



Examining the relationship between accents and social judgements: a forensic linguistics perspective.

UKLVC Online Conference, Glasgow

8th - 10th September 2021

Alice Paver, Natalie Braber & David Wright



Background & Aims

The IVIP project



- **Improving Voice Identification Procedures**
- Interdisciplinary ESRC funded project in linguistics, criminology, psychology and law
- Aims to **improve the understanding of earwitness behaviour** and to **improve the interaction of the criminal justice system with the use of earwitness evidence.**
- Strand 3 of the project is looking at how social stereotypes affect voice identification.

Background: Sociolinguistics

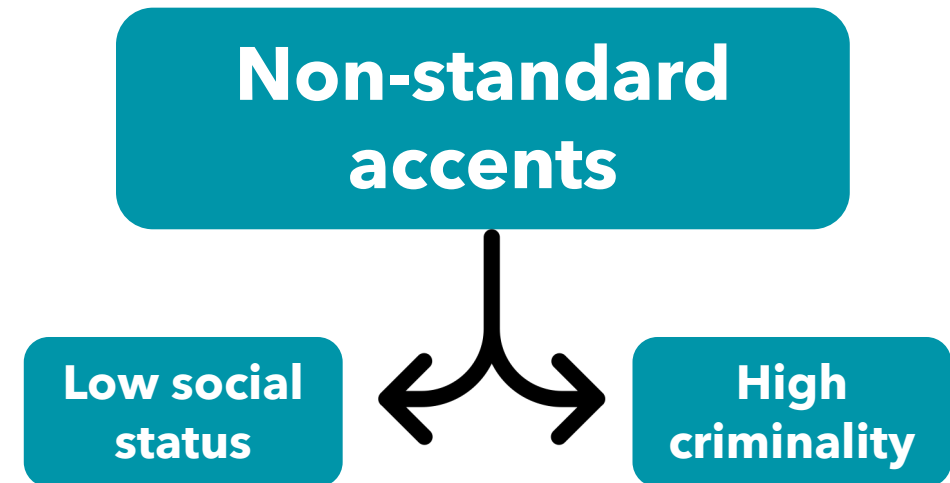
- People harbour **stereotypes** about people based on their voices and **regional accents**.
- Judgements of **social traits** group in terms of **status** (prestige), **social attractiveness** (solidarity) and **dynamism** (Coupland & Bishop 2007; Dragojevic et al. 2021).

Accent(s)	Judgement	Reference
Birmingham	Lowest social attractiveness & prestige	Coupland & Bishop 2007
RP/SSBE (Standard English)	Highest social attractiveness, high prestige	
Newcastle and West Country	High social attractiveness, low prestige	
London	Low social attractiveness, high prestige	

