

Two and a half types of variation

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OVERVIEW

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- II Change
- III The variable studied in the first two examples
- IV First example: The low (a)
- V Second example: The high (a)
- VI Third example: The raising of [ε]
- VII Conclusion

Section I

VARIATION

Structuralism

- Structuralism is a reaction against historicism
- The Saussurean dichotomy between diachrony and synchrony
- The revenge of the synchronic point of view
- Phenomenology or psychological realism?

The quest for constancy

- The concept of the phoneme as a method to eliminate phoneticism
- From allophones to phonemes: the conscious reduction of variation
- Quote from Eli Fischer-Jørgensen: *Trends in Phonological Theory*: 23
- Strongly influenced by Saussure the Prague School established phonological opposition as the fundamental concept upon which the other definitions were to be based. The PHONOLOGICAL OPPOSITION is described as a difference of sound which in a given language may serve to distinguish intellectual meanings³.
- Note 3: The purpose of the term 'intellectual' is to restrict meanings to those which belong to the linguistic content communicated; in this way sound differences which characterize the speaker as belonging to a certain group or which express feelings are eliminated.

Labov on the linguistic variable

From: 'The social motivation of a sound change'

[...]what are the most useful properties of a linguistic variable to serve as the focus for the study of a speech community. First we want an item that is frequent, which occurs so often in the course of undirected natural conversation that its behaviour can be charted from unstructured contexts and brief interviews. Secondly, it should be structural: the more the item is integrated into a larger system of functioning units, the greater will be the intrinsic linguistic interest of our study. Third, the distribution of the feature should be highly stratified: that is our preliminary explorations should suggest an asymmetric distribution over a wide range of age levels or other ordered strata of society. (p. 7f)

The phonetic variable in context

- Defining the so-called envelope of variation is not an easy task
- *What is to be counted in order for us to get a clear picture of what entity actually varies?*
- The phoneme as the envelope?
- Classes of allophones as envelopes?
- The allophone as an envelope?
- Reductio ad absurdum!

Section ii

CHANGE

Weinreich, Labov and Herzog on change

- "The facts of heterogeneity have not so far jibed well with the structuralist approach to language. [...] the more linguists became impressed with the existence of structure of language, and the more they bolstered this observation with deductive arguments about the functional advantages of structure, the more mysterious became the transition of a language from state to state. After all, if a language has to be structured in order to function efficiently, how do people continue to talk while the language changes, that is, while it passes through periods of lessened systematicity? [...]"
- Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968: 100

Variation as a precondition for change

- In variants we find the structure of tomorrow
- Structure is only sufficient, not pervasive: ordered heterogeneity is the rule, not the exception
- Variation is pervasive but not all variation gets to be (promoted to) significant variation
- Significant variation is connected with 'extra-intellectual' meaning, i.e. social meaning
- Hence sociolinguistics, i.e. the study of significant variation, holds the key to language change

The issue in this presentation

- *Are all variant pronunciations which get promoted to being sociolinguistic variables, i.e. which pattern with social structure in the broadest sense of social, conducive to change?*
- Three examples will be presented taken from the research at the Danish National Research Foundation LANCHART Centre in Copenhagen, cf www.lanchart.dk or www.dgcss.dk

Section iii

THE VARIABLE STUDIED IN THE FIRST TWO EXAMPLES

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*)
- **Around 1930** Otto Jespersen states the rule of complementary distribution for the short (a) variants:
 - AN [æ] is found before alveolar consonants and nil
 - AM [ɑ] is found before labials and velars

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 was, or is, characteristic of the WC, in particular the males**
- What does the present day evidence say?

The Copenhagen data set

- 42 informants in total:
- 24 in generation 1 (born 1944-62) interviewed first time in 1986-88 (Study 1 (S1), second time in 2006-08 (S2), 6 in each cell: Middle Class (MC), Working Class (WC), males (m) and females (f)
- 18 in generation 2 (born 1963-73); 4 in the two WC groups and 5 in the two MC groups

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 portion of the marked variant

Real time study of (a)-raising

- The LANCHART centre performed a real time panel study re-recording the 42 informants involved in the original Copenhagen urban sociolinguistics study (Gregersen and Pedersen 1991)
- *The issue of Age periods:*
- First recorded in 1986-87 when they were 25-40 years old, they were re-recorded in 2006-07 when they were 20 years older, i.e. 45-60 years of age

Section iv

FIRST EXAMPLE, THE LOW VARIANT OF (A): VARIATION LEADING TO CHANGE

First approximation

- AM4, i.e. the marked, supposedly WC variant in the entire data set at the LANCHART Centre, i.e. including much more than Copenhagen informants
- There are **110** instances of AM4 in the entire corpus
- and **12.468** instances of AM3

AM4 instances in Copenhagen

Generation 1 in S1:

- WC informants: 27
- MC informants: 1

TOTAL: 28

Generation 1 in S2:

- WC informants: 11
- MC informants: 2

13

Generation 2 in S1:

- WC informants: 2
- MC informants: 5

TOTAL 7

Generation 2 in S2:

- WC informants: 3
- MC informants: 1

4

Not a social variant but an individual feature!

- **The AM4 has all but disappeared in the speech community!**
- It seems to be characteristic that very few individuals have produced an extreme proportion of the sum total of AM4s
- In the Odder data set, for example, **only two persons** have an AM4 at all. One has one instance while the other one has **13** in the S1 and **5** in the S2.
- Of all the 19 AM4s in the Odder recordings, one person has produced 18!

