

A photograph of a city street in Baltimore, Maryland, featuring a row of colorful row houses (red, blue, green, and brown). The street is lined with utility poles and power lines. Several cars are visible on the road, including a white pickup truck and a blue sedan. The text is overlaid on the image.

**A REPORT ON /oy/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION IN
BALTIMORE**

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Overview

- Focus: Monophthongization of /oy/ in Baltimore
- Questions:
 - Is /oy/-monophthongization present in Baltimore?
 - Who uses /oy/-monophthongization?
 - What are the phonological characteristics of /oy/ in Baltimore?

BACKGROUND

/oy/-monophthongization [1/2]

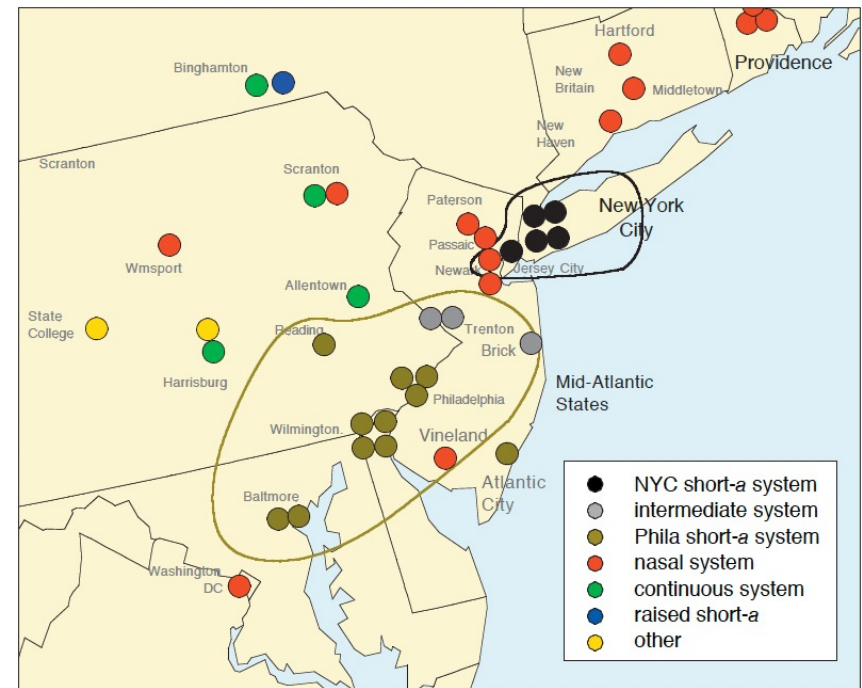
- Glide weakening and monophthongization of /oy/ is associated with the South (Thomas 2003)
- Kurath & McDavid (1961) describe weakened diphthongs as prevalent for /oy/ in the South and South Midland
- /oy/-monophthongization occurs infrequently in Labov et al.'s (2006) data (28/743 tokens)
 - 23 tokens before /l/ (e.g., *boil*) and 5 before /s/ (e.g., *oyster*)

/oy/-monophthongization [2/2]

- Labov et al. (2006) describe /oy/-monophthongization as part of the Back Upglide Chain Shift:
/oy/ -> /oh/ -> /aw/ -> /æw/
- Thomas (2008) reports that for rural White speakers, glide weakening mainly occurs among speakers born before 1960 (except before /l/)

Baltimore

- Under-researched
- The ANAE on Baltimore: "The data ... do not show any substantial differences between Philadelphia and ... Baltimore (Labov et al. 2006: 238)
- Baltimore's AAE shares features with Washington, D.C. (Blake & Shousterman 2010, Jones 2020)



The Mid-Atlantic and New York City dialect regions (Labov et al. 2006).

/oy/ in Baltimore

- Monophthongal /oy/ is a stereotype of Bawlmerese, White working-class Baltimore English (Malanoski 2024)
 - Noted in folk dictionaries since at least 1960
- However, monophthongal /oy/ has not been noted in prior descriptions of Baltimore English (Kurath & McDavid 1961, Hisley 1964, Labov et al. 2006)

METHODS

Participants

- 17 natives of Baltimore or its inner suburbs
- 12 White (10 women, 2 men)
- 4 Black (3 women, 1 man)
- 1 South Asian man
- Birth years: 1948–1995
- Education: 9 postgraduate, 5 college only, 3 less than college
- Mainly white-collar jobs
- Many upwardly mobile

Data collection and analysis

Data come from a reading passage and word list conducted as part of sociolinguistic interviews ($n = 259$)

