

# Competition in the Linguistic system:

*A Variationist Sociolinguistic perspective*

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# Variationist Sociolinguistics

- “If the language has to be structured in order to function efficiently, how do people continue to talk while the language changes?”
  - Labov 1972:xv



# Variationist Sociolinguistics

- Spoken data; often highly vernacular
- Principle of accountability,
  - To prove *ø* I could do it,
  - I had to prove *that* I could do it. (CMK/b)
- Competition, Probabilistic choices,
- The fundamental unit of change is not the rule but the *environmental constraint* within the rule
  - Labov 1982:75



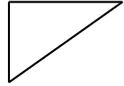
# Language Variation & Change

- Competition between variants at all levels of grammar
  - Lexis, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse-pragmatics
    - Labov, Trudgill, Milroy, Wolfram, Fasold, etc.
  - *supper/dinner; 'vase' [vez]/[vɔz]; somebody/someone; I say; I says; I don't know anything/I know nothing; she's going to be cheeky/she'll be cheeky; like you know/so you see*



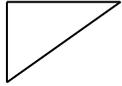
# Competition & Constraints

- Variation
- Heterogeneity
- Layering
- Alternation
- Optionality
- Constraints
- Weights
- Advantage
- Ranking



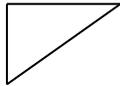
# Competition & Constraints

- Competition can endure across communities, countries, time and space
- **BUT ...** the patterning and weights of the constraints distinguish varieties in ways that expose a deeper understanding of linguistic phenomena
- Adaptive vs. evolutive change



# Types of change

- Change from above
  - Adaptive change
  - Occurs with reference to socio-cultural circumstances
- Change from below
  - Evolutive change
  - Occurs with reference to the linguistic system that gives rise to it



# Techniques of VSLX

- Descriptive-interpretive strand of modern Linguistics
  - Sankoff 1988: 142-3
- Whenever a choice can be perceived as having been made in the course of linguistic performance ... it is difficult to avoid invoking notions and methods of *statistical inference*
  - Sankoff 1988: 151

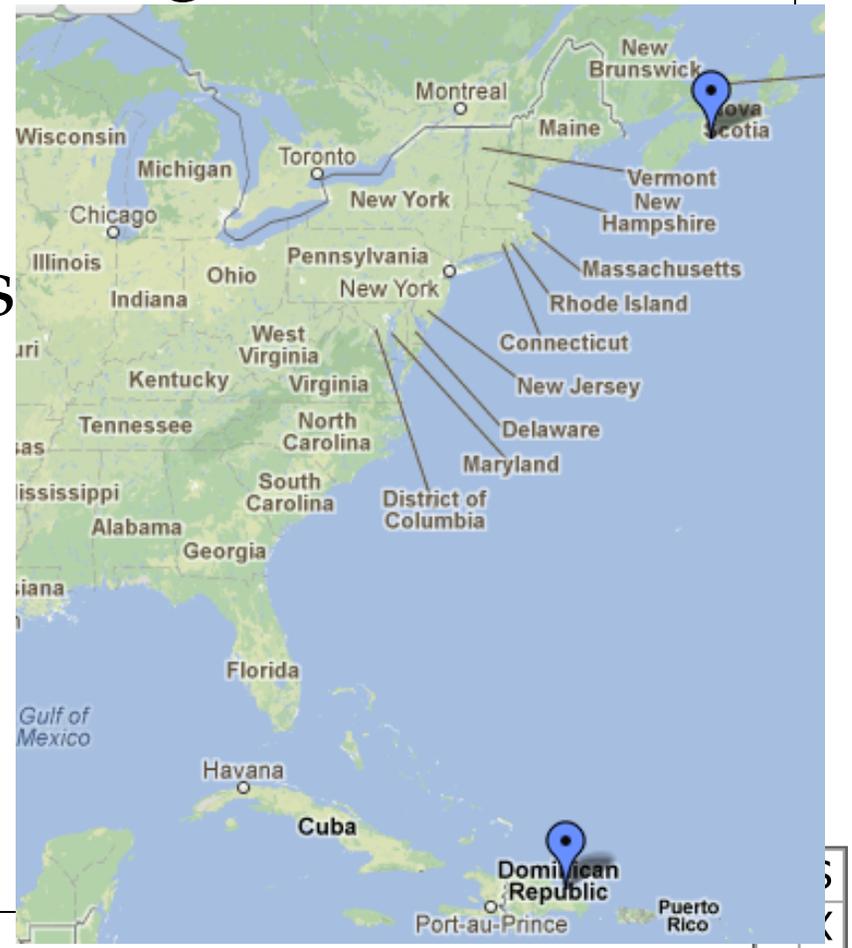


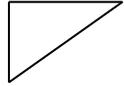
# Quantitative Methods

1. Statistical significance, which predictors (factors) are statistically significant and which are not
2. Constraint ranking / hierarchy, the relationship among categories within a predictor “*the grammar underlying the variation*”
3. Relative strength, weights, i.e. which predictor is strong or weak?

