

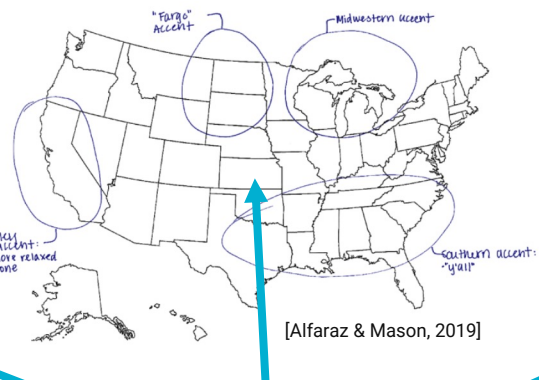
What makes a speaker sound



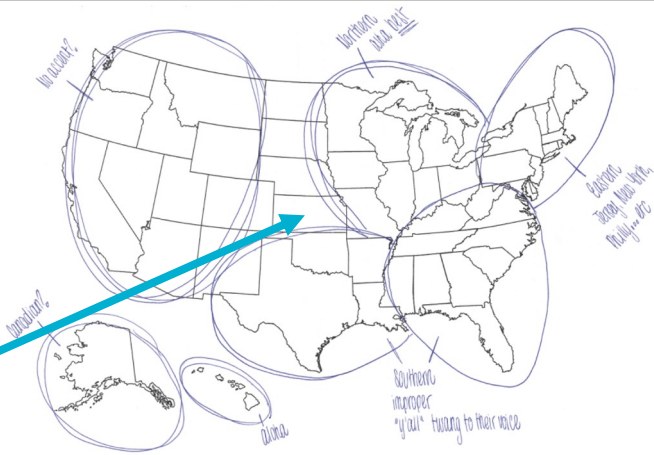
Kansan?



[Alfara & Mason, 2019]

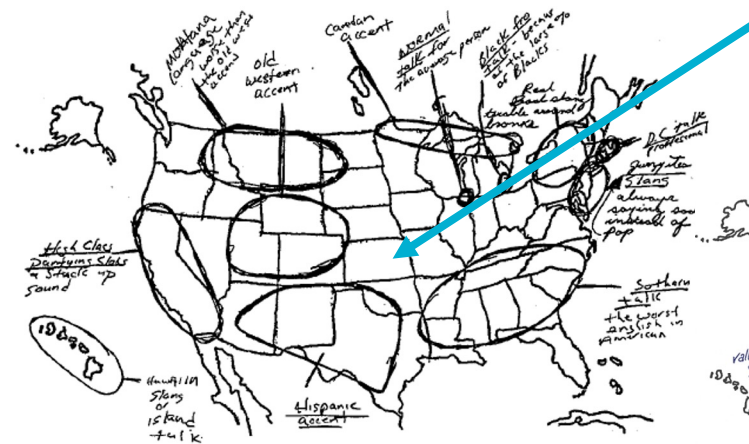


[Alfara & Mason, 2019]

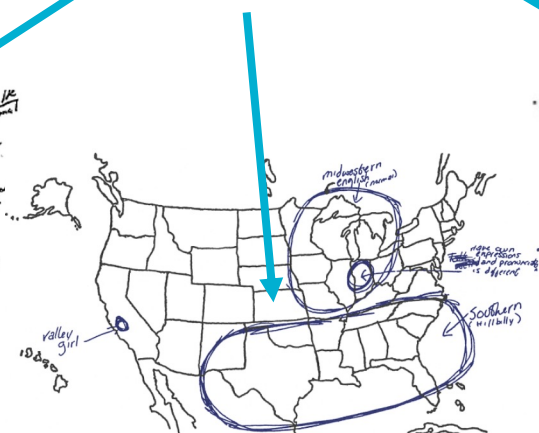


[Alfara & Mason, 2019]

Kansas is often not noted on perceptual dialectology maps



[Preston 1996]



[Preston 1996]



[Preston 1996]

Background

Many Kansans do not perceive their own speech as being Accented:

“We’re Midwestern, so **I don’t perceive us as having an accent...**The Midwestern accent is just kind of the **neutral accent**, right. The way people talk, it’s very flat. It’s **not valley girl**, and it’s **not hard Southern drawl** either. It’s just kind of middle.” –Participant L05



Background

What do Kansans actually sound like?

