

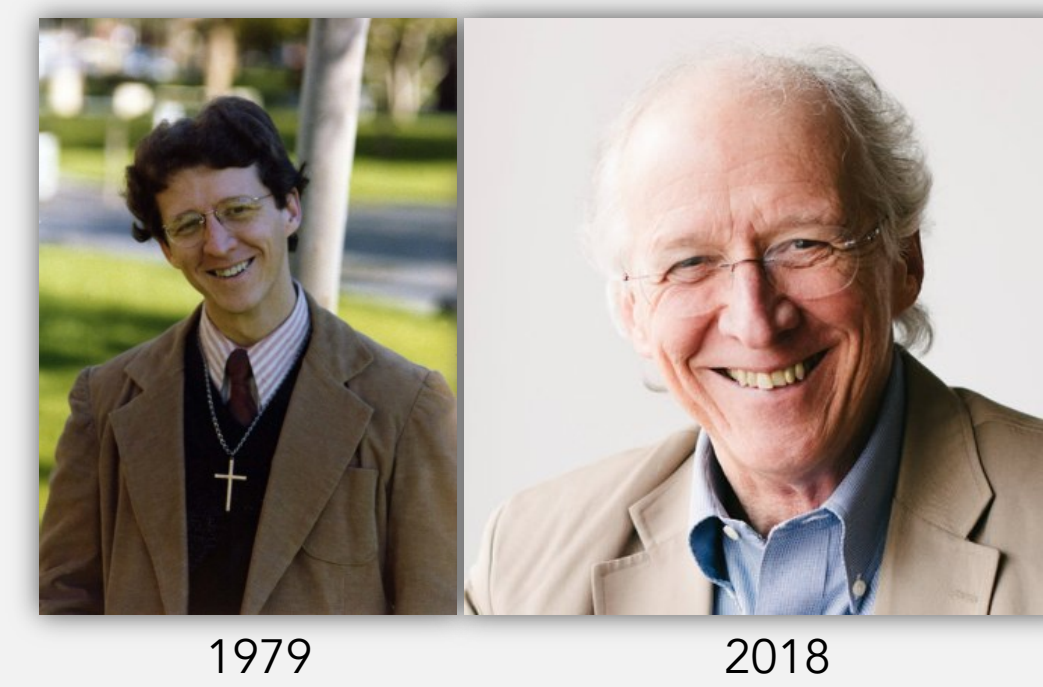
The Baptist Pastor Persona: A sociophonetic case study of vowel stability across a lifespan

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Background

John Piper (Retired Baptist Pastor)

- Born in Chattanooga, TN (1946)
- Spent formative years in Greenville, SC
- Pastor in Minneapolis, MN (1980–2013)
- Chancellor of College & Seminary (present)
 - 38 years in Minneapolis, MN



The Baptist Church in the US (Rhodes 2015)

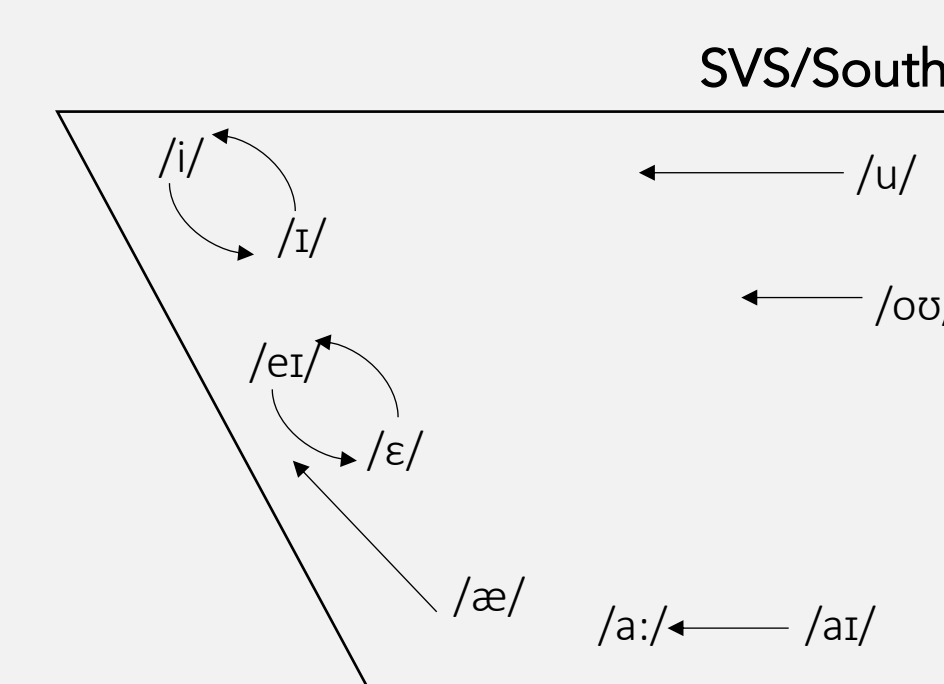
- First Baptist Churches on American soil were found in Rhode Island.
- In 2015, Baptists were deemed the second largest Christian family, second only to Roman Catholicism.
- Southern Baptist Convention is largest Protestant denomination in US

