

# User-generated content mining: From collective disease rates to individual demographics

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# Structure of the presentation

1. **Introductory remarks**
2. **Collective disease surveillance from search query data**
  - Google Flu Trends and inference inaccuracies
  - Steps towards improvement
3. **Mining socio-economic demographics from social media users**
  - Occupational class
  - Income
  - Socioeconomic status
4. **Concluding remarks**

# Context and Motivation

# Context and Motivation

*How can we use online  
user-generated content (**UGC**)  
to our benefit?*



# User-generated content for health. WHY?

- + Online content can potentially access a larger and **more representative** part of the population

Note: *Health surveillance systems are based on the subset of people who actively seek medical attention*

- + More **timely** information (*almost instant*)
- + Geographical regions with **less established health monitoring systems** could benefit
- + Small **cost** when data access and modelling expertise are in place

# Google Flu Trends — The idea



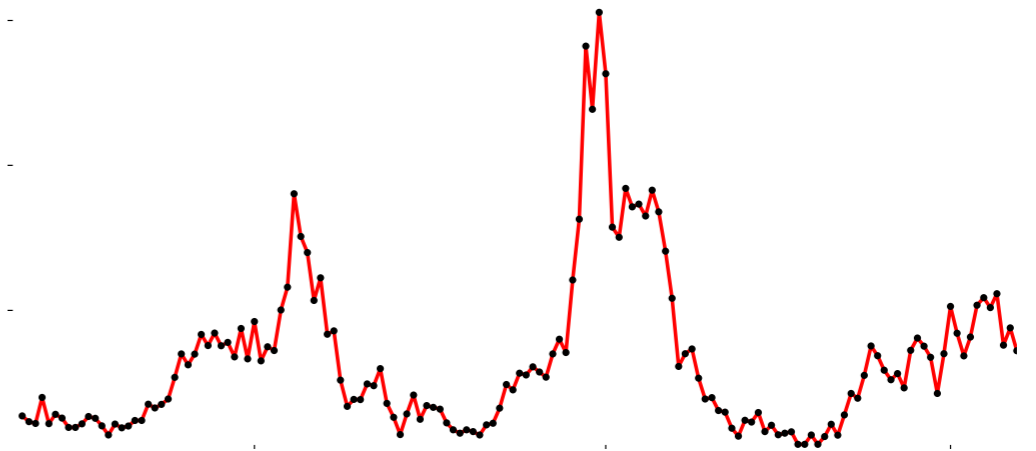
Can we turn **online search query statistics** to estimates about the rate of **influenza-like illness (ILI)** in the real-world population?

# Google Flu Trends — Supervised learning

search query frequency  
time series

Flu rates from a health  
agency representing  
doctor consultations

Google



$$\mathbf{X} \in \mathbb{R}^{M \times N}$$

$$\mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^M$$

$$\mathbf{logit}(y) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \mathbf{logit}(q) + \varepsilon$$

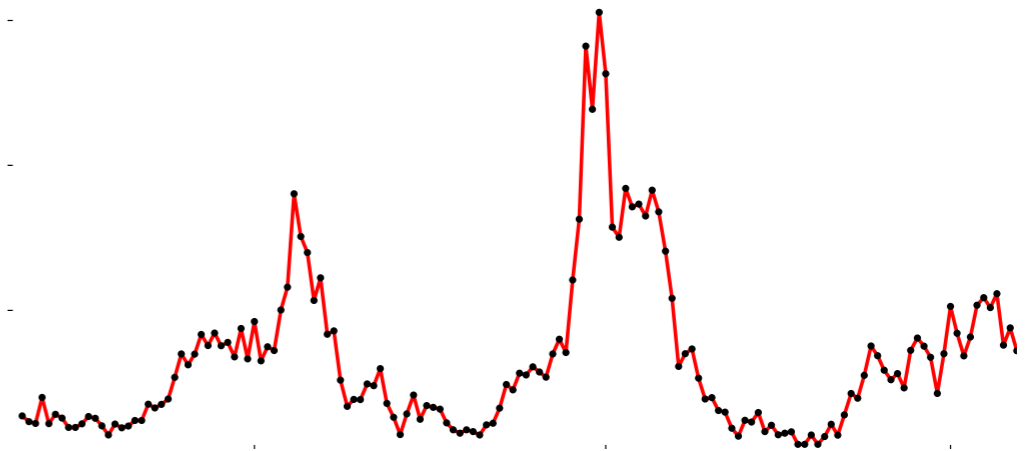
*(Ginsberg et al., 2009)*

# Google Flu Trends — Supervised learning

search query frequency  
time series

Flu rates from a health  
agency representing  
doctor consultations

$q$  is the aggregate frequency  
of a selected subset of the  $N$   
candidate search queries



