

Capsicun

A case of phonological variation in Australian English

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Capsicum or capsicum?



Other words?



From a Coles grocery store, May 2009.

Capsicun observations

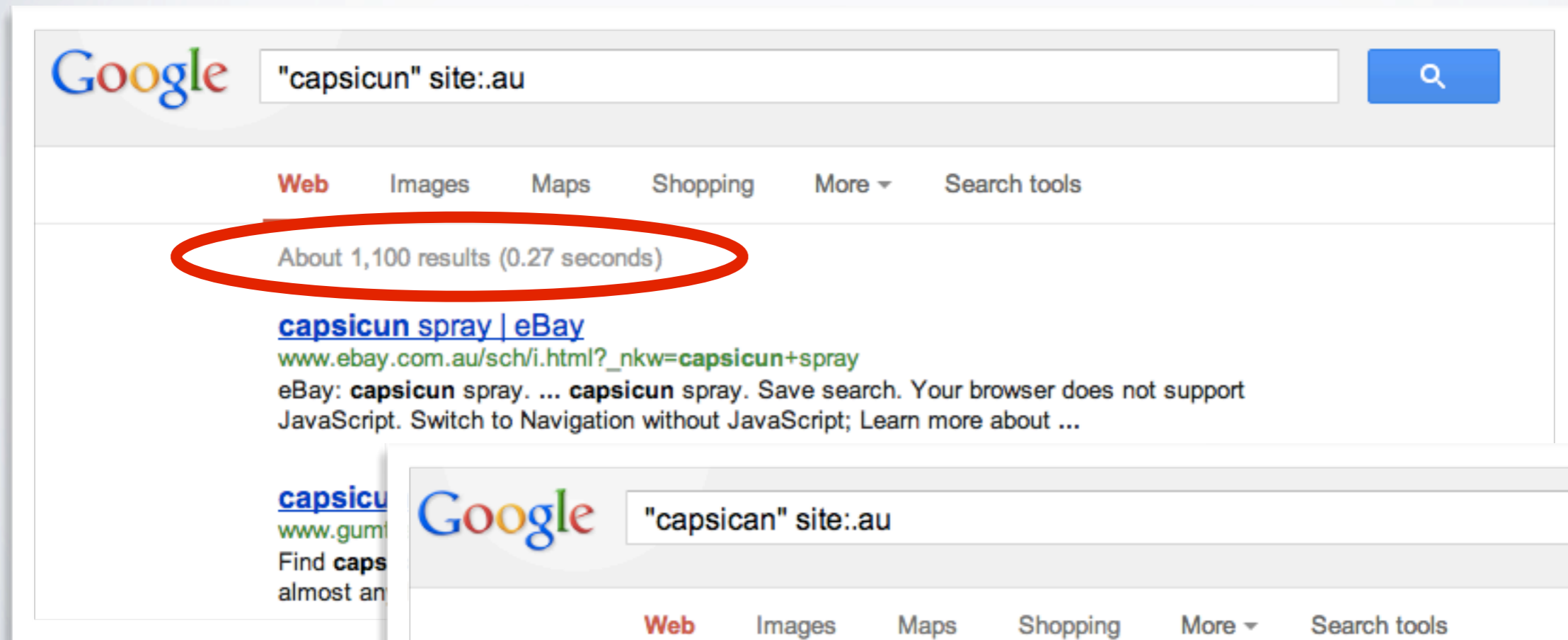


Capsicun observations

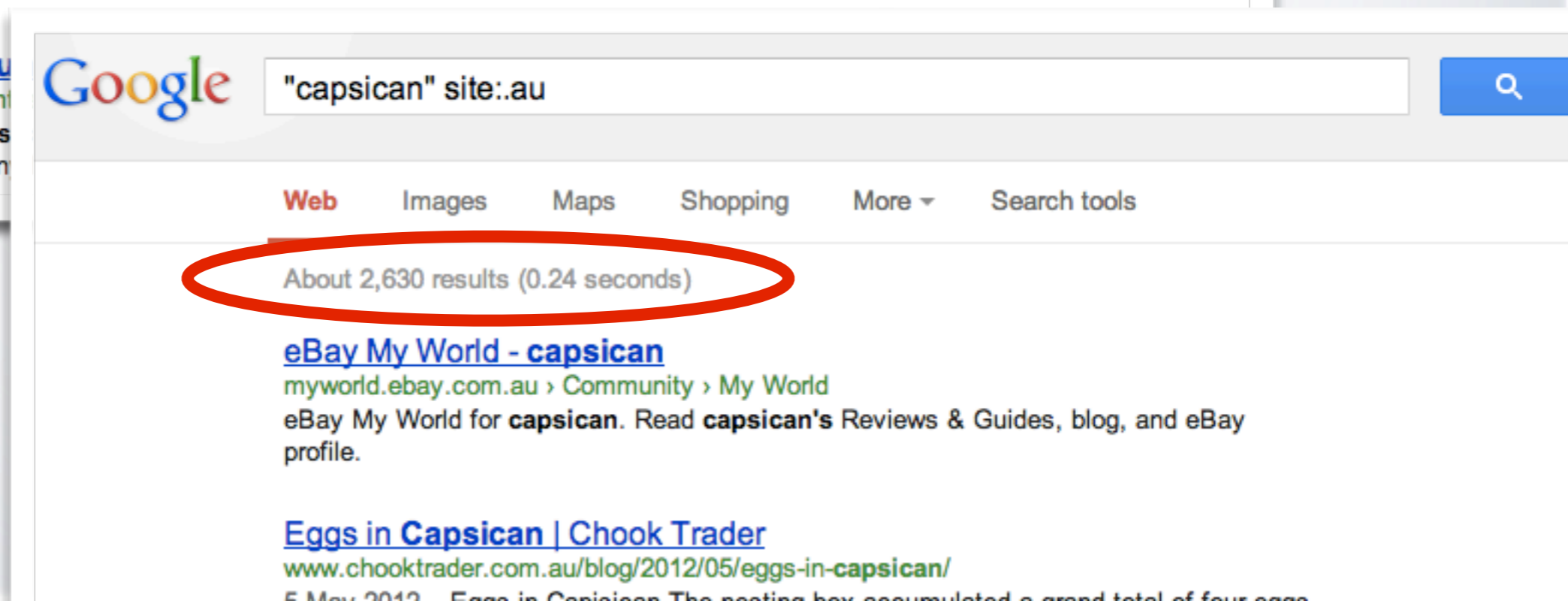


Data from the web

Many Australian web pages show *capsicun* or *capsican*.



