

BATH Variation amongst West Cornwall Schoolchildren: Using perceptions to understand production

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Introduction

- West Cornish English is a variety spoken in the county of Cornwall, in the far **South West** of the UK (Figure 1)
- Along with other South Western varieties, west Cornish English is **under-researched**, following the 'urban turn' in sociolinguistics (Britain 2017)
- Most of our knowledge of Cornish English is based on the **Survey of English Dialects (SED)** (Wakelin 1975), and we know little about the **social meaning** of the linguistic features of the variety
- This study first uses a **perception experiment** to explore which features of west Cornish English are most **salient** in real time
- It then investigates how the most salient feature, the BATH vowel [a:], has changed across **real time** since the SED
- Finally, it explores why the change may have occurred with a consideration of **style shifting** patterns amongst present-day schoolchildren in the region

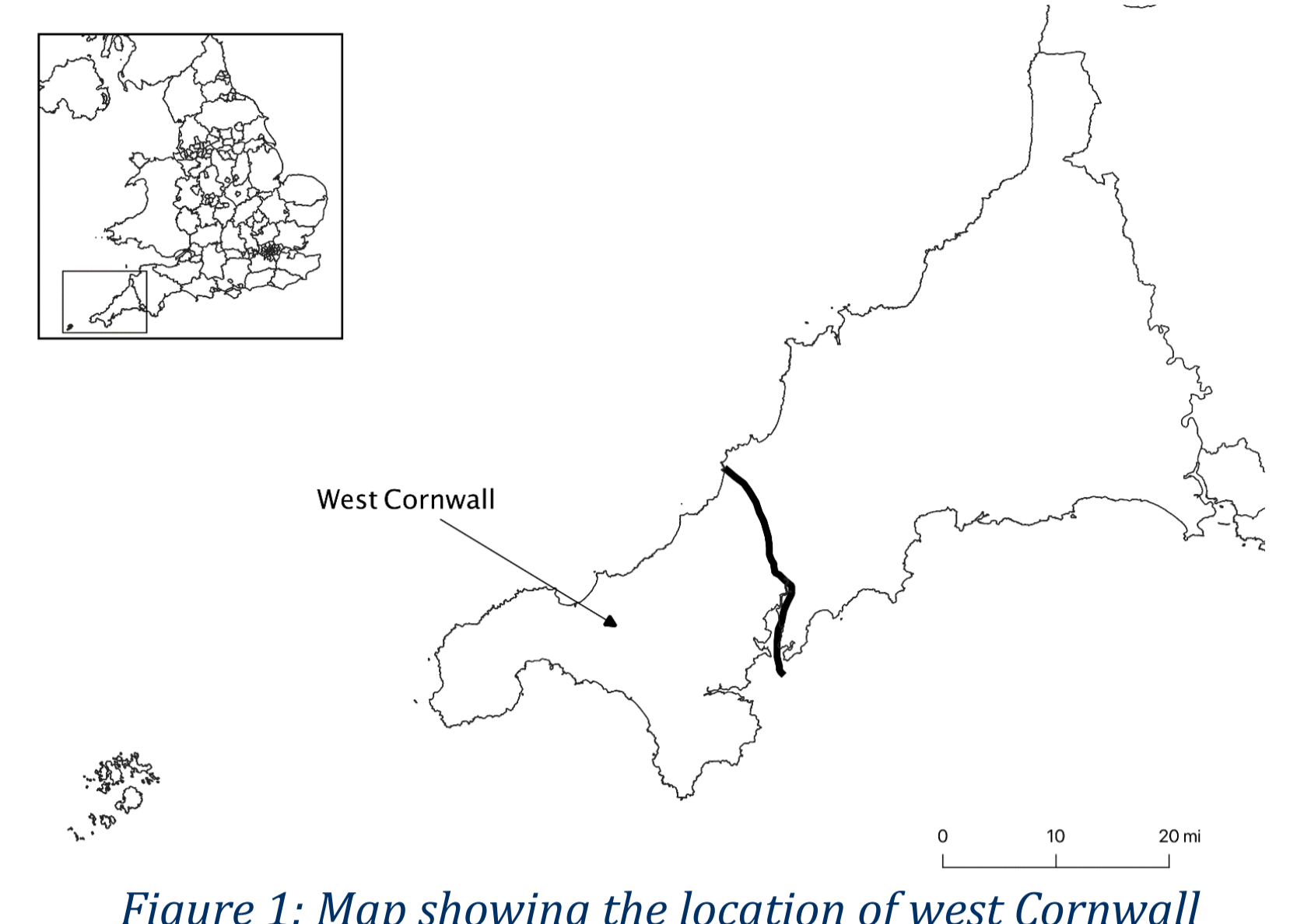


Figure 1: Map showing the location of west Cornwall

Perception – 'Real Time' Reactions to West Cornish English

Experiment Design

- Tested the **salience** of features of west Cornish English using a tool for capturing reactions to speech in **real time**
- Respondents listened to recordings of two middle aged west Cornish English speakers and **'clicked'** on a button whenever something stood out to them
- At the end, they listened to +/- 3 seconds from each click and **commented** on why they had clicked there
- Comments matched to clicks and coded for the feature(s) they responded to