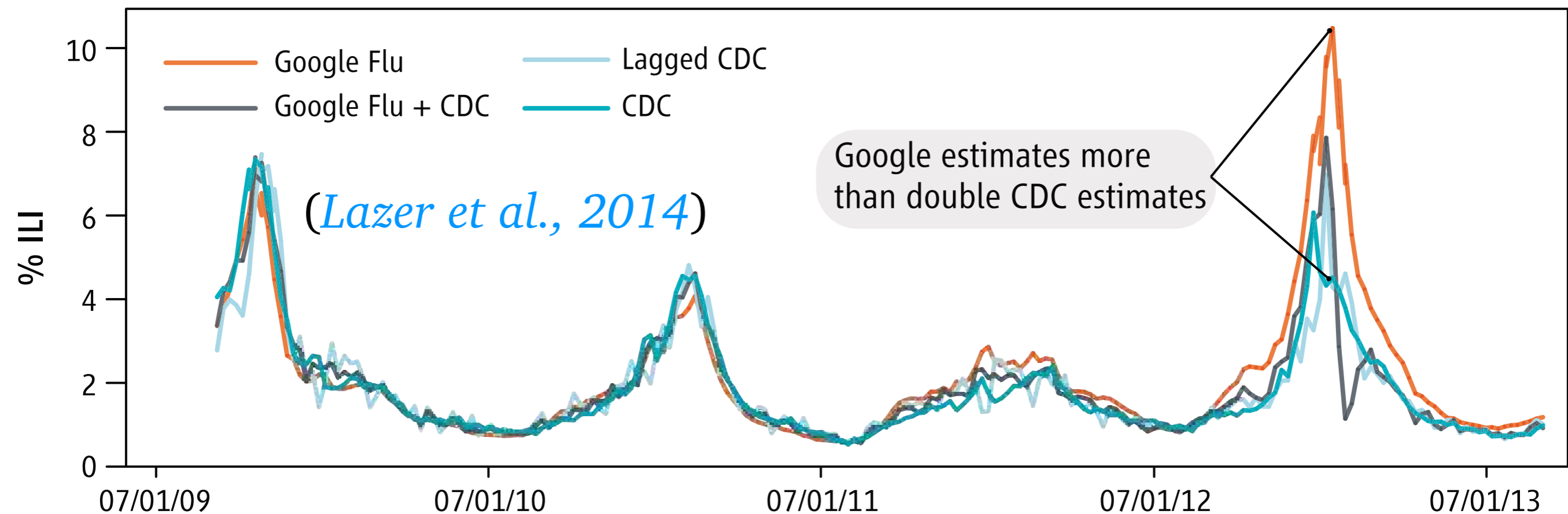
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$$\mathbf{logit}(\mathbf{y}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \mathbf{logit}(q) + \varepsilon$$

(Ginsberg et al., 2009)

# Google Flu Trends — Failure



The estimates of the online Google Flu Trends tool were approx. **two times larger** than the ones from the CDC in 2012/13

# Google Flu Trends — Hypotheses for failure

- **“Big Data”** criticism
- The **statistical learning model** was not good enough
- **Feature selection** was not good enough bringing in spurious search queries
- **Media hype** about flu significantly affects inference accuracy
- The **ground truth** is not perfect; it is rather a “silver” standard

# Google Flu Trends — Hypotheses for failure

- X “Big Data” criticism
- ✓ The **statistical learning model** was not good enough
- ✓ **Feature selection** was not good enough bringing in spurious search queries
- ? **Media hype** about flu significantly affects inference accuracy
- ✓? The **ground truth** is not perfect; it is rather a “silver” standard

# **Advances in nowcasting influenza-like illness rates using online search logs**

*Lamos, Miller, Crossan & Stefansen  
(Nature Scientific Reports, 2015)*

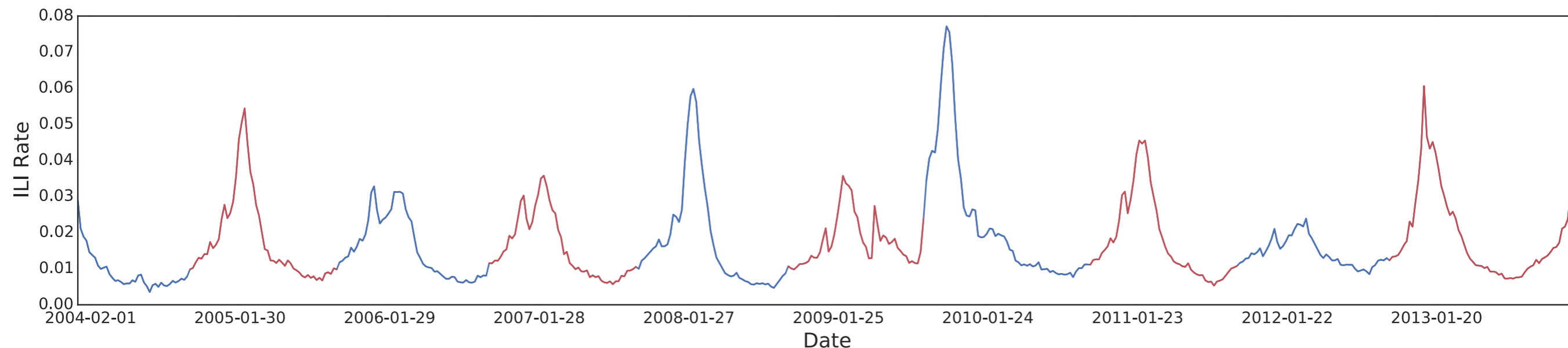


# Data

## Google search logs

- weekly search counts of **49,708** search queries
- corresponding total volume of weekly searches
- user search sessions geolocated in the **US**
- anonymised & aggregate data
- Jan. 2004 to Dec. 2013 (521 weeks, **~decade**)