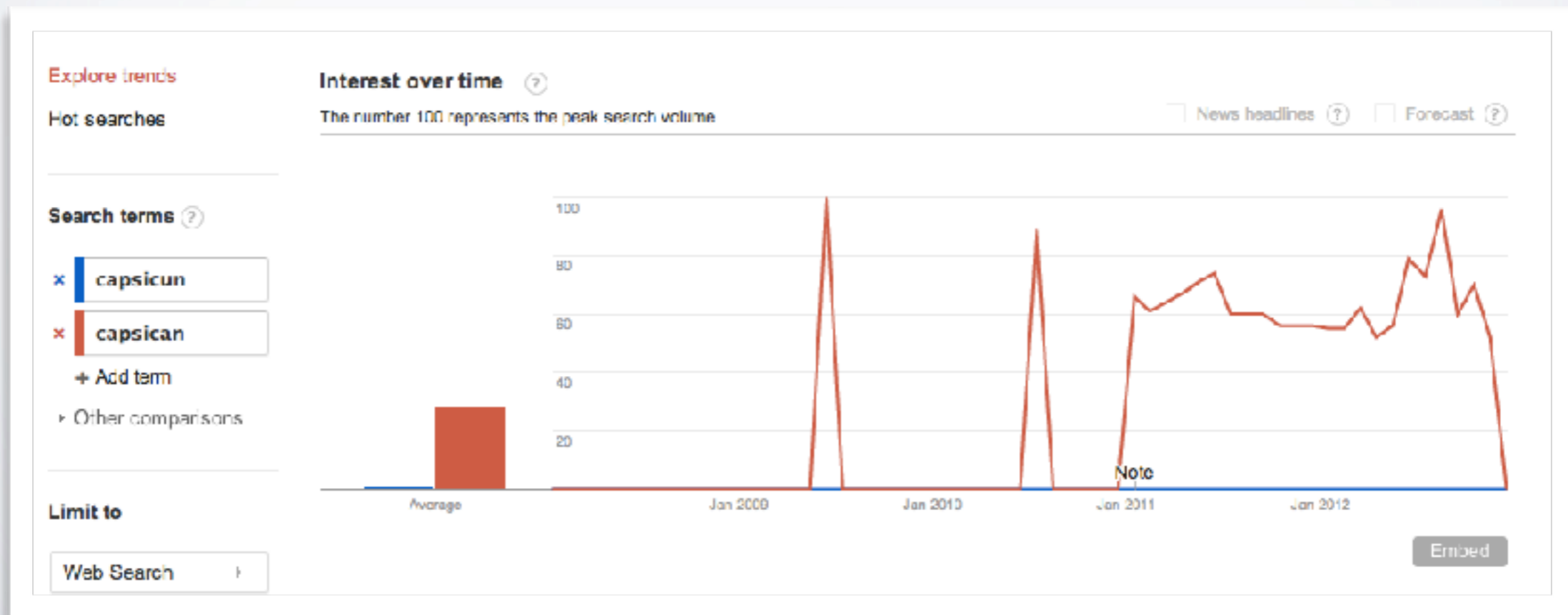
A screenshot of a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "capsicun" site:.au. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for "Web", "Images", "Maps", "Shopping", "More", and "Search tools". The "Web" tab is selected. Below the tabs, the search results are displayed. The first result is "capsicun spray | eBay" with the URL "www.ebay.com.au/sch/i.html?_nkw=capsicun+spray". The text below the URL reads "eBay: capsicun spray. ... capsicun spray. Save search. Your browser does not support JavaScript. Switch to Navigation without JavaScript; Learn more about ...". The text "About 1,100 results (0.27 seconds)" is circled in red.



A screenshot of a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "capsican" site:.au. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for "Web", "Images", "Maps", "Shopping", "More", and "Search tools". The "Web" tab is selected. Below the tabs, the search results are displayed. The first result is "eBay My World - capsican" with the URL "myworld.ebay.com.au > Community > My World". The text below the URL reads "eBay My World for capsican. Read capsican's Reviews & Guides, blog, and eBay profile." The text "About 2,630 results (0.24 seconds)" is circled in red.

Data from the web

People in Australia sometimes search for variants of *capsicum*.



Google Trends

<http://www.google.com.au/trends/>

[explore#q=capsicum%2C%20capsican&geo=AU&date=1%2F2008%2060m&cmpt=q](http://www.google.com.au/trends/explore?q=capsicum%2C%20capsican&geo=AU&date=1%2F2008%2060m&cmpt=q)

Data from the web

This is true for other words, too.

	aluminium	capsicum	condominium	(a) modicum (of)	chrysanthemum	bacterium	paramecium
-un	7290	1,090	64	2	9,250	5	0
-an	151	2,800	0	0	2	0	0
-um	19,000,000	583,000	351,000	1,040,000	152,000	68,800	61,600
<i>m per n</i>	2553	150	5,484	520,000	16	13,760	

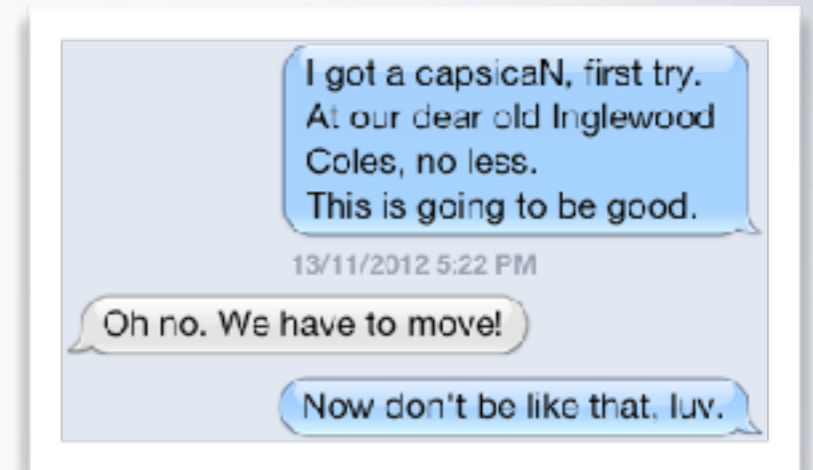
Attitudes about *capsicun*

"I don't know about anyone else but always annoys me when people say CapsicuN and not capsicum."

"It's wrong, but I know what they mean. It's not the kind of thing you'd pull someone up short on, because it's so common."

"It's just that some people can't help but pronounce some words incorrectly - it's not their fault, it's just the way they hear a word. The correct way IS capsicuM, with an M."

"I guess it's used by people who have never seen it spelt before."



Questions

How prevalent is *capsicun*?

Who is saying it?

Why is this happening?

Is this happening to other words?

Methodology

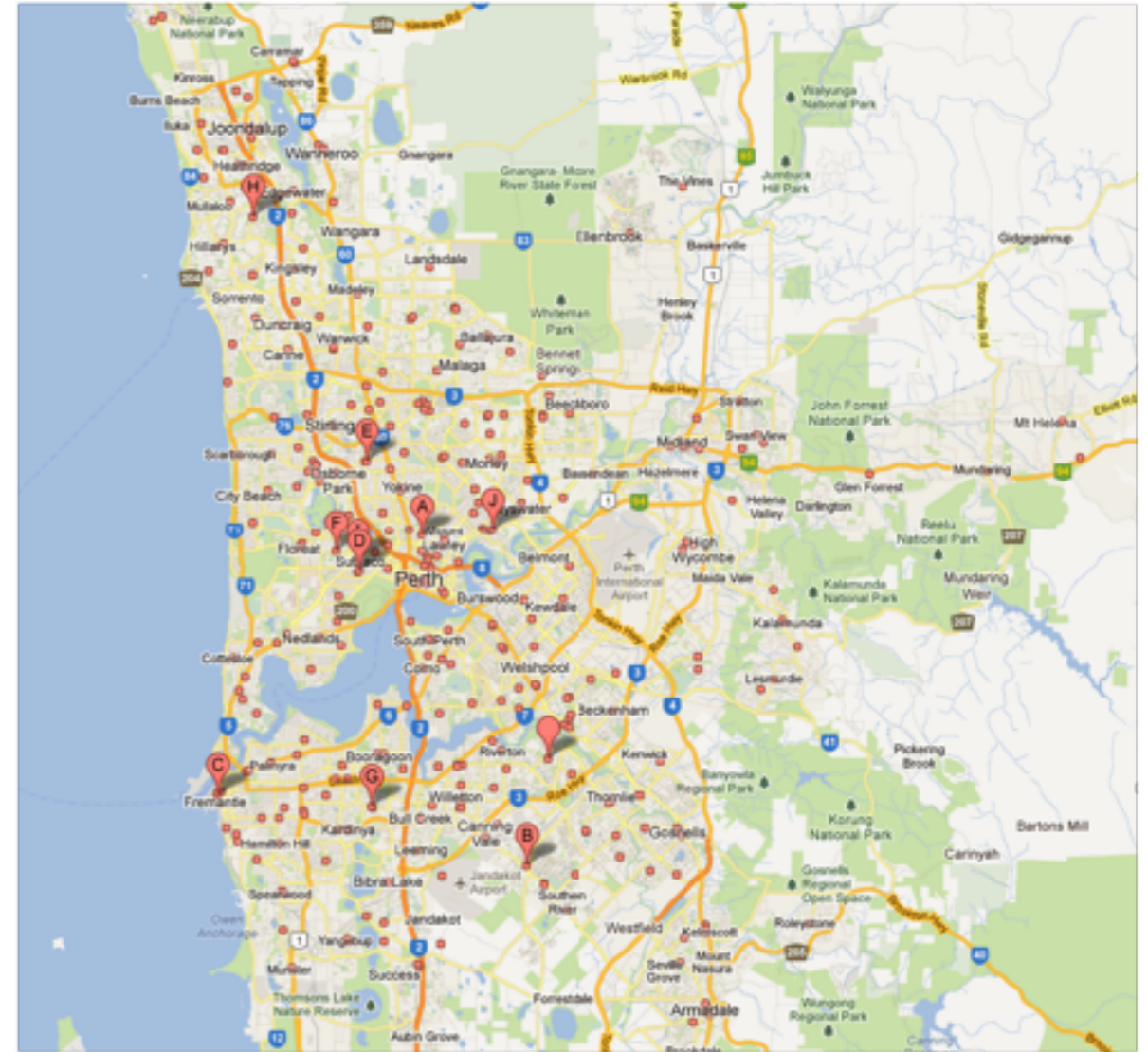
Similar to Labov's *fourth floor* study (1972)

