



Friendship and Ethnicity in Contemporary London English

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- Roll Deep Crew (East London grime/garage UK hip-hop crew)

Panel question

- **Does “ethnic style” have an influence on language change?**

Some questions

- How do the following contribute to new varieties of London English?
 1. Ethnicity
 2. Ethnicity of personal social network
 3. 'Practice'
 4. 'Personality'

*Linguistic innovators:
the English of adolescents in London
(2004–7)*

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www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/index.htm





Project design

- 16 elderly Londoners
- 105 17 year old Londoners
- from boroughs of Hackney and Havering, contacted through Further Education colleges
- female, male
- “Anglo” and “non-Anglo”
- Free interviews in pairs
- 1.5m words transcribed

Hackney and Havering differ in ethnic composition

- Hackney (inner London) is more innovative on all linguistic levels than Havering (outer London)

The friendship groups of the adolescent speakers in our sample reflect this

- Hackney young people's networks are *all* more multi-ethnic than any of the Havering young people's

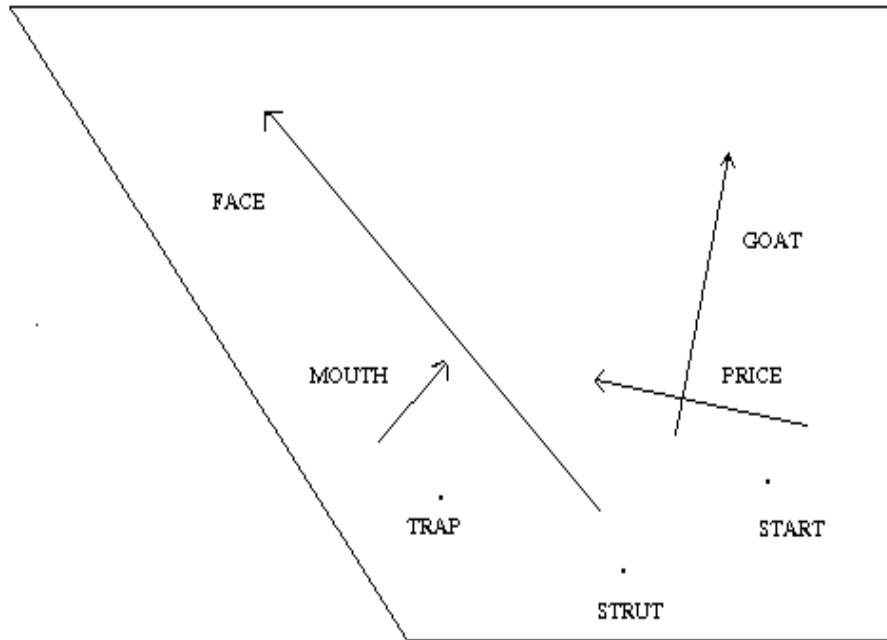
We haven't been able to isolate distinct (discrete) ethnic styles

- differences between ethnicities, where they exist, are quantitative in nature

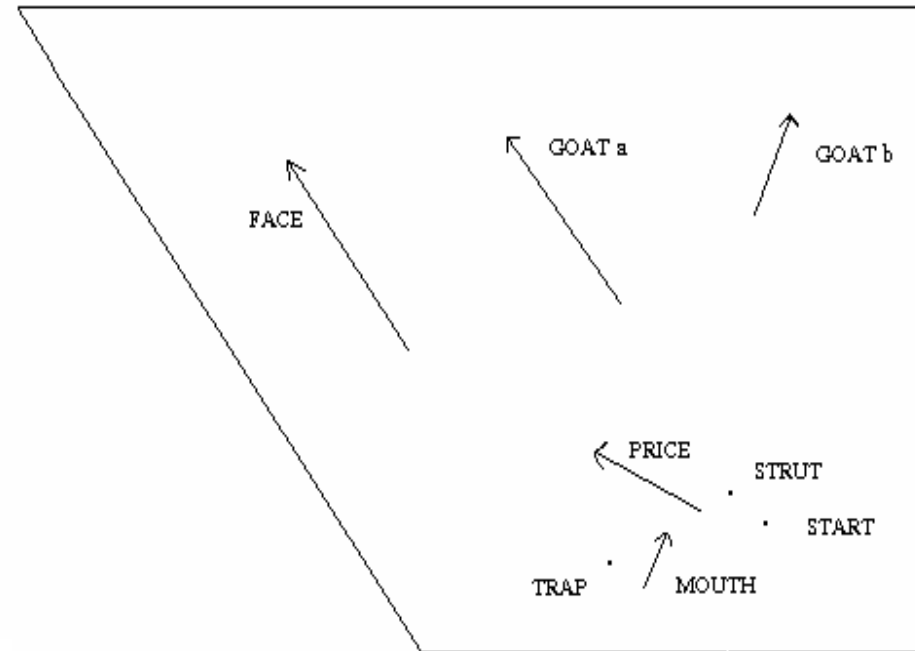
- differences between Hackney & Havering are more linked to network than to ethnicity or borough

However, there are linguistic innovations in Hackney where ethnicity is indirectly relevant

