

Accent Accommodation in American Students Studying in the UK

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INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted while on an academic study abroad at the University of Oxford, and subsequently expanded on in a class on quantitative linguistic methods at the University of Georgia.

The primary research question was if American exchange students in Oxford, UK would accommodate their language while speaking with a British English speaker versus an American English speaker, and if this accommodation was at all influenced by the participant's views towards British culture.



HYPOTHESIS

- Speakers preferring British culture would seek social prestige from British citizens and accommodate towards British English (BrE) pronunciations
- Speakers preferring American culture would emphasize their American heritage with British citizens and accommodate towards American English (AmE) pronunciations
 - Hypothesis is based on Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles ed. 1991)
 - Also accounted for Audience Design Theory (Bell 1984)

METHODS

- Eight participants interviewed twice over the length of the study abroad
 - All were predetermined as having 'high', 'mid' or 'low' views of Britain
 - Each interview was done by an AmE and then BrE speaker
 - BrE speaker had a Received Pronunciation (RP) accent, as the participants viewed it more highly than a Cockney accent
 - Participants were asked about their American identity and views towards American and British culture, then asked to read a word list

AmE to BrE pronunciation	Open Front to Back Vowel		Open to Mid Back Vowel		Postvocalic r		Intervocalic t	
	Bath	Water	Butter	Better	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE
Word	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE
Dialect	æ	ɑ:	ɑ	ɔ:	r	ø	r	t
Phoneme								

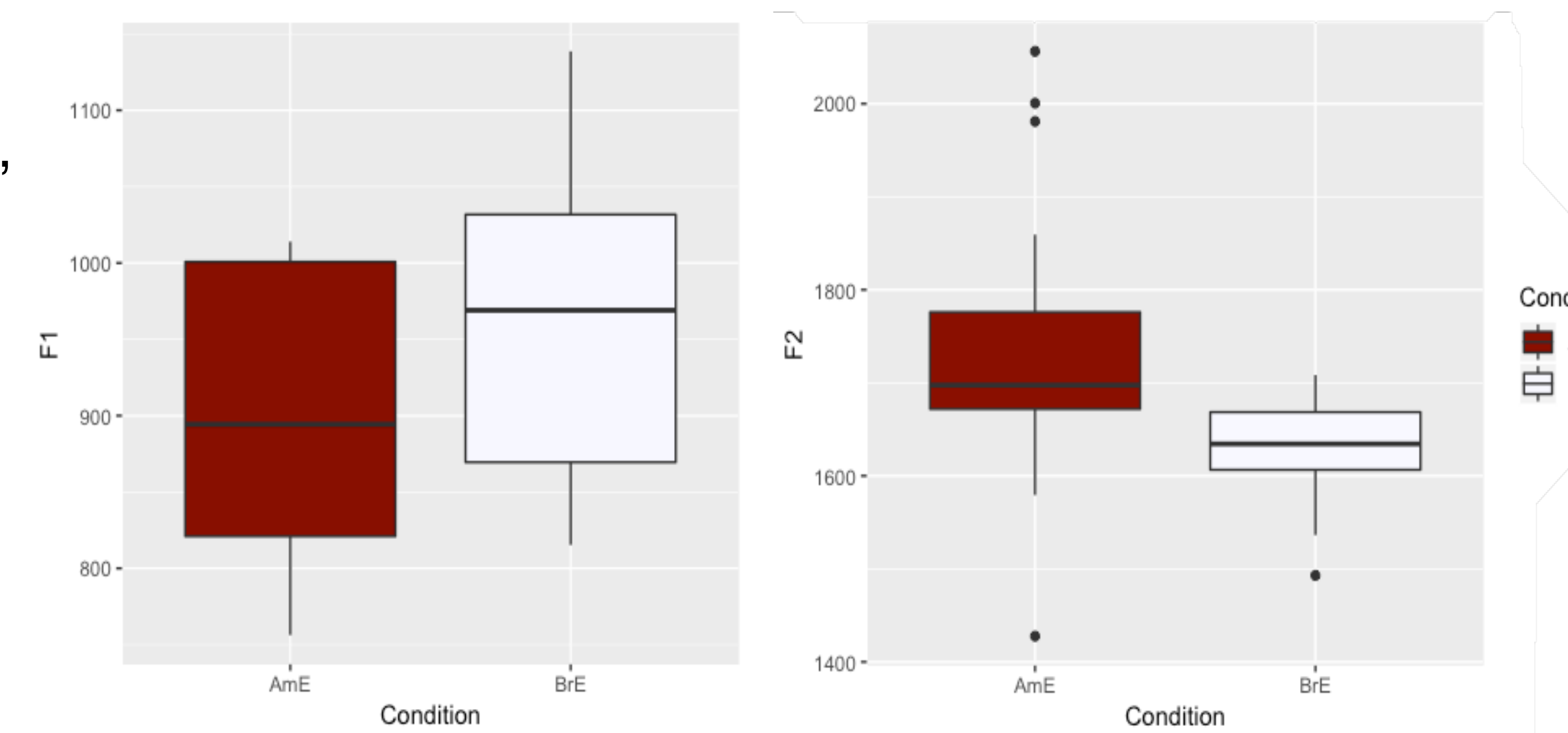
- Resulting data was analyzed and parsed in Praat by the researcher
 - Focused on F1, F2, F3 and duration of phonemes
- Participants filled out postsecondary questionnaires on their views of regional accents
- All final data was analyzed in RStudio with a stepwise linear model

