

A Po-Mo Boho in SoHo:  
Emerging Specificity in English  
Templatic Hypocoristics

Kyle Gorman

Laurel MacKenzie

University of Pennsylvania

# English hypocoristic formation

- Non-templatic (Itô and Mester 1997)
- Truncation and suffixation
- Minimal word constrains truncation at the cost of base faithfulness

# “CoCo” hypocoristics

- Output form:  $C_1+o.C_2+o$
- e.g.
  - South (of) Houston → SoHo
  - Horace Grant → HoGro
- Not just “stump compounding” or “syllabic acronyms”
  - Scarlett Johansson → ScarJo (though Google hits for ScoJo, in reference to the actress)

# Emerging specificity

- CoCo forms adhere to a rigid template at the expense of base faithfulness
- Restriction to a certain template is novel for English, but commonplace elsewhere
  - Reduplication (e.g. Austronesian) or templatic morphology (e.g. Semitic)
- Our goal today will be to fill out the lexical entry for the CoCo template

# Ancient history of CoCo

- boho (bohemian): OED 1920
- mofo (mother\*\*\*\*er): Hunter S. Thompson 1967 (unlikely to be “written” first)
- SoHo (South of Houston): NYT article introduces the word 1970
- slomo (slow motion) and po-mo (post-modern): OED 1978 and OED 1986

# Recent history of CoCo

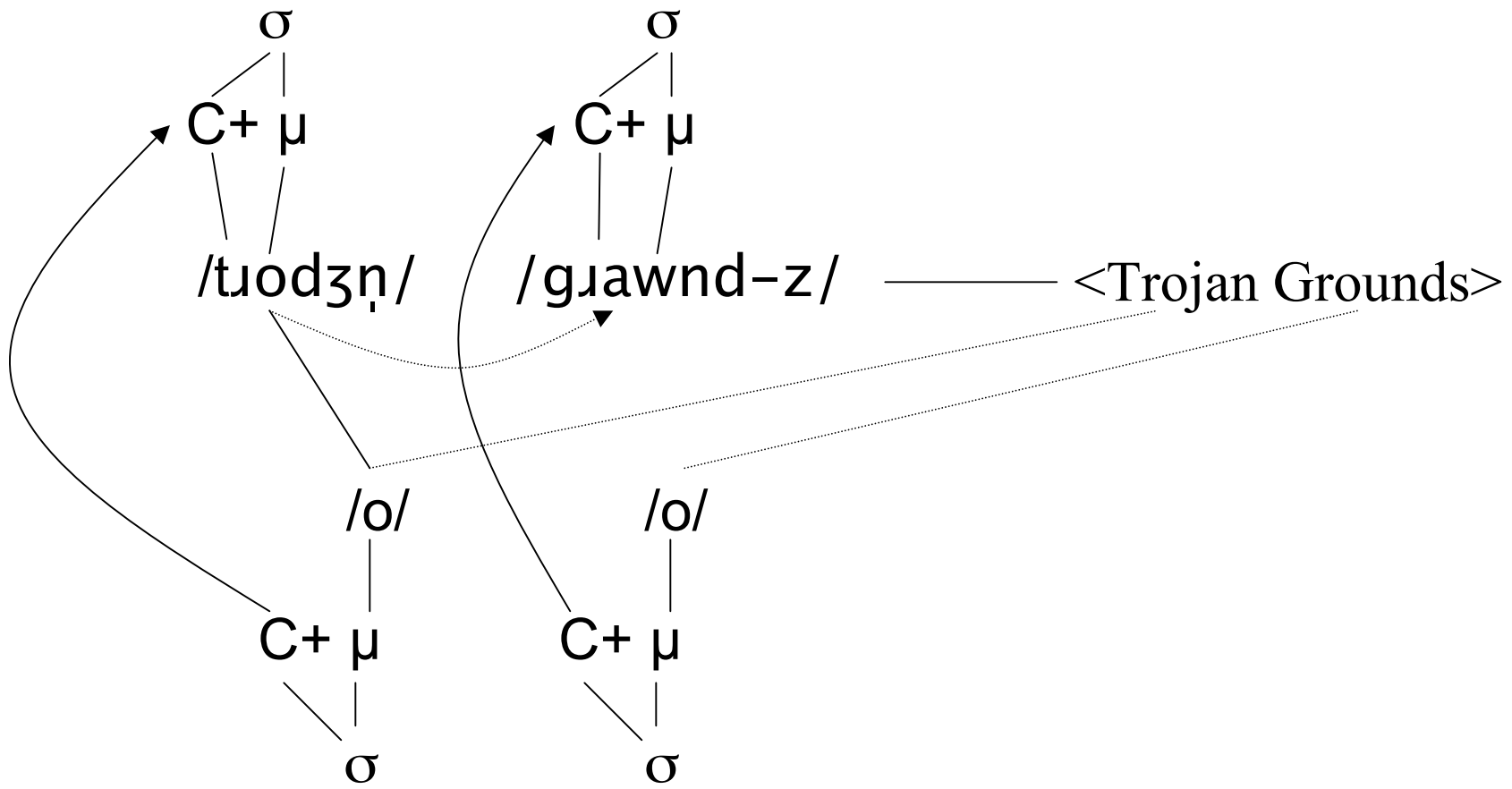
- Spreading rapidly, particularly on American college campuses:
  - HoCo (House Committee): Harvard Crimson 1996
  - CoHo (Coffee House): Stanford Daily 1999
  - FroGro (Fresh Grocer): Daily Pennsylvanian 2001 (built 2000)
- And numerous verbal examples!
  - JoMo (Jonathan Moses, prominent Penn undergrad)
  - RoJo (Ronald Johnson, USC wide receiver)
  - WoPo (Washington Post, competes with stump-esque WaPo)