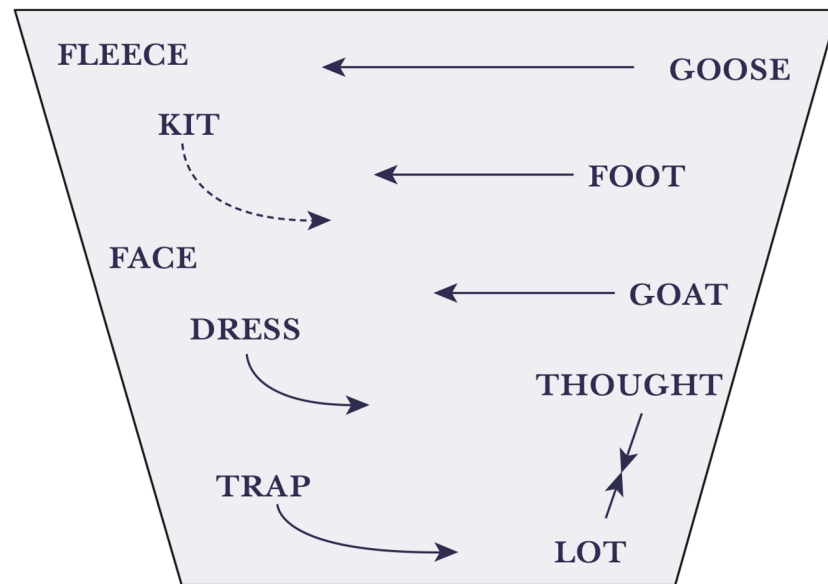
- Kansans often merge HULL-FULL-GOAL but not POOL like some other Midland talkers (Strelluf 2016)
- Many Kansans have PIN-PEN merger (Strelluf, 2018; Austen, 2020), typically associated with Southern speech
- Not much evidence for other “Southern” features



(Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:146)

Low Back Merger Shift

- Kansans across the state exhibit the **Low Back Merger Shift (LBMS)** which is also exhibited in Californian speech (and many other areas!) (Villarreal & Kohn, 2021; Kohn, 2024)
- **TRAP-retraction is perceived as Californian** (D'Onofrio, 2018), but Kansans do not associate it with Kansas even though it is prevalent in their speech (Villareal & Kohn, 2021)

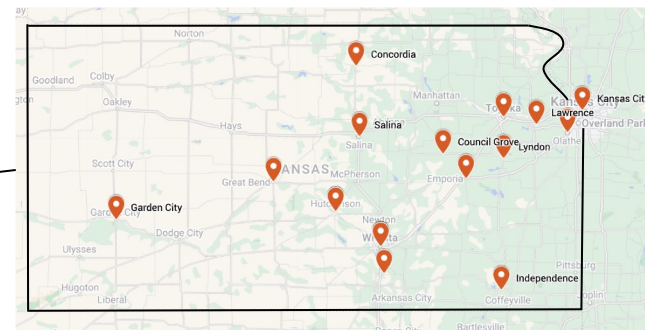
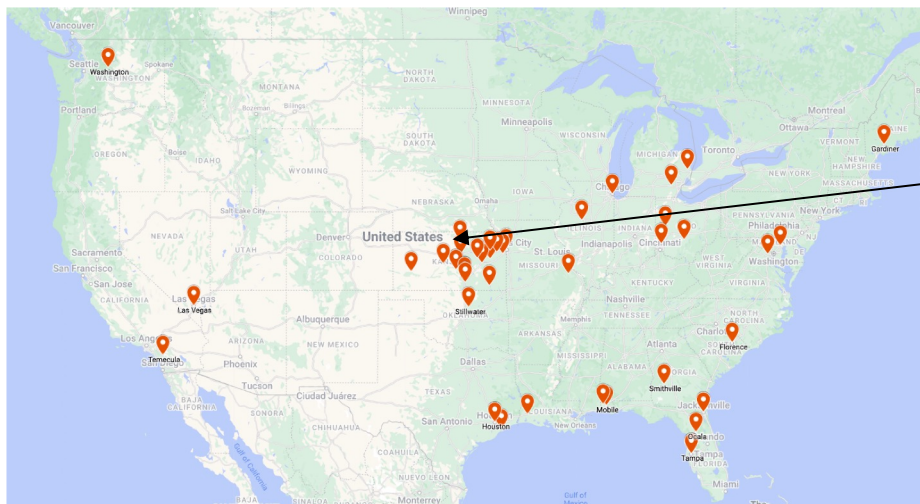


(Villarreal & Kohn 2021)

Methods

Methods

65 Participants (36 Kansans, 29 from Elsewhere in the US) heard 31 talkers read the “Please call Stella...” passage from the Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger, 2015)



Methods

For each talker, participants rated on 1–5 likert scales:

How “**Likely to be from Kansas**” the talker was

How “**Accented**” the talker sounded

Then checked boxes indicated traits like:

Region/state: e.g., “Midwestern”, “Southern”, “Northern”, “Californian”, “Ohioan”

Traits: e.g., “Educated,”, “Wealthy”, “Friendly,” “Polite”