Dialects in Contact

Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) in Greenville, SC:

(Labov, Ash & Boberg 2005)

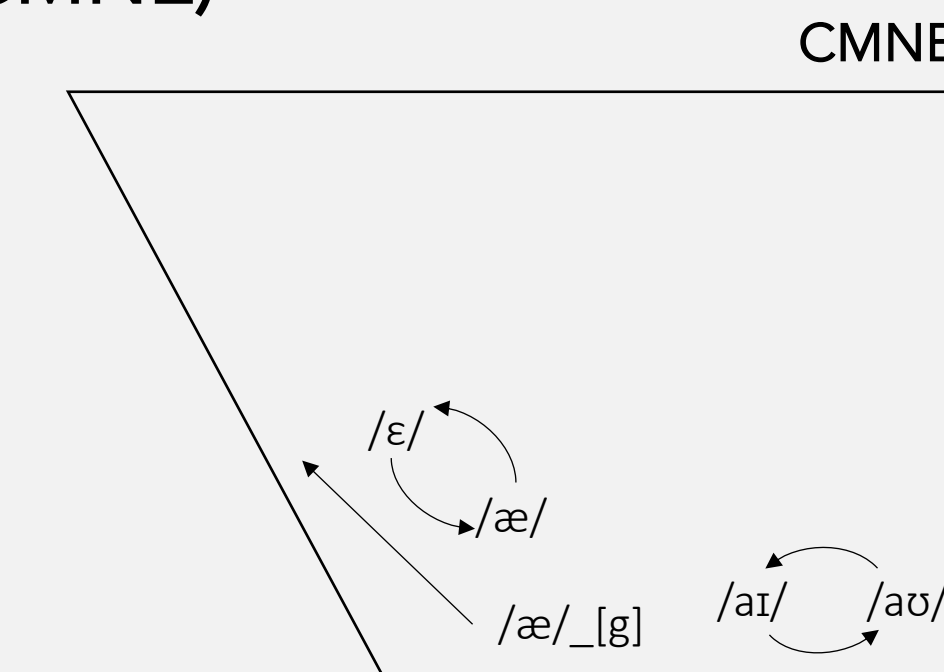
- /aɪ/ Monophthongization
- Reversal or overlap of /eɪ/ and /ɛ/
- Reversal or overlap of /i/ and /ɪ/
- /u/ Fronting
- /oʊ/ Fronting



Northern Cities Shift (NCS) in Central Minnesota English (CMNE)

(Labov, Ash & Boberg 2005, Koffi 2014)

- AWY Line
 - Reversal or overlap of /aʊ/ and /aɪ/
- EQ Measure (ANAE)
 - Reversal or overlap of /æ/ and /ɛ/
- /æ/ Raising before [g] (excluding prenasal contexts)



Research Questions

- Is there accommodation in Piper's speech away from Southern American English towards CMNE from 1980 to 2017?
- What does his congregation perceive authenticity as a Baptist pastor to be?
- What implications does this have for linguistic authenticity as it pertains to religious leaders?