Diphthong changes

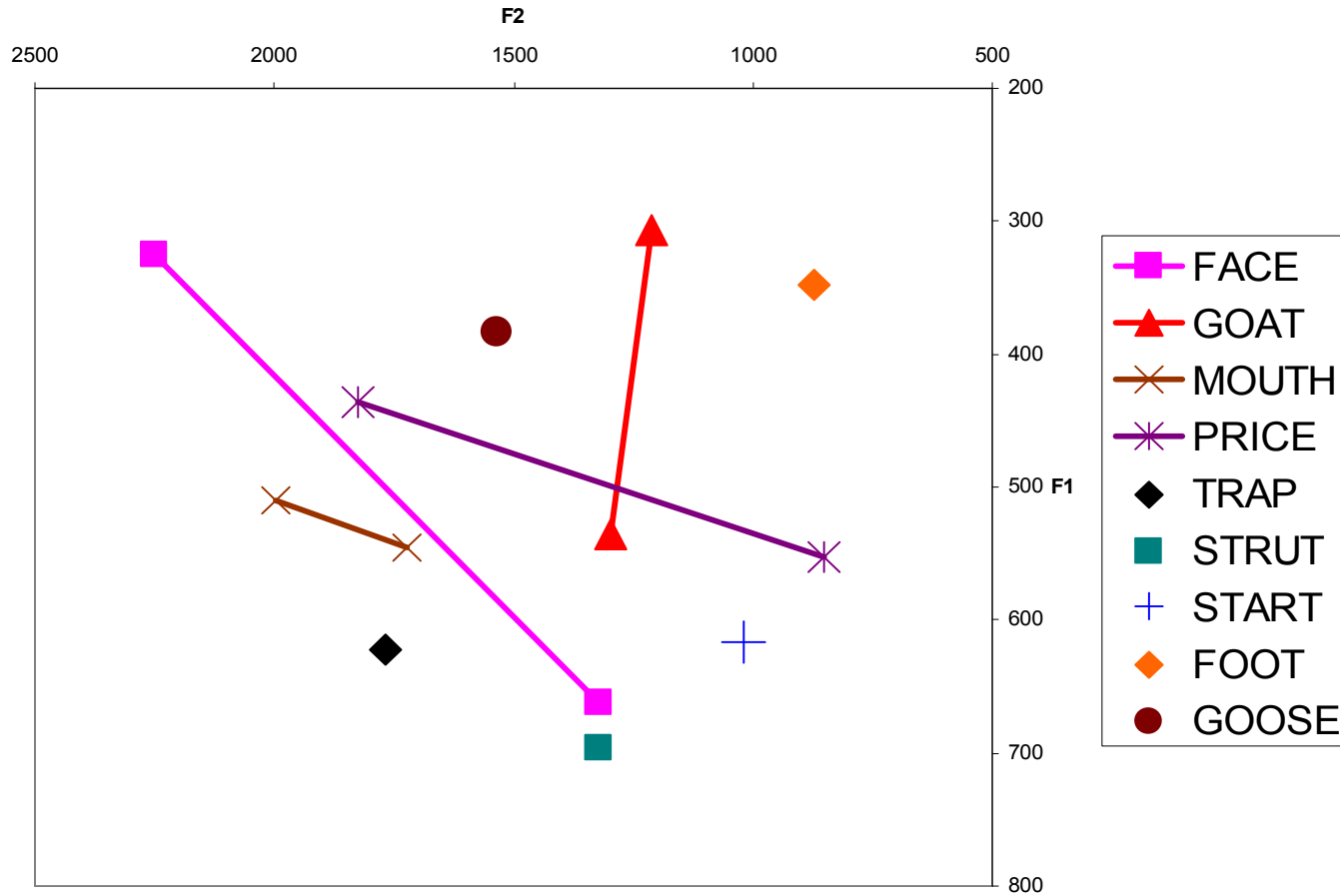


Traditional system



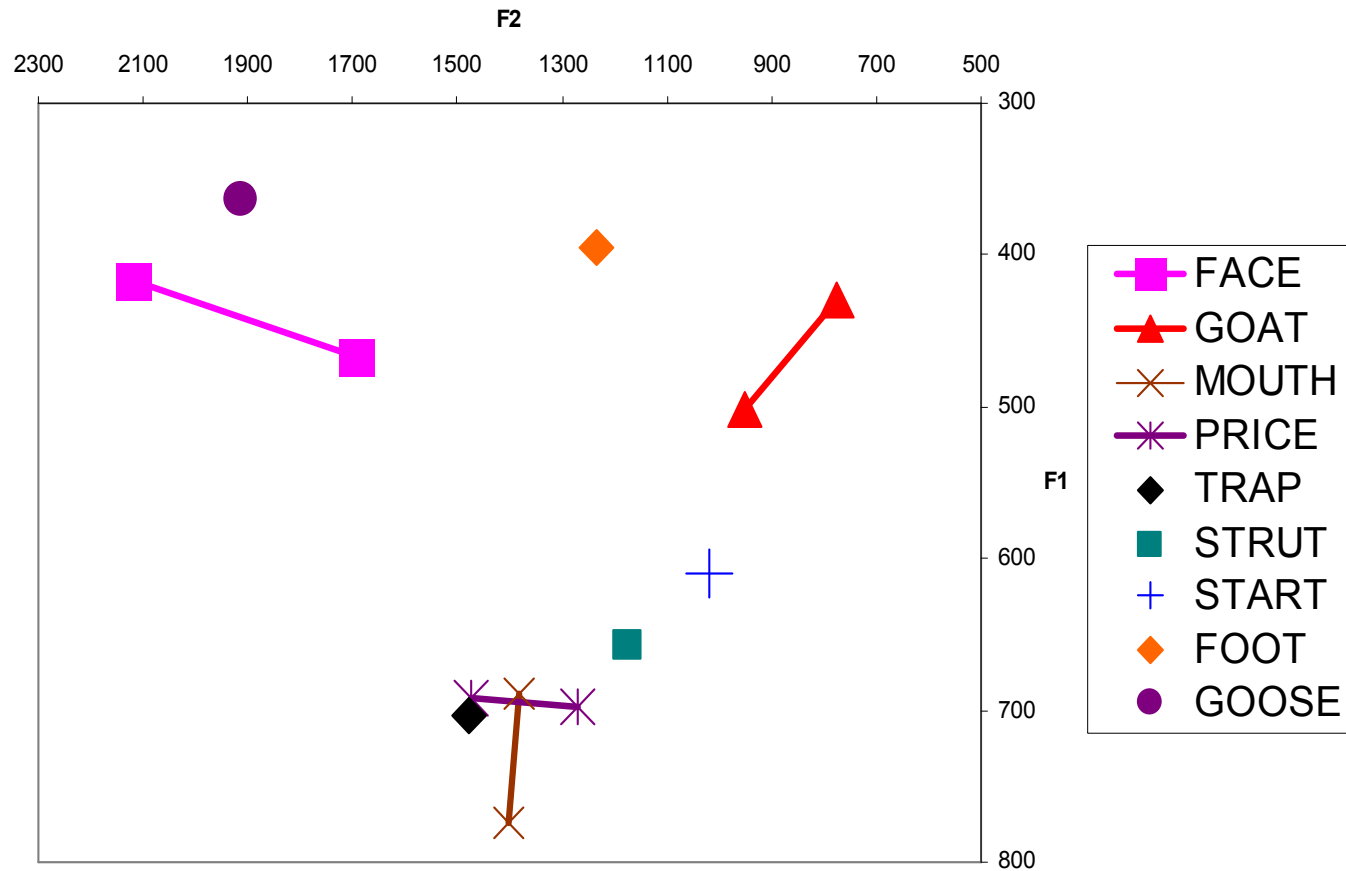
Emergent system

John



Inner London Elderly Speaker

Zack



Inner London adolescent speaker

Zack has the most raised FACE, and among the most raised GOAT, fronted GOOSE and fronted PRICE of all the young speakers.

Social network scores: ethnicity

- How many close friends have you got?
- What ethnicity are they? Are they white, black, Asian ...?

Scores:

1 = all friends same ethnicity as self

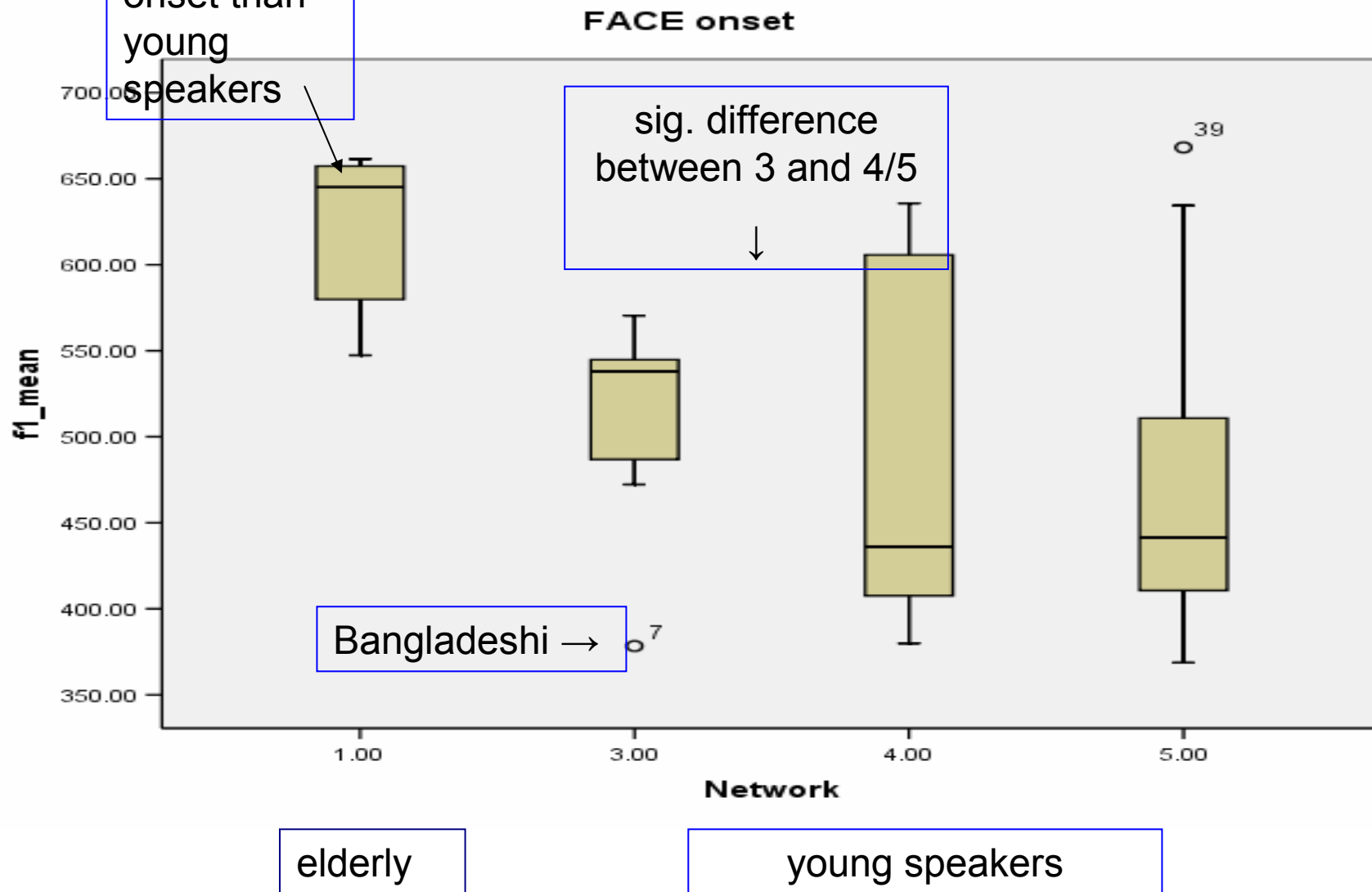
2 = up to 20% of a different ethnicity

3 = up to 40% “

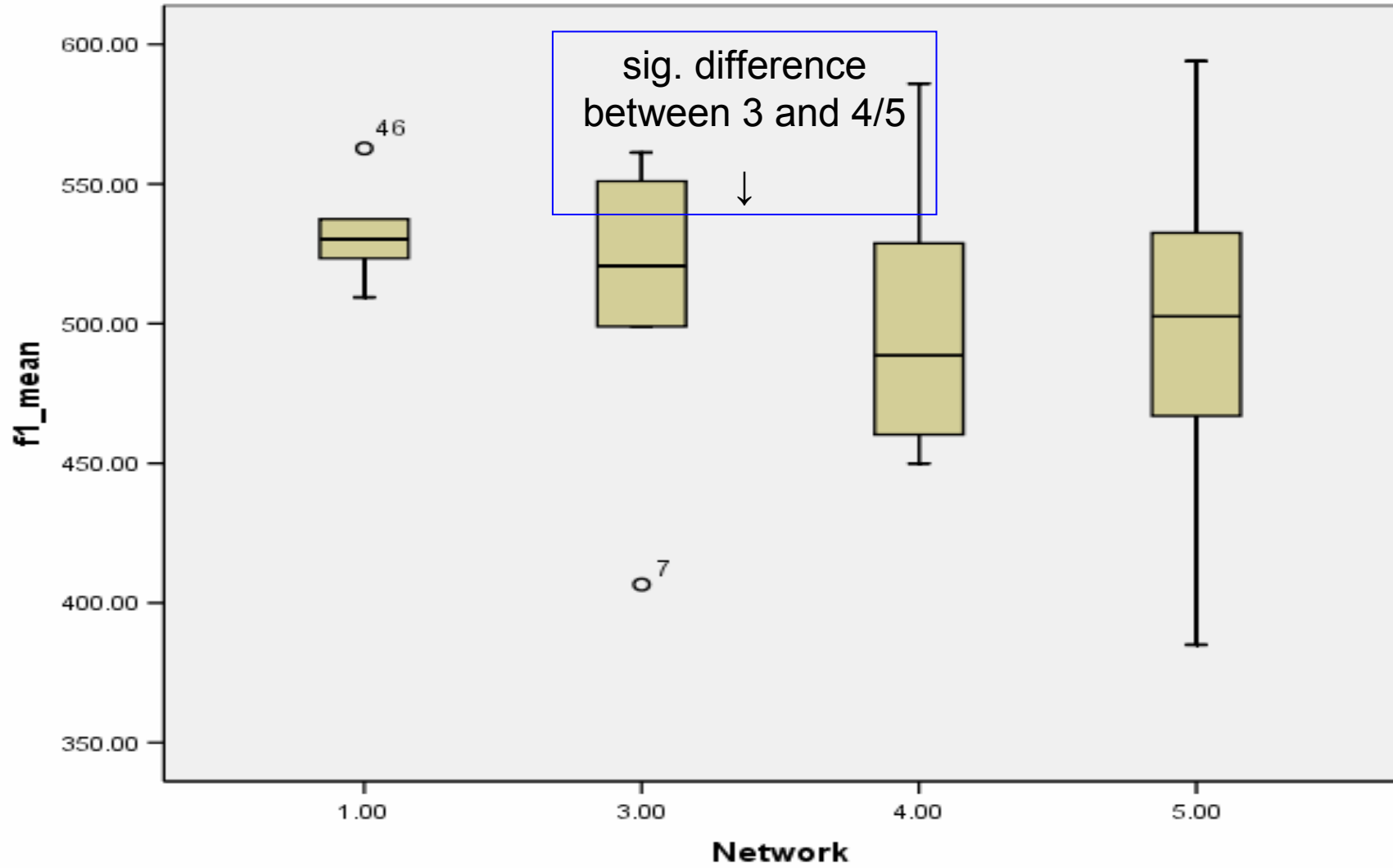
4 = up to 60% “

5 = up to 80% “

Social networks as predictors of leaders in change?



