

Roma acquisition of the Manchester *letter* vowel

Gerry Howley

Introduction

- Previous research indicates that migrants can acquire local dialect variation in a new language (e.g. Wolfram et al. 2004).
- However, it is still unclear why some speakers acquire more local features than others.
- There is evidence that speakers' social networks may impact upon acquisition (Schleef et al. 2011; Drummond 2013).
- However, most investigations examining migrants' social networks do not use the most ideally suited methodologies, such as ethnography.

Manchester *letter*

- Many Manchester speakers produce a lowered backed variant of the *letter* vowel /ə/ in absolute phrase final position (Baranowski & Turton 2015).

Research questions

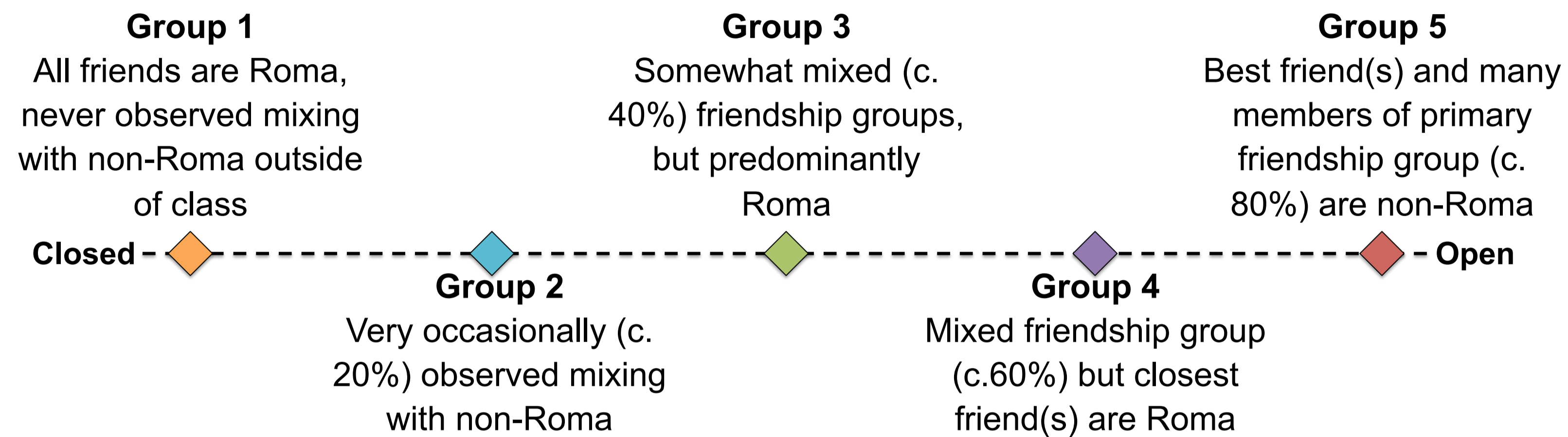
1. To what extent do adolescent Roma migrants reproduce Manchester patterns of variation for *letter*?
2. What social factors impact on Roma acquiring local patterns of variation?

Methods

- 2 years' participant observation in Manchester high school
- Conversational recordings in friendship pairs
- Acoustic analysis of 27 Roma students from school years 7, 10, and 11
- Acoustic analysis of 6 Manchester-born students for comparison purposes

