

Emerging Norms? Namibian English(es) on YouTube

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ISLE6: Evolving English and the Digital Era

Workshop: Lesser-Known and Expanding Circle Varieties of English on Social Media

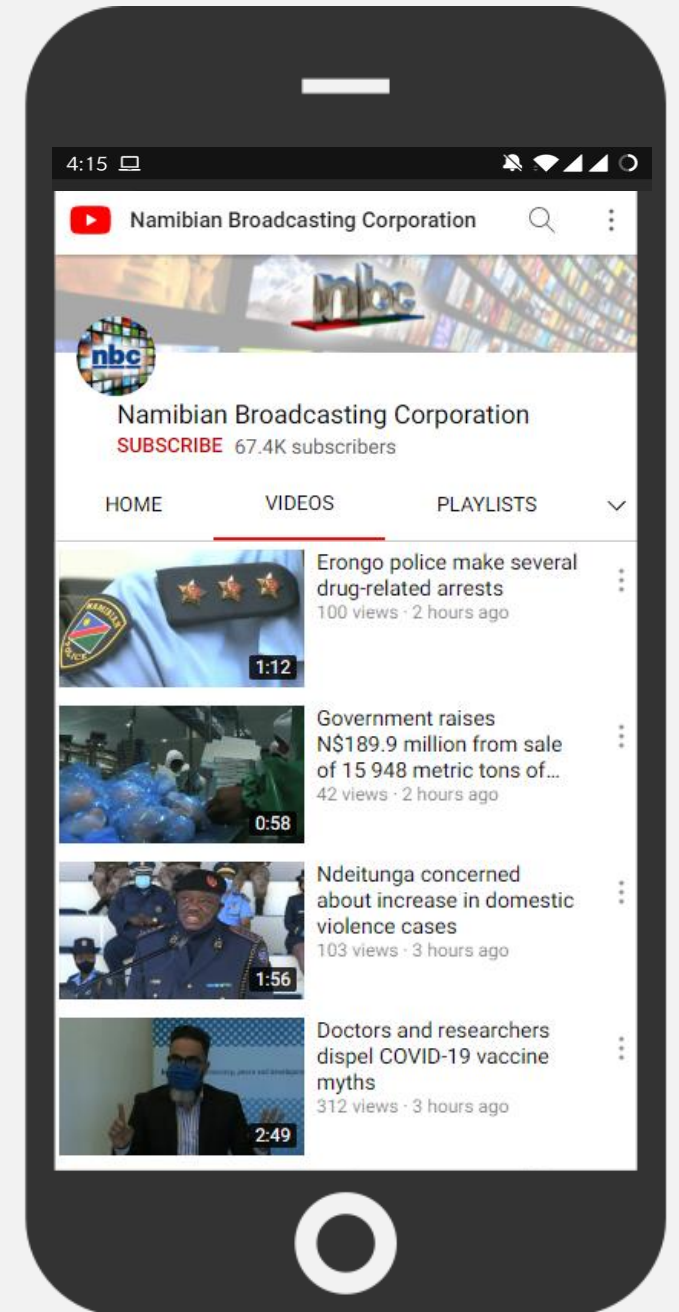
University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu

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Outline

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Namibian English(es): Some Context
- 3) (Namibian) Englishes on YouTube: What & Why?
- 4) Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)
- 5) “NBC English”?: Acoustic Analysis & Discussion
- 6) Conclusion & Outlook





Namibian English(es): Some Context

For further general information on Namibia, cf. e.g. Schröder (fc.2021).

- Population of about 2.6 million
 - One of the least densely populated countries in the world.
- Language contact between Bantu, Khoekhoe, and Indo-European languages.
- Independence in 1990: Since then, led by SWAPO.
- Since independence, English has been the sole official language.

- General Internet penetration rate in Southern Africa in 2018: 51%
(according to <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocial/digital-in-2018-in-southern-africa-86865907>)
- Namibia's Internet penetration rate: 31%





Namibian English(es): Some Context

- Only recently received more **attention** from World Englishes researchers (e.g. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014; Stell 2016; Steigertahl 2019; Schröder fc.2021).
- Before: Usually placed under the umbrella term ***South African Englishes*** (e.g. Trudgill & Hannah 2017: 127), which seemed plausible due to shared geographical and historical aspects.
- However: Evidence for **nativized and uniquely Namibian features** on different levels of linguistic description (e.g. Kautzsch & Schröder 2016; Schröder & Schneider 2018; Kautzsch 2019).