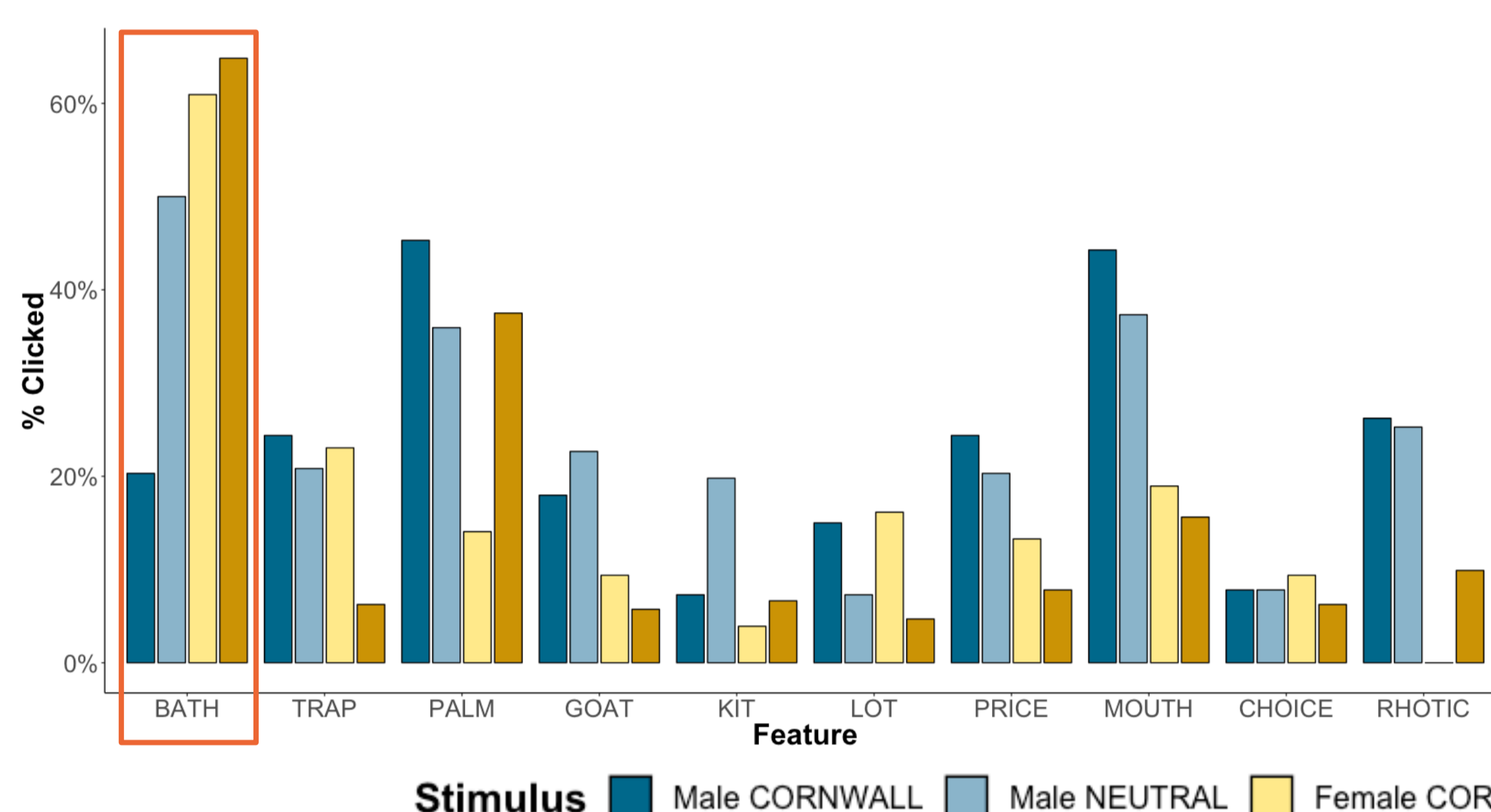


Figure 2: Proportion of clicks received for each Cornish English accent feature in each guise