# Constraints on base

- Some bases contain two /o/s:
  - FroYo (frozen yogurt)
- But most just contain one /o/:
  - JoGro (Josh Groban: singer)
  - MoJo (mobile journalist)
- But not all contain an /o/ at all!
  - MoDo (Maureen Dowd)
  - HoJo (Howard Johnson: motel chain)
- But we observe that those that lack /o/ at least have one <o>

# Constraints on output

- Complex onsets are retained:
  - Trojan Grounds (USC cafe) → TroGro (\*ToGo)
- Coda consonants fall out:
  - Morrison and Foerster (major law firm) → MoFo (\*MoFor)
- Looks a bit like a C+V.C+V template sometimes:
  - high fidelity → hifi
  - Sarah Palin → SaPa (google)
- But overwhelmingly, /o/ is the output vowel.
- Zimmer (2005) noted [o] the most popular surface form, and suggested orthography. His suggestion that these are “acronymic” is incompatible with the replication of complex onsets and the /o/ ~ <o> constraint.



[tʰo.gʁo]

# Overview

- Adaptation to Co.Co template

Fresh Grocer: FroGro



Trojan Grounds: TroGro



South of Houston: SoHo

Maureen Dowd: MoDo

- Presence of orthographic <o> or phonological /o/

# Experiments

Mona Boditch: MoBo

# Experiments

Mona Boditch: MoBo / Tony Roma: ToRo

1: The first nickname is better

2: No preference

3: The second nickname is better

# Experiments

Mona Boditch: MoBo

1: This is a terrible nickname for this person.

2

3

4

5: This is a great nickname for this person.