Methods

Data Set:

- Timespan: 37 years
- Ages: 34–71
- Number of Recordings: 15
- Average Duration: 35 mins 14 secs
- Audio: desiringGod.org
- Audiences: Baptists in Downtown Minneapolis

Data Processing:

- Transcripts and wave files to DARLA semi-automated (Reddy & Stanford 2015)
 - Filtered out stop words
 - Collected TextGrids
- F1, F2: 20%, 35%, 50%, 65%, & 80%
- Removed outliers (joeyr, Stanley 2018) at 50% of F1 and F2
- Tokens: 33, 730 Vowels (primary stress)

Statistical Analyses:

- Euclidean distance (Fox & Jacewicz 2009) of midpoints for contrasting vowels calculated in Excel

$$\text{Euclidean distance} = \sqrt{(F1_n - F1_{n+1})^2 + (F2_n - F2_{n+1})^2}$$

- Vector length (Fox & Jacewicz 2009) of /aɪ/ for word final, prevoiced, and prevoiceless contexts

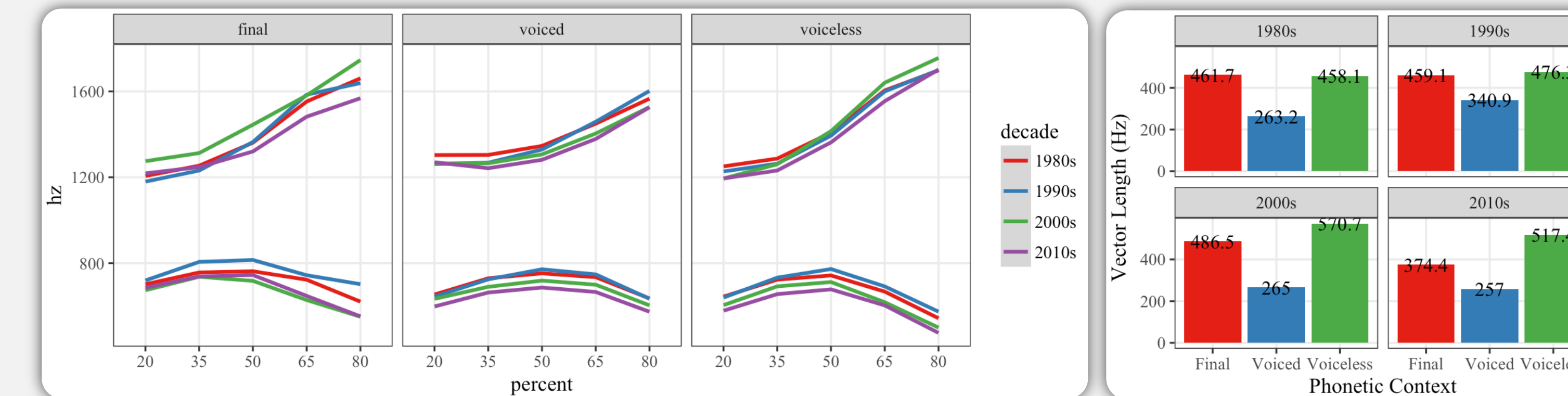
$$\text{Vector Length} = \sqrt{(F1_{20\%} - F1_{80\%})^2 + (F2_{20\%} - F2_{80\%})^2}$$

- ANOVAs of individual vowels
 - aov(F1~decade) run in RStudio (R Core Team 2016)
- Tukey's Honestly Significance Difference (TukeyHSD, R Core Team 2016)
- Vowels plotted using ggplot2 (Wickham 2019)