RESULTS

* Condition equates to which speaker the participant was interviewed by

æ to ɑ: shift

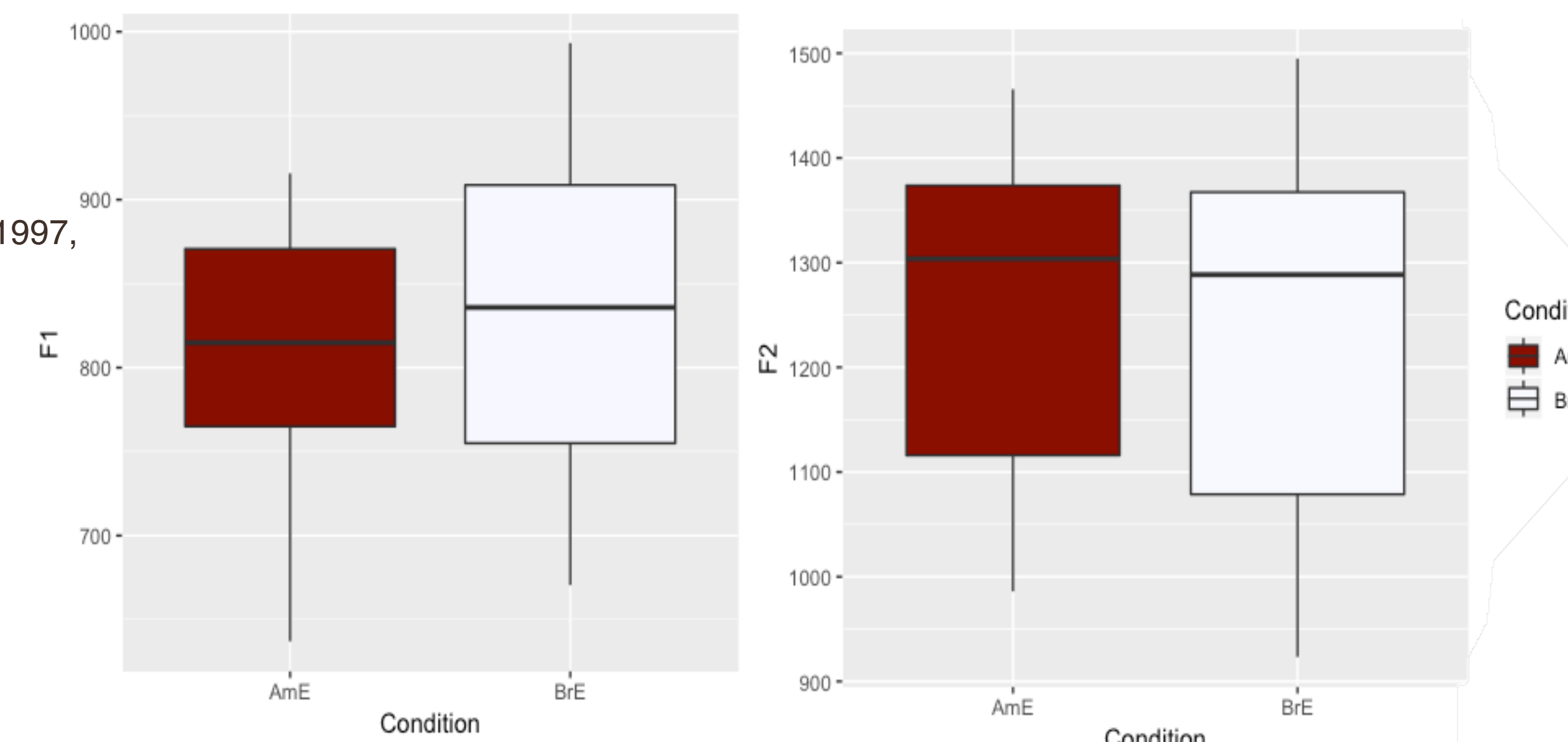
Marked by a higher F1, lower F2 in BrE (Deterding 1997, Hagiwara 1997)