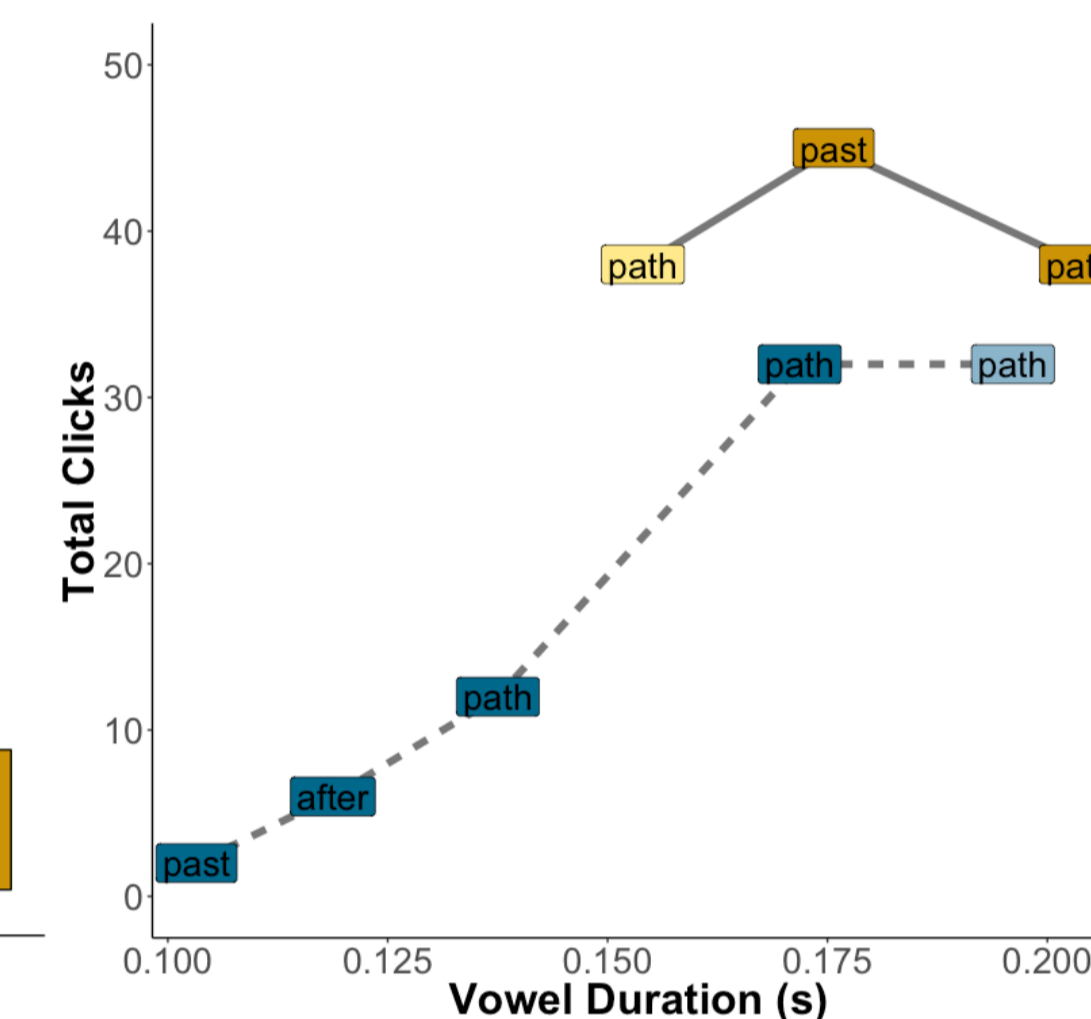


Figure 3: Total clicks for each BATH token according to vowel duration

Results

- The **BATH vowel** was one of the most salient features in the guises (Figure 2)
- The amount of clicks BATH received was directly tied to its **duration** (Figure 3)
- Therefore, the longer variant of **BATH [a:]** is most salient

Links to Rurality

- Montgomery and Moore (2018) used the same tool to test responses to Isles of Scilly English - another South Western variety
- Links between the long TRAP vowel [a:] and the concept of the **'South Western farmer'**
- Possible social meaning of South Western 'long <a>'

Production – BATH Variation in West Cornish English

Study Design

- **Diachronic** and **synchronic** analysis of BATH in west Cornish English
- Two corpora: 7 speakers from the **Survey of English Dialects**, and recordings made in 2018 of **42 Cornish schoolchildren**
- 2018 recordings stratified by different social factors, and **two 'attention to speech' styles: map task and word list**
- **F1, F2, and duration** measurements extracted from LaBB-CAT and Praat, normalised using z-scores
- BATH tokens also **auditorily coded** as fronted/backed/intermediate
- Mixed-Effects Regression models tested **real time** changes in F1, F2, and duration between corpora, and the effect of the **social factors** of variation in the 2018 corpus