Conclusion: a change has happened

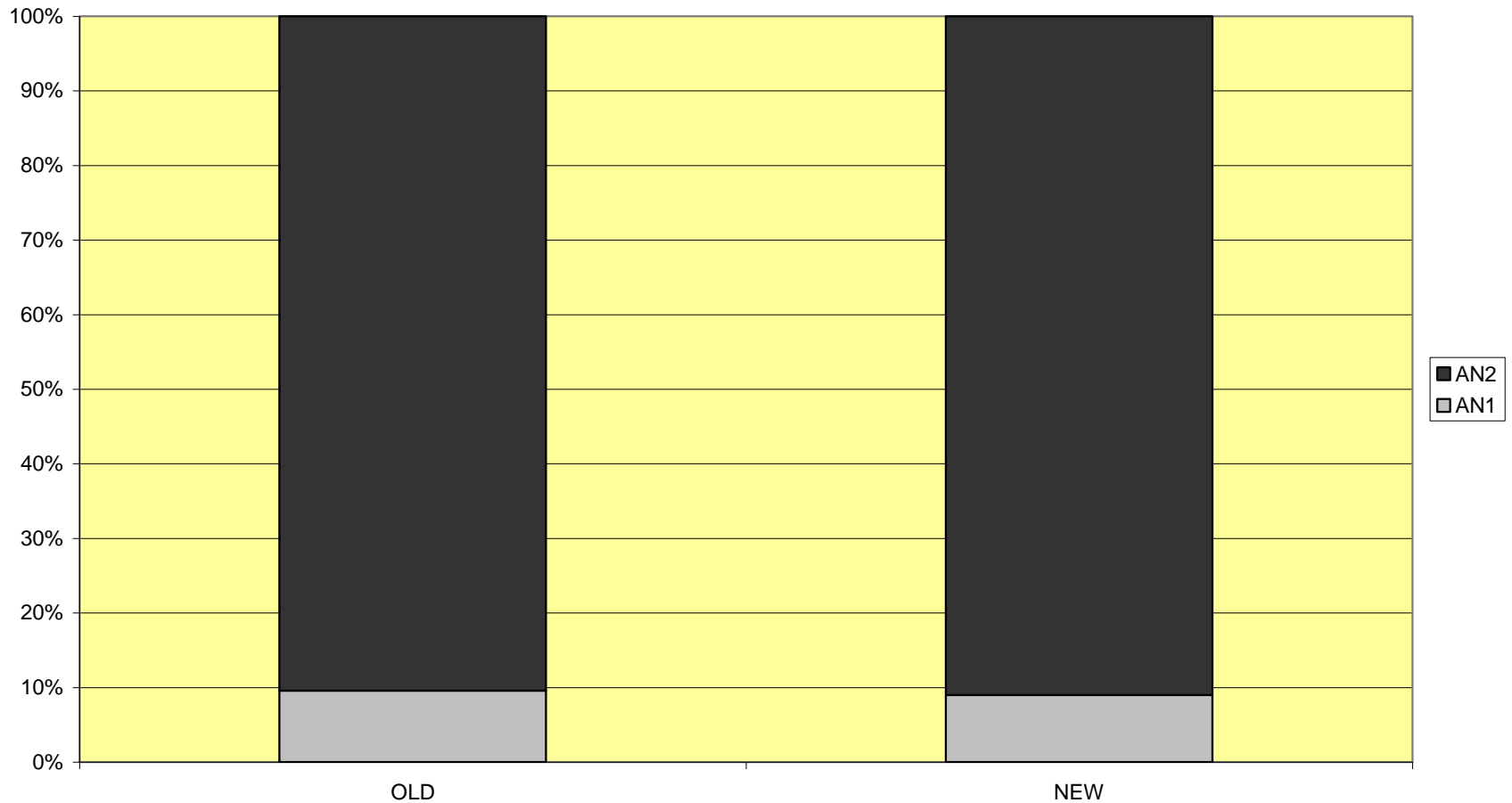
- Starting in the 1850s or later, but at least around 1888, the original value of the (a) was raised. The result may be seen now: AM3 is more fronted than the original quality of AM4.
- The old quality of the (a), the AM4, has disappeared as a social feature
- **AM4 is now a feature of specific individuals and thus no longer a social marker with an attached stereotype**

Section v

SECOND EXAMPLE: THE AN VARIABLE: STABLE VARIATION

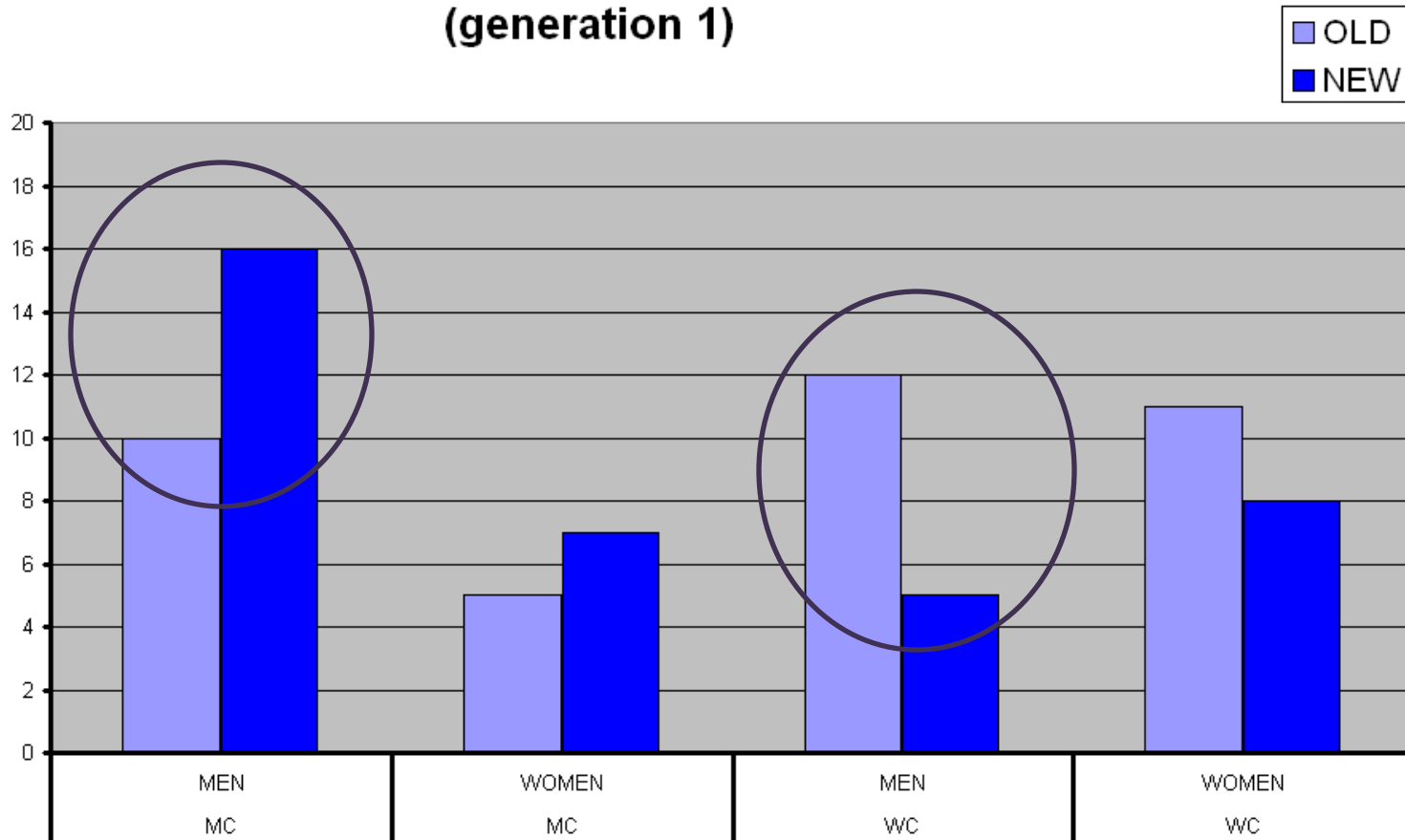
The real time data: nothing happened - apparently