# Origins of AAVE

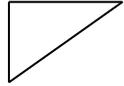
- ✧ African Nova Scotian English,  
Samaná English
- ✧ Focus on forms,  
variation, constraints
- ✧ Issues of ancestry  
and origins
- ✧ Comparative





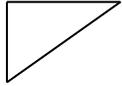
# Variable (-s) 3<sup>rd</sup> singular

- When she *come* out she *goes* and she *takes* her children. When she's on vacation well, she *remain* in the home. (SAM/009)
- Now he *make* plenty corn with them ten hands ... (ESR/010)
  - Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989, 1991, 1994



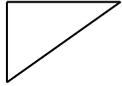
# Variable (-s) 3<sup>rd</sup> plural

- They *speak* the same English. But, you see, the English people *talks* with grammar. (SAM/007)
- When the plums *comes* off it ain't gonna be that broad (NPR/039)
  - Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989, 1991, 1994



# Full NPs

- *Tractors* runs away. (6 / 245)
- There's a few *jackdaws* comes out the back. (1 / 362)
- *Me legs* aches a bit. I got it in me knee joints now. (7 / 303)



# Pronouns

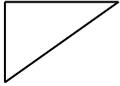
- **They** *sell* tickets so they know near enough how many's coming round about. (3 / 365)
- **They** *keeps* 'ee, they *keeps* 'ee alive, and there's times when you'm dread to see 'em go. (5 / 036)
- 'Cos they've got about 3 or 4 farms, what **they** *rents* off, you know. (2 / 367)

# Northern Subject Rule

- When the subject is a noun, adjective, interrogative or relative pronoun, or when the verb and subject are separated by a clause, the verb takes the termination *-s* in all persons.

– Lindley Murray 1795:211



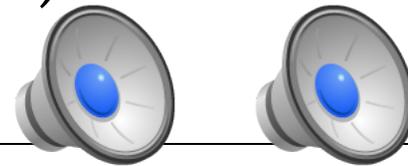


# Northern Subject Rule

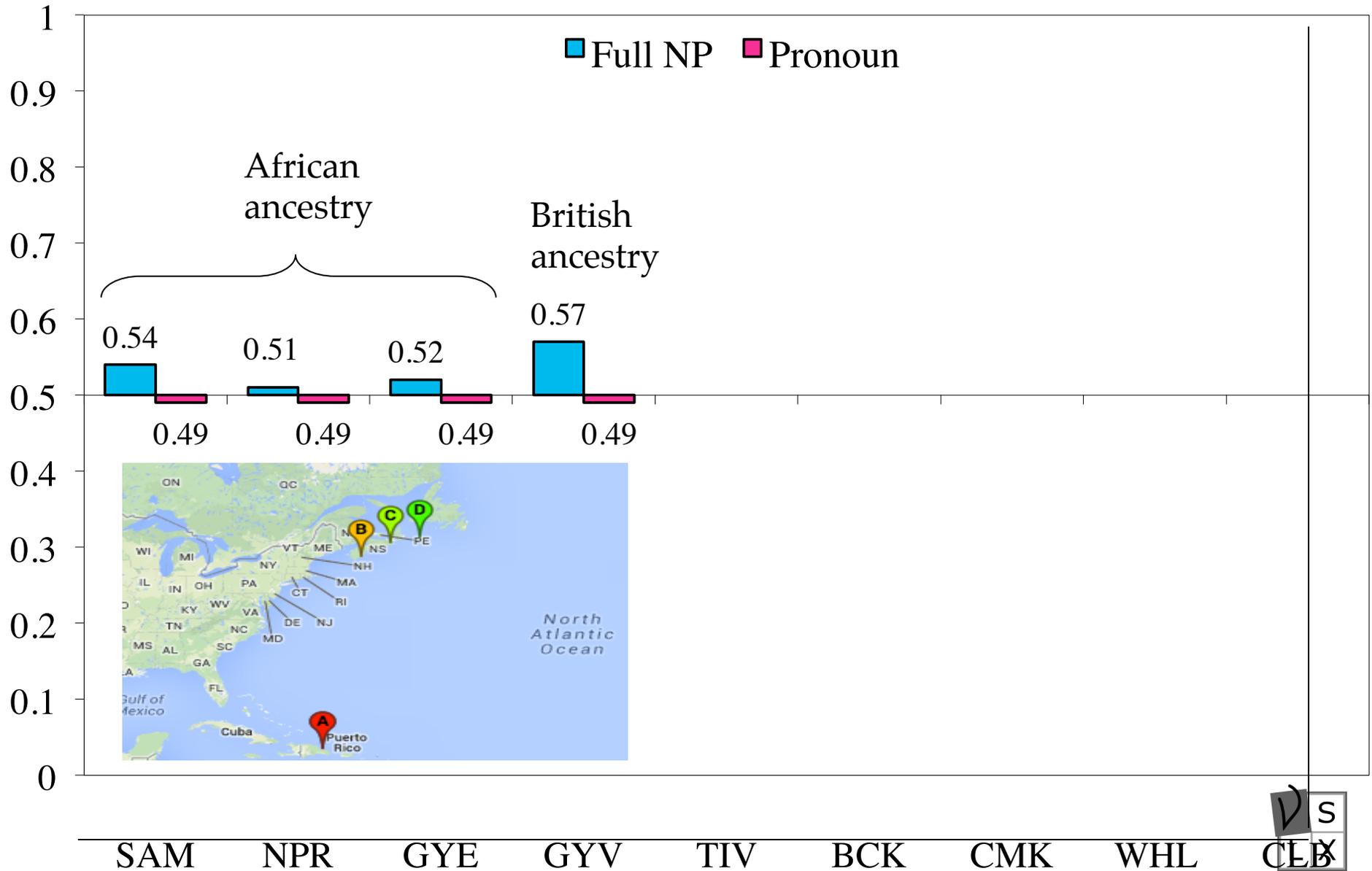
- Interpreted quantitatively *-s*, expected to be more frequent after a noun phrase than after pronouns.