## ILI rates from CDC



# Elastic Net for linear regularised regression

query frequency	$\mathbf{x}_i \in \mathbb{R}^m, i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$	—	$\mathbf{X}$
ILI rates	$y_i \in \mathbb{R}, i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$	—	$\mathbf{y}$
weights, bias	$w_j, \beta \in \mathbb{R}, j \in \{1, \dots, m\}$	—	$\mathbf{w}_* = [\mathbf{w}; \beta]$

$$\operatorname{argmin}_{\mathbf{w}, \beta} \left\{ \sum_{i=1}^n \left( y_i - \beta - \sum_{j=1}^m x_{ij} w_j \right)^2 + \lambda_1 \sum_{j=1}^m |w_j| + \lambda_2 \sum_{j=1}^m w_j^2 \right\}$$

**L1-norm**                      **L2-norm**

a sparse set of weights ( $\mathbf{w}$ ) is encouraged

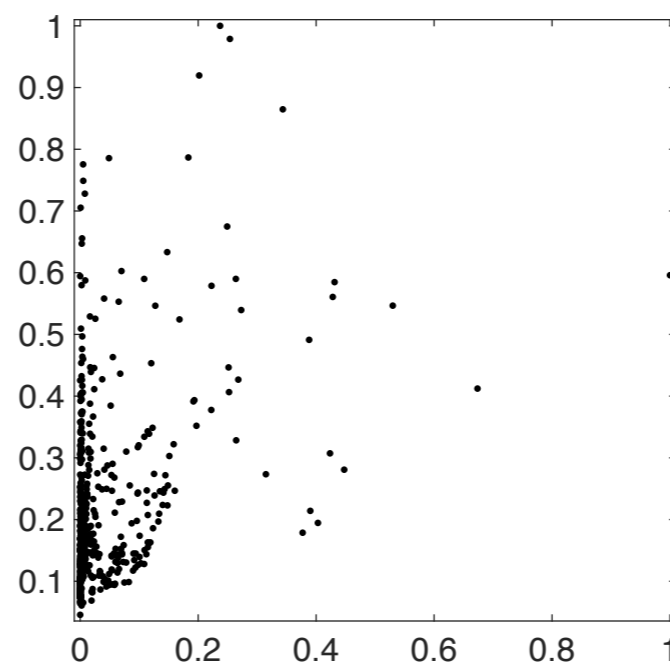
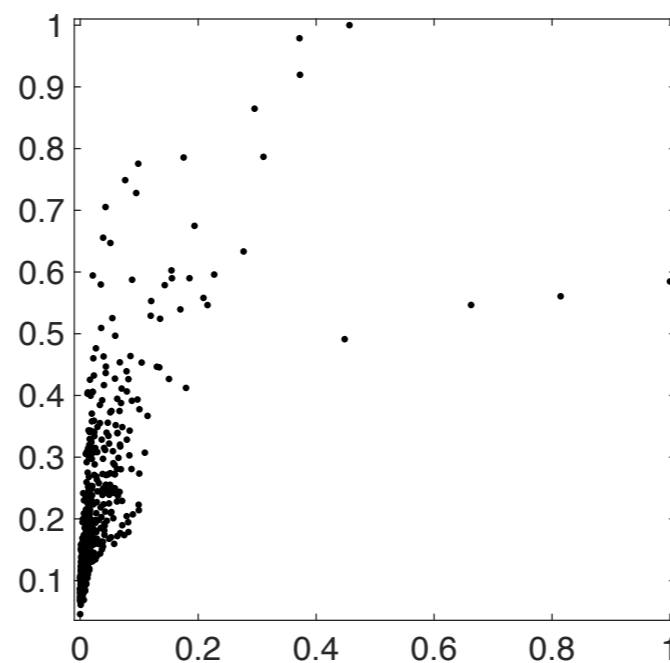
*(Zou & Hastie, 2005)*

# Nonlinearities in the data (1)

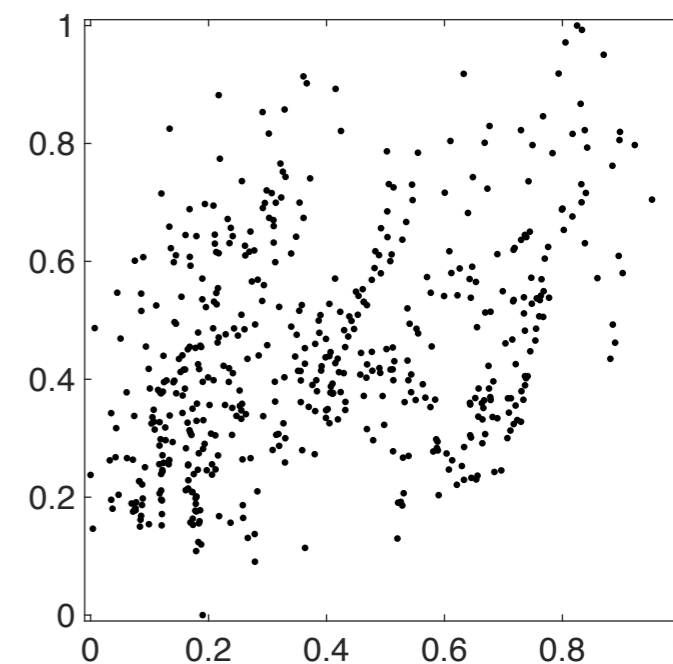
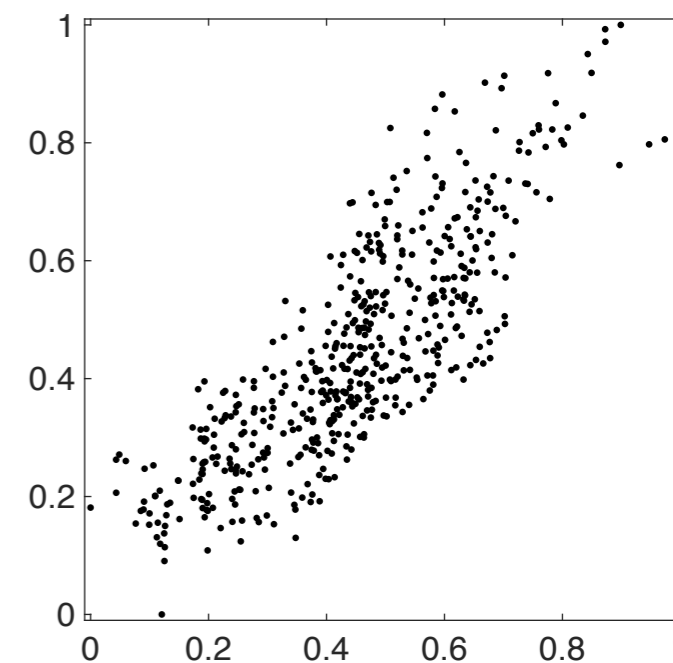
*“flu symptoms  
in children”*

