

# Songs and Sociolinguistics

**Two approaches**

**Franz Andres Morrissey**

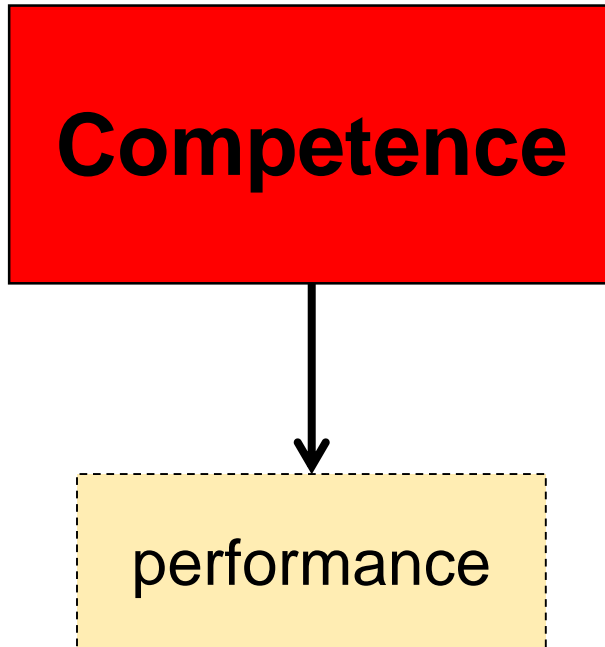
# The Plan

- Innovation in language and song
- Sociolinguistics (?) of performing ‘transatlantic’ song

But what – if anything – connects these?