# Experiments

Subjects: Penn students

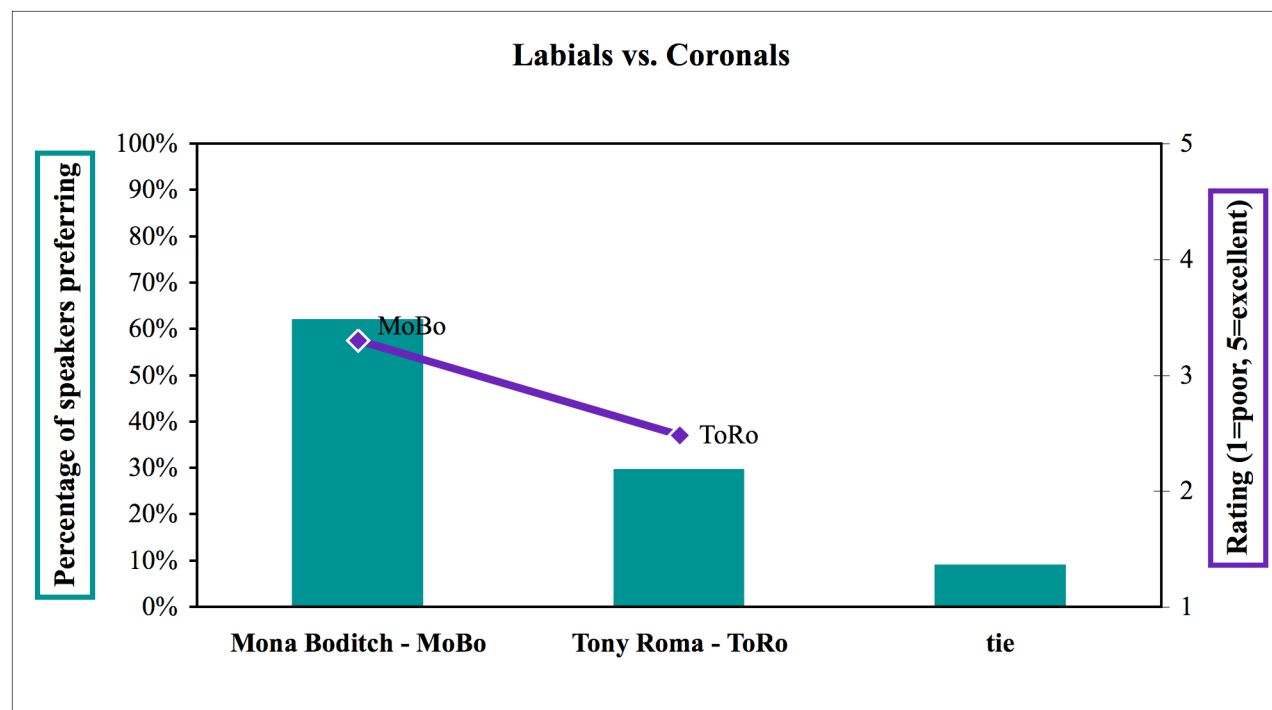
Comparison task: N=34

Rating 1-5 task: N=27

# Results

Hypothesis: Bases with labials are preferred.

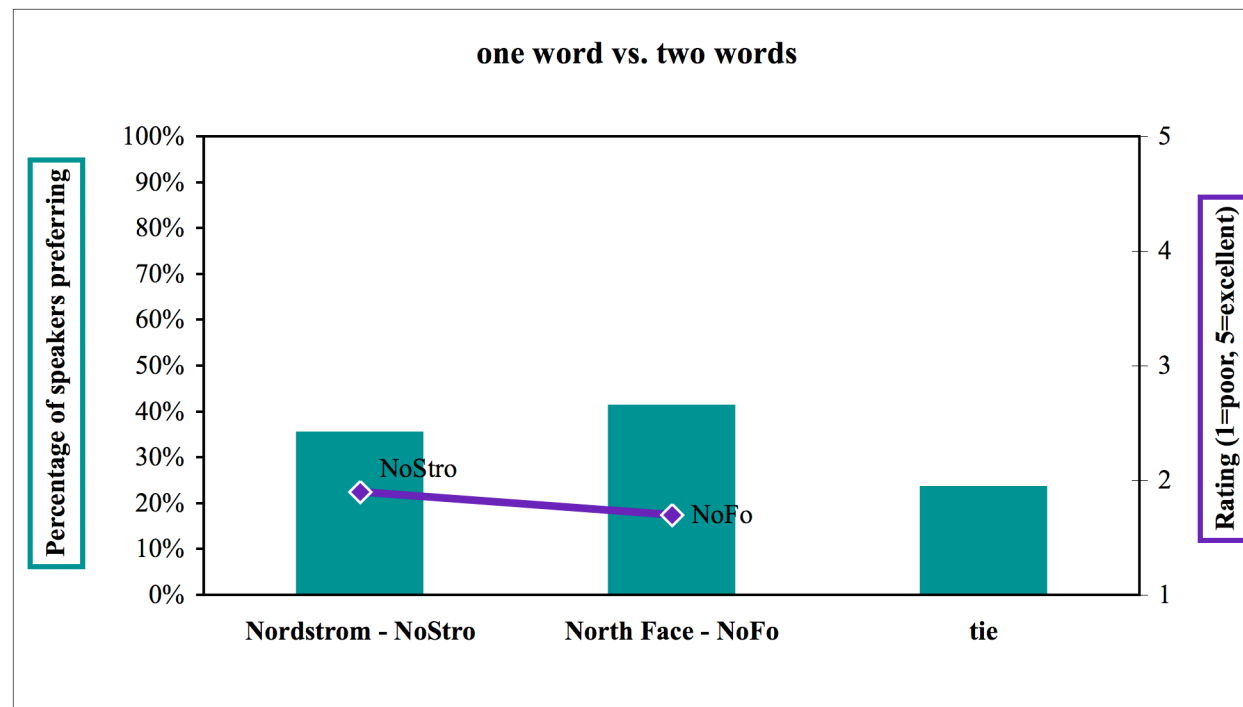
Task: Mona Boditch: MoBo / Tony Roma: ToRo



