

# Lifespan changes: A changing status of a local variant

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# Overview

- Three major studies on pronunciation over a period of 70 years
- My focus today:
  - North-East Iceland
  - Lifespan changes: 'hard speech'/'soft speech'
    - *Fata*, 'bucket': [fa:tʰa] vs [fa:ta]
  - Explanations: Language planning and attitudes
  - 'Voiced pronunciation'/'unvoiced pronunciation', for comparison
    - *Vanta*, 'need': [vantʰa] vs [van̥ta] ('need'),
  - Lifespan changes and age

# Three major studies on pronunciation: 1940s - BG

- Prof. Björn Guðfinnsson: An 'overview study' on Icelandic pronunciation
- 6,520 participants
  - Most of them 11-13 years old
  - 826 in North-East Iceland
- Reading method
- A paper card for each participant
  - Preserved at the National and University Library of Iceland
- The findings published in two books (Guðfinnsson 1946, 1964)
- Data re-analysed (see Guðmundsdóttir 2022)
- Comparable with later studies, inspite of various aspects of uncertainty

# Three major studies on pronunciation: 1980s - RÍN

- ▶ Rannsókn á íslensku nútímamáli
  - ▶ 'Research on Phonological Variation in Modern Icelandic'
  - ▶ Acronym: 'RÍN'
  - ▶ Led by Prof. Höskuldur Þráinsson and Prof. Kristján Árnason (see for instance Þráinsson & Árnason 1992, Árnason 2005).
- ▶ The whole country
- ▶ All age groups
- ▶ Around 3000 participants
  - ▶ Thereof around 400 participants from Guðfinnsson's study
- ▶ Reading method and images
- ▶ Tape records

# Three major studies on pronunciation: 2010s - RAUN

- Málbreytingar í rauntíma í íslensku hljóðkerfi og setningagerð
  - 'Linguistic Change in Real Time in the Phonology and Syntax of Icelandic'
  - Acronym: RAUN
  - Led by Prof. Höskuldur Þráinsson
- Phonological data gathered 2010-2012
- Real-time comparison
- A sample of adults:
  - who have taken part in two studies 30 years apart
  - who have taken part in three studies spanning a period of 70 years
- Panel study
- Young people: Data collected on a small-scale, in 2015
- Methods adapted from those used in RÍN

# 'Hard speech' vs 'soft speech' and the sample

- ▶ Main focus: 'hard speech' (*harðmæli*) vs 'soft speech' (*linmæli*)
  - ▶ 'Hard speech' is widespread in North (particularly North-East) Iceland
  - ▶ Characterised by aspirated plosives after a long vowel in words such as:
    - ▶ *api*, [a:pʰɪ] ('monkey'), *aka*, [a:kʰa] ('drive'), *éta*, [jɛ:tʰa] ('eat')
  - ▶ Most speakers of Icelandic use 'soft speech'
    - ▶ Lacking such aspiration
- ▶ Sample - from North-East Iceland
- ▶ 47 speakers from BG, RÍN and RAUN
  - ▶ Born around 1930
  - ▶ Age: Around 12 (BG) – 50 (RÍN) – 80 (RAUN)
- ▶ 15 speakers from RÍN and RAUN
  - ▶ Born 1963-1970
  - ▶ Age: Around 14-15 (RÍN) – 40-50 (RAUN)



# Is there a change in progress?

- ▶ What can happen across the lifespan?
  - ▶ People may retain the pattern of variation they adopted during language acquisition
  - ▶ They may follow developments among younger generations and change their language in the same direction
  - ▶ A 'retrograde lifespan change' may occur, with the change moving in the opposite direction

(See Sankoff 2019)

- ▶ We must know the direction!
- ▶ Young people in North-East Iceland - Frequency of 'hard speech'

1940s – BG		1980s – RÍN		2010+ – RAUN		
%	N	%	N	%	N	P
96.5	826	86.4	205	41.9	39	BG – RÍN: P = 0.001 RÍN – RAUN: P = 0.001

- ▶ There is a change in progress
  - ▶ 'Soft speech' in gaining ground over this period of 70 years