**“Performance”**

# Performance, what performance?



performance = flawed manifestation of competence

# Performance as impact

## Performance is

- space-related
- time-constrained
- social / dialogic → emergent
- multimodal

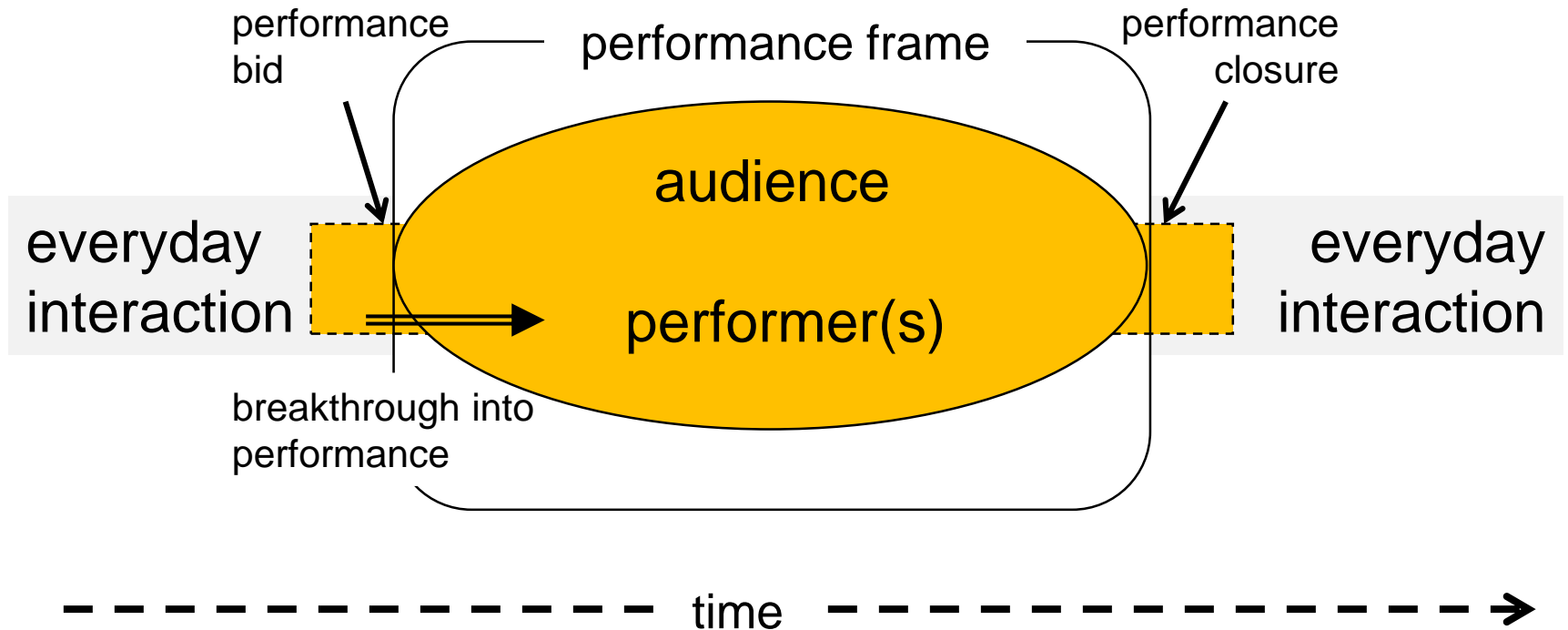
## Performance determines itself

## Performance creates performer constraints

# Innovation in Language and Song

**Passing on novel elements  
through performance in speech and singing**

# Breaking through into performance



# Types of performance

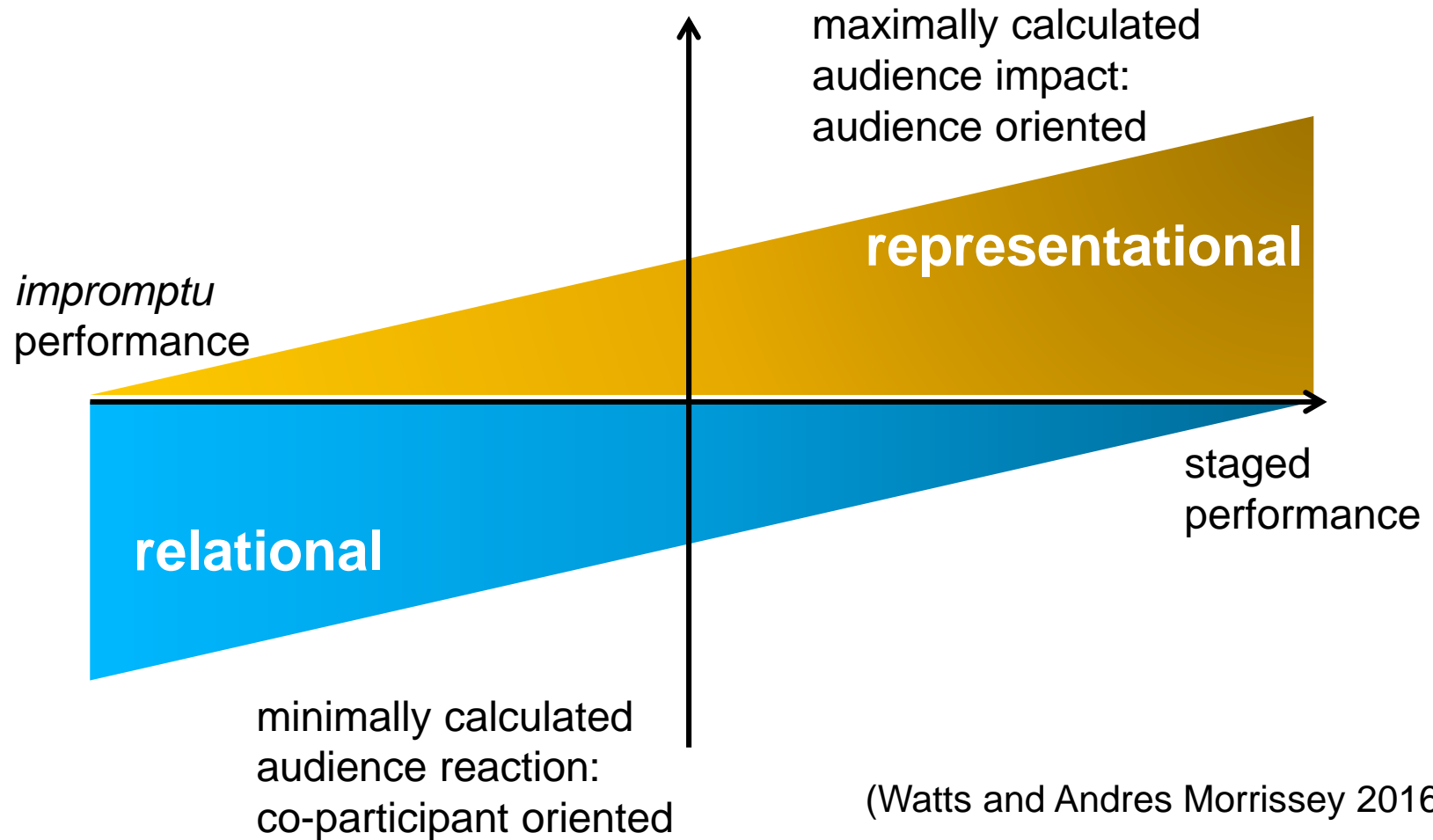
mundane  
performance



staged  
performance

(Coupland 2007)