Asked store workers:

“Is there a difference between the red *peppers* and the green *peppers*?”

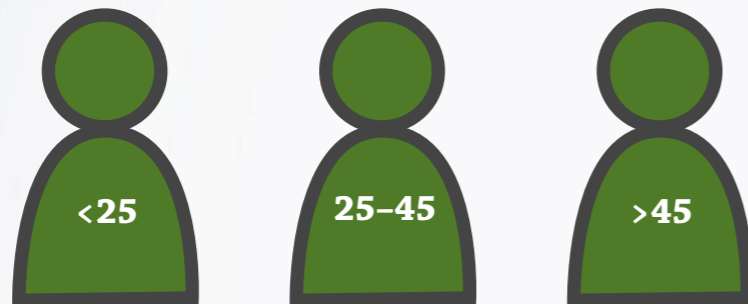
255 supermarkets within the Perth metropolitan area

304 data points

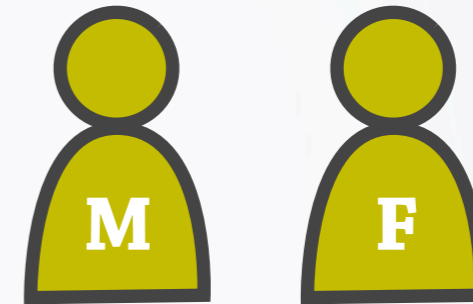


Variables

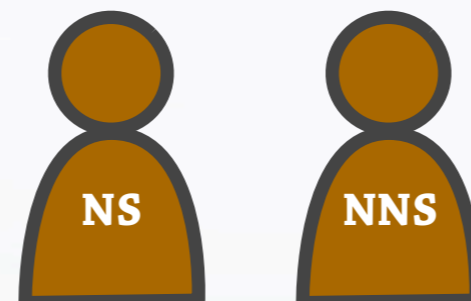
Age



Sex



Native speaker



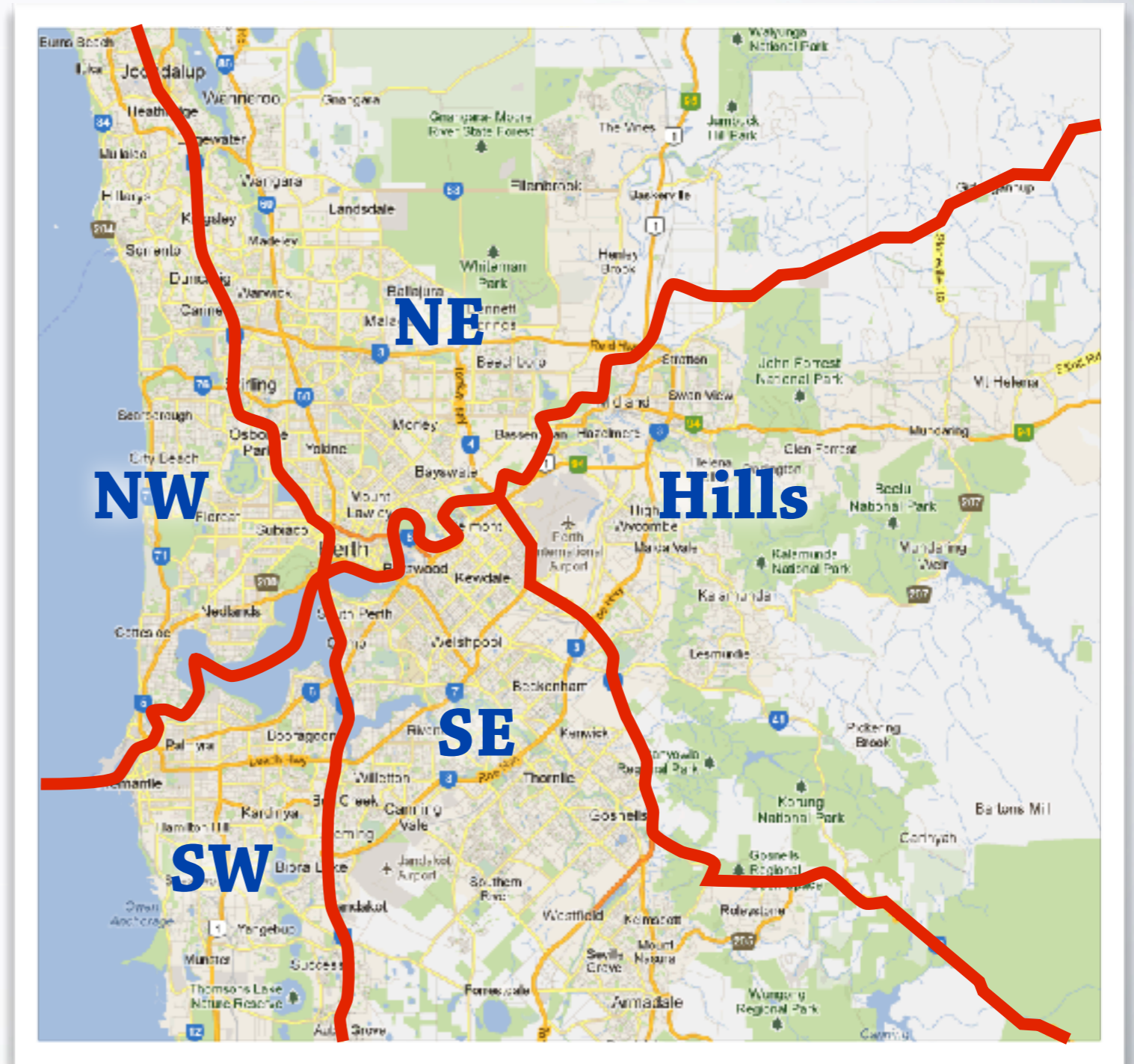
Kind of store

coles

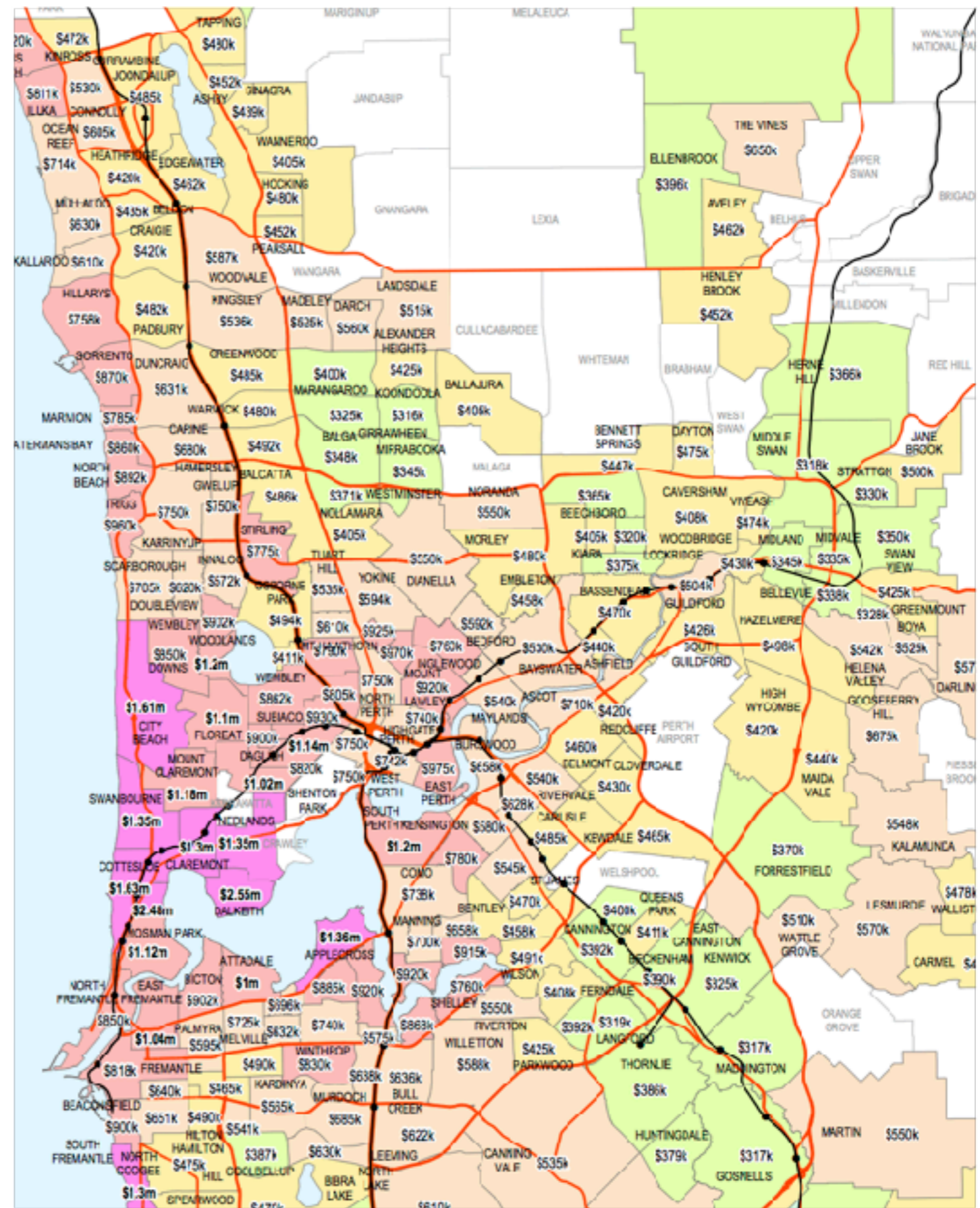
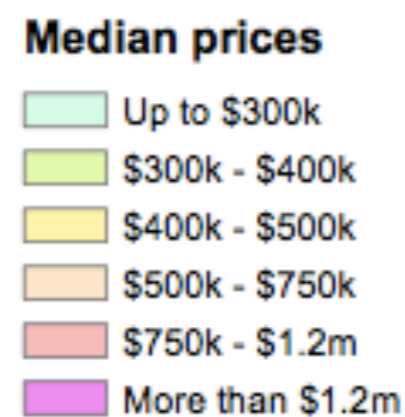


