In search of a pattern

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Individual and society

- Neither linguistic nor psychological changes in the lifespan of an individual can be supposed to be continuous

- Significant changes occur when individual life history cooccurs or concurs with significant changes in society

- There are two phases of life which for good reasons may have been overrepresented in linguistic research: the phase of acquisition and (though much less so, cf. Pichler et al. 2018) the phase of old age

- In this paper, I am mostly going to focus on what happens in between

Overview

- I: Theoretical starting points: The individual and society in history

- II: An integrated model

- III: Methods

- IV: Some exemplifications

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY IN HISTORY

The Labov model

	INDIVIDUAL	**SOCIETY**
1. stability	Stable	Stable
2. age grading	Unstable	Stable
3. generational change	Stable	Unstable
4. societal change	Unstable	Unstable

Comments on the model

- 1. Stability: Extreme interest but very rare
- 2. Age grading: Of the utmost interest for this conference; seen by Labov as a complicating factor (Labov 1994: 112) (cf. now Evans Wagner 2016)
- 3. Generational change: Focussed by Labov: *This seems to be the general model*
- 4. Communal change: Seen by Labov as rare (ibid.); difficult to detect

What makes a generation?

IF generational change is central this should make any change quite gradual and continuous since age is more or less continuous in a society

- I submit that members of speech communities do not experience the speech community as completely continuous but rather as stratified

- This means that it is initially a mystery what makes a generation stand out

- I propose to look at the intersection of personal history and grand history to answer that question

An approach to societal change: Grand history: Processes and events

- We need to make a conceptual distinction between historical *processes* like e.g. modernization, urbanization, internationalization/globalization, global warming etc. on the one hand and historical *events* on the other (Gregersen 2015)

- *Societal change and generational change: Events are more likely to create generations than processes* but since processes determine the path of history, processes create the *constraints* on the formation of generations. Processes, however, are the key to societal change

Societal change exemplified
From Japan to Aarhus

- Anker Jensen 1898 studied some small villages outside the nearby twon of Aarhus and concluded that the dialect was being undermined/leveled

- Sibata 1999 studied the Itoigawa dialect in 1950 and 1970 in a real time trend study and concluded that both innovations and loss of original forms occurred

- *Conclusion*: **Urbanization** as *a long term historical process* constrains the comparisons so that the two stages of a long term trend study may no longer be comparable

- **Gentrification** is the process within urban societies which may make a neighbourhood incomparable with itself in just 10 years, i.e. if you went to the same neighbourhood in e.g. Helsinki with 20 years in between, it might be totally different populations (in terms of speaker variables) we would study

Events as landmarks

- Events as landmarks

- The assassination of president John F Kennedy 22nd of November 1963

- Conditions for events becoming landmarks: global/massive exposure; significant interpretation; collective memory

- The Vietnam War; The Finnish-Soviet Winter War

The individual and significant age changes

- The individual life span: Landmarks at *passages*, rites of passage

- The historical construction of age sections:
  - the invention of childhood: getting baptized
  - the invention of young adults: a new market
  - the invention of the third age: last day at job

- General conclusion: from both sides adulthood has been modified so that it is now more or less equivalent with *the age of wage earning work*

- OBS: gender sensitive definitions

Events and generations

- Obviously, there is an interaction between individual life history and the grand history. If we talk about the generation of *die Wende* (i.e. the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989) this is more likely than not to refer to those individuals who were sufficiently young for the fall of the *Mauer* to make this a promising event though not too young to even notice.

- *Die Wende is a good example of a process and an event rolled into one - with **the event being the starting point of the process** (cf. also e.g. the Versailles Treaty as the start of the interwar period)*

Generations and language

- Labov had as his starting point that individuals did not change significantly as to linguistic competence-cum-practice after the critical period, i.e. after puberty – for biological reasons

- This has turned out to be wrong but the full story cannot be told yet

Excursus: critical period?

- To give you an idea of what milieu Lenneberg operated in, just this quote from a paper from 1969:

"There is nothing particularly surprising or revealing in the demonstration that language deficits occur in children who hear no language, very little language, or only the discourse of uneducated persons." (Lenneberg 1969: 636 published in SCIENCE)

Interactions between levels and age

- The idea that linguistic practice stopped to develop after puberty cannot be (equally) right for all linguistic levels

- LINGUISTIC LEVELS:
  - phonetics – phonology – graphetics – graphematics
  - grammar: morphology and syntax
 - semantics: lexical semantics and discursive semantics
  - pragmatics

Speech and writing

- We normally operate with a fourfold division:

|	PRODUCTION	PERCEPTION
Primary	speech	listening/com-prehension
Secondary	writing	reading

Sensitive periods and linguistic levels

- Acquisition: *perception* predates and is much broader than, *production*
- Acquisition is a perpetual process but does not unfold equally at all levels
- There seems to be a difference between on the one hand **semantics** (content) and on the other **phonology** (expression): The acquisition of L1 phonology as a system may be seen as a relatively finite process whereas the acquisition of semantics is a never ending story
- What about pragmatics?
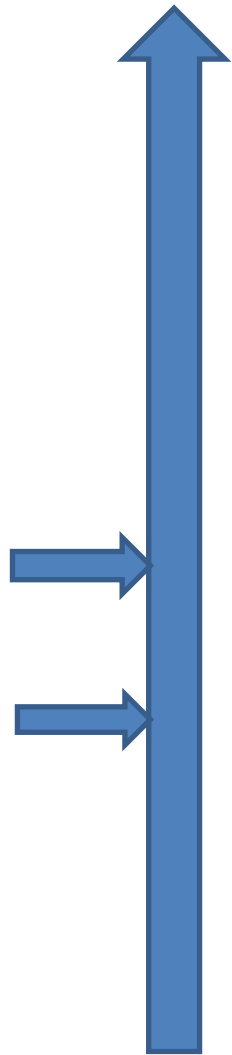
the making of a
generation

Historical processes
with events indicated horizontally
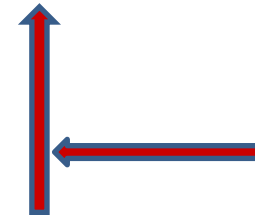
Individual life span with
significant events

Predictable and unpredictable events

- Many individuals lead lives which are highly predictable as to phases

- This may lead us to general and predictably life changing events such as **first day at job** (entering wage earning relationships), **last day at job** (leaving wage earning and entering third age)

- Others are drabbed by unpredictable events like disease or being fired, events which may have profound effects on their lives, presumably also as to linguistic practice

Reidunn Hernes's study

- In Hernes (2006) Reidunn Hernes has followed 17 individuals from a small town (Os) situated quite close to the second largest city of Norway, Bergen. She studies the dialect levelling which partly happens because of the site becoming more closely connected to Bergen and partly because young people move away from the place. The most interesting result is that you may detect significant change, if you record informants at two points in time (with only 6 years between) which are separated by a predictable life changing event like going away to e.g. Bergen for higher schooling or for military service

- Not all individuals change; that depends on dialect loyalty, a feature which is part of 'distinction' and – by the way – highly gendered

AN INTEGRATED MODEL

Ingredients

History (diachrony) and snapshots (synchrony) of:

- the societal level
- the level of groups
- the individual level
  - phonology etc
  - grammar etc
  - semantics & pragmatics etc
    - speech vs. writing/ production vs. perception

Individuals in society: trajectories

- We do already know that since linguistic practice in all speech communities is socially stratified, individual movement across strata will be mirrored partly or fully in the use of variants indexing strata

- TWO Examples:

    Foxy Boston (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994)

    Miriam (Tetreault 2018)

The role of subjective factors

- One thing is to study **linguistic practice**, another to study **linguistic ideology or attitudes** to specific languages, lects, lexical items or sociophonetic variants
- Relevance for age phases: What is appropriate language use for the various phases of gendered lives shift (Tetreault 2018)
- Ideally we should study both at the same time
- *This is particularly relevant for the issue of ageing since we all harbour ideologies as to what ageing is and which effects it has*