Results of SVS/South Features

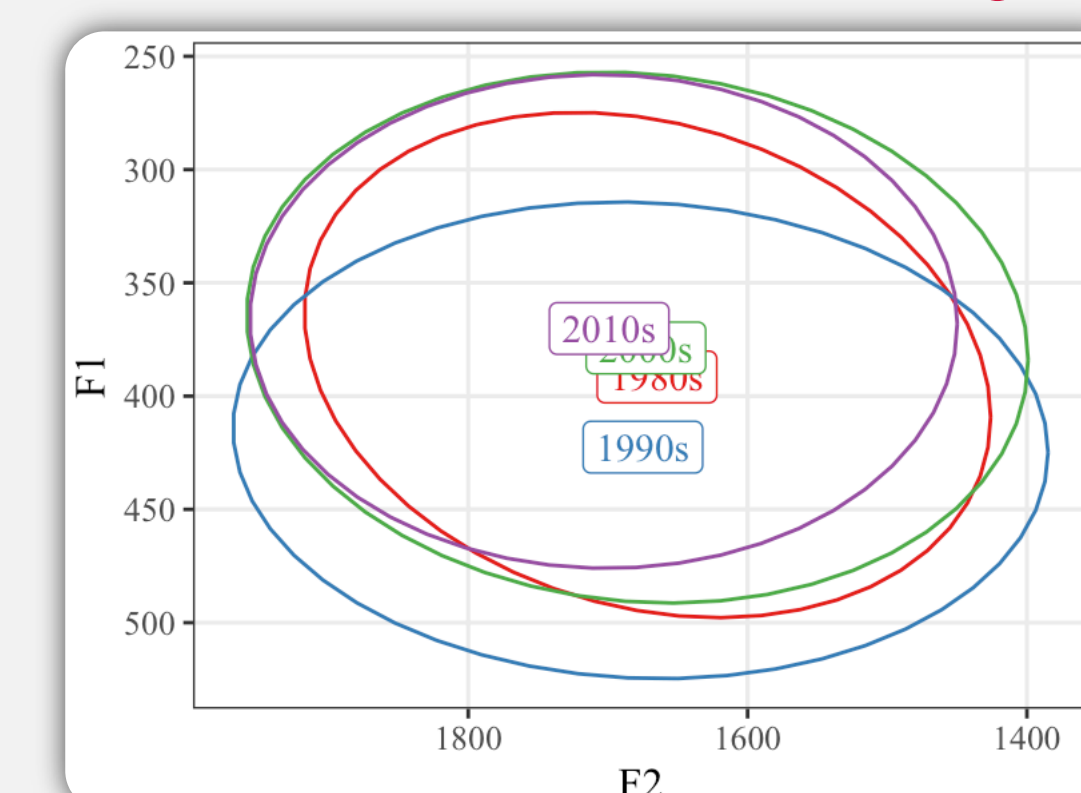
/aɪ/ monophthongization

SVS: /aɪ/ is "monophthongal" before voiced segments
CMNE: No accommodation



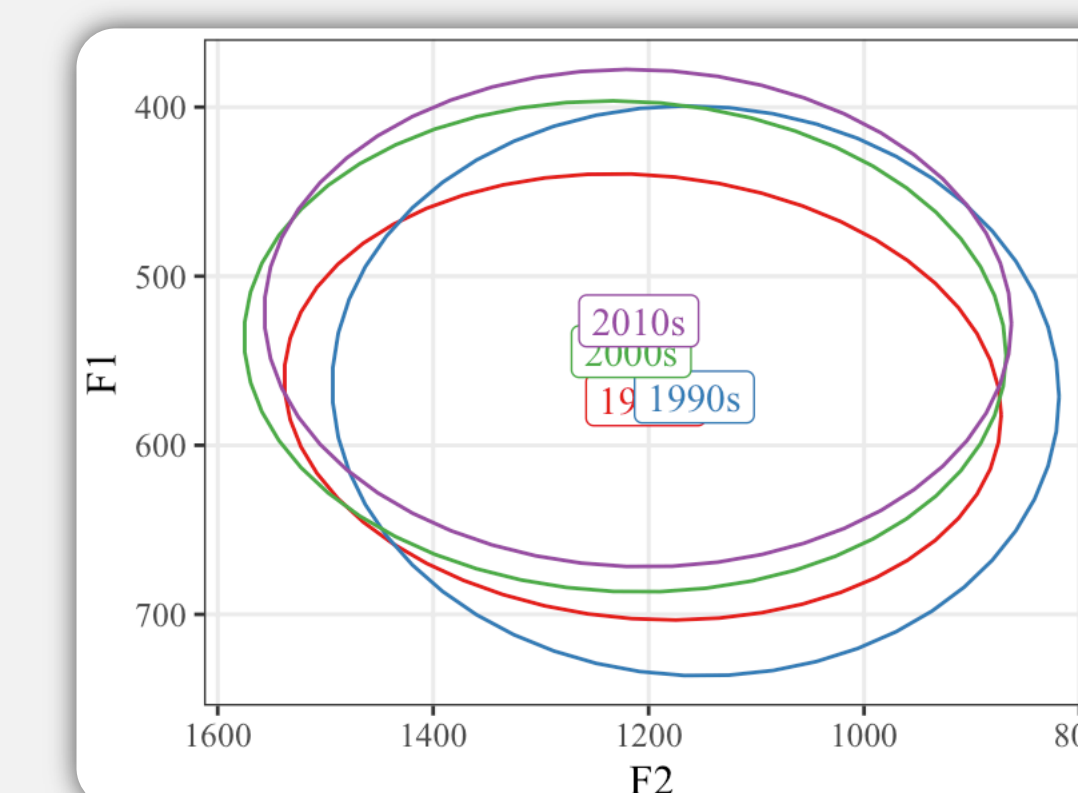
/u/ Fronting

South: /u/ becomes more front,
strengthening of Southernness
CMNE: No accommodation, divergence