# Results

Hypothesis: Bipartite bases are preferred.

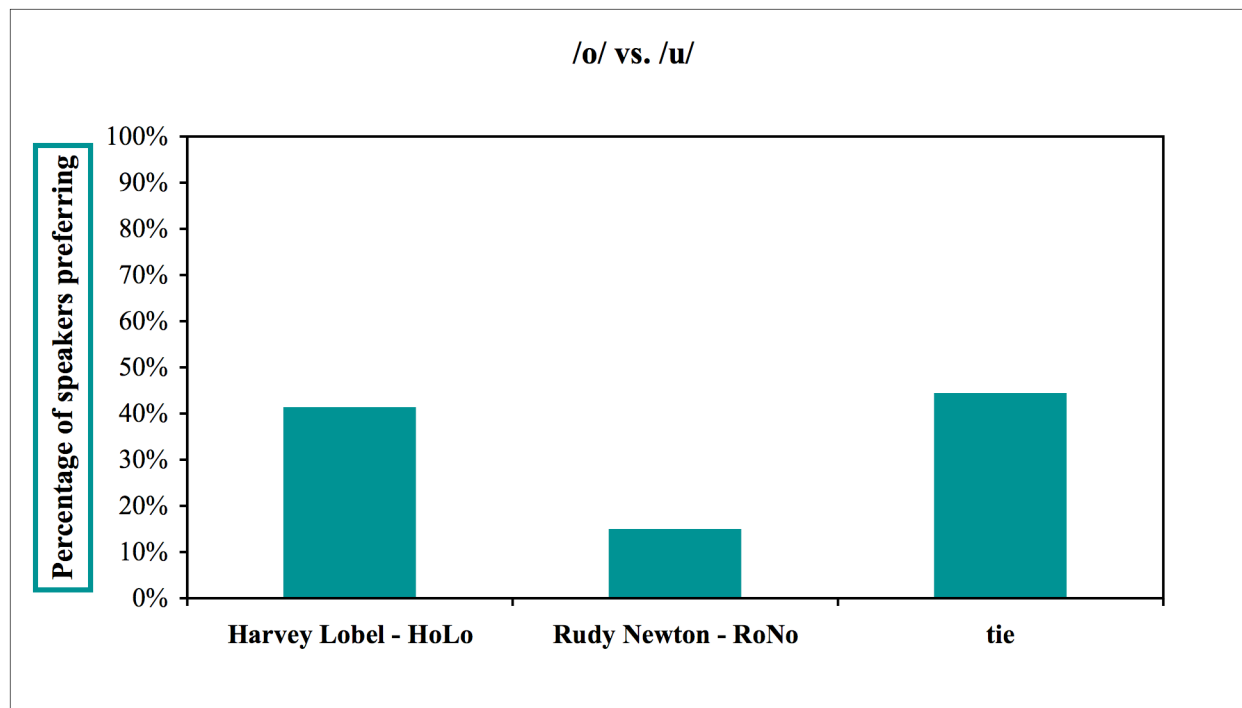
Task: Nordstrom: NoStro / North Face: NoFo



# Results

Hypothesis: Bases with /u/ are dispreferred.