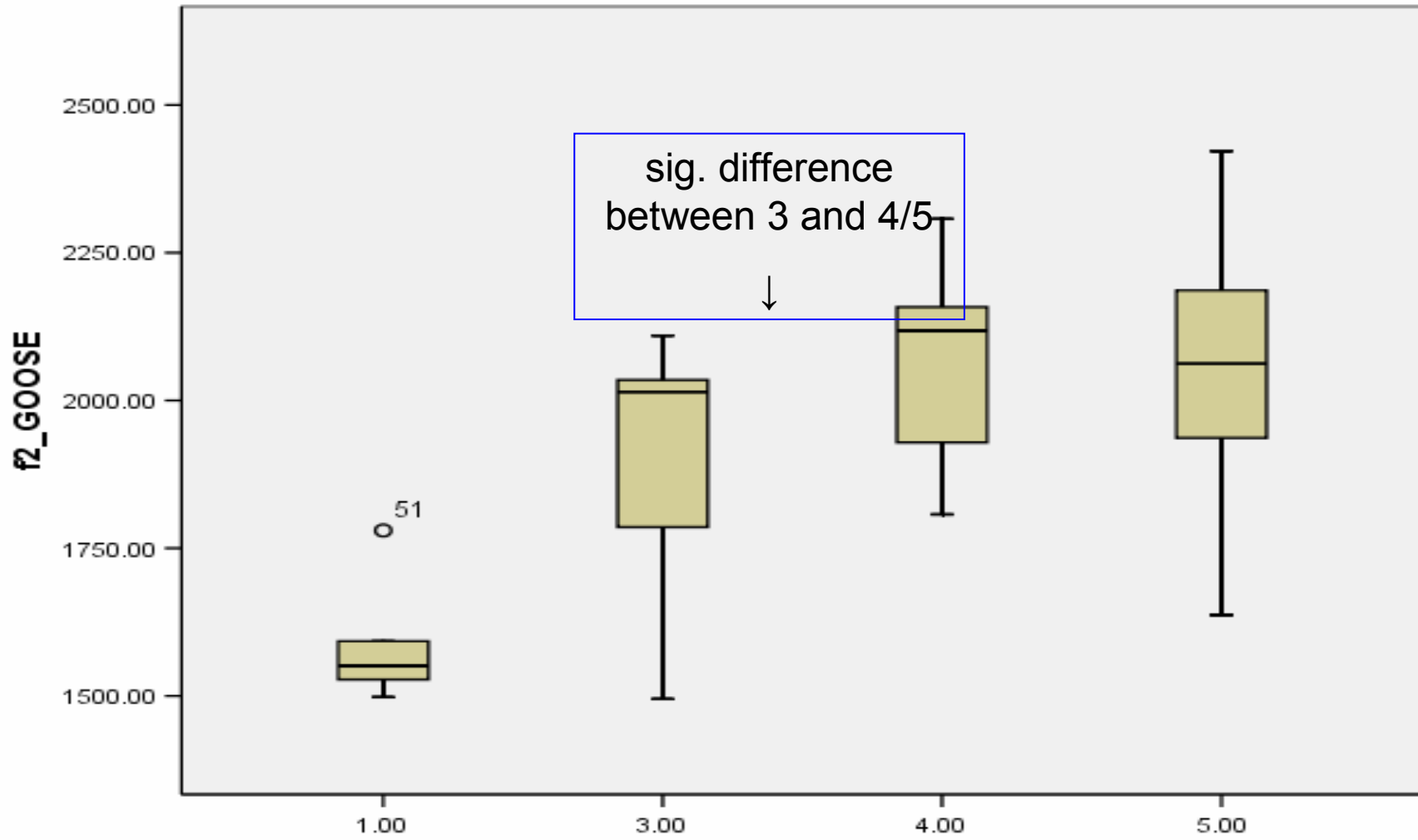
GOAT onset



elderly

young speakers

GOOSE

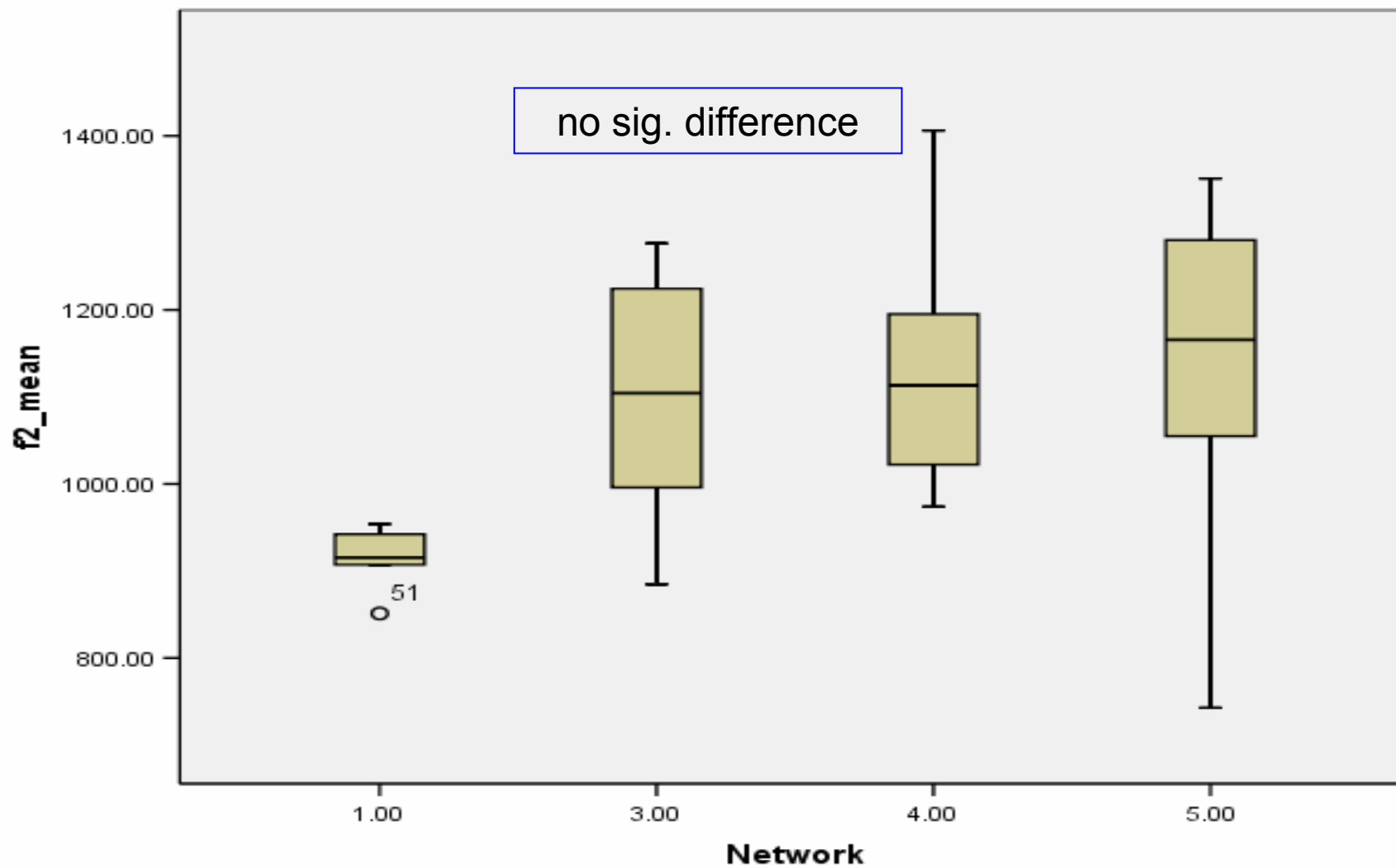


sig. difference
between 3 and 4/5
↓

elderly

young speakers

PRICE onset



elderly

young speakers

Who are the leaders in change?