# 47 speakers in three studies

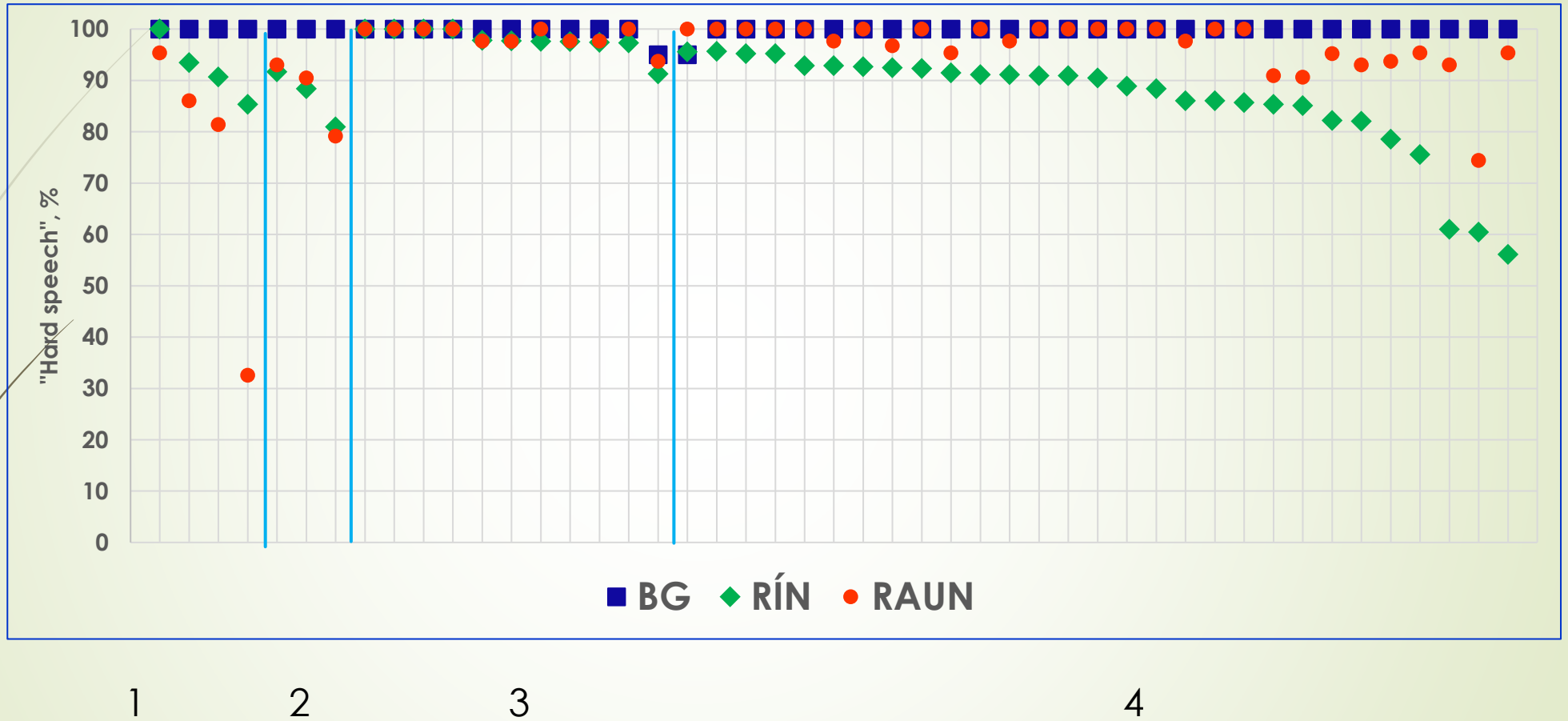
- Frequency of 'hard speech'

1940s BG	1980s RÍN	2010s RAUN		P
%	%	%	N	
99.8	89.4	94.7	47	BG – RÍN: P = 0.001 RÍN – RAUN: P = 0.005

- First period (BG – RÍN): "Typical" lifespan changes – adults changing their language in line with a change in progress
- Second period (RÍN – RAUN): 'Retrograde lifespan changes' – adults changing their language in the opposite direction
- Interesting: In Reykjavik, it was found in the early 1980s that people of this generation (born around 1930) had adopted 'hard speech' to a greater degree with age (Þráinsson & Árnason 1984)



