

# Religion

*(plus a brief sidebar on age)*

## Elicitation & metadata

David Bowie

University of Alaska Anchorage

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# The linguistic (un)importance of religion

- › Widespread assumption: No linguistic importance
  - › Religious affiliation is subject to individual choice
  - › Religious affiliation is subject to change at any time
  - › Social spaces (e.g., workplace) often cross religious lines
- › However: High social importance (in the United States)
  - › Highly salient attribute
  - › Frequent locus of strong social networks
    - › 40% of the US population attends religious services regularly
    - › Religious congregations provide a “third place”
- › If social networks affect language, why not religion?

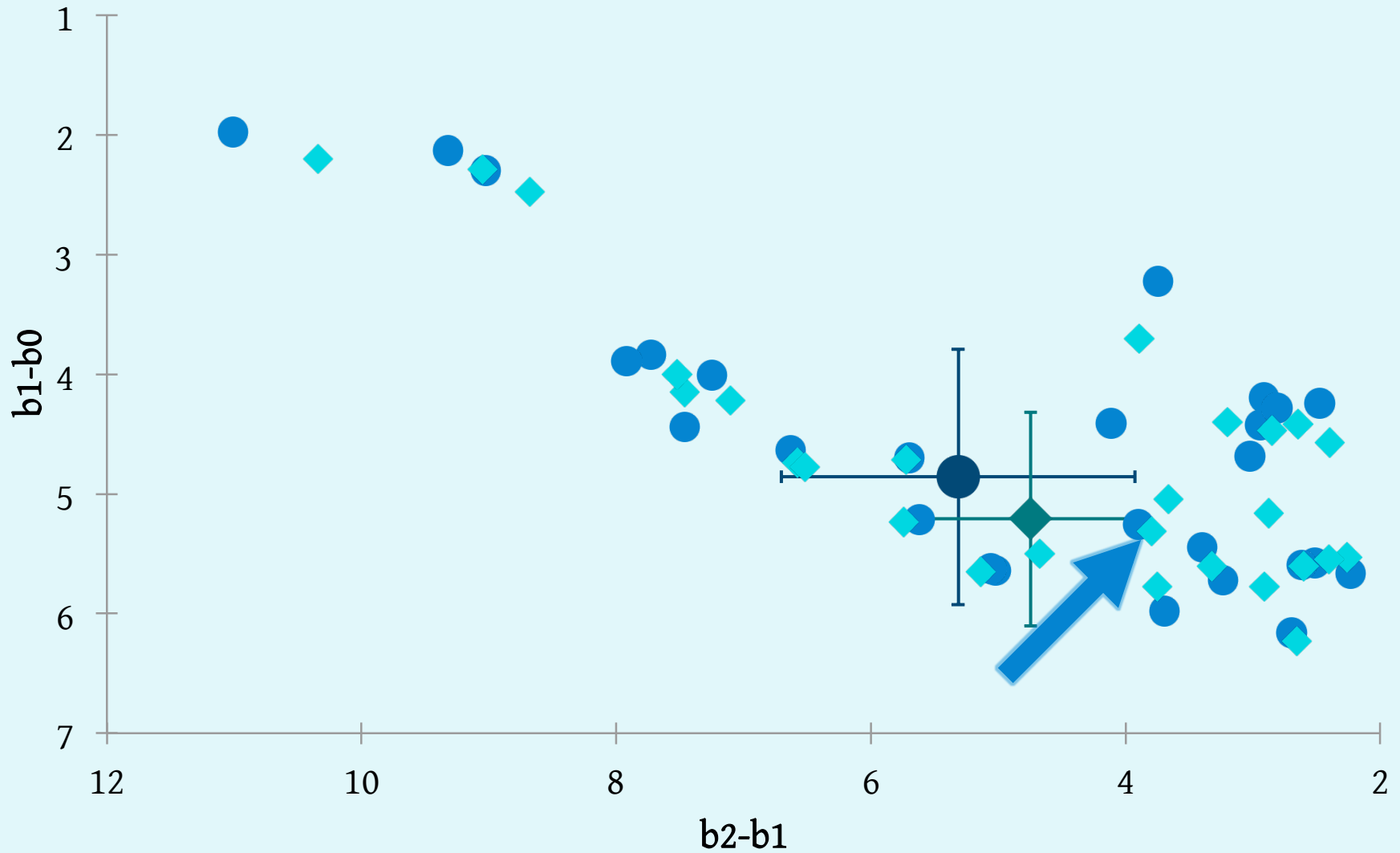
# Language and religion

- › Linguistic behavior correlates with religious affiliation
- › Literature from descriptive linguists, social psychologists
- › Some work by sociolinguists
  - › Correlates found in a variety of communities and religions
  - › Religion often treated as a sort of “ethnicity”
- › Language~religion correlates not limited to lexicon