– *-s with nouns > ∅ with pronouns*

– The cattle all *goes* to, to the big markets, these days... they *go* straight to the slaughter house. (DVN/008)



# Constraint Ranking — verbal -s





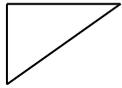
# Origins of constraints

- 3rd singular **-s** absence is found in African American communities, but not in the founder English dialects in Southwest England
  - Wolfram 2000:55

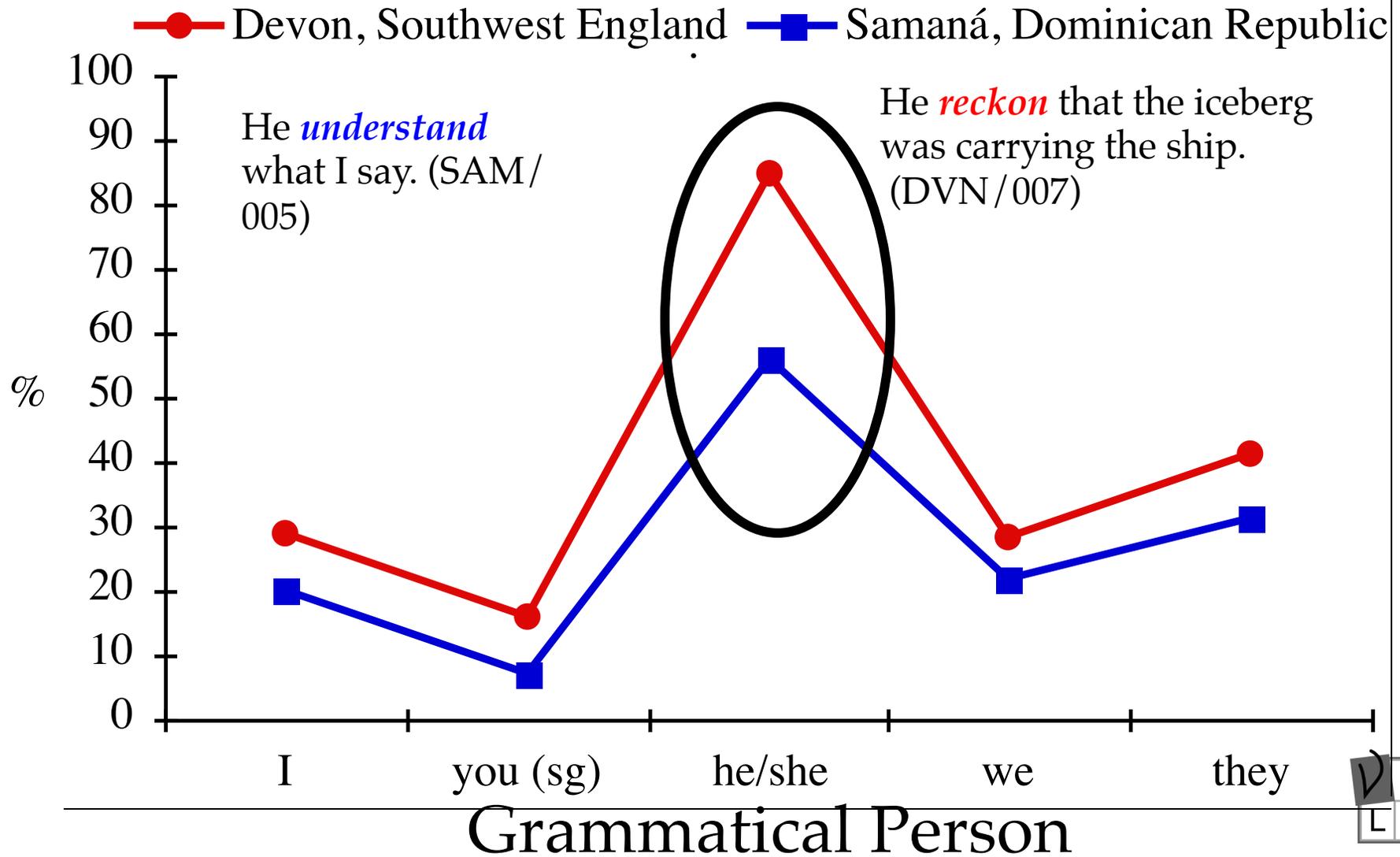
# UK Dialects Early 2001's

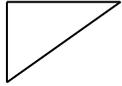
- Dialectal variation
- Linguistic competition
- Constraints
- Language change and regional differences