# Types of performance

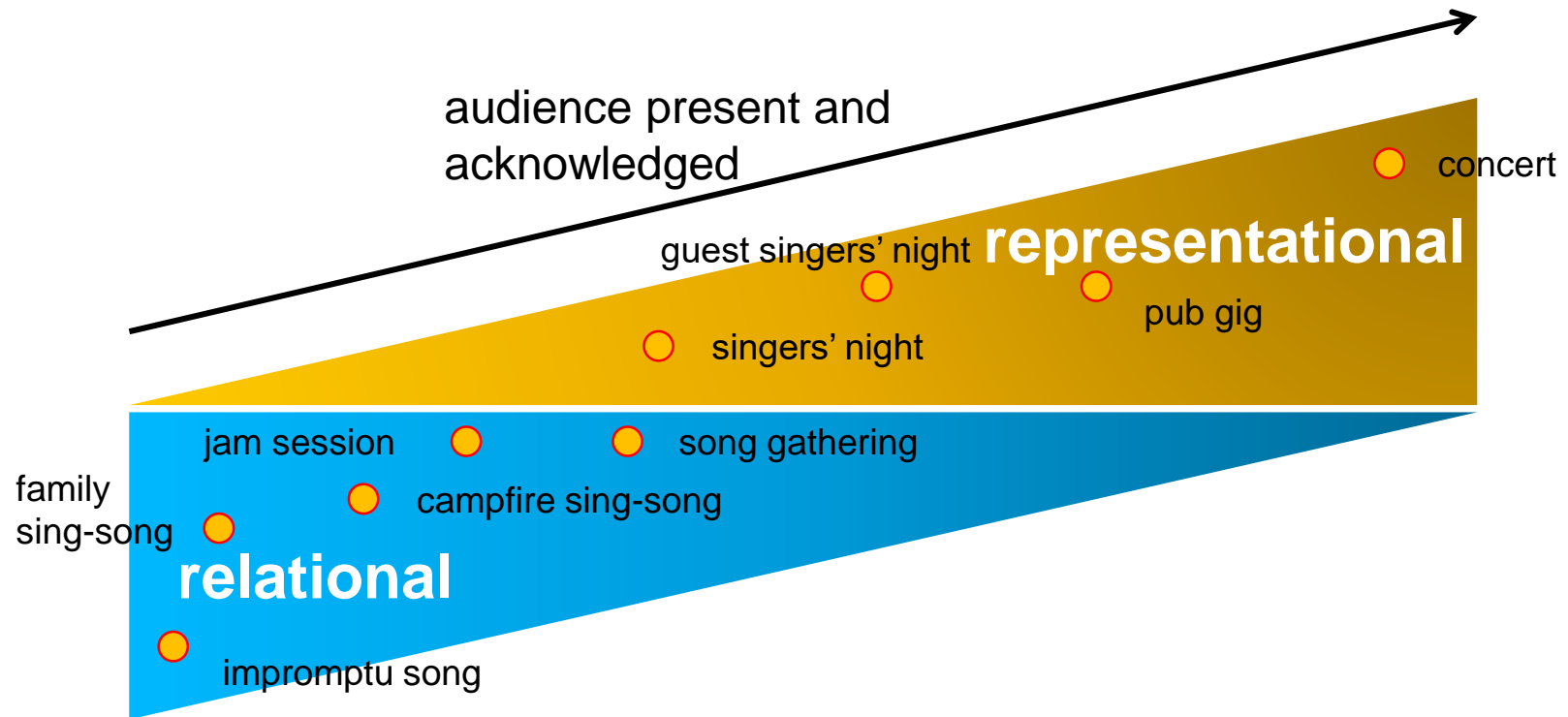




# Types of performance

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# The campaign of Bryan Henderson

## **‘One Man’s Quest to Rid Wikipedia of Exactly One Grammatical Mistake’**

(<https://medium.com/backchannel/meet-the-ultimate-wikignome-10508842caad>)

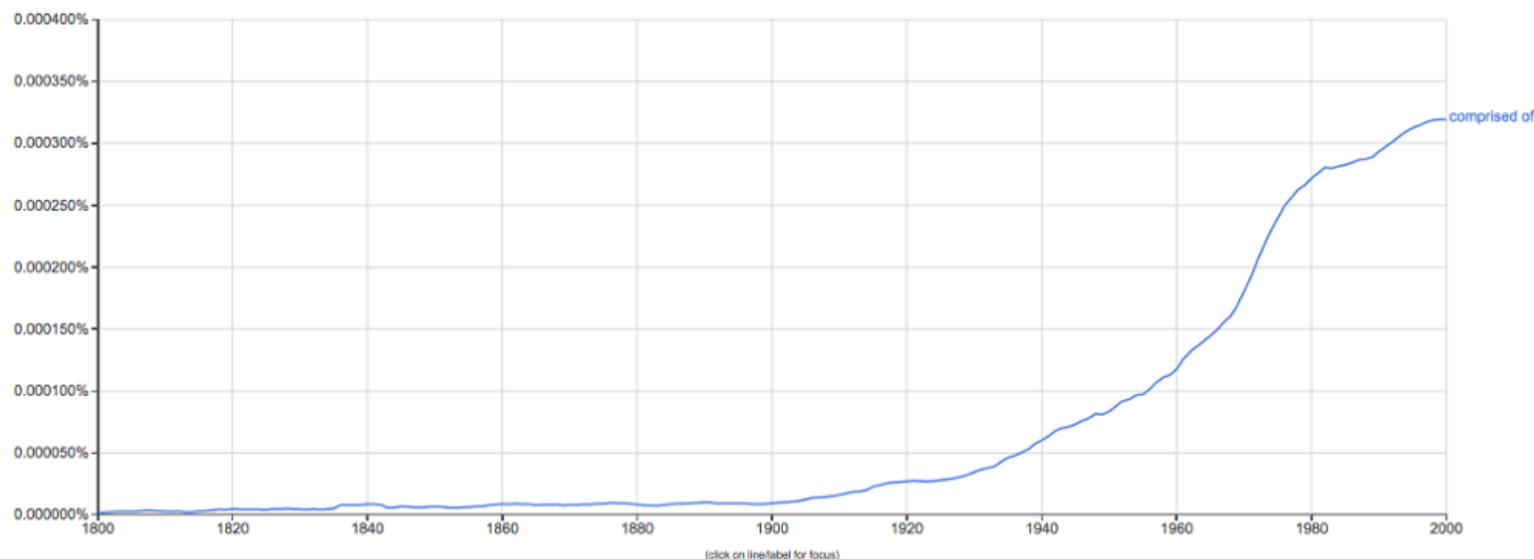
**‘Every Sunday night, before [Bryan Henderson] goes to bed, he tracks down and expunges the 70-80 new instances of “comprised of” that have appeared on Wikipedia in the past 7 days...’**

