

Introduction

- Vocatives are noun phrases that refer to the addressee and are not an argument of a verb,¹ such as “No way, **dude!**” or “C’mon, **man.**”
- Vocatives always convey something about the speaker’s feelings towards the addressee¹, as in *honey* or *idiot*
- English is full of address terms that are traditionally seen as masculine and friendly: *dude*, *man*, *bro*, *bruh*, *brother*, *buddy*, *mate*, etc.
- This research investigates the vocative *bro*, overlooked in previous work

Literature Review

- Vocatives have been studied for their range of functions: getting someone’s attention, establishing connection, mitigating disagreements and structuring discourse, etc.²
- Vocatives have been shown to change functions over their lifetime, e.g. the grammaticalization of *man* into expressive use as in “Oh *man!*”³
- Originally, *bro* was used as *brother* would be, as a term of familial or religious address
- In the mid-1900s, *bro* began to gain momentum through use by African-American communities⁴
- The use of *bro* skyrocketed in the 21st century for young men to refer to one another, ending up negatively associated with ‘bro culture’: male privilege, frat boys and toxic masculinity⁵
- Previous work highlighted the need to investigate more recent, innovative uses of *bro* that differ from these prototypical uses and users

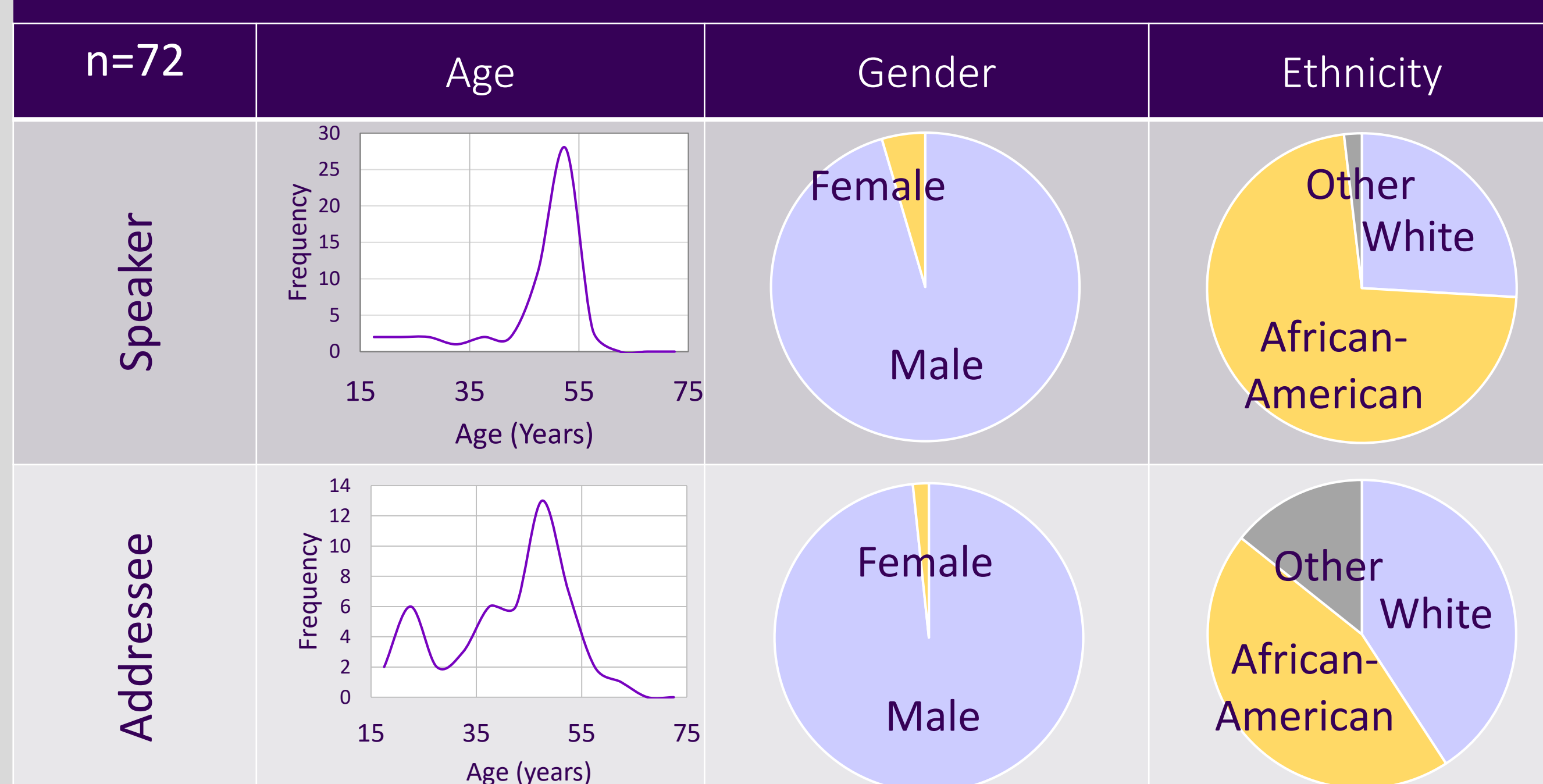
Research Questions

- Is *bro* used primarily by a particular demographic of users? (e.g. an ethnic group, an age group, a gender, etc.)
- Is *bro* used primarily in a particular position in an utterance? (e.g. “*Bro*, that’s crazy!” vs. “No way, *bro!*”)
- Is *bro* used primarily for a particular function? (e.g. creating solidarity or expressing surprise)
- Most importantly, how do the variables listed above interconnect?

Methodology

- Corpus Data:** gathered uses of *bro* from the online Corpus of Contemporary American English, a collection of speech from television and radio (1990-2017)
- Twitter Data:** collected recent tweets involving *bro* and gathered as much speaker demographic information as available (2019)
- Text Message Data:** created an online survey where participants upload their own text messages containing *bro* and provide demographic information on themselves and their addressee (2019-ongoing)

Corpus Data

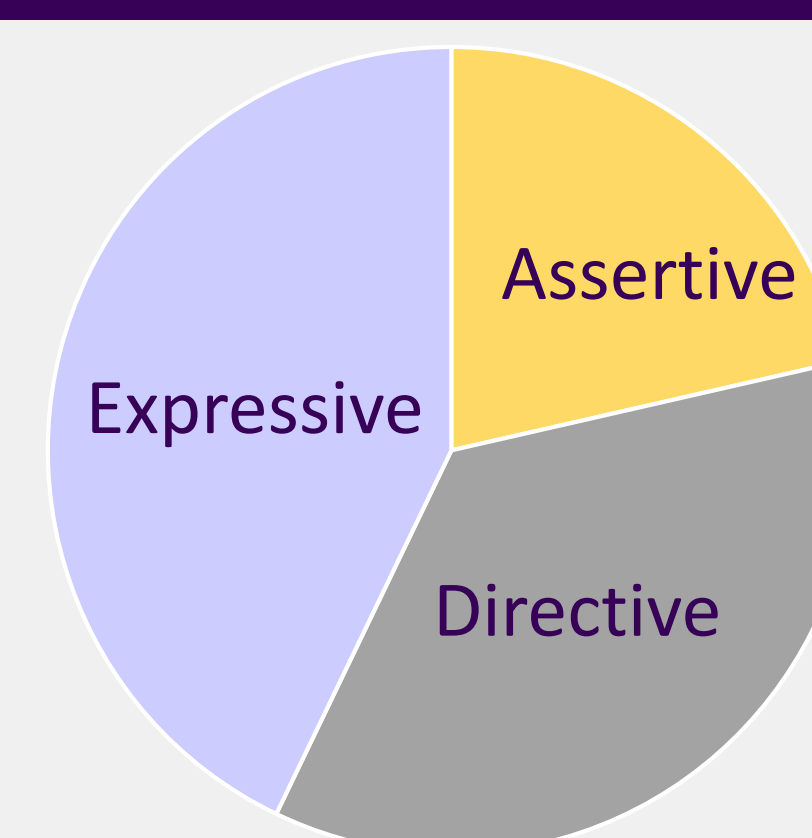


Preliminary Analysis

Utterance Function

The corpus tokens were categorized based on the communicative intent of the utterance⁶:

- Assertive** (conveying information)
- Directive** (commanding, advising, etc.)
- Expressive** (agreeing, apologizing, greeting, etc.)