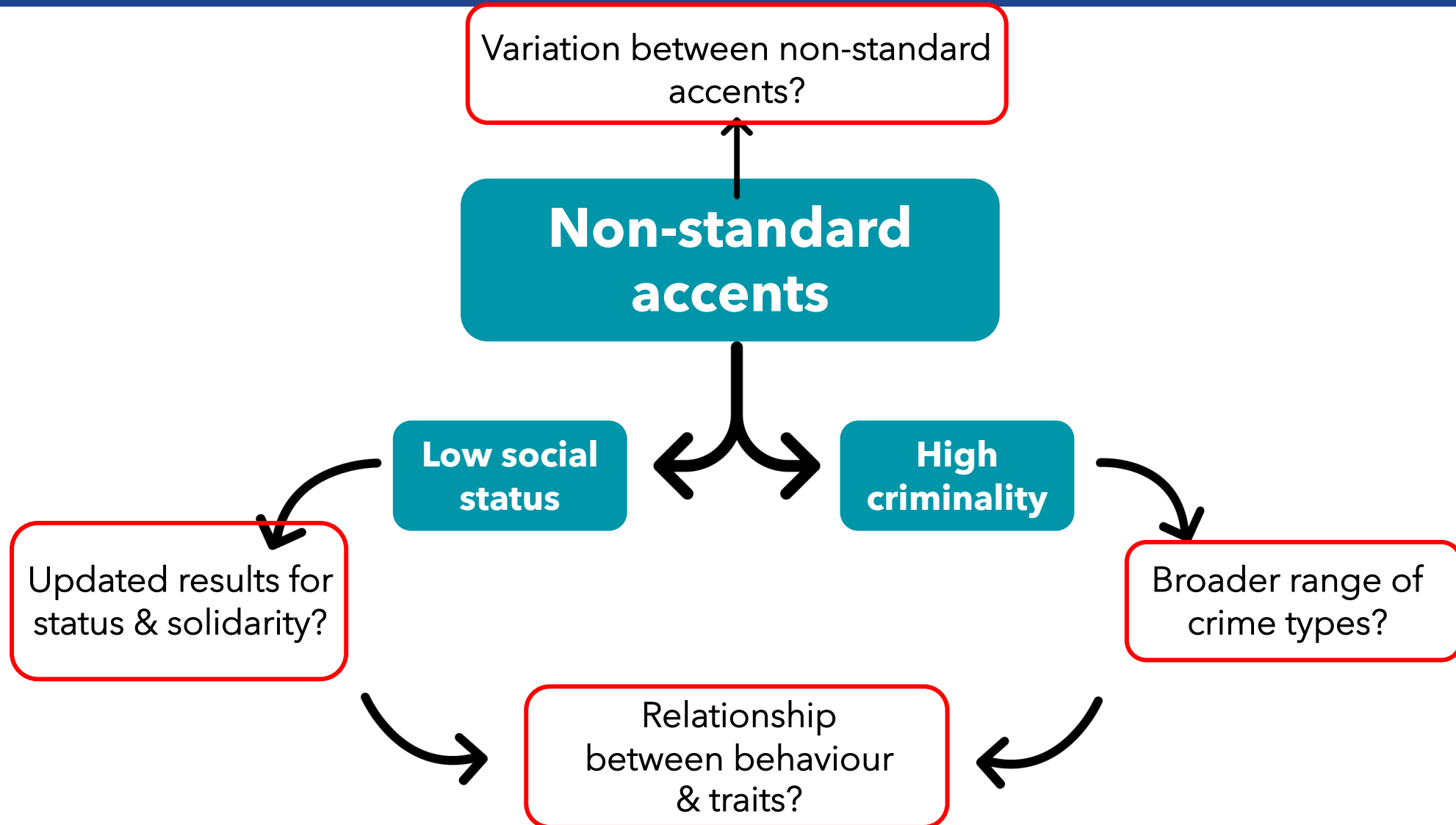
Background: Forensic linguistics



- People with certain accents being predicted as **more likely to commit certain crimes** than others (e.g. Seggie 1983; Dixon et al. 1994; 2002)
 - **Non-standard accents** associated with **blue-collar crime** – association with violence
 - **Standard accents** more associated with **white-collar crime** – association with deception



Aims



Aims



1. To provide **contemporary results for accent judgements** across a range of British English accents and social traits.
2. To examine whether listeners perceive speakers as **more or less likely to behave in certain (criminal) ways**.

Methodology

Methodology

- 100 participants heard 10 x 30s speech samples.
- Belfast¹, Birmingham¹, Bradford², Bristol¹, Cardiff¹, Glasgow³, Liverpool¹, London⁴, Newcastle⁵, SSBE⁶
- Rated statements on Likert scale 1-7 from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'

1. International Dialects of English Archive 2. WYRED 3.Scots Syntax Atlas 4. Eivind Torgersen 5. IViE 6.DyViS

Voice 2

Listen to the voice and rate how strongly you agree with the following statements.

The person in this recording sounds like someone who is...

