



Lexical Phonosemantics: A Featural Analysis

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Introduction

Many phonosemantic biases in spoken language vocabulary found so far ...

Words meaning this ... tend to have ...

I, you	Nasals [1, 2]
This	High-F2 [3, 4, 5]
That	Low-F2 [3, 4, 5]
Lips	Bilabial stops [6]
Nose	Nasals [6, 7]
Small	/i/, /t/ [7]
Tongue	/e/, /ε/, /l/ [7]

... what about ...

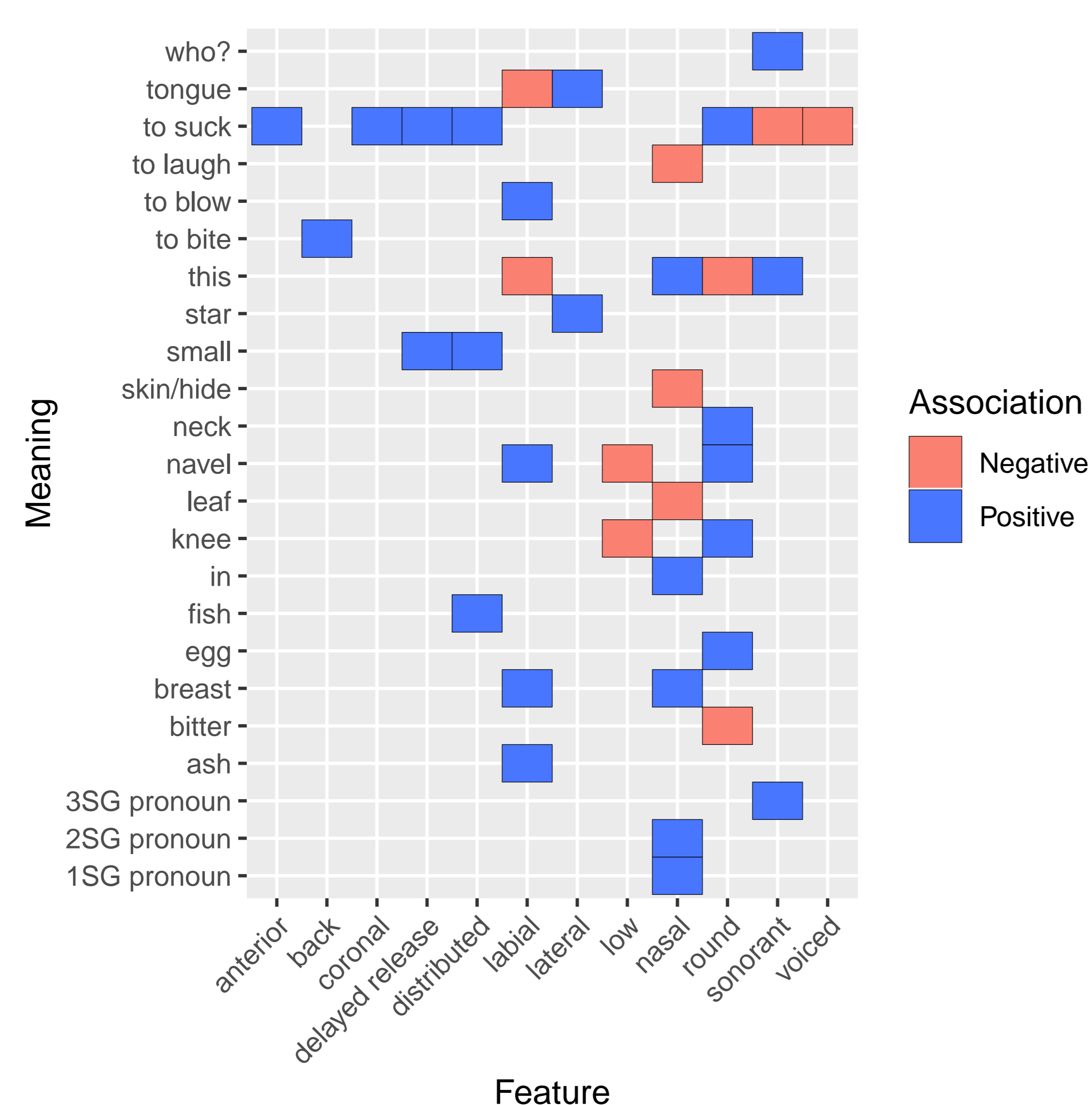
- Phonosemantics in the **Leipzig-Jakarta List**? [8]
- Association between meanings and **phonological features**?

Methodology

- 100 basic meanings (Leipzig-Jakarta List)
 - Least likely to be loanwords
 - Least analyzable
 - Most universal
 - Oldest age
- 66 genealogically distinct languages
 - The largest language of each of the largest 66 language families
 - * Indo-European > Spanish
 - * Sino-Tibetan > Mandarin
 - * ...
- Null hypothesis: The frequency of any [+feature] in the phonemes of morphemes for any given meaning is not significantly different from the mean frequency of the [+feature] in the phonemes of morphemes for all 100 meanings.
 - Binomial tests (FDR 10%) [9]

Results

Feature-meaning associations



Discussion

- Round shape
 - ‘egg’, ‘neck’, ‘knee’, ‘navel’ — [+round]
 - Bouba-Kiki Effect [10, 11]
- Buccal action
 - ‘to blow’ — [+labial]
 - ‘to suck’ — [+delayed release]
 - ‘to bite’ — [+back]
- Proximity
 - ‘this’, ‘in’, ‘I’, ‘thou’ — [+nasal]
- Brightness
 - ‘star’ — [+lateral]
 - /l/ sounds bright [12]
- Softness
 - ‘ash’, ‘breast’ — [+labial]
 - Labials sound soft [12, 13, 14]

Conclusion

- Featural analysis can be helpful in revealing lexical phonosemantic biases

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