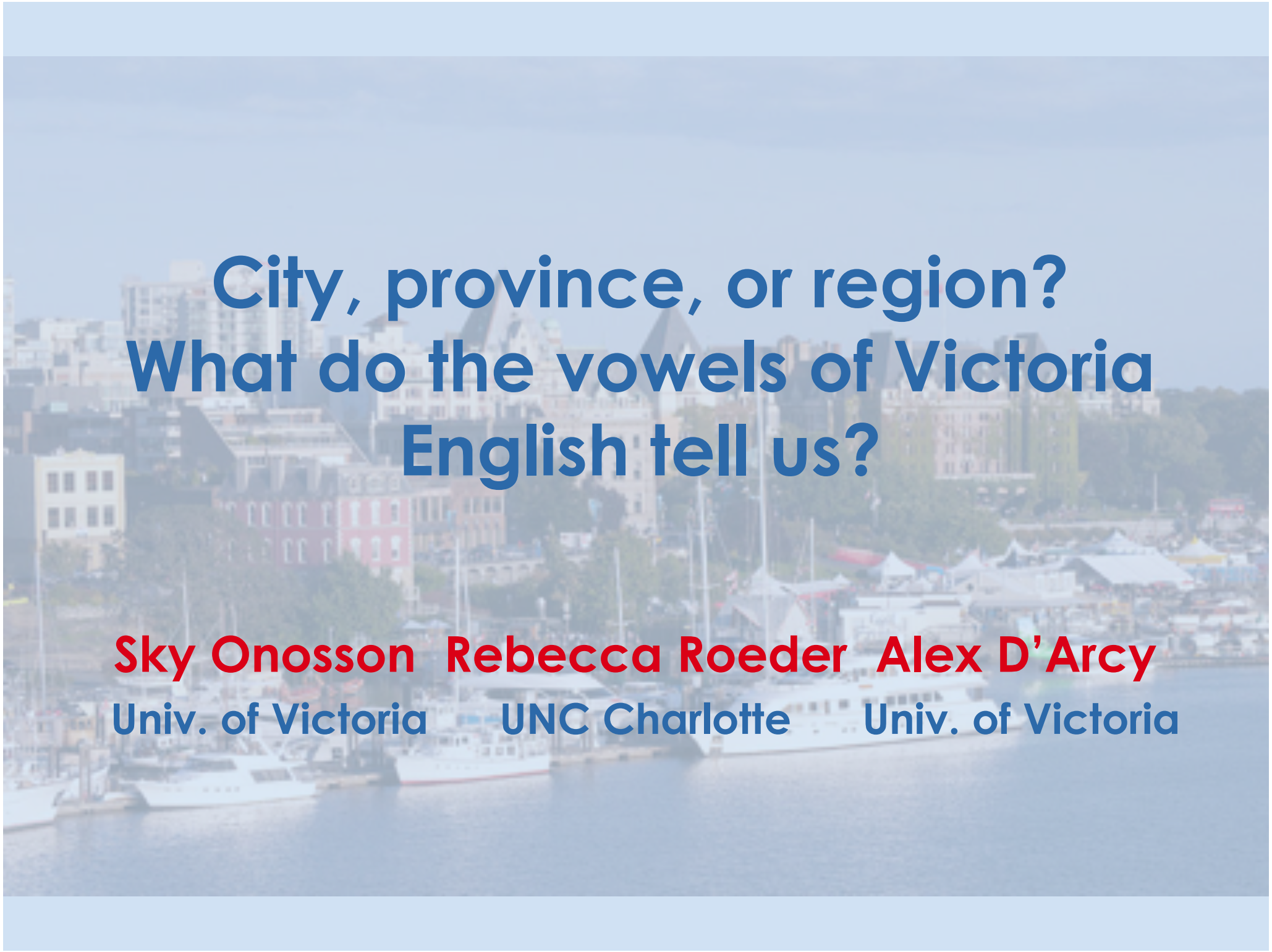


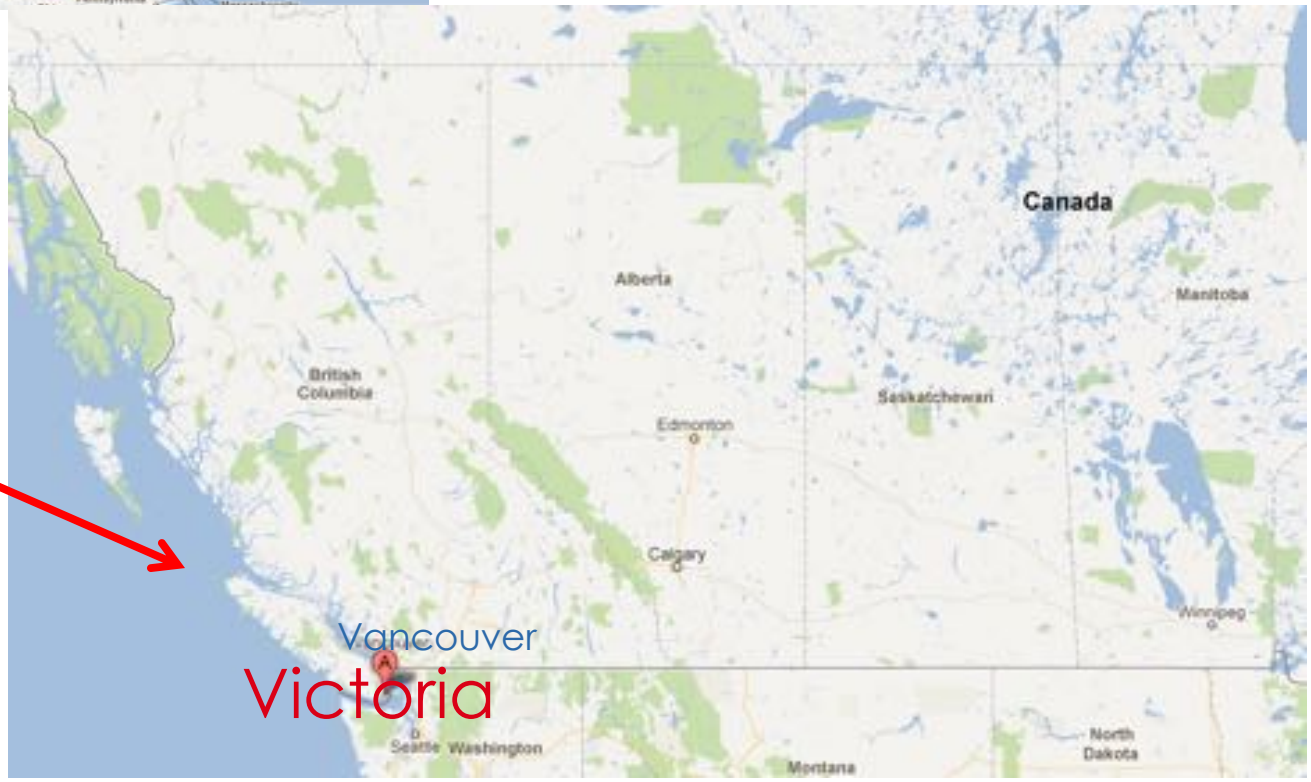
City, province, or region? What do the vowels of Victoria English tell us?

Sky Onosson Univ. of Victoria

Rebecca Roeder UNC Charlotte

Alex D'Arcy Univ. of Victoria

Vancouver Island



Victoria as a sociolinguistic entity

- 'British subjects could safely migrate, establishing their children's inalienable heritage and an eternal link of sentiment with the Motherland' (Kluckner 1986:11)
- schools 'became the means of … British culture to children of immigrants', enabling them to 'grow up British' (Trueman 2009; Barman 1984 inter alia)
- the English have consistently comprised ~20% of immigrants (c.1860–present)
- geographically separated from mainland; regular, year-round, affordable ferry and services not established until 1960
- branded as Canada's 'Most British City'

The Canadian English landscape

Victoria English is a dialect of Canadian English:

- it shares the Loyalist base (inheritance from primary settler population)
- it has been subject to continuous, longitudinal CE input across its history
- population is in regular contact with other Canadians (and others)

The Canadian English landscape

"Canadian English is remarkably homogeneous … urban, middle-class Anglophone Canadians speak with much the same accent in Vancouver and Ottawa, Edmonton and Windsor, Winnipeg and Fredericton." (Chambers 2010)

"To a large extent, a single type of English is spoken across the 3,000 miles (4,500 km) from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Ottawa, Ontario."