Namibian English(es): Some Context

- English in (urban) Namibia: Developing (phonological) norms?
- Previous studies investigate **phonetic as well as phonological variation** and find **ethnicity** to be an important correlate (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014; Kautzsch & Schröder 2016; Stell & Fuchs 2019; Schröder et al. 2020, fc.2021).
- Influence of, for example, **South African English(es) / Afrikaans-influenced varieties in terms of both exo- and endonormativity is discussed** (cf. e.g. Schröder & Zähres 2020; Stell 2020), but it is not clear which variety of English could be considered an endonormative standard at this point (if at all).

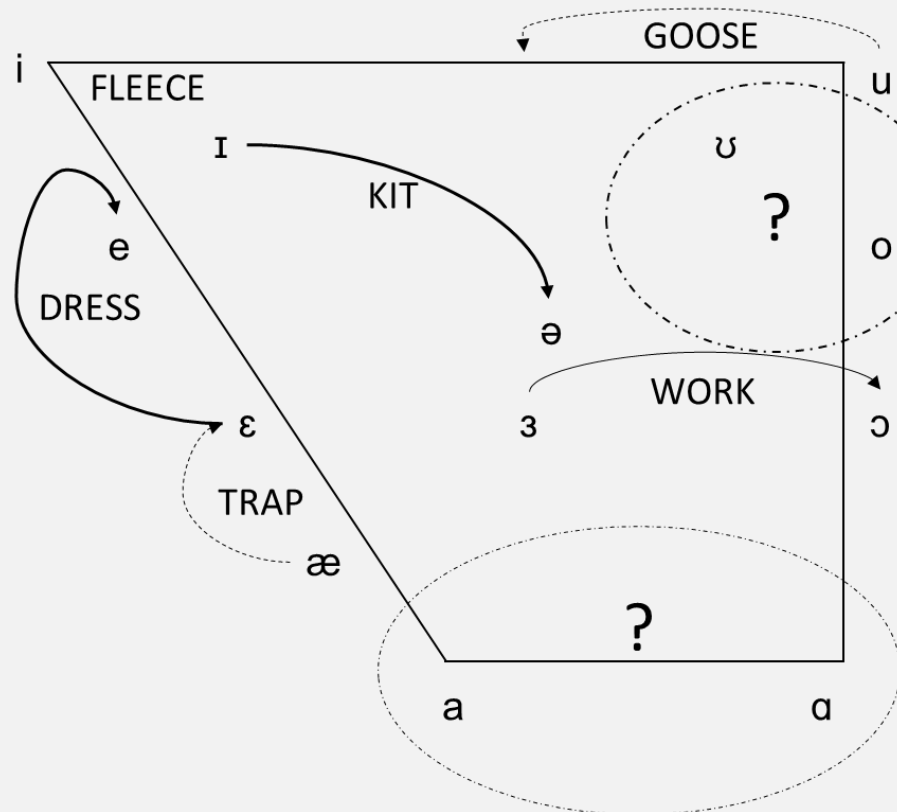


Namibian English(es): Some Context

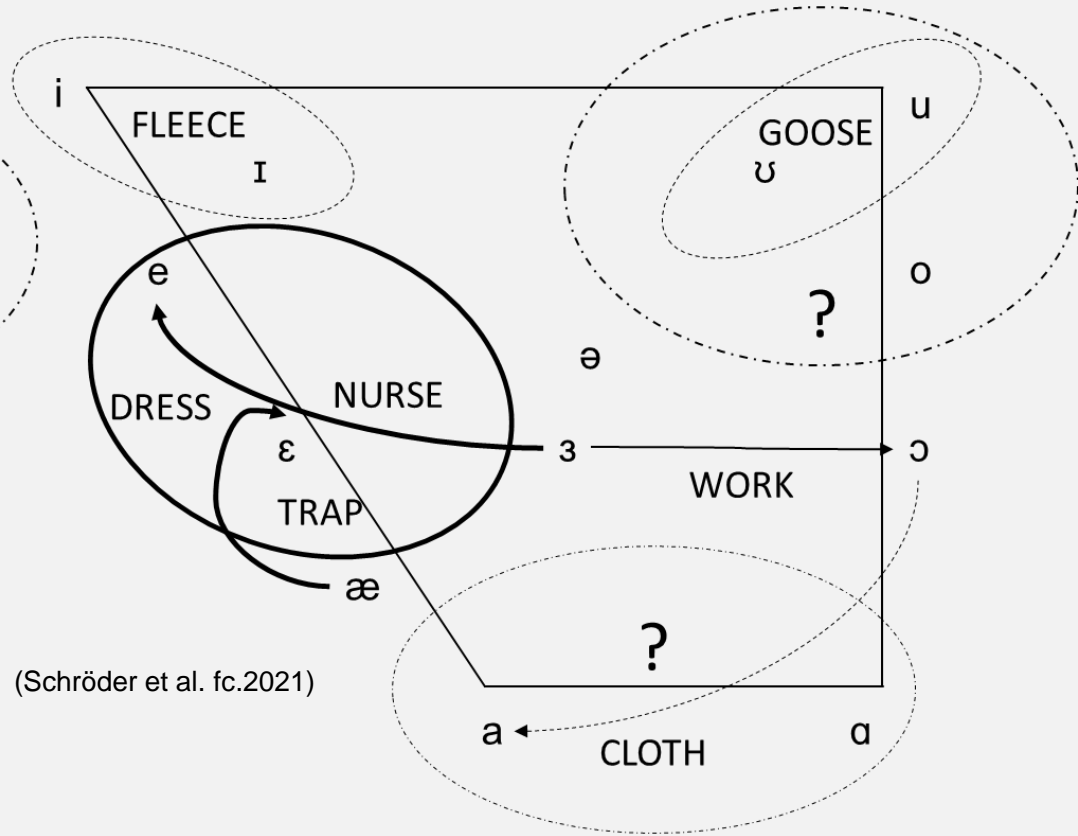
“Southern Hemisphere”?