Findings

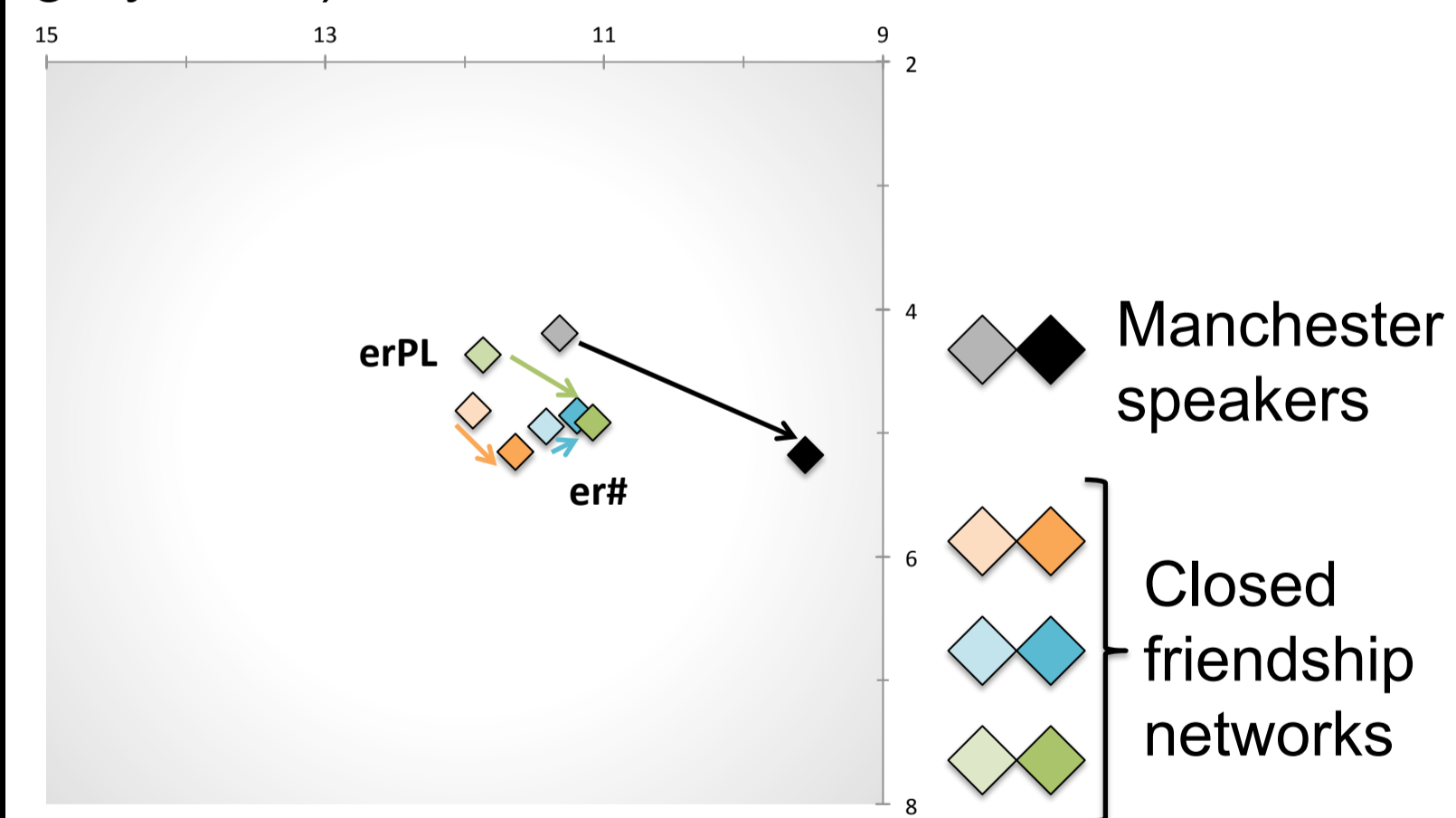
Roma friendship ties ranged from being very closed to more open. Five groups were identified:



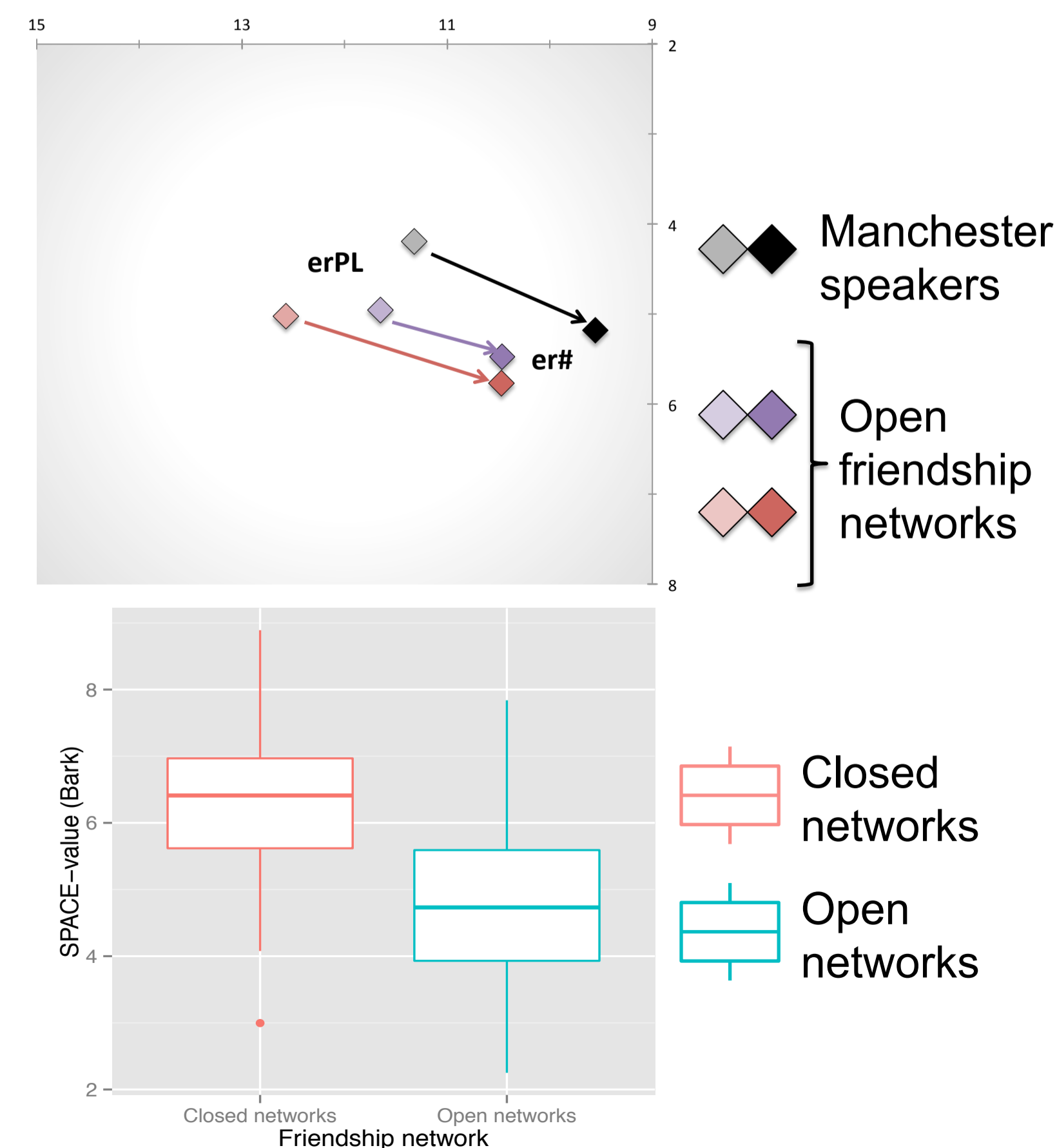
Manchester and Roma English speech was analysed for variation between:

- phrase final -er plural (erPL) e.g. 'Her letters'
- phrase final -er singular (er#) e.g. 'Her letter'

Roma speakers with more closed friendship networks produced very little variation between erPL and er#. Manchester speakers (shown in grey/black).



Roma speakers with more open friendship networks produced variation similar to Manchester speakers between erPL and er#.



***Letter* in absolute phrase final position:** Quantitative analysis of speakers' SPACE-values (F2 minus F1) revealed that Roma speakers who have more open friendship networks produce significantly lowered backed -er variants in absolute phrase final position (p<.0001).

Conclusions

- Ethnography evidenced that social networks play a key role in Roma dialect acquisition.
- Speakers' linguistic production shown to be just one element of identity performance that reflects degree of alignment with non-Roma culture.
- Findings support calls for more mixed methods variationist SLA studies.
- Recent changes in migration patterns and increasing superdiversity (Vertovec 2007) make this an important area of research both for the experience of migrants and those who live in the countries they move to.

References

- Baranowski, M. & Turton, D. (2015) Manchester English. In R. Hickey (Ed.) *Researching Northern Englishes*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Drummond, R. (2013) The Manchester Polish STRUT: Dialect Acquisition in a Second Language. *Journal of English Linguistics* 41(1): 65-93.
- Schleef, E., Meyerhoff, M. & Clark, L. (2011) Teenagers' acquisition of variation: A comparison of locally-born and migrant teens' realisation of English (ing) in Edinburgh and London. *English World-Wide* 32(2): 206-236.
- Vertovec, S. (2007) Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6): 1024-1054.
- Wolfram, W., Carter, P. & Moriello, B. (2004) Emerging Hispanic English: New dialect formation in the American South. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8(3) 339-358.

Contact details

Email: gerryhowley13@gmail.com
Twitter: twitter.com/gerryhowley
www.gerryhowley.wordpress.com