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/05/why-wikipedias-grammar-vigilante-is-wrong>

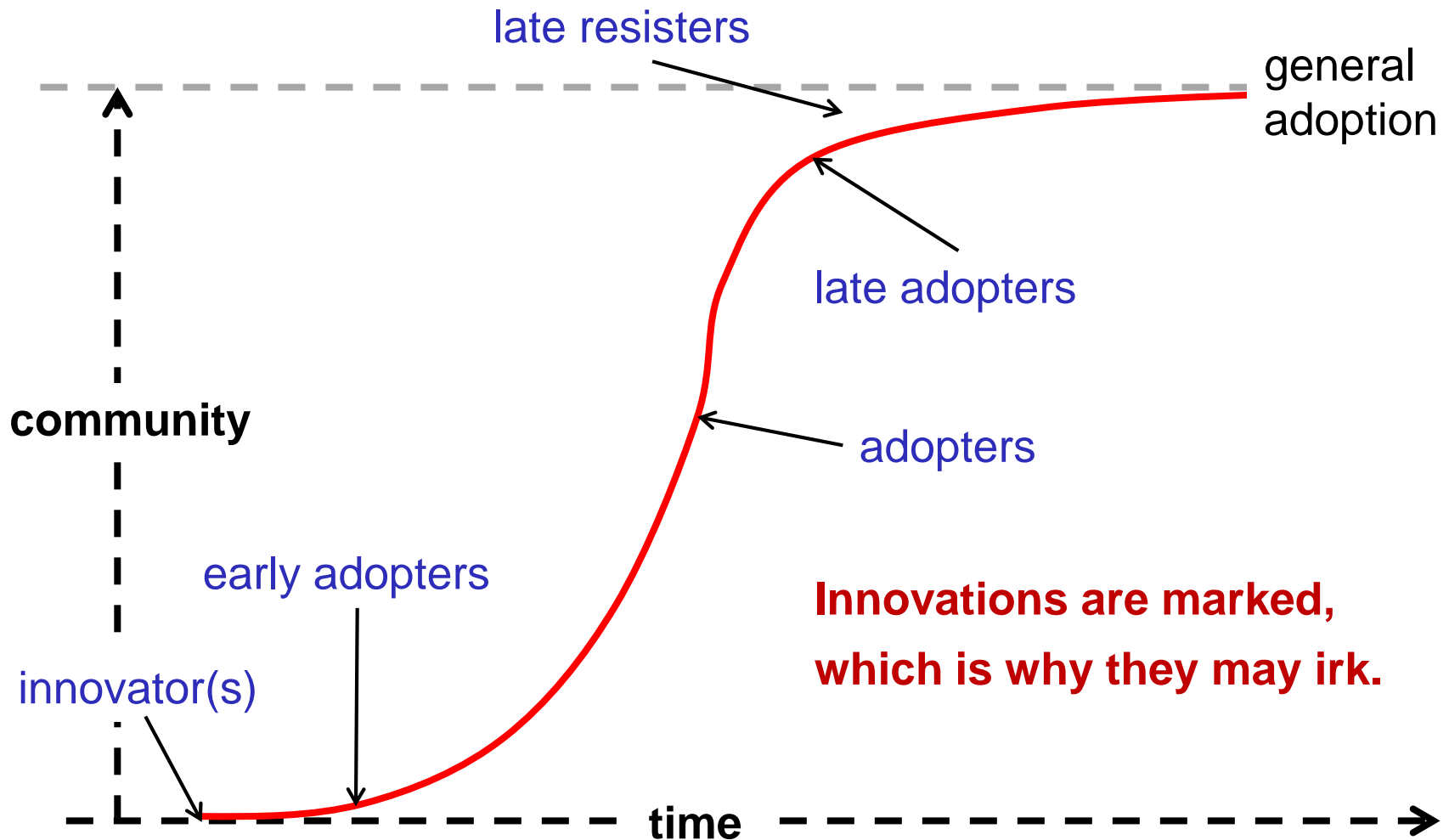
# The campaign of Bryan Henderson

**‘It’s new. Many current Wikipedia readers learned to write at a time when no respectable dictionary endorsed “comprised of” in any way. It was barely ever used before 1970’**