(Labov et al. 2006:217)

"Canadian English displays nothing like the dialect diversity of the United States, let alone that of Great Britain." (Labov et al. 2006:148, 217)

Regions of Canadian English

from: Boberg 2008

The western region: British Columbia

An understudied area (Gregg 1992; Esling & Warkentyne 1993)

- ANAE 2006: 4 Vancouverites
- Sadlier-Brown & Tamminga 2008: 12 Vancouverites
- Boberg 2008: 12 speakers (Vancouver & Victoria)

Distinct Prairies & BC features (Boberg 2008)

- BAG/BAN in close proximity
- START vowel retraction

Does Victoria pattern with Western Canada?

General Canadian norms

Areas of dialect mixing

- Canadian Shift (Clarke et al. 1995; Boberg 2005; Bigham 2009; Gramma & Kennedy 2009; Durian 2013)

Urban North America

- fronting of GOOSE, TOO, and GOAT vowels (ANAE 2006, Boberg 2011, Luthin 1987; others for CA & OR discussed below)

Is Victoria innovative or conservative?

Victoria English: research questions

1. How are vowel pronunciations in Victoria positioned with respect to General Canadian norms and Western Canadian (BC) norms?

Victoria English: research questions

1. How are vowel pronunciations in Victoria positioned with respect to General Canadian norms and Western Canadian (BC) norms?
2. Are there any vocalic features that make Victoria unique?

Our project: Victoria English Archive

Diachronic Corpus of Victoria English (DCVE)

- Recorded ~1965
- 58 speakers, born 1865–1936

Synchronic Corpus of Victoria English (SCVE)

- Recorded 2011–2012
- 162 speakers, born 1913–1996

Total diachronic window: 131 years

- 1st–6th generation Victorians

The sample

Age	Male	Female	Total
14–19	4	4	8
20–29	4	7	12
30–39	4	4	8
40–49	5	4	9
50–59	3	4	8
60–69	5	4	9
70–79	4	4	8
80–89	3	4	7
90–98	2	3	4

Total N = 73

The data

Vowel	Target words	Total N
FLEECE	seat, seed, seen, veto, see	344
KIT	did, kiss, sit, sick, tin, tip	403
FACE	stain, state, stayed, say	276
DRESS	dead, deck, set, step, ten, test	402
TRAP	sad, sat, tap, bad, cast, bag, bang, gag, hanger, tag +4	857
STRUT	bus, cup, cut, duck, stud, sun	386
LOT/THOUGHT	bother, cot, Don, monitor, sock, sod, top,caught,dawn+9	1158
GOAT	boat, bold, coat, code, cold, stole, stone, go, toe	600
FOOT	cook, foot, stood	209
GOOSE	boots, food, due, do, soon, too, tooth, new, student, +3	804
START	bar, car, dark, harp, star, start	388

Total N = 5827

Data and methods

Word List data (Boberg 2008)

- phonological environment controlled
  - manner: Vs before liquid, nasal & glide separated
  - place: labial, coronal (others tested individually)
  - primary Stress

Measurement and normalization

- FAVE used to measure annotated audio files (Rosenfelder et al. 2011)
- normalization: Nearey 1 method, accessed via NORM (Thomas & Kendall 2009)

Statistics

Linear regression

- to observe change over apparent time in men and women individually

ANOVA & MANOVA

- to compare multiple dependent variables across discrete categories of sex and age group

Analytic parameters

Phonetic variables

- Canadian Shift (KIT, DRESS, TRAP)
- Back up-gliding vowels (/uw/ & /ow/-fronting)
- START-retraction
- BAG/BAN raising
- yod-retention (SUIT)

Time frame

- synchronic: ages 14–23 vs Boberg 2008 students
- diachronic: all speakers over apparent time

Canadian Shift: KIT, DRESS, BATH

first observation (southeast Ontario)

