Grandfawther's Mardi Graw: The PALM vowel in New Orleans

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New Orleans English shares some features with New York City. Traditional NYC English maintains rare 3-way contrast between LOT, PALM, and THOUGHT, with PALM between LOT and THOUGHT. *Our research question: what is PALM's status in New Orleans?*

Background: shared features of NYC/NOLA; linguists have argued they're due to **diffusion**:

> Diffusion leads to simplified/incomplete imitation of source dialect (Labov 2007)
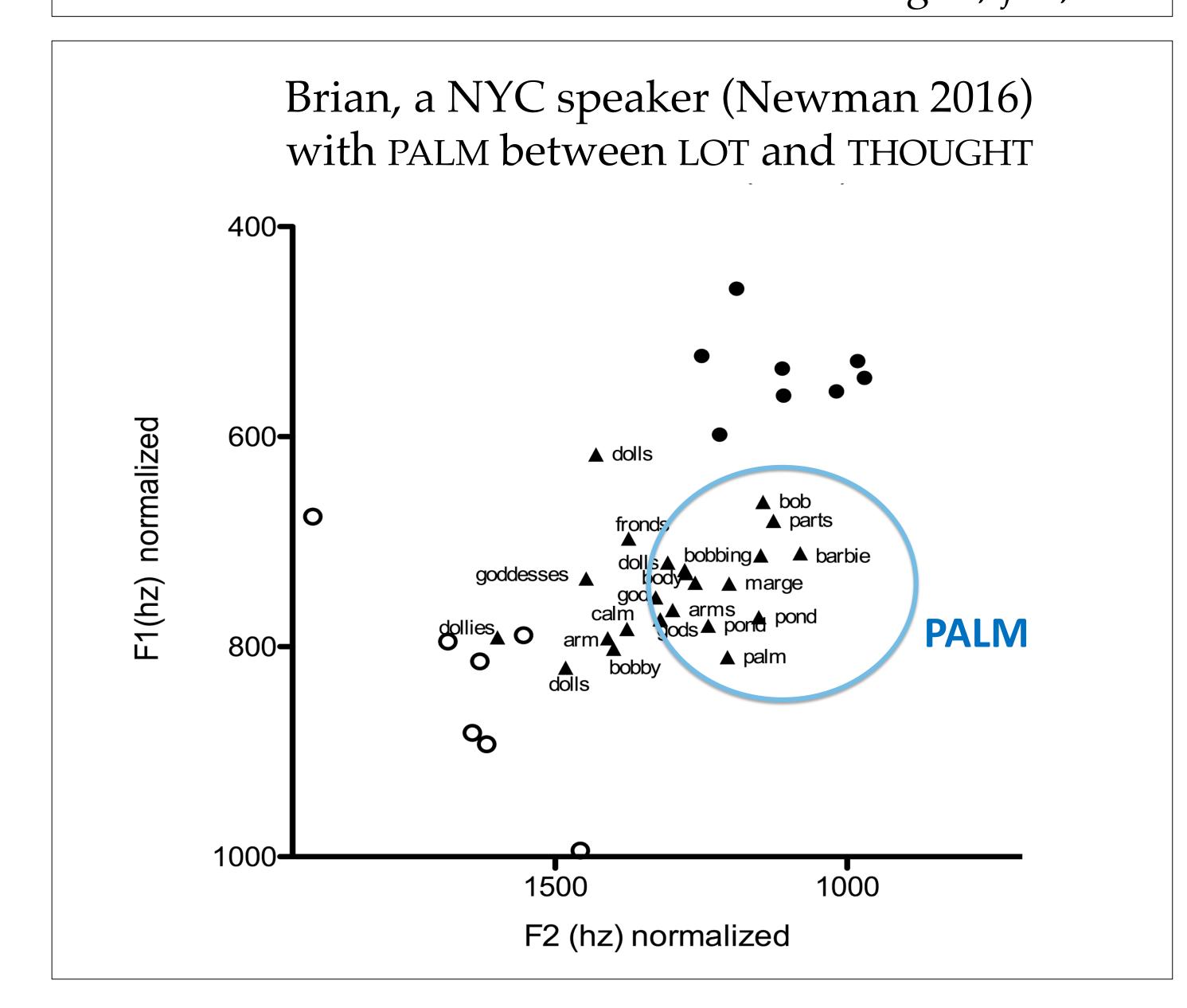
ARGUED NOLA → NYC:

Berger (1980)
- Historic documentation of BIRD-palatalization in South & NYC

ARGUED NYC → NOLA

Labov (2007)
- Compared split-short-a system constraints

Carmichael & Becker (2018)
- Constraint ranking comparison; evidence for diffusion of (r) but inconclusive for THOUGHT
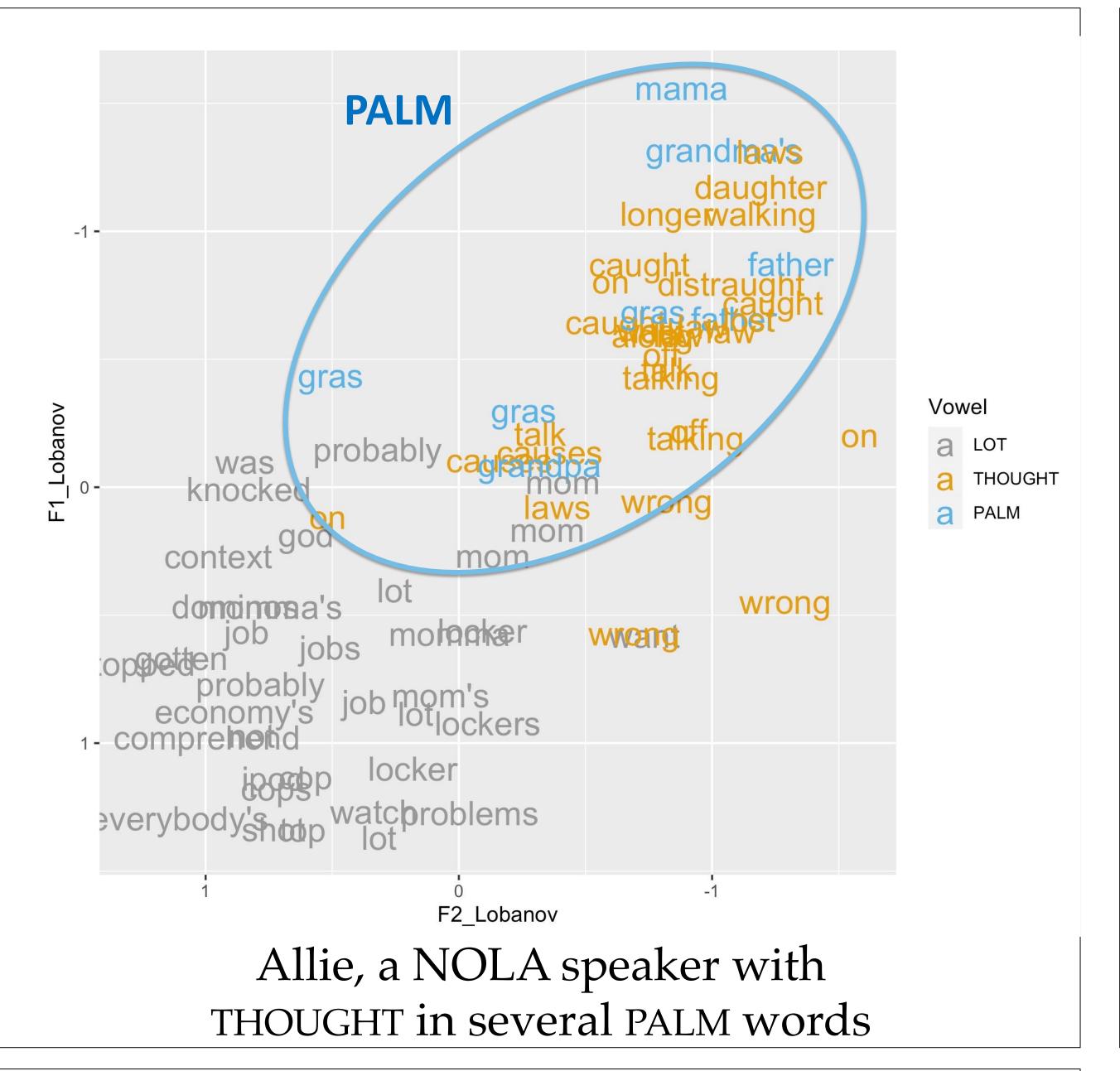
Participant	Birth	System Description	
Brian Berger	1954	Intact 3-D	
Aileen Hughes	1958	Weakened 3-D	
Caitlin Hughes	1987	Weakened 3-D	variably god, Bob, doll
Lissette Baracio	1952	Weakened 3-D	doll, Bob, pond, variably god
Jack Baracio	1950	MAIN	all PALM words
Joey Baracio	1980	MAIN	all PALM words
Charles Ledwith	1957	MAIN	all PALM words
Kerri Ledwith	1989	MAIN	all PALM words
Jack Granger	1955	MAIN	all PALM words
Lisa Happlemath	1979	MAIN	all PALM words
Karen Happlemath	2001	MAIN	all PALM words

PALM in NYCE: Newman (2016) finds LOT words with **voiced codas** transferred to PALM: *god*, *job*, etc.

Brian, a NYC speaker (Newman 2016) with PALM between LOT and THOUGHT

Methodology:

- Lobanov-normalized vowel tokens for 57 white NOLA speakers (sample balanced across age, gender, etc.)
- F1/F2 for THOUGHT, LOT, PALM extracted & plotted in F1/F2 space (N=4054; ~70 per speaker)
- Visually examined plots for distribution of PALM for speakers with unmerged THOUGHT/LOT

Findings: PALM words are *divided between LOT and THOUGHT* in New Orleans

Allie, a NOLA speaker with THOUGHT in several PALM words

A few speakers had THOUGHT in *god*, *John*; but voiced-coda LOT words mostly retain LOT

What vowel is in PALM words in NOLA?

LOT		THOUGHT
Andrea	*nacho*	*calm*
bra	*taco*	*father*
camouflage	*tsunami*	*grandfather*
Chicago	*yada yada*	*grandma*
debacle		*grandpa*
façade		*Mardi Gras*
garage		*Panama*
Java		*papa*
Ma		*pecan*
		restaurant

Blue: multiple unambiguous tokens in data

Common, long-standing words mostly THOUGHT; rarer words and recent loanwords mainly LOT.

Conclusion: Our findings support *diffusion NYC → NOLA*

- NYCE = only other known dialect with PALM regularly backer than LOT
- <u>We propose</u>: NOLA speakers perceived PALM backer than LOT in NYCE during period of contact, incorrectly identified it in THOUGHT category
  - But later PALM words (e.g. *taco*, *garage*) identified as LOT
- End result: NOLA English PALM distribution unlike anywhere else