Trustworthy	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Aggressive	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Working class	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Kind	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Rich	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Educated	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Confident	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Friendly	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Honest	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Intelligent	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree

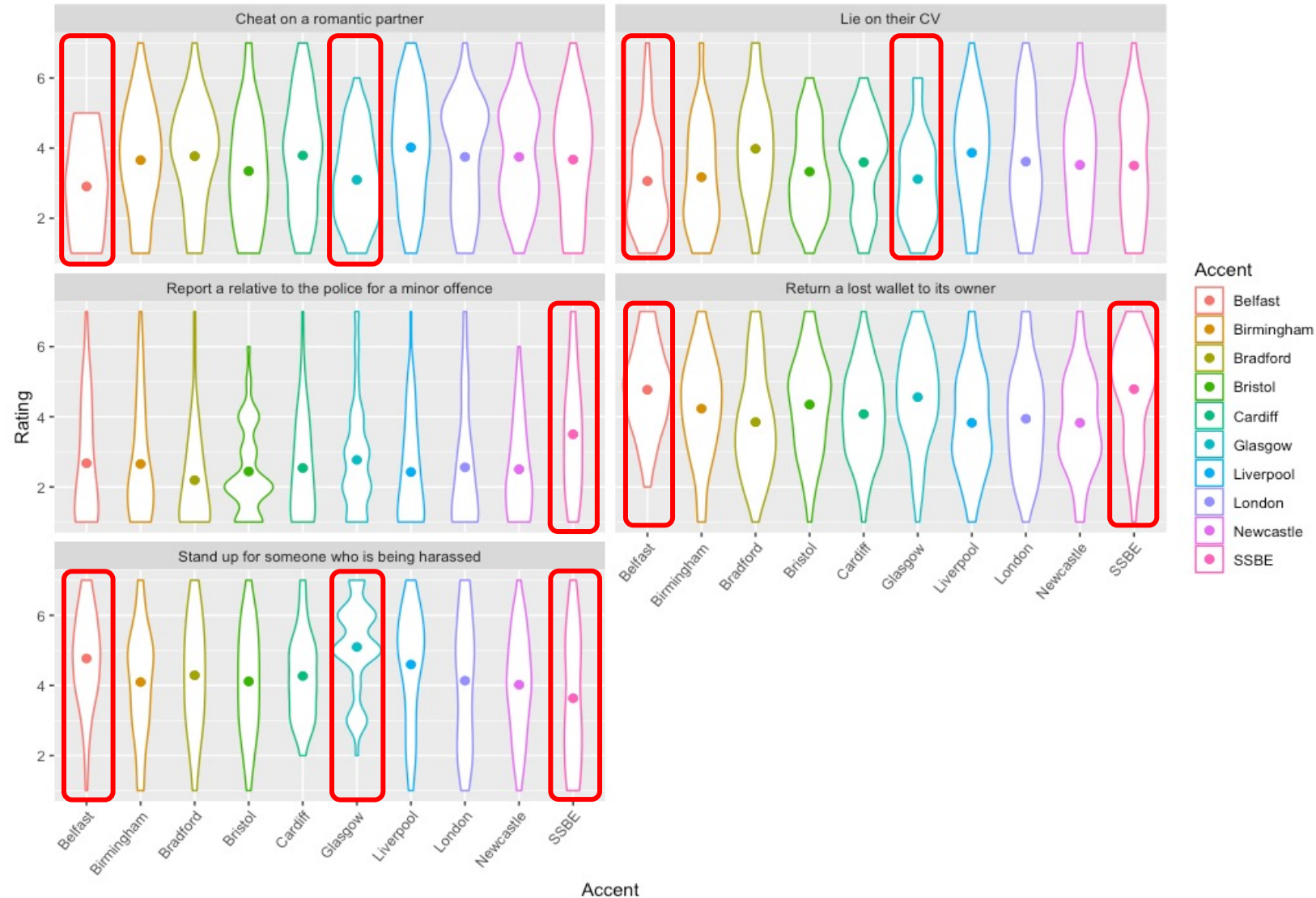
Methodology

- Social traits questions based on 'Defendant Vocal Characteristics Scale' (Cantone et al. 2019) and 'Speech Evaluation Instrument' (Zahn & Hopper 1985)
- Grouped into **three categories** of traits – **status** (e.g. 'educated'), **attractiveness** (e.g. 'friendly') and **dynamism** (e.g. 'confident')
- Behavioural questions motivated by wanting to find ratings for **morally good, bad, and ambiguous behaviours**
- As well as a **range of offence types**, without blue/white collar associations