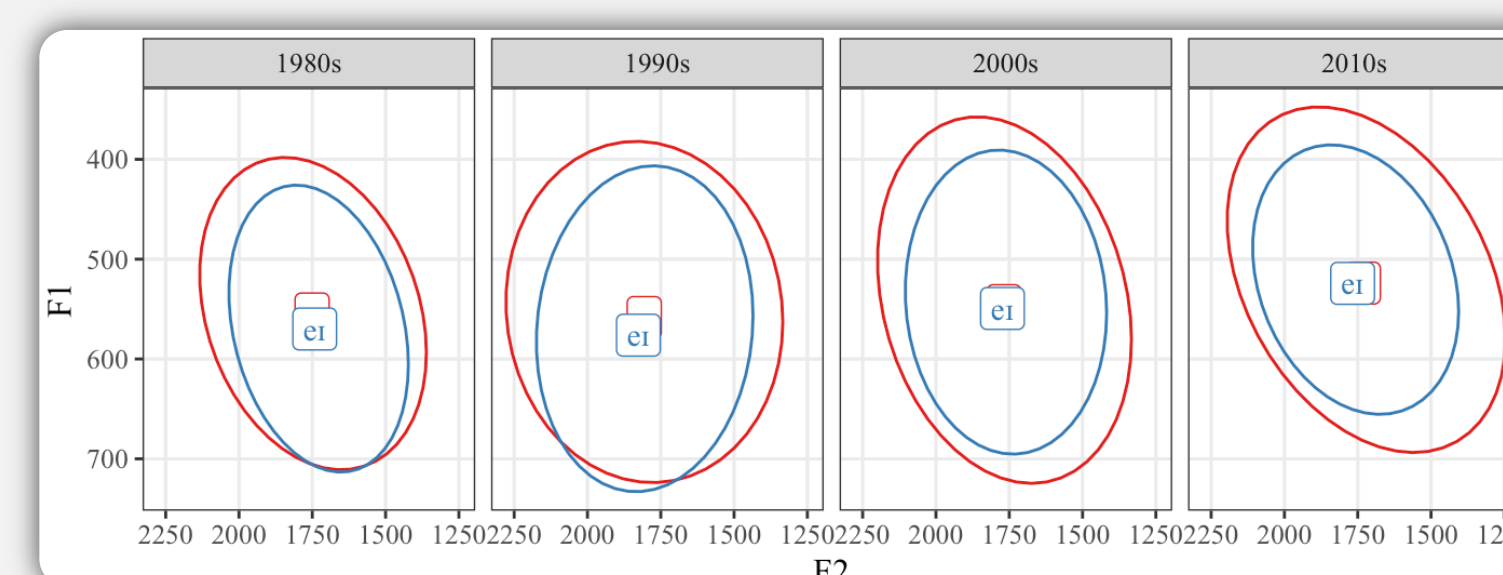
/oʊ/ Fronting

South: /oʊ/ is never fronted
CMNE: No accommodation



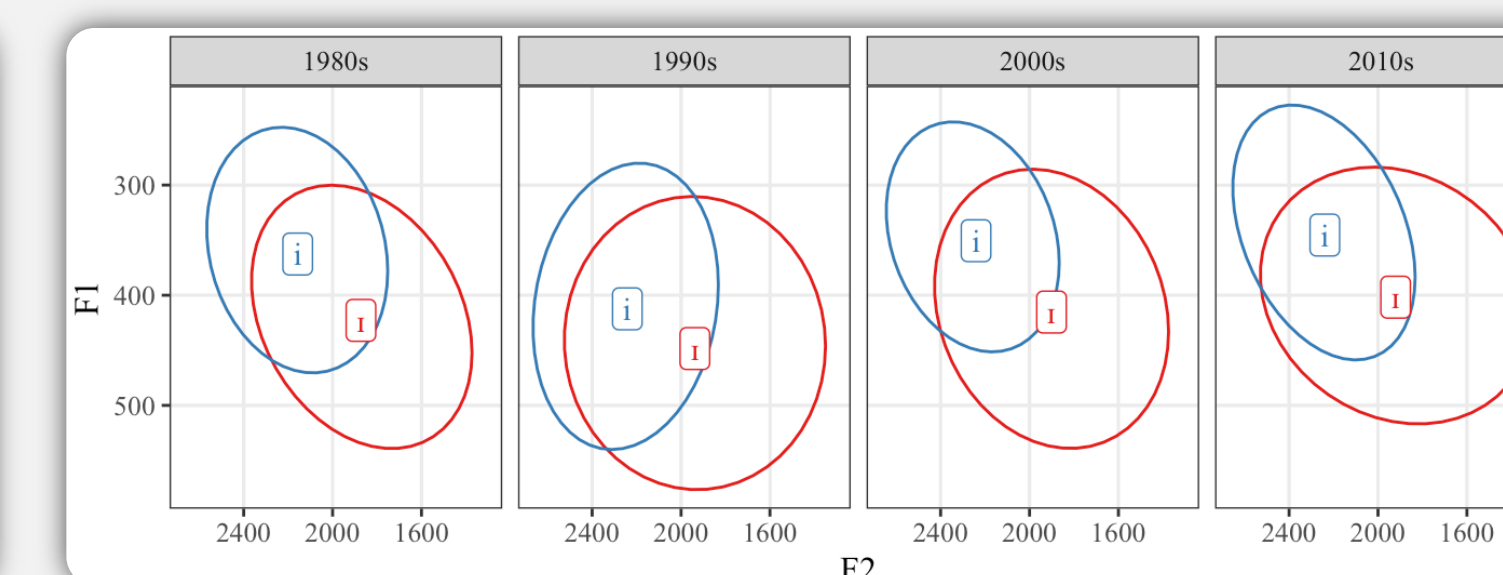
Reversal of /eɪ/ and /ɛ/