*“flu symptoms  
in adults”*

ILI rate



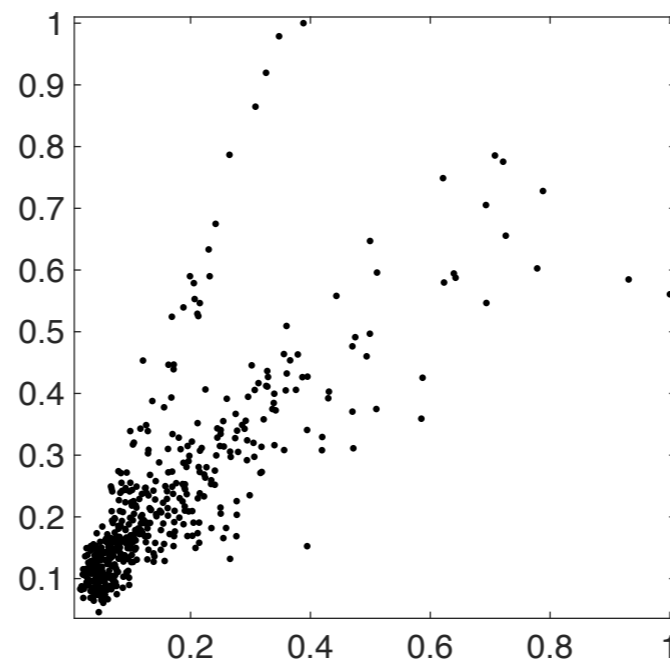
logit space



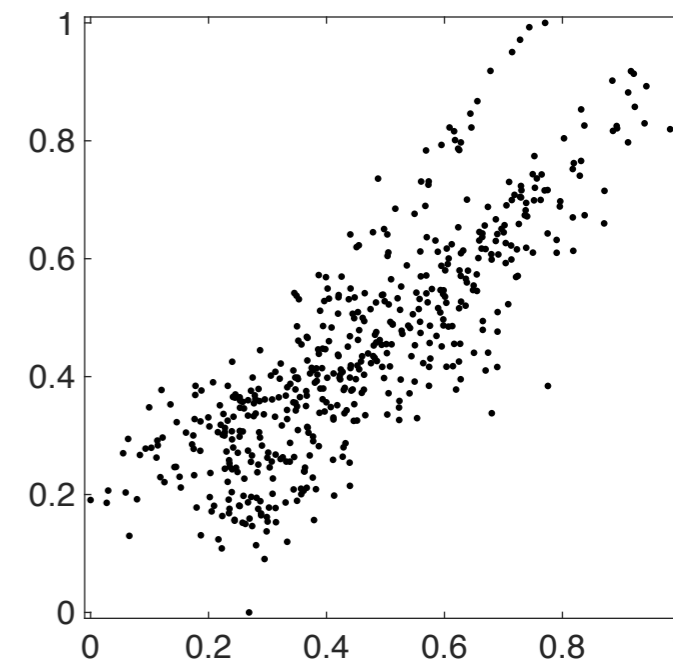
Query frequency

# Nonlinearities in the data (2)

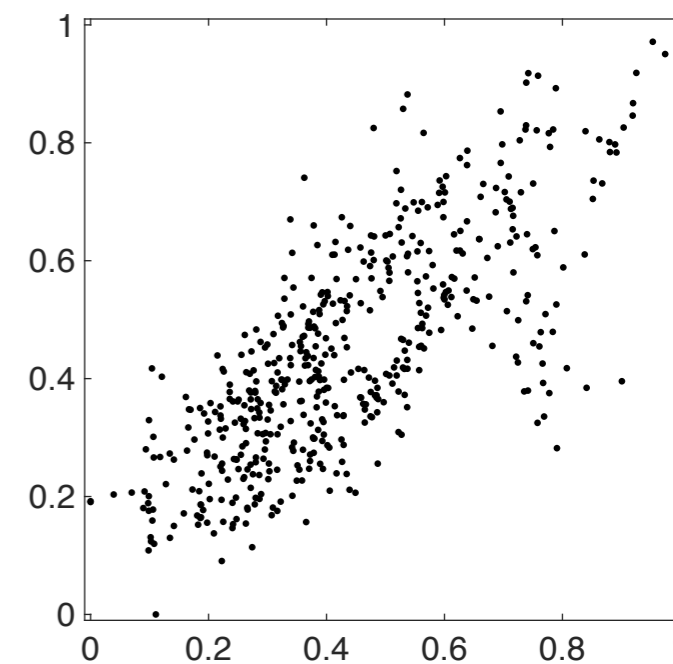
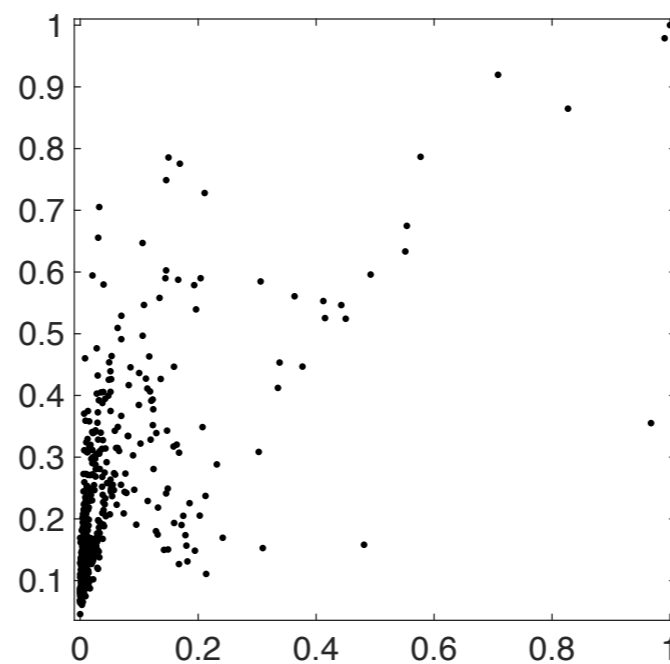
*“flu remedies”*



**logit space**



ILLI rate



*“tamiflu dosage”*

Query frequency

# Gaussian Processes for nonlinear modelling

Say  $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^d$  and we want to learn  $f : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$

$$f(\mathbf{x}) \sim \mathcal{GP}(m(\mathbf{x}), k(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}'))$$

**mean function**  
drawn on inputs

**covariance function (kernel)**  
drawn on pairs of inputs