Summing up

- Significant changes occur when individual life history cooccurs or concurs with significant changes in society
- History always modifies the way a (socio)linguistic change is produced and perceived and changes may interact with linguistic levels in unpredictable ways
- How a change is perceived will mean a lot for its eventual outcome ('changes' do go to completion)
- Historical events make generations out of otherwise continuous populations
- Historical processes partly shape how generations communicate and thus how linguistic signs are embedded in other semiotic processes

System and variation

- Critical periods were originally posited for the acquisition of language systems, not for the use of variants

- Variationist sociolinguistics, however, studies patterns of variation and here differences between generations, groups and/or speech communities *most often are quantitative not qualitative*

My data

- What I will present in the rest of this talk by way of examples will all of them involve statistically significant – or insignificant – differences in the quantitative patterns of use of sociolinguistic variants, however we define that

- But before that just some quick notes on methods

METHODS

Apparent time studies

- In apparent time studies you contrast age groups recorded at the same point in time

- Even though we have discarded the idea that people do not change after puberty, apparent time studies may still teach us something

- The Marianne Rathje design of contrasting recordings of young pairs of women who meet for the first time with recordings of older women who meet for the first time and then do the same with intergenerational pairs

Trend and panel

- If you study the same generation across time, your study is **a trend study**: Same generation but different individuals

- If you study the same individuals across time, your study is **a panel study**

- What we may learn from the two types is different but equally important

S1 and S2

- Studies in real time always involve (at least) two studies carried out at two different points in time

- We shall here call the first, the original study S1, and the 'replication' or the second study S2

- Relationships between S1s and S2s

- The general question of *comparability* (Gregersen et al. 2017)

QUANT vs QUAL

- Typically **qualitative studies** involve fewer persons (down to one cf Linguistic biographies like the trail blazing Harrington paper on Elizabeth II) and more information on each informant/the informant than can possibly be obtained from large sets of informants

- **Quantitative studies**, however, sacrifice some detail in terms of knowledge about the individual in order to generalize via statistical methods to larger populations for which the sample is seen to be representative. NB: With big data methods quantitative samples are getting increasingly more huge!

Generalization: mixed methods

- Recently a trend within the humanities and social sciences have tried to explore what a combination of QUANT and QUAL may accomplish

- May we overcome the limitations of treating an exception as the rule which is built into the QUAL method, if we have populations where we hone in a smaller subset *smartly selected from the larger sample?*

- May we perform the same if we supplement our QUAL studies with questionnaires or sociolinguistic interviews with a much larger population smartly found *by using the understanding generated by* QUAL?

IV

EXEMPLIFICATIONS

The LANCHART sites
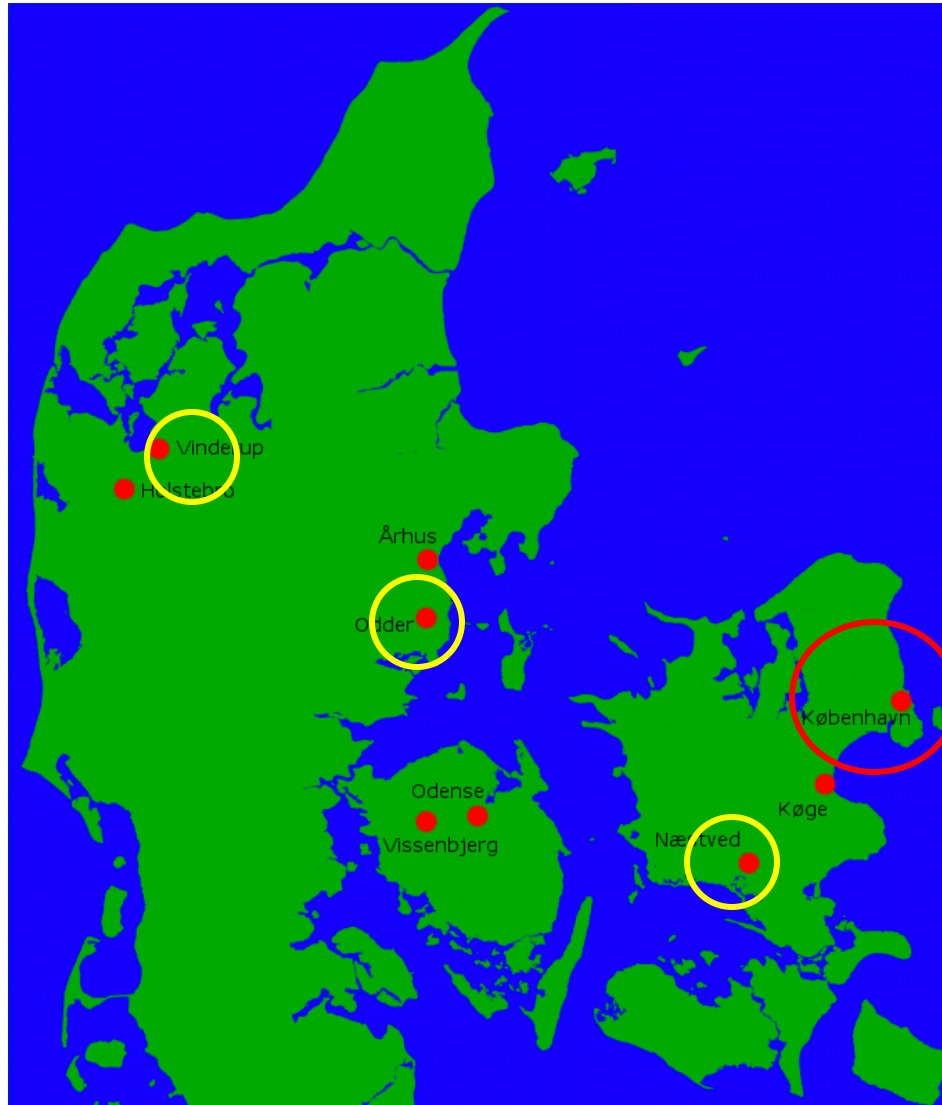
Real time

- Study 1s: 1978-89
- Study 2s: 2006-2010
- Two types of real time studies
- Panels: same people
- Trend: same design but different people
- The LANCHART studies reported on here are all panel studies but since the panels are stratified as to age, they may function as trend studies as well

Types of variables studied

- Discourse context variables (genres, interactional types)

- Semantic variables (e.g. epistemicity, General extenders and some lexical variables)

- Grammatical variables (generic pronouns)

- Phonetic variables

- Do they behave the same way, are they conditioned the same way, do they leave the same traces? Do they interact?

The anatomy of the LANCHART

- **Empirical work:**
- A repetition of six previous studies of spoken Danish from 1978 and 1986-89
- **Historical work:**
- On the Danish speech community before the sociolinguistic studies: summarizing the results of Danish dialectology
- On the Danish community, in particular the chosen sites

Data

- Sociolinguistic interviews
- BUT a lot happens during up to two and a half hours of conversation with an intimate stranger
- HENCE: we need to subdivide the interviews
- Hence the Discourse Context Analysis

IVa

SOME PHONETIC VARIABLES: FIRST EXAMPLE SHORT (A)

The history of (a) in Danish

1817: J.H. Bredsdorff, a man of many talents, proposes a phonetic alphabet which clearly indicates one value of (a), whether long or short, probably phonetically [ɑ]

1850: Rydquist identifies a *long* Copenhagen (a) which is more front and higher than the Swedish counterpart

Brink og Lund 1975 argue that the specific Copenhagen dialect evolves during the 1850s

The splits: long and short and the internal split of the short (a)