- Clarke et al 1995

very similar across regions

- Boberg 2008; Sadlier-Brown & Tamminga 2008

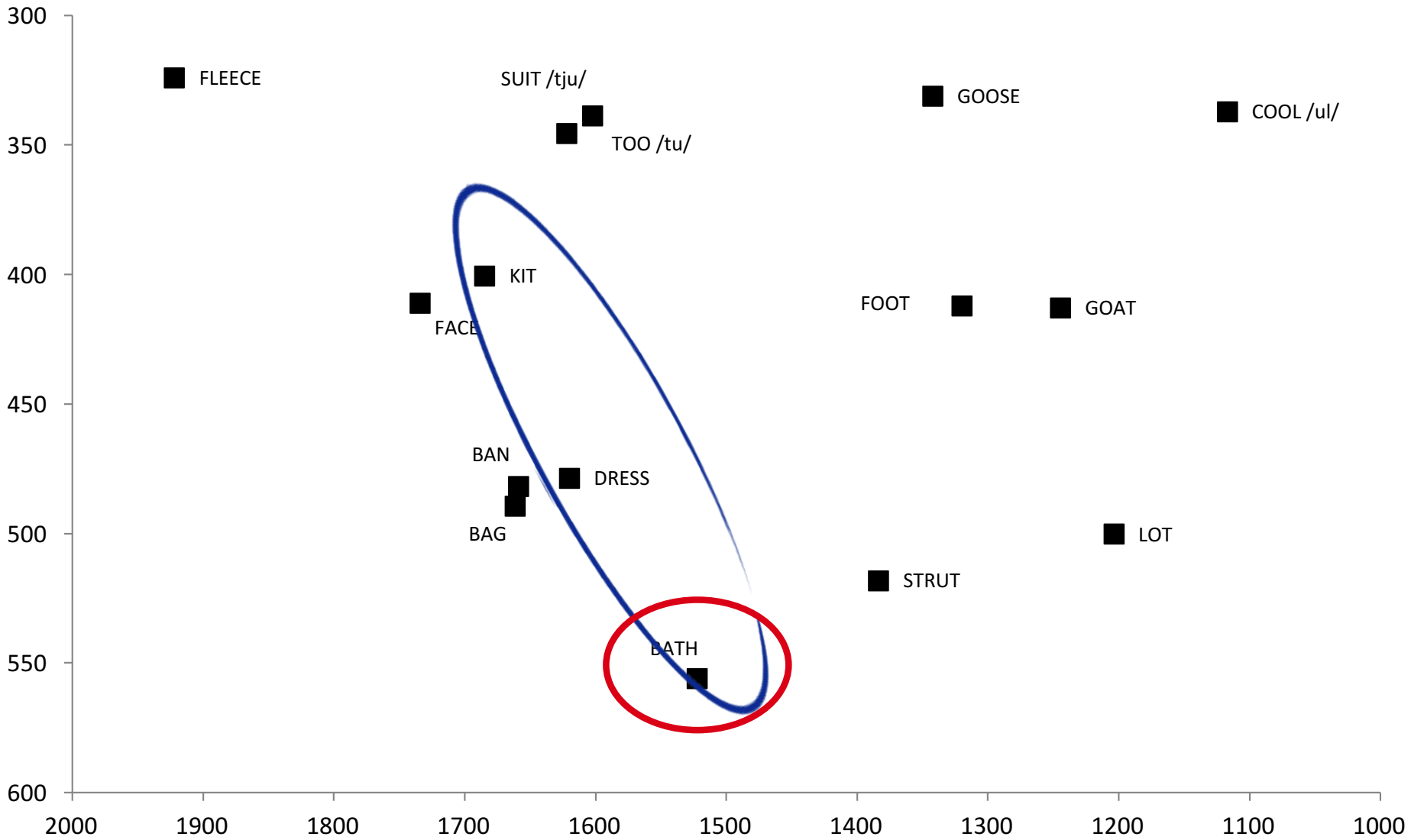
phonologically-motivated shift

- Gardner 2011; Roeder & Gardner 2013

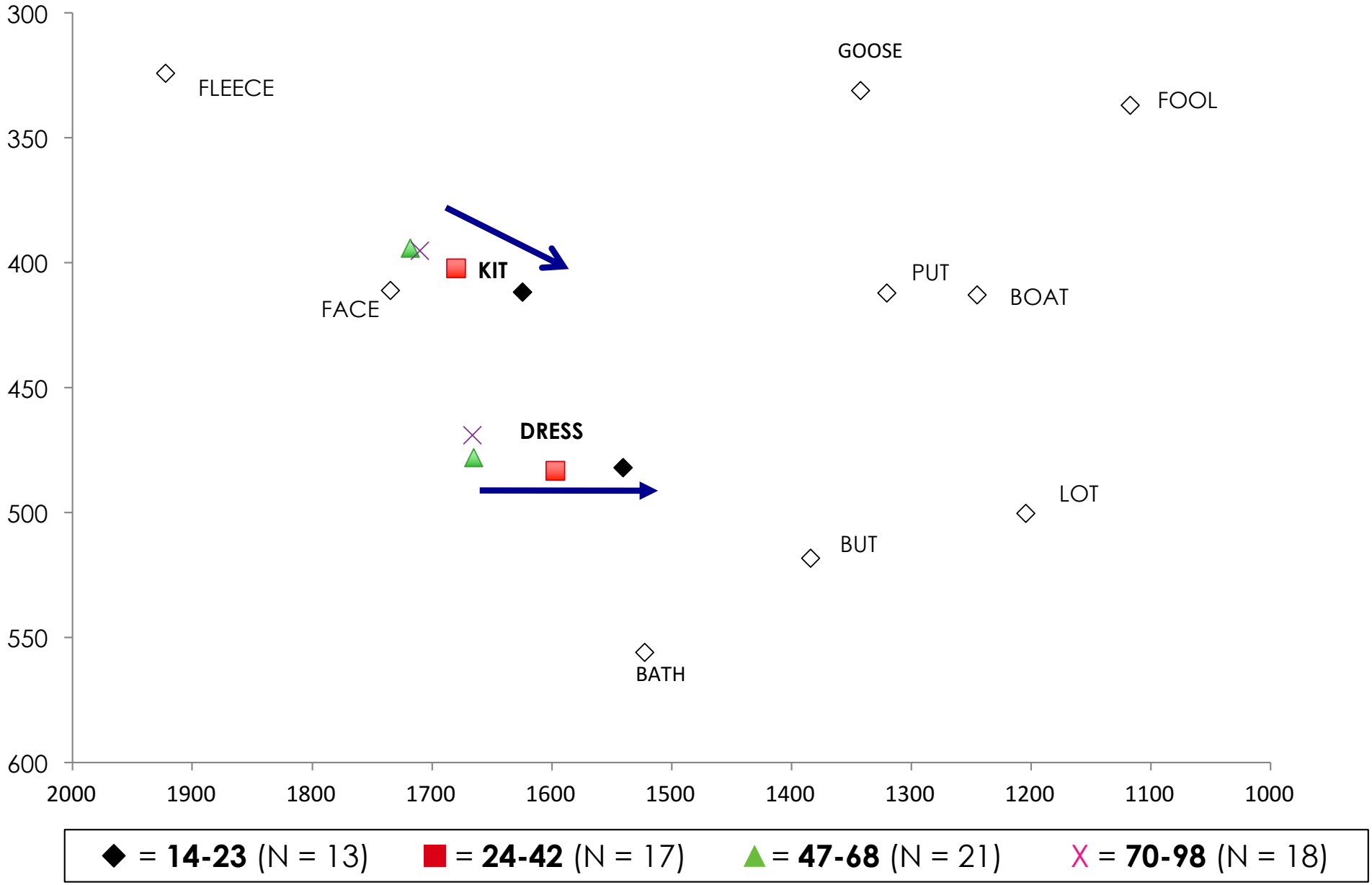
no longer a change in progress

- Roeder & Jarmasz 2010; Roeder 2012

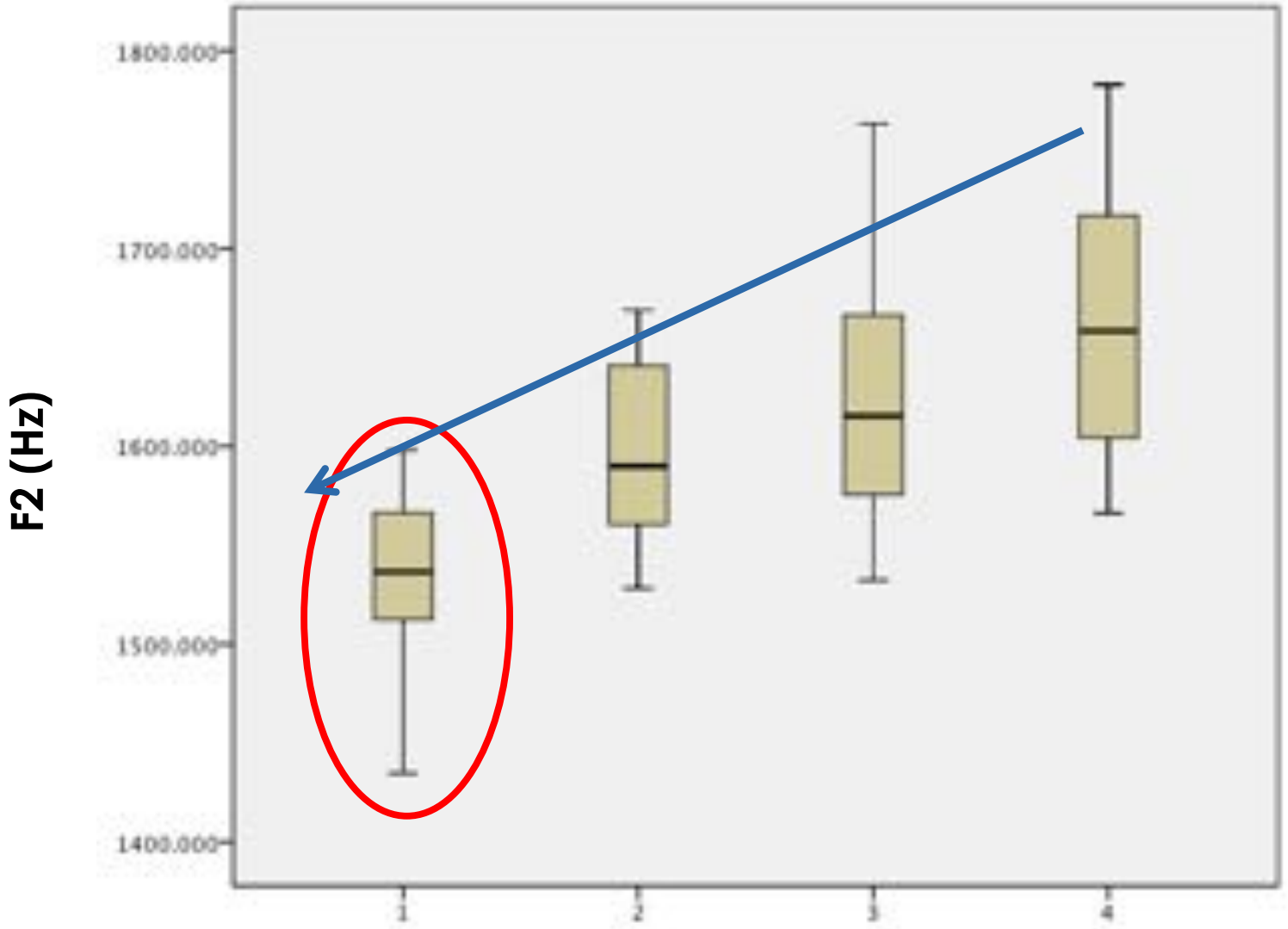
KIT, DRESS, BATH (speaker N = 73)