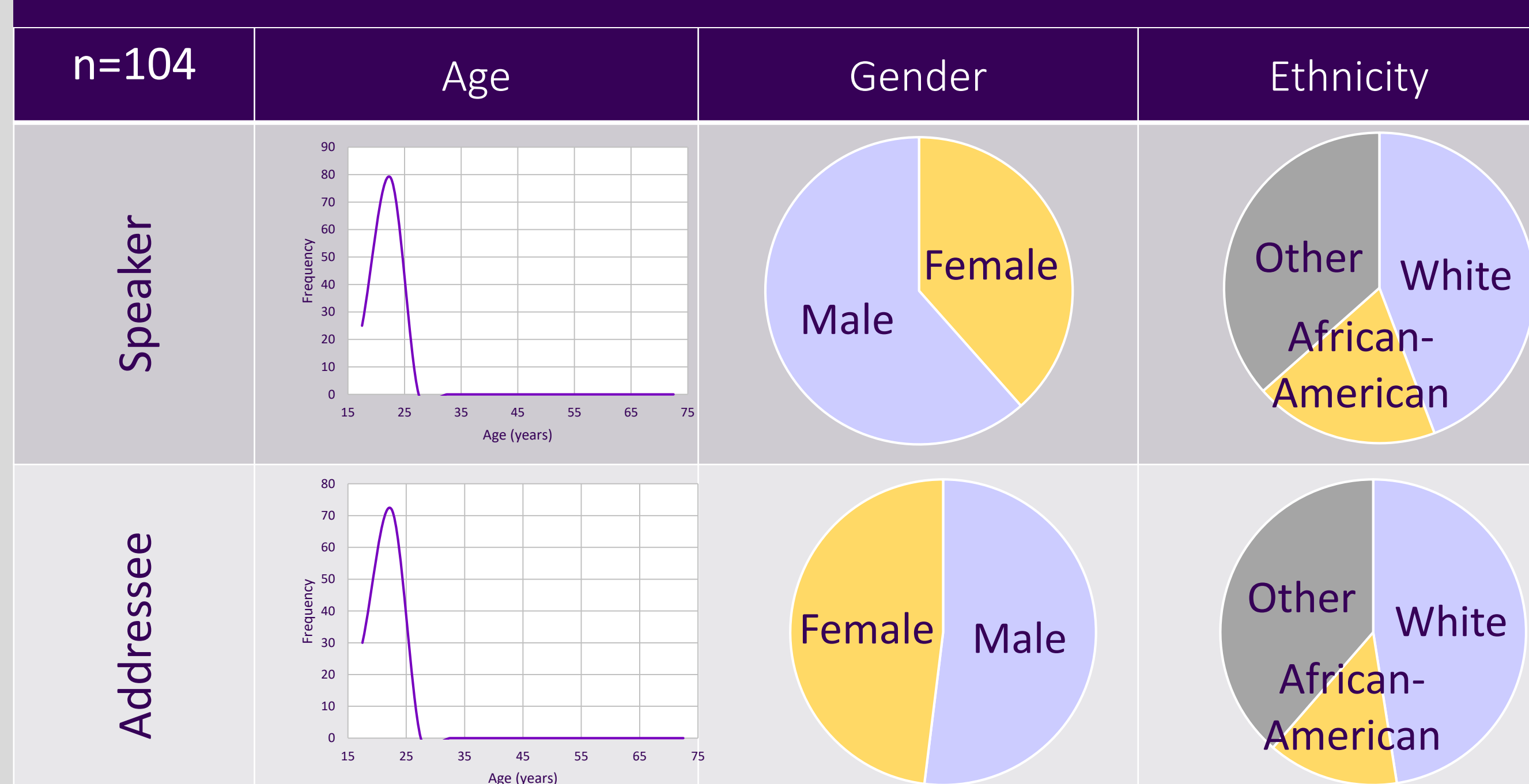
Bro Function

The most common functions of *bro* itself were:

- Addressee Selection e.g. “What do you make of all of this, bro?”
- Solidarity e.g. “Don’t worry about it, bro.”
- Mitigation e.g. “You just have to listen, bro.”