Results

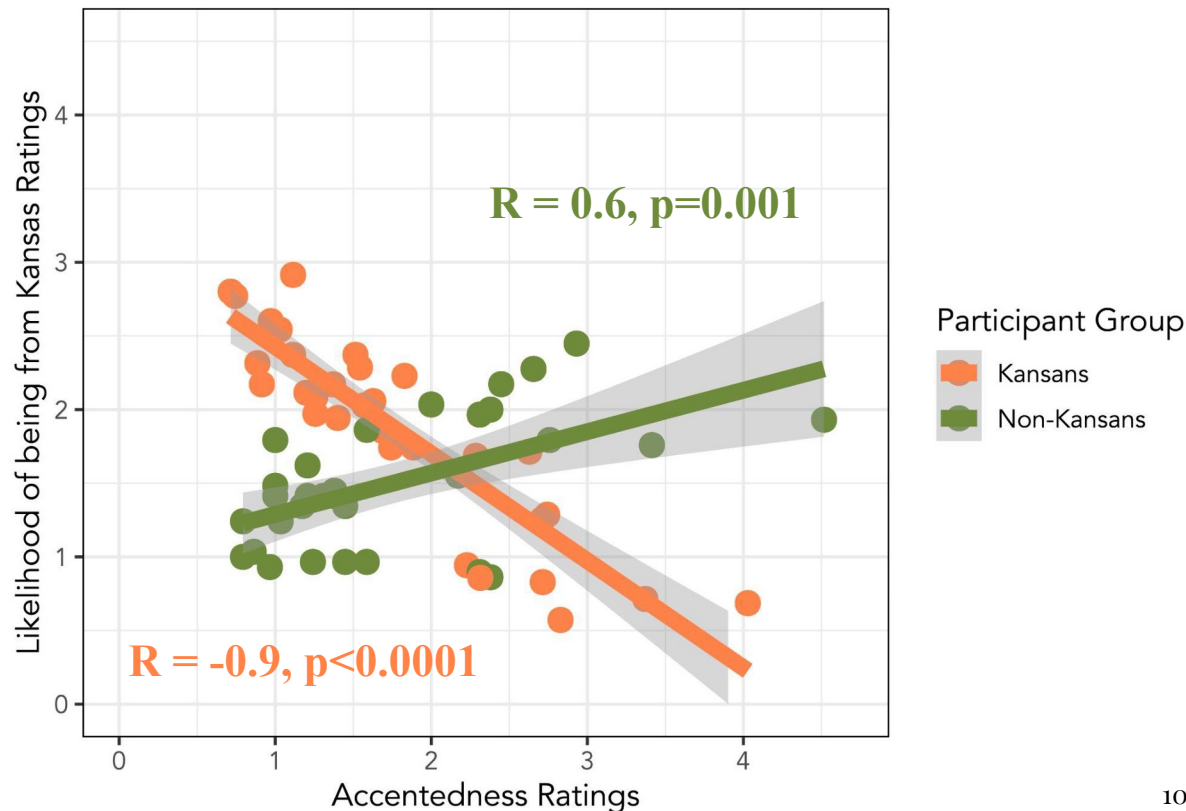
Results

Kansans & Non-Kansans have differing ideas about Kansas Speech

**Accentedness ratings
& Likelihood of
Being from Kansas**
ratings:

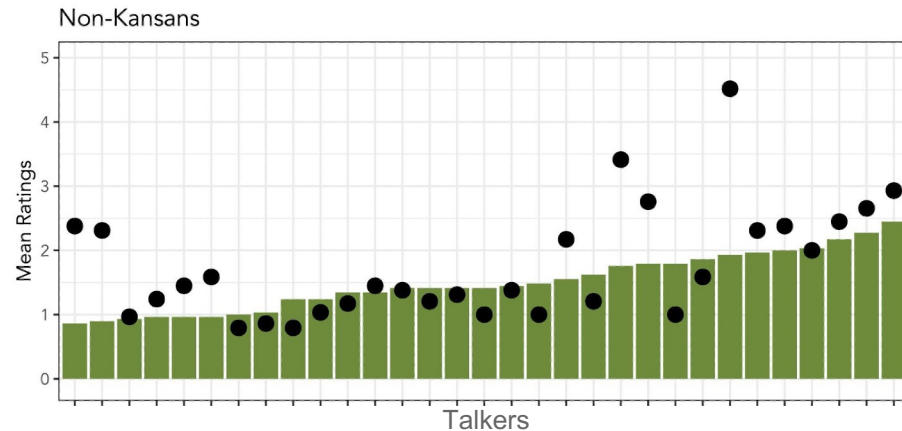
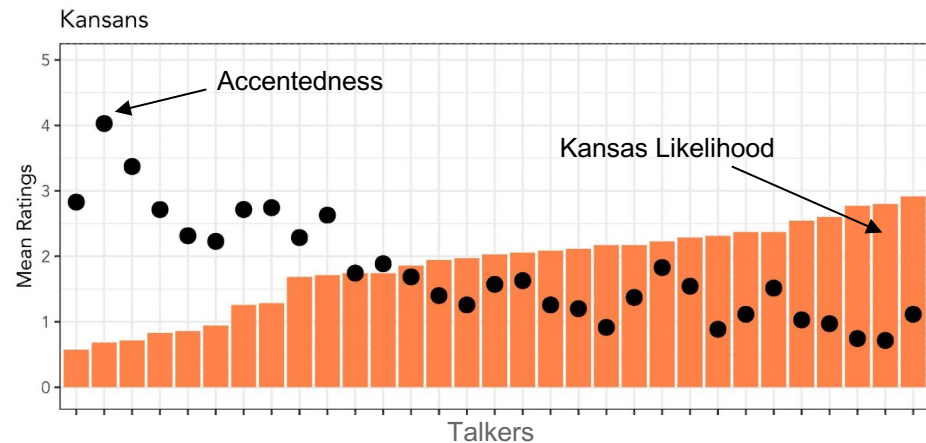
Negatively correlated
for **Kansans** but