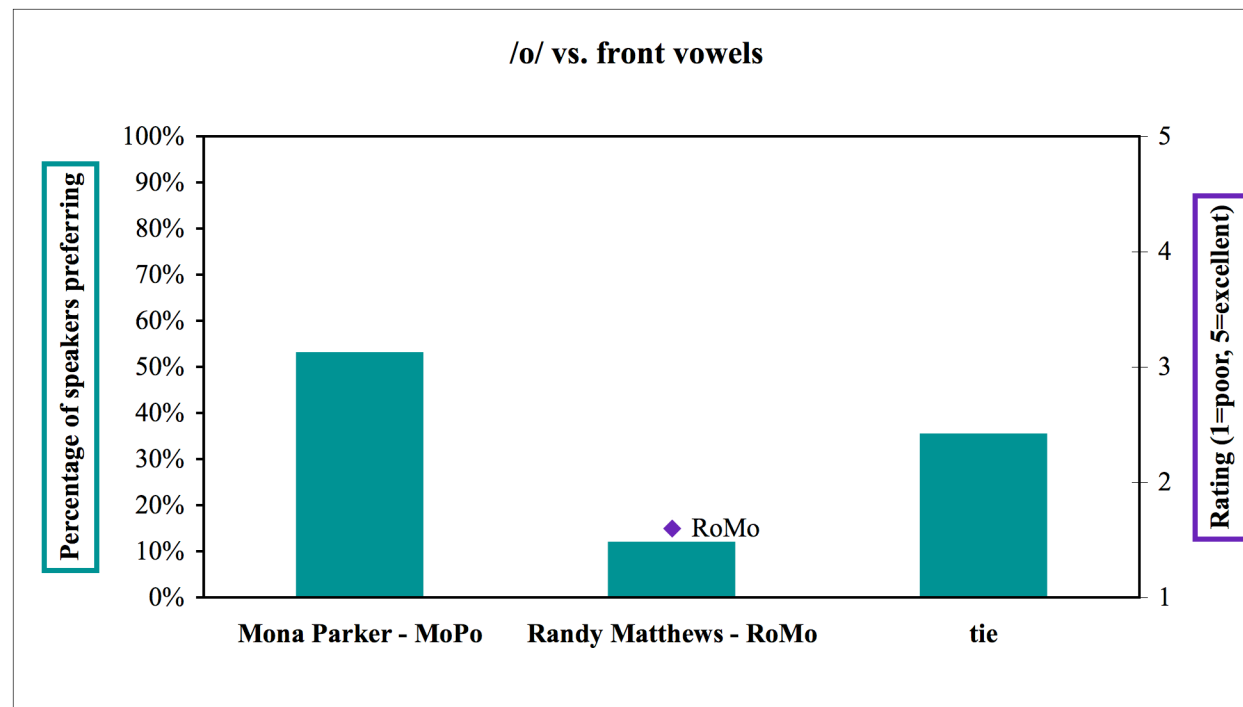
Task: Harvey Lobel: HoLo / Rudy Newton: RoNo



# Results

Hypothesis: Bases with front vowels are dispreferred.

