

# Indexicality, sociolinguistic awareness, and language change



## How does sociolinguistic awareness affect language change?

Social meaning impacts speakers' use of features (Labov 1963; Eckert 2019), which in turn affects language change.

**Awareness** hypothesized to play a major role: it distinguishes *indicators*, *markers*, and *stereotypes* (Labov 1972) – and is the distinction between *change from above* and *change from below* (Labov 2001)

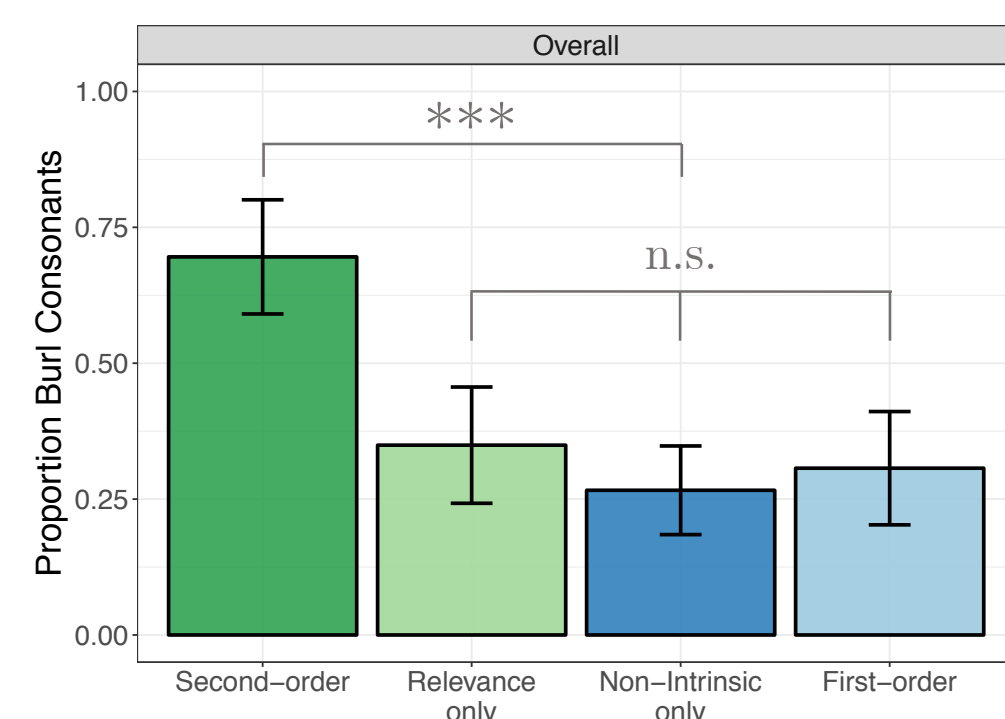
The framework of **orders of indexicality** (Silverstein 2000; Eckert 2008) considers not the *awareness* of speakers, but how **intrinsic** and **socially relevant** the traits are that are being indexed by a variant.

Recent research (Draeger & Kirtley 2016; Squires 2016; Eckert 2019) argues that social meaning can exist and play a role even when speakers are **not overtly aware** of it.

Here, we investigate how participants' linguistic behavior compares with self reports of their behavior.

## Alien language game

In previous work (Sneller & Roberts 2018), we used an alien language game (Roberts 2017) to show that **borrowing** occurs more readily when a variant is both *non-intrinsic* and *socially relevant* (higher-order index) than when it is neither or only one of those traits (first-order index). We manipulated the indexicality of one feature of the “Burl” player (“stronger” aliens) dialect, and tested how the indexicality of Burl forms affected the rate at which “Wiwo” players (“weaker” aliens) borrowed them (Figure 1).



Metalinguistic “yes” is more likely to be right than metalinguistic “no”

(but only for forms with higher-order indexicality)



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## Testing sociolinguistic awareness

The alien language game included two types of variation: vowel variation (manipulated to be generally below the level of awareness, no social indexicality) and consonant variation (above the level of awareness, varying levels of indexicality). For consonants, variants were associated with (a) non-intrinsic traits (b) socially-relevant traits (c) both, or (d) neither

We examine how well “Wiwo” participants’ actual borrowing of Burl forms aligns with their self-reported borrowing.

Metalinguistic awareness collected in post-game survey by asking:

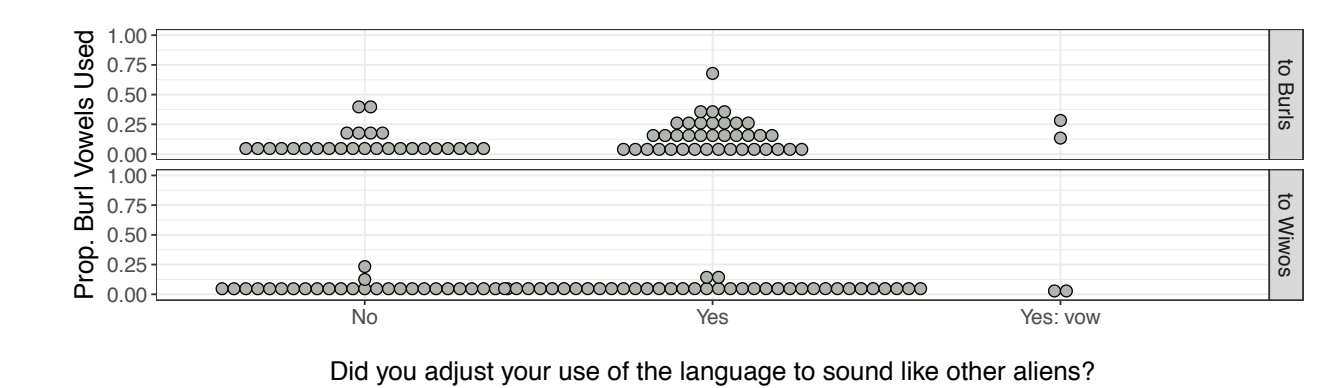
- “Did you do anything special with the alien language?”
- “Did you make any deliberate changes to the alien language?”
- “Did you try to adjust your use of the language to sound like other aliens?”

Responses categorized into 3 types of responses:

- “No”
- “Yes” (if participants answered yes but did not specify a variant)
- “Yes-cons” or “Yes-vow” (if specific variant was mentioned)

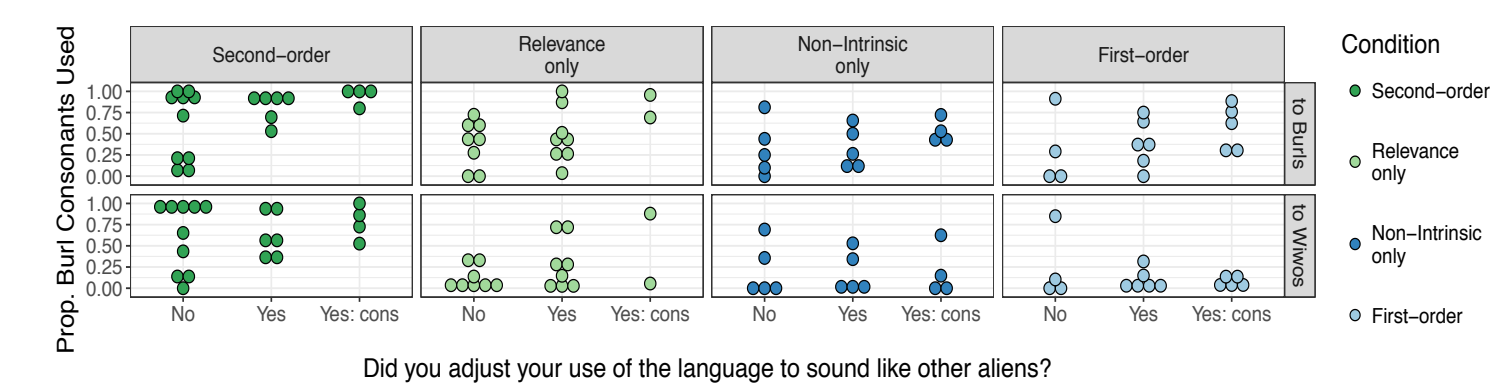
## Variants below the level of awareness:

Participant’s self-reported use was not related to their actual rates of borrowing, both when chatting with the source dialect (Burls) and with fellow Wiwos:



## Variants above the level of awareness:

Participants’ accuracy in their self-reported use of Burl forms depends on the **order of indexicality** that the form has. Across all conditions, **participants self-report not borrowed forms**. In the 3 non-higher-order condition, there is no correlation between reported borrowing and actual borrowing. For the second-order condition only, there is a stronger relationship between reported borrowing and actual borrowing.



We find that “No” responses have no predictive value on actual behavior; the same is true for “yes” responses **except** for in the higher-order indexicality condition, where there is a stronger relationship between reported behavior and actual behavior.

REFERENCES: Draeger, Katie & M. Joelle Kirtley 2016. *Awareness, salience, and Stereotypes in Exemplar-based Models of Speech Production and Perception*. In A. Babel, ed. *Awareness and Control in Sociolinguistic Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Eckert, Penelope. 2008. Variation and the Indexical Field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(4), 453–476. Eckert, Penelope. 2019. The individual in the semiotic landscape. *Glossa* 4(1): 14, 1–15. Labov, William. 1963. The social motivation of a sound change. *Word*, 19(3), 273–309. Labov, William. 1972. *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Labov, William. 2001. *Principles of Linguistic Change: Social factors*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. Roberts, Gareth. 2017. The linguist’s Drosophila: Experiments in language change. *Linguistics Vanguard*, 3. Silverstein, Michael. 2003. Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language and Communication*, 23, 193–229. Squires, Lauren. 2016. Processing grammatical differences: Perceiving vs. noticing. In A. Babel, ed. *Awareness and Control in Sociolinguistic Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Sneller, Betsy & Gareth Roberts, 2018. Why some behaviors spread while others don’t: A laboratory simulation of dialect contact. *Cognition* 170, 298–311.