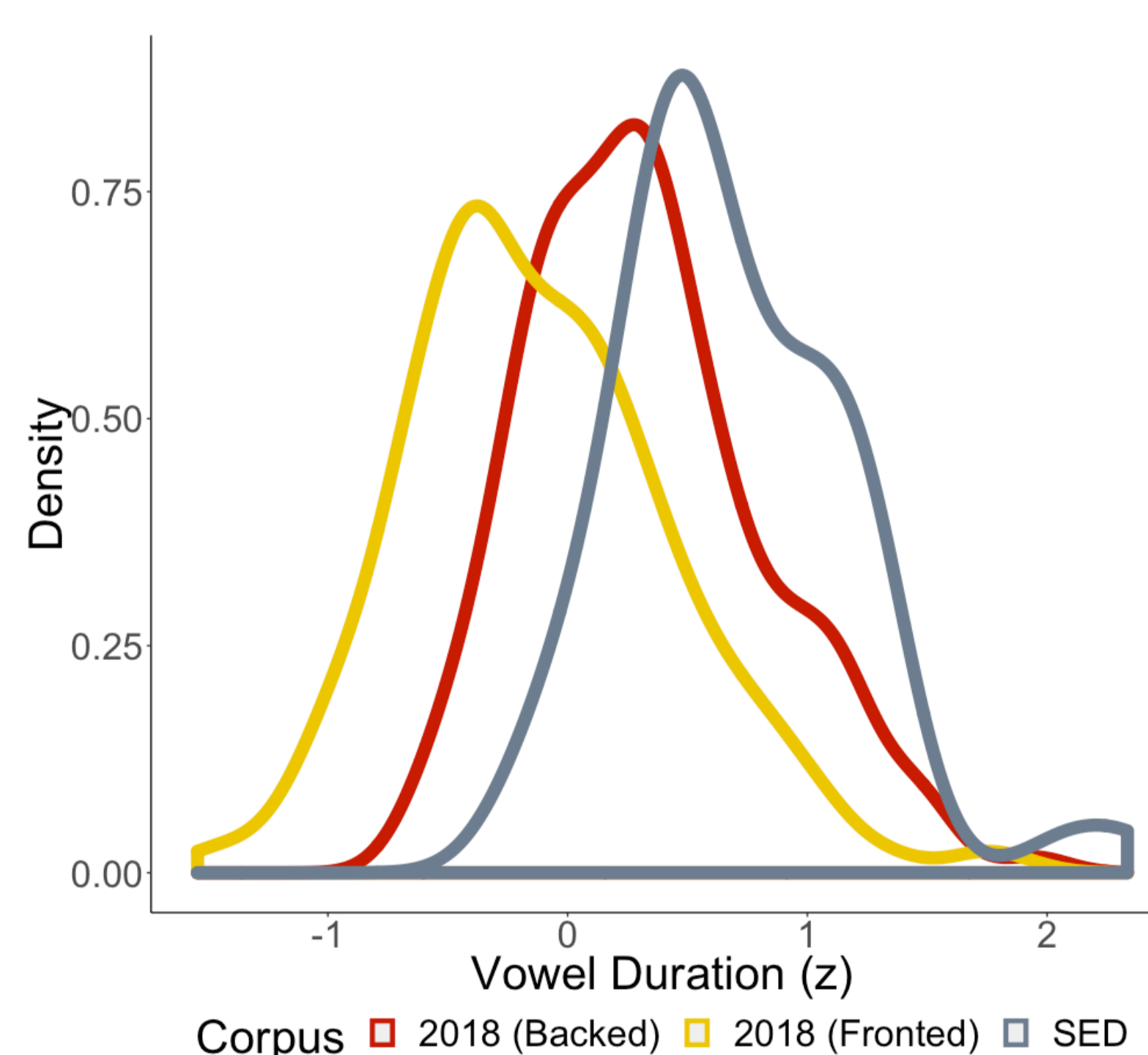


Figure 4: Density plot showing BATH durations in the SED and 2018 corpora, coloured according to auditory quality and corpus