# Proportion of -s absence

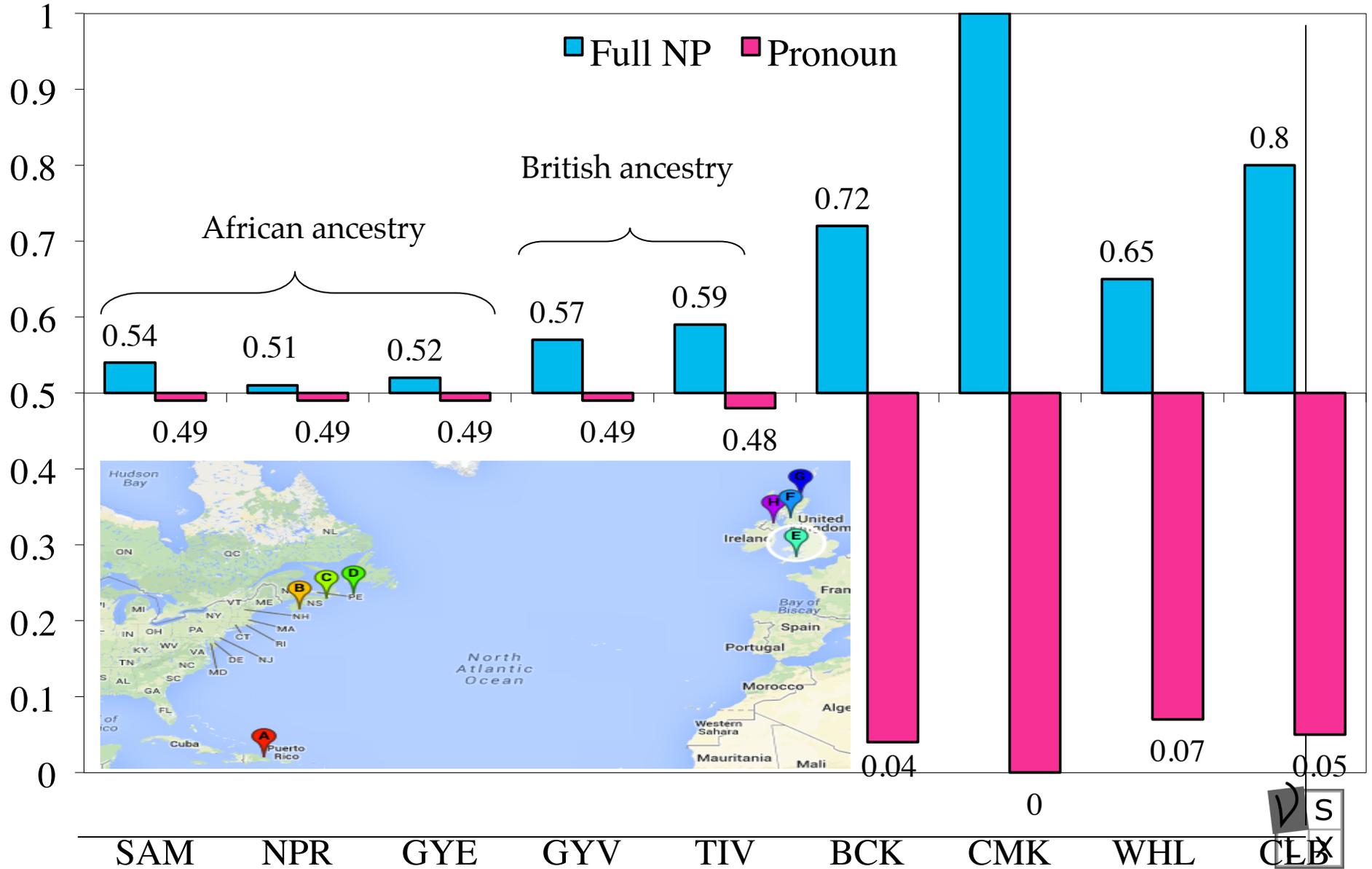




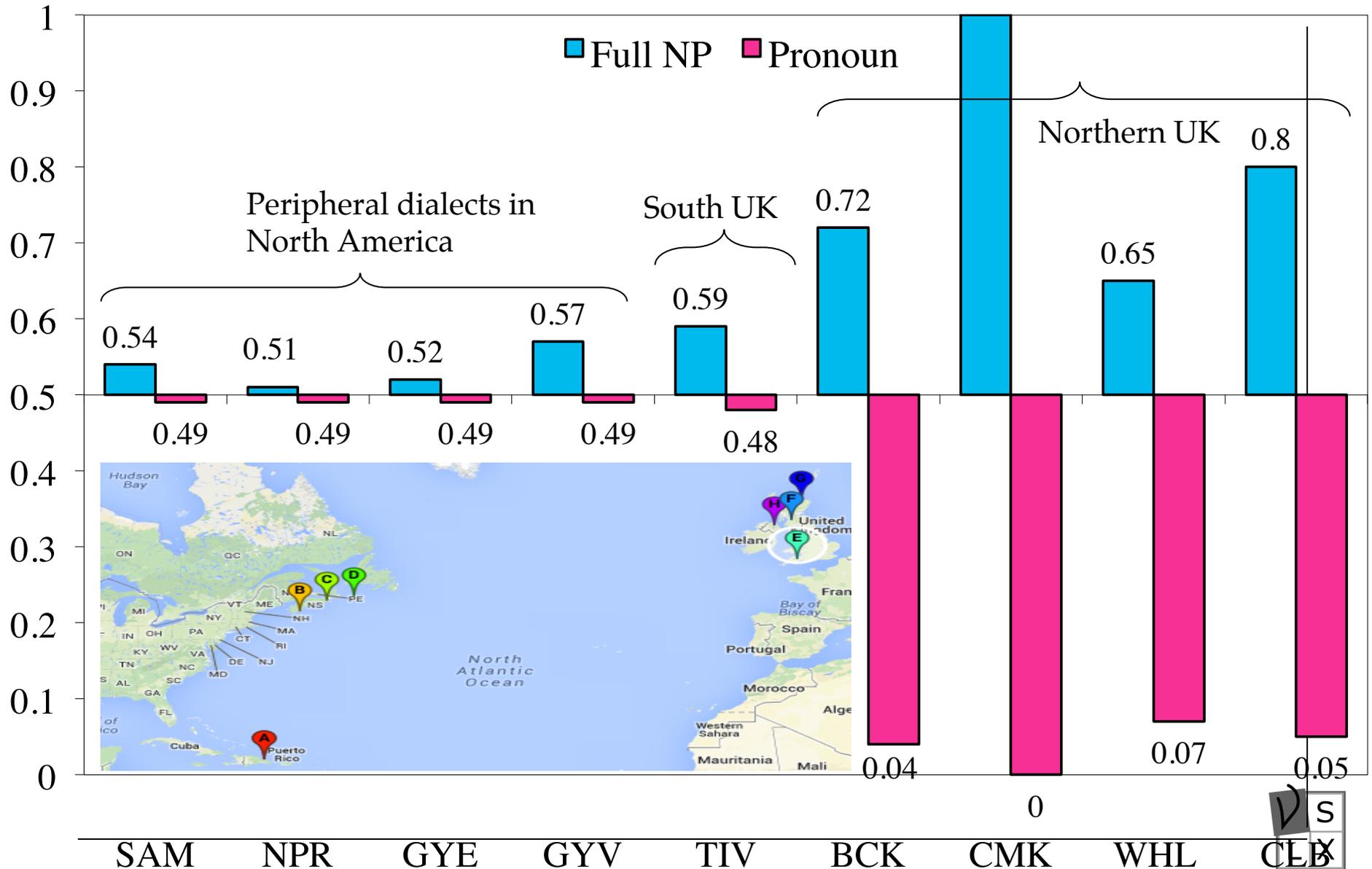
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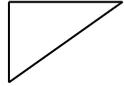
- European American pattern
  - a **strong** subject constraint, *-s* is favored for noun phrases over pronouns.
- African American Vernacular pattern
  - “**relaxation** of” the noun phrase constraint
    - Wolfram 2000