vs.

“(Pan-)African”?



(Schröder et al. fc.2021)





(Nam.) Englishes on YouTube: Why & What?

- **Why** YouTube as data source?

- **What** does YouTube have to offer for World Englishes & sociolinguistic research?



(Nam.) Englishes on YouTube: Why & What?

- **Why** YouTube as data source?
 - **Availability** of multi-faceted (& multi-modal) data types
 - “Treasure trove” (Schneider 2016) of *volunteered* and *archived* data
- } *Not just for Inner Circle countries / varieties!*
- **BUT** can be “nightmarishly” (Schneider 2016) uncharted territory without best practice models:
 - Conceptual issues** – e.g. which type of YT data exists and how can it be classified?
 - Methodological difficulties** – e.g. how can data be reliably and transparently retrieved?
 - Ethical deliberations** – e.g. can I just compile the publicly available data and analyze it? (cf. Pihlaja 2015)



(Nam.) Englishes on YouTube: Why & What?

- **What** does YouTube have to offer for World Englishes & sociolinguistic research?
 - YT functions as an archive for traditional professional mass media data types (TV, radio, film, etc.)
 - Distinctive and *new* types of data (e.g. vlogs, live streams, premieres) – professional & amateur (cf. e.g. Lee 2017; also Zähres 2019, fc.2021)
- **BUT** sociolinguistically relevant information (age, gender, L1, etc.) not available at first glance & sometimes not available at all (as also pointed out in Schneider 2016)

(Nam.) Englishes on YouTube: Why & What?

What does this mean for Namibian English(es)?

As someone being interested in finding out more about NamE phonology:

1. **Quantitative** approach using *archived* traditional mass media data and (somewhat) **automated** methods



2. *Qualitative* approach using formats like vlogs and rather ethnographic methods for investigating Namibian YouTubers (cf. Zähres fc.2021)



Namibian Broadcasting Corporation



- Data source: [YouTube channel of Namibian Broadcasting Corporation \(NBC\)](#) (cf. Zähres fc.2021)
- Namibia's only **public broadcasting station** broadcasting to TV, radio – and YouTube
 - Established in 1979, during apartheid era
- Active YT channel since 2015; ca. 5 to 15 videos daily; over 21,000 videos total (as of June 2021)
 - Video content: mostly news reports (i.e. **reading style data**), some interviews
 - Consistent and adequate sound quality for phonetic analyses
- Useful data source as one can assume that there is a **norm-orientation** towards public broadcasts

Namibian Broadcasting Corporation



- Historically, NBC broadcast programs by the pro-independence movement (mainly, the **SWAPO**) during apartheid times (cf. Mosia et al. 1994)
 - SWAPO party mainly consisting of Ovambos, which make up about 50% of Namibian population
- Still reports that the NBC suffers from a certain SWAPO-bias during their reports and coverage (e.g. *New Era* 2014).

➔ Details about **endonormative (Ovambo?)** variety being broadcast to the public?



- **SWAPO position towards NamE** in early 1990s as formulated by then-prime minister Geingob:
“**English does not bind us to any models to emulate. Nothing stops us to evolve our own regional form.** I hear a great deal of criticism of Namibian pronunciation, whether it is on television, or on radio, or outside the mass media. Somehow, when a German speaks English with an accent it is okay, when a Frenchmen (sic) with an accent it is cute, but when a black Namibian speaks English with an accent it is Namlish; a black Namibian’s pronunciation is unacceptable. None of the above-mentioned groups, when trying to speak English, are trying to be Englishmen!
Pronunciation is relevant only if a person chooses to live in England because he needs to identify with a speech community for integrative purposes. **In Namibia, we need not be dragged down for evolving our own form of pronunciation. We do not wish to become Englishmen. We wish to be Namibian speakers of English.**” (Geingob 1995: 178; my emphases).