Other

Area



Social class



Hypotheses

This is a low-prestige variable

People will use less *capsicun* on the more careful reading

Capsicun will be more prevalent in working-class areas and low-prestige stores

IGA, fruit and veg, and other

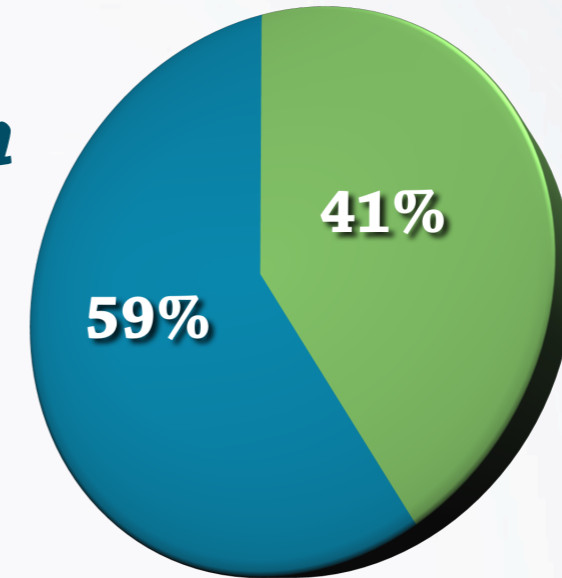
Overall prevalence

All respondents

capsicum 179

capsicun 125

capsicum



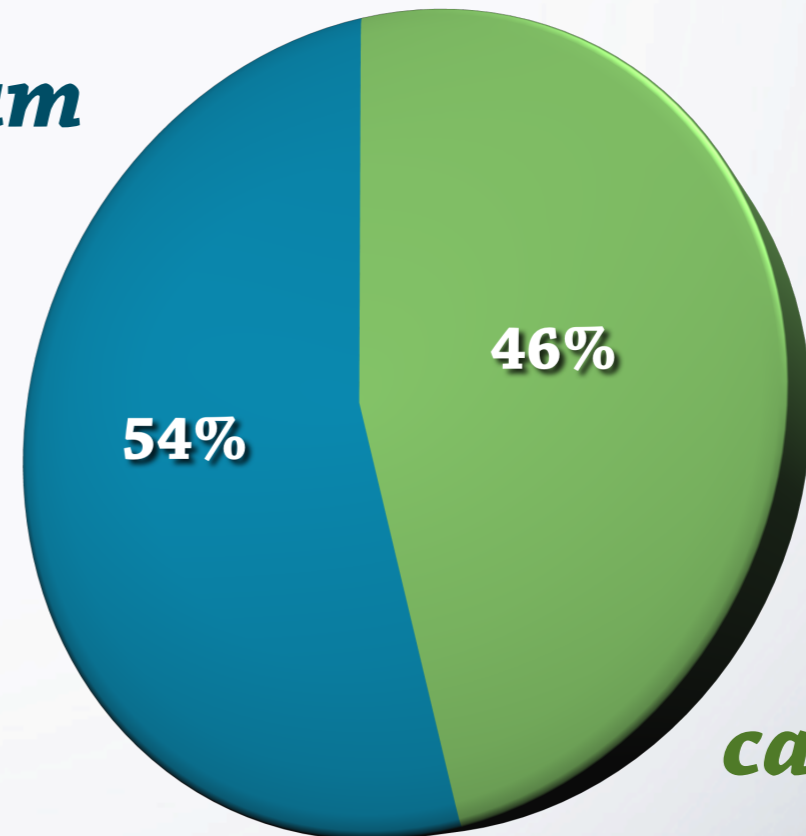
capsicun

When only native speakers are included

capsicum 128

capsicun 109

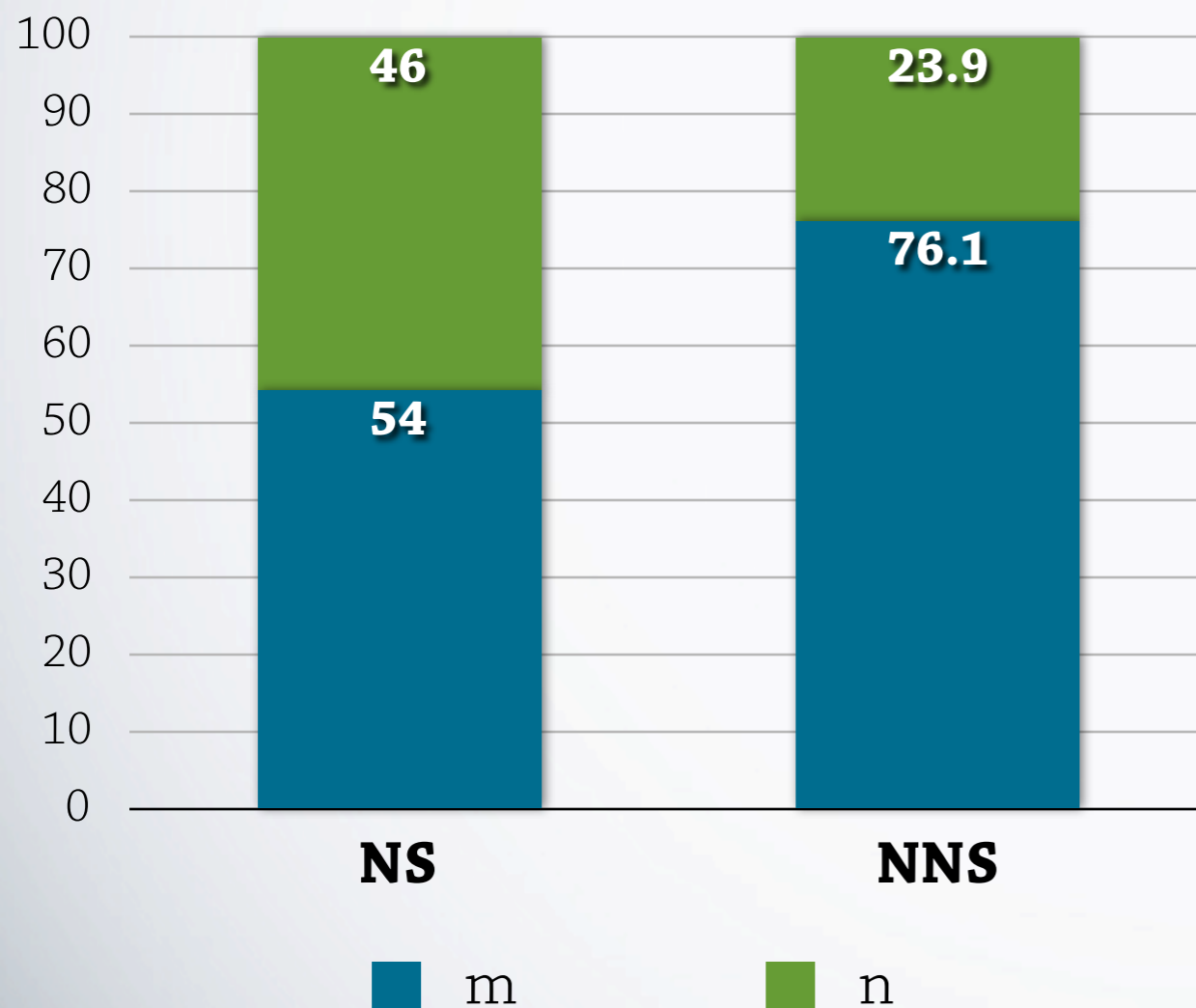
capsicum



capsicun

Native speaker (or not)