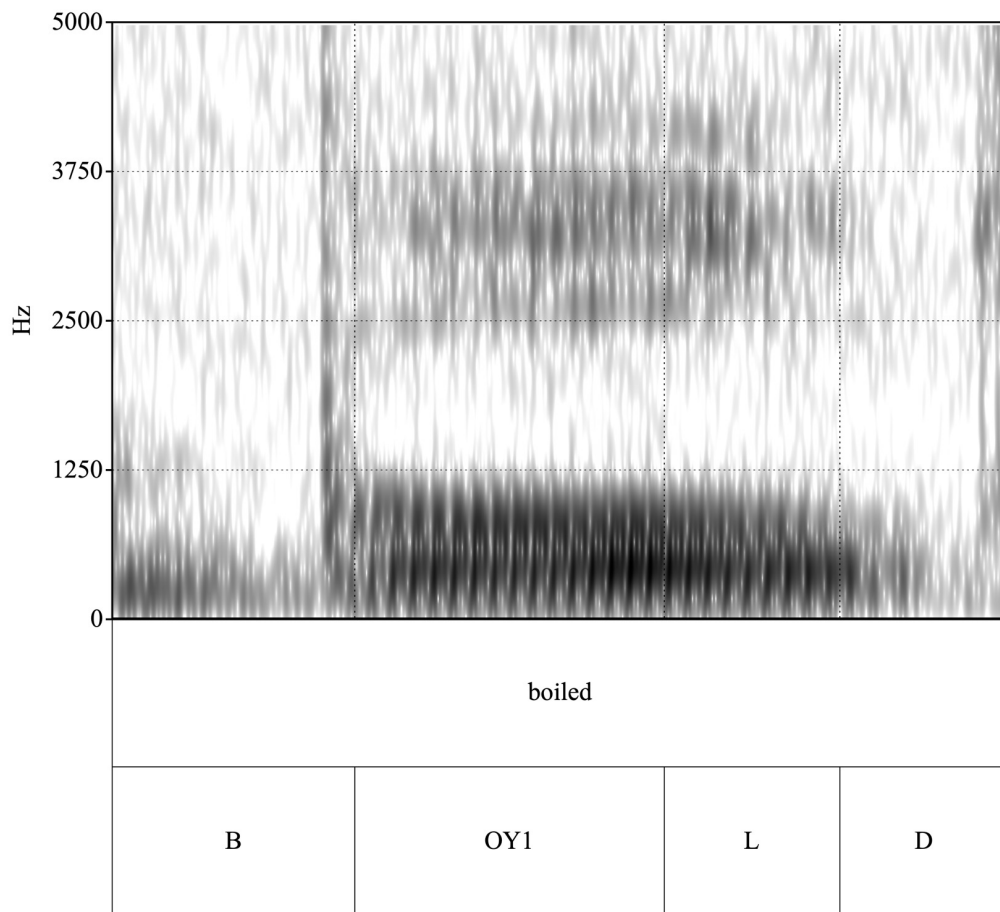
Transcripts aligned with Montreal Forced Aligner (McAuliffe et al. 2017)

Formants extracted with FAVE (Rosenfelder et al. 2022)

Glide strength operationalized as Euclidean distance between F1/F2 at 35% and 80% through the vowel