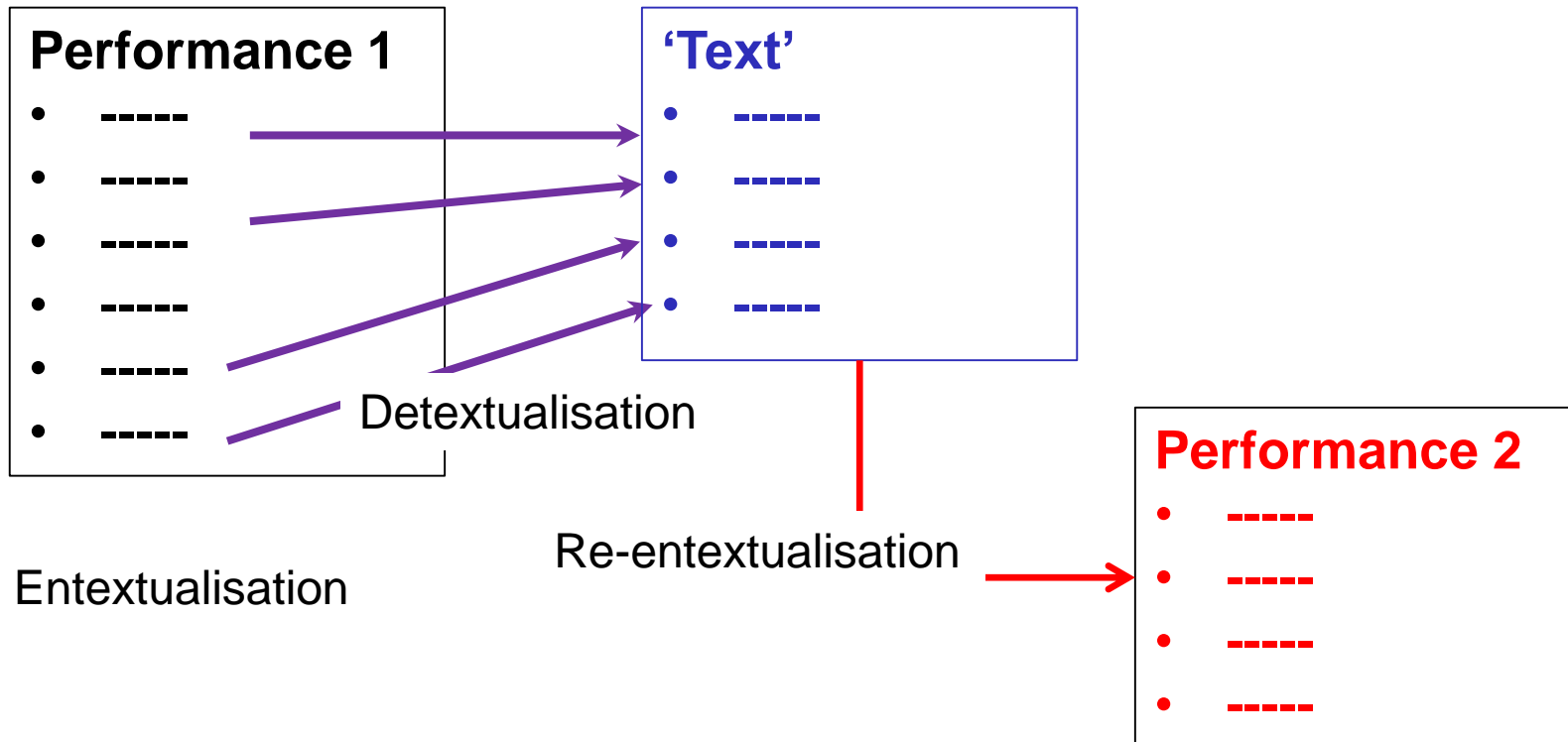
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/05/why-wikipedias-grammar-vigilante-is-wrong>