Positively correlated
for **Non-Kansans**



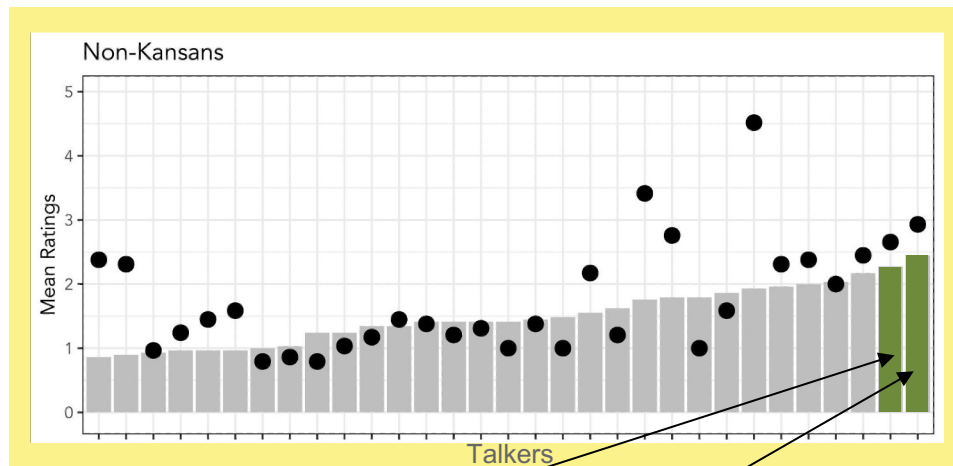
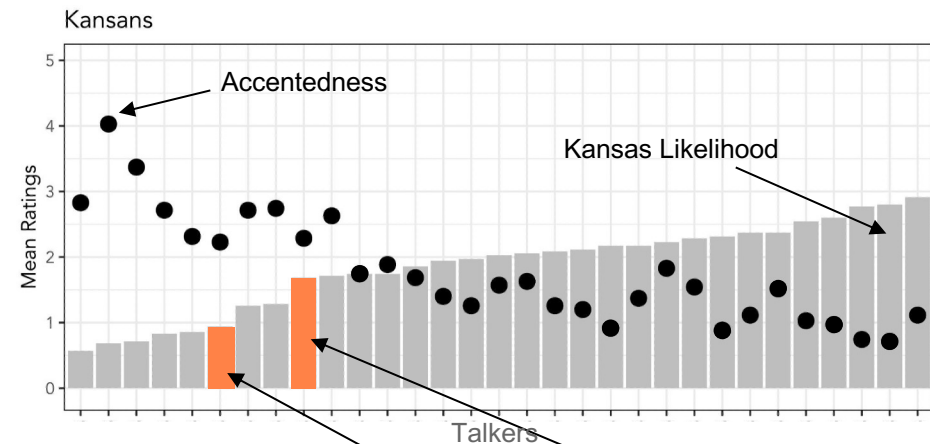
Results

Which Voices Were Rated Most **Accented**? Most **Kansan**?



Results

Who did **Non-Kansans** think sounded most Kansan?