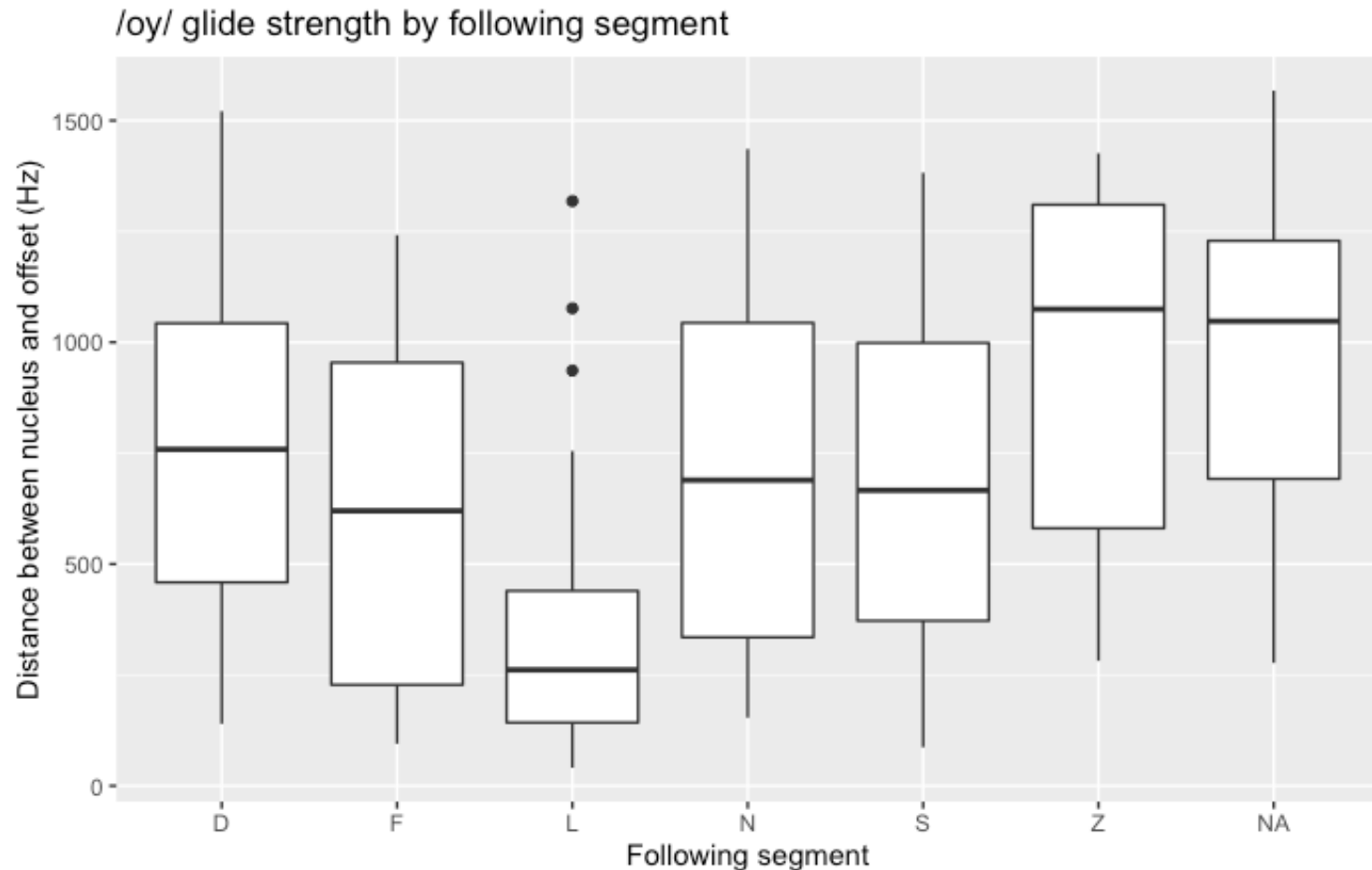
RESULTS

/oy/-monophthongization is present in Baltimore



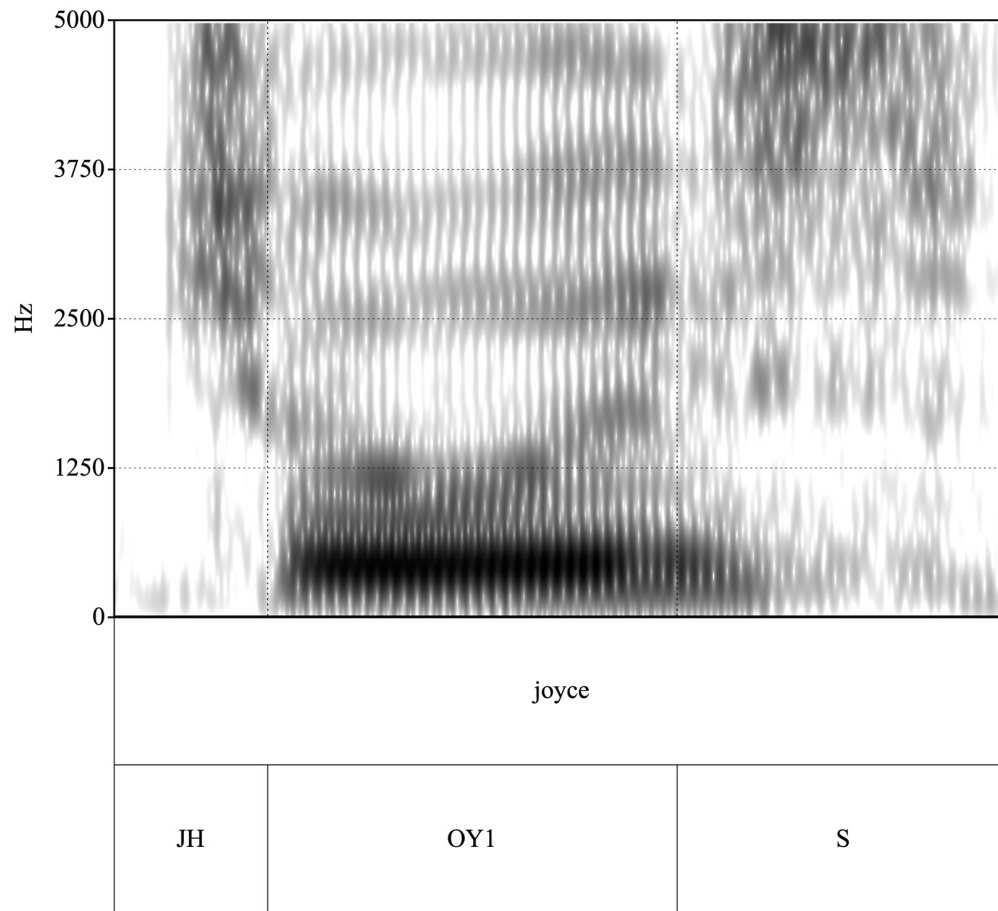
Crabs (b. 1983)

/l/ most strongly favors weakening



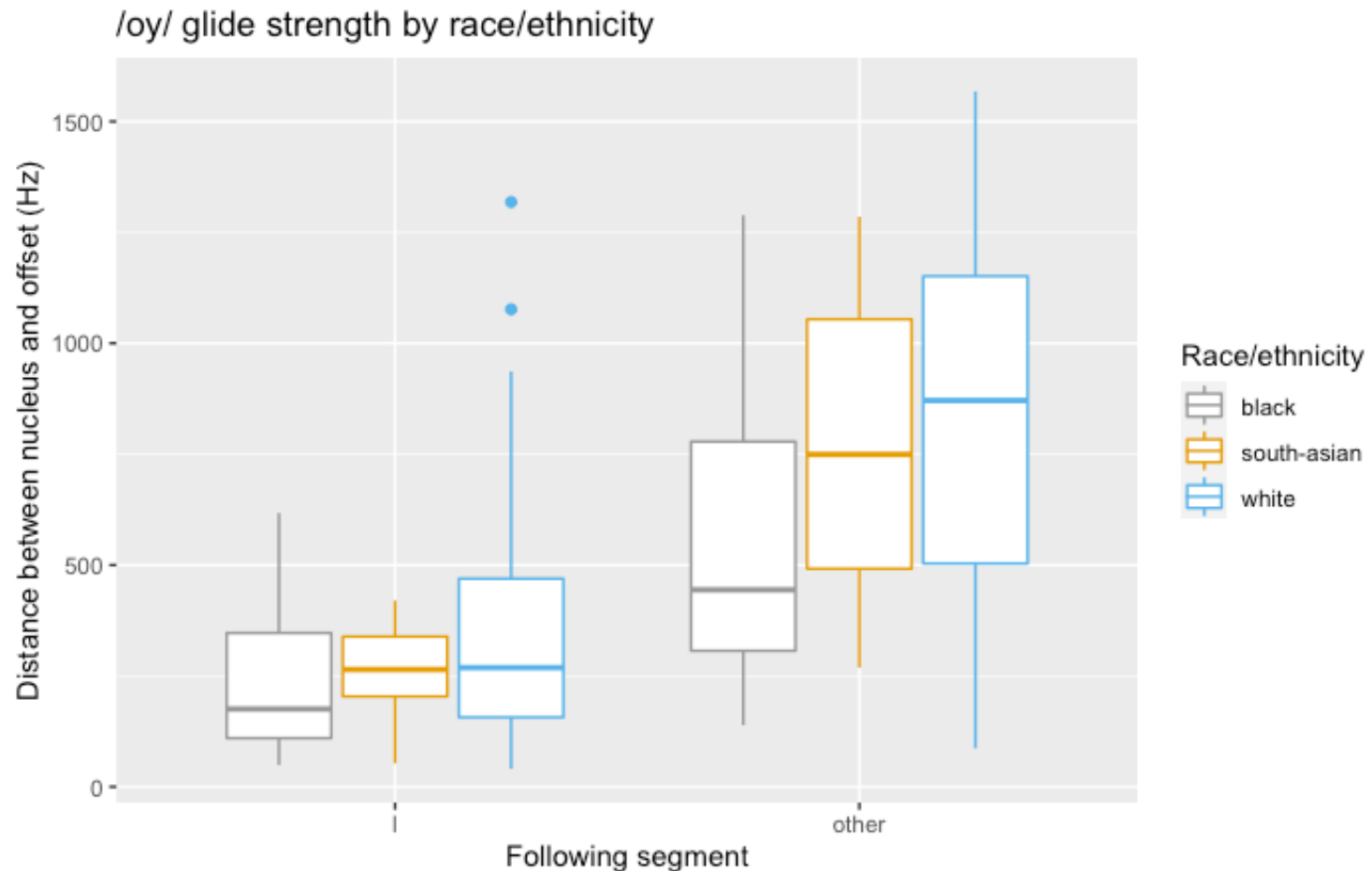
There were no notable difference between passage and word list style.