Results

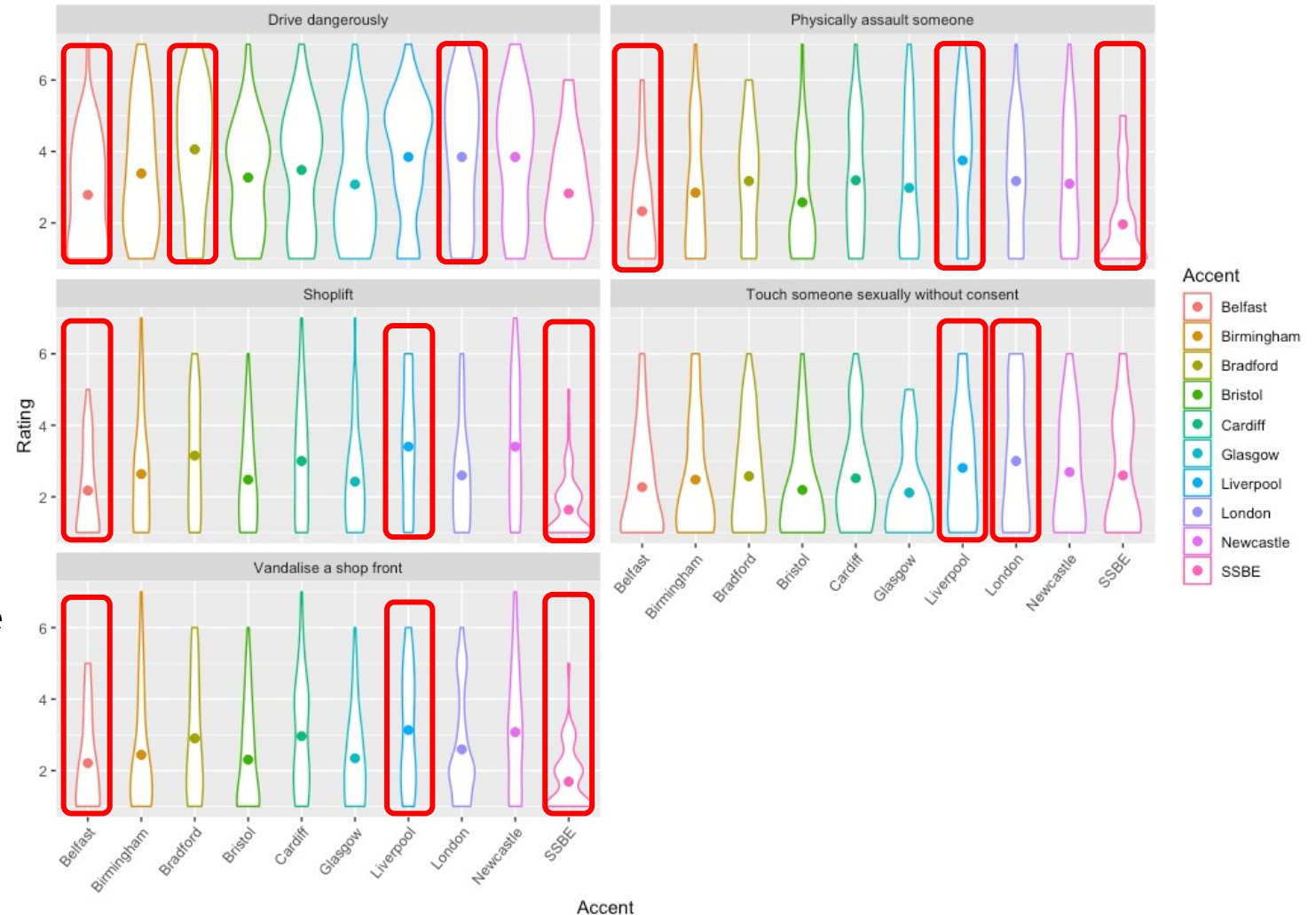
Results: Behaviour (Moral)

- Belfast & Glasgow rated high for 'morally good' behaviours
- Belfast and Glasgow also lowest for 'morally bad' behaviours
- SSBE does well on one morally good behaviour - 'return a lost wallet' - but not the other - 'stand up for someone'
- Also most likely to 'Report a relative to the police for a minor offence'