Speaker English 135
Orange Beach, Alabama

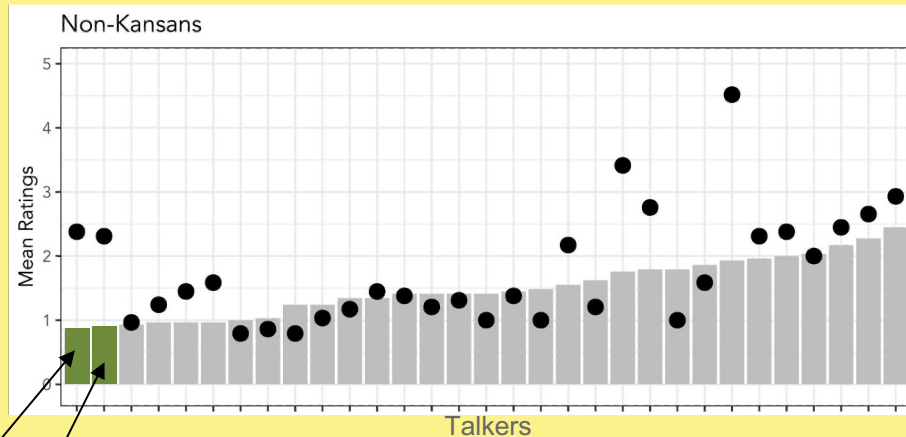
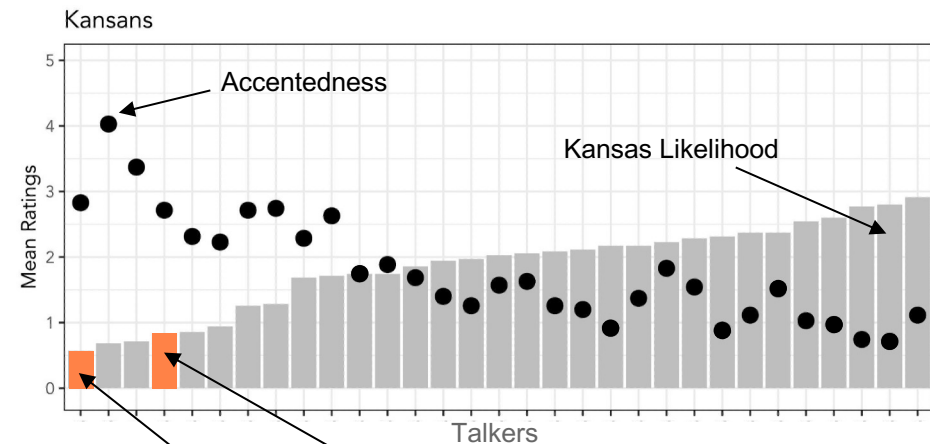


Speaker English
117
Elmore, Alabama



Results

Non-Kansans rated some voices highly accented but not Kansan

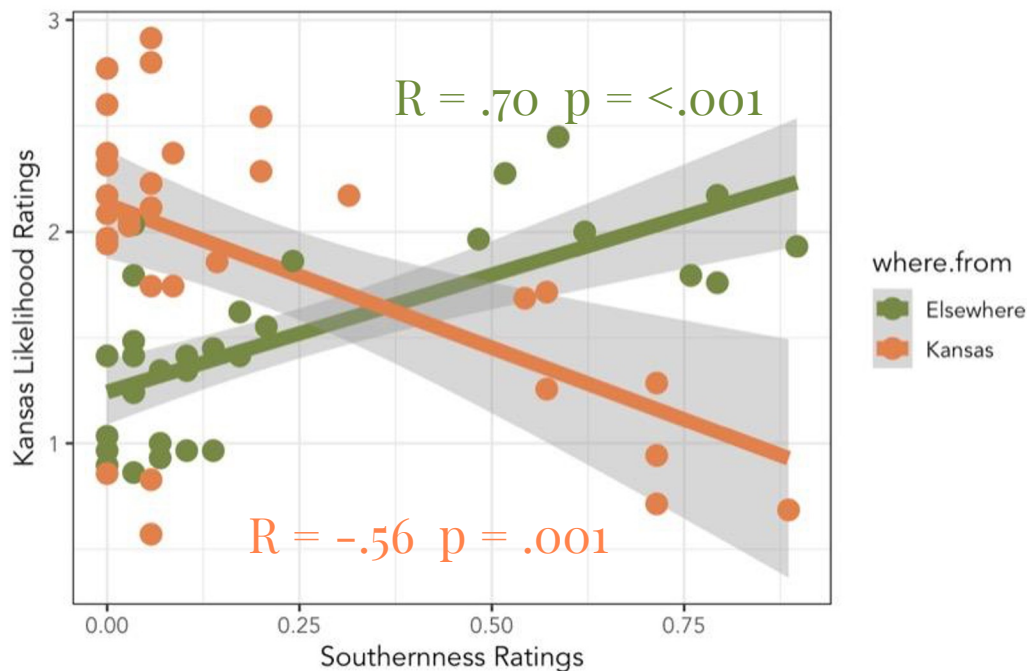


It's not just "accentedness"
that makes **non-Kansans** think
someone is from Kansas