# Each individual

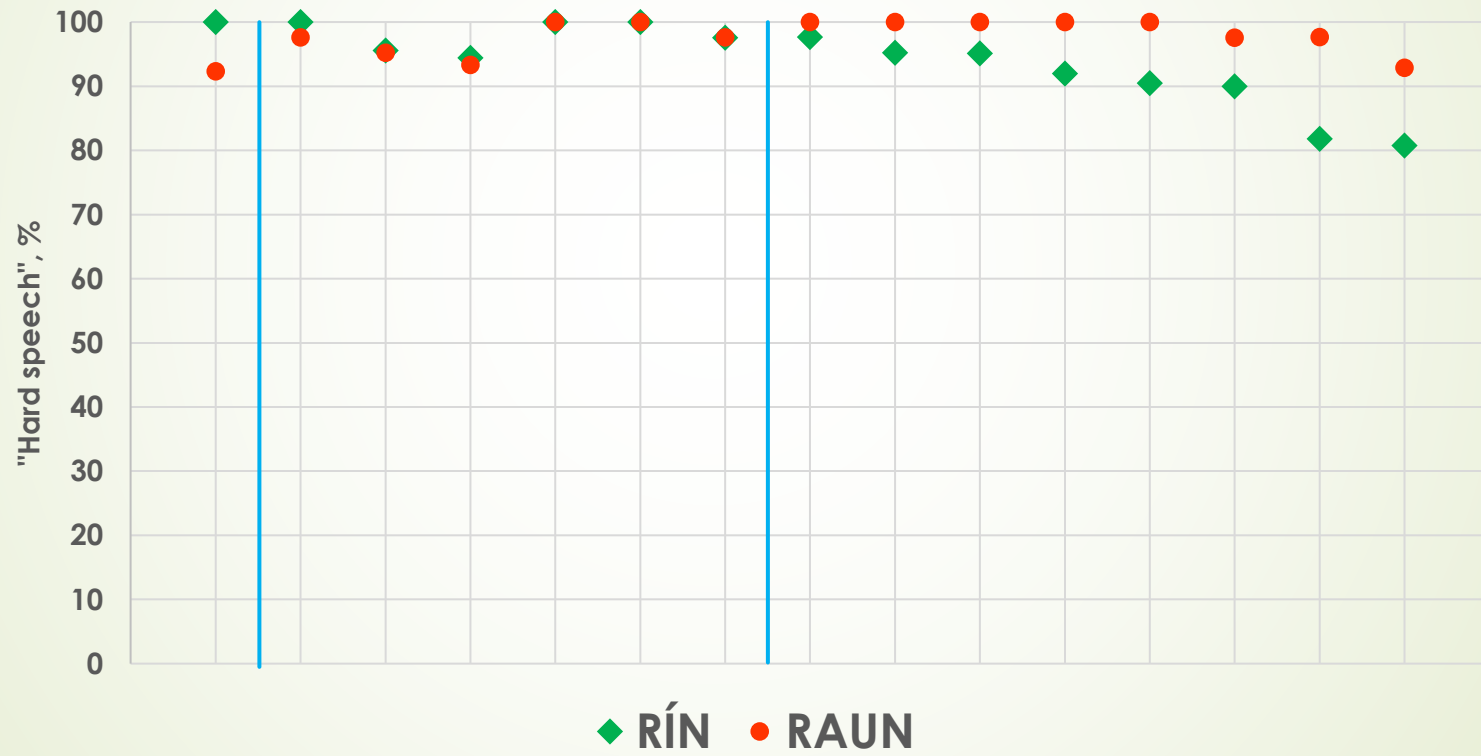


# 15 speakers in two studies

<b>1980s RÍN</b>	<b>2010s RAUN</b>		
%	%	N	P
94.0	97.6	15	0.042

'Retrograde lifespan changes'

# Each individual



# Toward explanations

- ▶ 'Hard speech' has long enjoyed some "respect"
  - ▶ Signs of retrograde changes over the second period are therefore not entirely surprising
- ▶ The switch in the 70-year period is surprising
  - ▶ With typical lifespan changes in the first half and retrograde lifespan changes in the second half

