

# Tracking Dialect Perception through the Lifespan

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# Social Meaning in Language

/kæt/



[keət]

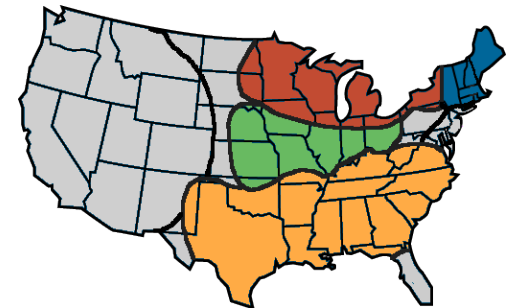
We provide information that indexes us as individuals every time we talk.

# Regional Dialect

## Adults can...

- Group people based on how they talk (Clopper & Pisoni, 2007)
- Identify where someone is from based on how they talk (for known dialects) (Clopper & Pisoni, 2004)
- Perceptually adapt to different pronunciations (Maye et al., 2008)
- Judge people based on how they talk (Lambert et al., 1960)

## How do children acquire these skills?



# Infant Abilities

**Before 12 months of age (often *well* before), infants can...**

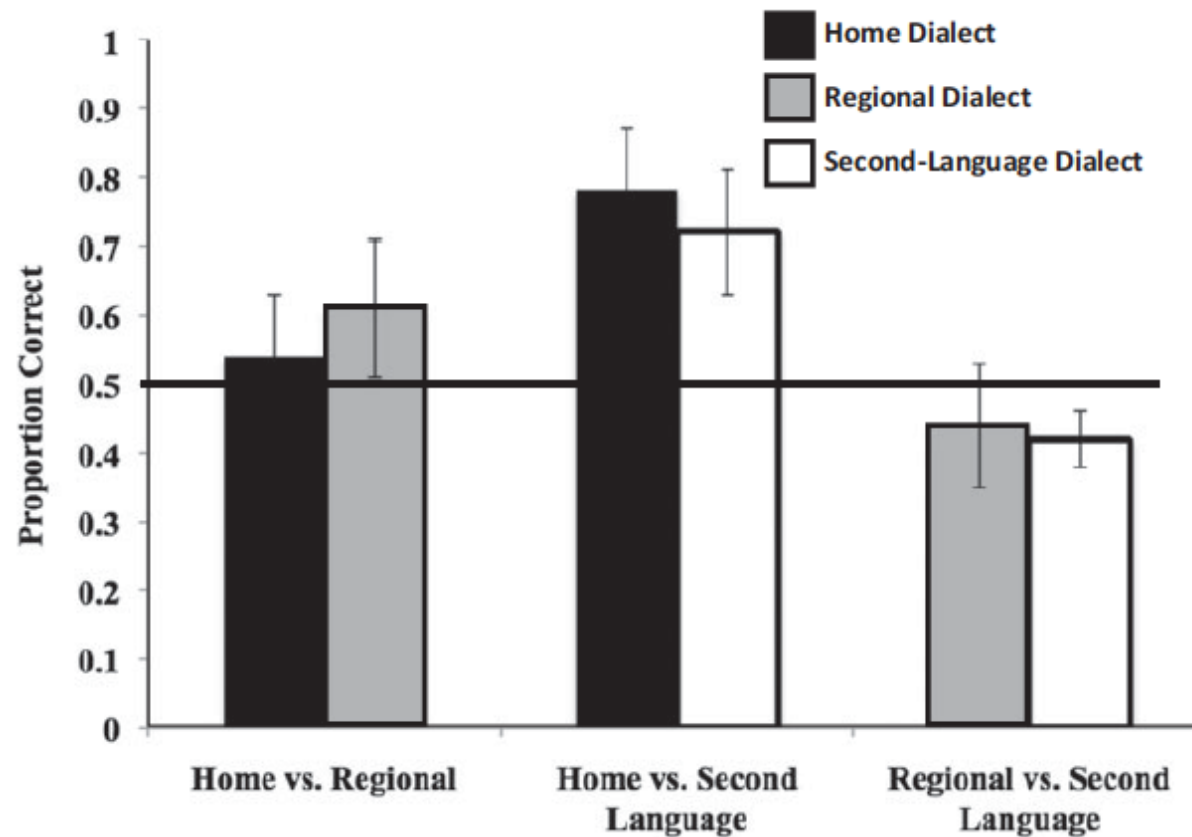
- Discriminate between two regional dialects of English  
(Nazzi et al., 2000; Butler et al., 2011)
- Show social preferences for speakers of their soon-to-be native language  
(Kinzler et al., 2007)

# Pre-School Problems

- Old pre-schoolers (age 5 and 6 years) FAIL to use regional dialect information in an explicit categorization task  
(Flocchia et al., 2009, Girard et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2014)
- They also FAIL to normalize across dialects in a word recognition task  
(Nathan et al., 2008)
- Social attitude judgments based on regional dialect are not solid until age 9 years  
(Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013)