# Constraint Ranking — verbal -s



# Constraint Ranking — verbal -s





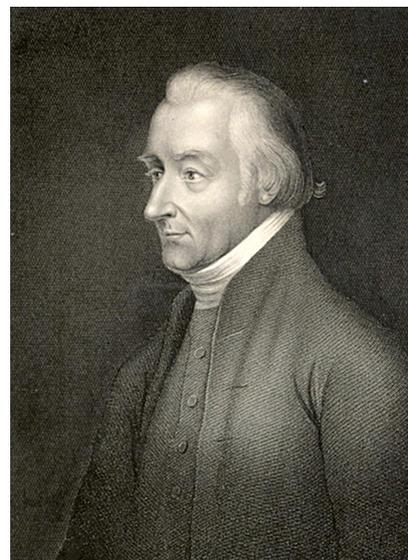
# Competition & Constraints

- Constraints can endure across communities, countries, time and space
- **BUT ...** weights of the constraints distinguish varieties in ways that expose a deeper understanding of linguistic phenomena
- Adaptive vs. evolutive change

# A historical remnant

Variable verbal *-s* exists in English dialects all over the British Isles and North America

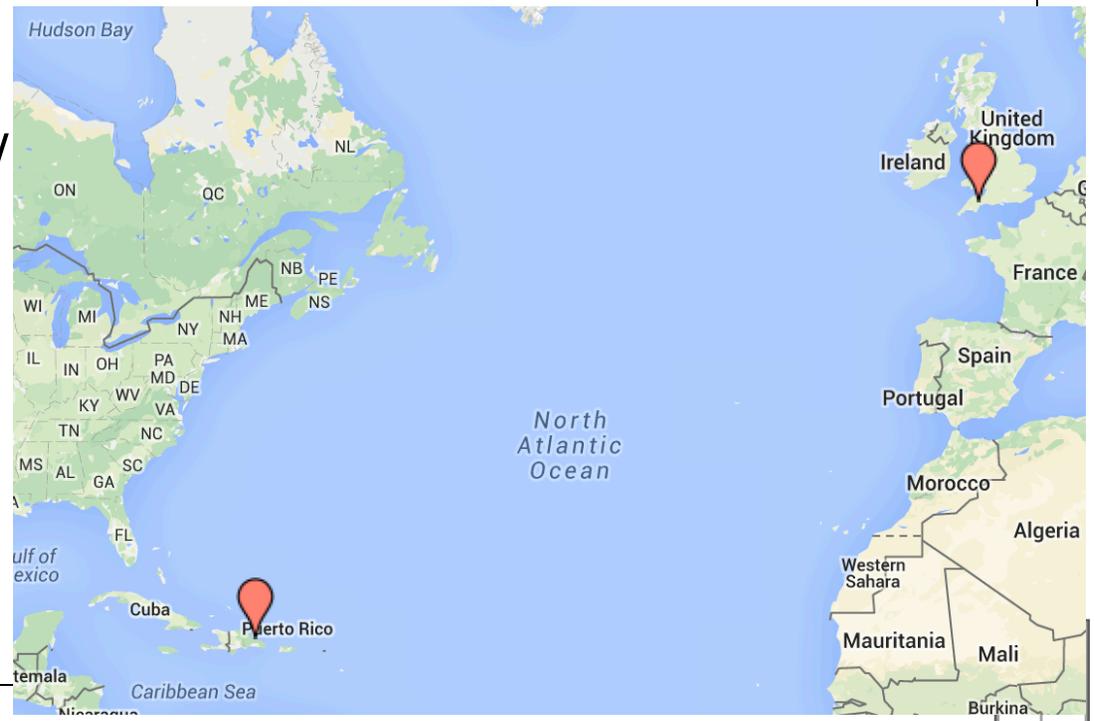
- An older feature of English —  
*The Northern Subject Rule*
- Qualitative differences expose transmission vs. diffusion



Lindley Murray

# Trans-Atlantic Comparison 2001's

- ✧ Samaná English, Devonshire English
- ✧ Focus on competition, constraints,
- ✧ Issues of ancestry  
and origins
- ✧ Comparative/  
historical





# Variable (*did*)

## Samaná, Dominican Republic: [SAM]

- I *did like* to eat the sugar. I *used to* like to eat the sugar. (SAM/J)
  - Tagliamonte, 1991

## Somerset, Southwest England: [SMT]

- It was always what everyone *used to* do when you *did hear* the air-raid sirens. (SMT / d / 935)
  - Jones & Tagliamonte, 2003



# English origin constraints

## Parallel processing

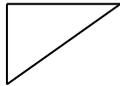
- And she all the time *did love* me. She all the time *did tell* me the medicines was good for the children. (SAM/S/1569)

## Adverb position

- You *did* ALWAYS *keep* a jar cider 'round the back of the rick. (SMT/m/3967)

## Clause Type

- They had some vessel what *did steal* them out. (SAM/S/1788)



# Creole Origin Constraints

## Stative Anterior effect

1. [-stative, +anterior]

A barrel of coal, they was *pass* here. Four and half. Well I *did buy* at three and a half. (SAM/F/2829)

2. [+stative, -anterior]

