

Corpus Research Group, Lancaster University
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A corpus-based study of invariant tags in London English

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*Linguistic innovators:
The English of adolescents in London (2004–7)*

*Multicultural London English:
The emergence, acquisition and diffusion
of a new variety (2007–10)*

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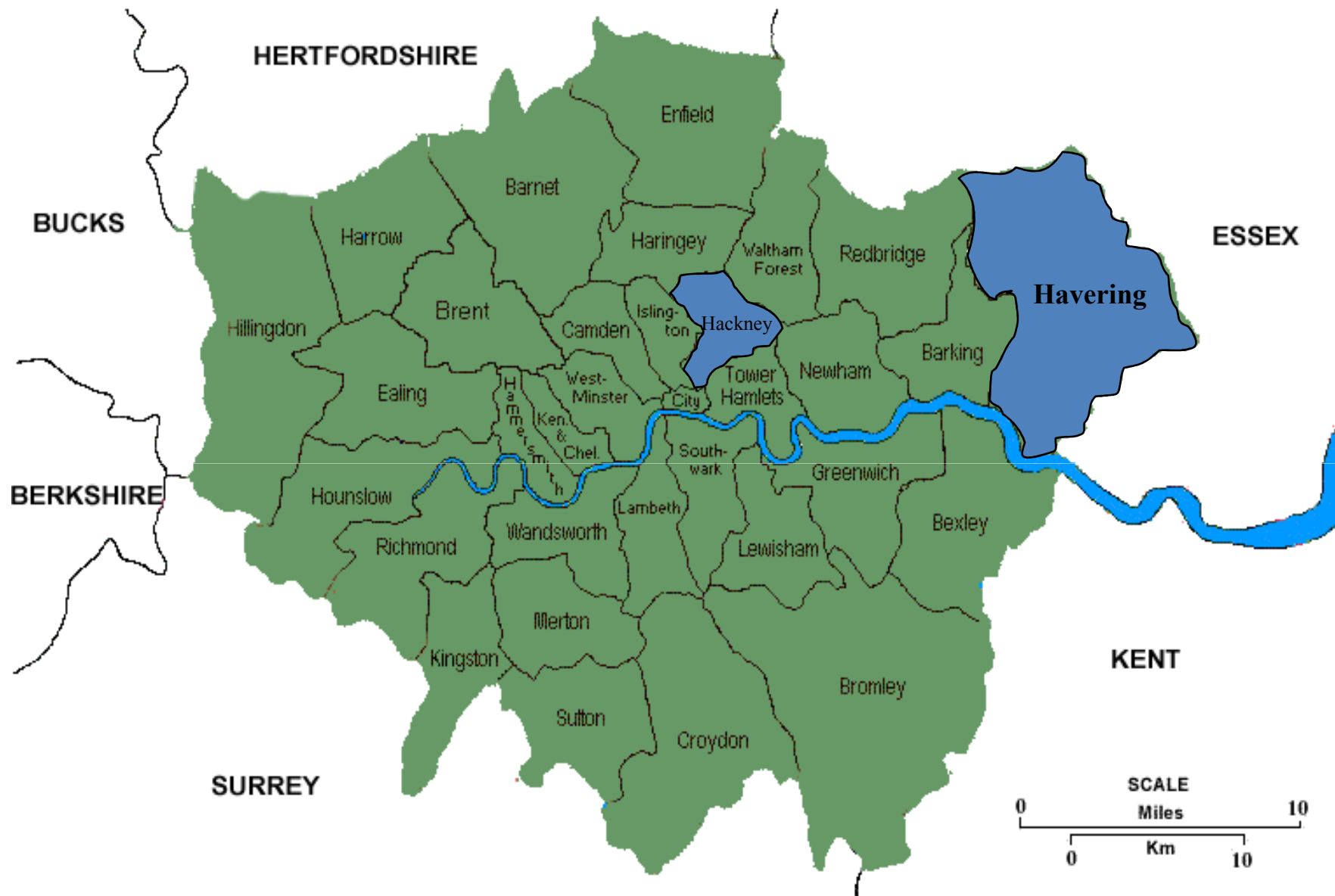
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<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/>

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/multicultural/>

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Why study London English?

- London as the centre of linguistic innovation in British English
 - Diffusion of linguistic features from inner to outer London and beyond
- London as a multicultural city
 - High level of dialect and language contact

Why study invariant tags?

- Frequent in spoken language
- Frequent in young people's speech
 - Young people are linguistic innovators
 - We're interested in linguistic innovation
- An innovative tag user = A linguistic innovator?

Invariant tags

- Part of a tag question
- Anchor and tag
 - Canonical tag
 - *It's cold, isn't it?*
 - *They're late, aren't they?*
 - Invariant tag
 - *It's cold, innit?*
 - *They're late, innit?*
- *innit* is an invariant tag

We examined:

- Simple invariant tags
 - *innit, okay, right, yeah*
- Multi-word invariant tags: (elliptical) clauses
 - *You get me*
 - *You know*
 - *(Do)/(If) (you) know what I mean*
 - *(Do) (you) know what I'm saying*

Some examples

- but he's been here for her **innit**?
- they just ain't got nothing **innit**?
- she's coming up for sixty now **yeah**?
- no the thing **right**? I I didn't mind **right**? but the thing that pissed me off is the that she brung the fight into the house
- he makes you laugh but he's just annoying **if you know what I mean**? but he's just he will come behind me once **yeah**? he come behind me and he's got my hood on my jacket and stuck it over my head

Linguistic Innovators Corpus (LIC)

- 2005/2008
- 1,3 million words
- London boroughs:
 - Hackney (inner London)
 - Havering (outer London)
- Speaker data:
 - age, gender, ethnicity, friendship network, social class (all working class)
- Sociolinguistic interviews

Sociolinguistic variables in LIC

- Age
 - Young (16-19)
 - Old (60+)
- Place of residence:
 - Hackney (inner London)
 - Havering (outer London)
- Sex
- Ethnicity
 - Anglo
 - Non-Anglo