Formally: Sets of random variables any finite number of which have a multivariate Gaussian distribution

## Why do we use Gaussian Processes?

- + Kernelised, models nonlinearities
- + Interpretability (AutoRelevance Determination)
- + Performance

(*Rasmussen & Williams, 2006*)

# Common covariance functions (kernels)

Kernel name:

Squared-exp (SE)

Periodic (Per)

Linear (Lin)

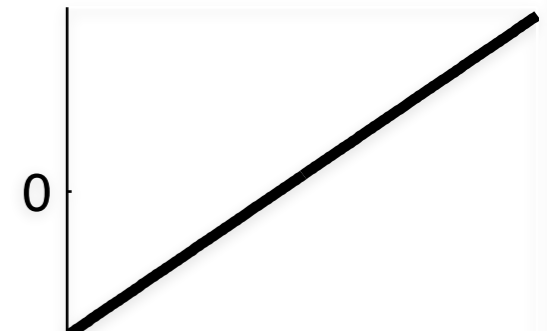
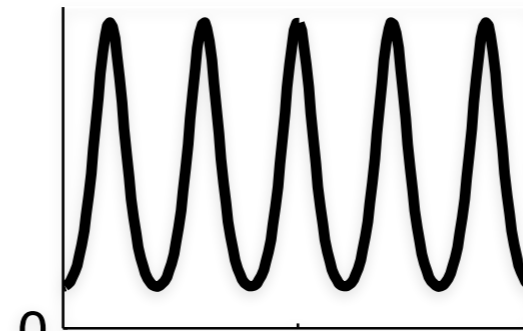
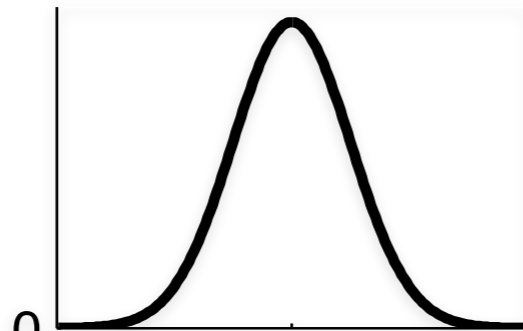
$$k(x, x') =$$

$$\sigma_f^2 \exp\left(-\frac{(x-x')^2}{2\ell^2}\right)$$

$$\sigma_f^2 \exp\left(-\frac{2}{\ell^2} \sin^2\left(\pi \frac{x-x'}{p}\right)\right)$$

$$\sigma_f^2 (x - c)(x' - c)$$

Plot of  $k(x, x')$ :