Canadian Shift: KIT & DRESS



Canadian Shift: DRESS retraction



Canadian Shift: KIT, DRESS, BATH

F2 DRESS most robust CS change in progress

- Victoria (current study)
- Montreal (Boberg 2005)

F2 DRESS less retracted

- Prairies & Quebec (Boberg 2008)

Victoria fits as more conservative

- Isolated, with same input but strong Anglo influences historically

GOAT, GOOSE, TOO Fronting

Parallel changes in progress

- ANAE 2006; Boberg 2010
- Common in languages of the world

Urban (Midlands U.S. & Toronto)

- ANAE 2006

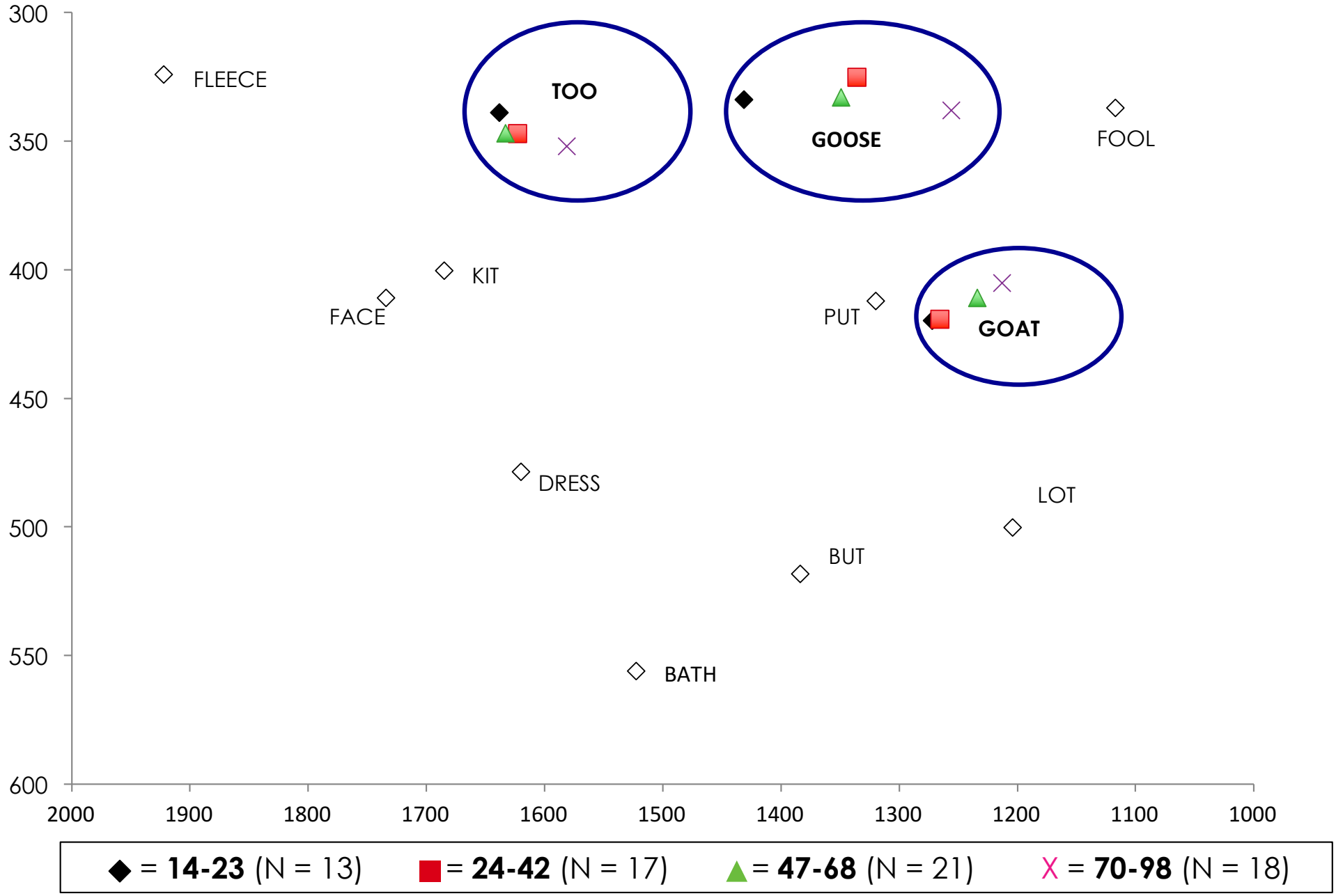
California

- Hinton et al 1987; Luthin 1987; Fought 1999; Hall-Lew 2011; Kennedy & Grama 2012; Babel 2015