# Language planning and attitudes

- ▶ Thoughts of harmonising pronunciation in Iceland  
(See Guðfinnsson 1981, Guðmundsdóttir 2022)
- ▶ Guðfinnsson himself selected three variants for harmonisation in the first instance:
  - ▶ 'Réttmæli' - 'correct speech'
    - ▶ Instead of *flámæli* 'slack-jawed speech' / *hljóðvilla* 'sound confusion'
    - ▶ *Lifa* - ('live'): [lɪ:va] – [lɛ:va]
  - ▶ 'Hv- pronunciation'
    - ▶ South-Icelandic variant. Most people used 'kv- pronunciation'.
    - ▶ *Hver* - ('who'): [xvɛ:r] – [k<sup>h</sup>vɛ:r]
  - ▶ 'Hard speech'
    - ▶ *Fata* - ('bucket'): [fa:t<sup>h</sup>a] – [fa:ta]

# Some influence

- ▶ Guðfinnsson's proposals were not implemented in line with his plans
  - ▶ However:
    - ▶ Their influence was felt in school curricula right up to the 1970s
    - ▶ In the 1940s, pronunciation courses were held for teachers
    - ▶ At least in one Reykjavik school children displaying 'slack-jawed speech' received special corrective tuition



# ‘Hard speech’ vs ‘soft speech’

- ▶ Proposals for harmonising pronunciation reflected the attitudes of academics
  - ▶ They favored ‘hard speech’
- ▶ General attitudes towards ‘hard speech’ appear to have long been positive
  - ▶ I don’t know how positive or for how long time
- ▶ Some signs that the nature of such positivity has changed

# ‘Hard speech’ becomes ‘clear speech’

- ▶ In relation to his opting for ‘hard speech’ Guðfinnsson did not state that it was ‘better’, ‘more correct’ or ‘clearer’ than ‘soft speech’
- ▶ Books from around 1990: “The difference between ‘hard speech’ and ‘soft speech’ is not that ‘hard speech’ constitute a clearer pronunciation.”  
(Gíslason & Þráinsson 1993, Kristmundsson *et al.* 1987, Pálsdóttir 1992)
  - ▶ A reaction to public opinion
- ▶ 2013-2016:
  - ▶ Some surveys of attitudes towards the relevant regional pronunciation and awareness of them
  - ▶ Málpekki (Guðmundsdóttir 2022, Hlynsdóttir 2016)
  - ▶ The best Icelandic is spoken in North Iceland
  - ▶ ‘Hard speech’ is the most respected of all pronunciation variants in Iceland
  - ▶ It is ‘better’, ‘more correct’ or ‘clearer’ than ‘soft speech’

# Conclusion

- ▶ 'Hard speech' was a regional pronunciation in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - ▶ People probably had a rather positive attitude towards it
- ▶ Midway through the century, academics chose it for the purposes of harmonisation
  - ▶ Promoted to some extent by the school system
- ▶ 'Hard speech' gradually established itself as a prestige variant
  - ▶ Clear and proper language, especially appropriate in relatively formal language
- ▶ In Reykjavik in the 1980s: people born around 1930 had adopted 'hard speech' to a greater degree with age
- ▶ At that time it was still a regional variant of North Iceland
  - ▶ Gradually losing ground to 'soft speech'
  - ▶ Observed among both young people and adults
- ▶ As 'soft speech' gains ground, space is created for the view that 'hard speech' is better than 'soft speech'
  - ▶ This leads to a switch to retrograde changes among adults
  - ▶ Younger generations: Time will tell!

## For comparison: ‘Voiced pronunciation’ / ‘unvoiced pronunciation’

- ▶ ‘Voiced pronunciation’:
  - ▶ Voiced sonorants /l,m,n/ before aspirated plosives /p,t,k/ in words such as:
    - ▶ *hem**p**a*, [hemp<sup>h</sup>a] (‘cassock’), *van**t**a*, [van<sup>h</sup>a] (‘need’), and *hjá**l**p*a, [çaulp<sup>h</sup>a] (‘help’)
  - ▶ Most speakers of Icelandic: The sonorants unvoiced and the plosives unaspirated
- ▶ Young people: Major change over a period of around 70 years
  - ▶ ‘Unvoiced pronunciation’ has been (and is) gaining ground
  - ▶ ‘Voiced pronunciation’ is now at the point of disappearing from the speech of young people
- ▶ Change in progress!