- Around 1850 long (a:) becomes higher and more front
- Around 1888 this variant [a], or even [æ], is found also in the short (a) before a (j) in words like 'mig' (*me*), 'dig' (*you*), 'sig' ((*your)self*); **the variable AJ**
- Around 1930 Otto Jespersen states the rule of complementary distribution for the short (a) variants:
- AN [æ] is found before alveolar consonants and nil; **the variable AN**
- AM [ɑ] is found before labials and velars; **AM**
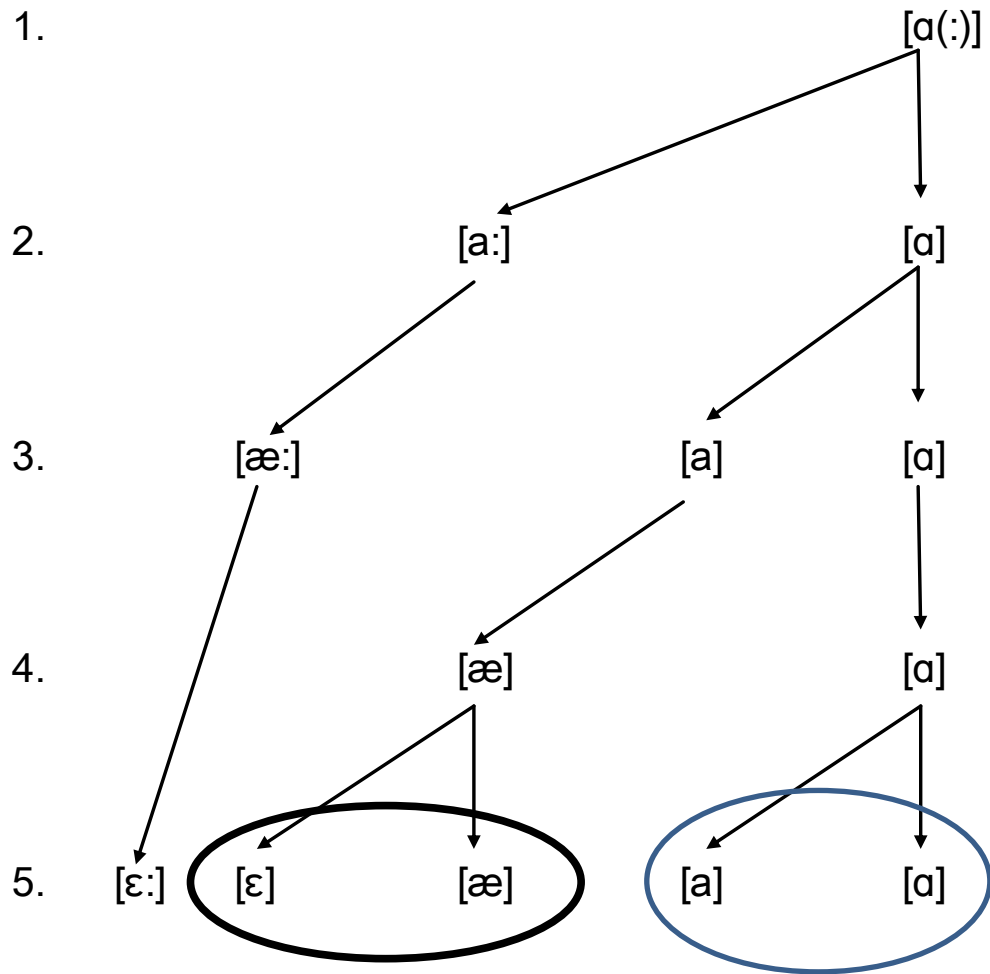- A small set of words are deviant because of a following R; **the variable ANR**

Figure 1: The many splits of the common (a) since the beginning of the 19th century. First the long (a:) moved forward (2), then the short (a) before (j) followed suit (3) and the two short (a)s were then split according to context while the long (a:) moved upwards (4) and finally the long (a:) moved even further upwards and the context sensitive short (a)s were split in two variants each, the upper one being more or less identical to the long (a:) while the lowest and most back one is identical to the vowel quality preserved in r-influenced contexts like 'arm' (Eng. *arm*) (5). In this study I am only concerned with the two variants of short (a) within the oval.

The final split of the short (a)s

- 4 main variants of short (a) may be distinguished:
- **AN** (before alveolars and nil) is found in two variants: AN1 [ɛ] and AN2 [æ]. There is agreement in the literature that the AN1 was, or is, a characteristic of the Working Class (WC), in particular the males
- **AM** (before labials and velars) is also found in two variants: AM3 [a] and AM4 [ɑ]. In the literature there is agreement that the AM4 used to be characteristic of the WC, in particular the males

Marked and unmarked variants

- **In the variable AM,** AM3 is the unmarked variant and AM4 the marked one; a third variant is a lengthened AM3

- **In the variable AN**, AN2 is the unmarked variant and AN1 the marked one

- Tables and figures show either both variants or the relative percentage of the marked variant
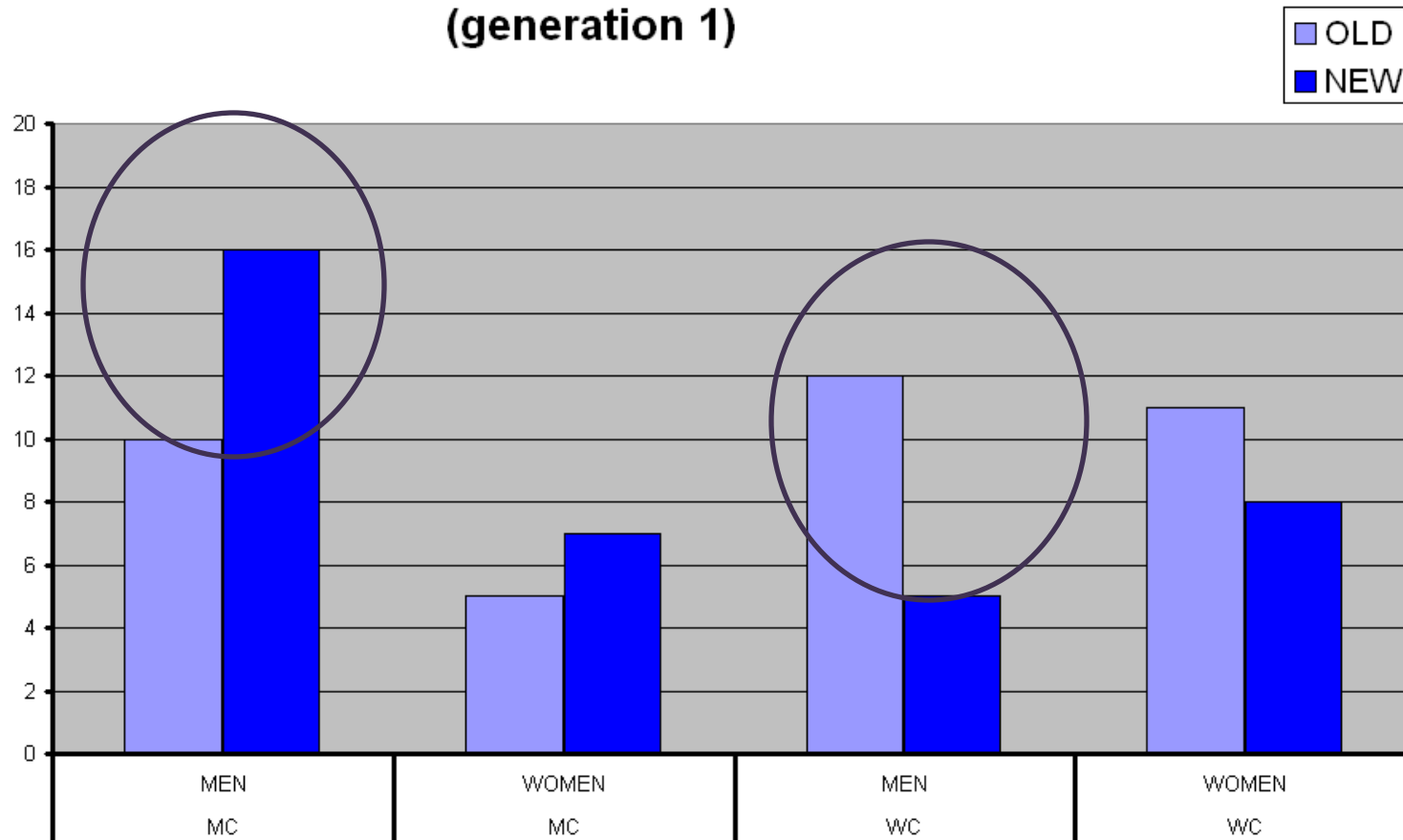
Nothing happened in real time - apparently