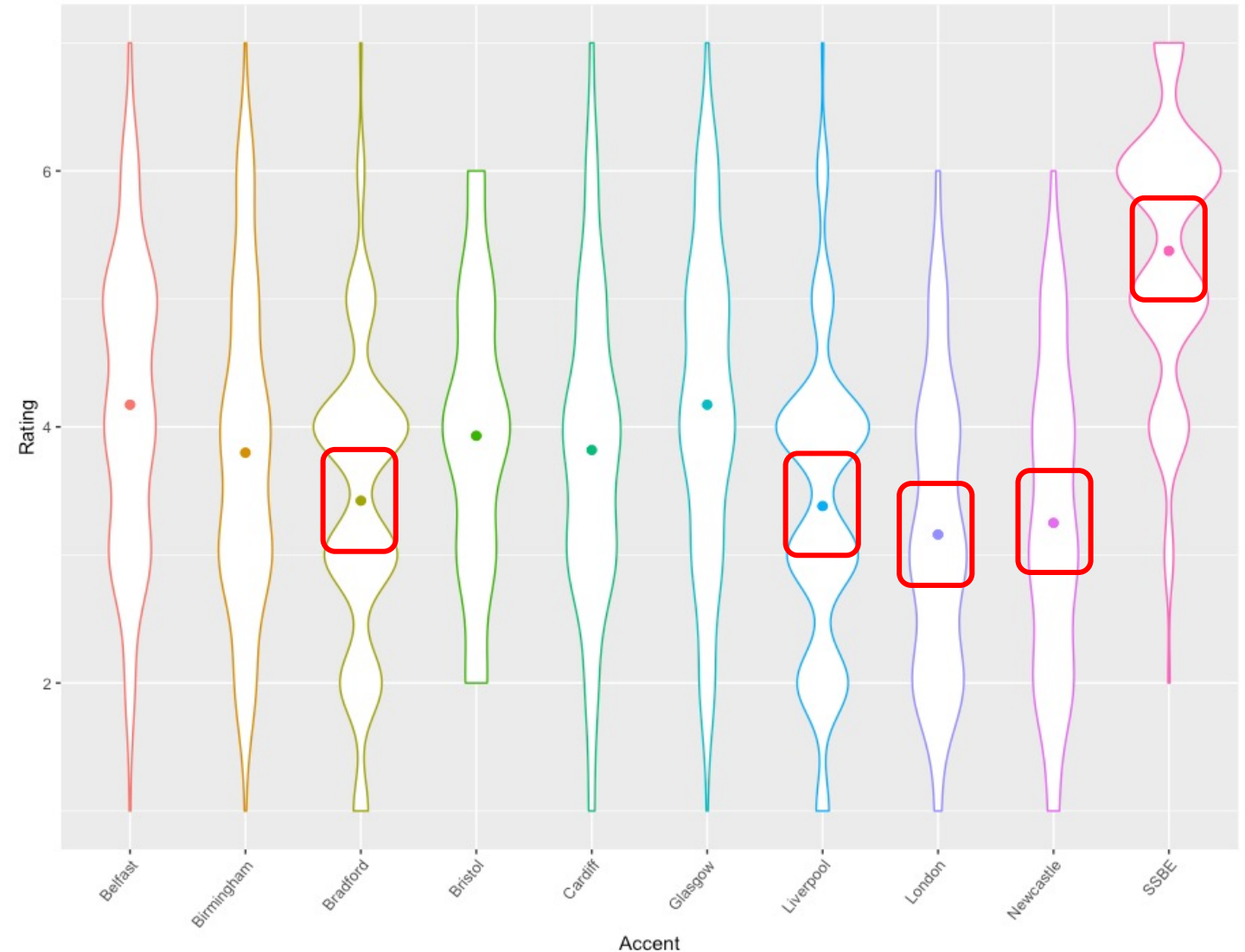
Results: Behaviours (Criminal)