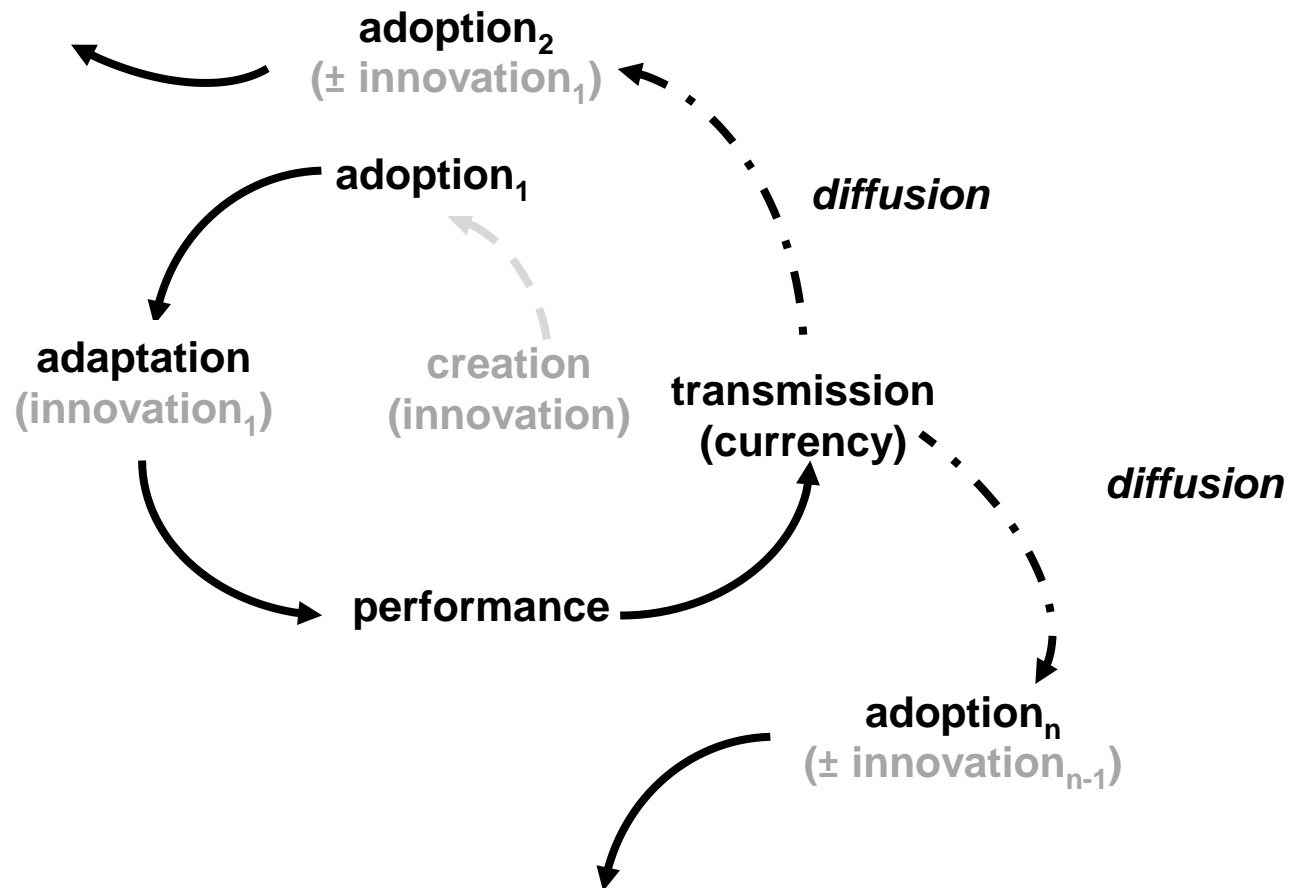
# Spreading innovation



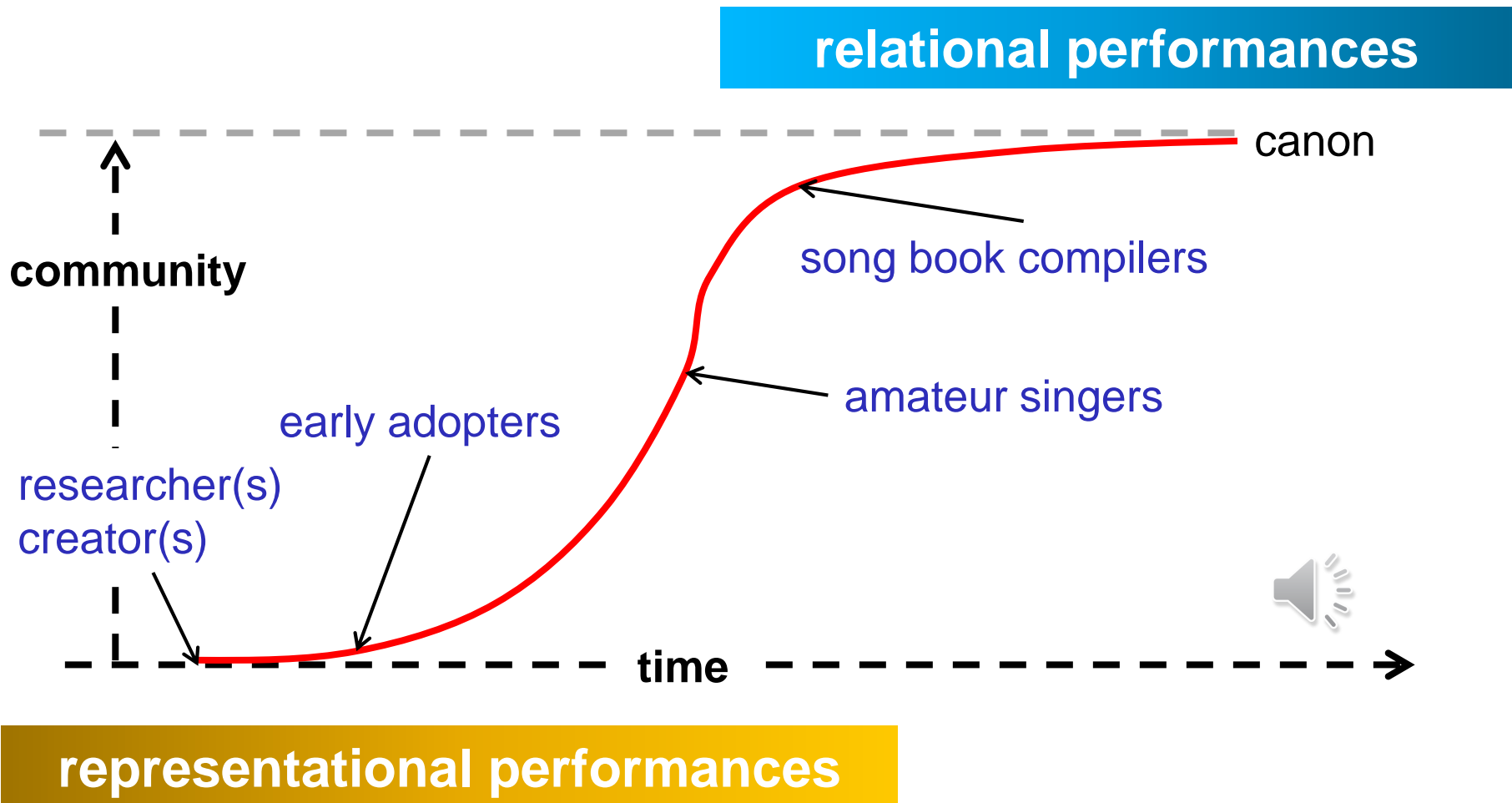
# 'Text' (Baumann and Briggs)