Percentages



Native speaker

Non-native speaker

	m	n
Native speaker	128	109
Non-native speaker	51	16

$$\chi^2 = 10.55$$

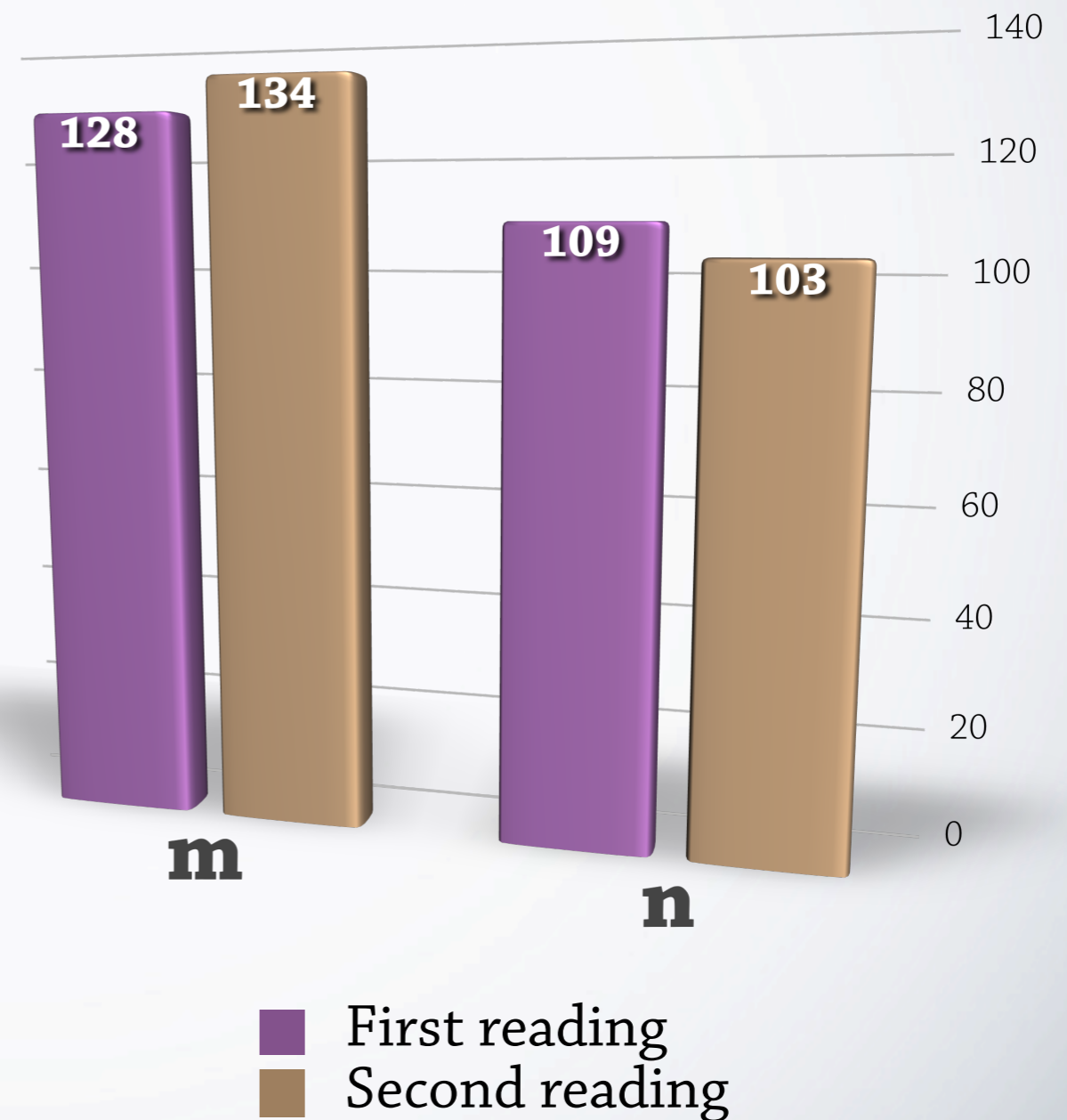
$$p\text{-value} = 0.0011$$

Switchers

Some switch from
capsicun to *capsicum*

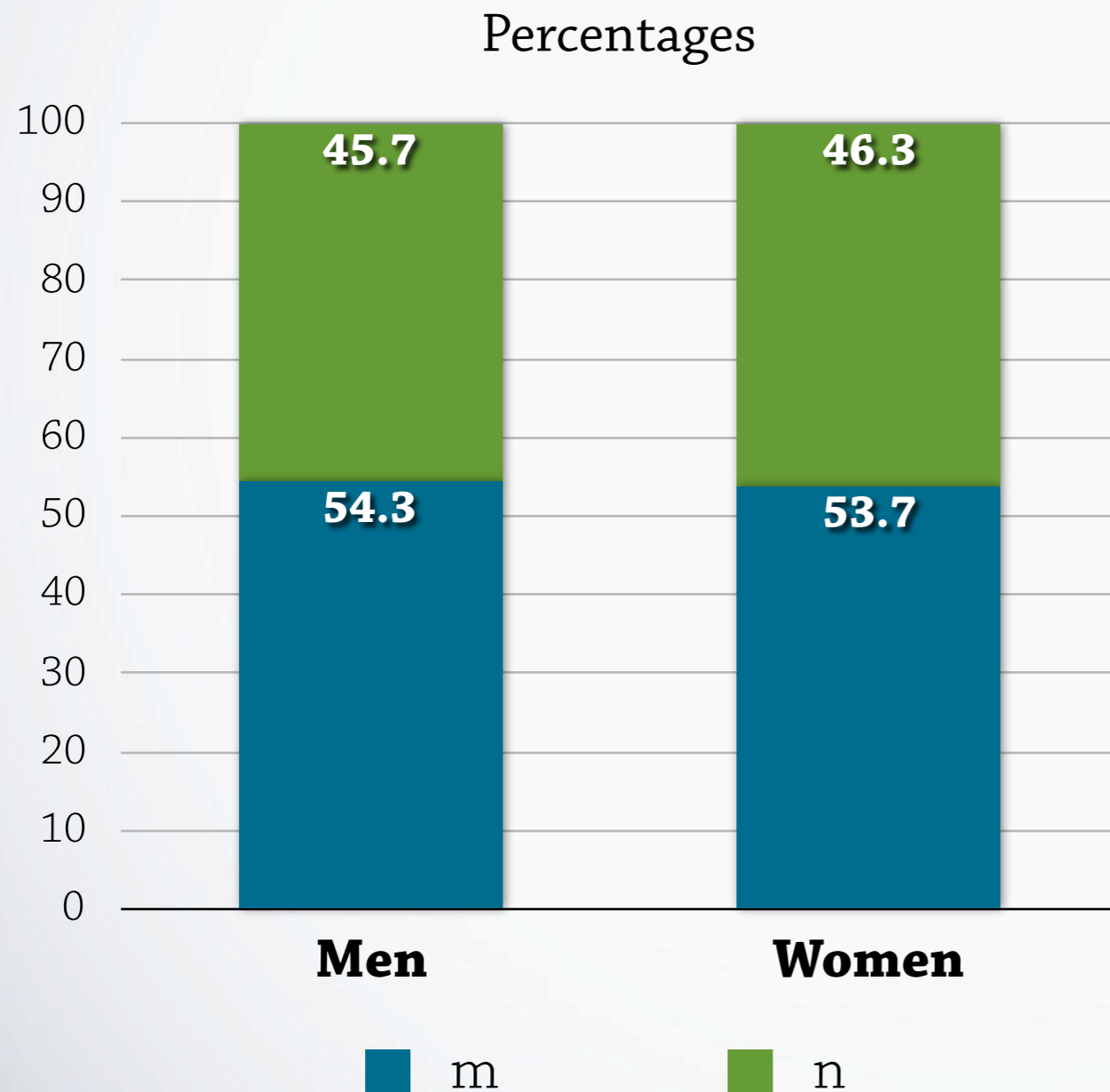
but surprisingly,
some switch in the
other direction

Instances of *capsicum* **m**
and *capsicun* **n**



Sex

Not significant.