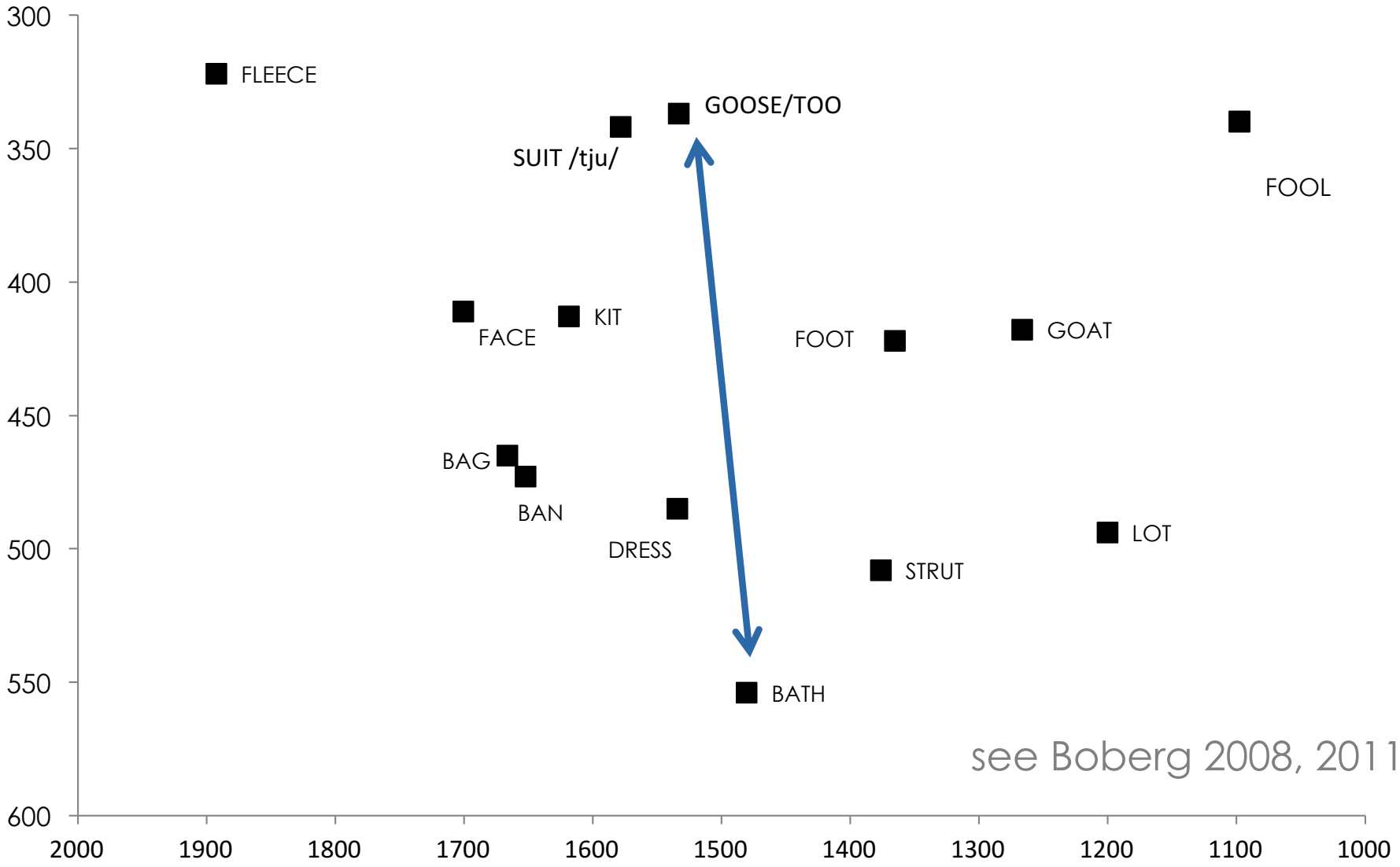
Oregon

- Conn 2003; Ward 2003; Becker 2013; McLarty & Kendall 2014

BOAT, GOOSE, TOO Fronting

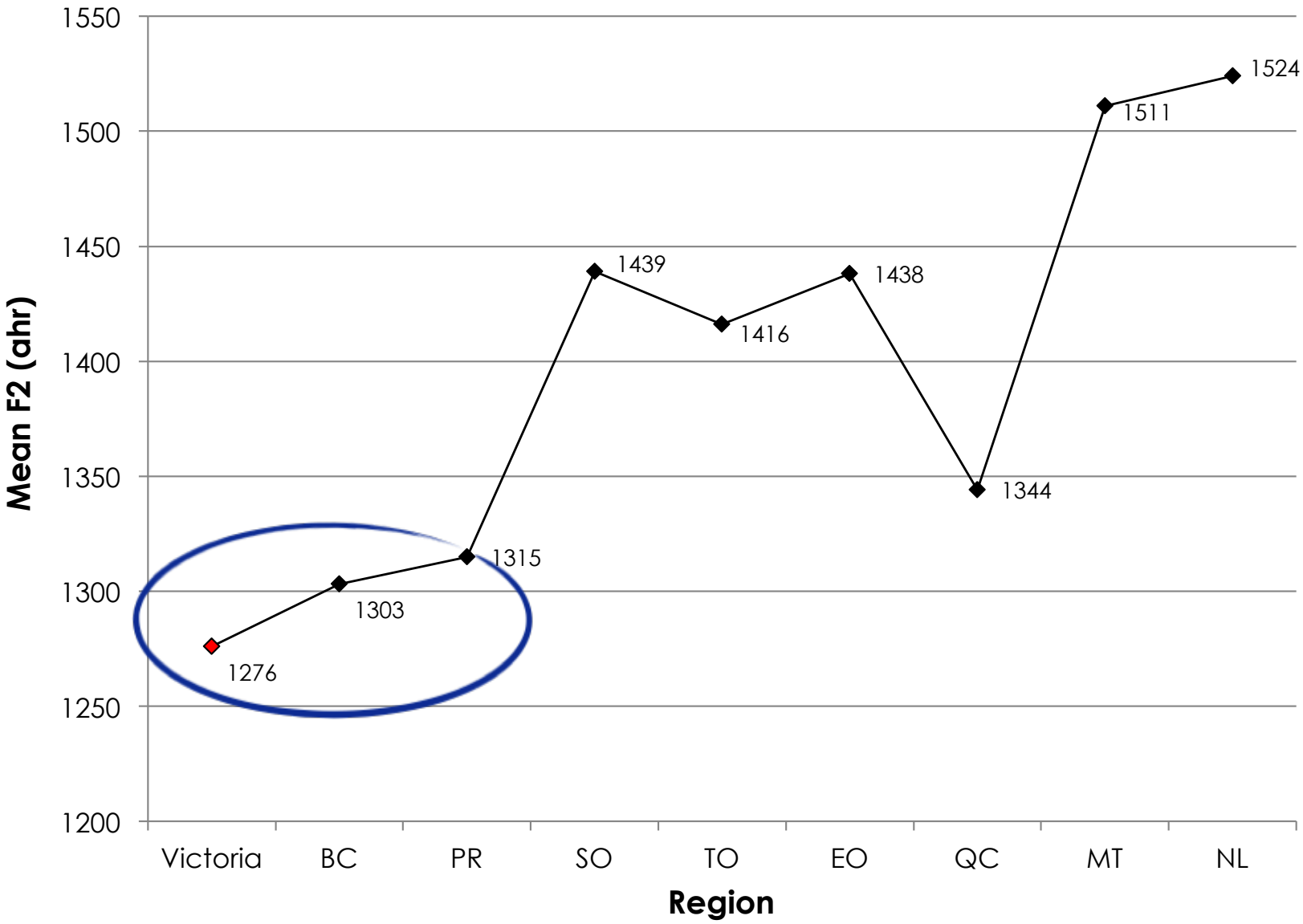


/uw/-fronting (ages 14-23, N = 14)



see Boberg 2008, 2011

Retracted START [west to east by region]



adapted from Boberg 2008 (144, Fig.3)

Western Canadian: BAG ≈ BAN

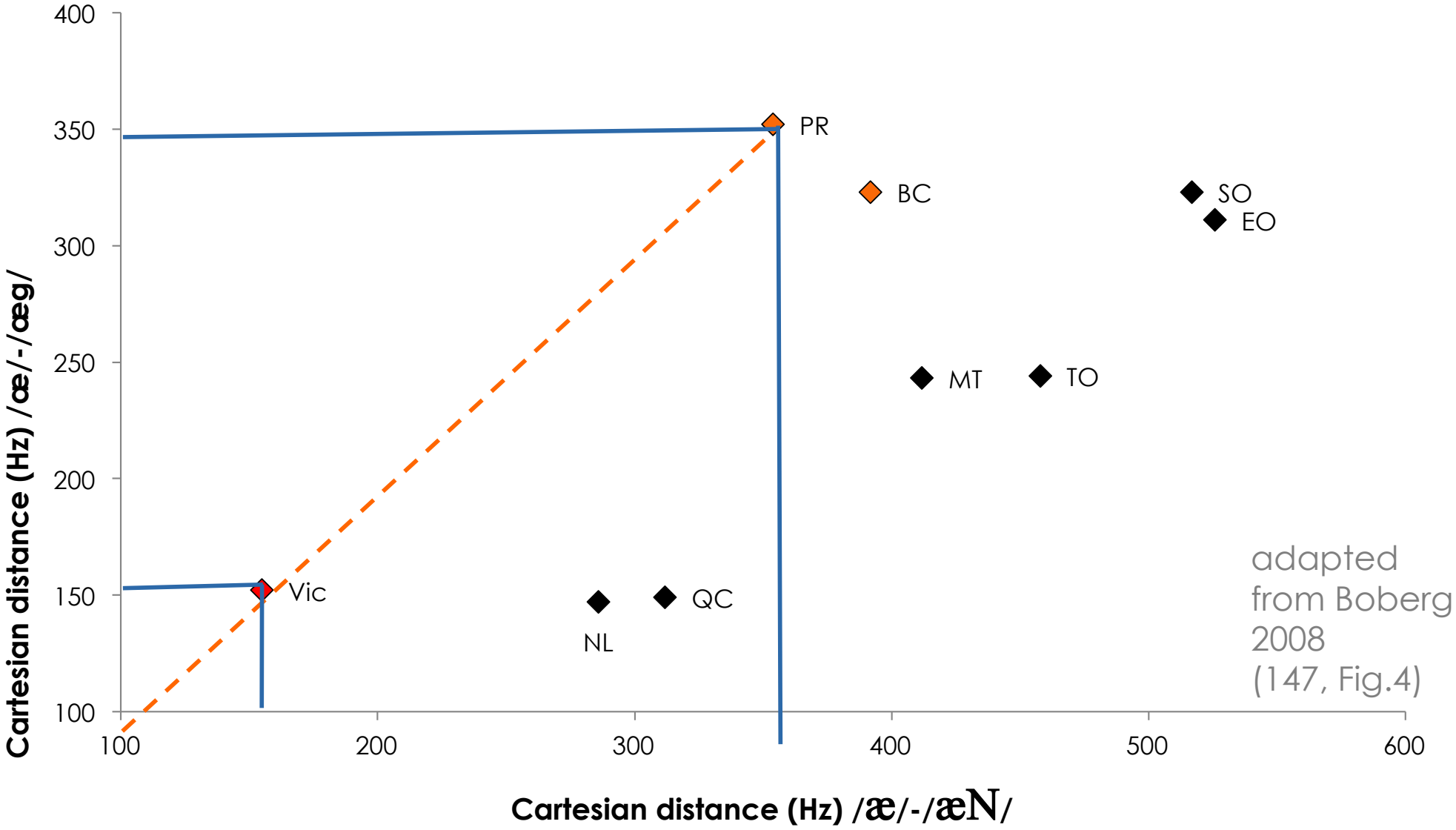
Extreme raising of pre-voiced-velar /æ/ (BAG)