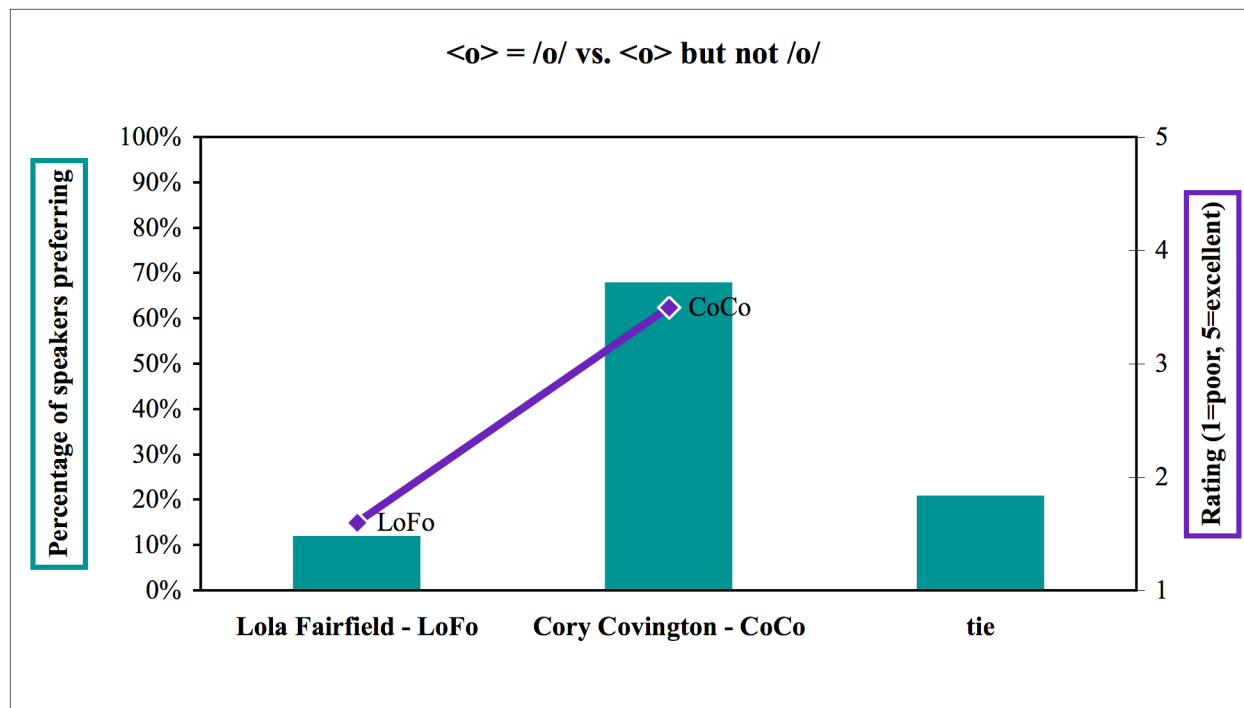
Task: Mona Parker: MoPo / Randy Matthews: RoMo



# Results

Hypothesis: Orthographic and phonological /o/ is preferred over just orthographic /o/.

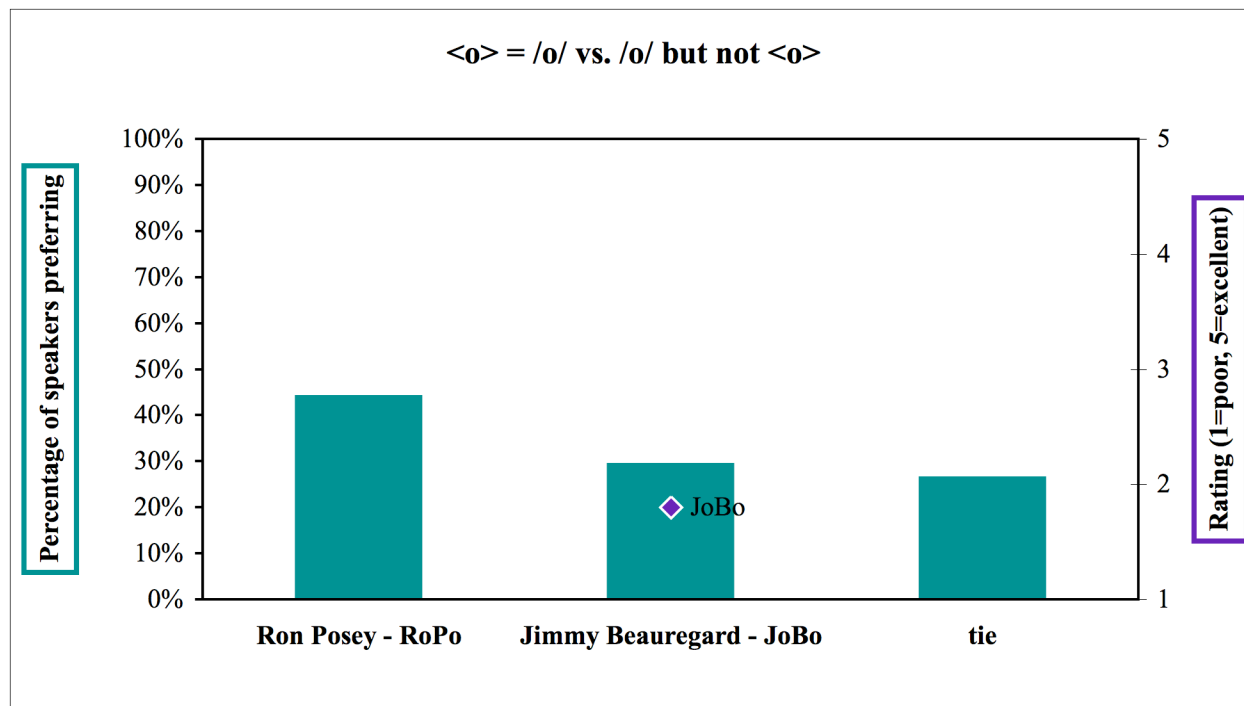
Task: Lola Fairfield: LoFo / Cory Covington: CoCo