“NBC English”?



Method:

- Analysis of random sample of NBC news reports from mid-2018
 - Metadata of all of the NBC’s YT videos compiled via YouTube Data Tools (cf. Rieder 2015)
- Transcripts automatically created via YouTube’s automatic captioning system + proof-reading
 - Kim et al. (2019) evaluated YouTube’s as one of the most accurate automatic transcription systems
 - Personal experience shows that it does indeed work very well with reading-style World Englishes data

“NBC English”?

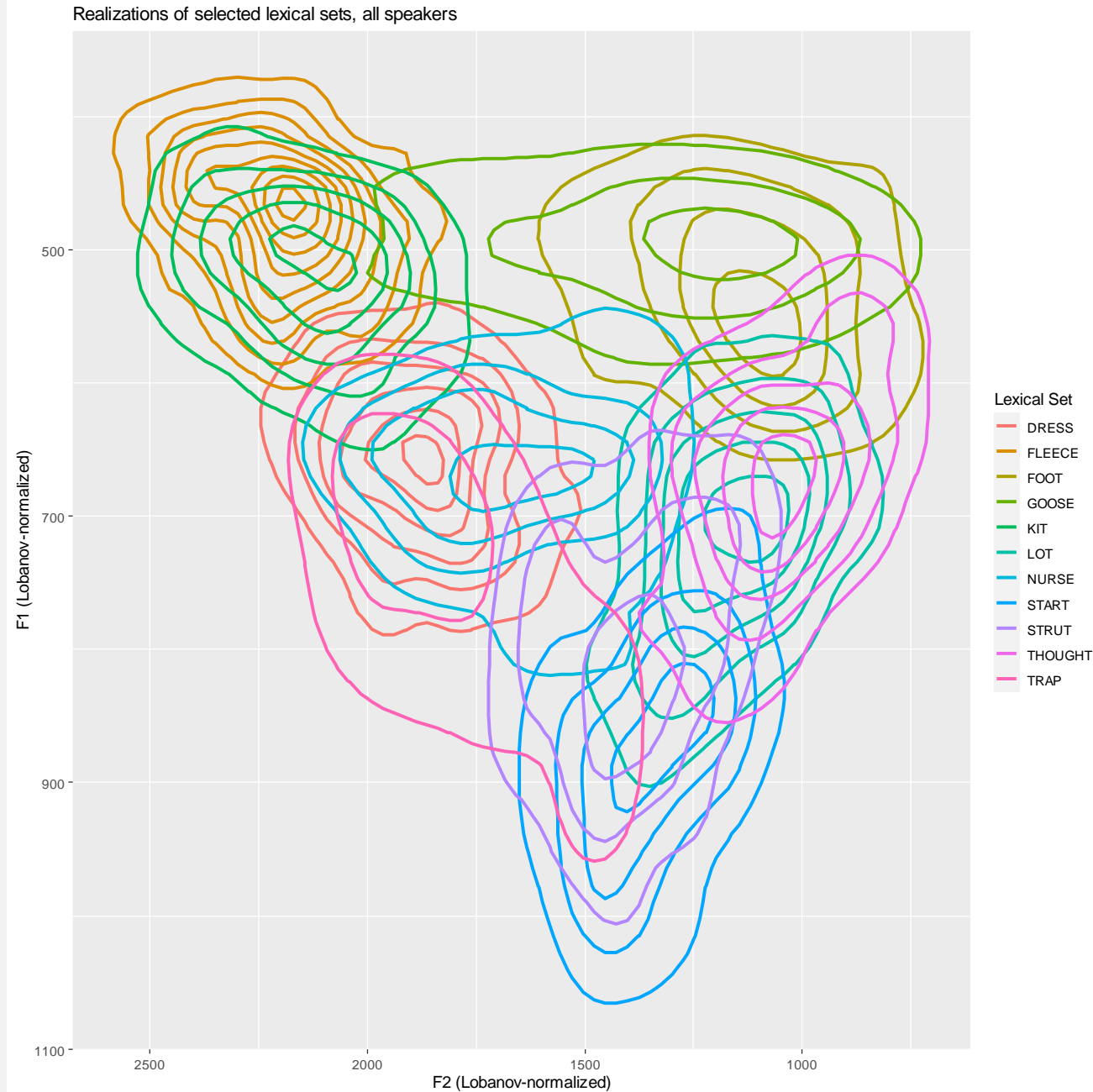


Method:

- Analysis of random sample of NBC news reports from mid-2018
 - Manual identification of unique speakers, selection of 1 or 2 video files per speaker
 - 58 videos, 34 speakers (17 female, 17 male)
- Automated segmentation, vowel extraction, normalization & phonetic analysis via FAVE suite (cf. Rosenfelder et al. 2014; also Meer 2020; Meer et al. 2021)
 - 10,636 total vowel tokens automatically extracted
- Data visualization via RStudio and ggplot2 (cf. Wickham 2016)