The real time picture of short (a) 1986 vs 2006

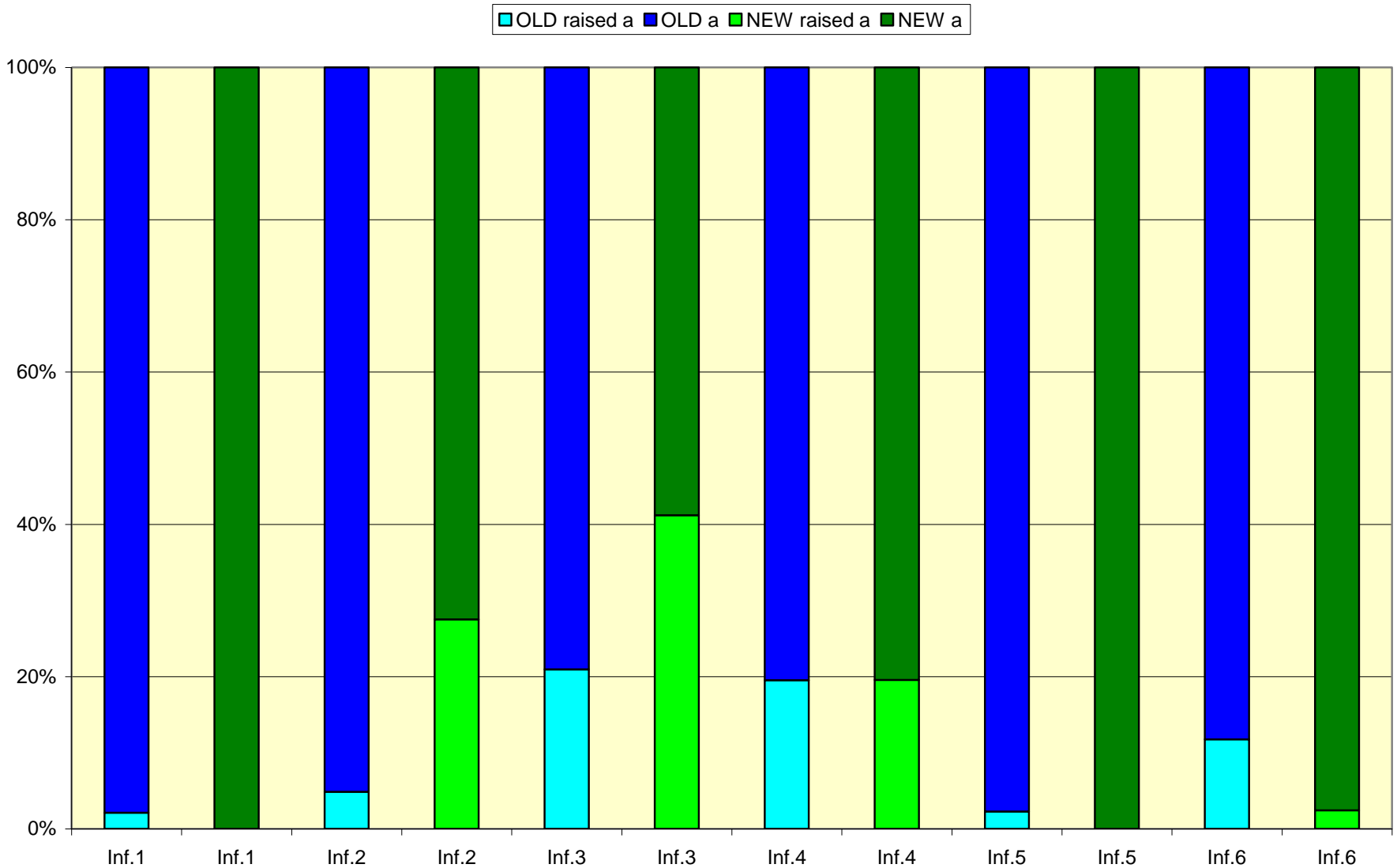


BUT: Real time change at the group level

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



The MC men in real time

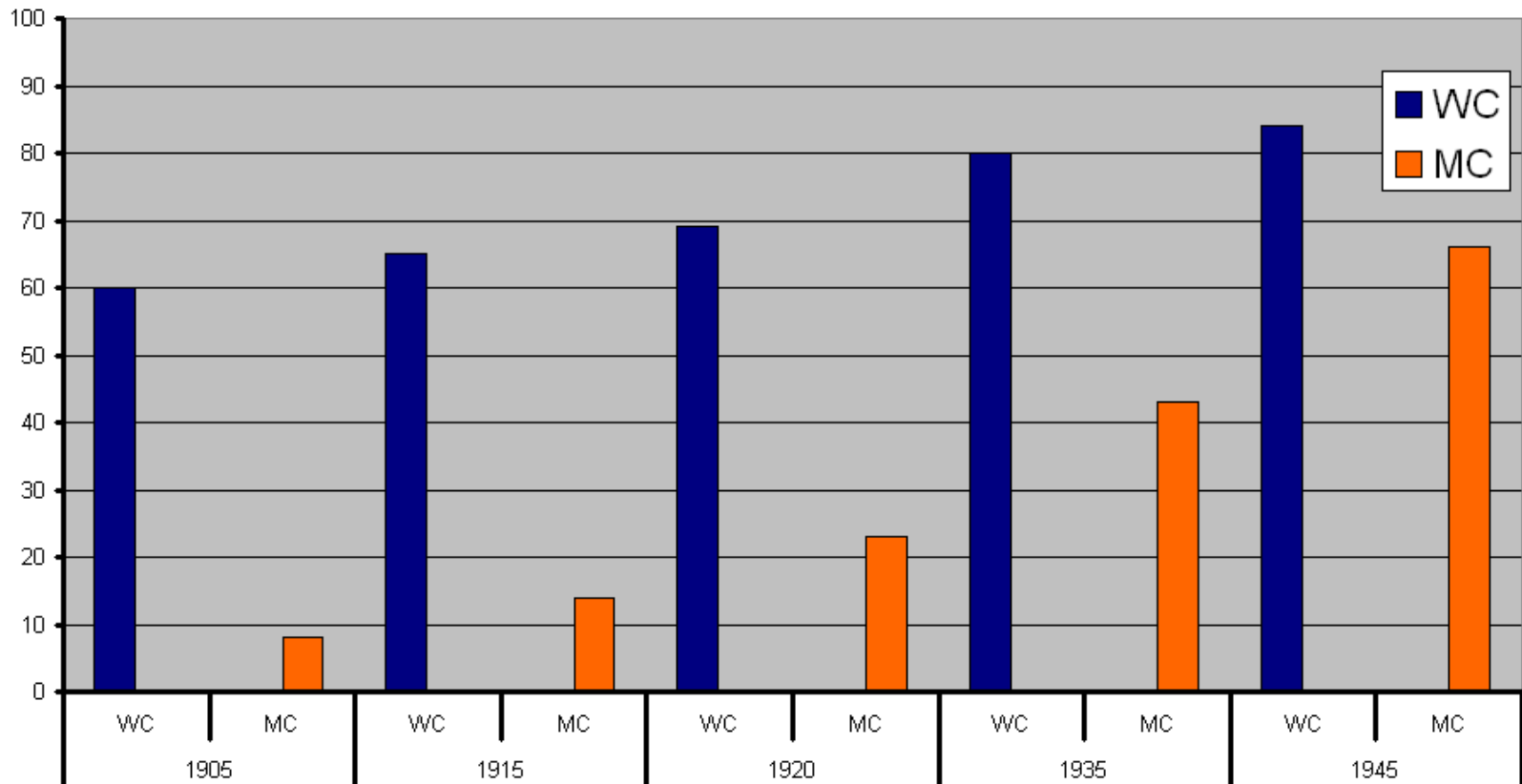


Prolonging the data set backwards

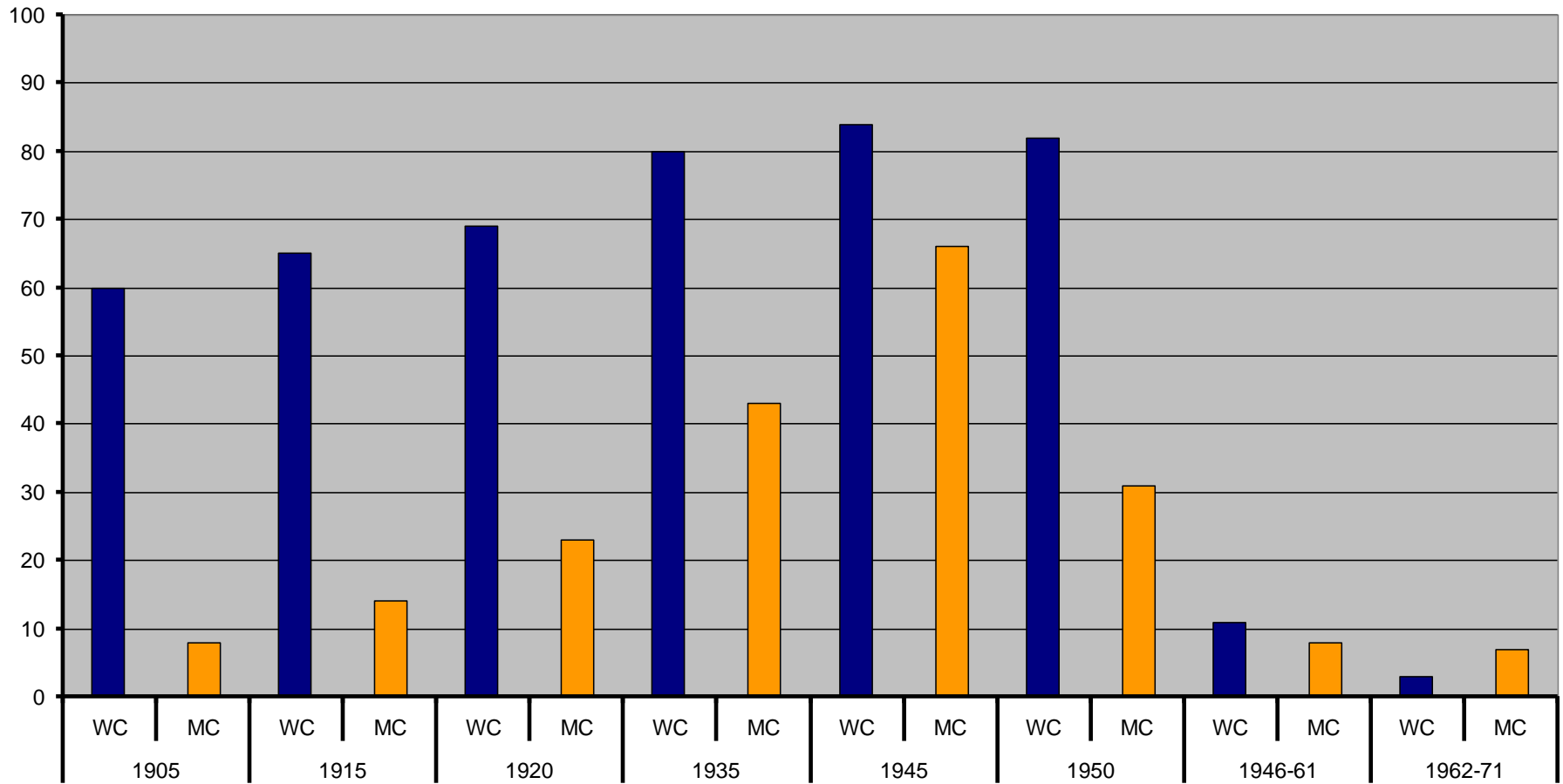
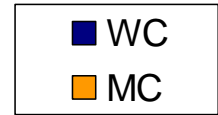
- In 1977-78 Jens Normann Jørgensen had carried out a study of the raised short (a)
- His study involved several generations and was thus a perfect example of a study in apparent time
- There were four groups of informants, born 1905, 1920, 1935 and 1950