# The Folk Song Process: From adoption to diffusion



# From creation to canon



# Songs across the water

**Singing styles decisions and singing realities**



## Where to start from...

Previous work focused on

- **Use of “Mid-Atlantic” as a Standard in “British” popular music (Trudgill 1983, Bell 1984)**
- **Process of change in the standard emulated (Simpson 1990)**
- **Inconsistencies in the realisations**
- **Sociolinguistic explanations**

## Trudgill's concluding question

**“... even in the narrow field of pop-song pronunciation it is not possible ... to explain why *particular* ... consonantal, vocalic or other variants are retained, rejected or selected, and not others. ... until we are better able to account for why, say, the Clash ... sing [kɑːnt gɛɗ ə'hɛd] (rather than [kænt gɛɗ ə'hɛd] or [kɑːnt gɛ? ə'hɛd]), we as sociolinguists may perhaps not be able to make much progress either.”**

**(Trudgill 1983: 159-160)**

# Salient differences between SBE and GenAm

| Style Feature | orthographic representation          | Standard British English (SBE) / (RP)            | General American (GenAm)                                |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| SF1           | Vowels in <i>bath</i> and <i>hat</i> | [ɑ:] or [æ] respectively                         | [æ]   |
| SF2           | Vowels in <i>not</i> and <i>all</i>  | rounded [ɒ] and [ɔ:]                             | unrounded lower back vowel [ɑ] for both                 |
| SF3           | The vowel in <i>eye</i>              | diphthong [aɪ]                                   | half-lengthened [aː] (Confederate Vowel)                |
| SF4           | Postvocalic /r/ as in <i>car</i>     | lengthening of the vowel [:]                     | alveolar / retroflex approximant, [ɹ] or [ɻ]            |
| SF5           | Intervocalic /t/ as in <i>city</i>   | [t <sup>h</sup> ] or [t] ([ʔ] regional variants) | [d] (Simpson (1999: 345))<br>[ɾ] (Trudgill 1983)<br>[ɾ] |

**SF1 [ɑ:] and [æ] / SF3 Confederate vowel /  
SF4 rhoticity / SF5 Intervocalic –t–**

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## **The Beatles Live at the BBC: ‘Young Blood’ (1964)**

(1) I saw her standing on the corner  
[aɪ sɔː hə 'stændɪŋ ən ðə 'kɔːnə]  
A yellow ribbon in her hair [hɜ hɜː]  
...



I can't get you out of my mind  
[aː kənt 'getʃə arə maː maːnd]

I tried to talk but I just stood there [ðɜ]

## SF2 (Un)rounded low back vowel / SF4 rhoticity / SF5 Intervocalic –t–

### Lindisfarne: Caught in the Act (1983)

(2) I must [α must] stop going [gəɪn] to parties ['pɑ:ti:z], ...

My hair is changing colour ['kulə]

and I'm getting kind [kɛɪnd] of thin

... Next time [tɛɪm] you see me there,

will you kindly ['kɛɪndli] throw me out [ɛʊ?].

(3) I'm a lover not a fighter  
[a'm ə ɪ'ʌvə nɔ: ə fa'fɪ:tə]

and I'm [am] really [ɹi:ɪ] built for [fɔ:] speed

## SF4 Rhoticity

### Rolling Stones: 'Little Red Rooster' (1965)

- (3a) If you see my little red rooster [**'ru:stə**]  
Please drive him home  
Ain't had no peace in the farmyard [**'fɑ:mjɑ:d**]  
Since my little red rooster's [**'ru:stə z**] been gone



### Howlin' Wolf: 'Little Red Rooster' (1971)

- (3b) If you see my little red rooster [**'ru:stə**]  
Please drive him home  
There's no peace in the barnyard [**'bɑ:njɑ:d**]  
Since the little red rooster [**'ru:stə**] been gone





## Britpop: various style features

### Oasis: 'Wonderwall' (1995)

- (5) Today [tʊdeɪ] is gonna be the day  
When they gonna throw it back to [tu] you  
By now you shoulda somehow  
Realised [riə'laʊzd] what you gotta ['gɑrə] do [du:]  
I don't believe that anybody [ɛnɪ'bɑ:di]  
Feels the way I do [du:] about you now.



To compare:

### Beatles: 'With a Little Help from My Friends' (1968)

- (6) Do you need anybody? [ɛnɪ'bɑ:di]  
I need somebody [sʌm'bɑ:di] to love.





## The picture so far

**Mainly orientation towards GenAm**

- **SF1 to SF5 relatively frequently observed**
- **Lack of rhoticity in the Stones**
- **Genre is a strong factor in style choice**
  - **Novelty or Folk / Music Hall inspired songs use other models**
  - **Punk and Britpop represent a departure (at least in parts)**

**But there are inconsistencies that are almost systematic...**

**(Only) manifestation of insufficient mastery of reference style?**

## SF2, 3, 4, and 5 revisited

### The Beatles: 'Hey Jude' (1968)

(7)

...

to make it better ['bɛtʰə] better ['bɛrə] better ['bɛrə] ...