# Results

Hypothesis: Orthographic and phonological /o/ is preferred over just phonological /o/.

Task: Ron Posey: RoPo / Jimmy Beauregard: JoBo

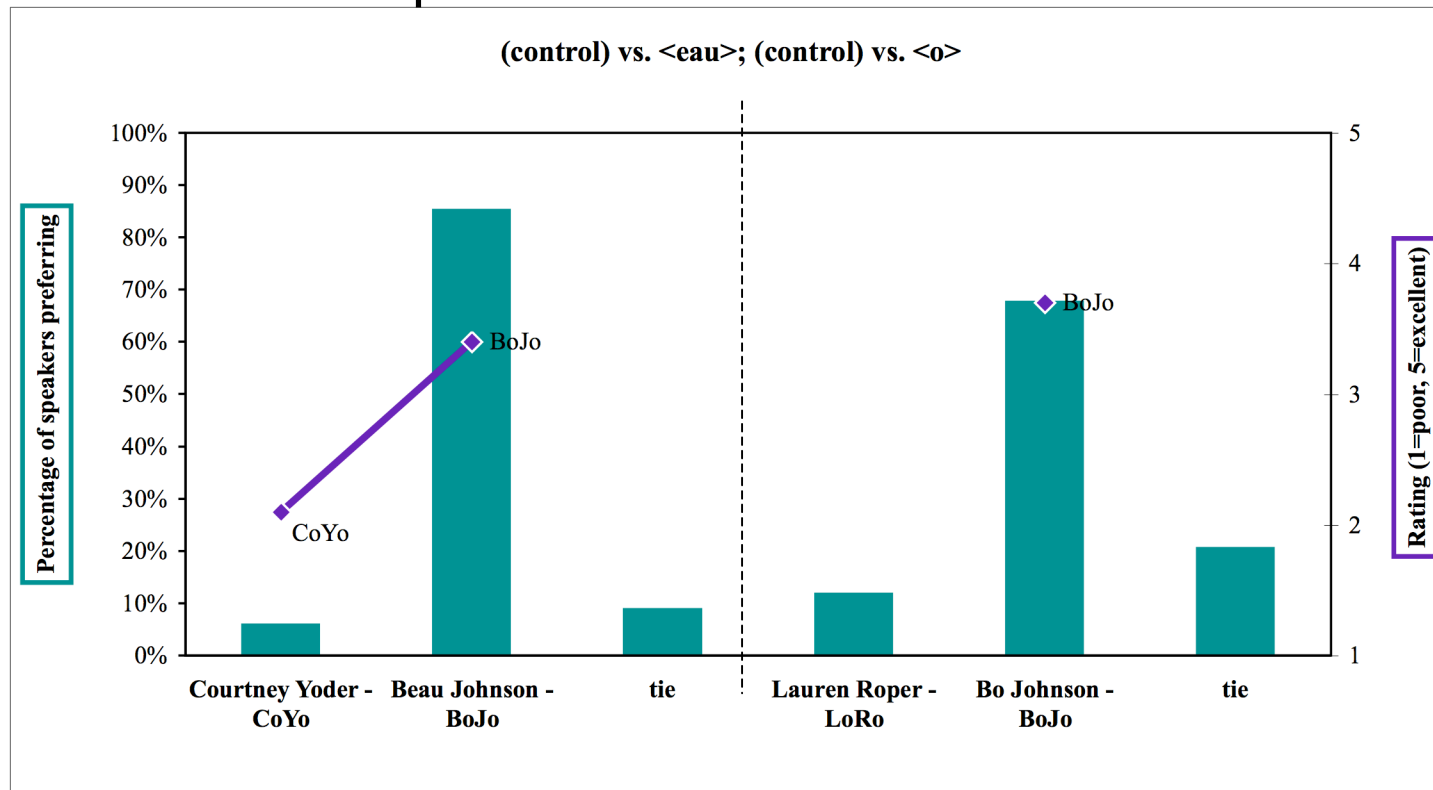


# Results

Hypothesis: Orthographic and phonological /o/ is preferred over just phonological /o/.

Task: Courtney Yoder: CoYo / Beau Johnson: BoJo

Lauren Roper: LoRo / Bo Johnson: BoJo



# Conclusions

Preferred: /o/ and <o>

Bo Johnson: BoJo (3.7/5)

Cory Covington: CoCo (3.5/5)

Dispreferred: front vowels

Randy Matthews: RoMo (1.6/5)

Becky Reeder: BoRo (1.4/5)

Tolerated: <eau> and /u/

Jimmy Beauregard: JoBo (1.8/5)

Rudy Newton: RoNo

Highly specific base constraints.

# Why /o/?

- French also has a process of nickname formation appending /o/ to truncated forms:
  - dictionnaire → dico
  - apéritif → apéro
- OED: truncation of words after /o/ lead to o-final abbreviations “probably established an association of the ending -o with casual or light-hearted use which it has retained ever since” (e.g. memo, typo) → -o suffix (cheapo, wino, ammo).
- Also connective /-o-/, as in “syntactico-semantic” to account for medial /o/ in CoCo?

## Why /o/?

- “Phoneaesthetic” connections with /o/: “light-hearted”ness (pace OED)
- Associations with “exotic” CVCV phonotactics?
- Associations with infant speech (“place harmony”: work of Paula Fikkert)