SVS: Share vowel space, stable over time
CMNE: No accommodation



Reversal of /i/ and /ɪ/

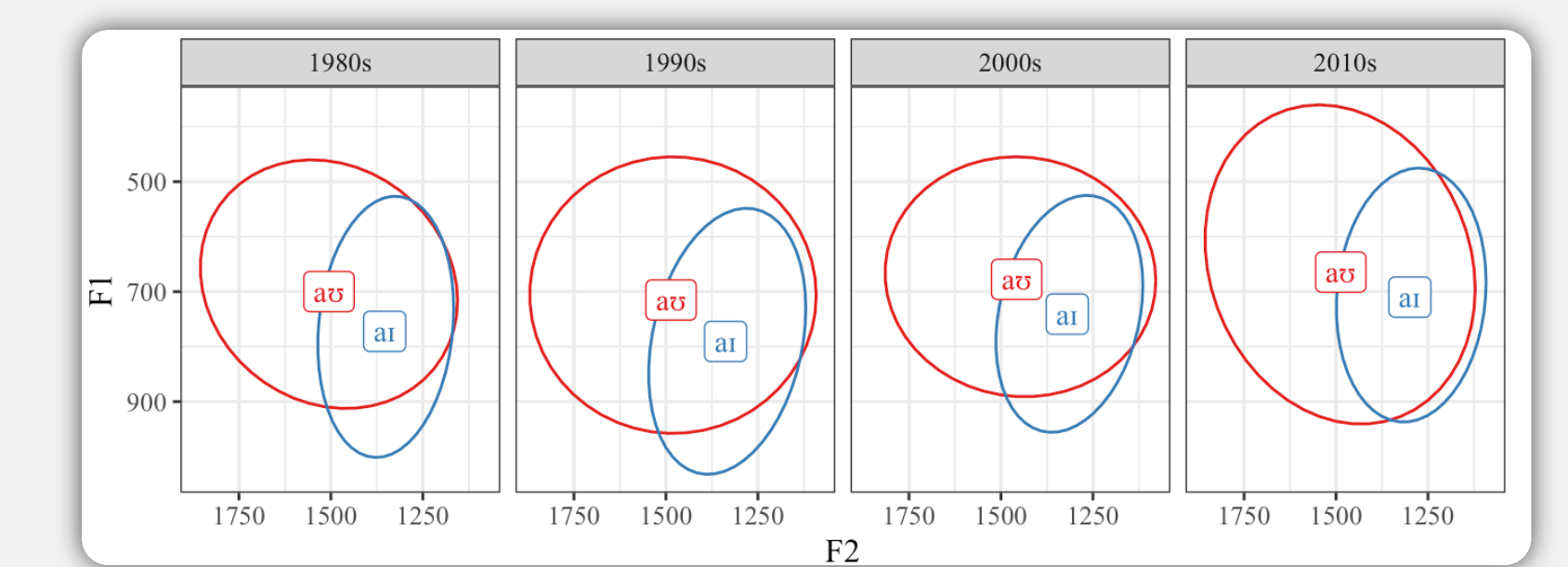
SVS: Share vowel space, stable over time
CMNE: No accommodation