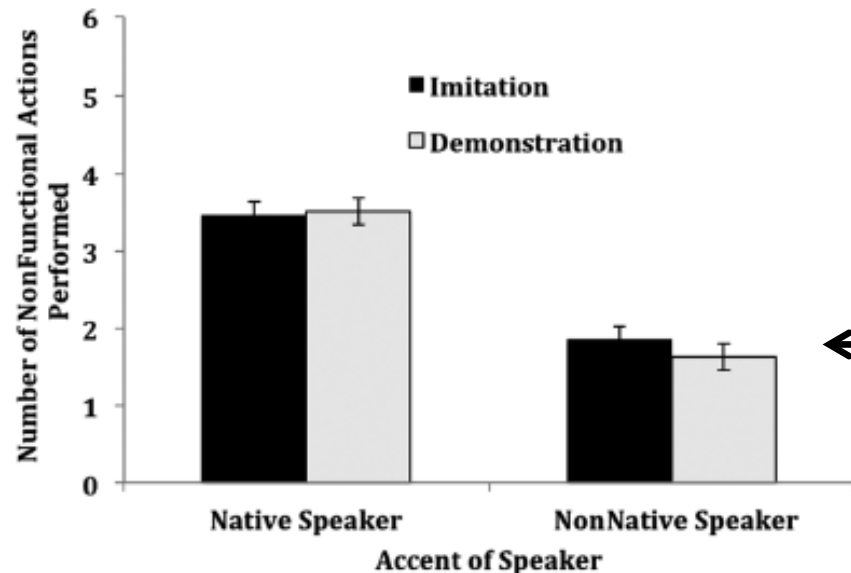
# Pre-School Problems

(Wagner, Clopper, & Pate, 2014)



# Some Hope: Foreign Accents

**Pre-school aged children DO seem to use the difference between native and foreign accented speech to make social judgments.**



- Children would rather be friends with a native talker

(Kinzler et al., 2007)

- Children would rather imitate and learn from a native talker

← (Wagner, Dunfield, & Rohrbeck, 2014)

- Children can categorize talkers using home vs. L2 variety

(Wagner, Clopper, & Pate, 2014)

# So what's the story?

- Task differences
- Different kinds of dialects and other speech variation examined
- Sparse data set to make generalizations from



# The Ohio Regional Dialect Developmental Repository



- Cross-sectional data from a large sample to establish developmental milestones for a range of dialect skills:
  - Discrimination*
  - Grouping (free classification, explicit categorization)*
  - Localness judgments*
  - Attitude judgments (solidarity, status)*
  - Production*
  - Intelligibility*
- Sampled fairly densely from 4 – 17 years of age, and somewhat more sparsely from 18 – 94 years of age
- Phase 1: Between-subjects  
Phase 2: Within-subjects  
Phase 3: Make (some of) the data publicly available

# For Today

- **Free classification by children (4 – 11 years)**
- **Localness judgments by children and adults**

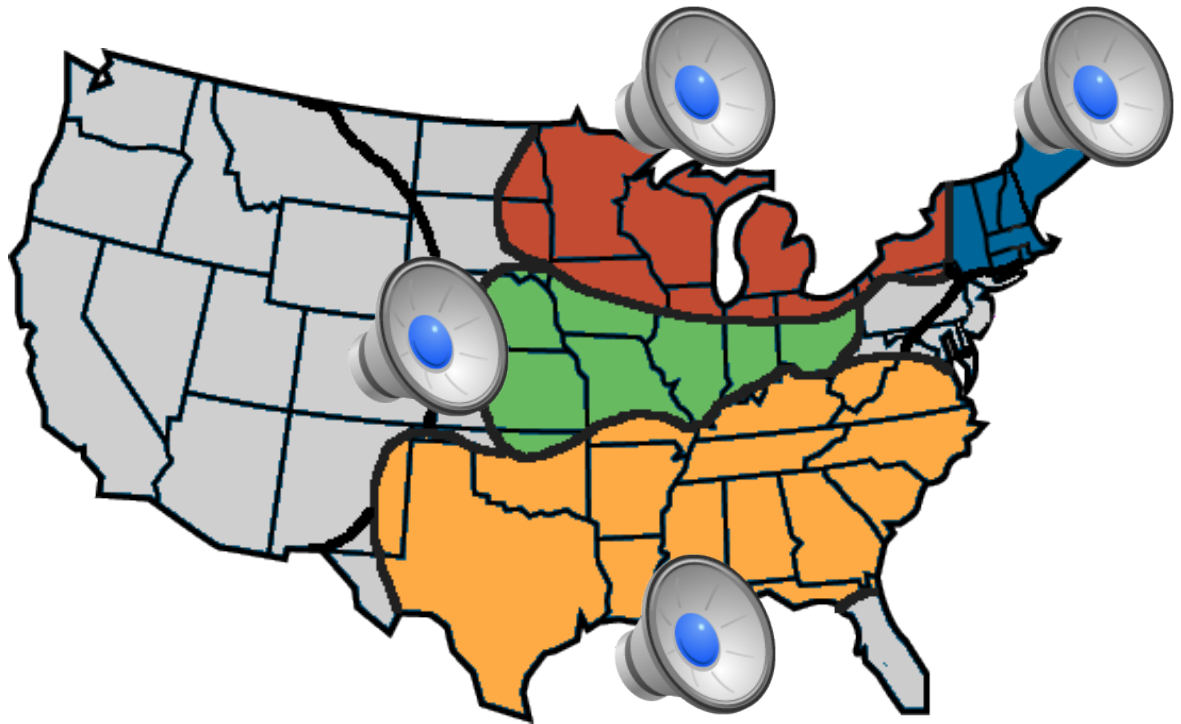
# Free Classification

- Task is a child-friendly adaptation of Clopper & Pisoni (2007)
- Participants listen to a set of talkers and are asked to group them based on “where they are from”
- 3 female talkers from each of 4 regional dialects