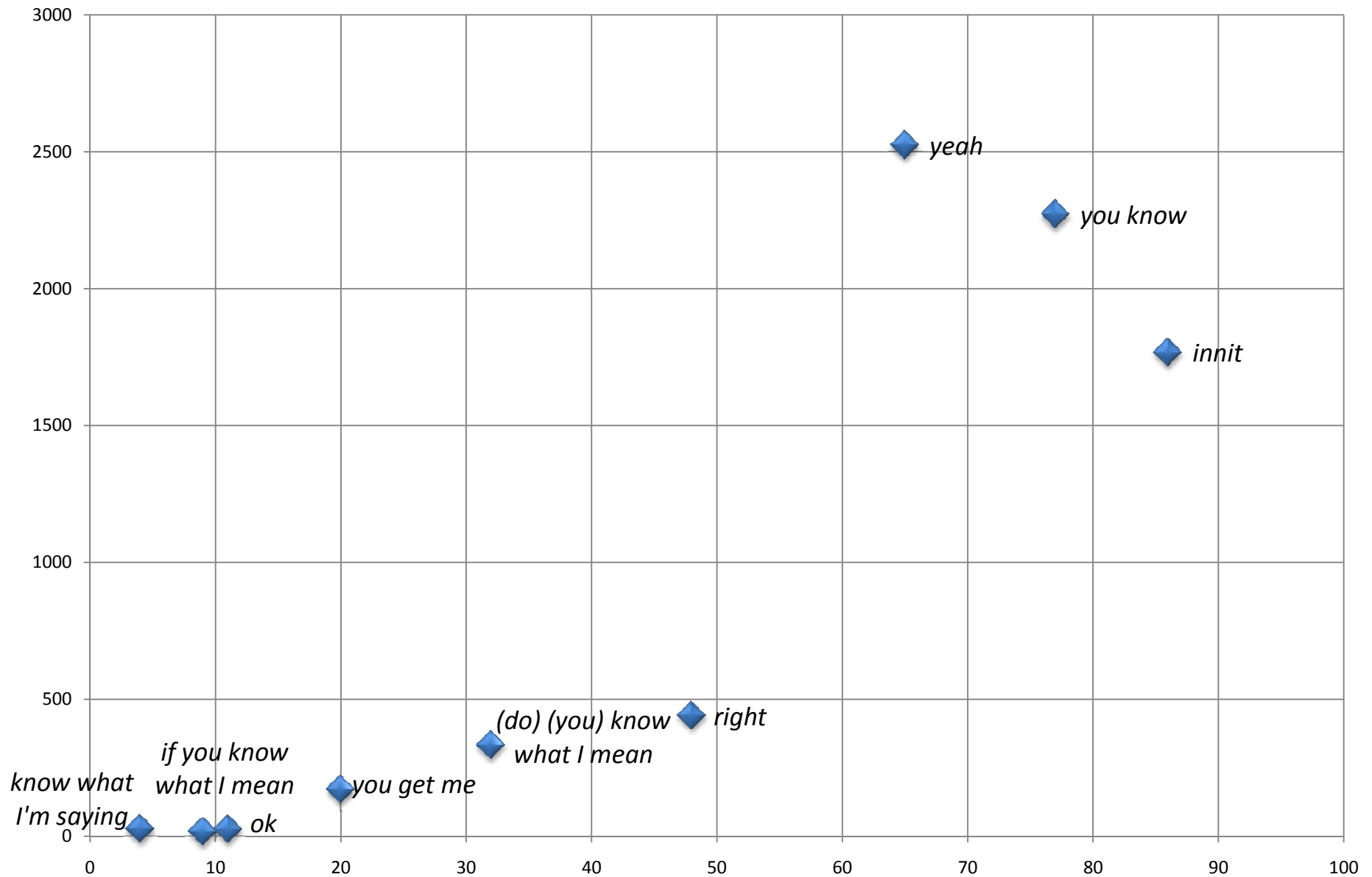
Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT)

- 1993
- 500,000 words
- London boroughs:
 - Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Camden (inner London)
 - Barnet (outer London), Hertfordshire
- Speaker data:
 - age, gender, social class
- Self recordings

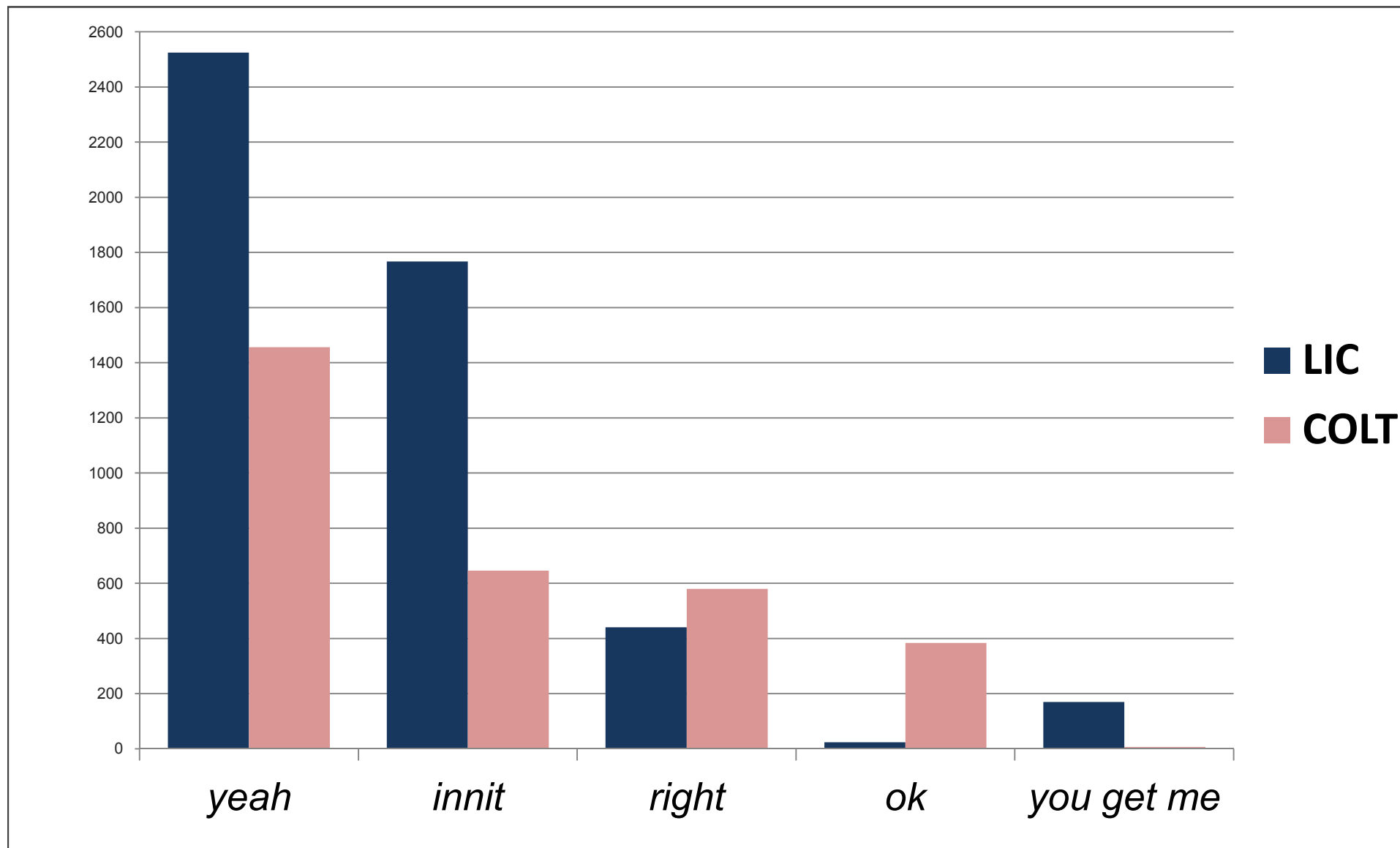
Metrics

- **Frequency**
 - occurrences per million words
- **Spread**
 - Ratio (%) of tag users to speakers