- North Central United States (e.g. Zeller 1997, Bauer & Parker 2008)
- Pacific Northwest (e.g. Wassink et al 2009, Freeman 2014)
- Canada west of Quebec (e.g. Boberg 2008)

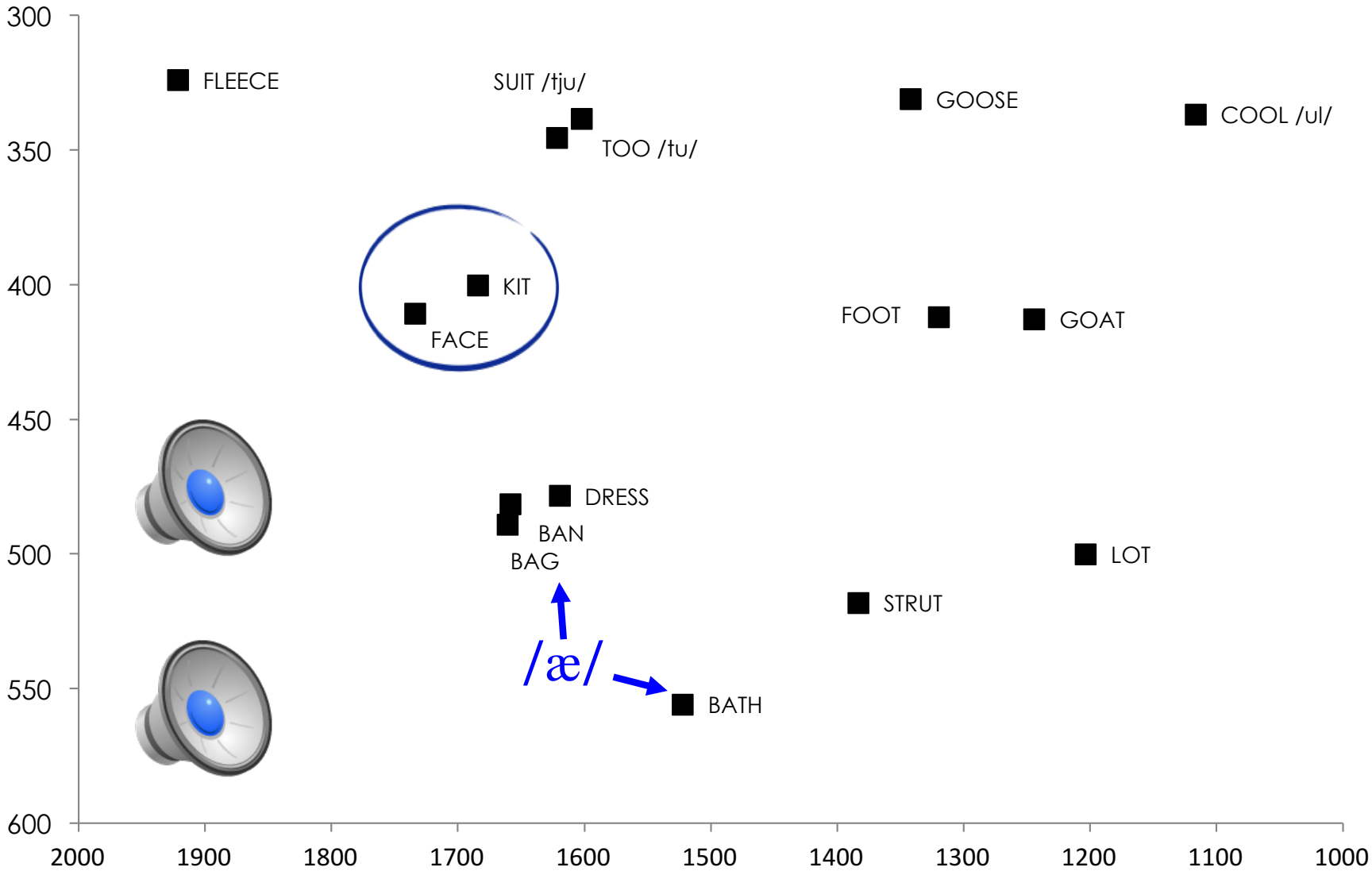
BAN = BAG (Boberg 2008)