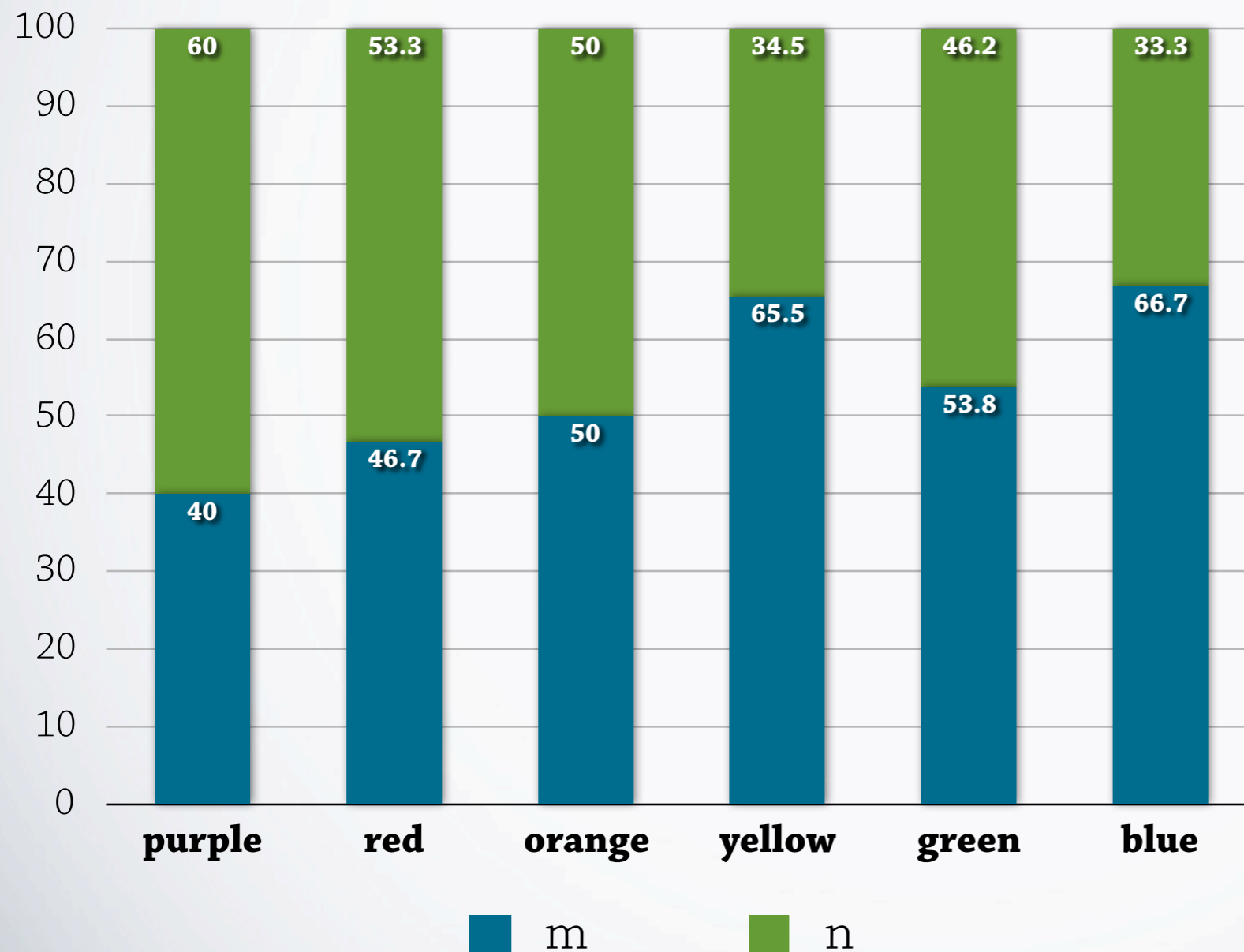


	m	n
Male	63	53
Female	65	56

$$\chi^2 = 0.008$$
$$p\text{-value} = 0.929$$

Class

Not significant.

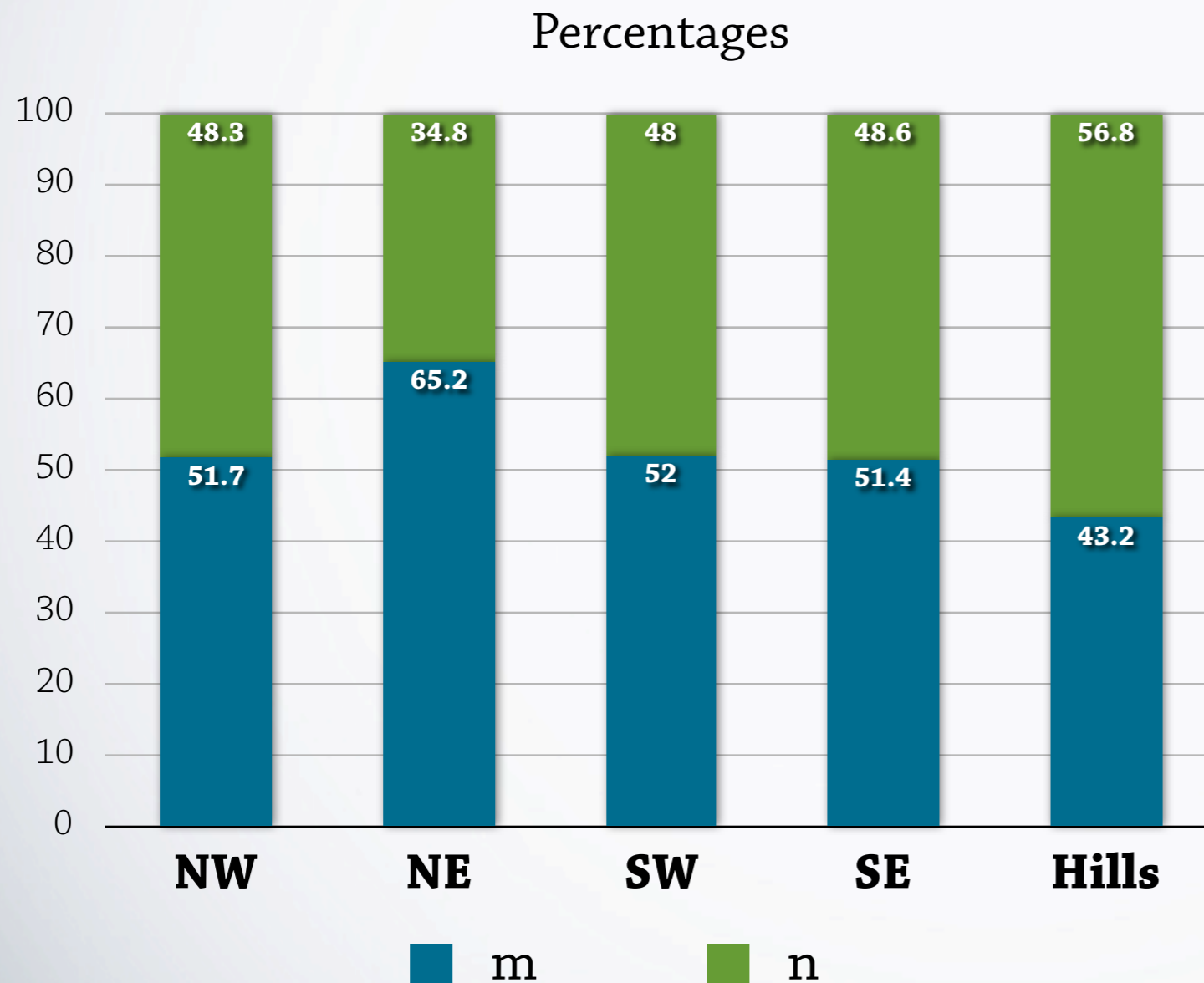


	m	n
purple	4	6
red	14	16
orange	42	42