Young LIC speakers: frequency and spread



Young speakers in LIC and COLT: Comparison of frequencies



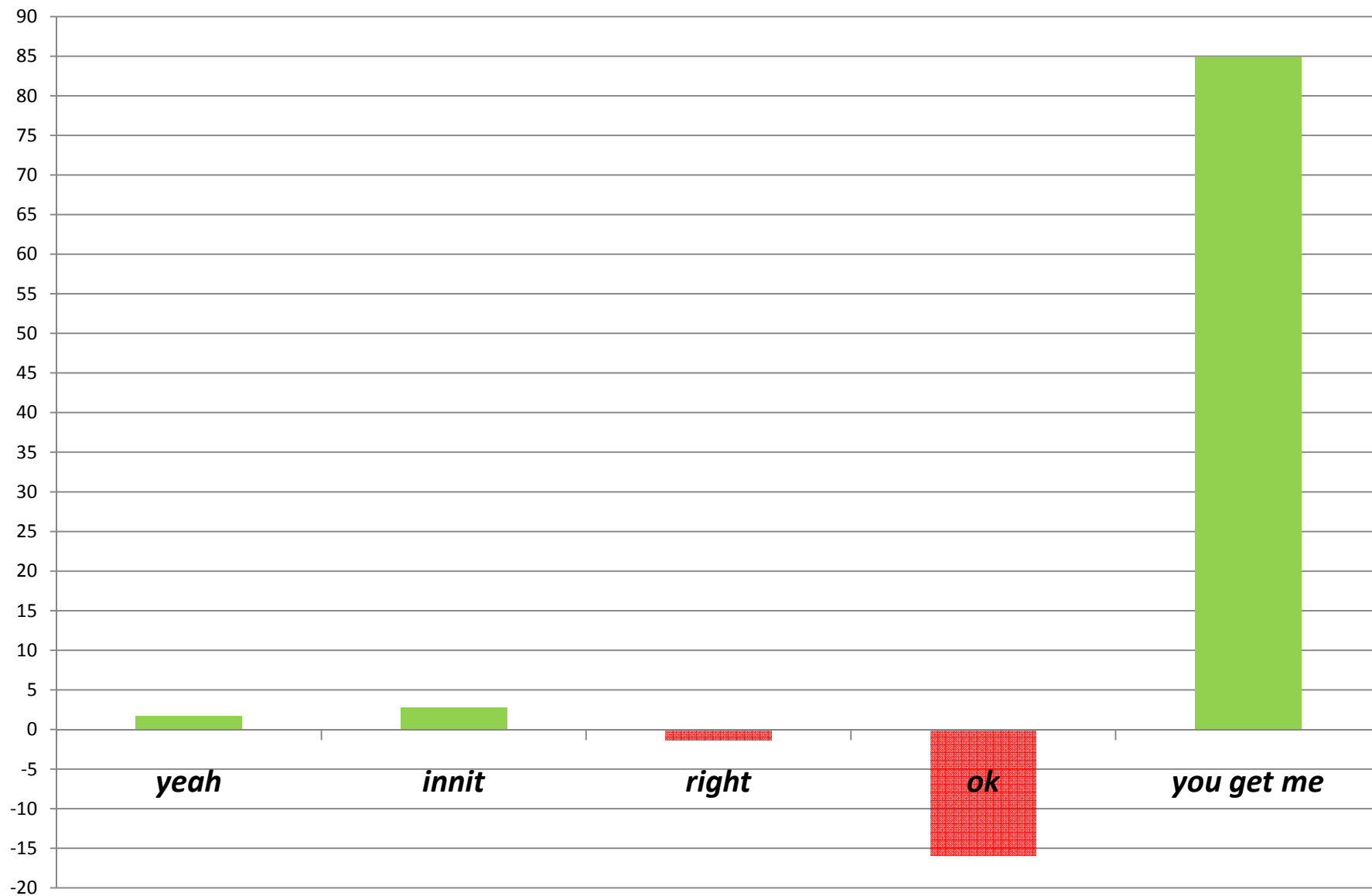
Difference ratio: LIC/COLT

(without *you get me*)



Difference ratio LIC/COLT

(including *you get me*)