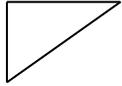
She *lived* over Greenways, but her daughter *did live* just out of Wincanton. (SMT/d/1198)

3. [-stative, -anterior]

Oh you had to *make* the rick properly otherwise he *did fall* down. (SMT/c/571)

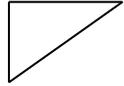
# Logistic regression— variable (*did*)

	SOMERSET			SAMANÁ		
	Input 0.064	Total N 3388		Input 0.062	Total N 1047	
	FW	%	N	FW	%	N
<b>HISTORICAL CONSTRAINTS</b>						
<b>PARALLEL PROCESSING</b>						
Preceding <i>did</i>	.85 ↑	27	222	.80 ↑	25	24
Preceding other	.47 ↑	6	3166	.49 ↑	7	1019
Range	38			31		
<b>ADVERB POSITION</b>						
Preverbal	.79 ↑	23	56	.87 ↑	33	9
Other/None	.49 ↑	7	3332	.50 ↑	7	1034
Range	30			37		
<b>CLAUSE TYPE</b>						
Subordinate	.60 ↑	10	513	.68 ↑	16	139
Other	.48 ↑	6	2875	.47 ↑	6	904
Range	12			21		
<b>CREOLE CONSTRAINTS</b>						
<b>STATIVITY/ANTERIORITY</b>						
-stative, + anterior	.72 ↑	17	119	.90 ↑	38	24
-stative, -anterior	.55 ↑	8	1921	.54 ↑	8	593
+stative, -anterior	.40	4	1285	.41	5	406
Range	32			49		



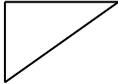
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# Competition, Constraints & Weights

- An entire suite of constraints is preserved across diverse circumstances
- Remarkable constancy in time and space across a different sub-systems of grammar
- **BUT ...** the relative weighting of the constraints diverges in minor ways
- Evolutive change with minor restructuring

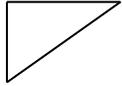


## Variable (have got)

- He *'s got* bad-breath; he *has* smelly feet.  
(YRK)



- They *got* a lovely family bible... Thomas *has* it. (CLB / q)
- We *'ve got* enough money; we *got* some food. (BCK / t)
  - Tagliamonte, 2003, 2013

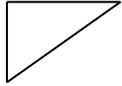


# UK Varieties

## 2001's

- Multiple communities from north to south
- Focus on constraints, language change and regional differences
- geographic diffusion