- In addition JNJ used data from a previous study featuring informants born 1915 and 1945

Inference from apparent time as to AN variants

Apparent time diagram of AN1%_s in Copenhagen 1905-
1945 (birth years)



The Copenhagen AN1% 1905-1971



Just checking

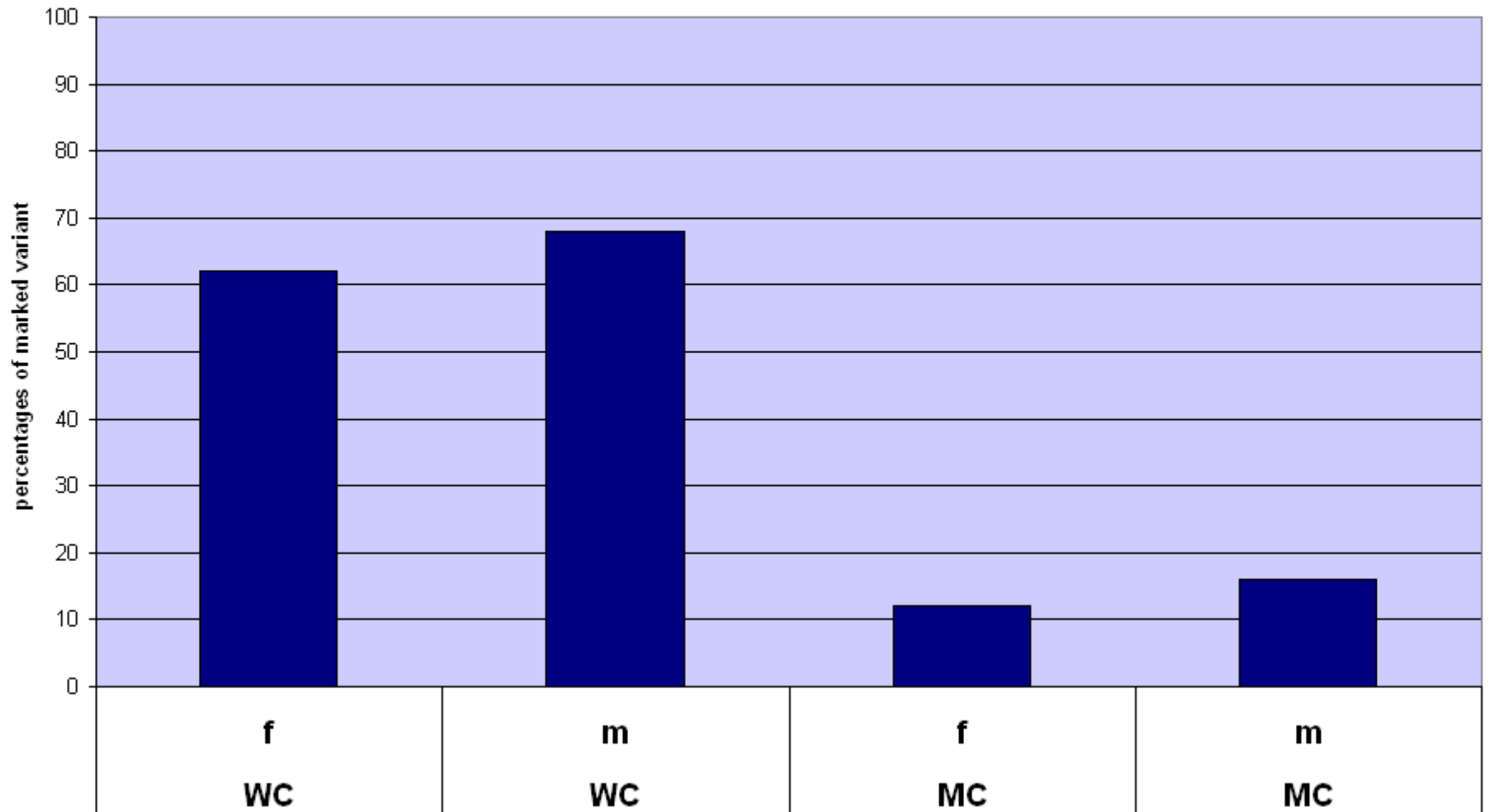
- In order to test whether this apparently quite dramatic shift was indeed based on the same coding practices, we undertook a re-coding of the earlier recordings
- We re-coded the recordings from informants born in 1905 and 1945
- The coders were from the same generation as those who had coded the LANCHART material

Maybe...