### Cat Stevens: 'Wild World' (1970)

(8)

Hope you have a lot of [ə 'laɪə]

nice things to wear [weə]

But then a lot of [ə 'laɪə] nice things

turn bad out there [ðeə]

Oooh baby baby it's a wild [waɪld?] world [wɜ:ld]

It's hard to get by [baɪ] just upon a smile [smaɪl]



## An alternative explanation

SF2: [ɑ] preferred to [ɒ]

SF3: [aʔ] preferred to [aɪ]

SF4: [ɾ] preferred to [t] or [t<sup>h</sup>]

SF5: [ɜ] preferred to [ɹ]

Preferred sounds are  
easier for legato notes  
easier for held notes  
“carry more sound”

**Inconsistencies**

**due to Sonority**

**less sociolinguistic ineptitude**

# Sonority, a brief reminder

Most sonorous



12 low (open) vowels

11 mid vowels

10 high (close) vowels

9 glides

8 flaps/taps

7 laterals

6 nasals

5 voiced fricatives

4 voiceless fricatives

3 voiced plosives

2 voiceless plosives

Least sonorous

1 complex plosives /affricates

Burquest and Payne  
1993

# GenAm 5(+) in terms of sonority

| Style Feature | SBE / RP                                | GenAm   | comparison of sonority                                      |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| SF1           | [ɑ:] or [æ] respectively.               | [æ]   | not really significant                                      |
| SF2           | rounded [ɒ] and [ɔ:].                   | unrounded low back vowel [ɑ]                          | unrounded lower vowel preferred: easier passage             |
| SF3           | [aɪ]                                    | [aˈ] (Confederate Vowel)                              | avoidance of closure preferred                              |
| SF4           | Postvocalic /r/ lengthening of vowel[:] | alveolar, possibly retroflex approximant, [ɹ] or [ɻ]. | avoidance of closure preferred                              |
| yod-dropping  | nju:z                                   | nu:z  | avoidance of opening preferred                              |
| SF5           | Intervocalic /t/                        | alveolar flap/tap [ɾ]                                 | voiced, minimal interruption of vowel sound; flap preferred |

# Marking of Style Choices

Interaction between **style choice** and **manifestation of features** in Rock and Pop vocals:

- unmarked
- /semi-marked
- marked
- conspicuously marked

# Marked SBE: Americans going British

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## The Monkees: 'Last Train to Clarksville' (1966)

- (9) Take the last [lɑ:st] train to Clarksville ['klɑ:ksvɪl].  
I'll [aɪl] be waiting ['weɪt<sup>h</sup>ɪŋ] at the station.  
We'll have time [taɪm]  
for coffee ['kɒfɪ] - flavoured kisses  
And a bit of conversation [ˌkɔ:nvə'seɪʃən].



## Jefferson Airplane: 'White Rabbit' (1967)

- (10) One pill makes you larger  
and one pill makes you small [smɔ:l],  
And the ones that mother ['mʌðə] gives you  
Don't do anything at all [ət<sup>h</sup>].  
Go ask [ask?] Alice/When she's ten feet tall [t<sup>h</sup>ɔ:l]

## Marked SBE: Emphasizing British “sophistication” or “artiness”

### Sophie Ellis-Bextor: Murder on the Dance Floor(2002)

(13) It's murder on the dance floor [**dans flɔ:**]

But you'd better not ['bɛrə **nɒt** (?)]  
kill the groove, DJ.

Gonna [gɒnə] burn [bɜ:n]  
this god[gɒd]damn house ...



### Pink Floyd: Us and Them (1973)

(14) Down and out

It can't [kɑ:nt] be helped

but there's a lot of it [**lɒt** əv **ɪt** ə'baʊt] about





# Conspicuously marked: Regional accent

**blur:** Country House (1995)

- (15) City dweller ['dweɪl<sup>a</sup>], successful fella  
Thought [θɔ:t] to himself  
“Oops I’ve got a lot [<sup>a</sup>v gɒt ə lɒt] of money”  
I’m caught in a rat race [kɔ:ʔ in ə raʔ reɪs] terminally  
  
I’m [<sup>a</sup>m] a professional cynic  
but my heart’s not in it  
[bʌʔ mə hɑ:ʔs nɒʔ in ɪʔ]  
I’m payin’ the price ...



# Conclusion: Unmarked style choices

**unmarked:** American realisation of SF1, SF2, SF3, SF 4,  
non-rhotic realisation of SF5 possible

**semi-marked:** SF5 non-rhotic for Blues,  
lɜːv etc. for Southern Rock

**SF1-4 American realisation**

**Default based on**

**→ high sonority**

**→ genre compatibility**

**→ reference style**

# Conclusion: Marked style choices

**marked:**                      **SBE (/regional British styles)**  
                                     **SF1 [ɑɪ], SF2 mainly rounded, but not**  
                                     **always**  
                                     **SF3 on most semi-short notes [aɪ],**  
                                     **otherwise often [aʼ]**  
                                     **SF4 in legato [ɾ] otherwise usually [t] or [t<sup>h</sup>]**  
                                     **SF5 non-rhotic except for regional styles**

**Oriented towards**

**→SBE reference style with neutral sonority**

**→high sonority features may “intrude”**

# Conclusion: Conspicuously marked style choice

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Conspicuously  
marked:

“Classy” SBE / regional British styles  
as above with avoidance of all GenAm  
features  
local dialect features

Oriented towards

→reference style with neutral sonority

→reference style also “against” high sonority features

**Thanks very much for  
listening.**