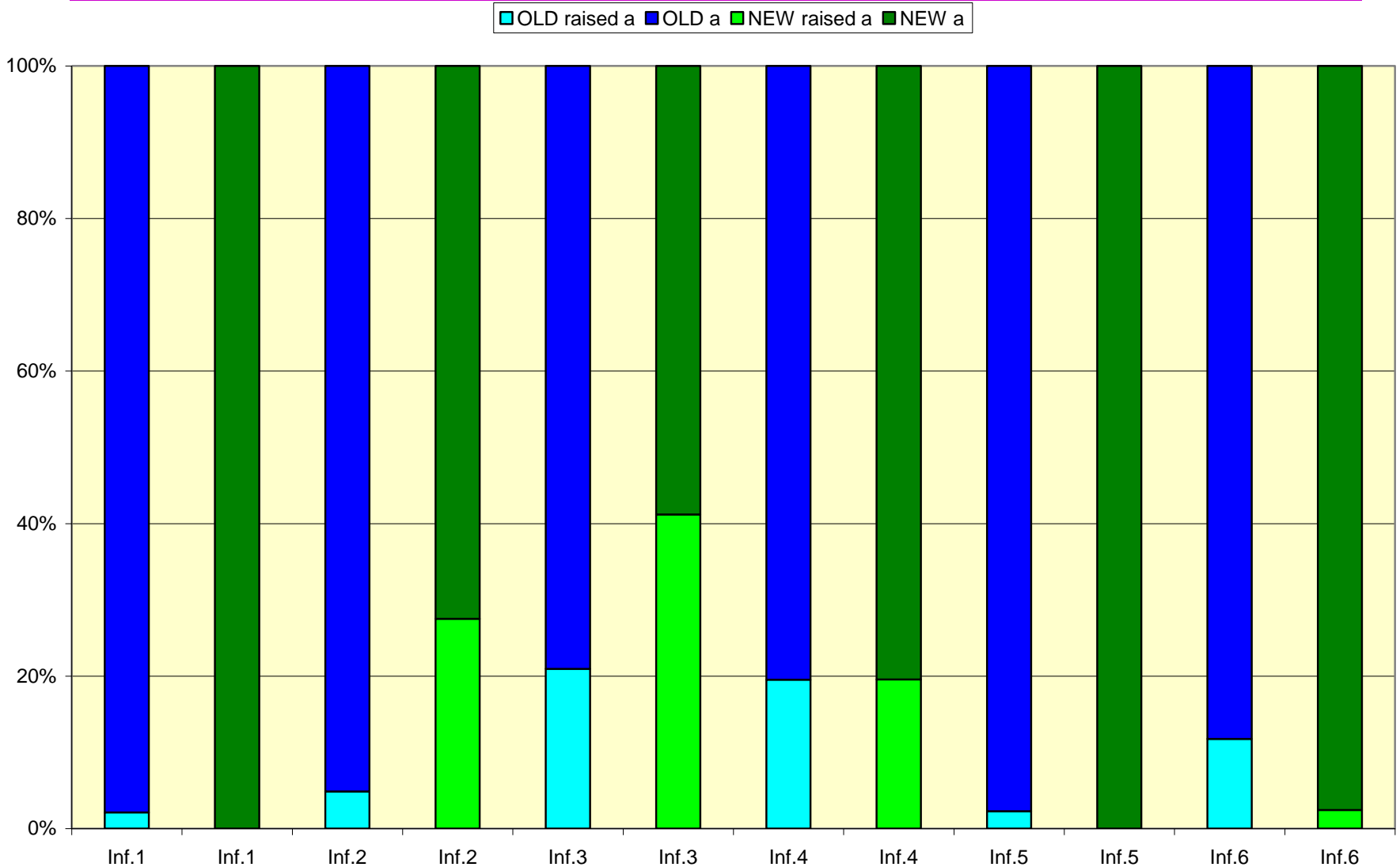**The real time picture of short (a) 1986 vs 2006**
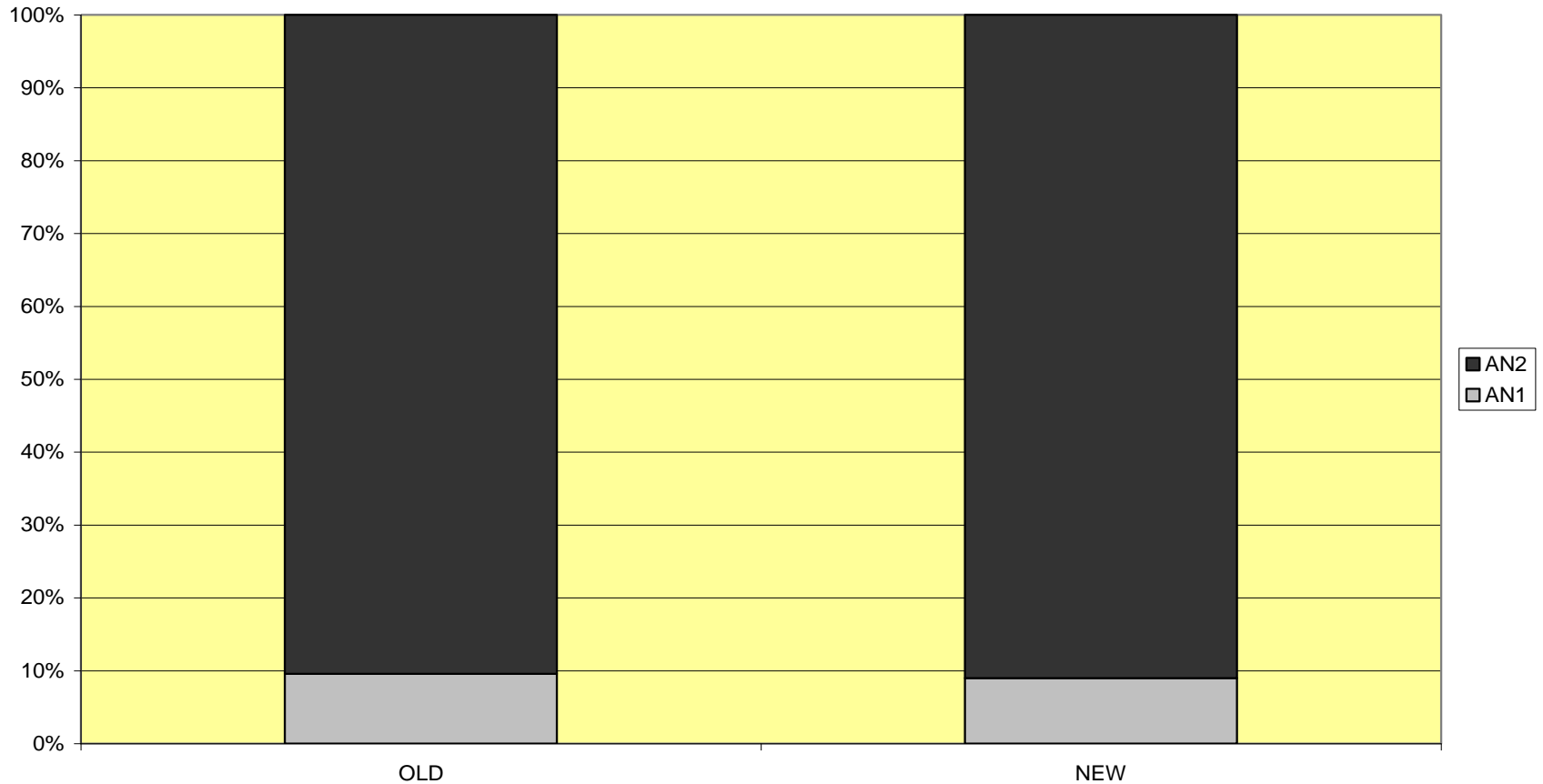
BUT: Real time change at the group level

The percentage of raised /a/ in the Copenhagen data (generation 1)