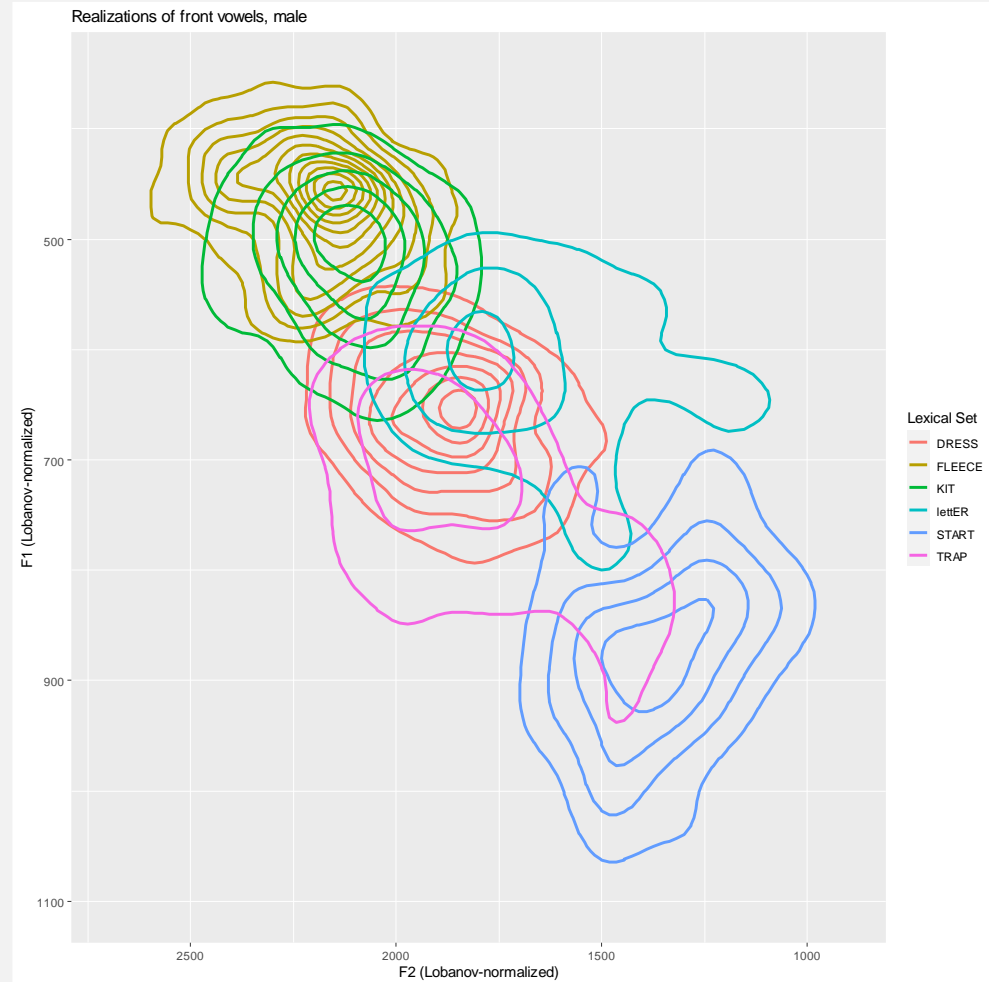
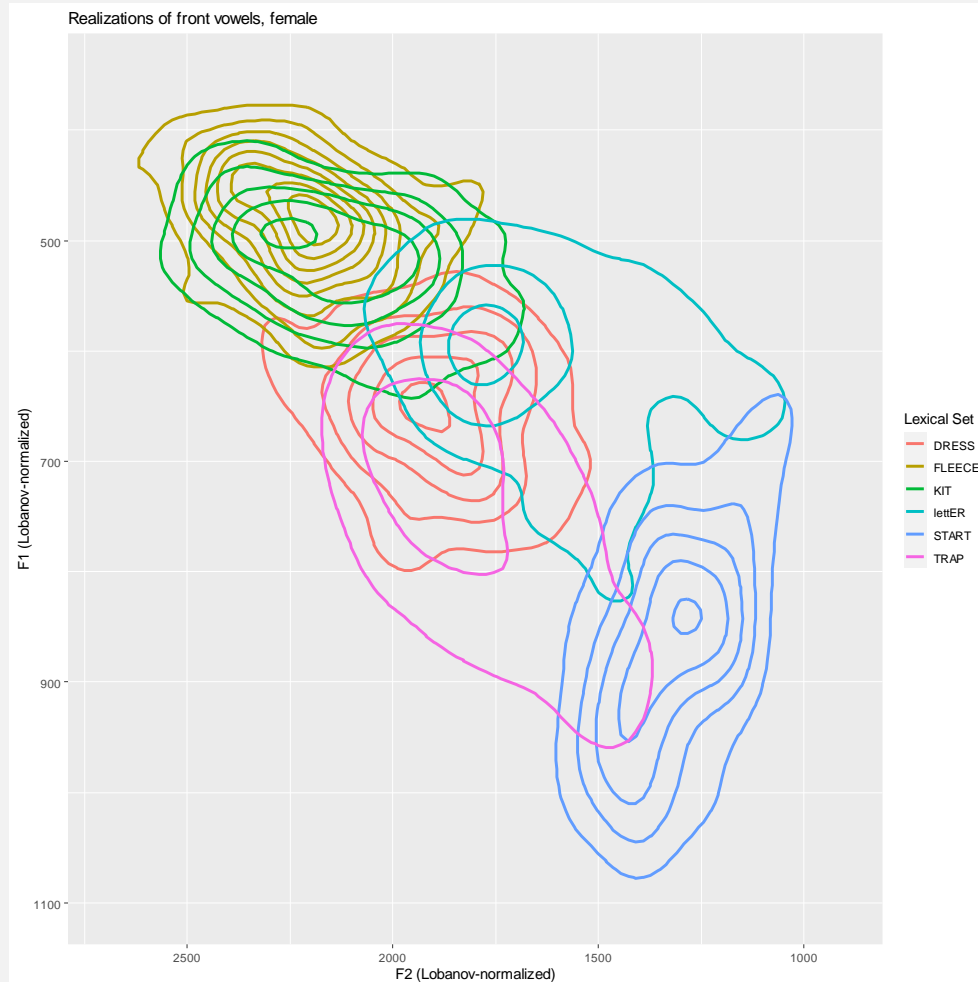