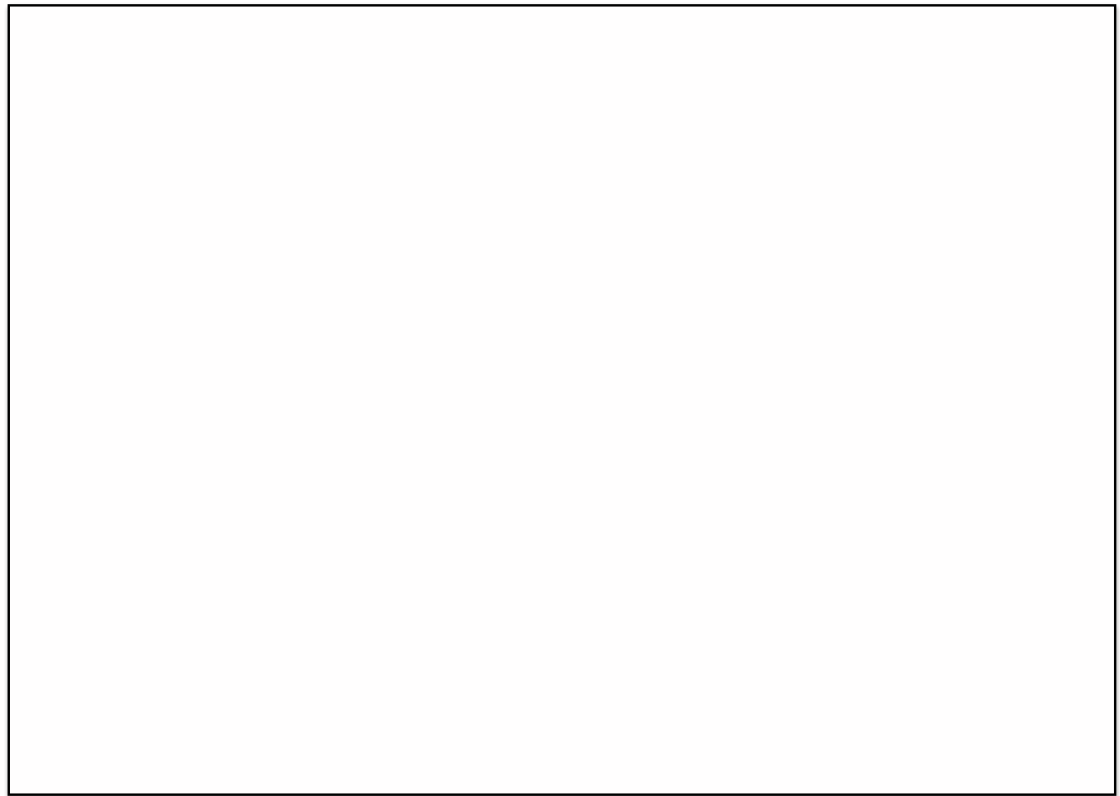
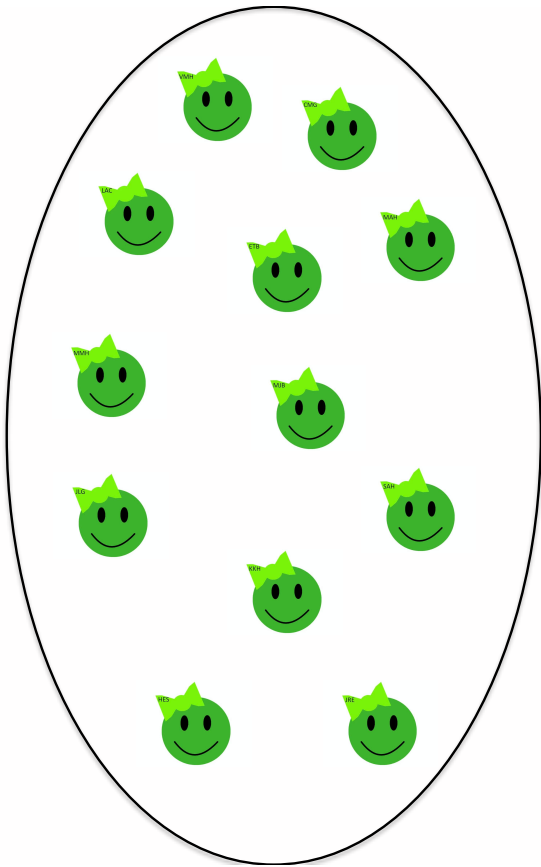
# Regional Dialects Used

She had your dark suit in greasy wash water all year.