It's *Southern-accentedness*

Results

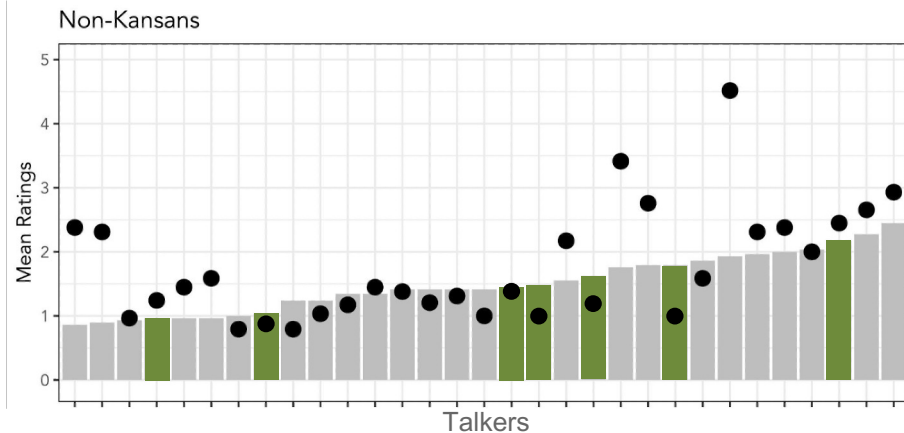
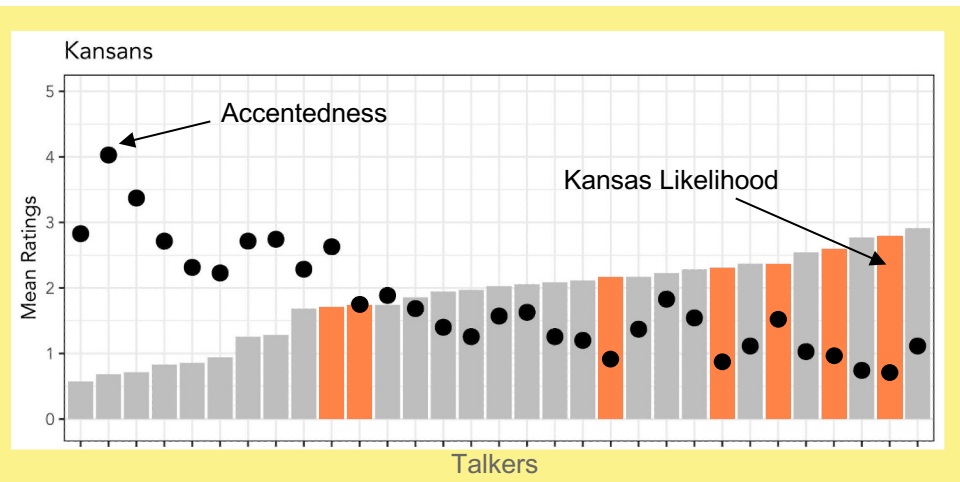
It's not just accentedness...but SOUTHERN accentedness



Non-Kansans associate Kansans with **Southernness**, but Kansans do not.

Results

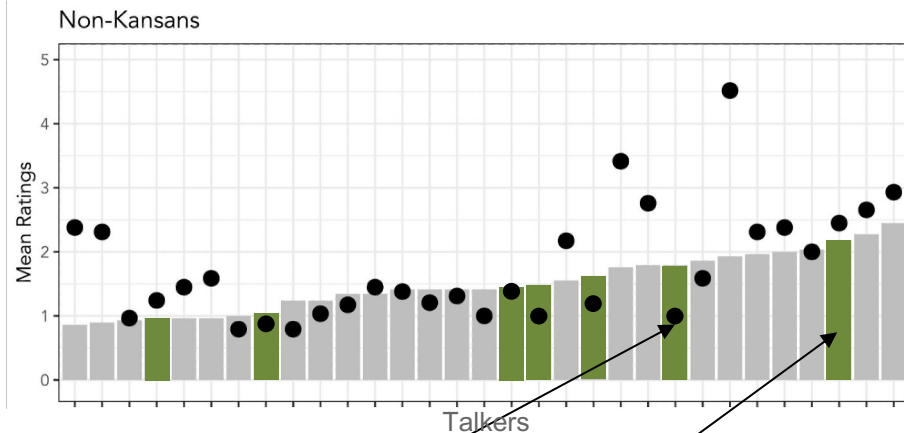
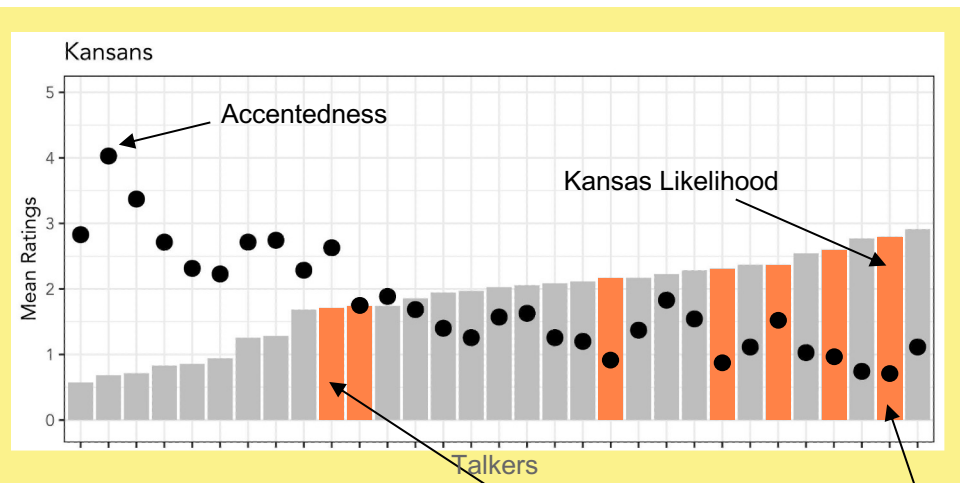
Who did **Kansans** think sounded most Kansan?