Results of CMNE Features

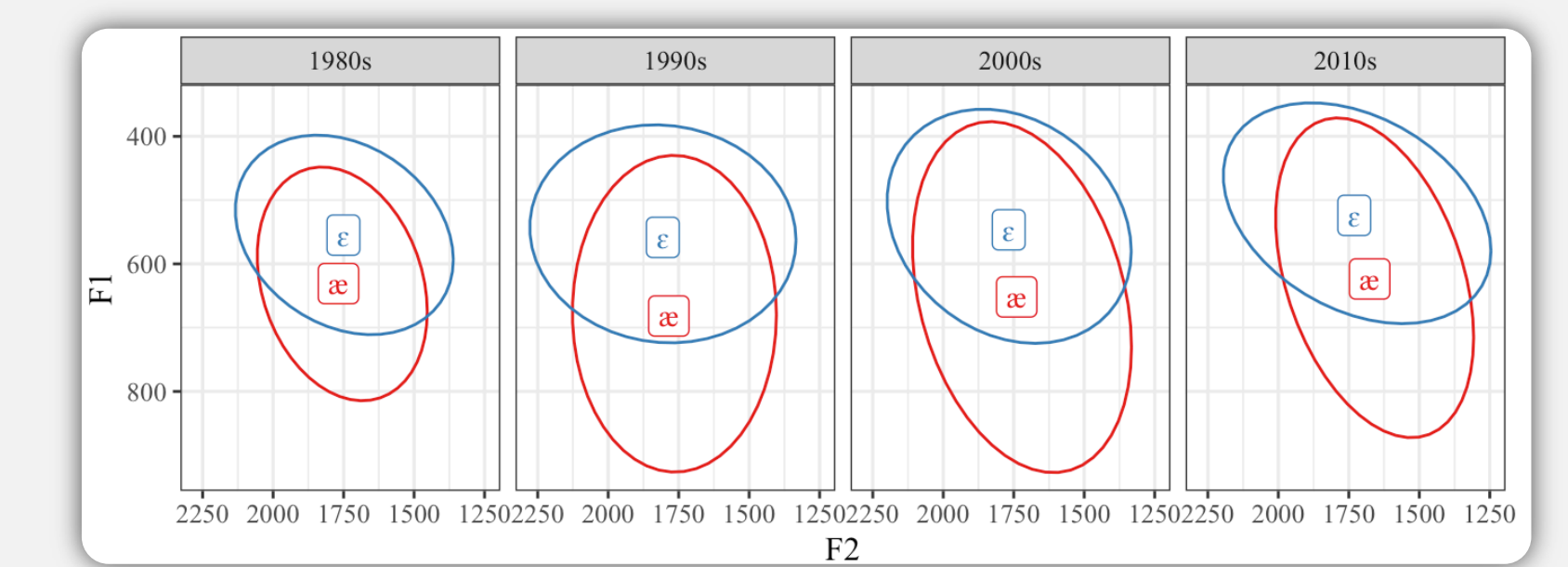
AWY Line: Reversal of /aʊ/ and /aɪ/

CMNE: No accommodation, divergence
South: Production remains characteristic of South