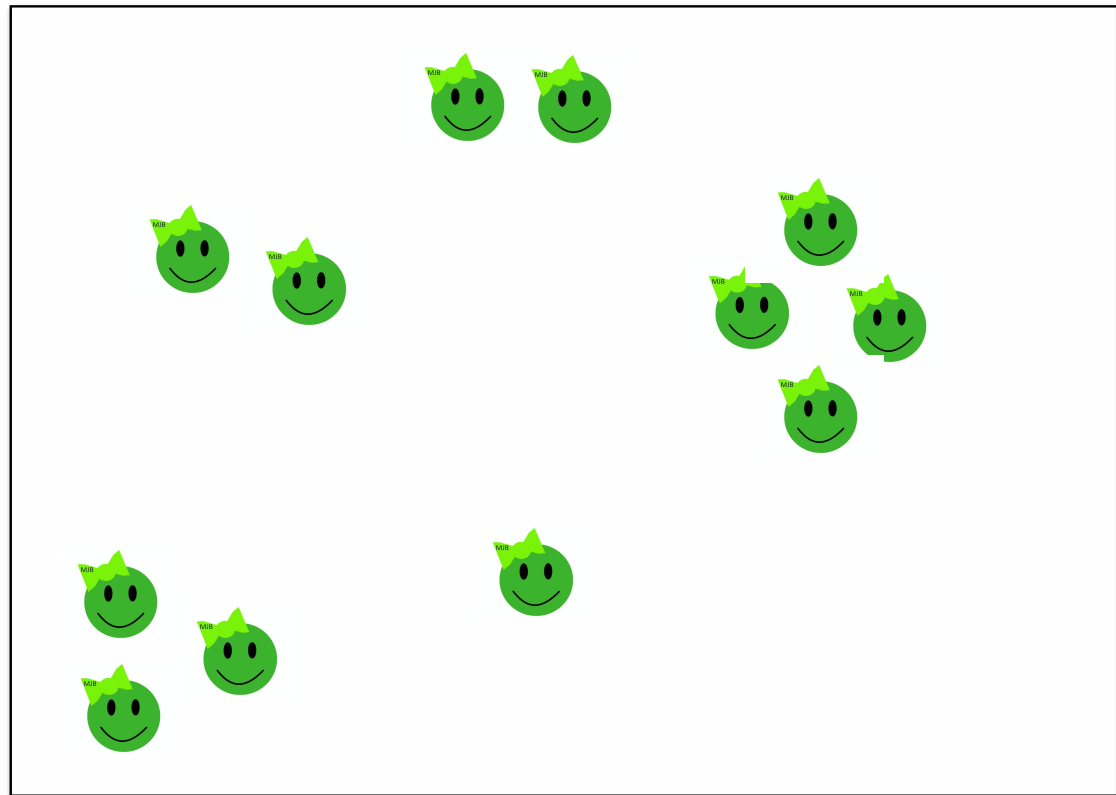
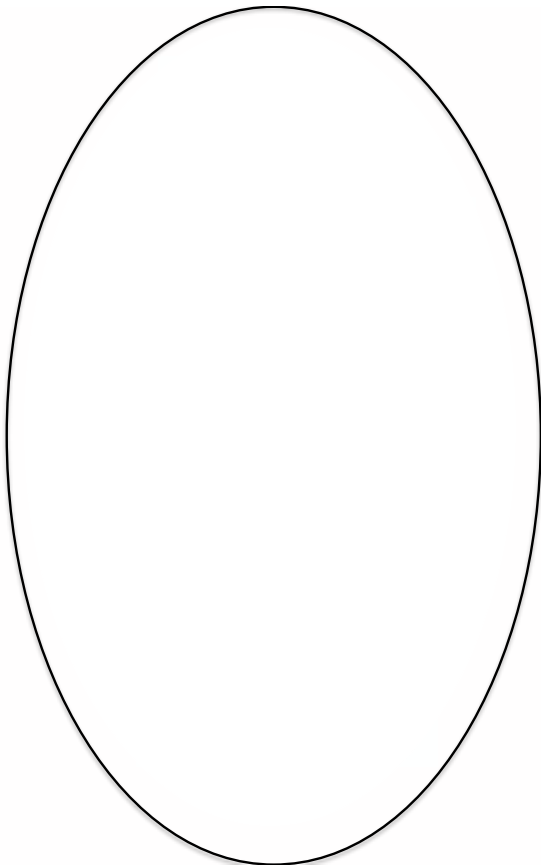
- Midland
- North
- New England
- South



# Free Classification



# Free Classification



# Free Classification Advantages

- **Open-ended task**
  - Children can make as MANY or as FEW groups as they want
- **Easy listening**
  - Children can listen to each talker as many times as they want
  - All talkers say the same sentence

# Free Classification Participants

Age group (years)	Mean age (years)	N
4 – 5	4.5	40
6 – 7	6.6	44
8 – 9	8.4	45
10 – 11	10.4	41
total		170

*The standard adult version of the task (5 talkers per dialect, no cute icons) was also conducted with 8 – 11 year olds (N = 100), 12 – 17 year olds (N = 100) and adults (N = 200). See Yan et al. (2014) .*