Kansans are better at identifying *talkers from Kansas*.

Results

Who did Kansans think sounded most Kansan?



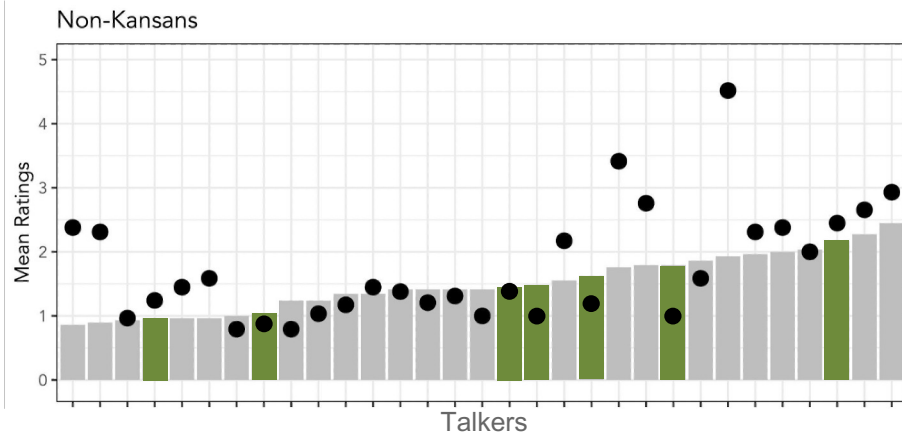
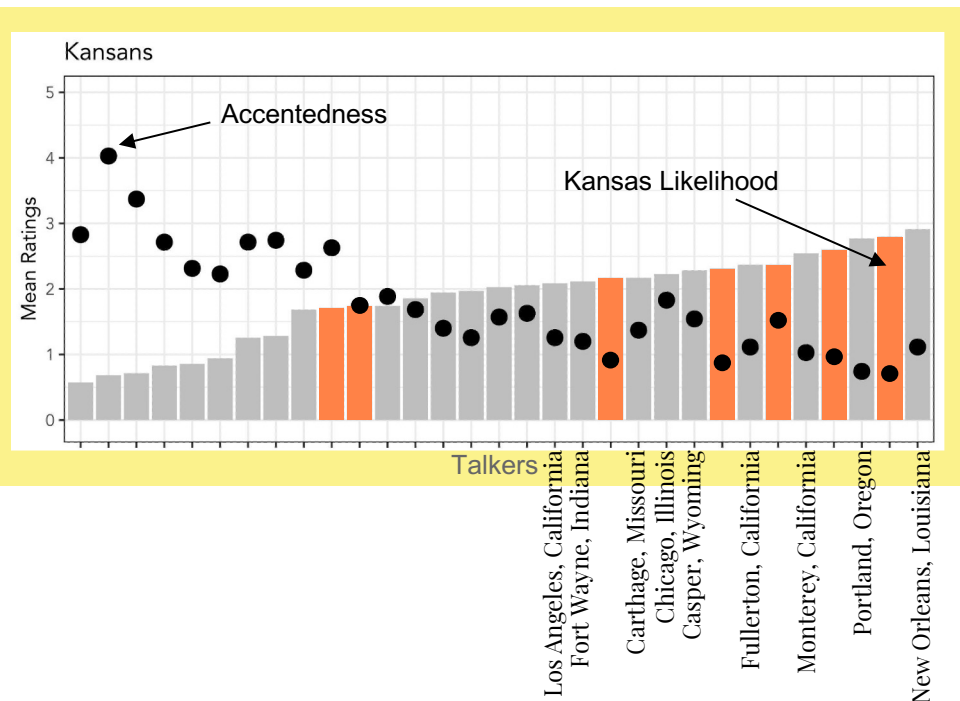
Speaker English 345
Kansas City