# The effect of religious affiliation

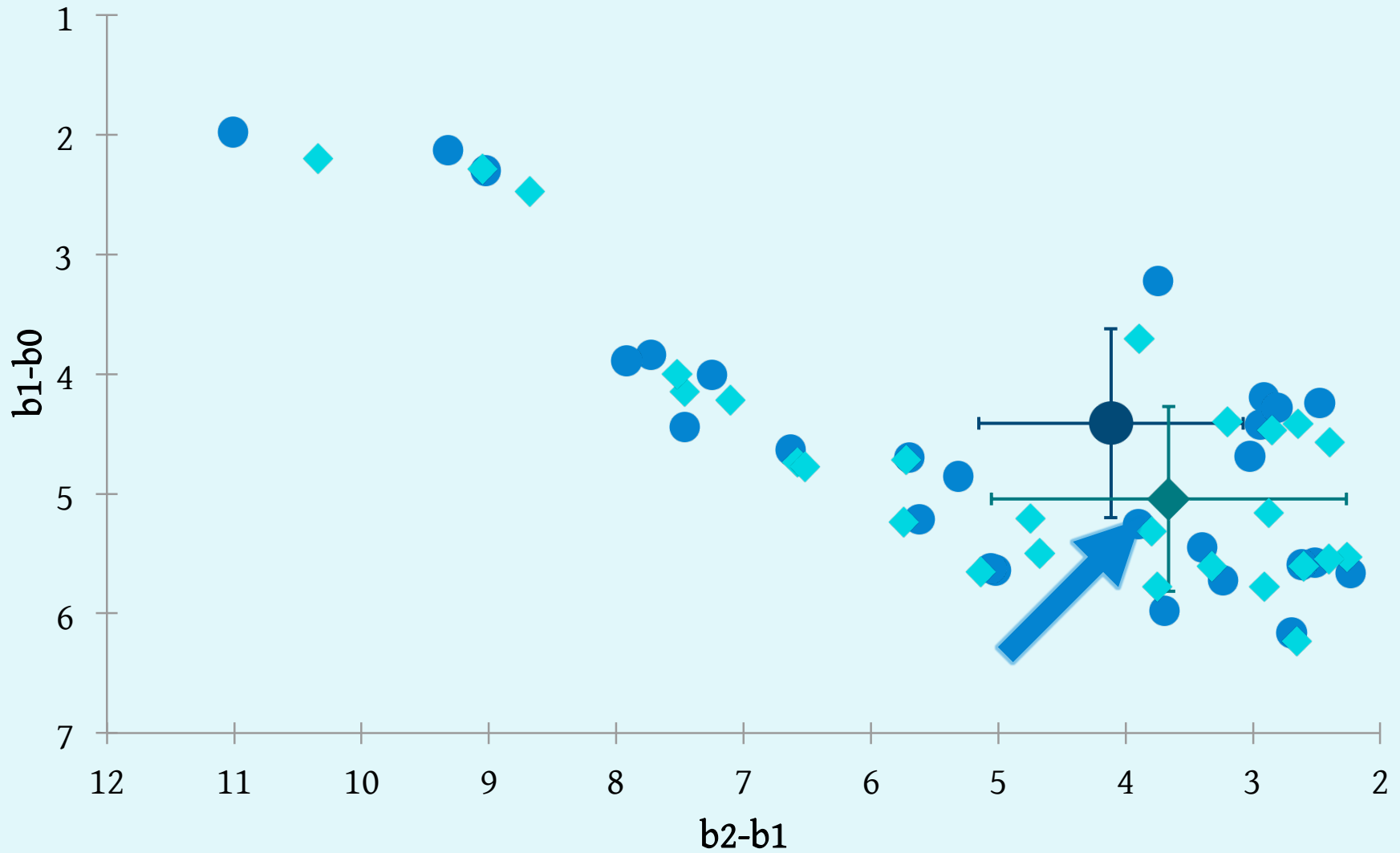
- › Study conducted in Utah County, Utah
  - › About 80% of the population self-identifies as Mormon
  - › Majority of Mormons self-identify as actively participating
  - › Appears to be little religion-based neighborhood segregation
  - › Very little religion-based school segregation
  - › Structure of congregations encourages hyperlocal networks
  - › Local conventional wisdom:
    - › Mormons and non-Mormons have separate social networks
    - › Mormons and non-Mormons are linguistically different
- › The local linguistic knowledge turns out to be correct