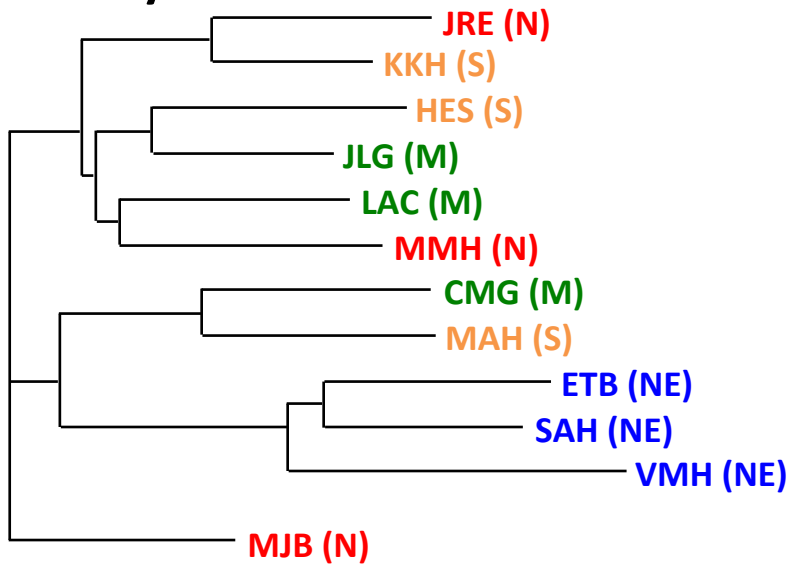


# Results: Groups and Accuracy

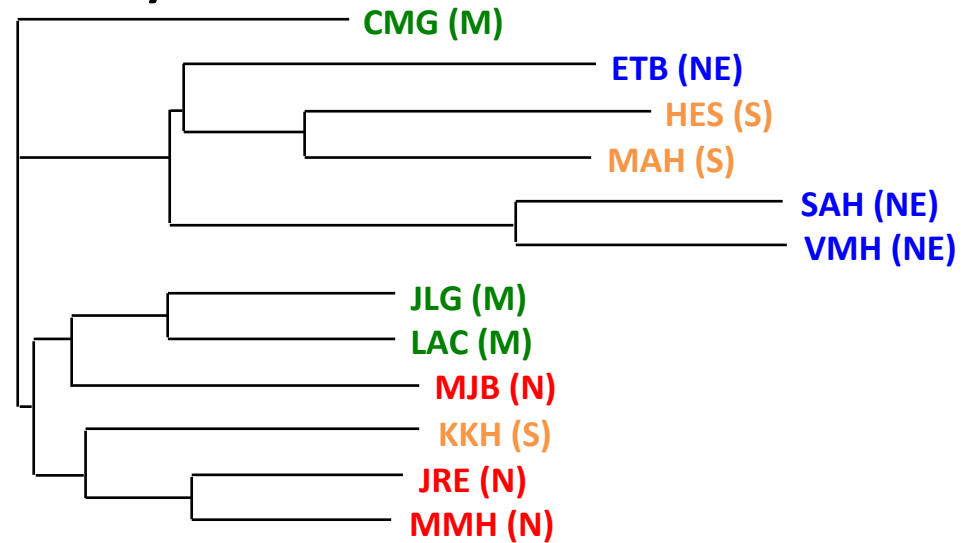
Age group (years)	Mean number of groups	Proportion correct pairings	Proportion errors	Difference score (correct – errors)
4 – 5	3.40 (1.92)	0.45 (0.25)	0.39 (0.21)	0.05 (0.14)
6 – 7	4.77 (1.87)	0.31 (0.21)	0.22 (0.17)	0.09 (0.14)
8 – 9	4.67 (2.15)	0.42 (0.25)	0.19 (0.15)	0.23 (0.21)
10 – 11	4.56 (1.80)	0.39 (0.27)	0.16 (0.10)	0.23 (0.26)