- Strong visual trend towards BrE pronunciation in F1 and F2
- p < .05, passes Shapiro-Wilk test, and bootstrapped overfitting test

ɑ to ɔ: shift

Marked by a lower F1 and F2 in BrE (Deterding 1997, Hagiwara 1997)

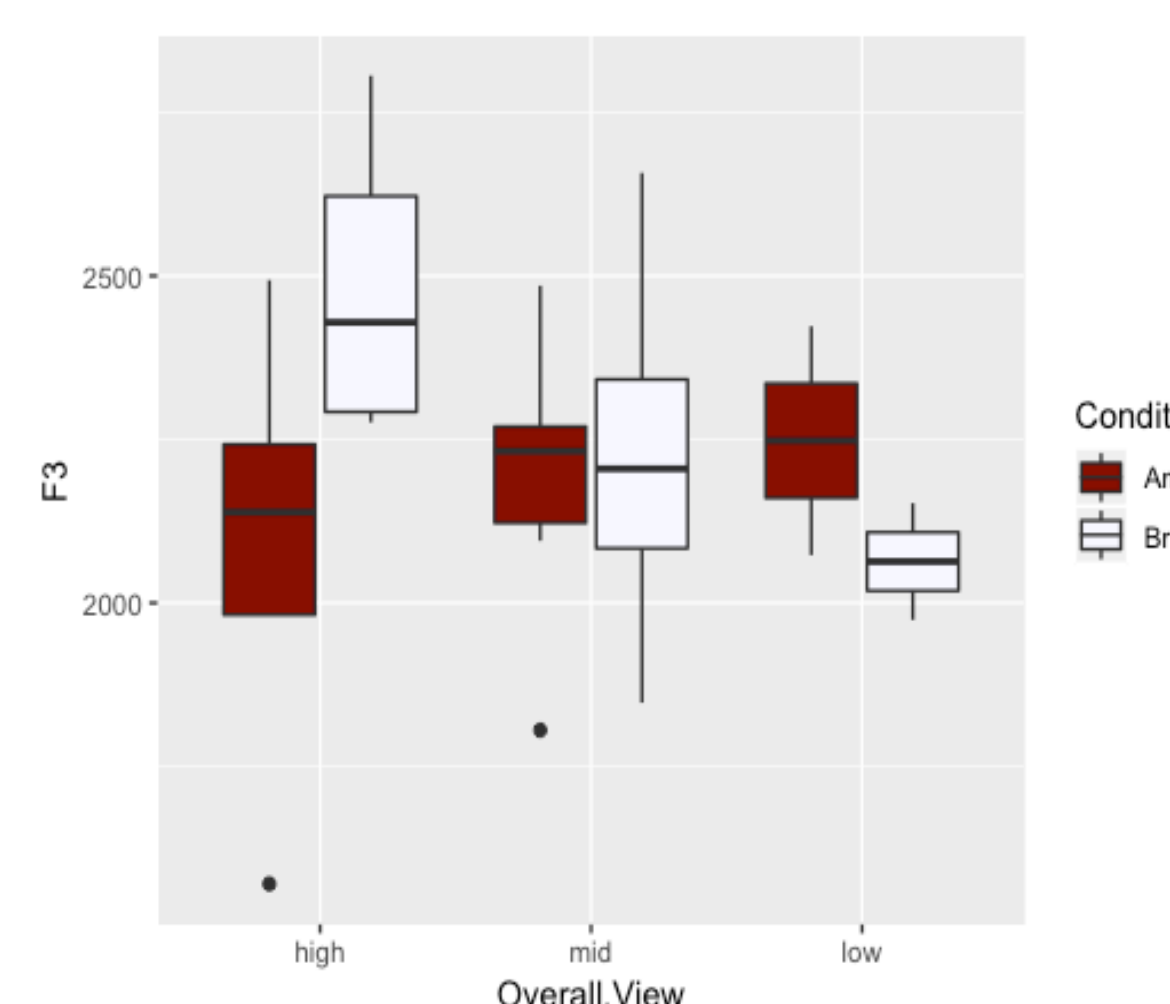


- Visual trends of F1 and F2 lowering not apparent
- p < .05, passes bootstrapped overfitting test, F2 fails Shapiro-Wilk test

Postvocalic r

Marked by a higher F3 in BrE (Yan 2003)