- Prairies & British Columbia
- Victoria patterns with Western Canada

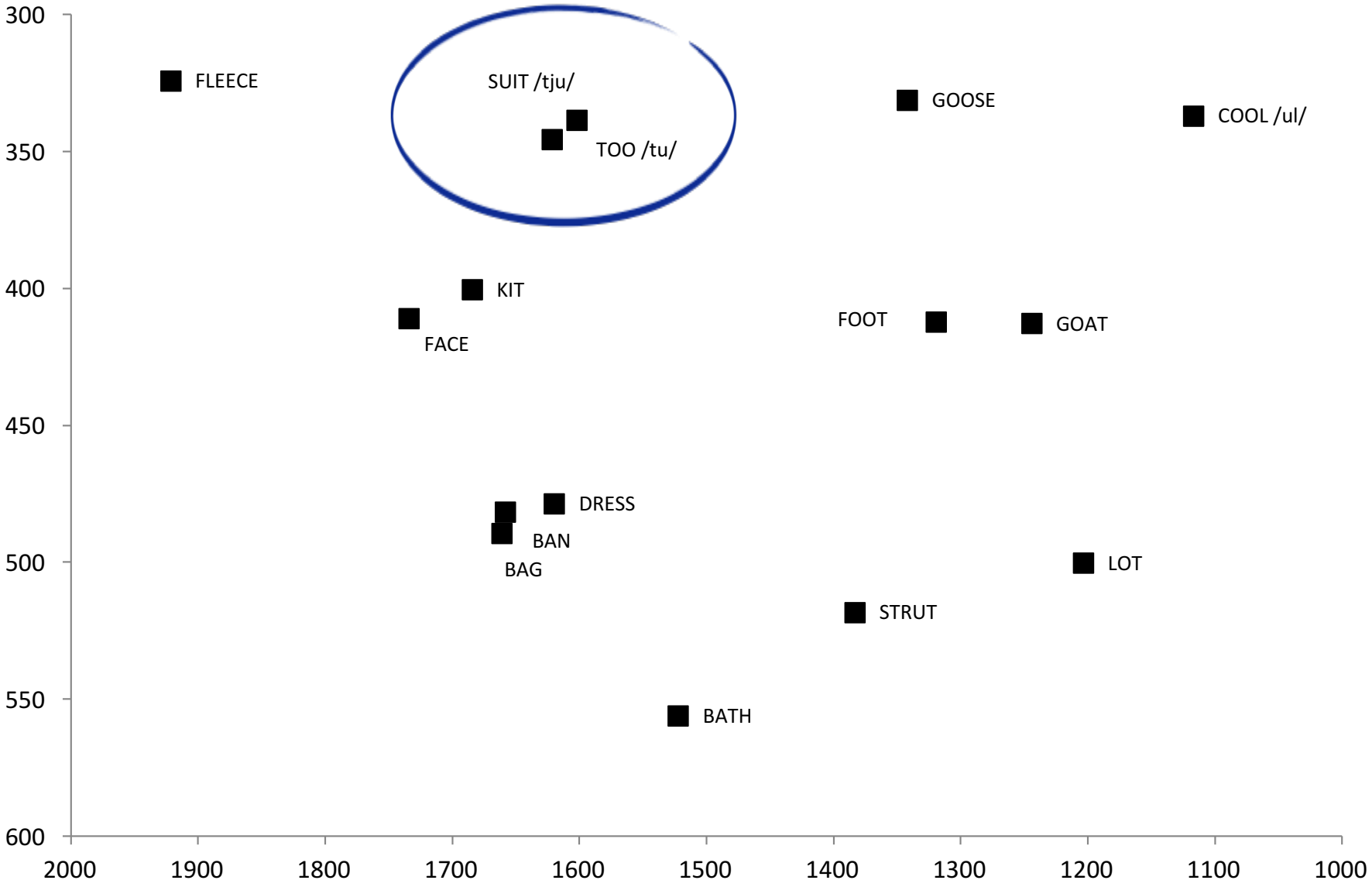
Western Canadian: BAG ≈ BAN



Western Canadian: BAG ≈ BAN

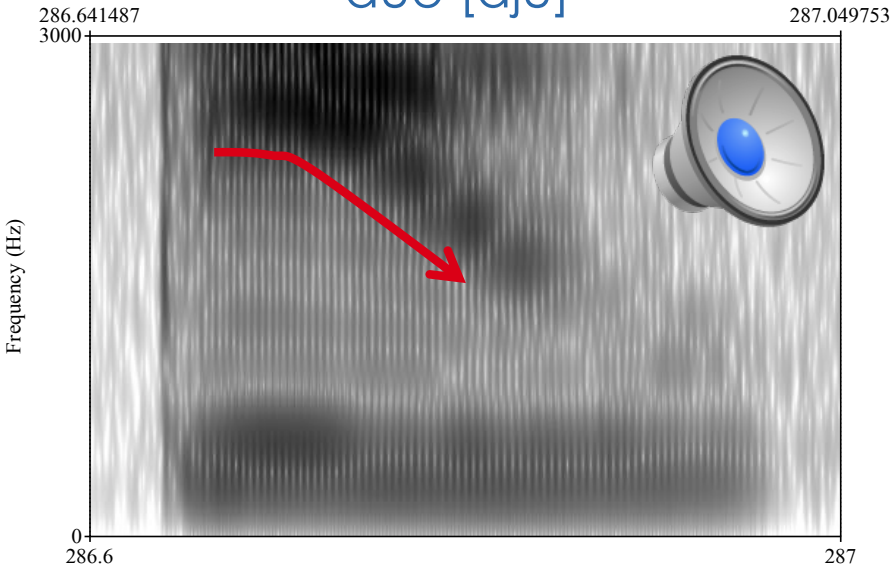


Glide retention

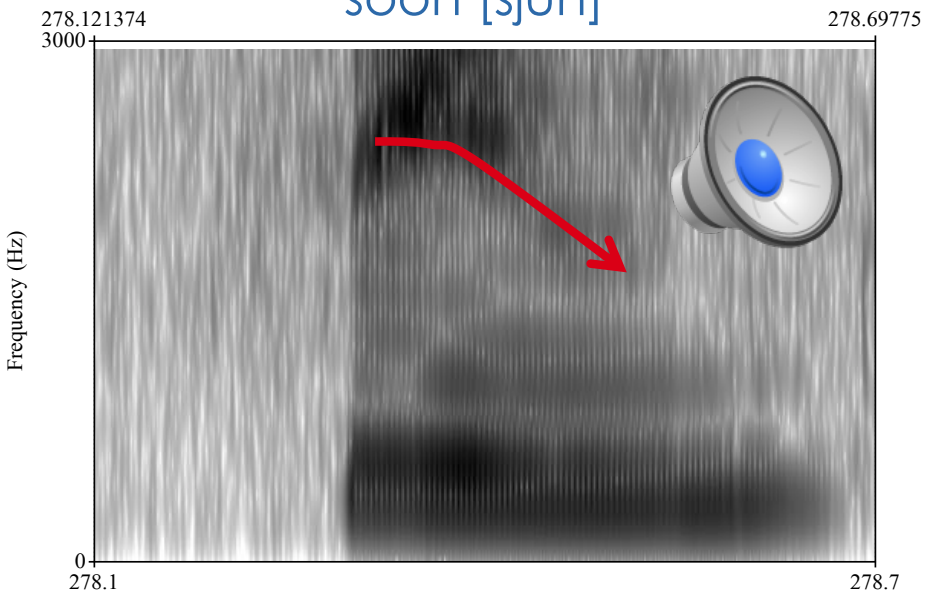


Teenage glide-retention

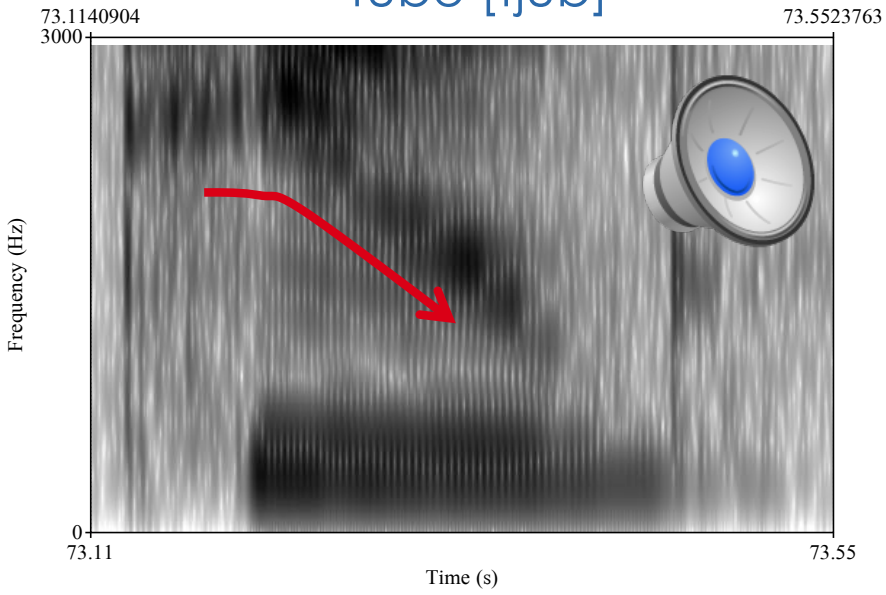
due [dju]



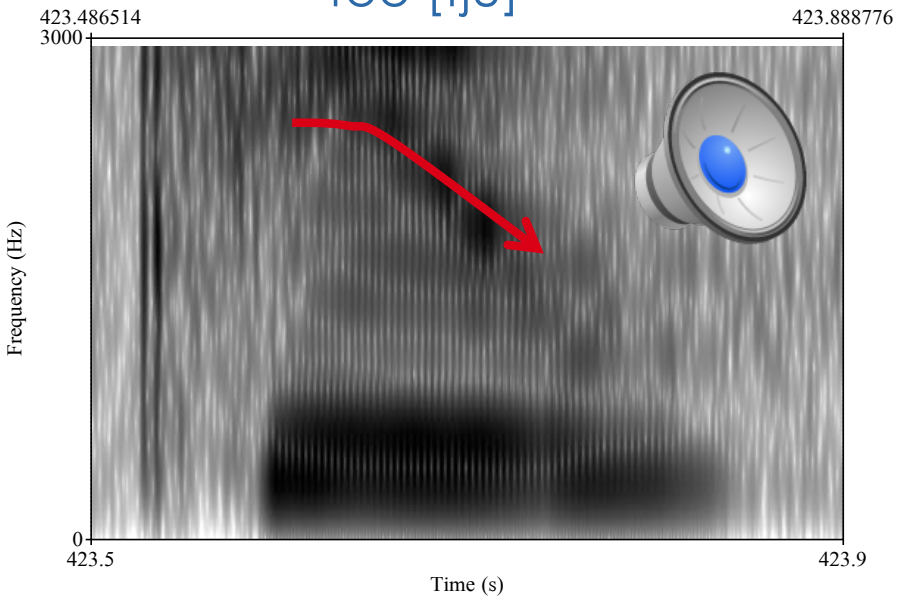
soon [sjun]



tube [tjub]



too [tju]