- Specific crimes: SSBE least likely to commit some crimes - 'physical assault', 'shoplift' and 'vandalise a shop front'
- Belfast next least likely for all these, as well as 'drive dangerously'
- Liverpool most likely to 'shoplift', 'physically assault someone' and 'vandalise a shop front'
- Bradford and London most likely to 'drive dangerously'
- London and Liverpool most likely to commit sex offence



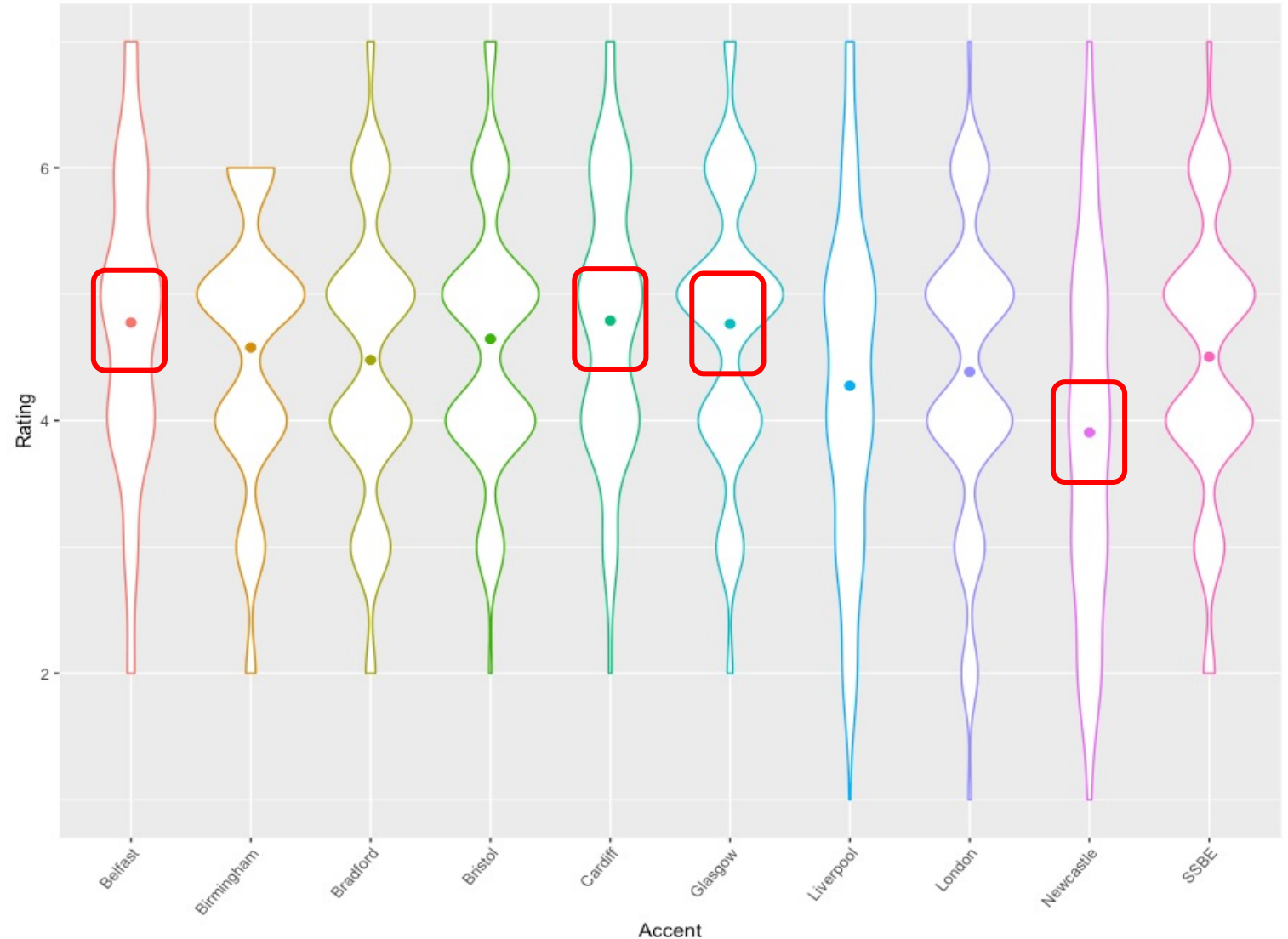
Results: Social Traits (Status)