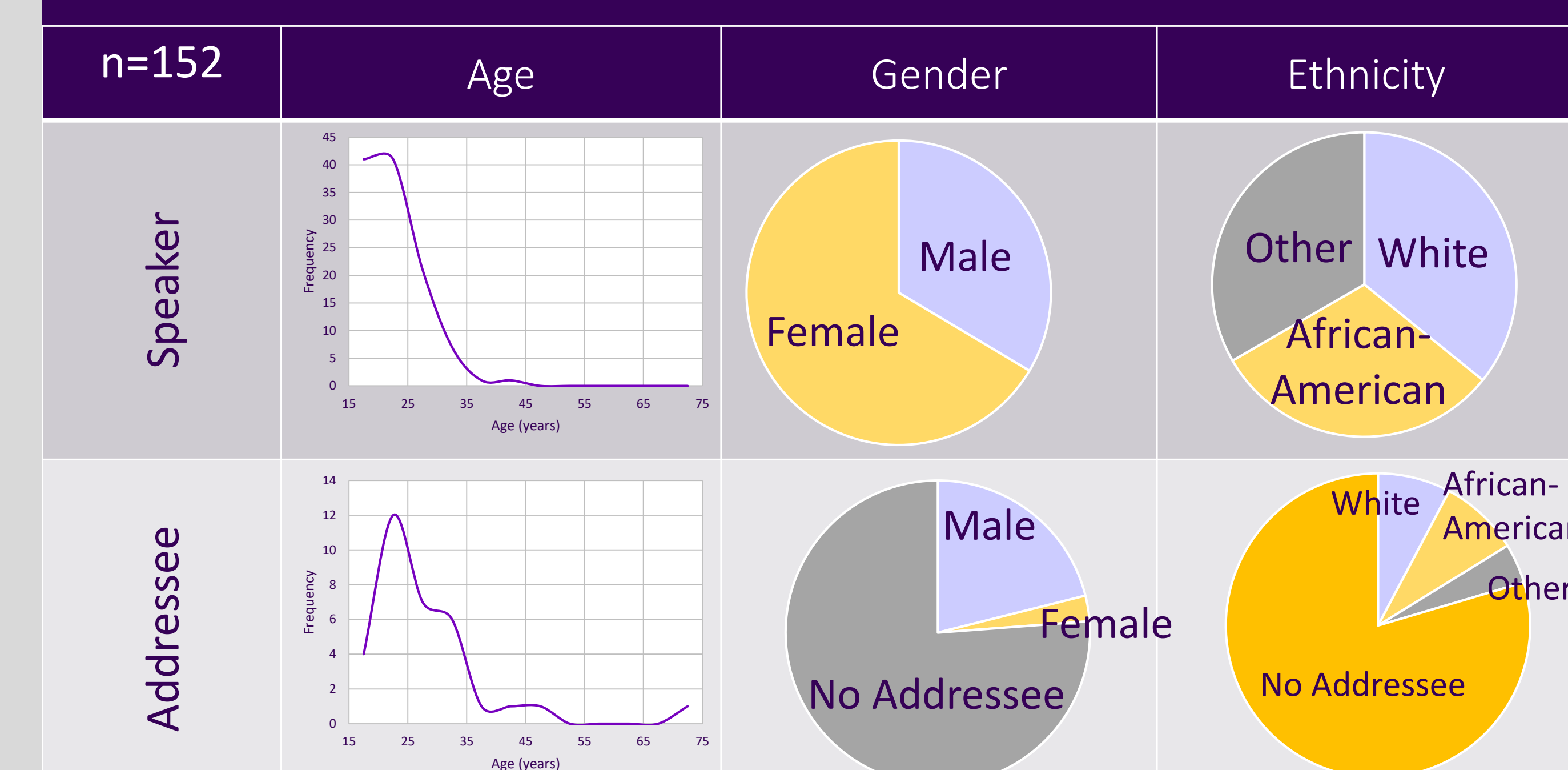
- These uses are more ‘traditional’, typical of vocatives in previous research^{7,8}
- These tokens are predominantly in **final** position
- The speakers are generally **older** (as it is radio/TV programming)
- The speakers tend to be **African-American males**, the original *bro* users

Text Message Data



For simplicity, miscellaneous categories like unknown, multiple addressees, etc. are not shown in any graphs.