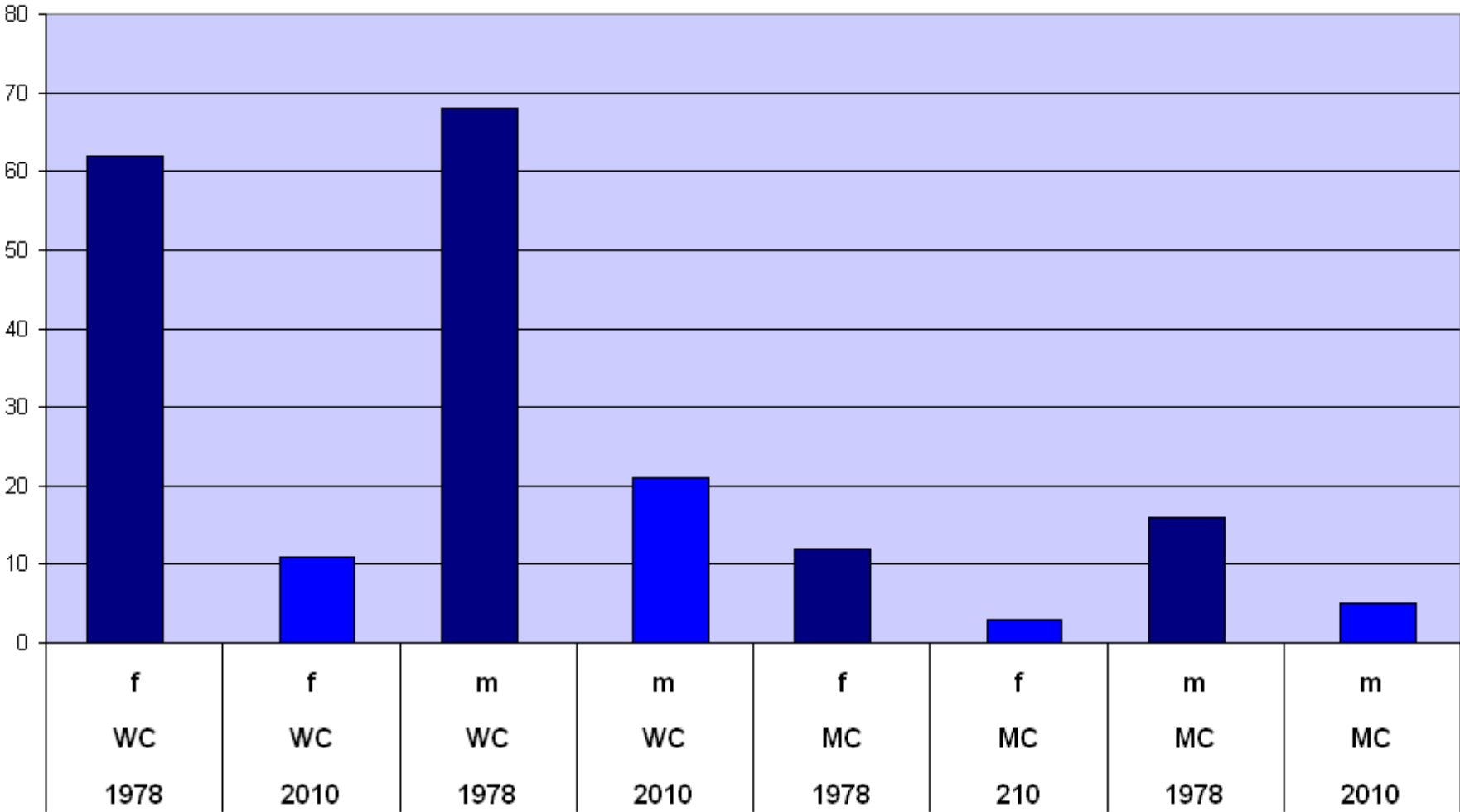
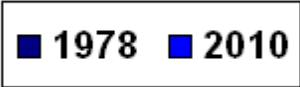
- Maybe the LANCHART coders were not using the same classification of variants as Normann Jørgensen had when he classified sounds in these recordings

Auditory results from 1977-78

■ ϵ



Coding in time 1978 vs. 2010



Coding as an historical practice

- The **level** of AN1 use seems to be dramatically different

BUT

- The pattern of the groups is the same!
- Coding itself is an historical phenomenon

Conclusion

- We have no doubt as to the reality of the variants, the front short (a), the AN variable, still has two variants, AN1 and AN2; there are **1018** instances of AN1 in the entire corpus against **12.244** AN2s
- But the pattern of use to-day has been reversed: 3 of the 6 MC men in generation 1 have a significant proportion of AN1s whereas the WC men have diminished their use of it!
- What the consequences for the stereotypical perception of the AN1 are, we simply do not know!

Conclusion

One thing, though, is clear:
No change has gone to
completion here;
the variation between AN1
and AN2 is **stable variation**

Section vi

THIRD EXAMPLE: A GHOST REAPPEARING: ÆNG-RAISING

The variable [ɛ] > [e]_[ɨ]

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

Three values:

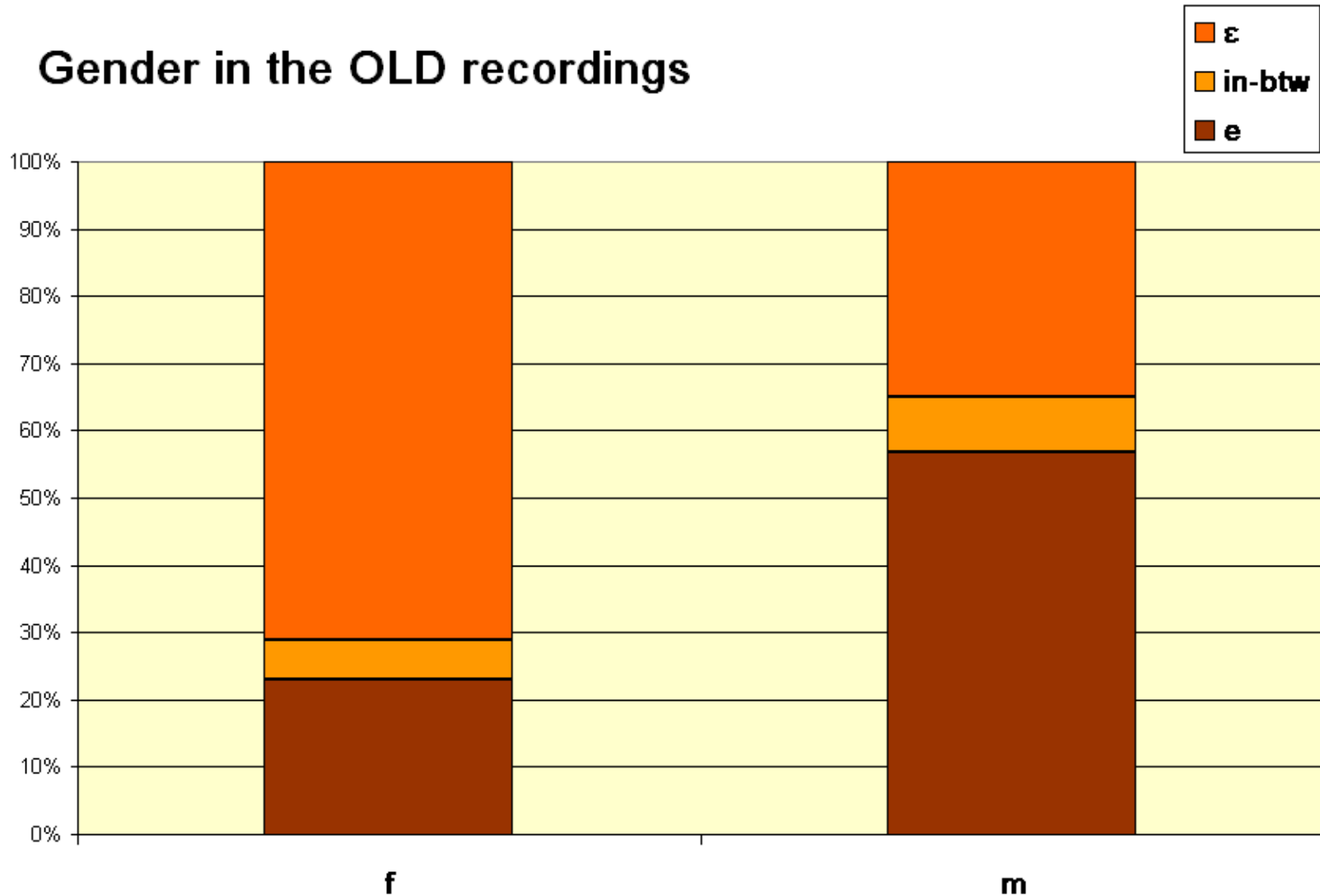
- **Original (standard) value:** [ɛ]
- **Raised variant:** [e]
- **An in-between variant** which is heard as neither identical to [e] or [ɛ]: in-btw.
- *penge* (money) realized as [peŋə] or [pɛŋə]

Method

- Auditory coding by two independent coders; any discrepancy is solved by a third person, the checker
- In principle *forced choice*, either [e] or [ɛ], but in practice the coders felt the need for the in-btw. value as well

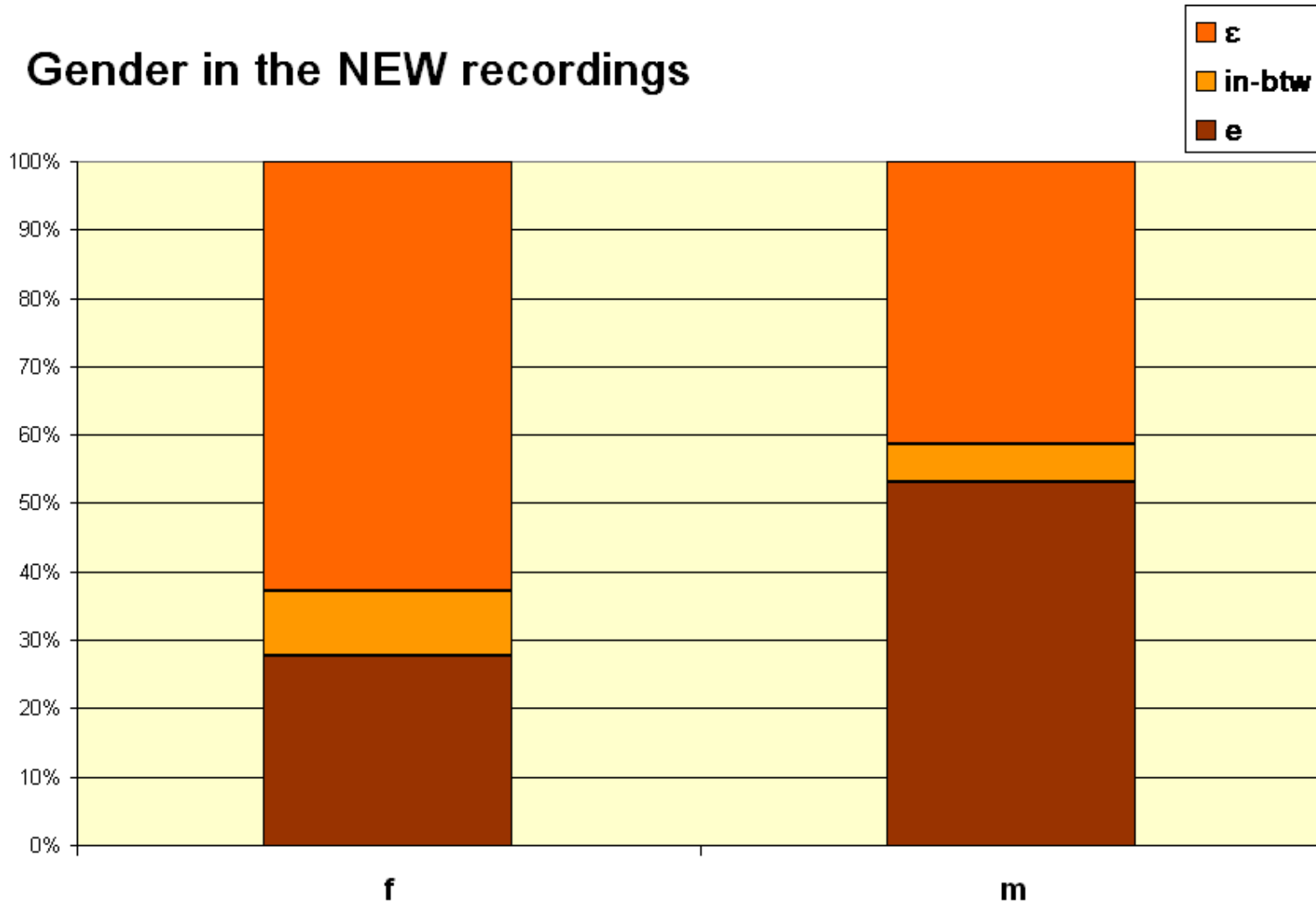
The generation 2 results: gender (N=396)