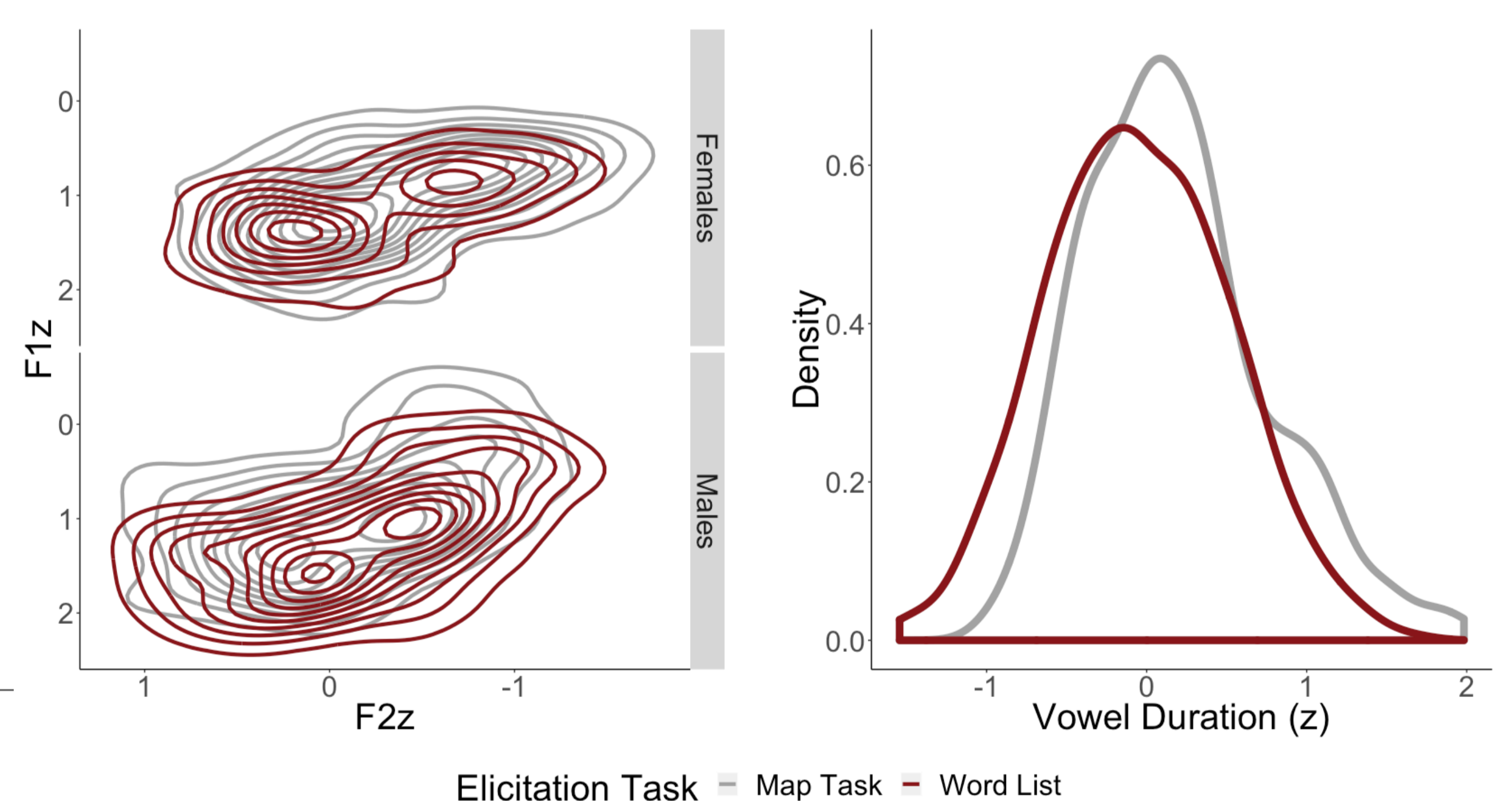


Figure 5: 2D kernel density plot (left) and density plot (right) showing the acoustic parameters of the BATH vowel according to elicitation task and (for vowel quality) gender.

Diachronic Results

- Fronted tokens in the 2018 corpus were **significantly shorter** than backed tokens (Figure 4)
- Significant real time shift towards either backed BATH, or an **innovative short, front BATH vowel** in west Cornwall

Synchronic Results – Style Shifting

- Significant shift **towards fronted BATH** for the girls **and away from lengthened BATH** (for both genders) in most monitored style (Figure 5)
- Suggests that **duration of fronted BATH is stigmatised**, but the quality is not, providing insight into the innovation of short, front BATH vowels in Cornwall

Conclusions

- This study has provided insight into the understudied South Western varieties of English
- Shown how **different acoustic elements of a variable can carry subtly different social meanings**. The duration of the traditional Cornish English BATH vowel may be linked to rurality, while the fronted quality may have more positive associations
- Demonstrated how **rural adolescents are not simply succumbing to the effects of standardisation** but, just like their urban counterparts, are innovative in their language use

References

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- Montgomery, C. & Moore, E. 2018. Evaluating S(c)illy voices: The effects of salience, stereotypes, and co-present language variables on real-time reactions to regional speech. *Language* 94(3). 629–661.
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