively with /ey/-raising

Are the leaders nonconformist?
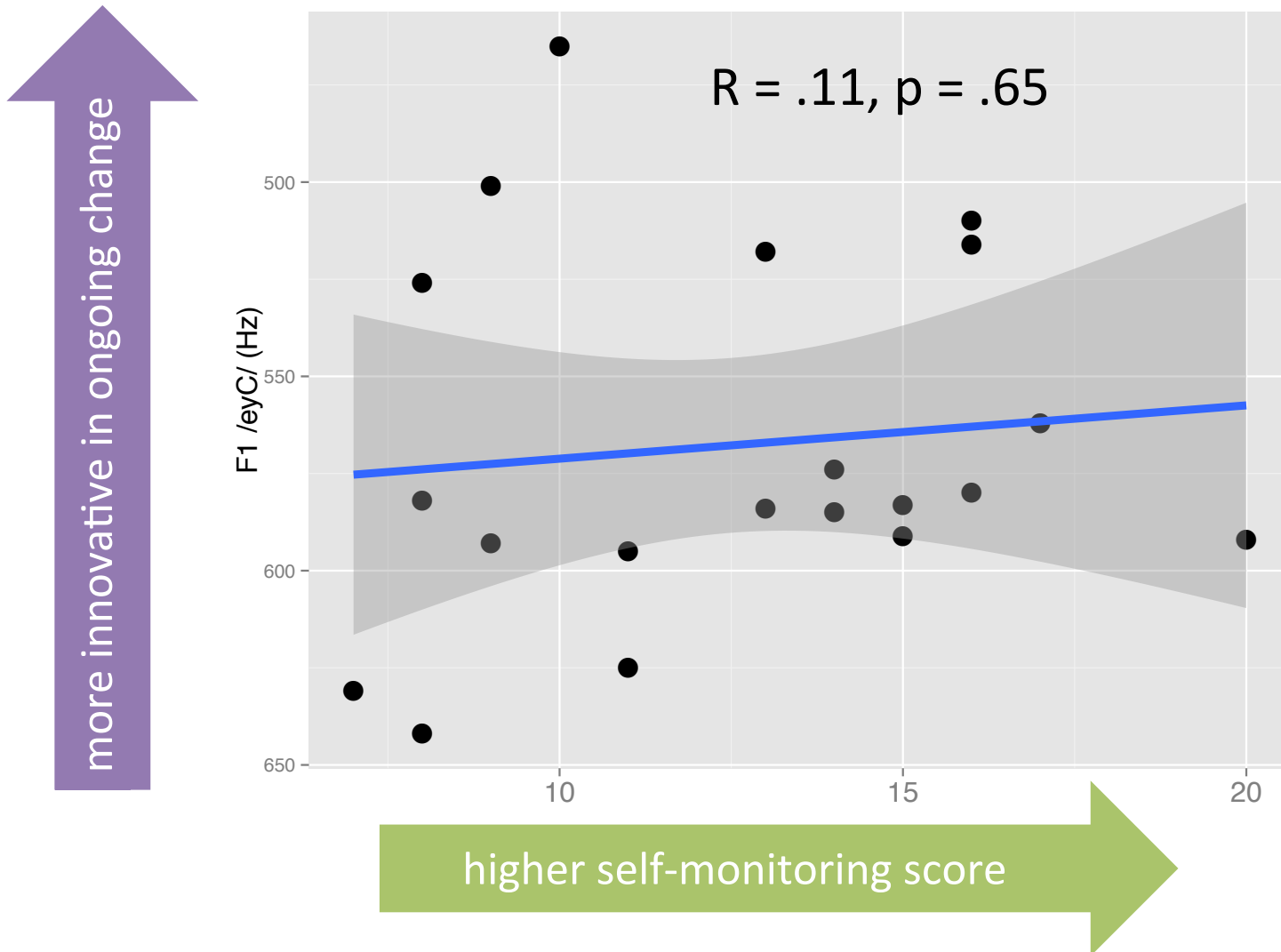
Discussion

- Limited preliminary evidence on role of empathy is in opposite direction from Yu's conjecture: speakers who are most advanced in /eyC/-raising are *least* empathetic, not most

- Not yet any evidence to support the hypotheses that the leaders of this sound change are socially nonconformist or linguistically inflexible

Discussion

- Theories of what role personality plays in sound change will need to be sensitive to different particular changes or different types of change:
  - different levels of social salience
  - different origins
  - different involvement of phonetic factors

Discussion

- Theories of sound change from the laboratory can and should be tested against spontaneous speech data on change in progress in speech community
- Stay tuned for results from the full project!

Thank you

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Contact me:

tamminga@ling.upenn.edu

Language Variation and Cognition Lab
http://sites.sas.upenn.edu/tamminga-lab