The MC men in real time: 3 types

□ OLD raised a ■ OLD a ■ NEW raised a ■ NEW a

IVb: next example

INTRODUCING THE (ENG) VARIABLE

The variable [ɛ] > [e]_[ŋ]

- The raising of the [ɛ] before the velar nasal may be operationalized as follows:
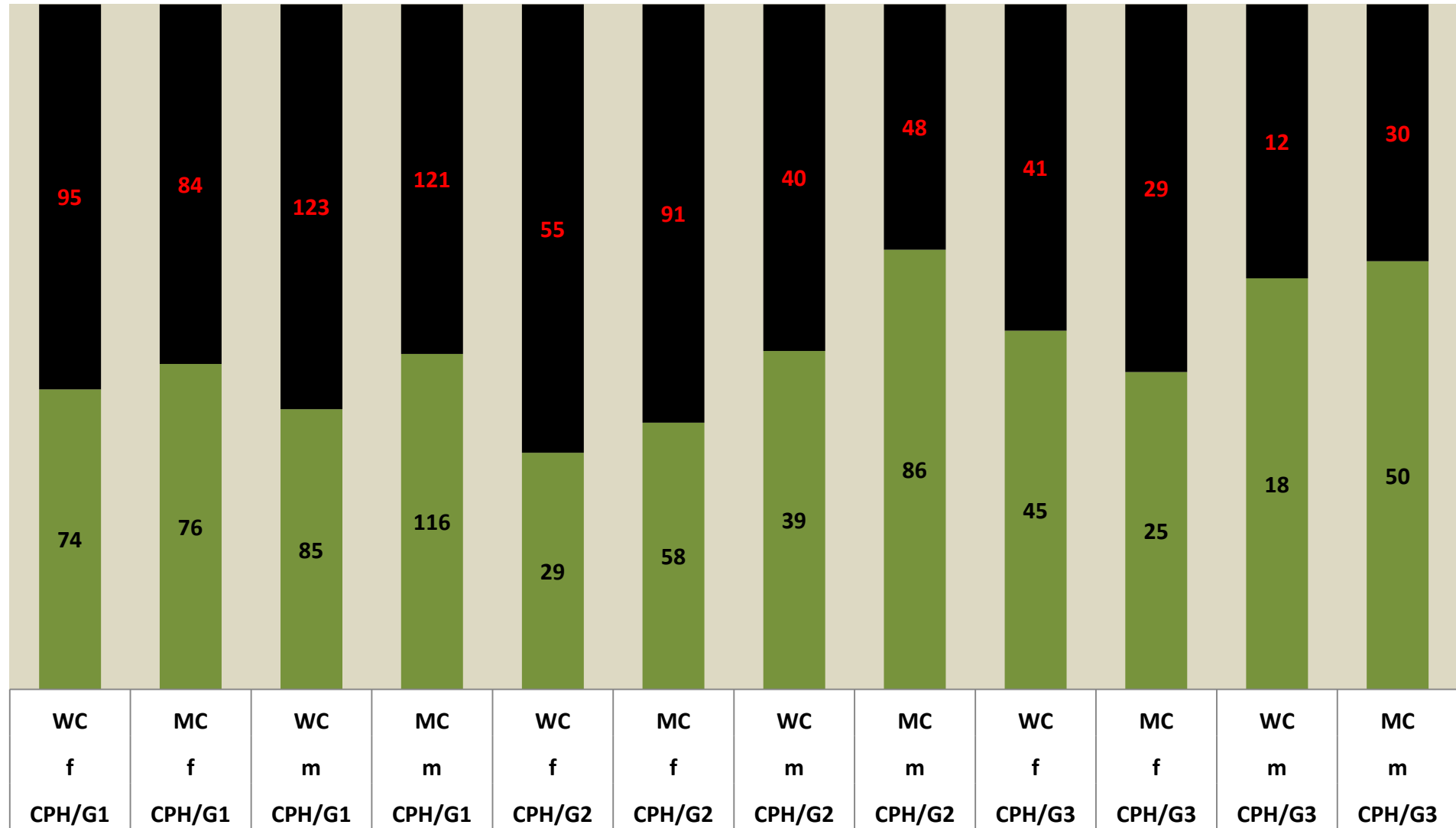
Three values:

- Original (standard) value: [ɛ]

- Raised variant: [e]

- An in-between variant which is heard as neither identical to [e] or [ɛ]: in-btw.

- *penge* (money) realized as [peŋə] or [pɛŋə]

- In this presentation we collapse the two raised variants as the non-standard ones
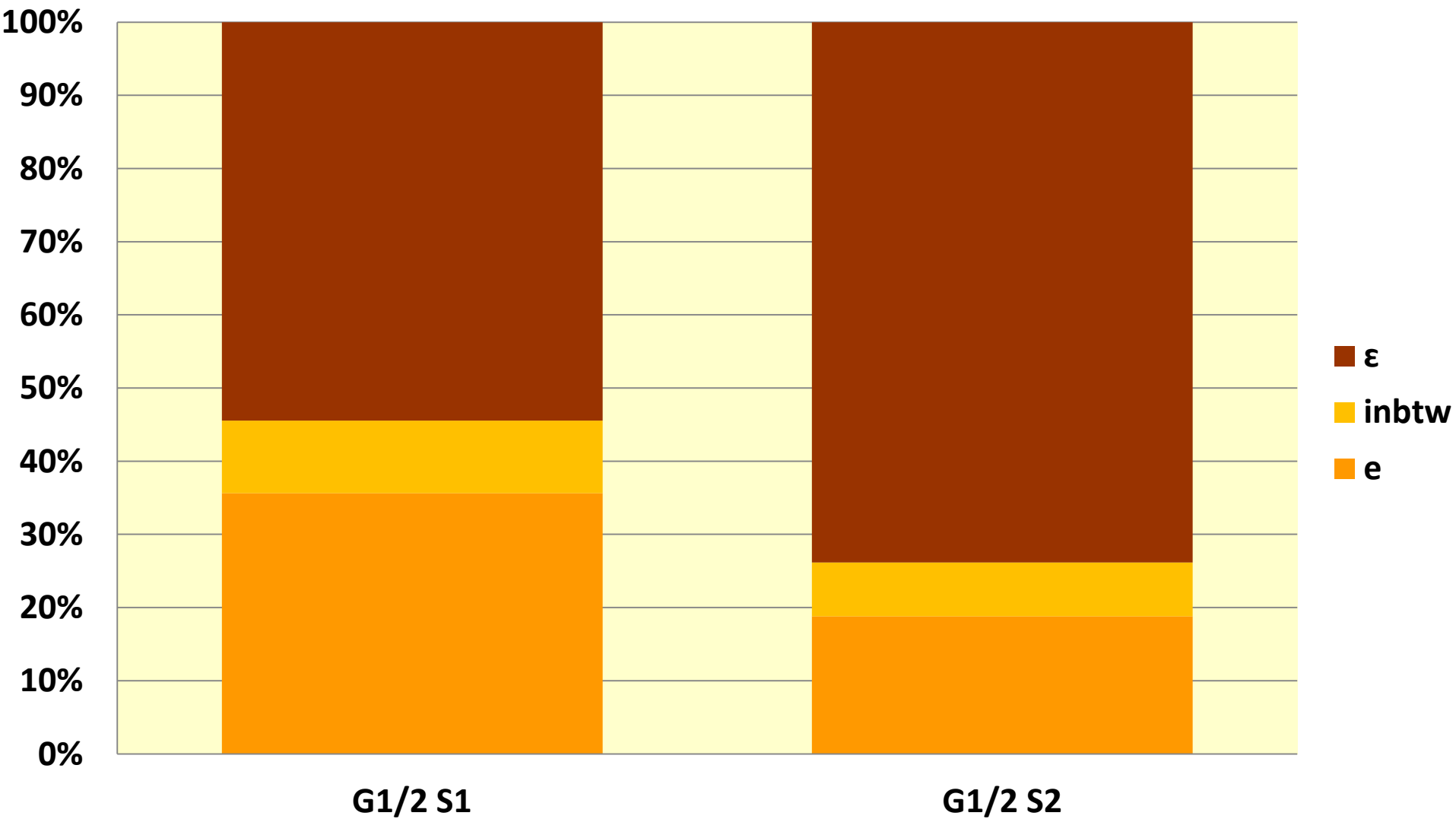
Making data comparable: informants

