

Impacts of Social Constraints on African American English as Presented in Non-Rhoticity, Th-Stopping, & Alveolar vs Nasal Velar

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Introduction & Methodology

- Study uses 1966 Bengt Loman Tapes looking at AAE feature: th-stopping, alveolar vs. velar nasal, and non-rhoticity
- Tapes are from a small low-income family living inside Washington, D.C
- All variables were auditorily coded
- The below table 1 breaks down the speakers in each conversation

Conversation 1

Speakers:

- (1) Michael (MJ) age 10
- (2) Gregory (GJ) age 10

Relationship: Cousins & Best friends

Speech Event: Talk with another boy of same age

Conversation 4

Speakers :

- (1) Anita Porter (AP) age 10
- (2) Michael Jones (MJ) age 10
- (3) Jacqueline Drew (JD) age 11
- (4) Margy Gurney (MG) member of research staff

Relationship: Friends

Speech Event: tell a story in front of a small mixed audience

Conversation 8

Speakers:

- (1) Patricia Jones (PJ) age 39
- (2) Gregory (GJ) age 10

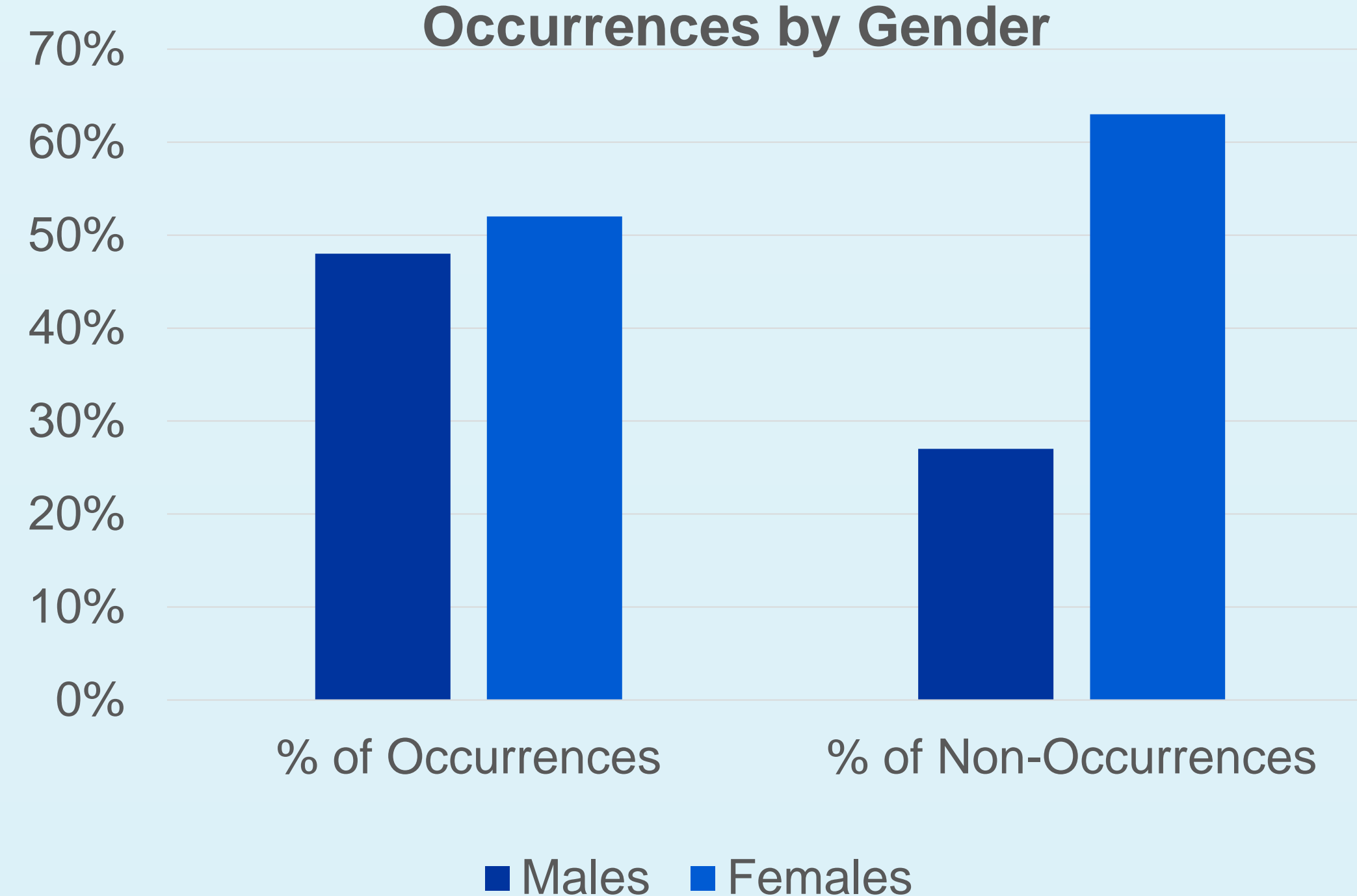
Relationship: Aunt (MJ's mother) and Nephew