# Older (47) and younger (15) participants

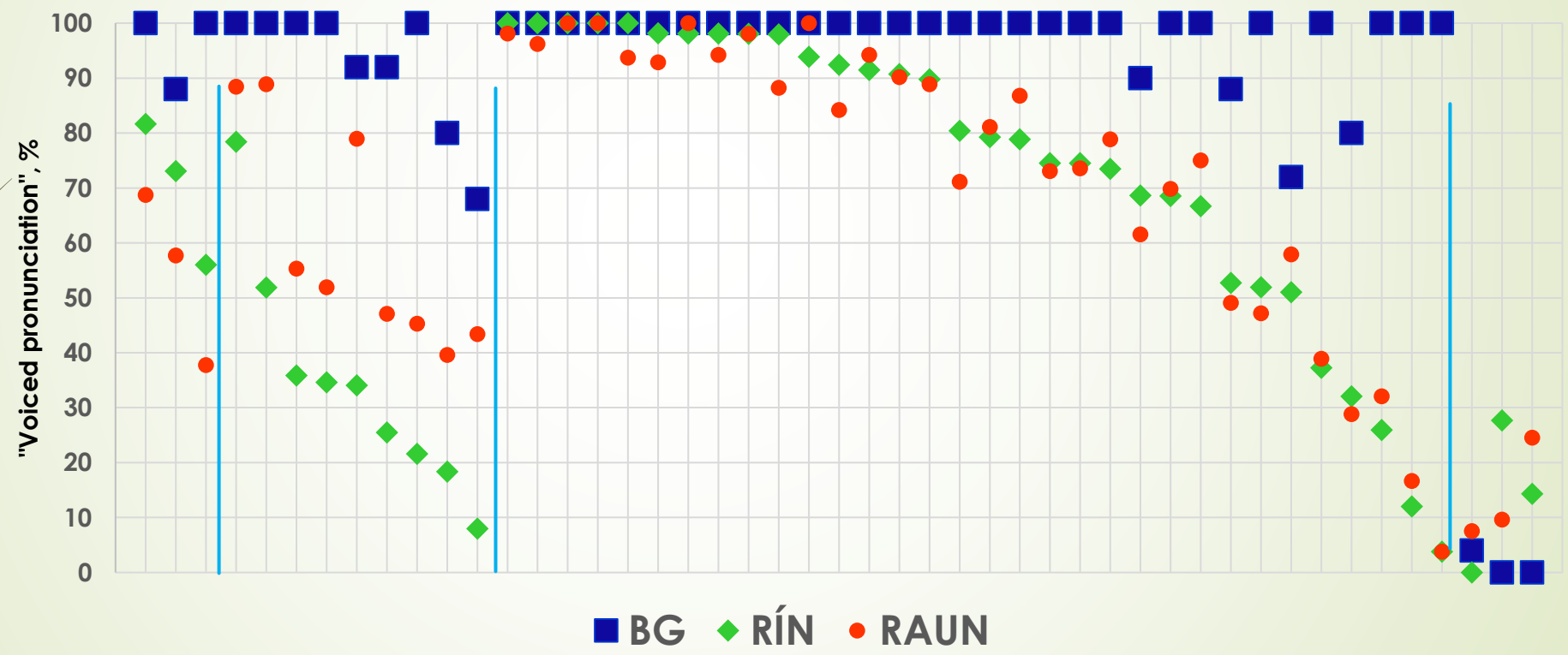
	<b>1940s BG</b>	<b>1980s RÍN</b>	<b>2010s RAUN</b>		
	%	%	%	N	P ('Voiced pron.')
<b>Older, 'voiced pron.'</b> (Older, 'hard speech')	<b>90.5</b> (99,8)	<b>62.6</b> (89,4)	<b>66.2</b> (94,7)	47	BG – RÍN: P = <b>0.000</b> RÍN – RAUN: P = <b>0.075</b>
<b>Younger, 'voiced pron.'</b> (Younger, 'hard speech')		<b>60</b> (94,0)	<b>45.8</b> (97,6)	15	RÍN – RAUN: P = 0.026

- First period: 'Hard speech' **and** 'voiced pronunciation': Typical lifespan changes
- Second period:
  - 'Hard speech', both groups: Retrograde lifespan changes
  - 'Voiced pronunciation', older group: Stable
  - 'Voiced pronunciation', younger group: Typical lifespan changes