# Results: Cluster Analysis

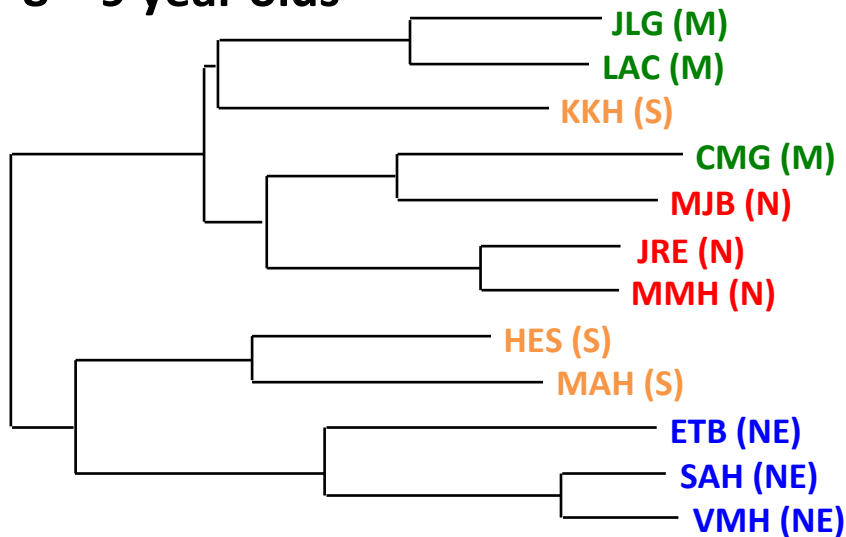
## 4 – 5 year olds



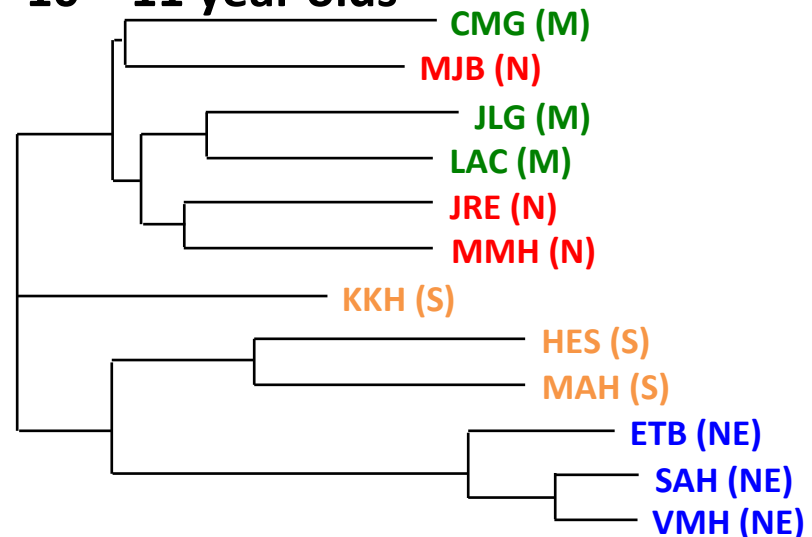
## 6 – 7 year olds



## 8 – 9 year olds

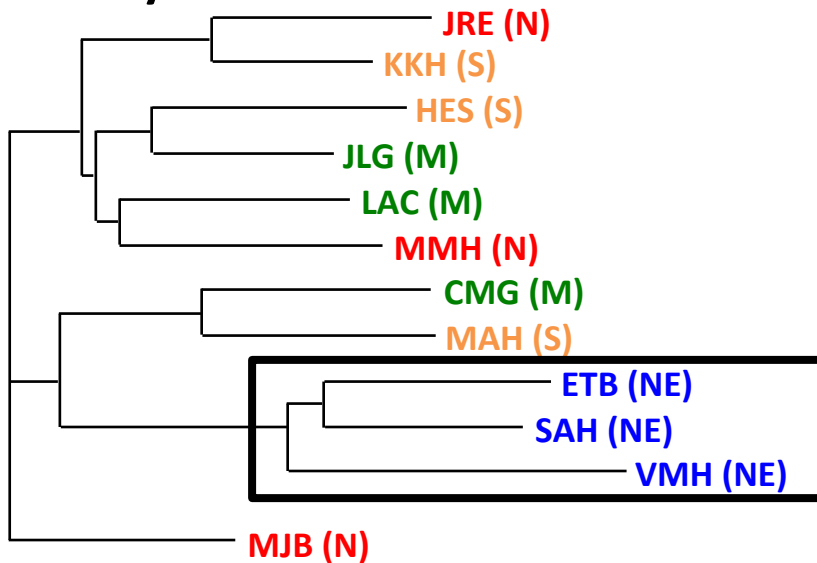


## 10 – 11 year olds

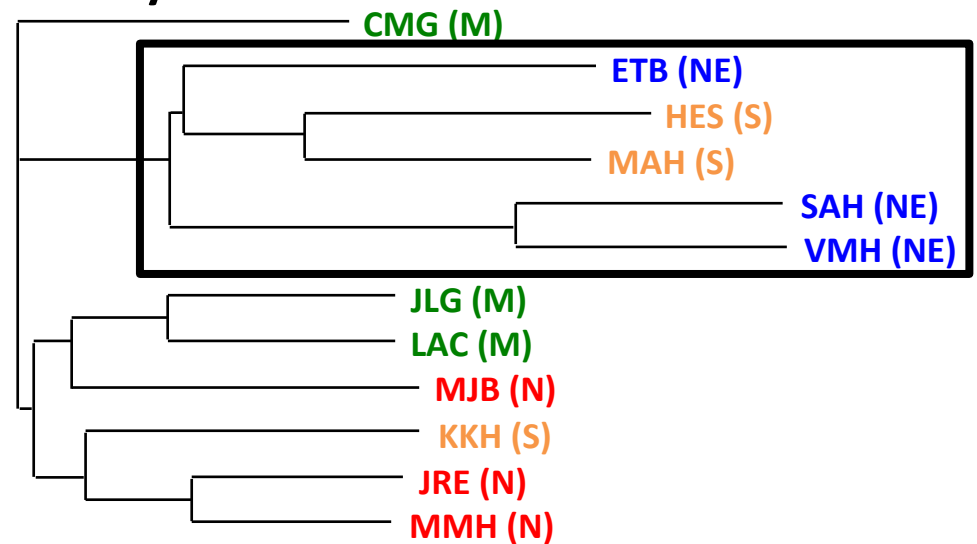


# Results: Cluster Analysis

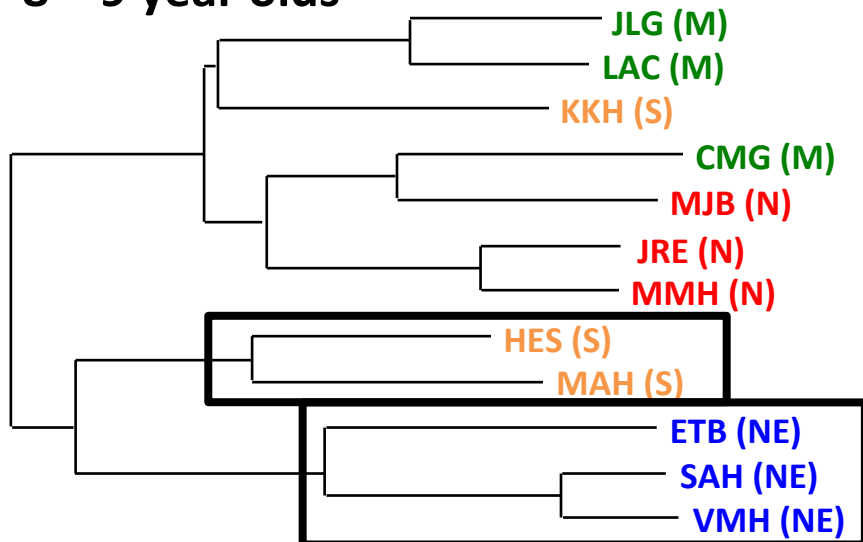
4 – 5 year olds



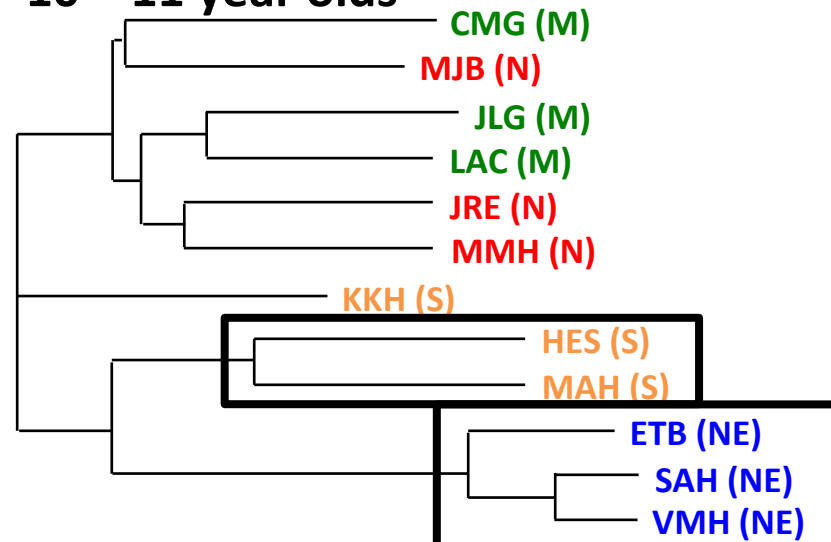
6 – 7 year olds



8 – 9 year olds



10 – 11 year olds



# Free Classification Summary

- **Pre-schoolers CAN classify talkers by dialect**
  - These data are the first to show that pre-school aged children can group individual talkers based on regional dialect
- **Exposure matters**
  - ALL children grouped the **New England** talkers together, and children in our sample have the least exposure to this dialect
- **In-group/out-group matters**
  - 6- and 7-year-olds group **New England** and **South** into one (out-)group
  - By 8 – 9 years, children have clearly distinct **New England** and **South** groups, and (like adults) group **Midland** and **North** together