- The 3 generations in the LANCHART study:
- *GENERATION* **1**: born between 1941 and 1963
- recorded the first time as 25-45 year olds, the second time 20 years later
- *GENERATION* **2**: born between 1964 and 1971
- recorded the first time as 15-24 year olds, the second time 20 years later (30 years for Vinderup)
- *GENERATION* **3**: born between 1989-1994, recorded once 2006-2010

The CPH 3 Generations (G1, G2, G3) in S2; (ENG) variable

	WC f CPH/G1	MC f CPH/G1	WC m CPH/G1	MC m CPH/G1	WC f CPH/G2	MC f CPH/G2	WC m CPH/G2	MC m CPH/G2	WC f CPH/G3	MC f CPH/G3	WC m CPH/G3	MC m CPH/G3
ε	95	84	123	121	55	91	40	48	41	29	12	30
e+inbtw	74	76	85	116	29	58	39	86	45	25	18	50

Word profile for 'engelsk' (English) in real time G1 and G2 combined

Legend: ε, inbtw, e

Categories: G1/2 S1, G1/2 S2

Word profile for 'engelsk' (English) in G3
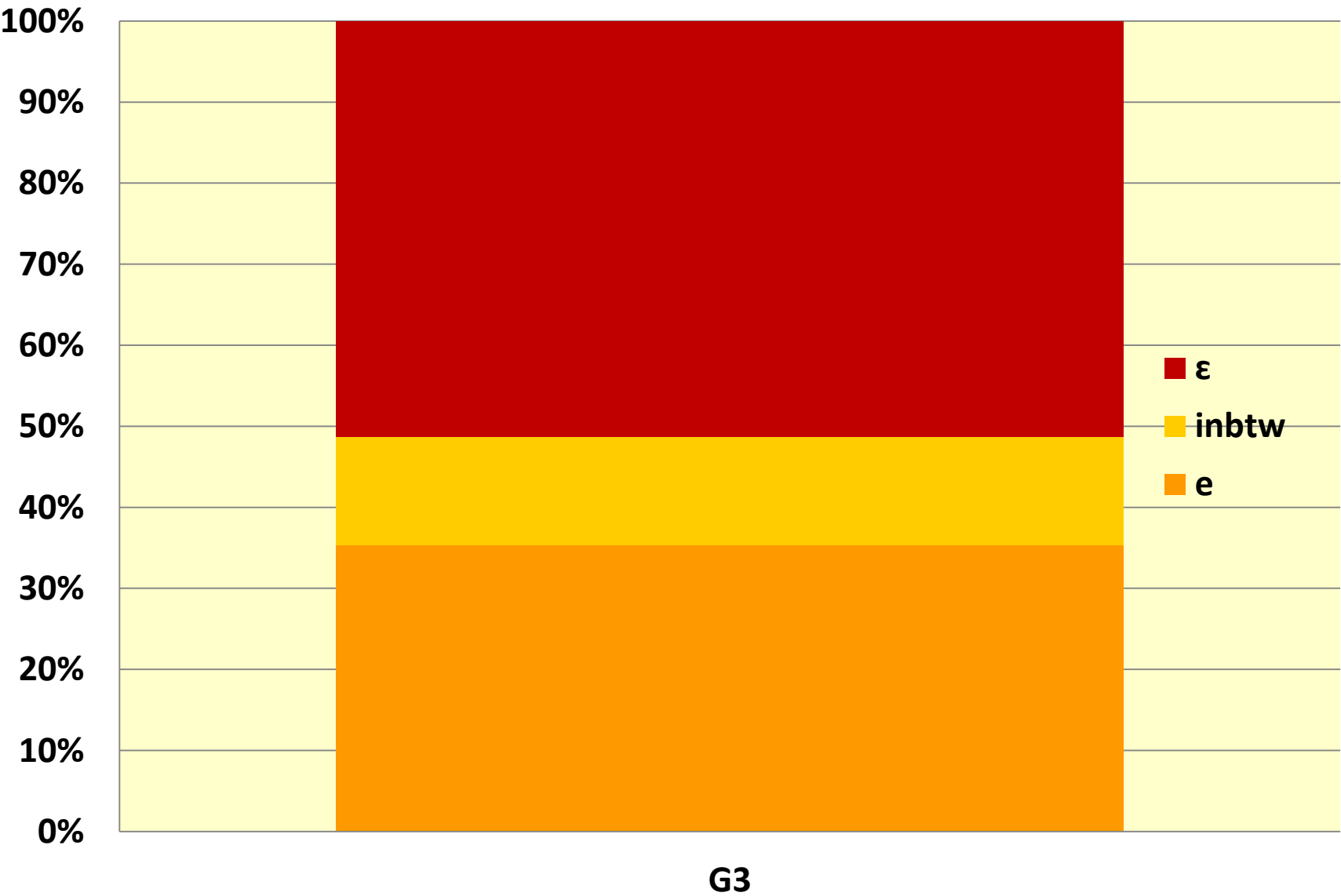
Word profile for 'penge' (money) in real time and through generations: Gs 1 and 2 in real time and G3
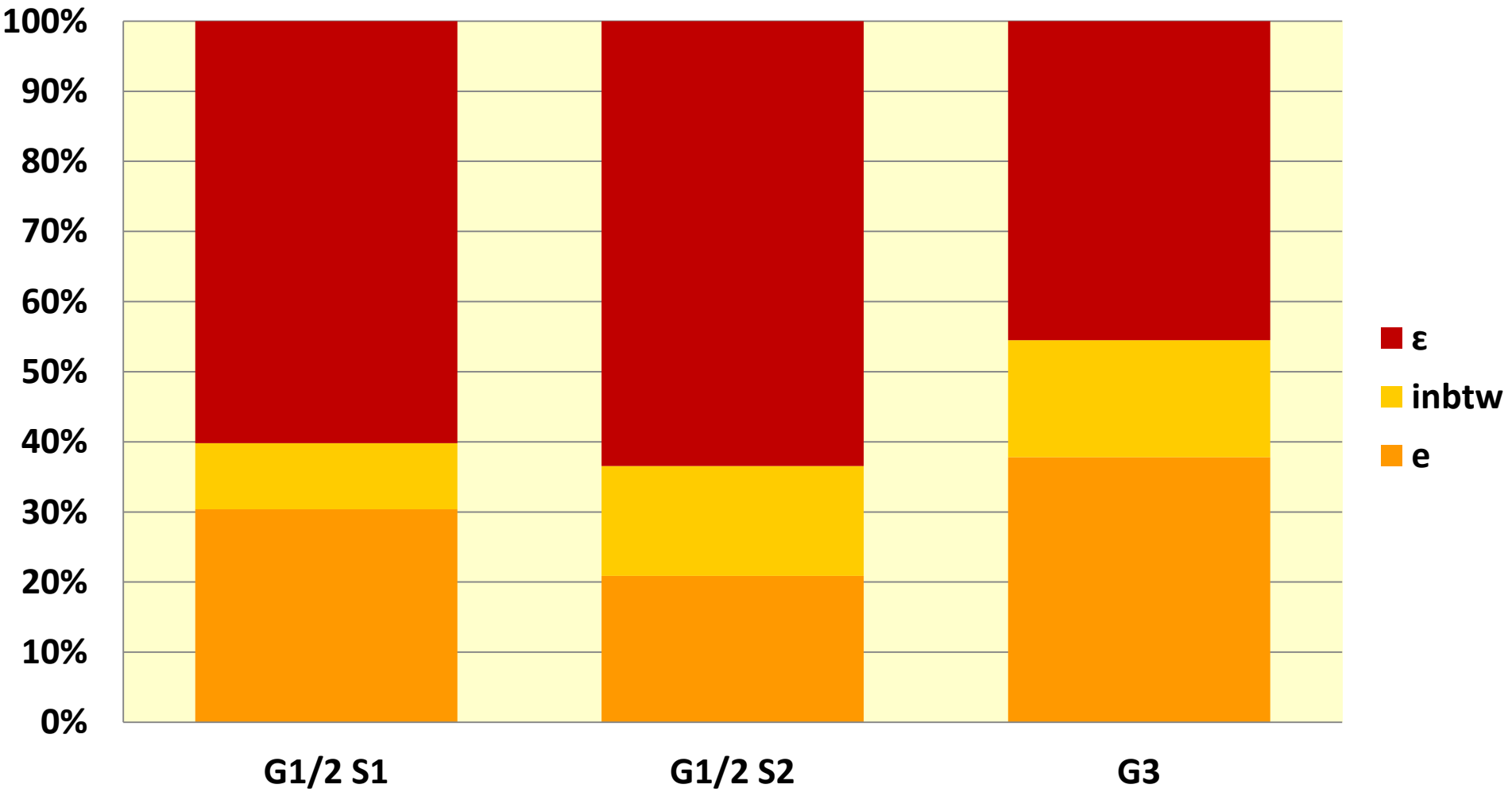
Individuals vary in direction of change