Glide weakening also occurs in other environments (but monophthongization is rare)

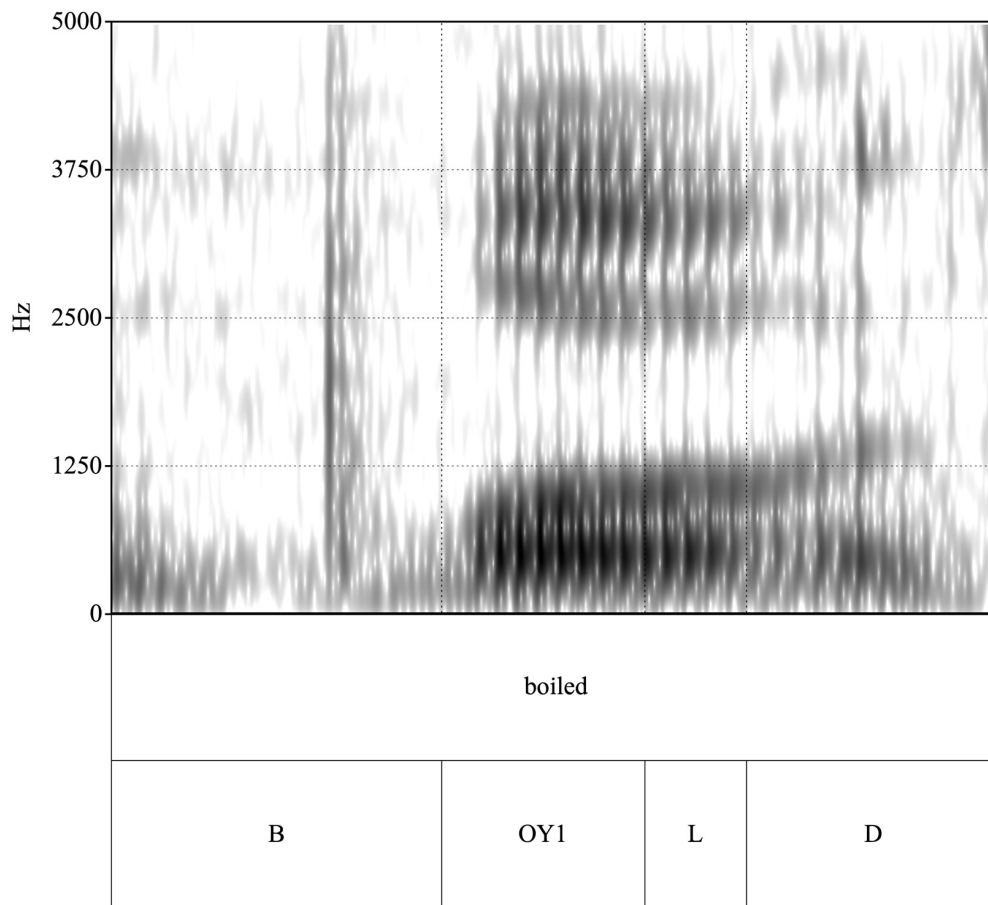


Trish (b. 1964)