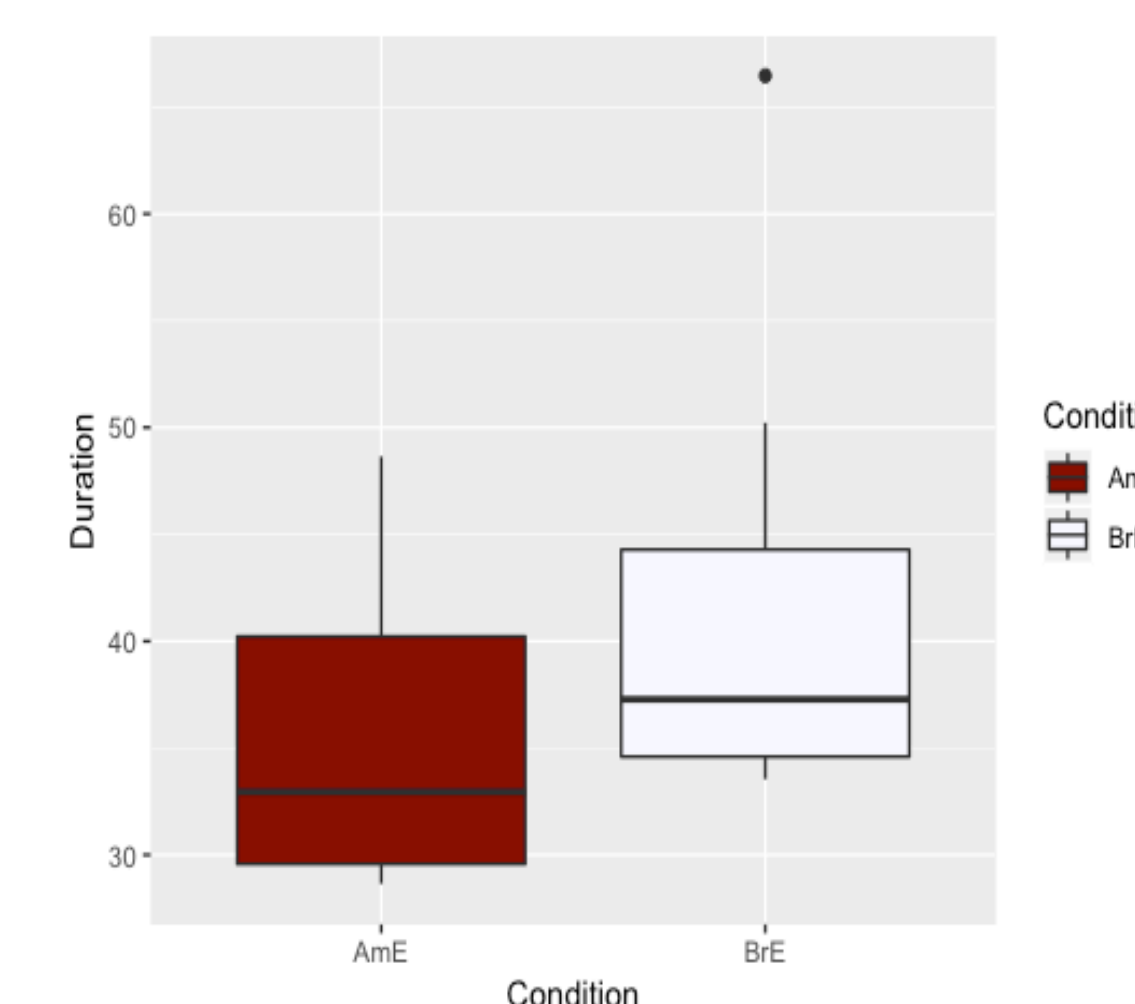
- Speaker view seemed to slightly predict convergence or divergence
- Initially no model fit, but a Tukey Test showed AmE:high and BrE:high yielded lowest p-value



Intervocalic t

Marked by a longer duration in BrE (Smith 2017)

- Visual trend of extended duration apparent
- However, model was overfitted and data was non-normal



CONCLUSIONS

- The æ to ɑ: vowel showed the strongest visual trend towards accent accommodation, and was corroborated by the stepwise model
- ɑ to ɔ: vowel showed little trend towards accent accommodation, possibly due to smaller vowel space than the other tested vowel
- Postvocalic r showed possible convergence in 'high' view speakers, but because of the lack of a fitted model further research is required to make any strong assertions
- Intervocalic t also showed possible convergence, but overfitted and abnormal data also require further research to prove anything

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Collecting more tokens from speakers that also fit these requirements would be beneficial, as it was a fairly small speaker sample
- Collecting other vowels to analyze could be informative as well
 - For Southern speakers, see if /ɪ/ shifts to become more diphthongized
- Consonant phonemes were shorter and more difficult to track than vowels, so a focus solely on vowels could be easier to analyze

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