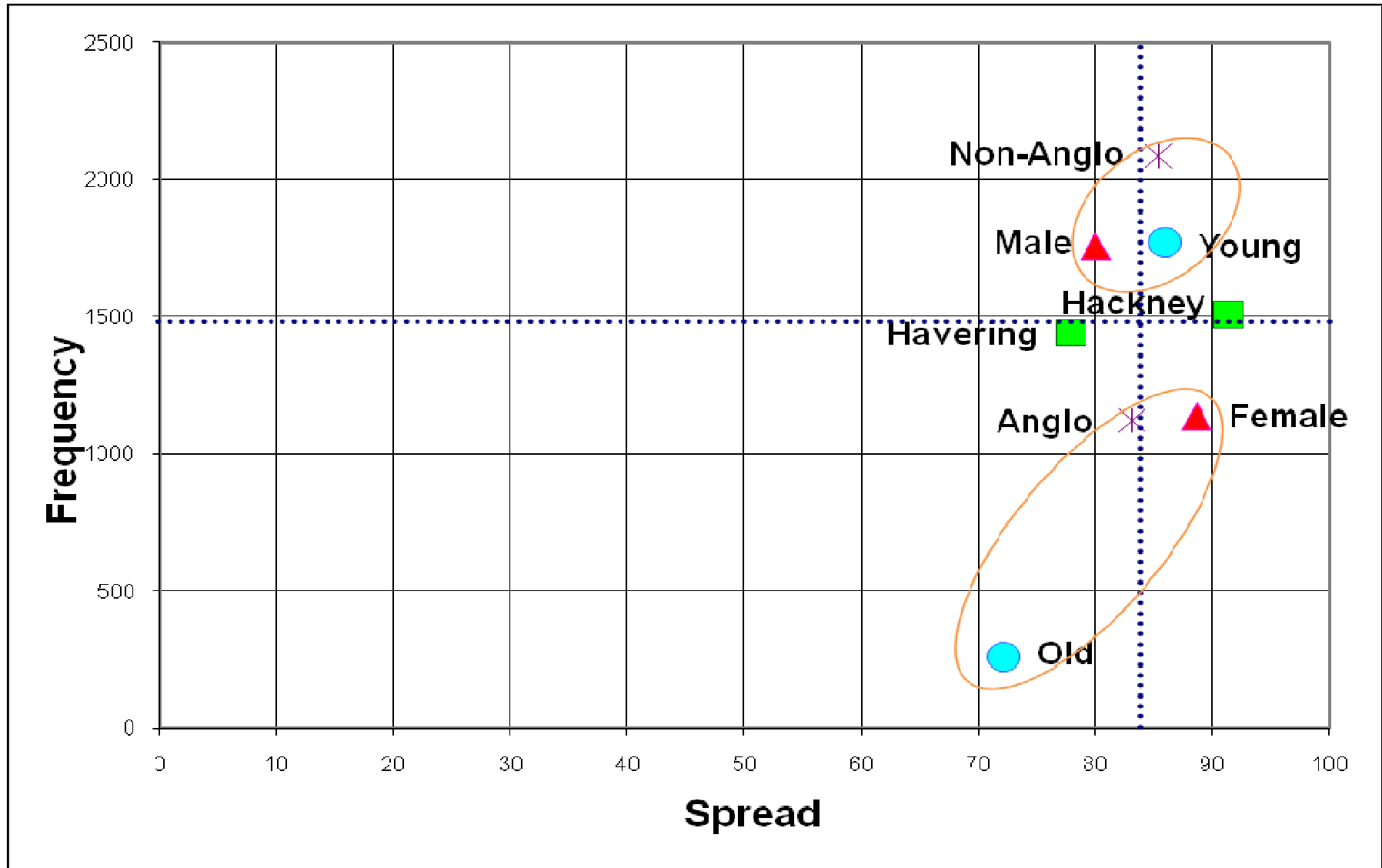


**Looking at tags:
Use by sociolinguistic variables**

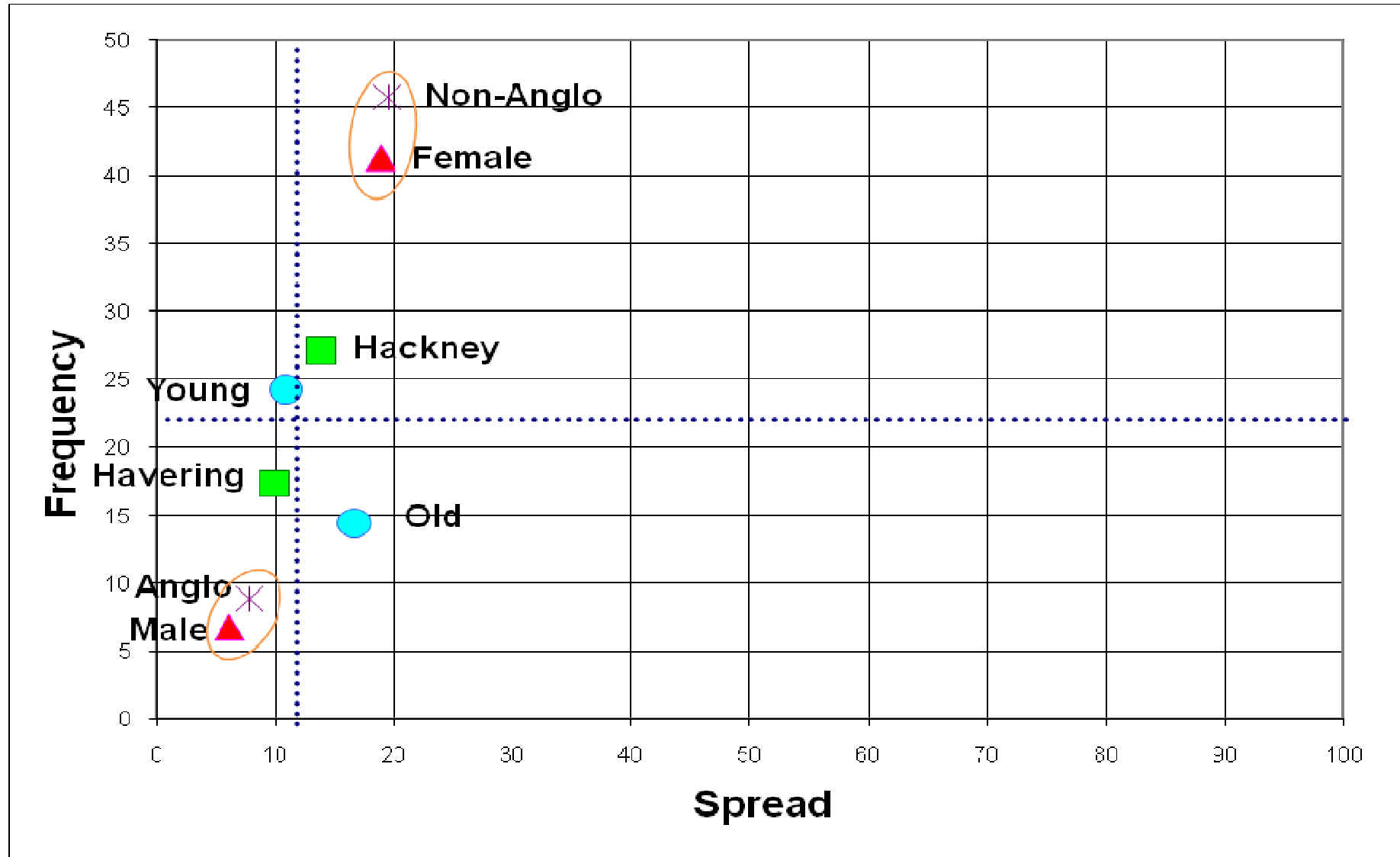
	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Residence
<i>innit</i>	Young	Male	Non-Anglo	---
<i>ok</i>	---	Female	Non-Anglo	---
<i>right</i>	Young	Female	Non-Anglo	Hackney
<i>yeah</i>	Young	---	Non-Anglo	---
<i>you get me</i>	Young	---	Non-Anglo	Hackney
<i>you know</i>	Old	Male	Anglo	---
<i>(do) (you) know what I mean</i>	Young	Female	Anglo	Havering
<i>if you know what I mean</i>	Young	---	---	Havering
<i>(do) you know what I'm saying</i>	Young	Female	---	Havering

- **Bold**: both frequency and spread differences are statistically significant.
- **Normal**: only frequency differences are statistically significant.
- **'---**': both frequency and spread are similar/comparable.