yellow	36	19
green	28	24
blue	4	2

$$\chi^2 = 5.273$$
$$p\text{-value} = 0.383$$

Area

Not significant.



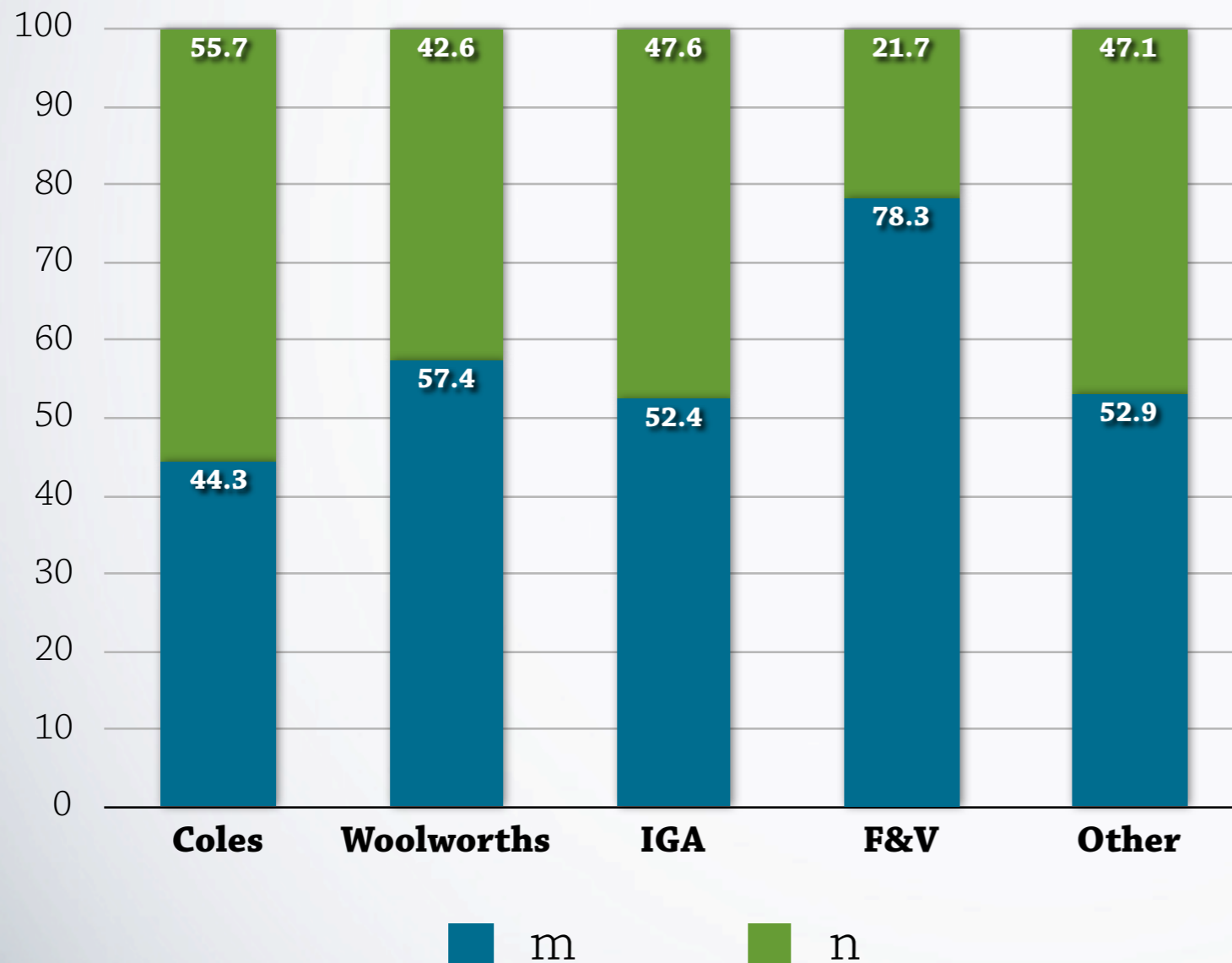
	m	n
Northwest	15	14
Northeast	45	24
Southwest	13	12
Southeast	36	34
Hills	19	25