Gender in the OLD recordings



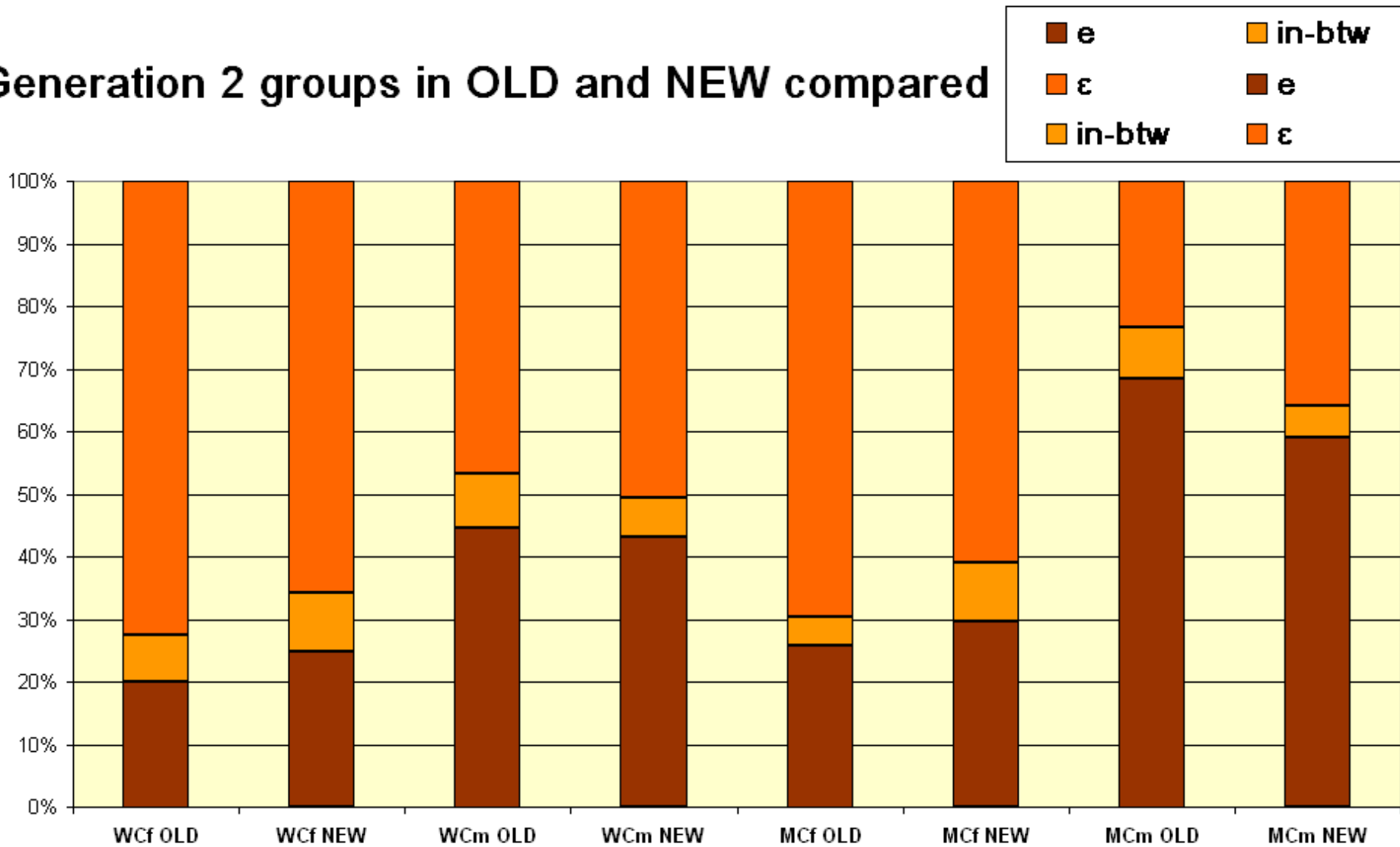
Gender in the NEW recordings (N=447)

Gender in the NEW recordings



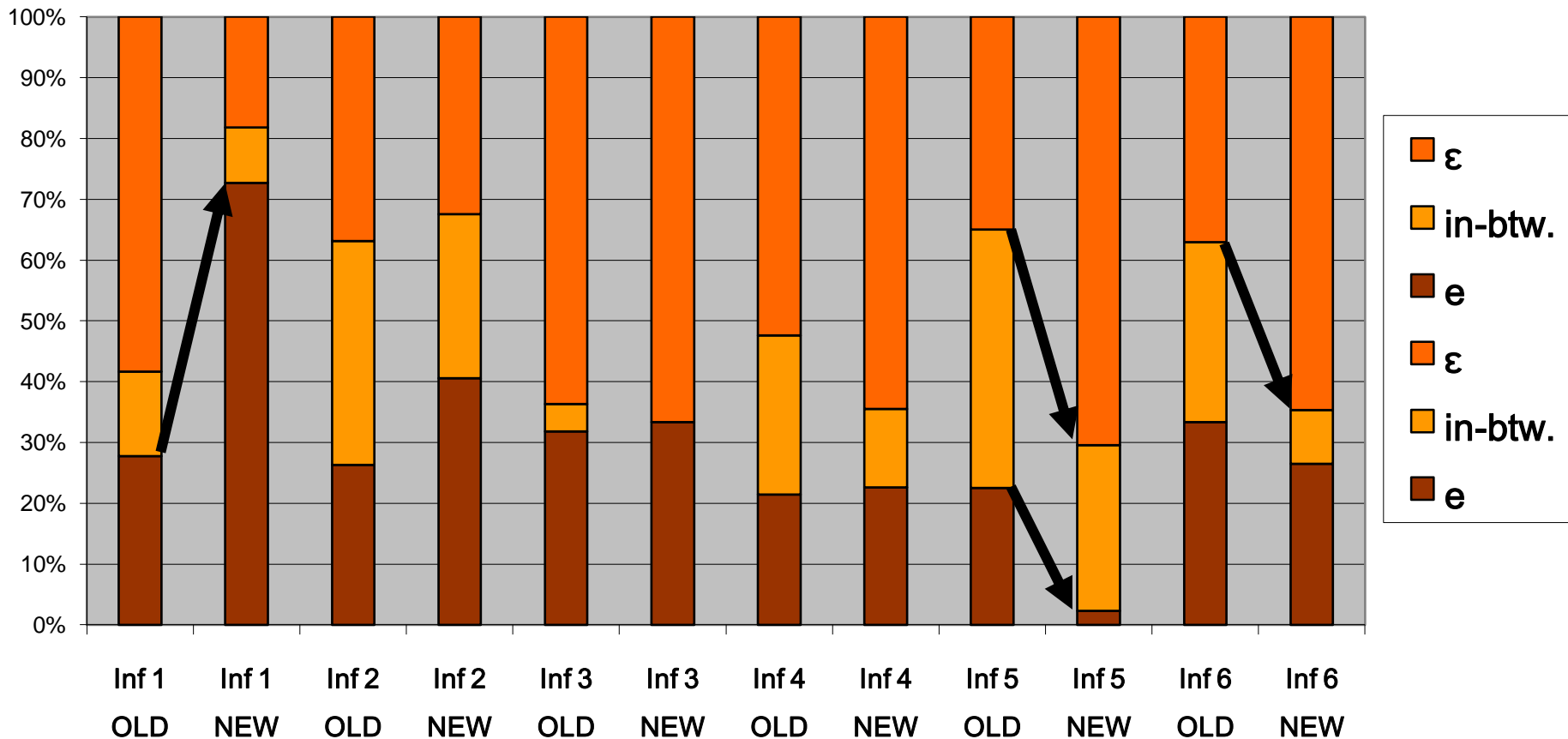
The generation 2 groups

Generation 2 groups in OLD and NEW compared



Individual differences in real time

The WC women's pattern in OLD and NEW recordings compared



Linguistic points

- The status of the in-between variant: [ɛ] as the standard variant and everything else as raising - or three distinct values with their separate stories? (I will not discuss this to-day)
- Is this stable variation or variation with a direction (a change) and if so how old is it?
- Is this lexical diffusion and if so from which part of the lexicon?