Speaker English 213
Dodge City, KS



Results

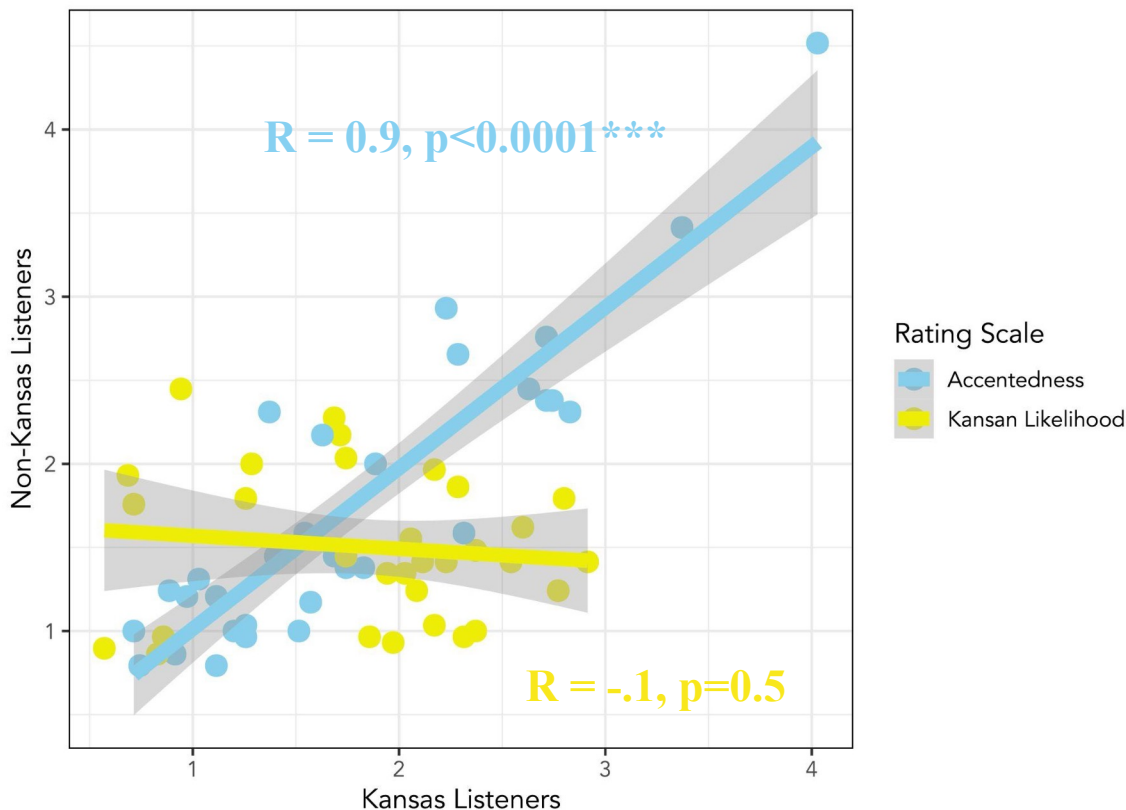
Who did Kansans think sounded most Kansan?



Kansans are better at identifying *talkers from Kansas*.

Results

Kansans and Non-Kansans agree on some things



Kansans and Non-Kansans agree which voices sound

“Accented”

But not which voices sound “Kansan”

Discussion

Overview

- **Kansans** and **non-Kansans** agree on which talkers sound accented—just not which talkers sound Kansan
- **Non-Kansans** associate Kansas with “Southern” accents, while **Kansans** view themselves as “unaccented” midwesterners
- Kansans display similar “**Linguistic Security**,” to Michiganders in Preston’s classic perceptual dialectology study (Preston, 1999)

Overview

- Kansans judge the “least accented” talkers as most Kansan, but that doesn’t mean they perceive all Kansas speech as “unaccented.”
- The Dodge City talker was rated as highly accented but not considered representative of Kansas speech.
- Ideas about “true Kansans” being unaccented may reinforce stereotypes about *all* Kansas speech as unaccented.



Overview

Why is Kansas often left off of perceptual dialectology maps if non-Kansans do associate it with Southernness?

- Kansas as a “flyover state” with less sociolinguistic salience
- Non-Kansans may associate Kansas speech with Southern accents (when pressed) because of associations with rurality?

Next steps:

- What particular features are listeners attending to that make them think someone sounds Kansan? Previous work suggests it may not be TRAP-retraction, so what are listeners picking up on?

Thank You!

Thanks to RAs Dagan Fultz and Abba Benafield

Thanks to Jeff Holliday, Margarethe McDonald,
Dagan Fultz & Tyler's mom for feedback