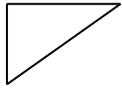




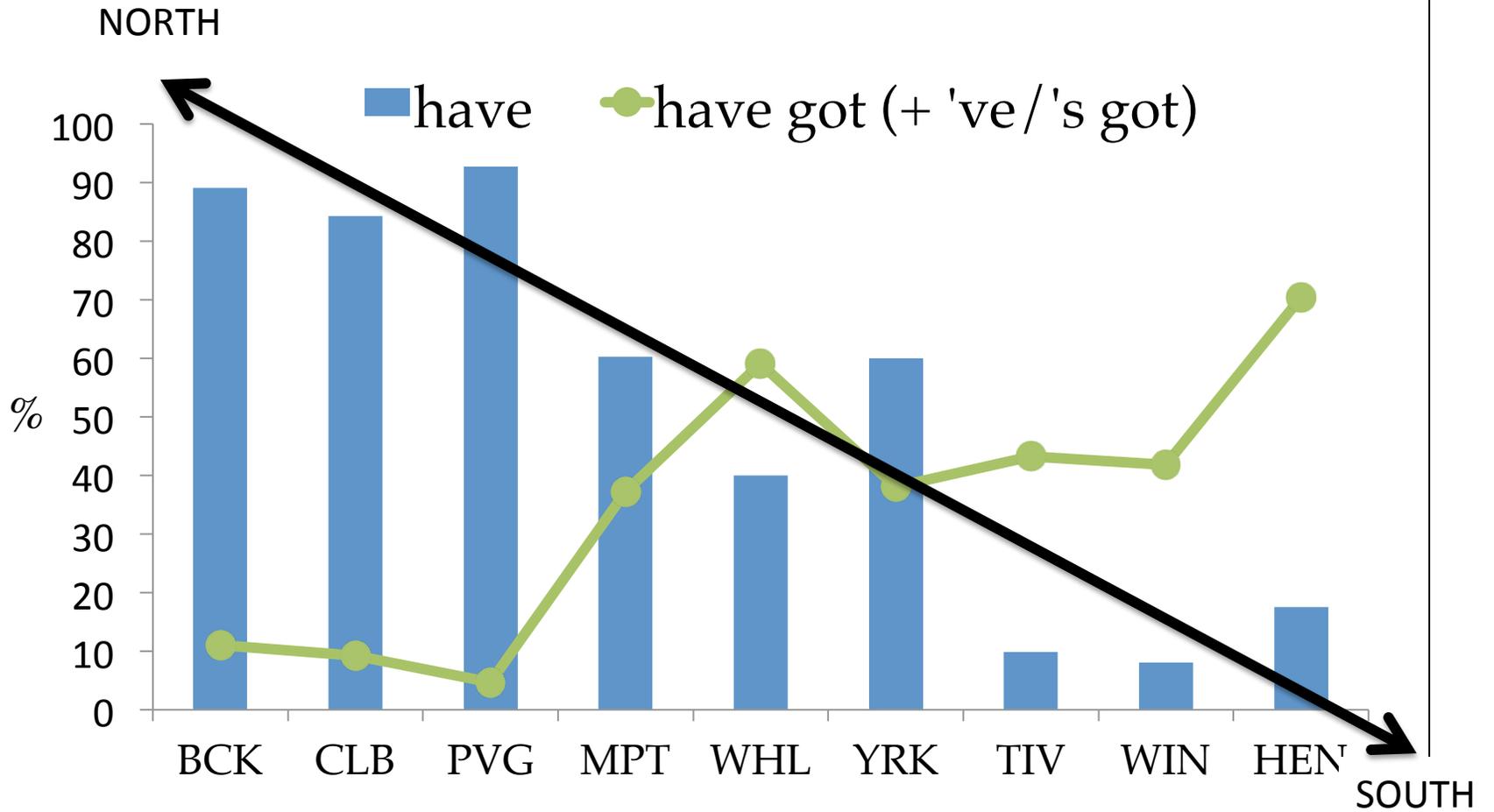
# Trajectory of change

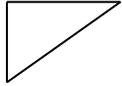
*have* → 'v/'s → 'v/'s got → *got*





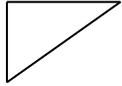
# Competition





# Predictors for *have got*

TYPE OF COMPLEMENT		TYPE OF SUBJECT	
Concrete	✓	Pronoun	✓
Abstract	✗	NP	✗



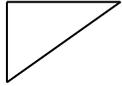
# Type of Subject

Pronouns:

- *I've got* a phone number. (CMK / !)
- *You've got* Scotch blood in you. (MPT / @)

Noun phrases:

- *The turbines has* a habit o sticking sometimes. (PVG / g)
- *Every area has* different words for things. (PVG / d)



# Type of complement

Abstract:

- You *have* these *memories* lass. (CMK/q)
- I've a *notion* to go to the trip. (CLB/k)

Concrete:

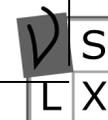
- She *has got* near *two thousand pound* with her. (CLB/b)
- They've *got* a very big *boat*, like. (PVG/c)

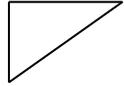
# Relative weight

	NI	CMK	BCK	YRK	MPT	WHL	SSX	DVN	SMT
Corrected Mean	.11	.52	.11	.36	.39	.72	.83	.91	.92
Proportion	12%	53%	11%	44%	39.8%	73%	82%	91%	92%
<b>Type of complement</b>									
Concrete	<b>.55</b>	<b>.55</b>	.51	<b>.55</b>	<b>.54</b>	<b>.54</b>	<b>.54</b>	.56	.52
Abstract	<b>.24</b>	<b>.23</b>	.36	<b>.28</b>	<b>.32</b>	<b>.33</b>	<b>.24</b>	.50	.34
<b>Type of Subject</b>									
Pro	<b>14%</b>	.50	.51	<b>.58</b>	<b>.52</b>	.52	.51	.52	.41
NP	<b>0%</b>	.49	.42	<b>.09</b>	<b>.33</b>	.38	.41	.27	.39

Robust competition

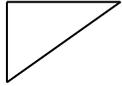
Dominance of  
new variant





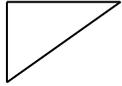
# Competition, Constraints & Weights

- Diversity of constraint effects and varying weights across communities
- The evolution of the linguistic system is visible in shifting patterns
- Regional diversity reflects change
- Synchrony mirrors diachrony



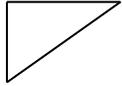
## Summing up ...

- Competition, constraints and weights galore!
- Linguistic data are probabilistic with variegated complex architectures
- Competition is systematically constrained from multiple sources



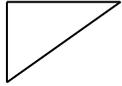
## Summing up ...

- Varying constraints and weights can distinguish dialects, varieties, origins, trajectories of change and types of change, etc.



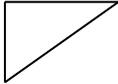
# Summing up ...

- The evolution of the linguistic system can be viewed in competition
- Competition, constraints and weights taken together offer important evidence for interpreting and explaining language



# Questions

- What is the full inventory of evidence from competition, constraints and weights in the literature?
- What do the constraints mean?
- Where do they come from?
- *Causation remains mysterious*



# Selected References

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