ID	Gender	Class	Recording year	ENG1	ENG12	ENG2	other var.	Chi2 3way	Fish 2ways			ENG1	ENG12	ENG2	
AMF	F	WC	old	10	5	21	0	0.025	0.0119	AMF	new	8	1	2	2
ANO	F	WC	old	5	7	7	4	0.554	0.5006	ANO	new	15	10	12	9
ABK	F	WC	old	7	1	14	2	0.755	1.000	ABK	new	4		8	3
JOL	F	WC	old	9	11	22		0.368	1.000	JOL	new	7	4	20	1
MKC	F	WC	old	9	17	14	3	0.001	0.0009	MKC	new	1	12	31	6
VGR	F	WC	old	9	8	10	6	0.049	0.2331	VGR	new	9	3	22	3
TOT				49	49	88	15			TOT		44	30	95	24

The CPH WC men in S1 and S2
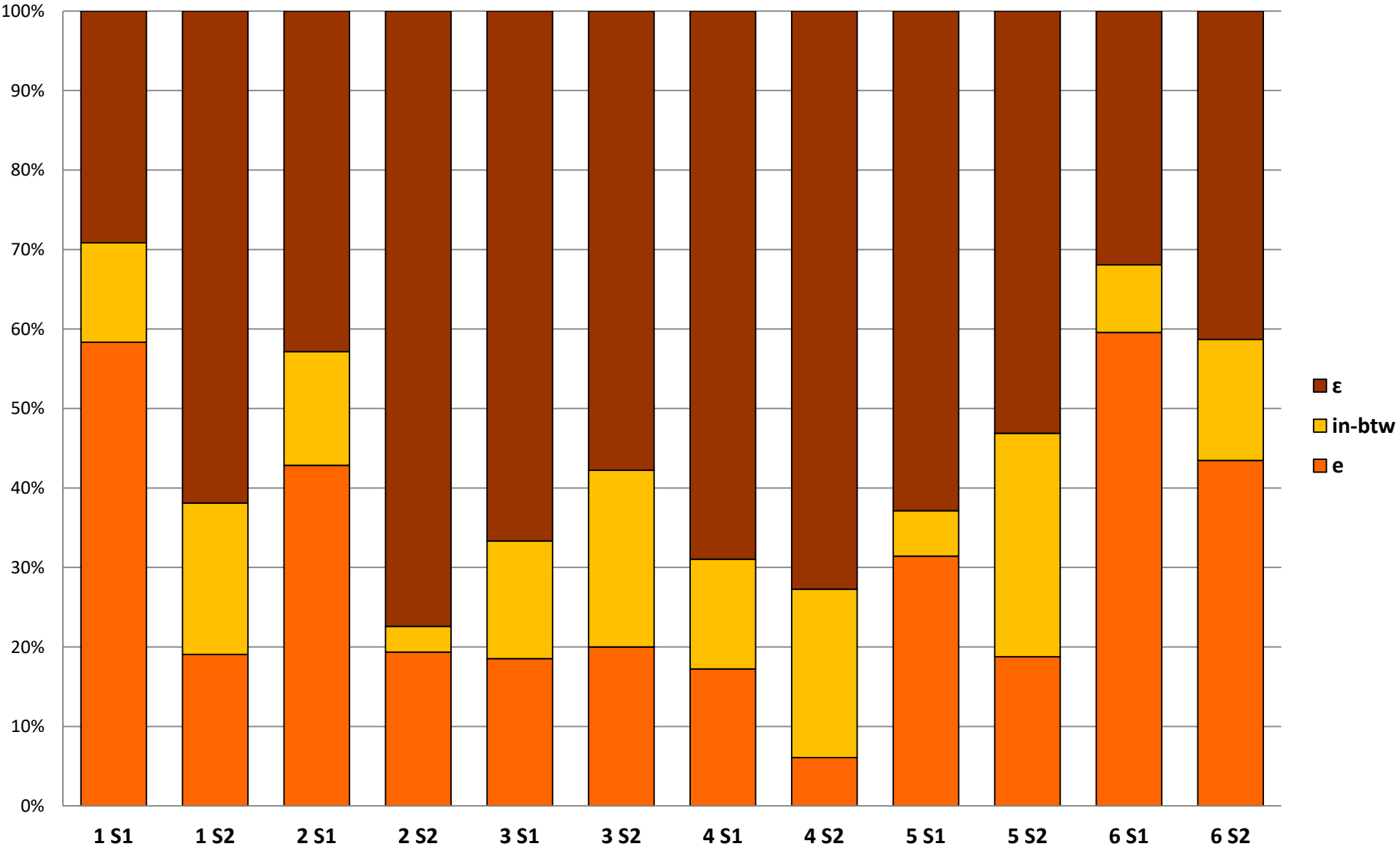
Individual change and direction

- 7 (or 8 depending on how you count) individuals out of 24 change significantly in real time

- 2 out of 7 (8) go against the generation trend, i.e. in this case they actually have *more* raising rather than significantly less – as the rest of the G1