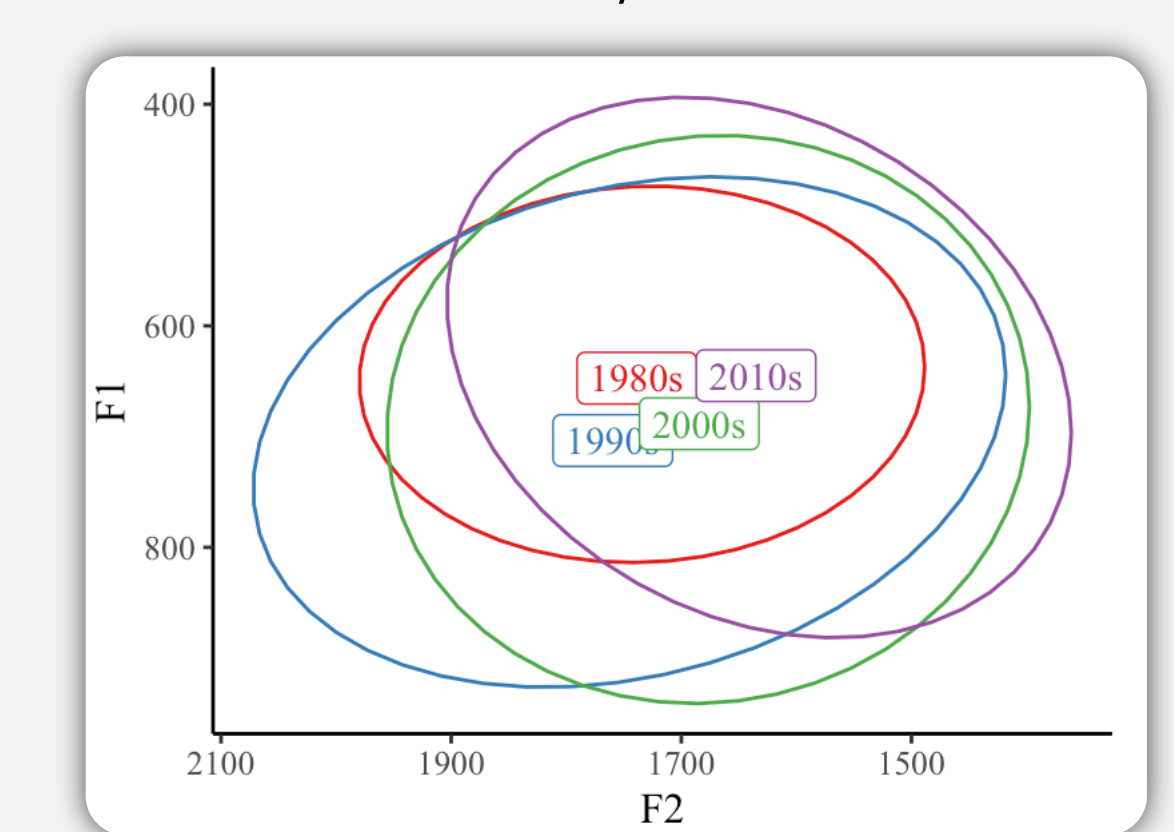
EQ Measure: Reversal of /æ/ and /ɛ/

CMNE: No accommodation, divergence
South: Production remains characteristic of South



/æ/ Raising (excluding prenasal contexts)

CMNE: No accommodation, not enough data to analyze /æ/ before [g]
SVS: /æ/ is raised, stable over time



Conclusion & Discussion:

Lifespan Change/Stability

- In Minneapolis, the Baptist pastor persona is tied to sounding Southern, specifically if one is already from the South.
- Social factors influencing accommodation:
 - Ruth Bader Ginsburg (Shapp, LaFave & Singler 2014), Queen Elizabeth (Harrington, Palethorpe & Watson 2000), & Tom Perry (Stanley & Renwick 2016)
- Indexing identity (performed/prescribed speech)
 - Across audiences: Martin Luther King, Jr. (Wolfram et al. 2016)
 - Via stable linguistic patterns: Sir Attenborough (MacKenzie 2017) & Noam Chomsky (Kwon 2014)
- Identities are tied to profession and social standing

Linguistic Authority & Authenticity (Perceived & Performed Identity)

- Covert "southernness" in use of less iconic SVS features
 - like /u/ fronting and overlapping front vowels
 - Goldilocks conundrum (Balance of authenticity and authority)
Not too Southern to maintain **authority** in community as a leader
- Just Southern enough to be **authentically** Baptist

Takeaway: Piper's vowel stability, and occasional increase in "southernness", is suggestive of his **authenticity** and **authority** as the Baptist pastor within the domain of preaching

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