White speakers tend to have stronger glides

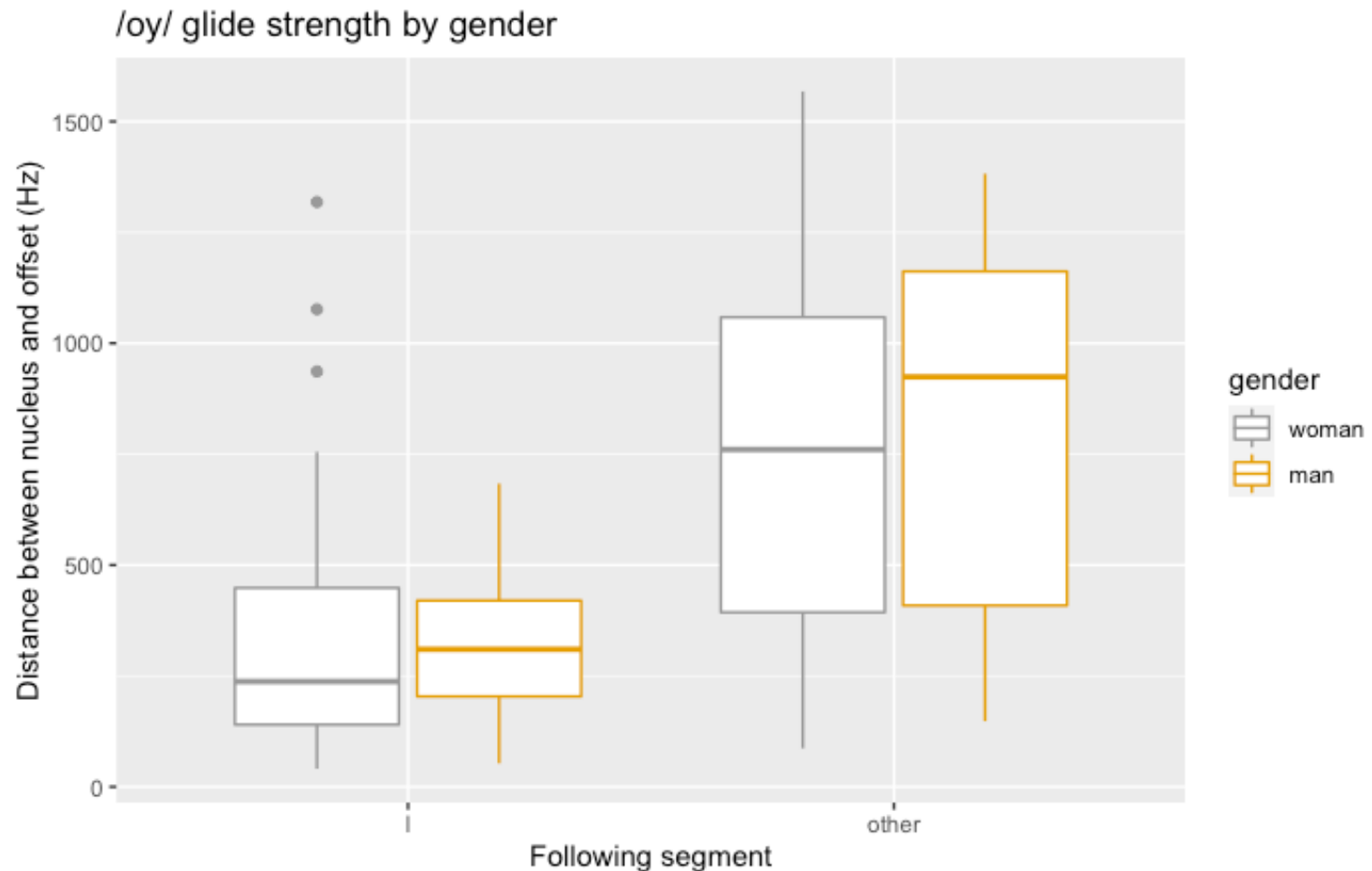


Monophthongization occurred among a Gen 2 immigrant speaker

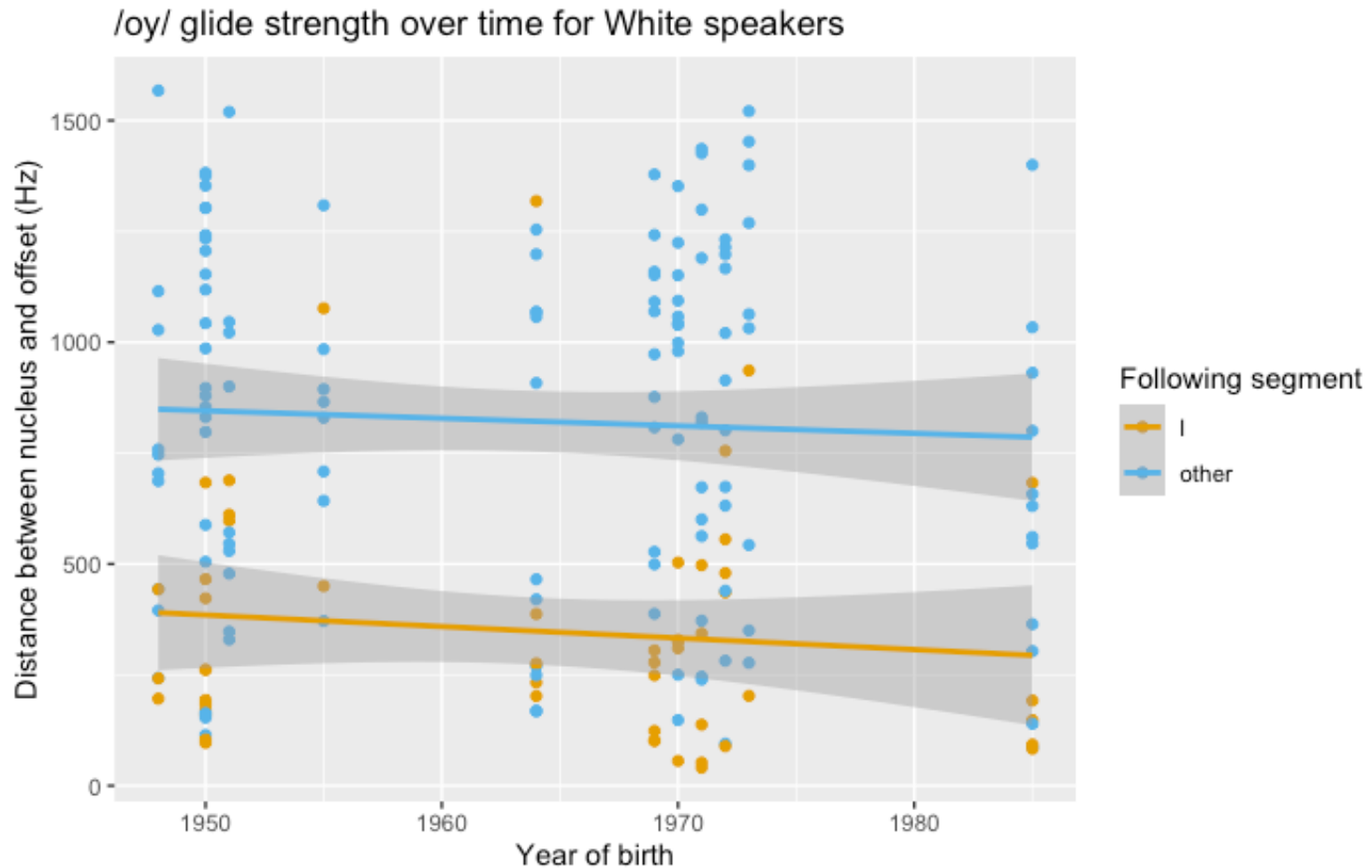


Aamir (b. 1995)

Women have slightly weaker glides

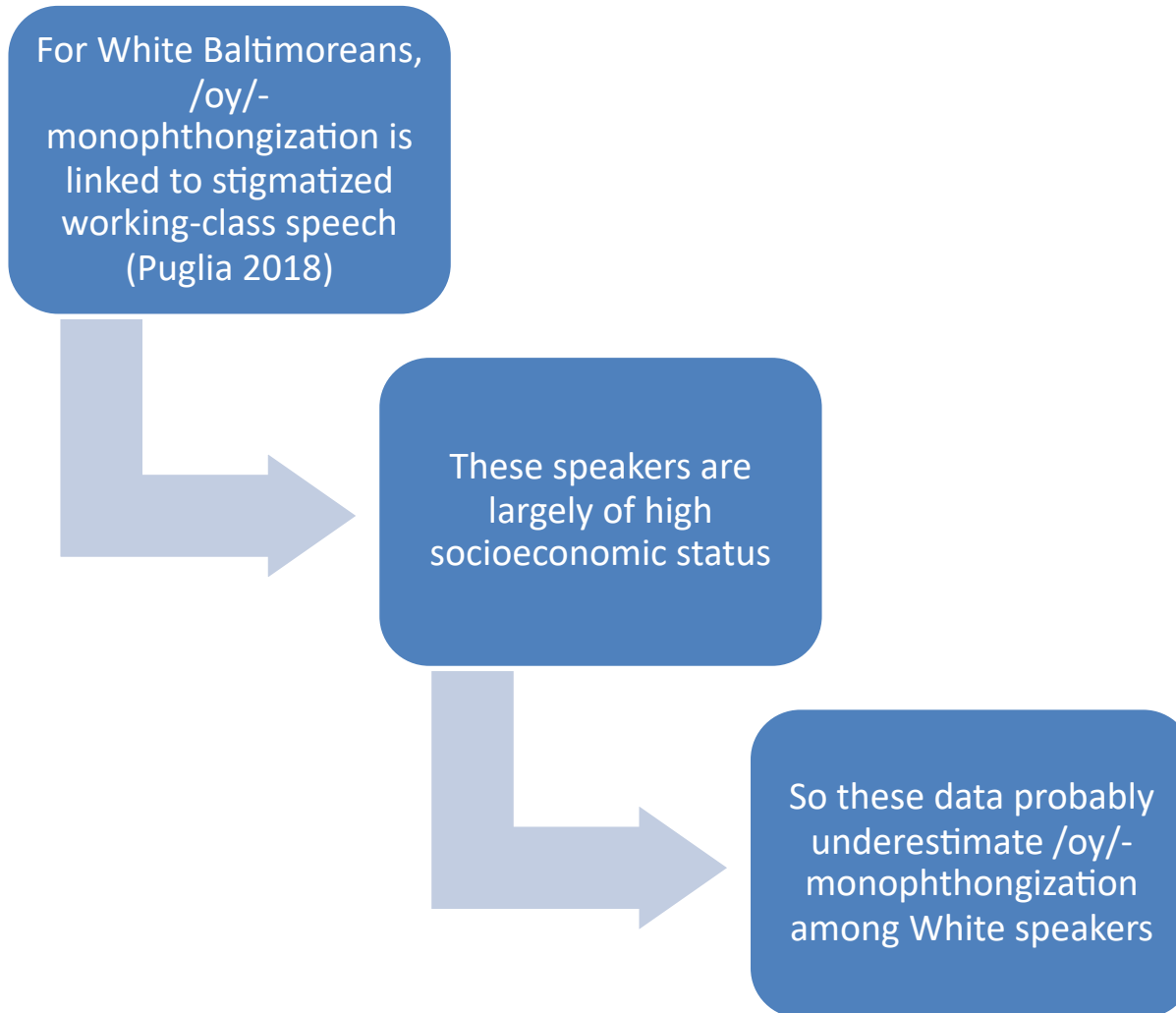


This feature appears stable among White speakers



DISCUSSION

Class and stigma



White speakers avoided monophthongal /oy/



Sally (b. 1969)

I enjoyed most of the food, especially
the b– (.) *b[ʊɪə]*/ed (.) seafood



Trish (b. 1964)

T: I saw a couple words in there that I
coulda very easily pronounced
differently like *b[ʊɪə]*/ I coulda said
b[ʊ]/ (laughter)

A: Is that the normal way you'd say
it?