- On the other hand, the G1 real time significant change towards less raising thus depends on 5 or 6 out of 24; the rest either have more raising or are stable
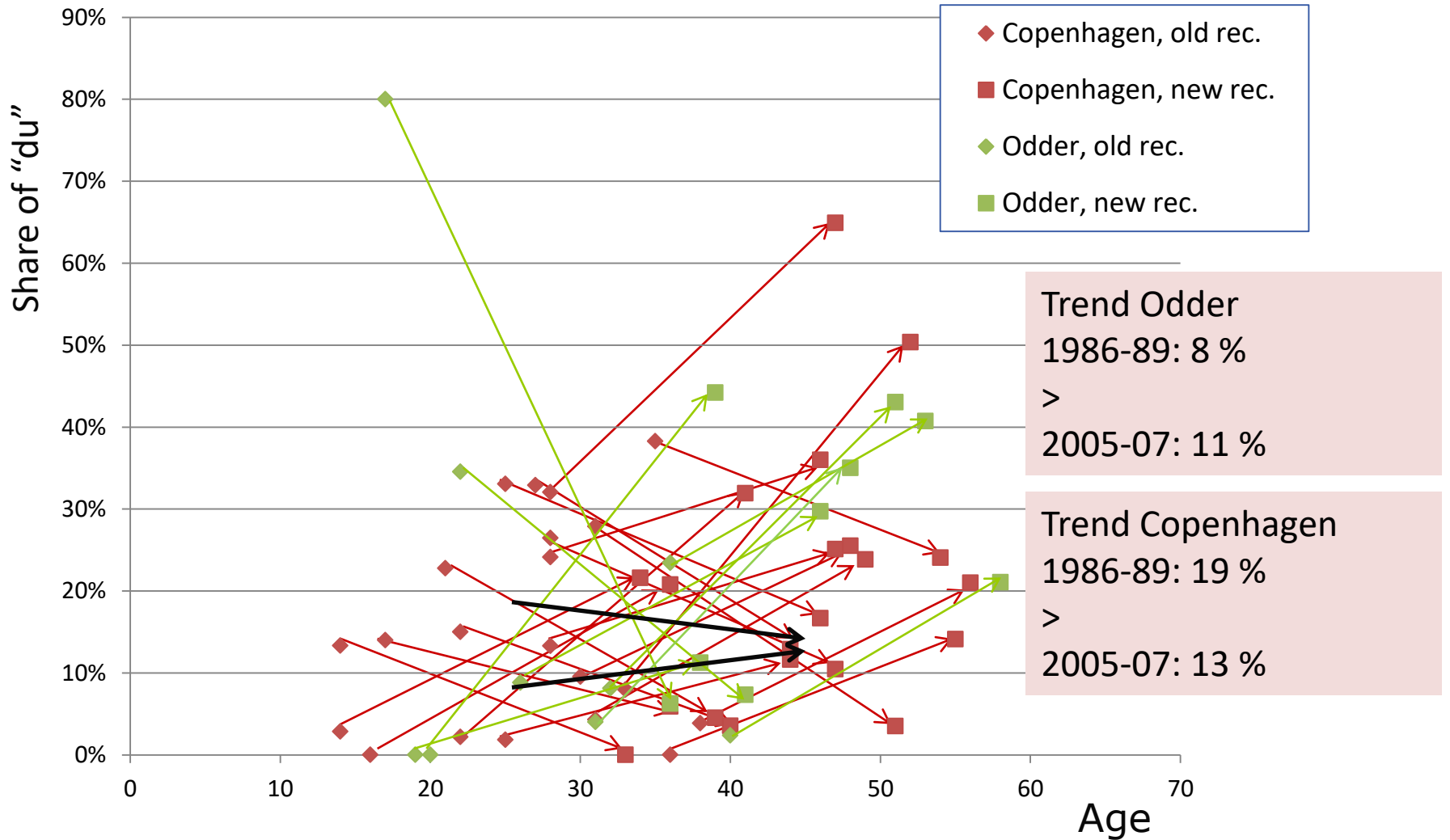
Summarizing the phonetic lesson

- Group change may be dependent on very few individuals changing significantly
- Since we have controlled for age, site, social class and gender, what else may be the reason for this difference inside the group? Personality differences? Trajectories?
- Note that these results are from people who have not (yet) changed life phase!
- Individuals do NOT change in the same direction and hence do not necessarily change in the same way as their group or society at large
- Some of the changes may be due to lexical differences in the realization of the (eng) variable: What we talk about is important (cf. Karen Beaman et al.s paper)
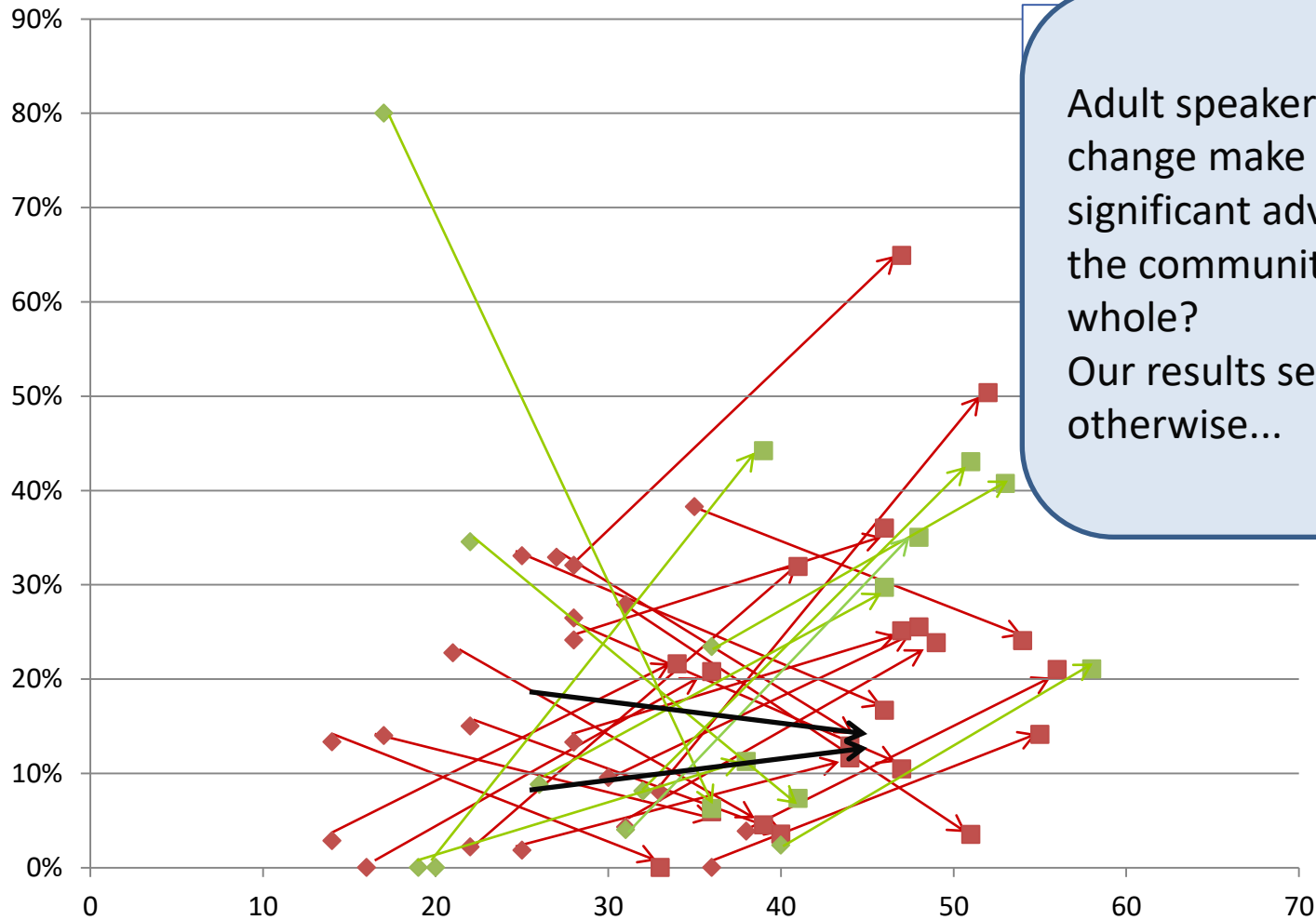
IVc: Courtesy of T. Juel Jensen

A MORPHOSYNTACTIC EXAMPLE

Unstable informants, pronouns with generic reference

Trend Odder
1986-89: 8 %
>
2005-07: 11 %

Trend Copenhagen
1986-89: 19 %
>
2005-07: 13 %

Legend:
- Copenhagen, old rec.
- Copenhagen, new rec.
- Odder, old rec.
- Odder, new rec.

Y-axis: Share of "du" (0% – 90%)
X-axis: Age (0 – 70)

LANCHART

Unstable informants, pronouns with generic reference

Adult speakers who change make less significant advances than the community as a whole?
Our results seem to show otherwise...

General conclusion

- In the life span, there are good reasons to conjecture that significant linguistic changes occur at, or as a later consequence of, social choices, life changing events or transitions to new phases of life

- Yet, to my knowledge, very little research has been directed at documenting precisely the linguistic consequences of such events, probably because it is hard to tell beforehand or hard to ask for permission to record when a drastic event has happened

- I have demonstrated that linguistic changes happen even in the middle of adulthood when informants are recorded with a distance of ca. 20 years which only goes to show that changes may occur at any time or place

BUT

- WE need more research which is aimed specifically at changes of life phases or changes brought about by external events so that we may judge the effect of the various causes on the patterns of use of variables at the various levels of language

Thanks

- Thanks to Torben Juel Jensen for sharing the figures on syntax
- Thanks to you all for listening (if you did)
- Thanks for not falling asleep (if you didn't)
- Thanks for not snoring (I didn't hear you)

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