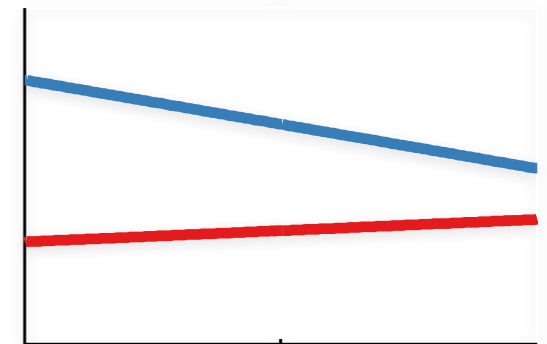
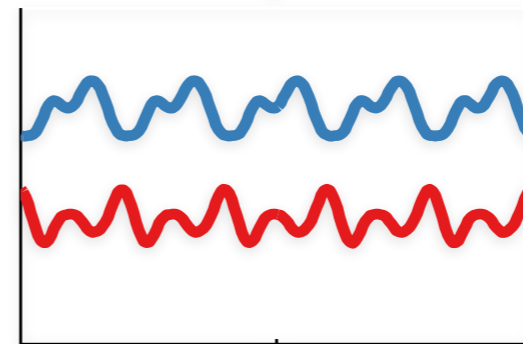
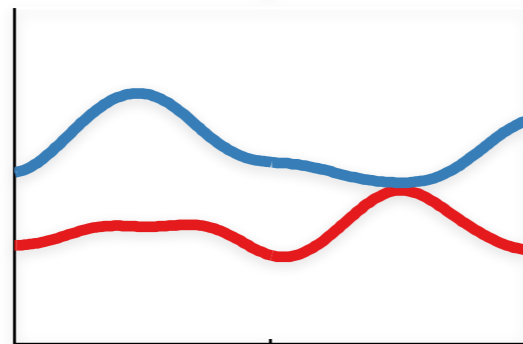
$x - x'$

$x - x'$

$x$  (with  $x' = 1$ )



Functions  $f(x)$   
sampled from  
GP prior:



$x$

$x$

$x$

Type of structure:

local variation

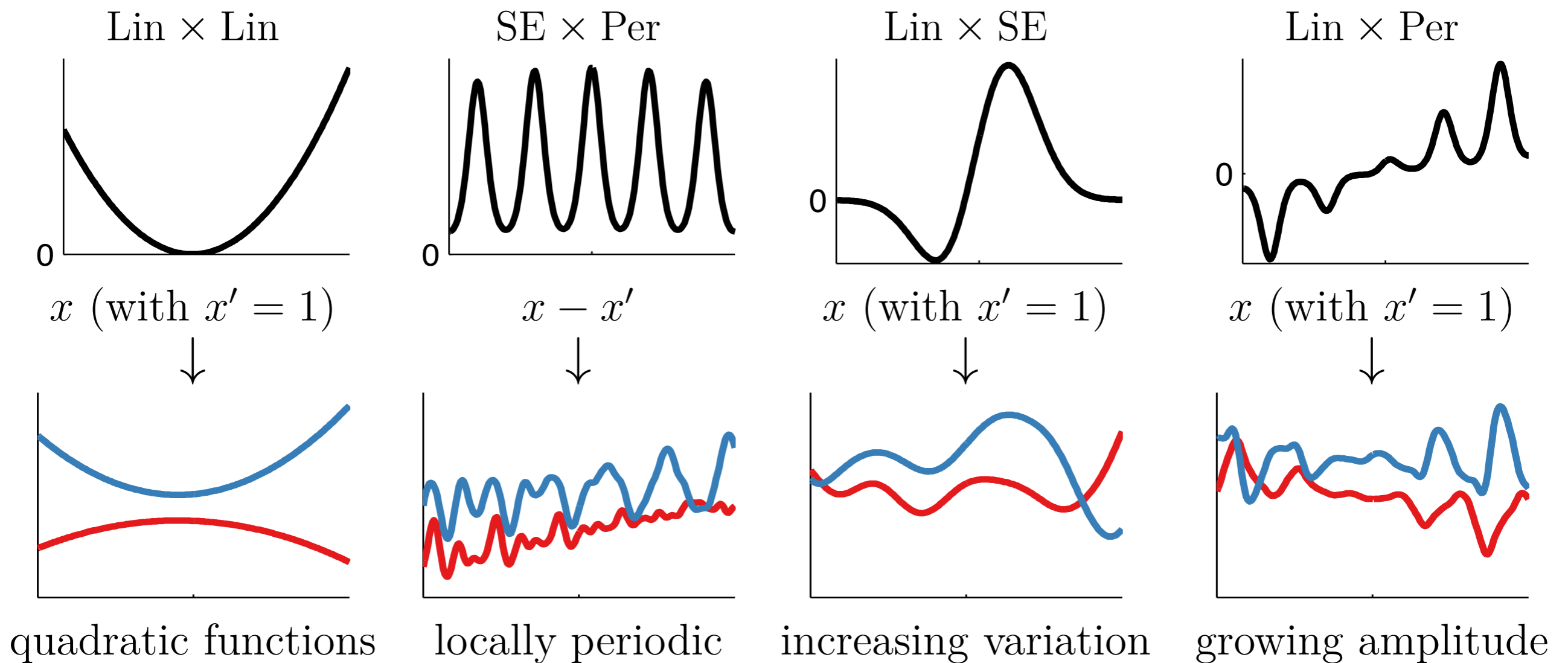
repeating structure

linear functions

(*Duvenaud, 2014*)

# Combining kernels in a GP

it is possible to **add** or **multiply** kernels  
(among other operations)