Speech Event: Talk with an adult from their own family

Non-Rhoticity

- Non-Rhoticity can occur when there is an absence of /r/ in the preconsonantal (e.g fourth), intervocalic (e.g barrel) and final (e.g four) portion of a word
- This variable told a particularly interesting story when it came to non-occurrences
- Research has found that at around the ages 10 or 11 girls begin to outperform boys linguistically in school regardless of socioeconomic status (Washington 2019).

Percentage of Non-Rhoticity Occurrences by Gender

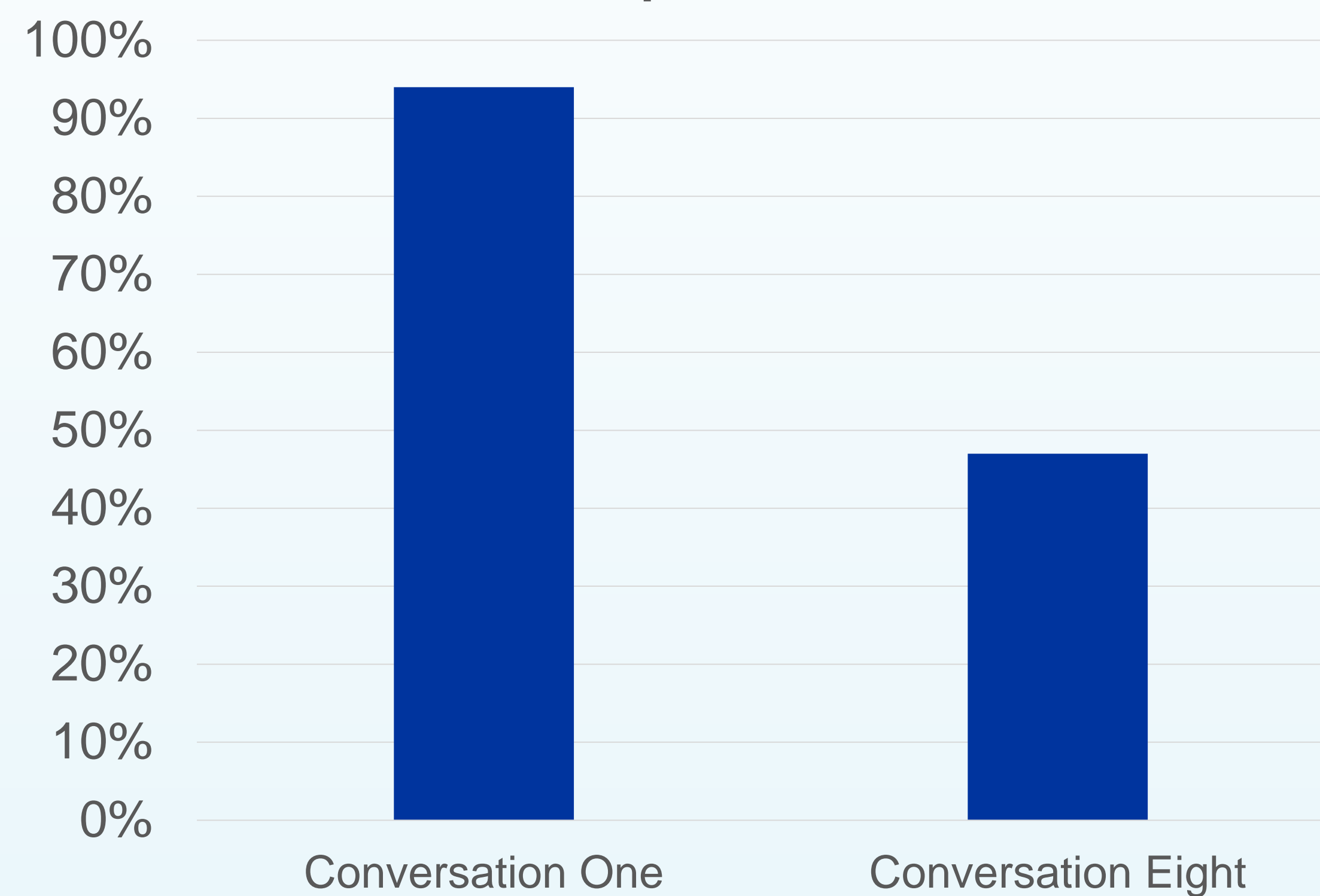


Graph 1

Th-Stopping

- Th-stopping in African American English (AAE) is when the speaker pronounces interdental fricatives (ð or θ) as alveolar plosives.
- Th-stopping can manifest as a voiced dental or alveolar stop, this can be realized in words like “that” that are pronounced as “dat” or “thin” pronounced as “tin.”

Gregory's Percentage of Th-Stopping Occurrences per Conversation



Graph 2

Alveolar vs Velar Nasal

- Alveolar /n/ can be realized as “walkin” while velar nasal /ŋ/ can be realized as “walking.”
- Alveolar /n/ is a common feature of language not exclusive to the African American community.
- In AAE this variable can be heavily influenced by socio-economic status, age, sex, and other demographic information

Speaker	Alveolar Occurrences	% of Alveolar Occurrences	Velar Nasal Occurrences	% of Velar Nasal Occurrences
AP: Anita	2	67%	1	23%
MJ: Michael	0	0%	0	0%
JD: Jacqueline	14	93%	1	7%
PJ: Patricia	0	0%	15	100%
GJ: Gregory	7	58%	5	41%