- Most extreme innovative variants are used by speakers with high multi-ethnic network scores 4 and 5 – *regardless of ethnicity*

Many Hackney adolescents use innovative vowel variants

- **Seven of these also use the innovative quotative: “This is me”/ “This is her”:**

Zack

Laura

Dom

Tina

Raymond

Alex

Kim

- **All have network score 5 (Dom has 4)**

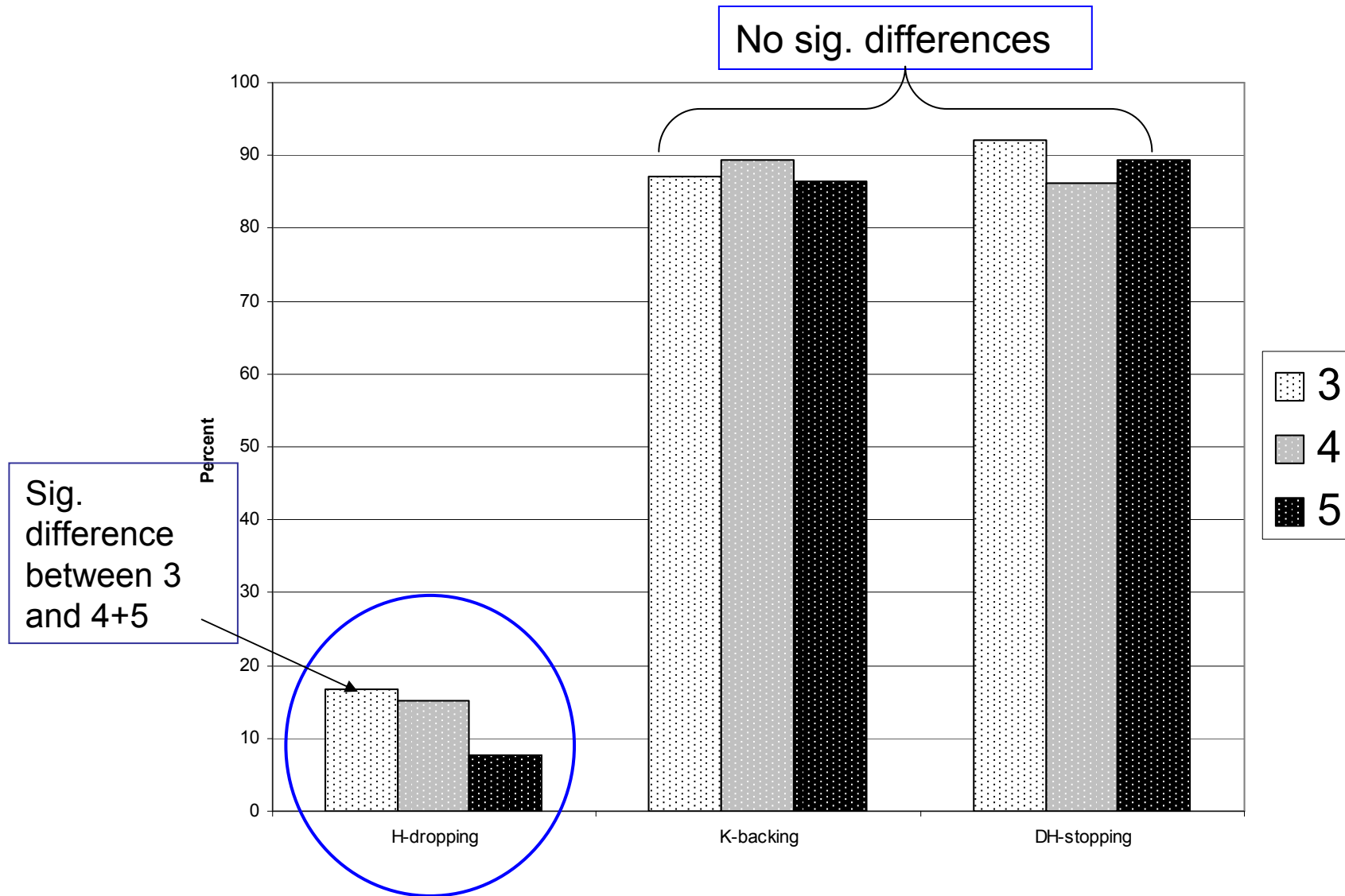
- Question: can they be labelled 'innovators'?

But first ...