(some) Results:
All monophthongs



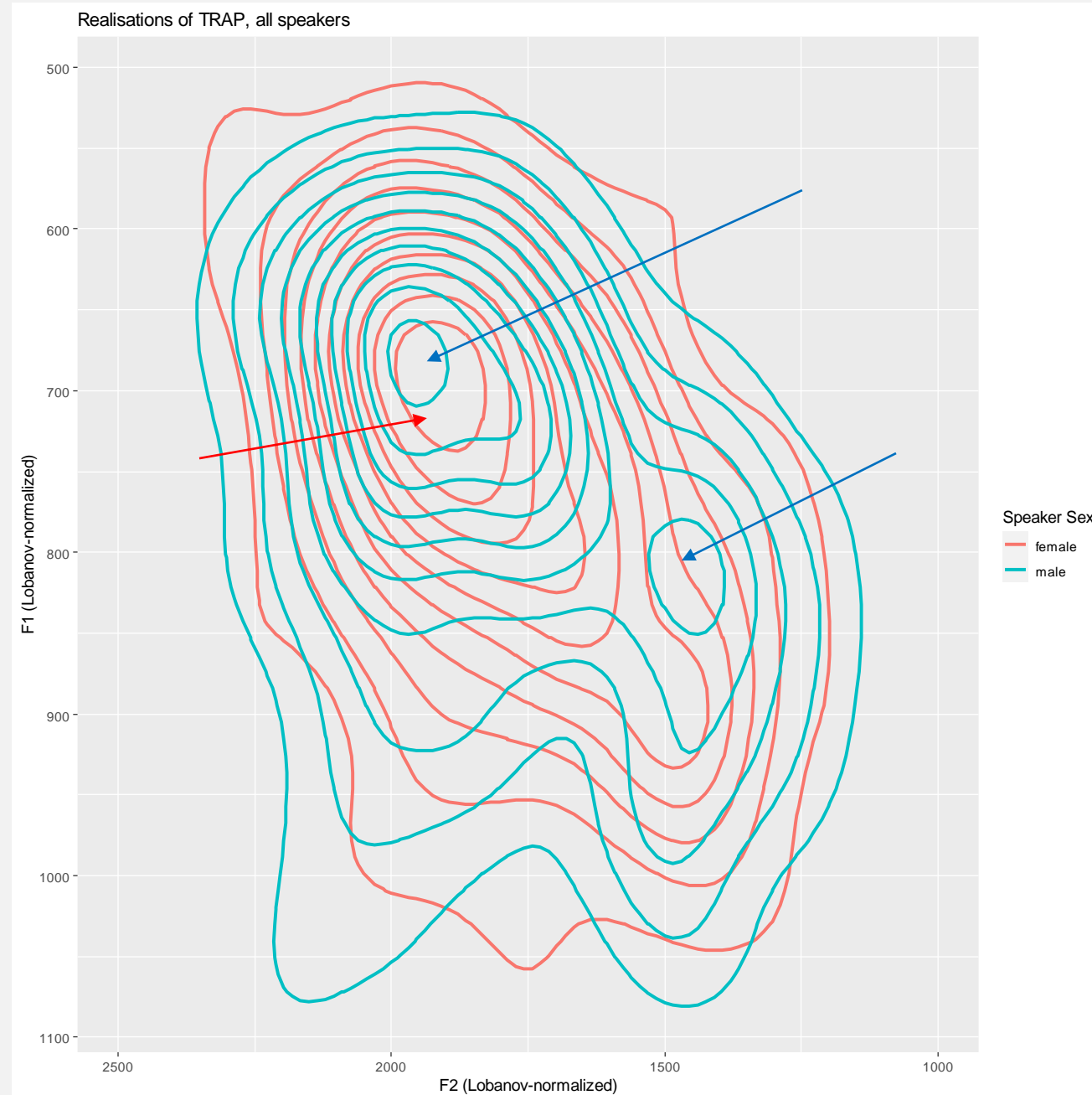


Results: Front vowels, female vs. male





Results: TRAP



Conclusion

Method:

- NBC YouTube data works well for automated acoustic analyses & FAVE proves to be accurate for Namibian English (NBC) data.
- Amount of sociolinguistic contextualization extremely scarce in this data type, though.

NamE Phonology:

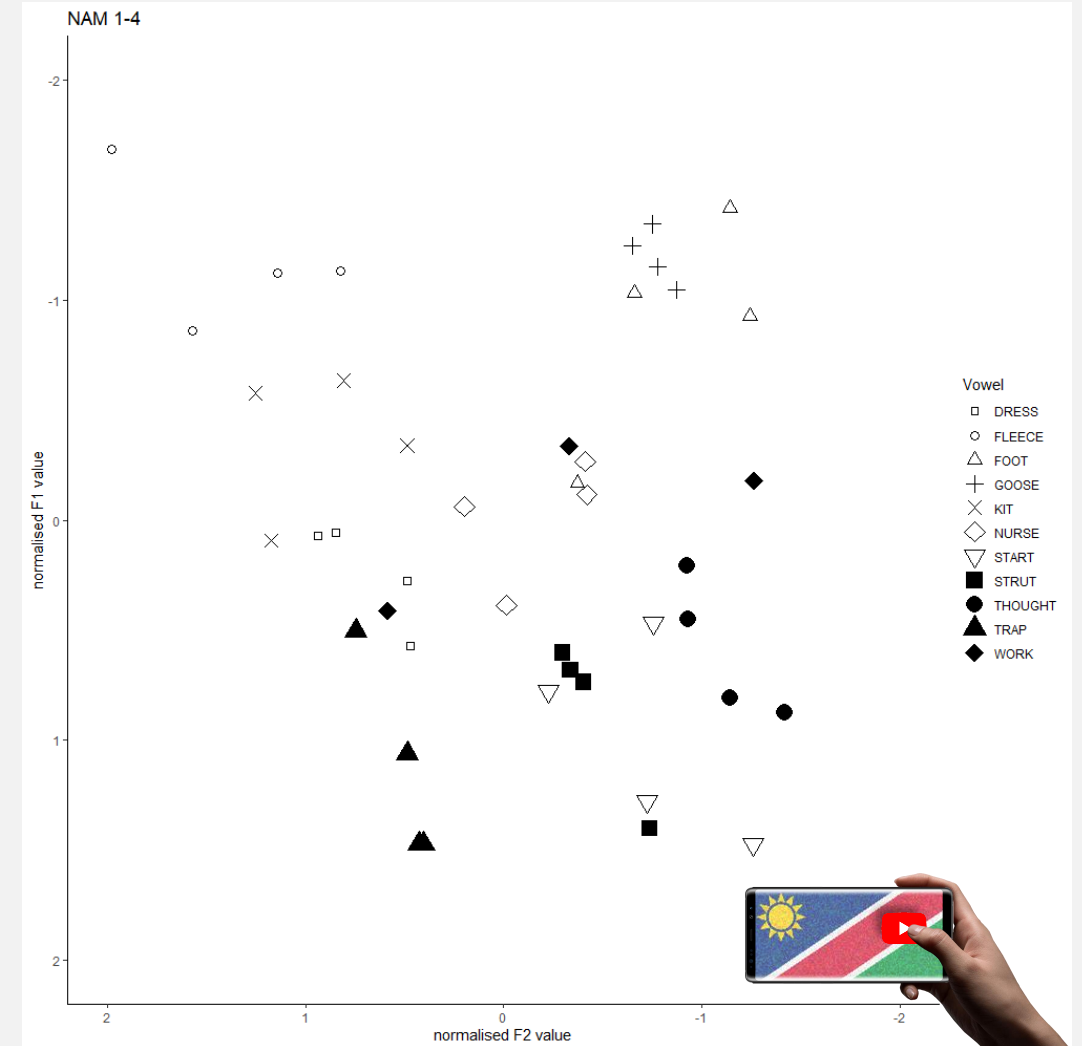
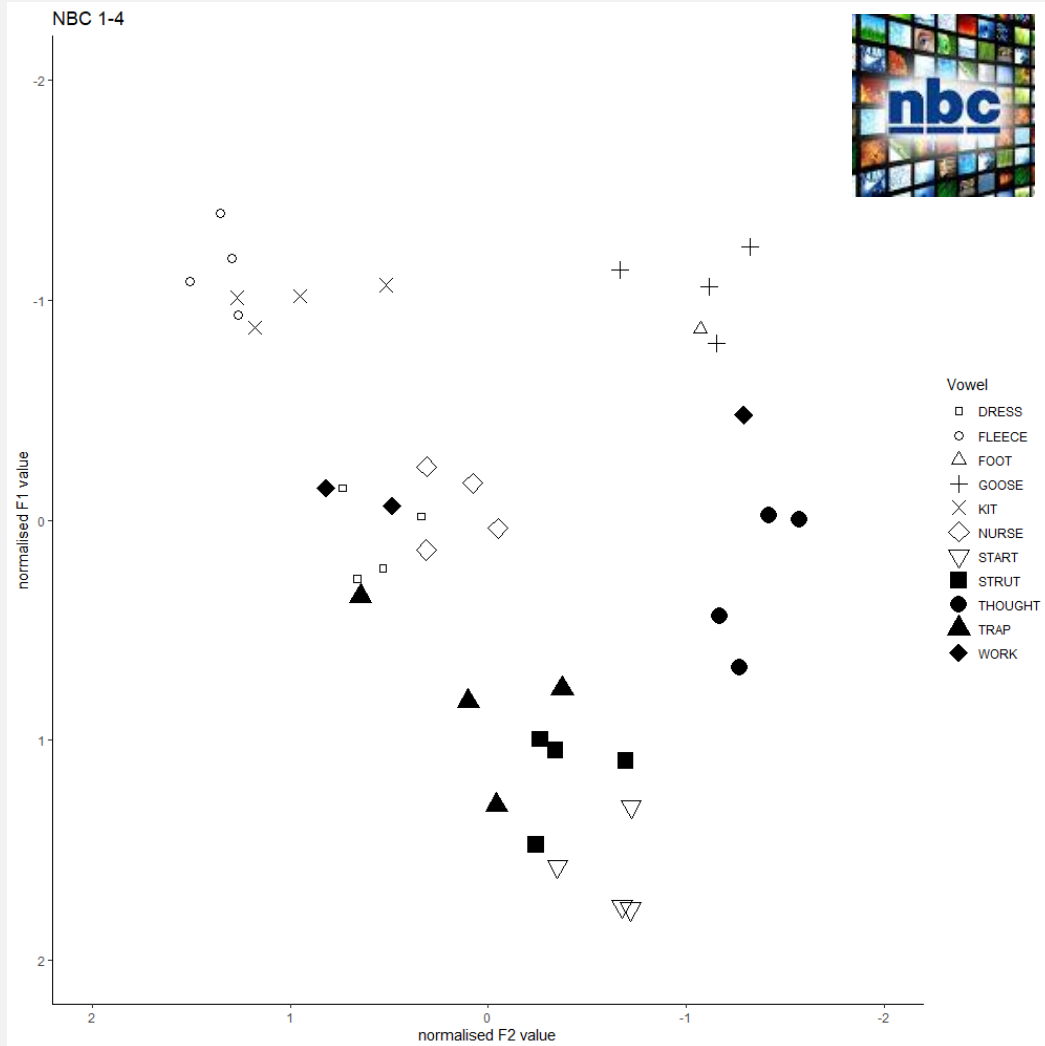
- Vowel space clustering around 5 vowels (potentially Oshiwambo-/Bantu-influenced) in NBC data.
- NBC data reveals NamE variation within the only available sociolinguistic macro category, i.e. sex,
– ethnicity is (unsurprisingly) not the only relevant variable here!

Outlook

- The variety broadcast by NBC reporters, however, is not representative for how many young Namibians actually speak on YouTube!
 - Age?
 - Medium?
 - Reading style vs. more informal speech?
 - Style / performance / register specific to YT?
 - more research on YT-specific style(s) needs to be conducted!

Outlook: NBC vs. NamTubers

(Zähres fc.2021)



Thank you for your attention!

Any questions, comments, and other type of feedback are much appreciated.



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Images:

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- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvQbrQHNdcofvya0aG7jEjA>