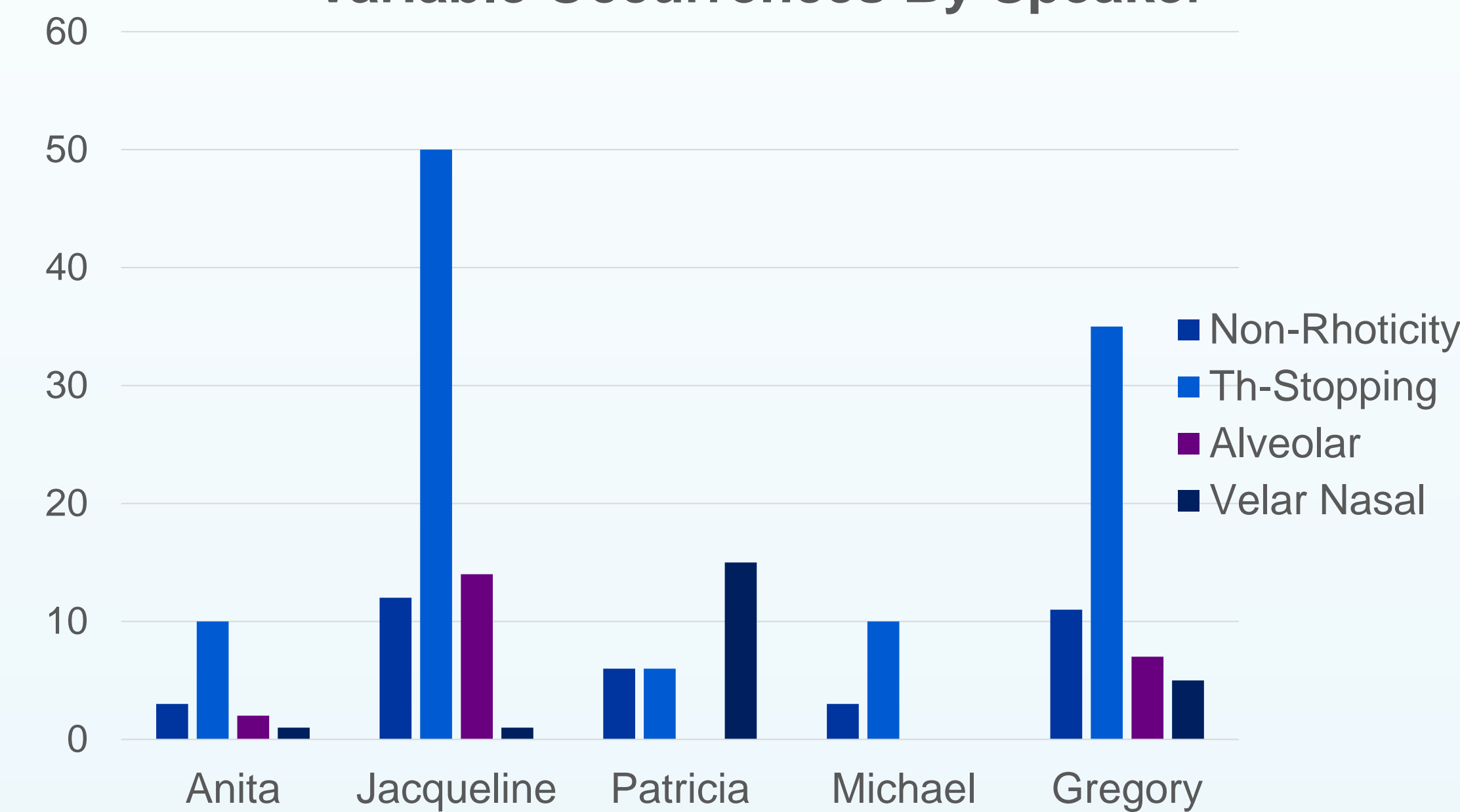
Table 2

- Context is important in the instances in which alveolar occurs
- Anita would employ alveolar or velar nasal depending on the speaker she was mimicking during telling her story
- Jacqueline used alveolar almost 100% of the time while casually telling a story
- This variable also was almost 100% linked to the use of morphosyntactic features of AAE
- Gregory used alveolar 100% of time while talking to his cousin indicating that alveolar might be his most casual form of speech

Results

- Social constraint seem to have a large impact on the speaker's employment of each variable
- Overall, Patricia has the lowest rates of all variables, and this may be due to her upbringing
- JD & GJ have the highest rates of Th-stopping but that can be attributed to the amount of times they spoke

Variable Occurrences By Speaker



Graph 3

Conclusion

- When the data is broken down further into individual speakers there is more information.
- Data is especially affected by social constraints
- Patricia provides an interesting insight into how these AAE variables present in adult African American women considering their social environment. Since Patricia spent most of her life working in the homes of higher income individuals
- When Gregory is speaking to his best friend Michael, he uses more features of AAE (variables th-stopping and alveolar) than when he is having a less casual conversation with his aunt.
- The results in this study indicate further research into children's use of AAE to index identity or communicate across different community groups
- Further research into Bengt Loman Tapes can be done related to intonation and other linguistic variables

Acknowledgements

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