(*Duvenaud, 2014*)

# GP kernel on query clusters

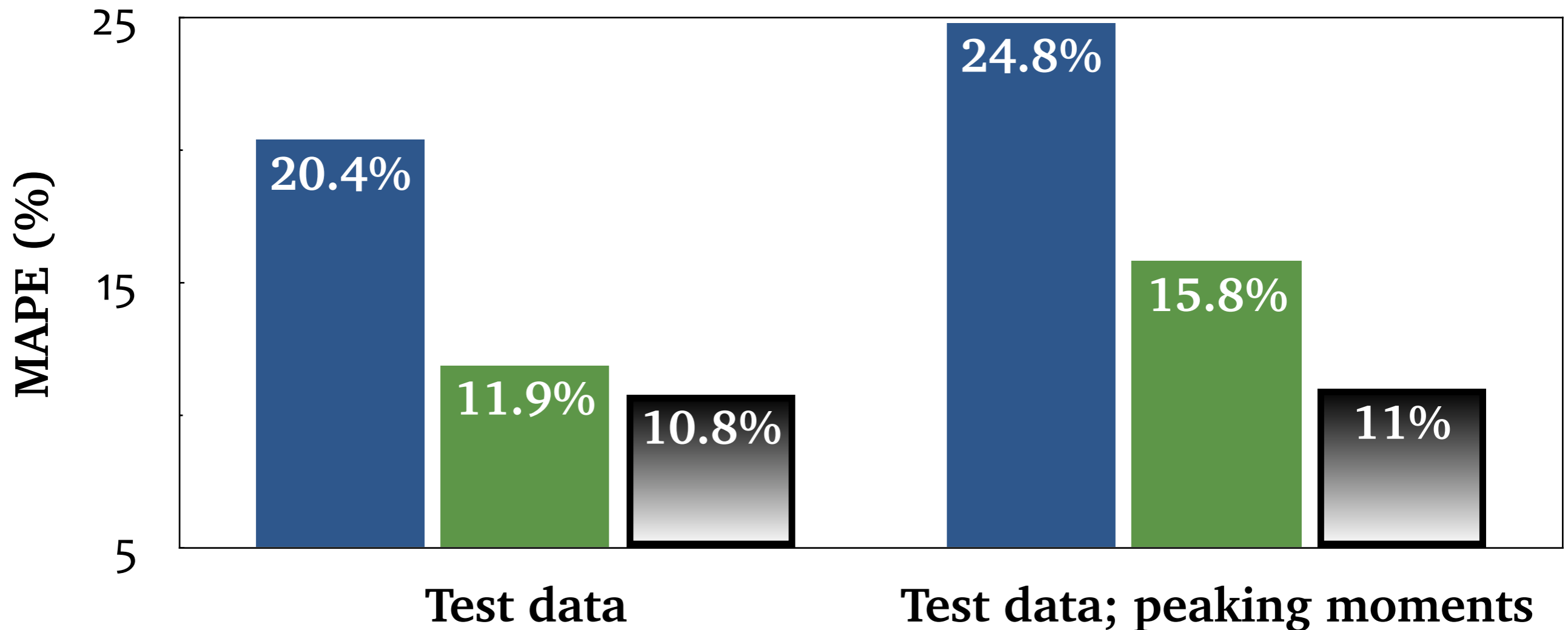
$$k(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') = \left( \sum_{i=1}^C k_{\text{SE}}(\mathbf{c}_i, \mathbf{c}'_i) \right) + \sigma_n^2 \cdot \delta(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}')$$

- + **protects inferences from radical changes** in the frequency of isolated queries
- + models the **contribution of various themes** (clusters) to the final prediction (*bi-product: interpretability*)
- + learns a sum of lower-dimensional functions: smaller input space, **easier learning task**, fewer samples required, more statistical traction obtained
- [*trade-off*] assumption that relationships between queries in separate clusters provide no information about ILI