## But what do children know about actual places?

- For adults, the regions indexed by regional dialect correspond to actual, sometimes quite specific, places
- When do children link regional dialect to different (known) places? How is that skill linked to their ability to group talkers by place?

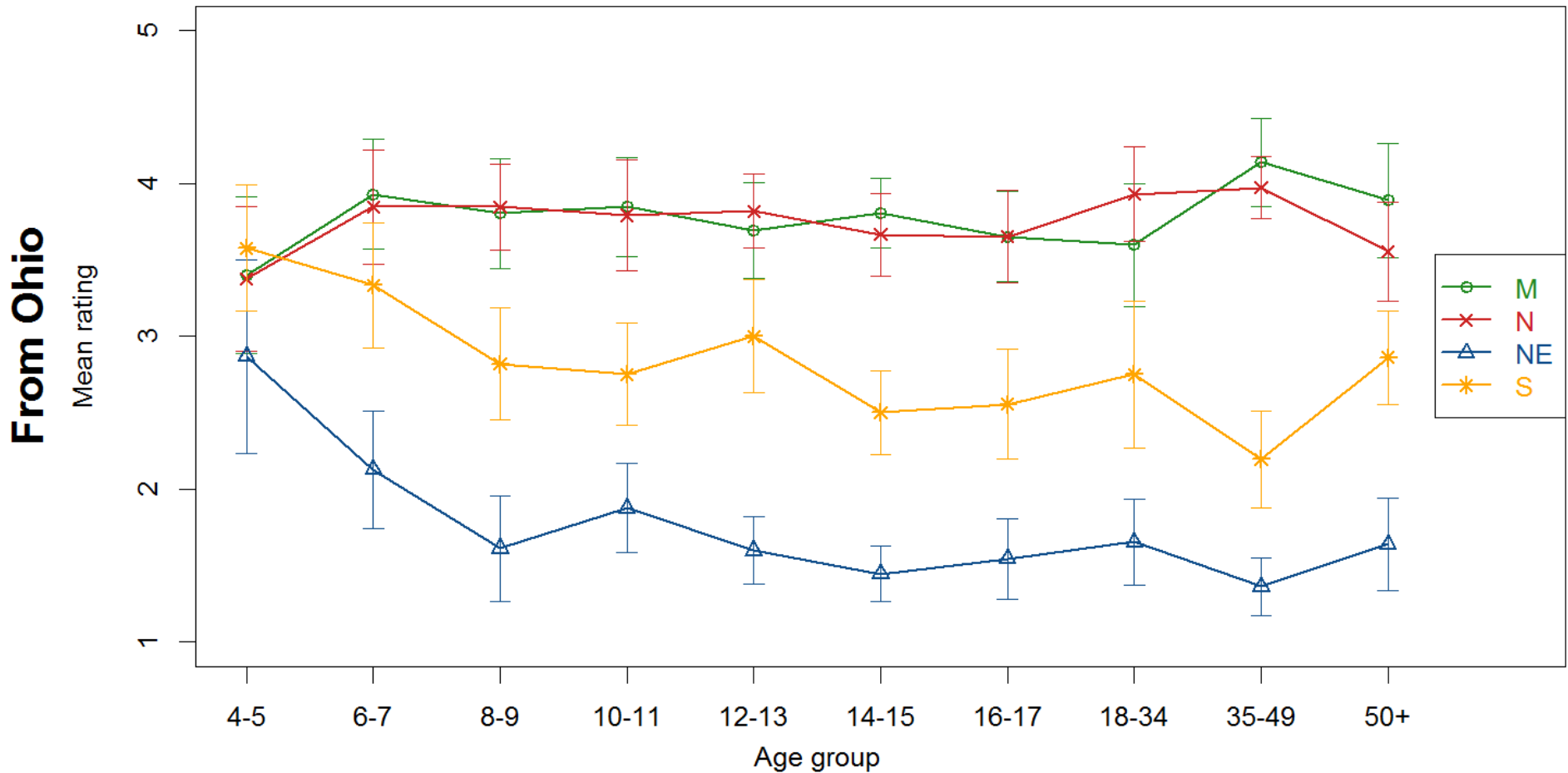
# Localness Rating Task

- How much does this person sound like she's from Ohio?
  - *Very much like she's from Ohio*
  - *A little like she's from Ohio*
  - *Maybe or maybe not like she's from Ohio*
  - *Not really like she's from Ohio*
  - *Not at all like she's from Ohio*
- Three female talkers from each dialect (**Midland**, **North**, **New England**, **South**) were rated in a randomized order