The vowels tell us that Victoria is:

a Western Canadian city

- START-retraction
- BAG/BAN relative placement

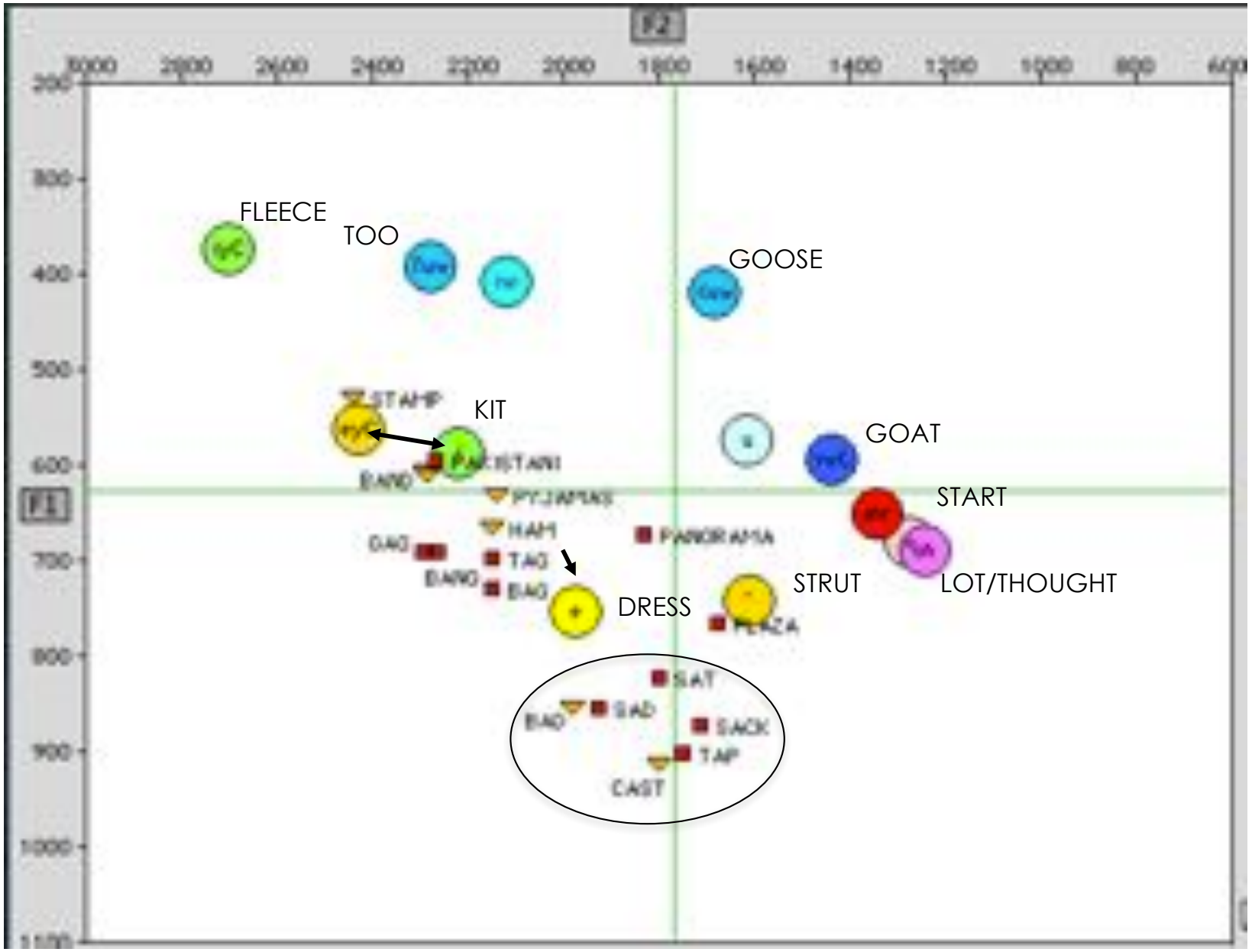
slightly less urban than Vancouver

- GOAT and GOOSE/TOO fronting
- Canadian Shift

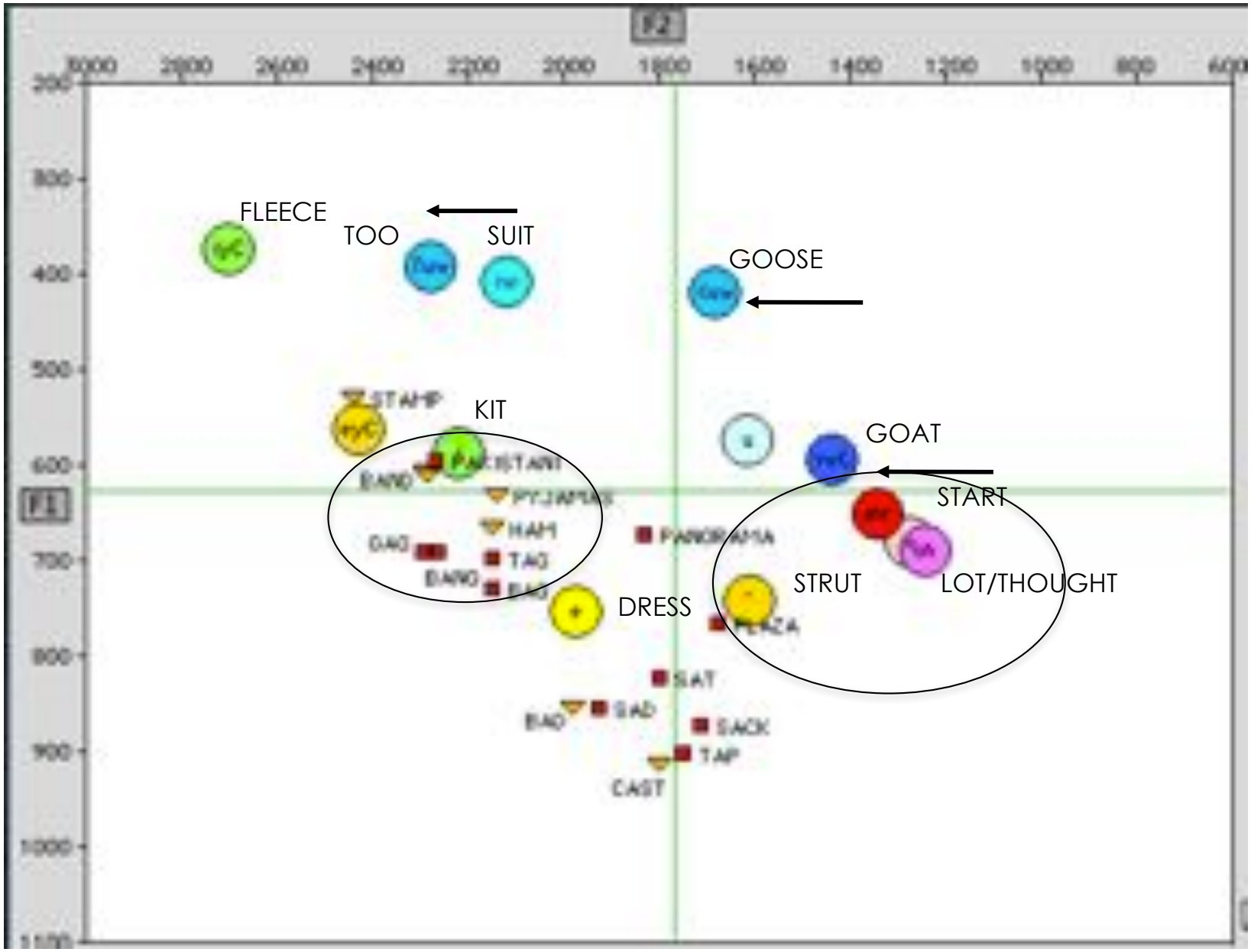
still a bit unique

- widespread glide retention on SUIT

An innovative speaker: female, age 21



An innovative speaker: female, age 21



next steps

BAG/BEG and BAG/PLAGUE (BAGEL) merger

- Does Victoria display merger?

Low back merger (LOT/THOUGHT)

- Do older speakers in Victoria display a distinction between these vowels?

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