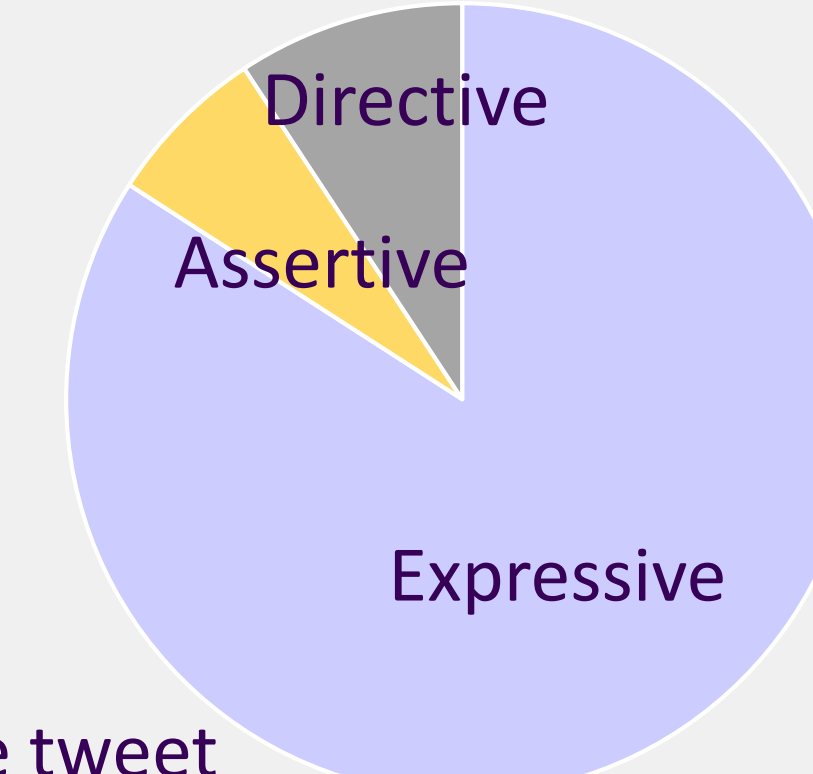
Twitter Data



Preliminary Analysis

Utterance Function

The corpus tokens were categorized by communicative intent, just like the corpus data.



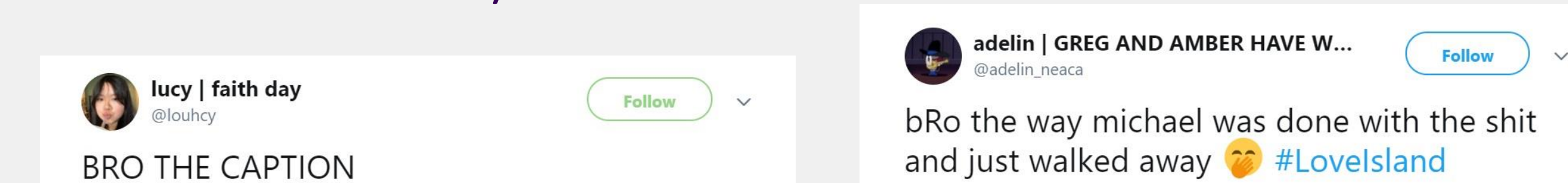
Early Observations

Two general categories were observed:

- ‘prototypical’** uses associated with ‘bro culture’
 - ‘toughens up’ an otherwise ‘soft’ tweet
 - creates solidarity in an abrupt or aggressive tweet
 - favours **final** position in the utterance
 - often directed at a particular person i.e. have an **addressee**
 - often used by **males**



- ‘innovative’** uses that break away from general perceptions of *bro*'s use
 - expressive (ie. showing surprise, delight, frustration, etc.)
 - often involves typographical emphasis (eg. *BRO*, *brO*, *broooooo*)
 - favours **initial** position in the utterance
 - tends not to be directed at a particular person ie. **no addressee**
 - often used by **females**



Next Steps

- Continue to recruit participants’ text message data to generate a large body of original data
- Complete analyses of all data
- Contrast uses of *bro* across data sets

References

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