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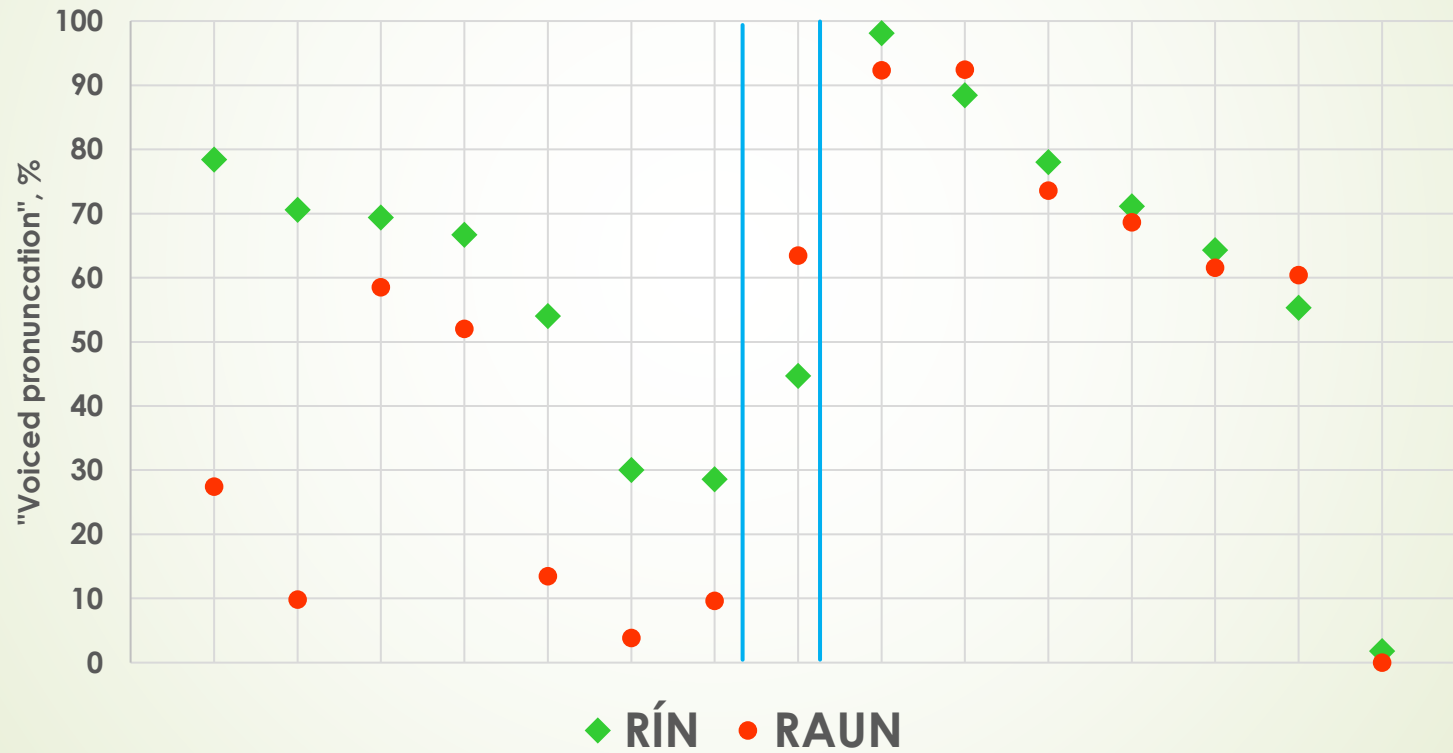
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# Each individual - older





# Each individual - younger



# Age

- ▶ The first 2–3 decades of adulthood:
  - ▶ “Typical” lifespan changes may be expected
    - ▶ Both variants in the first period, ‘voiced pronunciation’ in the second period
  - ▶ Attitudes may have the effect of bringing about retrograde lifespan changes
    - ▶ ‘Hard speech’ in the second period
- ▶ In later life:
  - ▶ Greater tendency towards stability or retrograde lifespan changes
  - ▶ Attitudes may promote such retrograde lifespan changes
    - ▶ ‘Hard speech’
  - ▶ In the absence of such an influence, stability is more likely
    - ▶ ‘Voiced pronunciation’
- ▶ Lifespan changes in line with a change in progress are rare after the age of 50  
(See Sankoff 2006)

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