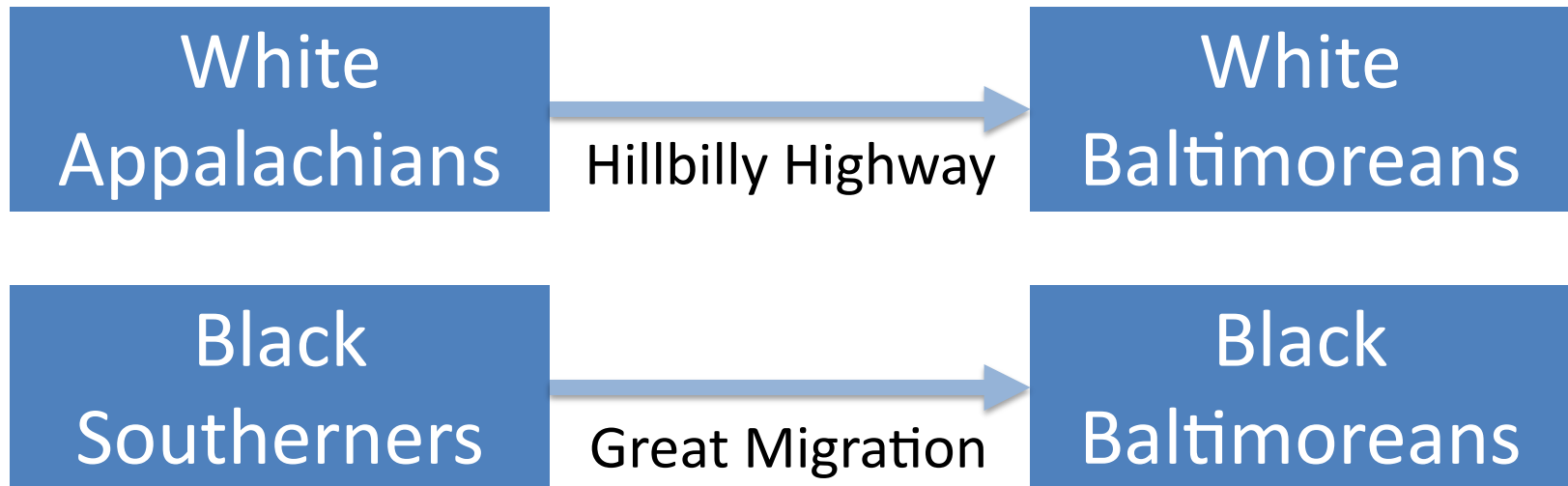
T: No, I would say *b[ʊɪə]*/

/oy/ and race

- /oy/-monophthongization is present among all racial groups in the data
- This is surprising, given:
 - the history of segregation and racial conflict in Baltimore (cf. Van Herk 2008, Labov 2010)
 - the association of monophthongal /oy/ with White working-class Baltimoreans
- This may be due to two factors

Factor 1: Dual origins

- Monophthongal /oy/ may have different sources for Black and White speakers (Malanoski & Newman in press)



Factor 2: The dissemination of ideology

- Monophthongal /oy/ may not index Whiteness for speakers of color
 - The texts and practices that led to the enregisterment of Bawlmerese largely circulated among White speakers (Rizzo 2010)

Black Baltimoreans do not associate monophthongal /oy/ with White Baltimoreans



Black Baltimoreans do not avoid monophthongal /oy/

Baltimore and the Back Upglide Shift

The Back Upglide Chain Shift:

/oy/ → /oh/ → /aw/ → /æw/

(Labov et al. 2006)

Baltimore has
fronted /aw/

(Labov et al. 2006)

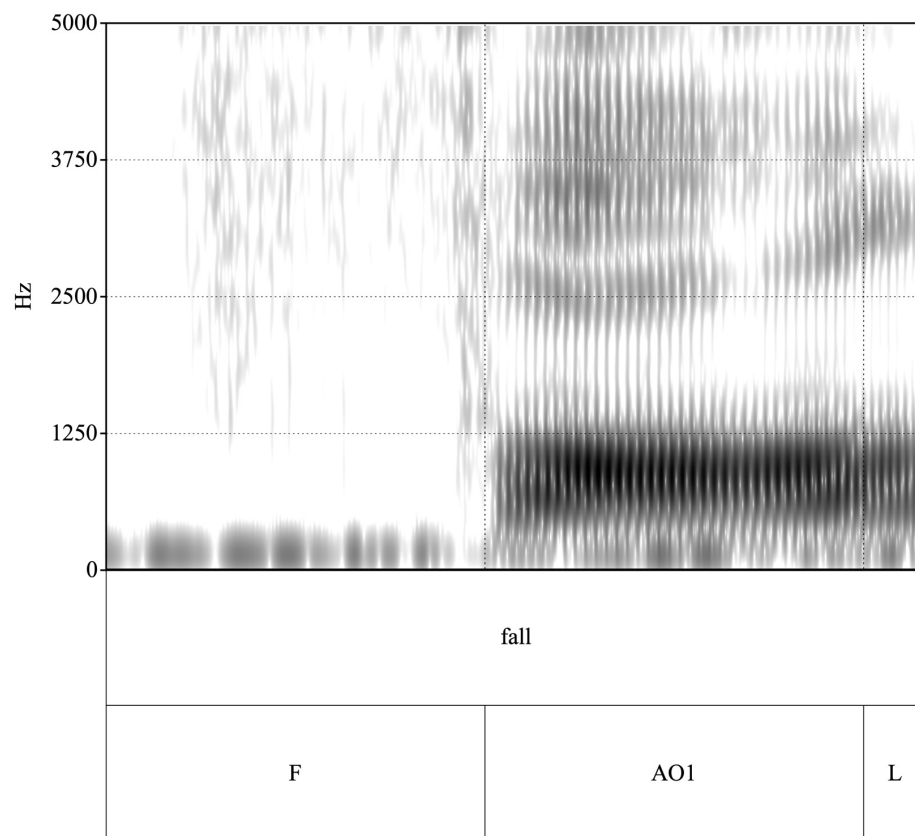
Baltimore has
raised,
ingliding /oh/

(Labov et al. 2006)