$$\chi^2 = 5.856$$
$$p\text{-value} = 0.210$$

Kind of store

Not significant.

Percentages



coles

Woolworths
the fresh food people

IGA



other

	m	n
coles	27	34
Woolworths	31	23
IGA	43	39
other	18	5
other	9	8

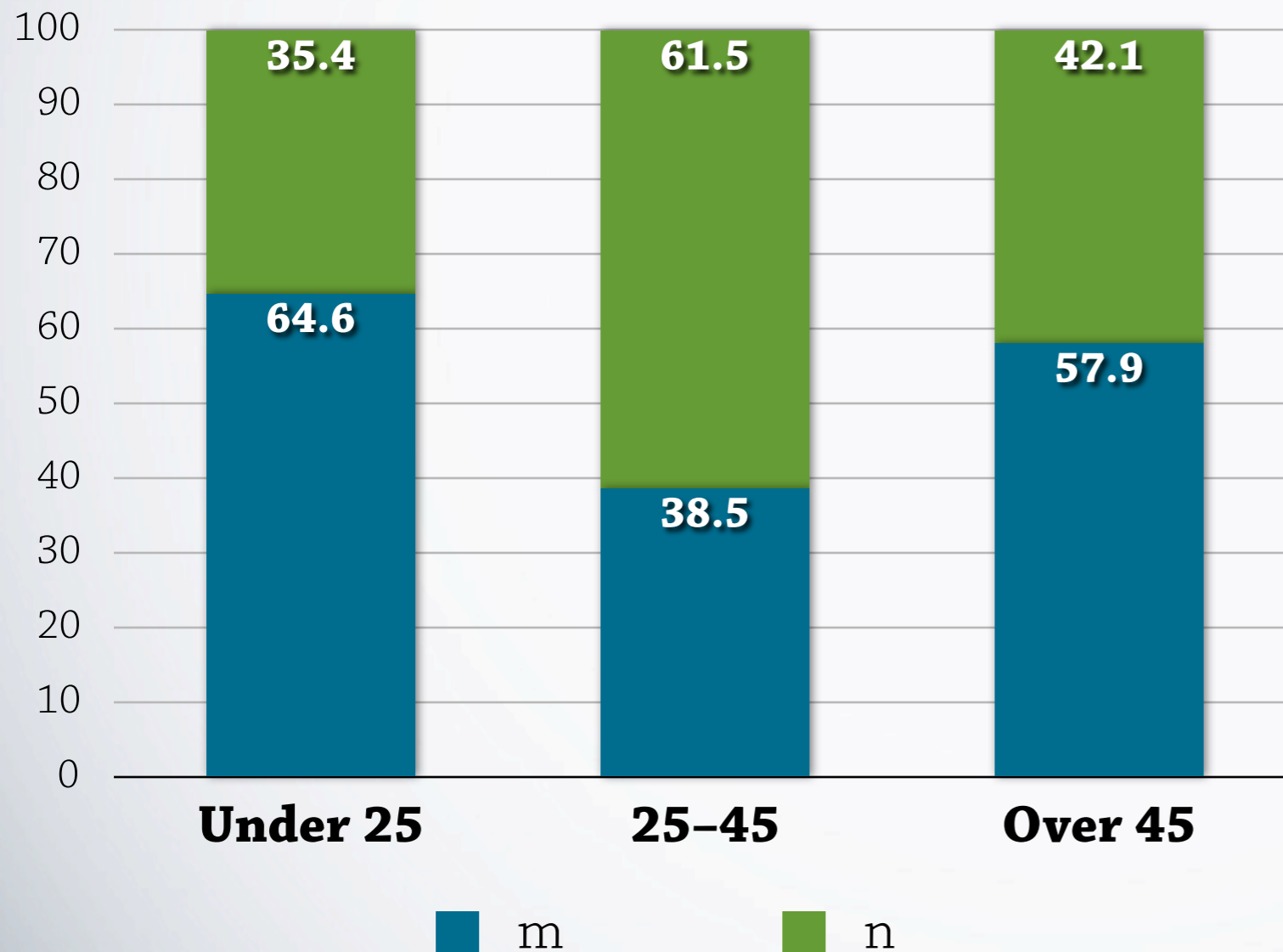
$$\chi^2 = 8.119$$

$$p\text{-value} = 0.087$$

Age

Significant

Percentages



	m	n
under 25	82	45
25-45	35	56
over 45	11	8

$\chi^2 = 14.67$, d.f.=2
 p -value = 0.0007

What's happening?

Possibility 1

This is an age-related feature.

Possibility 2

Age is standing in for something else.

The age variable is actually showing *class*
in a way that the *class* variable didn't catch.

What's happening?

Why didn't the *class* variable catch it?

Everyone was the *same* class.

Workers are unlikely to borrow prestige from a grocery store.

Why is this happening?

The Latin origin of *-um* words may not be very obvious

as with words ending in *-ium*

Many English words end in *-un* or *-an*

Alveolarisation is well-attested

workin', thinkin'...

<i>-ium</i>	126
<i>-um</i> or <i>-am</i>	233
<i>-un</i> or <i>-an</i>	495
<i>-ion</i>	1630

from a word list of 80,000 words

What about *chrysanthemum*?

Still ongoing

Some *chrysanthemum*

No *chrysanthemum***n**

Some *chrysanthe**n**um* (2 of 5)



Conclusions

The *capsicun* phenomenon is quite prevalent.

It correlates strongly with age

but this may be a proxy for social class.

There is a tendency to switch from *capsicun* to *capsicum* when respondents are paying more attention to their speech performance.

What's next?

More investigation into *capsican* in Perth

Try to pin down the role of age v. class

Other places in Australia?

Other words

chrysanthemum

Thank you.

And questions.