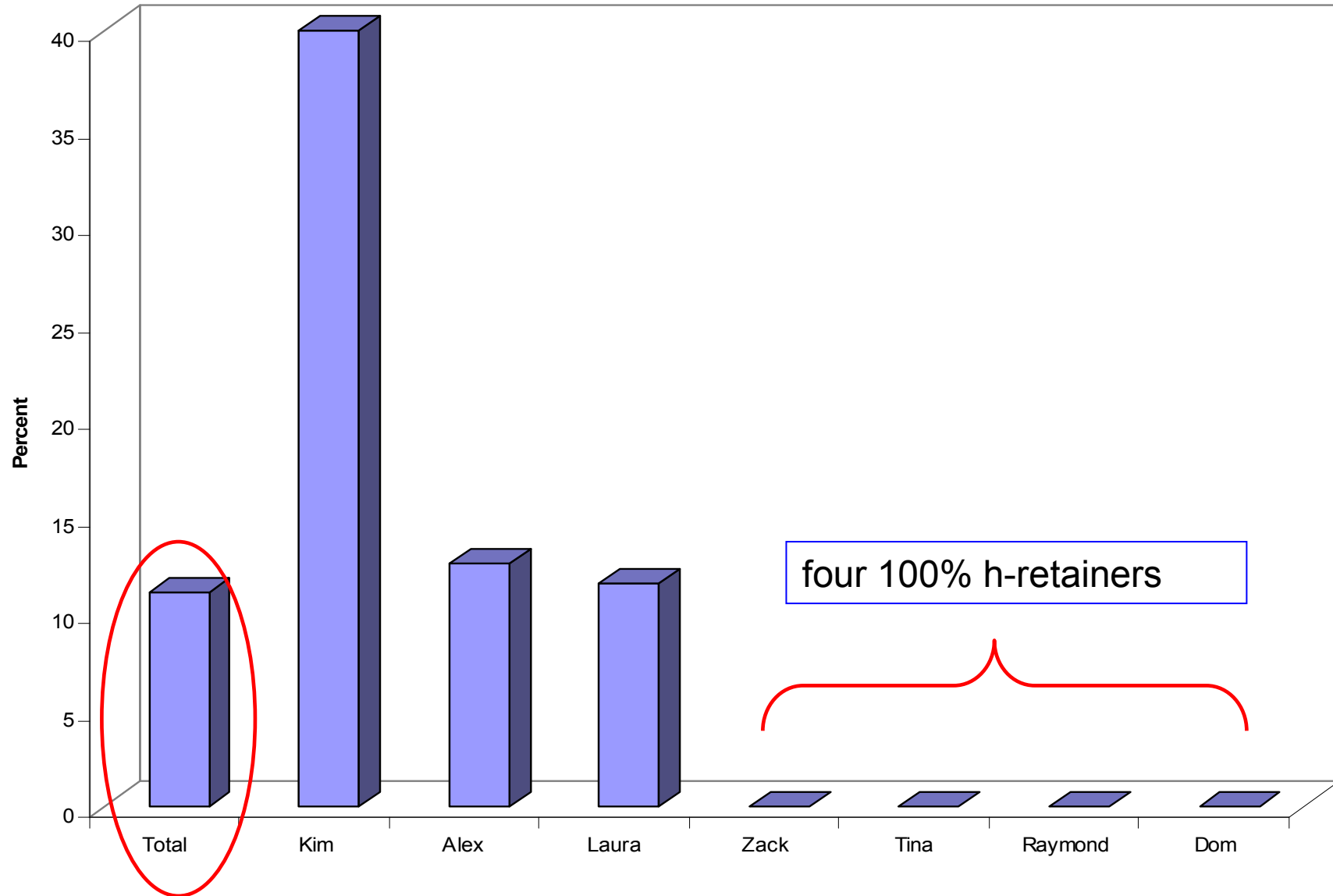
Consonant changes

- Reduction of H-dropping
- Backing of /k/ in front of non-high vowels
- Word initial DH-Stopping