/oy/ → /oh/ → /aw/ → /æw/

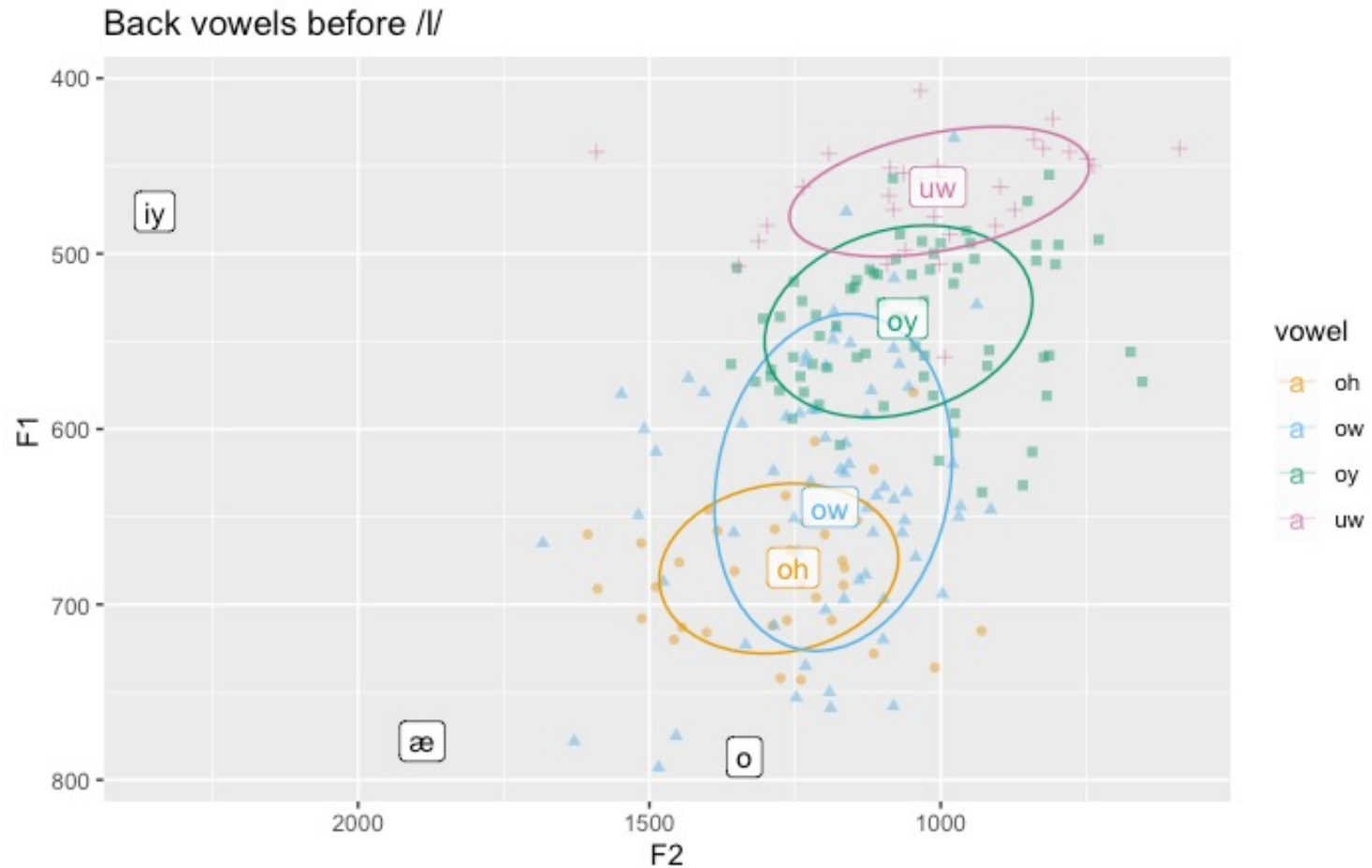
Baltimore's back vowel space

- /oy/ is also raised in Baltimore (Hisley 1964)
- /oh/ also undergoes monophthongization before /l/
- In dialect respellings, monophthongal /oy/ is represented as /oh/ (e.g. <awl> *oil*)
- Could there be a conditioned merger of these vowels?



Sally (b. 1969)

The back vowel space before /l/



Conclusion

- /oy/-monophthongization is present in Baltimore and demonstrates the same phonological conditioning observed elsewhere
- This feature is present among all racial/ethnic groups in the sample
- This feature appears to be stable
- White speakers, but seemingly not other speakers, associate this feature with working-class White Baltimoreans
- Monophthongal /oy/ remains distinct from other vowels

Final note: Placing Baltimore

- /oy/-monophthongization distinguishes Baltimore from Philadelphia
- Notably, the presence of this feature aligns Baltimore more with the South
- Like New Orleans (as we saw yesterday), Baltimore exhibits a combination of “Northern” and “Southern” features
- Like Maryland in general (despite what many say!), it is not obvious whether it is Northern or Southern

Thanks

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THANK YOU!

THE ADS AUDIENCE

ME

**BALTIMORE
FACTS**