# Utah County: pre-nasal /Λ/



● Mormons    ◆ Non-Mormons

# Utah County: pre-lateral /ʌ/



● Mormons    ◆ Non-Mormons



# Religion as a social factor

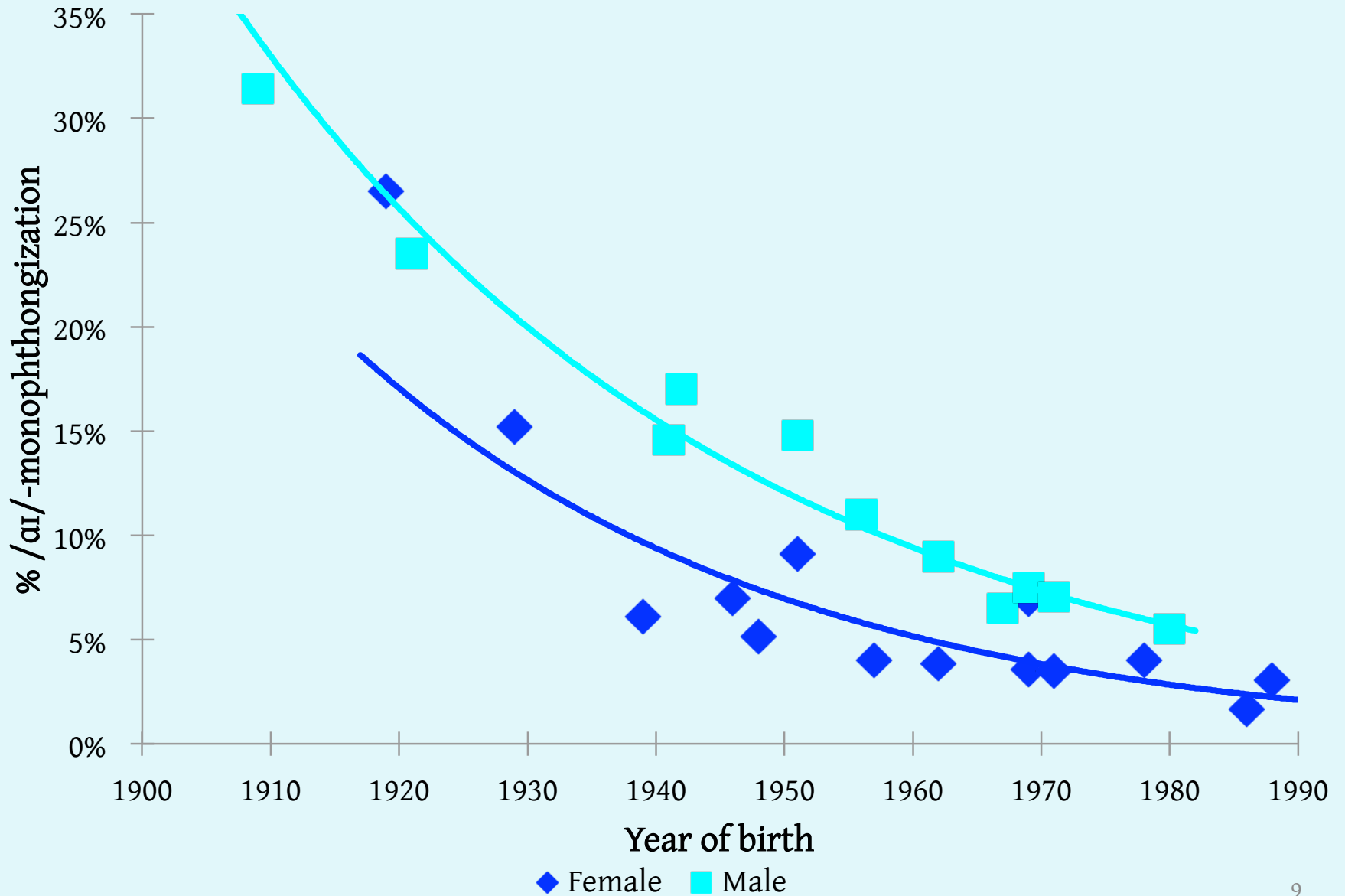
- › Religious behavior interacts with other social factors
  - › Region, social class, education, age...
  - › Interactions mean religion and other factors must be tracked
    - › Tracking only one means we can't tell what's really affecting behavior
    - › In fact, it may skew results enough to contaminate any analysis
- › One clear example: Age