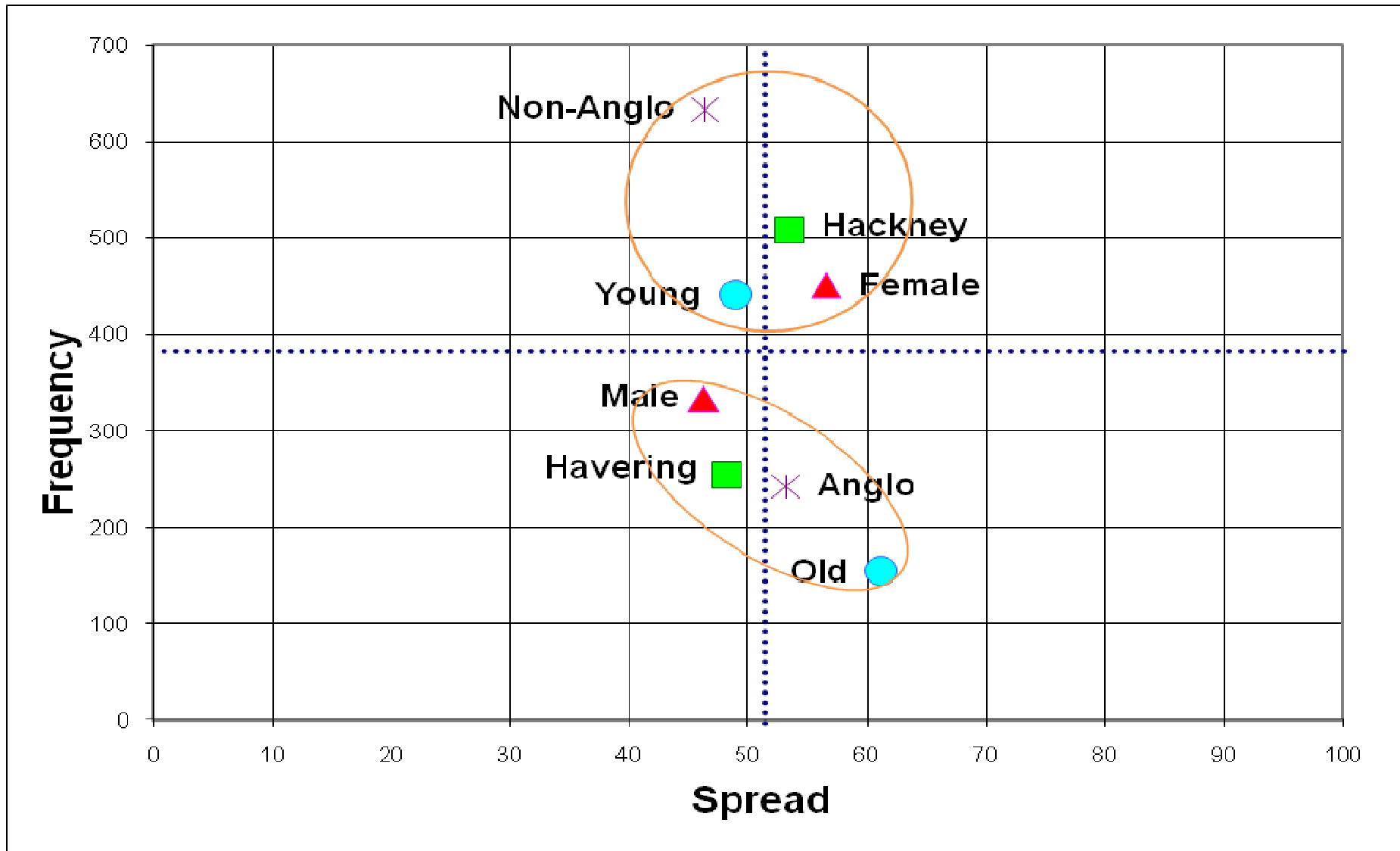
innit



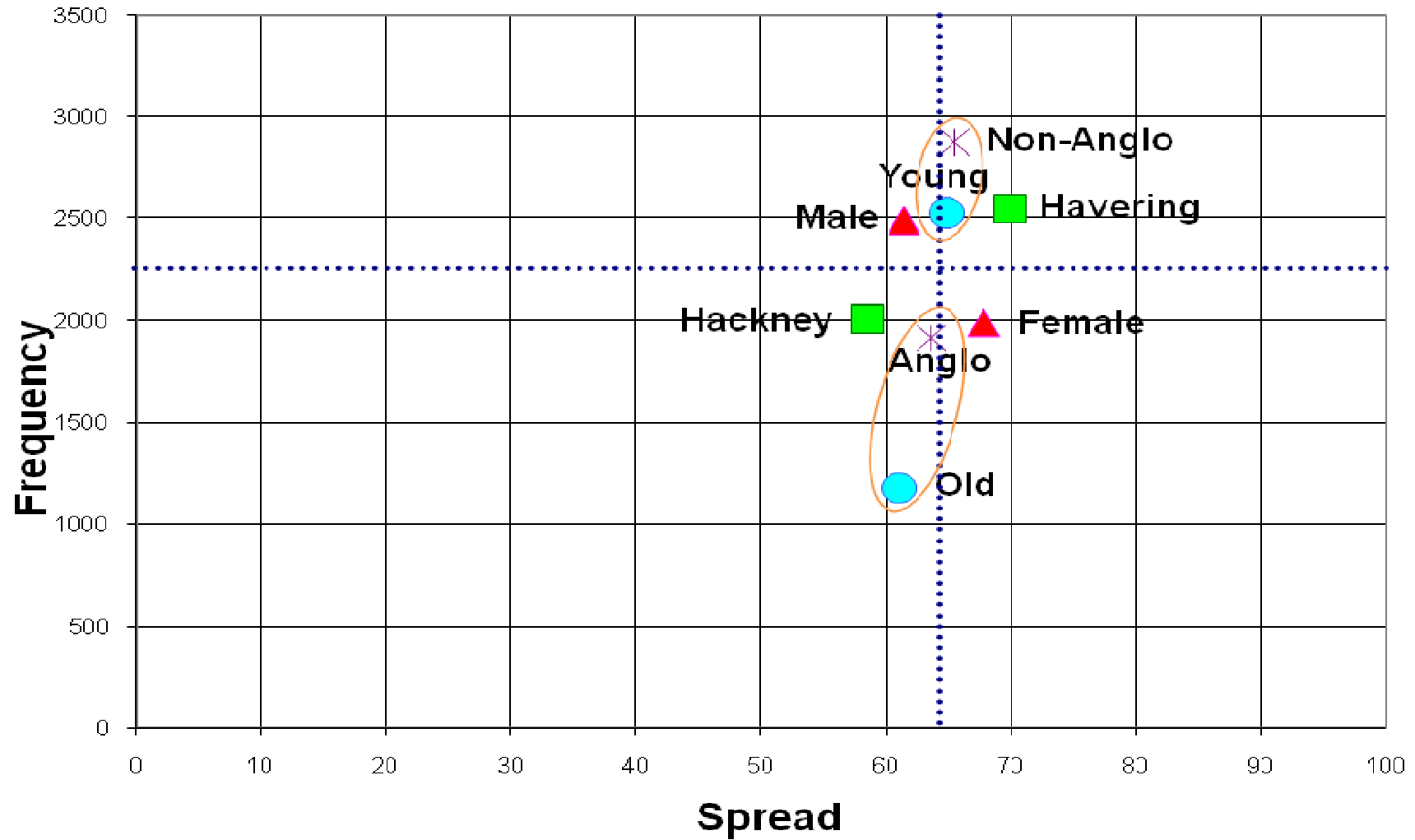
okay



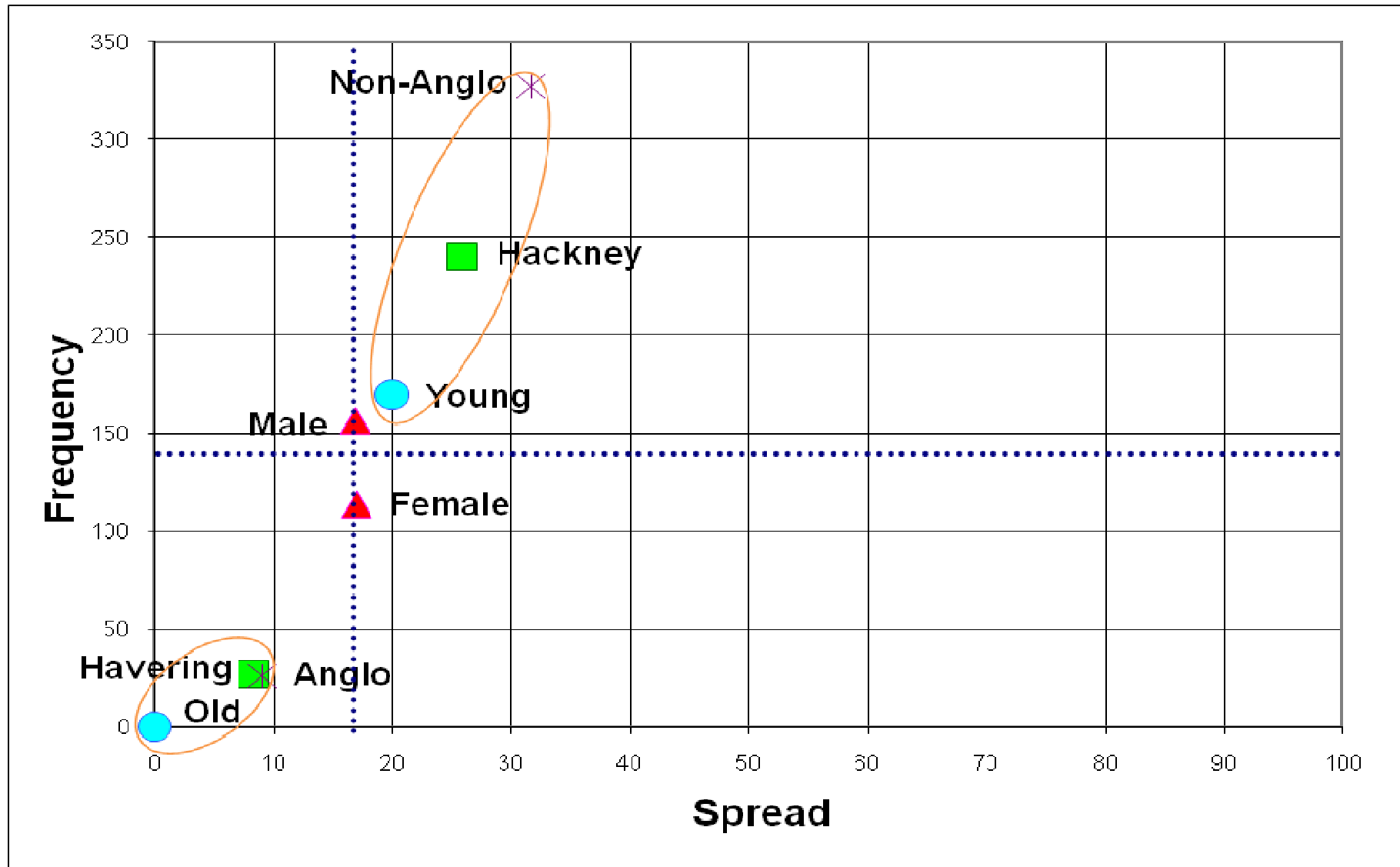
right



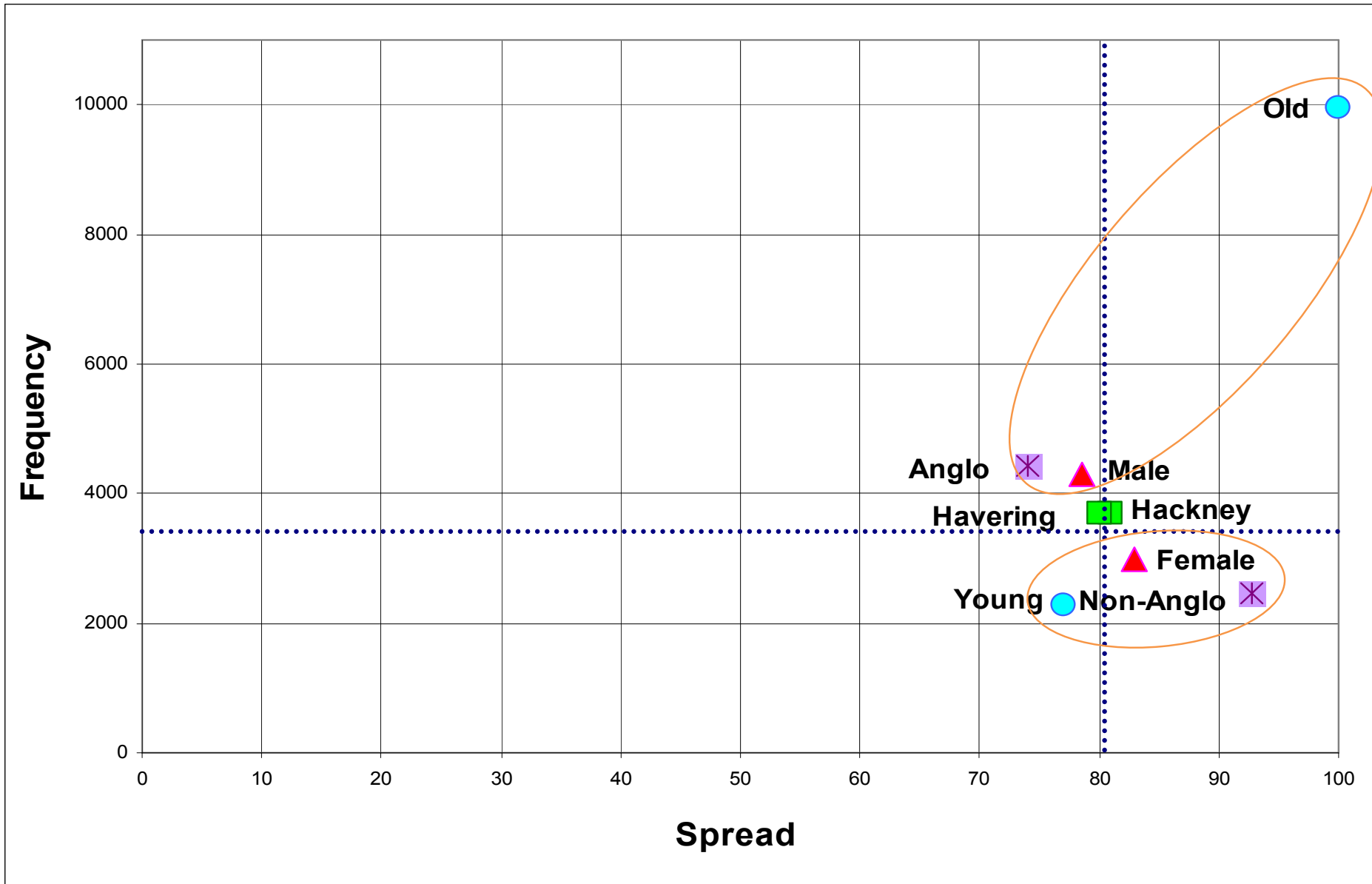
yeah



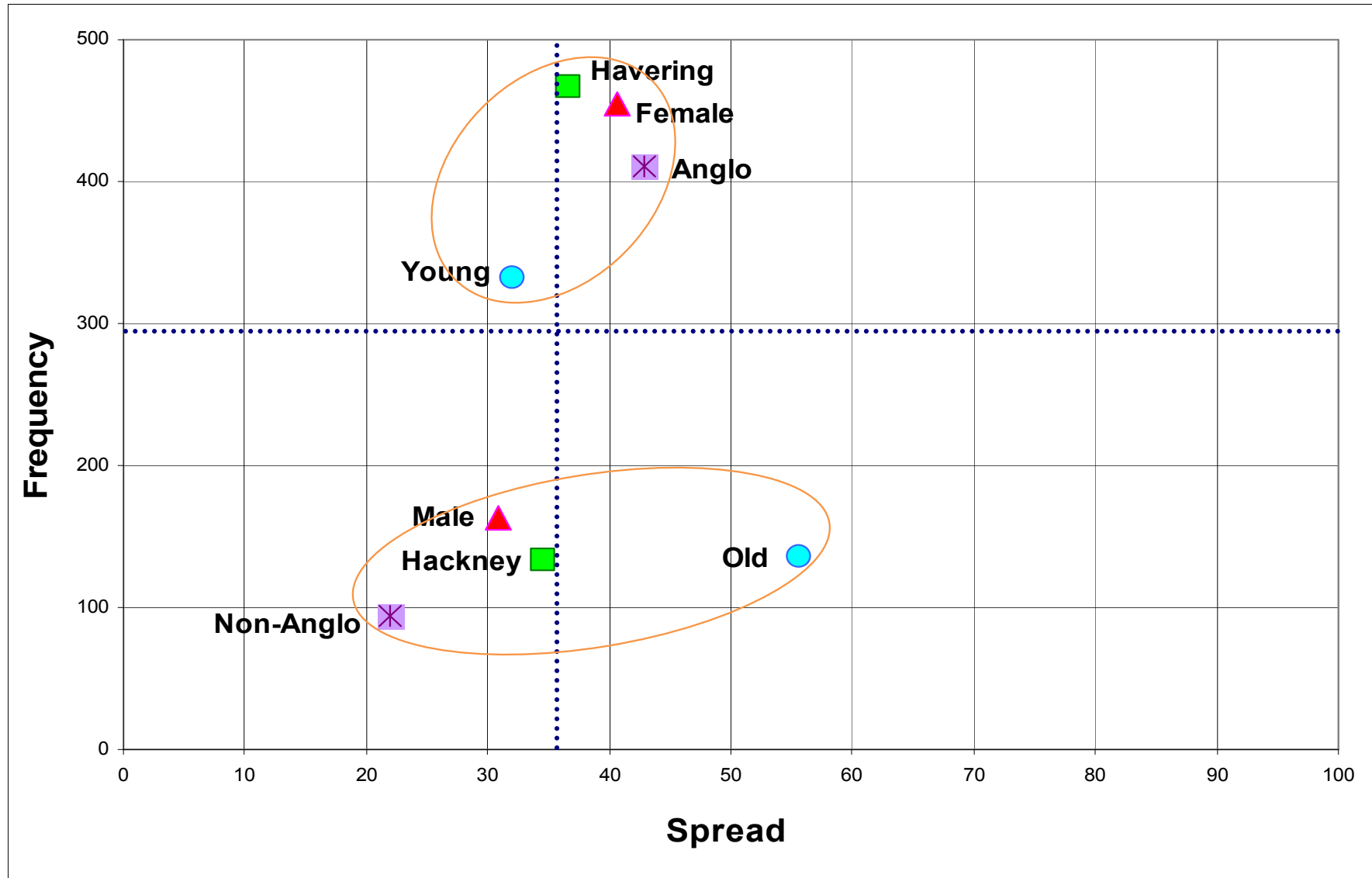
you get me



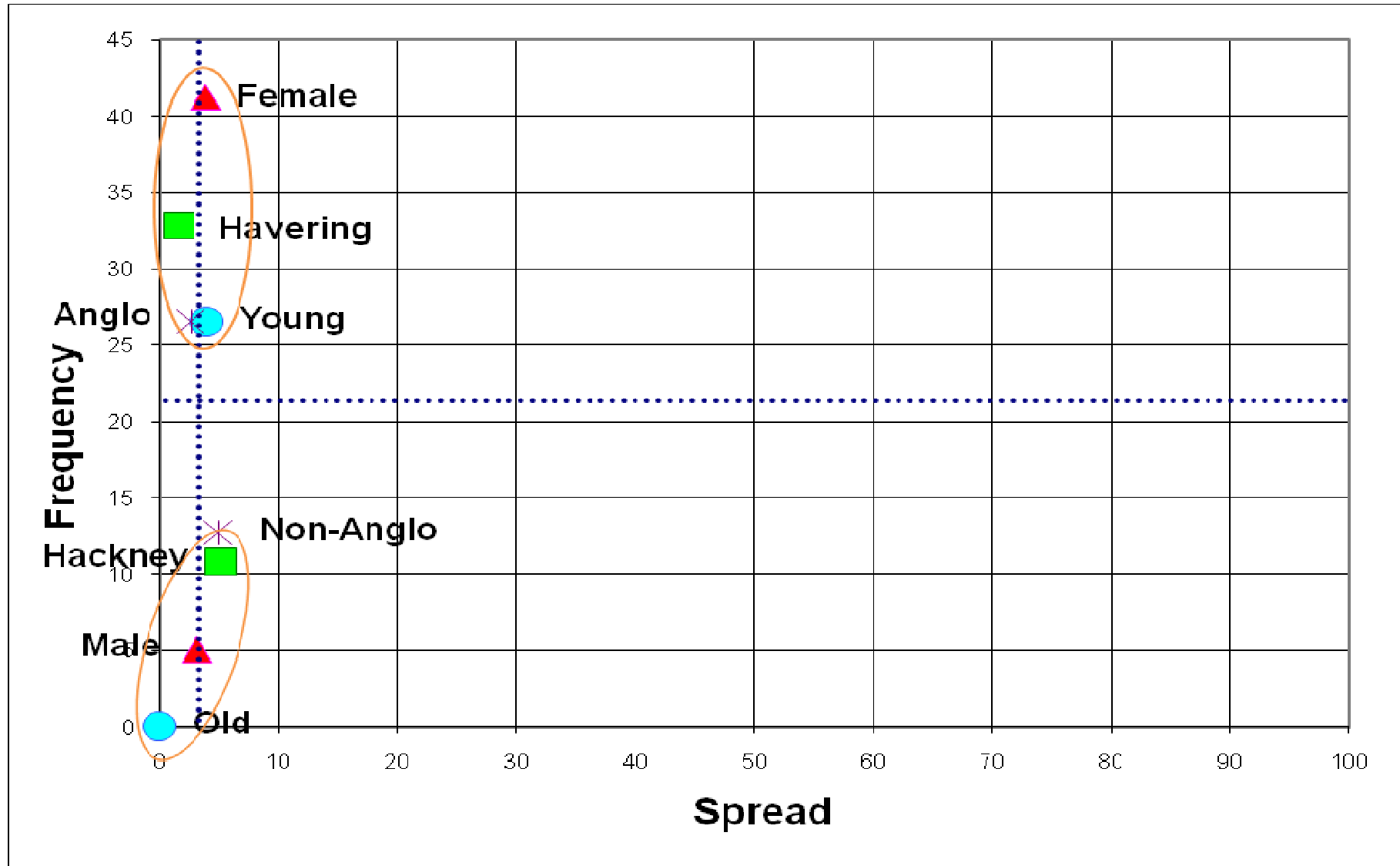
you know



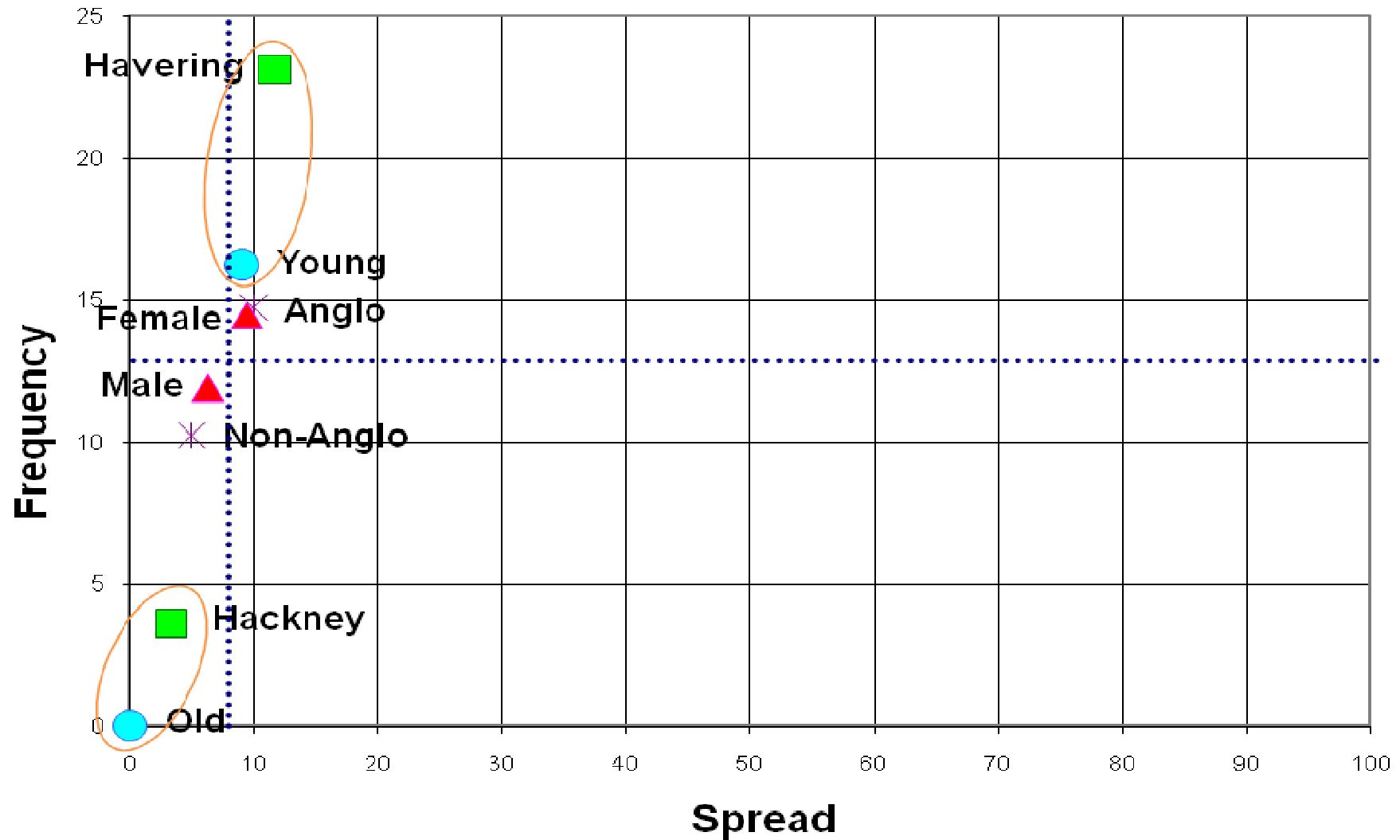
(do) (you) know what I mean



(do) (you) know what I'm saying



If you know what I mean



**Looking at sociolinguistic variables:
Tag usage in sociolinguistic groups**

Tags and age

	Young	Old	No clear preference
Freq. + Spread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>you get me</i> 	--	
Freq. only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>innit</i> • <i>right</i> • <i>(do) (you) know what I mean</i> • <i>if you know what I mean</i> • <i>(do) you know what I'm saying</i> • <i>yeah</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>you know</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ok</i>

- Vast majority of tags more frequently used by young speakers.

Tags and sex

	Male	Female	No clear preference
Freq. + Spread	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ok</i> 	