# Localness Rating Participants

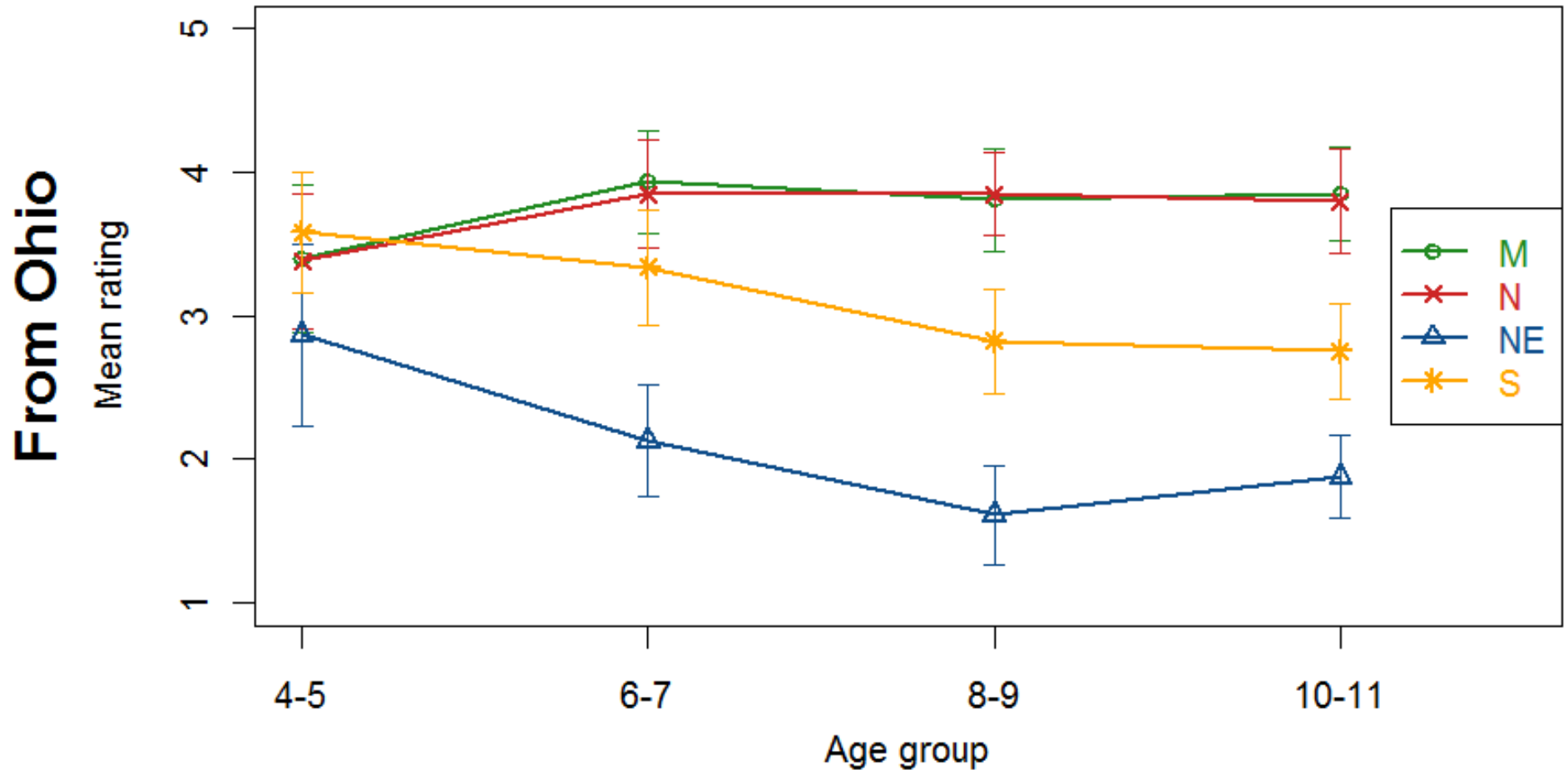
Age group (years)	Mean age (years)	N
4 – 5	4.9	15 (data collection ongoing)
6 – 7	6.5	24
8 – 9	8.3	24
10 – 11	10.3	24
12 – 13	12.5	24
14 – 15	14.5	24
16 – 17	16.6	24
18 – 34	25.7	24
35 – 49	40.9	24
50+	61.0	24
<i>total</i>		231

# Localness Ratings: All Participants





# Localness Ratings: 4 – 11 Year Olds



# Localness Rating Summary

- **Similarities to free classification**

- By age 8 – 9, children show adult-like performance on both tasks: they separate **South** and **New England** talkers into distinct clusters and rate them as being non-local (although **New England** talkers are less local than **South**)

- **Differences from free classification**

- 4- and 5-year-olds cluster the **New England** talkers together, but they do not identify them as non-local
- 6- and 7-year-olds cluster **South** and **New England** talkers together, but only rate the **New England** talkers as being non-local

# General Summary

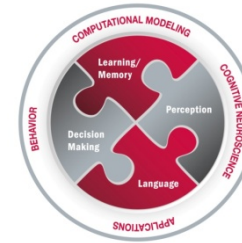
- **Pre-school aged children CAN use regional dialect to group talkers**
  - Earliest success found for such a task
  - Some dialects facilitate children's ability to group talkers (exposure? social relevance?)
  - Skills become adult-like by around age 8 years
- **Explicit judgments about region location (here vs. not here) MAY develop differently than the ability to group talkers**
  - Adult-like abilities are achieved in the two tasks at the same time, but the developmental trajectories are different

# Stay Tuned...

- Data collection on other tasks is still ongoing and there is much more to come!

# Thank You!

**Cynthia Clopper**

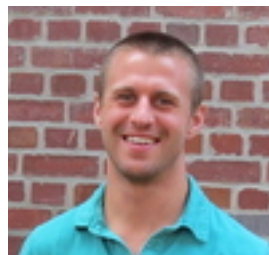


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