# Age as a social factor

- › Quite different from religion
  - › Age is not subject to change by an individual
  - › Widely recognized as important for sociolinguistic analysis
- › Several possible patterns of age-related change
  - › Age grading
  - › Community change reflected in apparent time
  - › Individual change reflected in real time
  - › Individual change due to age-associated physical changes
- › Default assumption for variationists: Apparent time

# Waldorf, Maryland: /aɪ/-monophthongization



# A brief sidebar on age (part one)

- › Apparent time doesn't always work
  - › Speakers aren't linguistically static across the lifespan
  - › Speakers have a set of linguistic repertoires to choose from
- › Aging can be associated with linguistic pathologies
- › Gerontologists find increased diversity with age
  - › Holds up even excluding age-associated pathologies
  - › Would be unsurprising if this happens linguistically
- › Aging has a subjective component
  - › Perception by oneself
  - › Perception by others

## A brief sidebar on age (part two)

- › Teasing out age effects requires real-time data
  - › Need to elicit age
  - › Need to track when data was collected
- › People may lie about their age
  - › Ask directly for an individual's age
  - › Ask separately for their year of birth
- › Tracking dates of collection can be done by the researcher

# Religion and age

- › Strong interaction between age and religion
- › In 2007, 10% of US adults claimed no belief in deity
  - › 16% for those aged 18 to 29
  - › 5% for those 70 and older
  - › Unclear whether this is age-graded or something else
  - › Either way, there is an interaction between age and religion
- › Understanding age requires understanding religion

# What do we do, then?

- › Religious affiliation needs to be tracked
- › Most reliable method is self-identification
  - › Avoids problem of those nominally affiliated, but unconnected
  - › (Usually) provides only current affiliation
  - › Potential issues with social desirability bias
  - › Has problem of those who self-identify but don't practice
- › Follow-up needed to gauge level of activity
  - › Potential issues with social desirability bias
  - › Terms for activity levels may mean different things
- › Optimal: Original affiliation

# Eliciting religious affiliation (census)

- › India 2011:

What is the person's religion?

- › United Kingdom 2011 (cp. Australia, Ireland, New Zealand):

What is your religion? [Choices: No religion; Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations); Buddhist; Hindu; Jewish; Muslim; Sikh; Any other religion, write in.]

- › Canada 2011:

What is this person's religion? Indicate a specific denomination or religion even if this person is not currently a practising member of that group. For example, Roman Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Muslim, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Greek Orthodox, etc. You can also check: No religion.

- › United States (National Survey of Religious Identification) 1990:

What is your religion? [If *Protestant*: Which Protestant denomination would that be?]

- › United States (American Religious Identification Survey) 2008:

What is your religion, if any? [If *Protestant* or *Christian*: Which denomination?]

# Eliciting religious affiliation (Gallup)

- › Gallup 1948 to 1976:

What is your religious preference—is it Protestant, Roman Catholic or Jewish?

- › Gallup 1977 to 1978:

What is your religious preference—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish or Eastern Orthodox?

- › Gallup 1979 to 2000:

What is your religious preference—is it Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or an Orthodox religion such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?

- › Gallup 2000 to 2005:

What, if any, is your religious preference—are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, or an Orthodox religion such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?

- › Gallup 2005 to now:

What is your religious preference—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, another religion, or no religion?



# Eliciting religious affiliation (Pew 2008)

- › Initial question:

What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?

- › If *nothing, none, &c*:

And would you say that's atheist, agnostic, or just nothing in particular?

- › If *something else or don't know*:

Do you think of yourself as a Christian or not?

- › If *Christian (unspecified) or Protestant*:

As far as your present religion, what denomination or church, if any, do you identify with most closely? Just stop me when I get to the right one. Are you Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Congregational or United Church of Christ, Holiness, Reformed, Church of God, Nondenominational or Independent Church, something else or none in particular?

So what?

## So what?

1. Sociolinguists need to elicit information on religious affiliation (plus activity and history, where possible) from speakers if we wish to understand what's actually going on linguistically in at least some of our communities.
2. Eliciting information on religious affiliation is tricky, not least because there are so many models to choose from.
3. When eliciting information on age, year of birth may be more reliable (and easier to harmonize across corpora) than age.

Thank you