Freq. only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>innit</i> • <i>you know</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>right</i> • <i>(do) (you) know what I mean</i> • <i>(do) you know what I'm saying</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>you get me</i> • <i>if you know what I mean</i> • <i>yeah</i>

- Females show preference for a larger number of tags.
- Males show preference for the high frequency tags.

Tags and ethnicity

	Anglo	non-Anglo	No clear preference
Freq. + Spread	--	• <i>you get me</i>	
Freq. only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>you know</i> • <i>(do) (you) know what I mean</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>innit</i> • <i>ok</i> • <i>right</i> • <i>yeah</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>if you know what I mean</i> • <i>(do) you know what I'm saying</i>

- Non-Anglos ...
 - show preference for a larger number of tags.
 - have a significantly higher frequency of all simple tags
 - show significantly higher frequency and spread for the innovative tag, *you get me*.

Tags and inner and outer city

	Hackney	Havering	No clear preference
Freq. + Spread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>you get me</i> 	--	
Freq. only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>right</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>(do) (you) know what I mean</i> <i>if you know what I mean</i> <i>(do) you know what I'm saying</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>innit</i> <i>ok</i> <i>you know</i> <i>yeah</i>

- *you get me* and *right* characteristic of hackney
- The multi-word *you know* tags are most frequent in Havering.
- Comparable preference for most simple tags.

Friendship network (1)

Tag	Comparison of average scores of users/non-users	Two-dimensional comparison: number of users/non-users with high/low scores
<i>innit</i>	No significant effect	No significant effect
<i>ok</i>	No significant effect	No significant effect
<i>right</i>	No significant effect	No significant effect
<i>yeah</i>	No significant effect	No significant effect

Friendship network (2)

Tag	Comparison of average scores of users/non-users	Two-dimensional comparison: number of users/non-users with high/low scores
<i>you get me</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users have a 30% higher average network score than non-users	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users of <i>you get me</i> can be expected to belong to high-density multi-ethnic friendship networks.• No safe predictions can be made regarding the score of non-users. <p>→ High network score does not predict use.</p> <p>→ Low network score predicts non-use.</p> <p>→ Tag still emerging.</p>

Innovative tags and linguistic innovation

- Established tags, irrespective of whether they are becoming more or less frequent, are widespread enough to no longer depend on multi-ethnic interactions.
- On the contrary, new (innovative) tags, like *you get me*, are currently used significantly more frequently within the multi-ethnic networks in which they have probably first emerged.

Tags as part of the bigger picture

- Innovation in the invariant tag system is in line with previous findings on innovation in phonology and grammar.
- Inner-city, non-Anglo males are in the lead
- The frequency of new tags is highest in high-density multi-cultural friendship groups