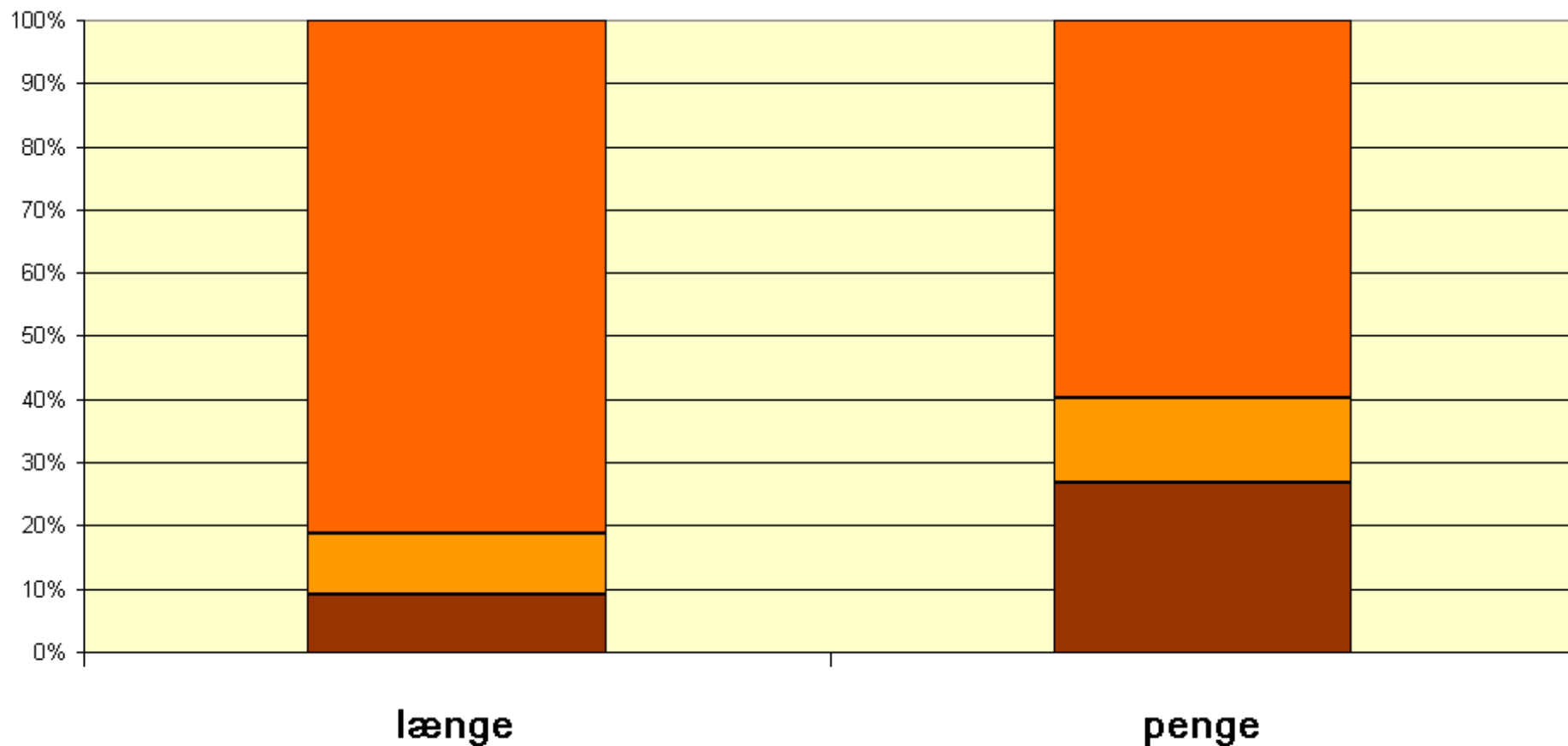
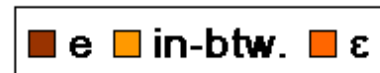
Lexical diffusion or morphophonology?

- 'penge', *money* (no relation to modern word forms with any [a]) vs. 'længe', (*for long, adv.*) with a connection to the word 'lang', *long*

| | [e] | in- btw. | [ɛ] |
|---------|-----|----------|-----|
| 'længe' | 28 | 29 | 248 |
| 'penge' | 200 | 101 | 448 |

- Chi square: 48.7 $p < 0.000$

'længe' vs. 'penge'



The history of the variable ÆNG

- Projekt Bysociolingvistik 1991: new variable (not mentioned in Brink og Lund 1975)
- We concluded then:
- "The ÆNG picture looks very much like an ongoing change...[...] It is very likely that this variable is in the process of becoming a social and stylistic marker..." (Holmberg et al.:220)

Finn Køster's results

- Finn Køster in 1996 listened to the recordings of Zealandic dialect at the Department of Dialectology in search of this variable.
- Køster finds that it is not a Copenhagen variable but is found earlier in the south of Zealand. It is not very OLD, i.e. found in the traditional Zealandic dialect, but it is there with the younger dialect speakers
- Køster reports percentages of [e] realizations between 42 (in the lexical item 'penge') and 25
- No in-between quality

The prehistory of ÆNG-raising

- Karen Margrethe Pedersen has found ample evidence of ÆNG-raising in the letters of one upper class Copenhagener, Louise Juel, ***from the 1700s !***
- The only reason we can see this, is that Louise Juel apparently writes in an orthography that quite accurately depicts her pronunciation
- In this orthography the letter <æ> is rare, and not found at all before <ng>, and the letter <e> is replaced by <i> indicating ÆNG-raising
- penge > ping; tænke > tinke; enke > inge; længe > linge

A ghost reappearing

- If Karen Margrethe Pedersen is right, and I believe she is, we are witnessing the reappearance of a ghost:
- A process once present in Copenhagen disappears totally for centuries only to reappear first as a dialectal feature and then as a Copenhagen feature, characteristic of young MC males!

Conclusion

- What in 1991 looked like a 'new and vigorous change' has spread from the young MC men to other social groups
- Maybe this raising is not new (cf. Finn Køster and Karen Margrethe Pedersen), but if that is the case is this a variation leading to change or not? It did not before, why would it do so now? More likely, it is a reappearing stable variation.
- The conditions for revealing a ghost process like this, is that we find the rare kind of orthographical evidence: a writer who uses an orthography which discloses her/his speech

La longue durée: Interpretation

- Short vowels were systematically lowered in older Middle Danish. Incidentally, this is (one of) the reason(s) we have such a difficult orthography
- We might relate the *ÆNG*-raising to the raising that affected first the long and then the short (a). Maybe a *general reversal* of the lowering, viz. a raising process, is at work here?
- Or maybe a local chain shift is going on where the raising of (a) pushes the [ɛ] upwards to [e]?

section vii

CONCLUSION (AT LAST!)

Here is the answer...

to the question posed at the outset:

- NO, not all variation leads to change,
though it may be too early to tell, yet

THANKS

- For your patience
- To the staff at the LANCHART Centre, cf. www.lanchart.dk (in English) and www.dgcss.dk (in Danish), in particular Nicolai Pharao and Marie Maegaard
- And last, but not least, to the Danish National Research Foundation for the grant!

ENG in CPH and other sites in Denmark