# Acknowledgments

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# References

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<b>Locations</b>					
SoHo	South of Houston	NoHo	North Houston	LoHo	Lower Houston
SoPo	South Portland	SoNo	South Norwalk	SoCo	South Congress
SoPo	Southport	NoHo	North Hollywood	RoPo	Rohnert Park
MoCo	Montgomery County	JoCo	Johnson County	CoCo	Contra Costa
PoCho	Port Chester	SoYo	Southwest Yonkers	SoBro	South Bronx
SoBro	South of Broome	SoBro	South of Broadway	BoMo	Baltimore
<b>Institutions/Businesses</b>					
PfoHo	Pforzheimer House	LoHo	Lowell House	NoHo	North House
HoHo	Honors House	FloMo	Florence Moore Hall	CoHo	Coffee House
CoPo	Corner Pocket	TroGro	Trojan Grounds	YoPo	Yogurt Park
FroGro	Fresh Grocer	HoJo	Howard Johnson	MoFo	Morrison and Foerster
WoPo	Washington Post	TroHo	Trojan Horse		
<b>People</b>					
MoDo	Maureen Dowd	ScoJo	Scarlett Johansson	FloJo	Florence Griffith-Joyner
HoGro	Horace Grant	JoGro	Josh Groban	RoJo	Ronald Johnson
CoMo	Courtney Moore	JoMo	Jonathan Moses		
<b>Things</b>					
boho	bohemian	bobo	bourgeois bohemian	mofo	mother****er
po-mo	post-modern	SoCo	Southern Comfort	fro-yo	frozen yogurt
slo-mo	slow-motion	mojo	mobile journalist	HoCo	House Committee
pro-fro	prospective freshman	HoHo	House Host	RoHo	Room Host
coco	color computer	ho-cho	hot chocolate		