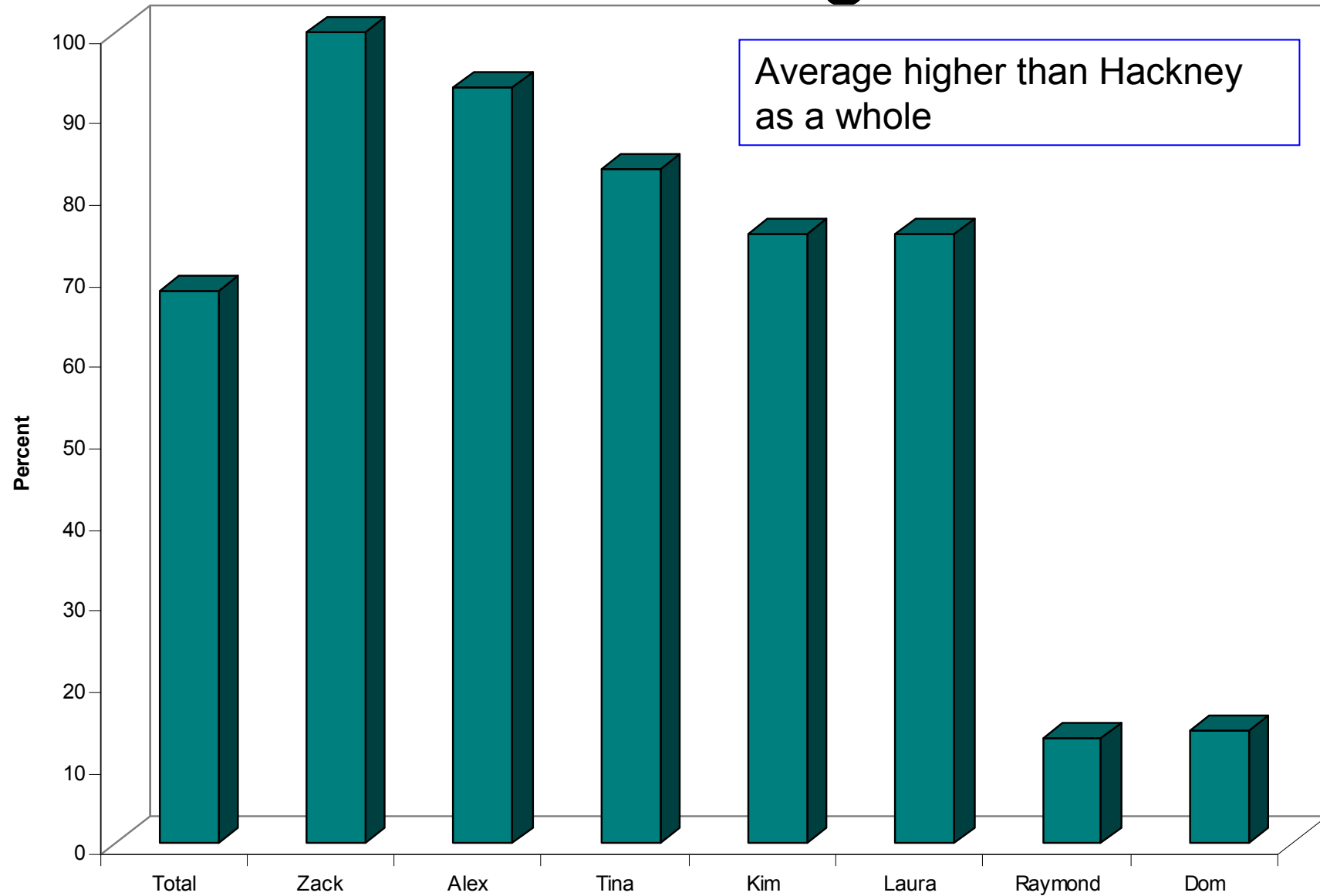
Consonants by network score



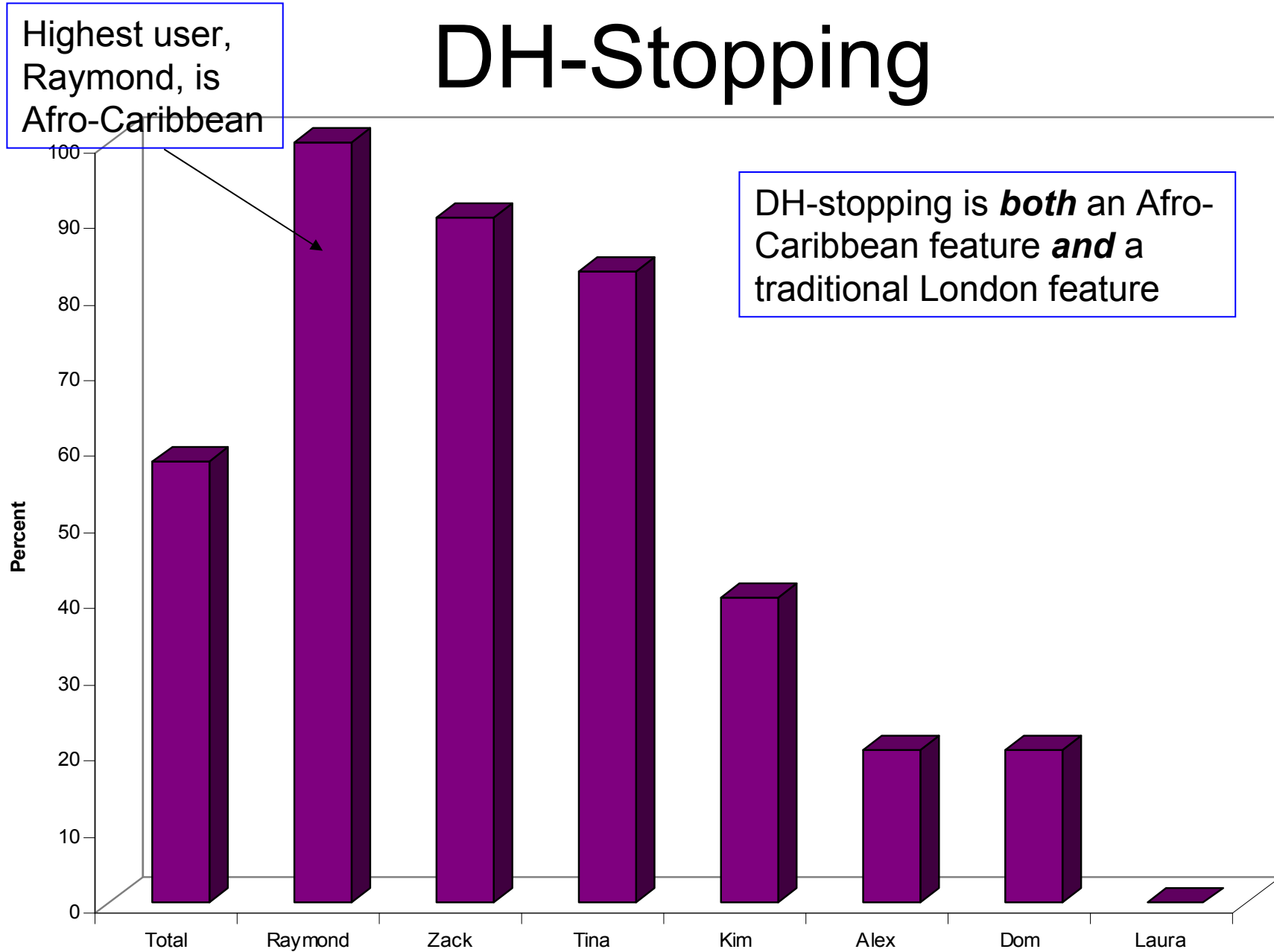
H-dropping



K-backing



DH-Stopping

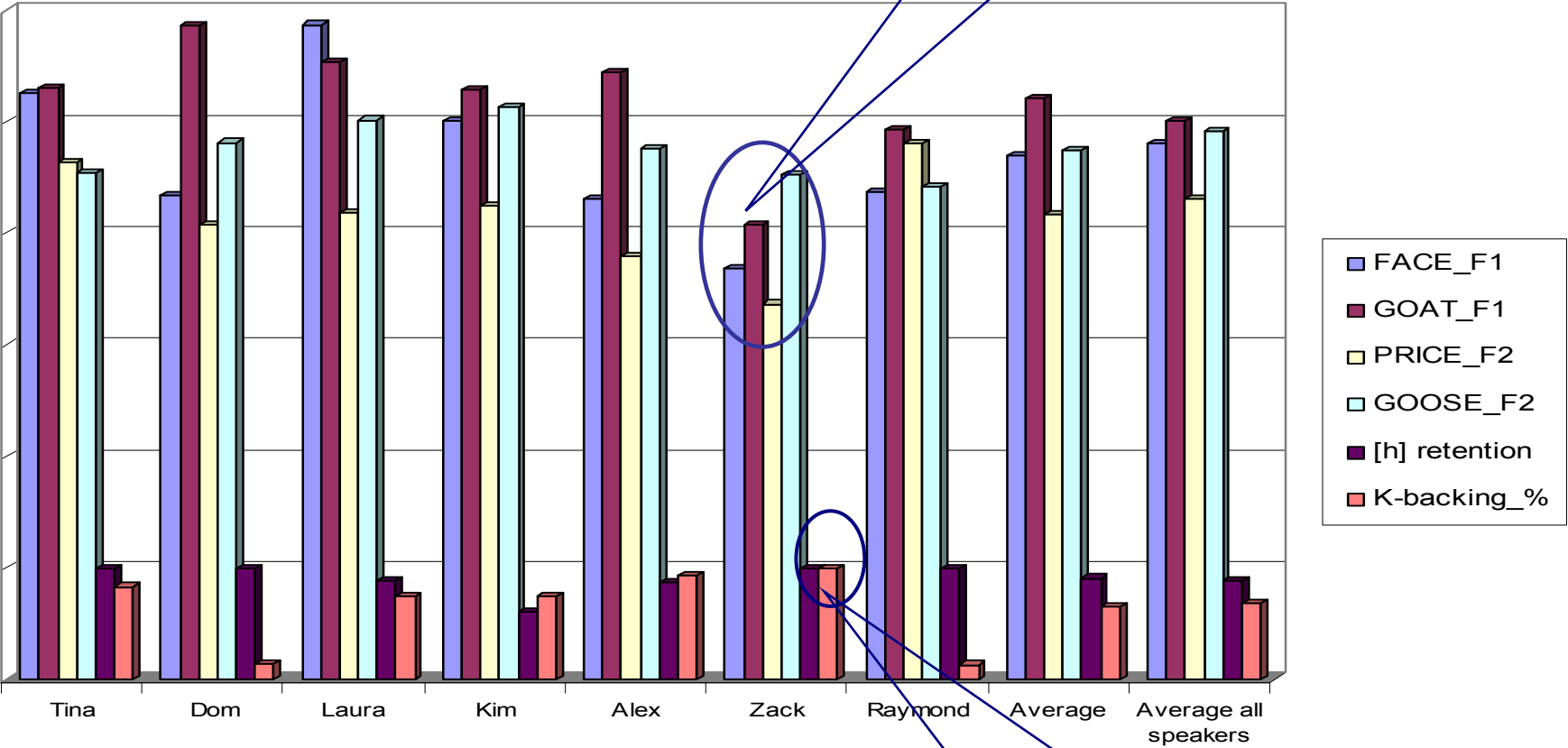


Who are the leaders in change?

- speakers with high multi-ethnic network scores
- non-Anglos

They are in the lead in vowel changes,
but a mixed picture for consonants

and he's a high user of new vowel features, too




Zack is a high user of new consonant features

Conclusions for phonological features

- The bar chart shows Zack to have the most innovative vowel variants and also to have 100% h-retention and high levels of k-backing.
- Raymond, who is Afro-Caribbean, is a close second
- Both non-Anglo ethnicity and (for Anglos) multi-ethnic networks promote use of innovative phonological features

THIS IS + S(subject)

- A new quotative – accounts for 4.8% of quotatives among adolescents in inner London
- Used with a range of subjects
 - This is them* ‘what area are you from . what part?’
This is me ‘I’m from Hackney’
 - This is her* ‘that was my sister’
 - This is him* ‘don’t lie . if I search you and if I find one I’ll kick your arse’
 - This is my mum* ‘what are you doing? I was in the queue before you’
 -  *This is my mum’s boyfriend* ‘put that in your pocket now’

Discourse function of *This is + S*

The 'this is+S' quotative depends on narrative style and other aspects of the discourse context:

- Strongly favoured in first-person contexts
- Used categorically with direct speech
- Heightens involvement, so occurs at key moments in the narrative
- Used predominantly with conversational historic present
- Speakers have lots of other possibilities ('say', 'go', 'be like' and other quotatives). So we wouldn't expect the frequency of use of 'this is +S' to parallel the frequencies of the innovative vowel or consonant forms - the usual problem with discourse features
- **The main point is that these 7 speakers all use the innovative quotative, not how often they use it.**

📢 I literally walked past two thugs that I didn't not knew but they just grabbed me by the hood swang me in a alley and had me at knifepoint. and I couldn't do nothing but I said . And

THEY SAID “where you from?”