- Status dimensions (excluding 'working class')
- SSBE overwhelmingly rated higher than all other voices
- Bradford, Liverpool, London and Newcastle lowest



Results: Social Traits (Attractiveness)

- Attractiveness dimensions
- Belfast, Cardiff and Glasgow rated highest
- Newcastle rated lowest



Discussion

Discussion & Implications

- Standard variety associated with high status, and low criminality
 - New insight on morally ambiguous behaviour
- Some more detail on variation in judgements of non-standard British accents
 - Birmingham not as strongly negative as previous studies
 - Newcastle much less positive – speaker issues?
- Scottish and Irish accents do well on solidarity dimensions
 - They also rate high for morally good behaviours and low for morally bad
 - Demographics?

Discussion & Implications



- Accents rated low on status & high on crime are Northern English accents
- Association between 'blue-collar'/violent crime and Northern English & London accents
 - Driving and sex offences less clear relationship with status
 - Possible relationship with social attractiveness?
- Forensic implications: bringing bias to the courtroom.

Thank you!



www.phonetics.mml.cam.ac.uk/ivip



@ivipproject



aep58@cam.ac.uk

References



Axer, G. (2019). British accent perceptions and attributions of guilt by native and non-native speakers. *Journal of Language and Discrimination* 3(2): 195-217.

Cantone, J.A., L.N. Martinez, C. Willis-Esqueda and T. Millerd. (2019). Sounding guilty: How accent bias affects juror judgments of culpability. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice* 17(3): 228-253.

Coupland, N. and H, Bishop. (2007). Ideologised values for British accents. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11(1): 74-93.

Dixon, J. A., Tredoux, C. G., Durrheim, K., & Foster, D. H. (1994). The role of speech accommodation and crime type in attribution of guilt. *Journal of Social Psychology* 134: 465-473.

Dixon, J.A., B. Mahoney, and R. Cocks. (2002). Accents of guilt? Effects of regional accent, race, and crime type on attributions of guilt. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 21(2): 162-168.

Dragojevic, M., Fasoli, F., Cramer, F., Rakić, T. (2021) Toward a century of language attitudes research: looking back and moving forward. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 40(1): 60-79.

Frumkin, L. A., & Thompson, A. (2020). The impact of different British accents on perceptions of eyewitness statements. *Journal of Language and Discrimination* 4(1): 119-138

Jones, B. C., Feinberg, D. R., DeBruine, L. M., Little, A. C. & Vukovic, J. (2008) Integrating cues of social interest and voice pitch in men's preferences for women's voices. *Biology Letters* 4: 192 -194.

References



Kurinec, C.A. & Weaver III, C. A. (2019) Dialect on trial: use of African American Vernacular English influences juror appraisals. *Psychology, Crime & Law* 25(8): 803-828.

Nolan, G. and E. Grabe. (1996). Preparing a voice lineup. *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law (Forensic Linguistics)* 3(1): 74-94.

Philippon, A. C., Cherryman, J., Vrij, A., & Bull, R. (2008). Why is my voice so easily recognized in identity parades? Influence of first impressions on voice identification. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 15: 70-77.

Romero-Rivas, C., Morgan, C. & Collier, T. (2021) Accentism on trial: categorization/stereotyping and implicit biases predict harsher sentences for foreign-accented defendants. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Online First.

Seggie, I. (1983) Attribution of guilt as a function of ethnic accent and type of crime. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 4(2-3): 197-206,

Street, R. L., Brady, R. M. & Putman, W. B. (1983) The Influence of Speech Rate Stereotypes and Rate Similarity on Listeners' Evaluations of Speakers. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 2(1): 37-56.

Tompkinson, J. (2016). *Accent evaluation and the perception of spoken threats*. Unpublished MSc dissertation. University of York.

Further issues



Bradford

- Variation between voices in terms of identification responses.
- How do we quantify correctness?
- What does this mean for stereotypes about accents?



Glasgow