I SAID “east london that's where I'm from”

THIS IS THEM “don't be funny” cos they're . I was right in a bit of east london so

THEY SAID “don't be funny with me like that cos I'll stab you” and

I SAID “I'm not trying to be funny”

THIS IS THEM “what area are you from . what part?”

THIS IS ME “I'm from (name of place)” and then like

THEY JUST SAID “oh yeh I don't like that area where area” and then like some hero. thank god there is some typical heros who. it's like if you're short don't even bother come over because you're just gonna get stabbed yourself like .

Seven speakers are users of THIS IS+S

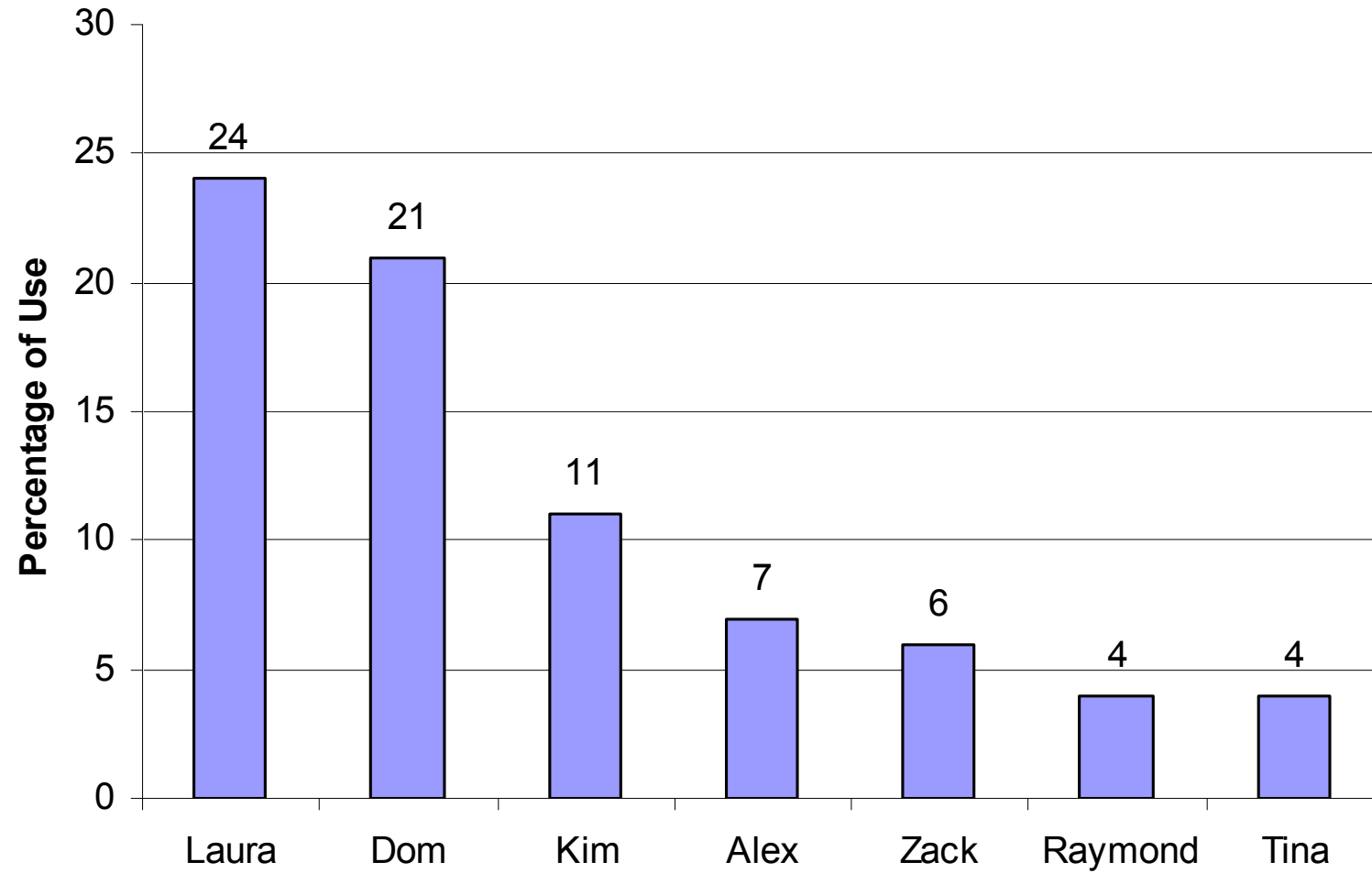
They are not identical in their use of the innovative forms:

e.g. Zack has the highest frequency of the phonetic/phonological innovations, but he is only the 5th highest user of the new quotative form;

Laura and Dom are the highest users of the new quotative forms but they vary in the frequency with which they use the innovative phonetic forms.

➤ Overall, though, the 7 adolescents are all frequent users of innovative forms:

Linguistic Innovators - Distribution of Quotative THIS IS + SUBJECT



What do the 7 adolescents have in common?

It is not solely ethnicity:

Zack:	white British
Laura:	white British
Dom:	Columbian
Alex:	mixed race (white/black Afro-Caribbean)
Kim:	white British
Raymond:	Afro-Caribbean
Tina:	white British (self-identifies as such; father is Indian)

All the Hackney adolescents use the phonetic/phonological innovations to some extent

The 7 users of THIS IS+S all have ***more ethnically mixed friendship groups*** than the other adolescents in our sample.

Relevance to language change?

- returning to the four factors of ethnicity, social network, practice and personality**

Our speakers most likely use ‘crossing’ and stylised speech, including ethnic styles

However, it is the **language and dialect contact** experienced by these ‘new Londoners’ which leads to the quasi-permanent phonologies and grammars of our speakers. We think this because:

The nature of a speaker’s friendship group (**ethnic composition of social network**) is crucial in this dialect contact

Multi-ethnic friendship groups allow the take-up of innovations:

Dom: “When you hang around with someone things of that person will get stuck to you and things of you get stuck to him do you get me now?”

And **ethnicity** may be an independent factor, but it is difficult to separate this from social network

(Community of) practice?

They are highly involved in youth culture (such as rapping and MCing)

Personality?

The 7 speakers are dominant characters within their friendship groups

They are looked up to by their peers

We think it possible that these 7 are the leaders of change amongst the adolescent speakers we studied