# Inference performance

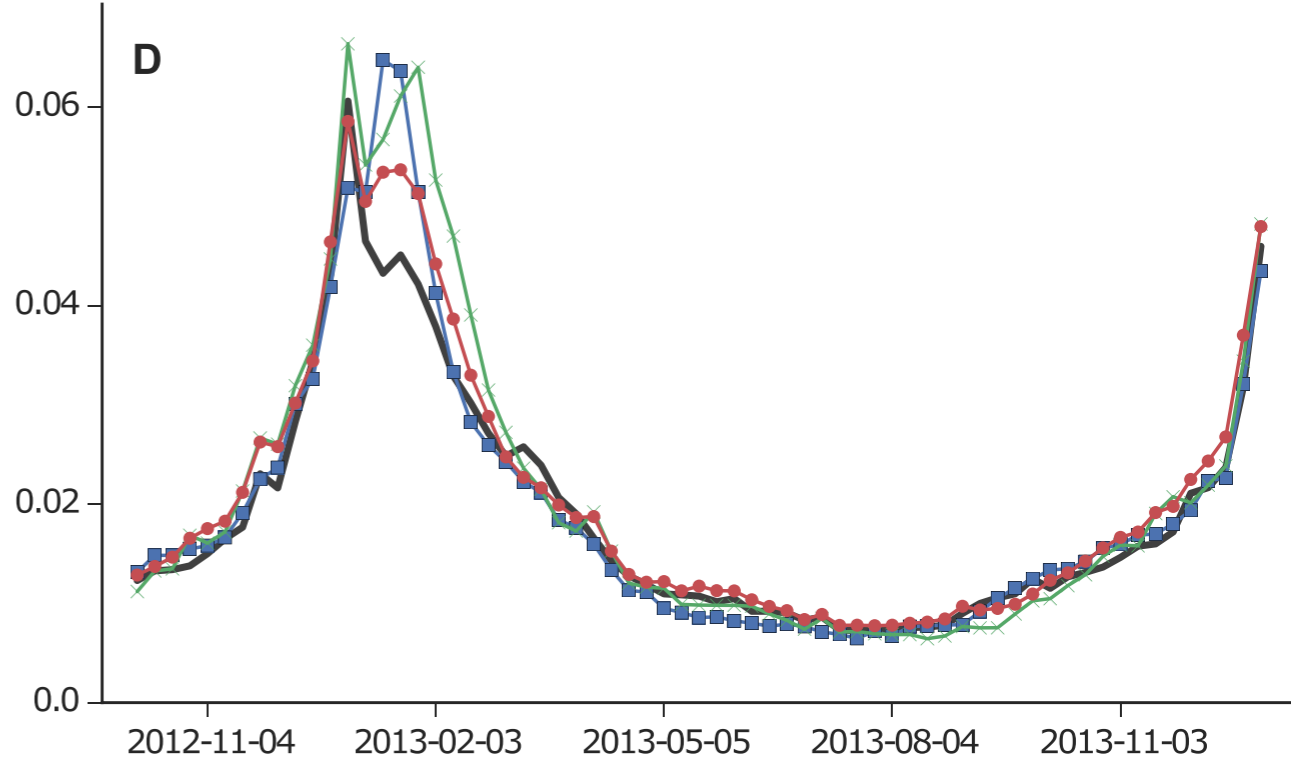
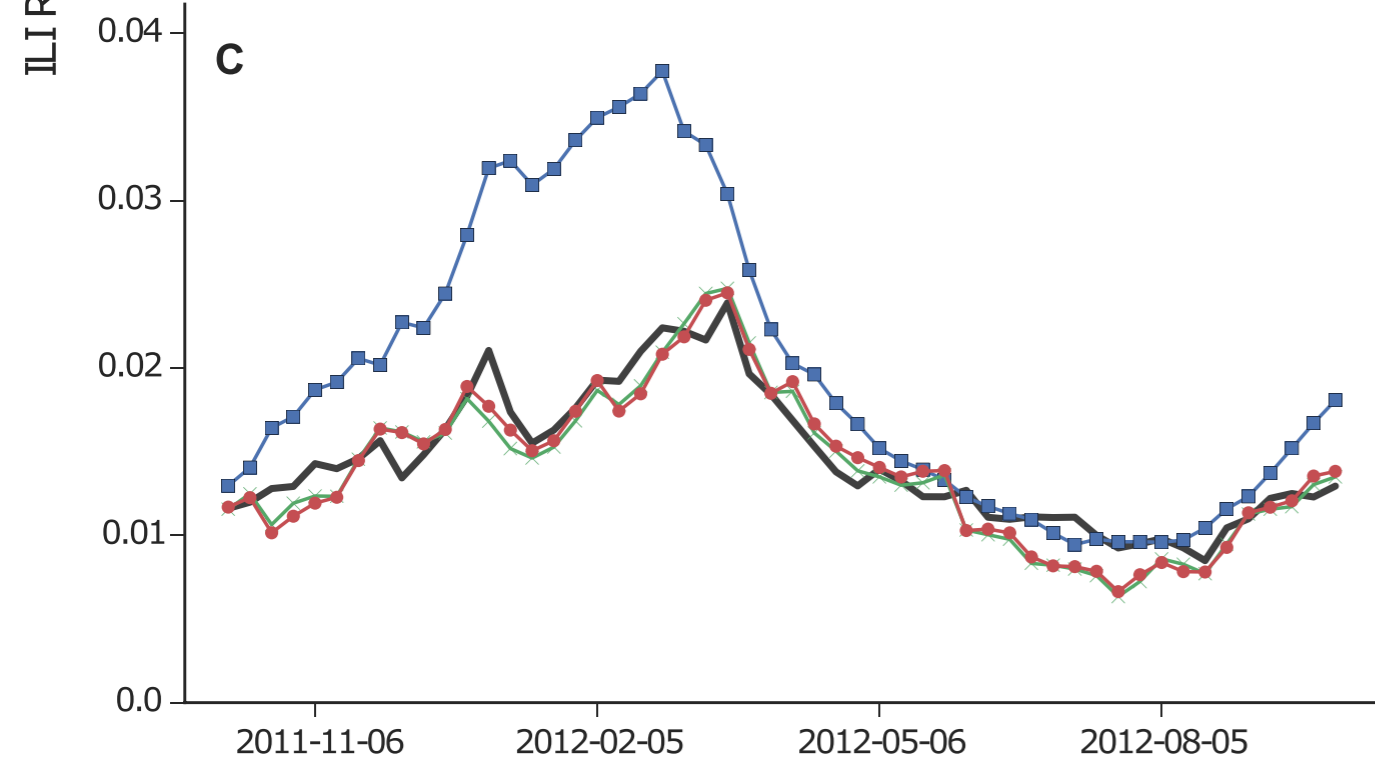
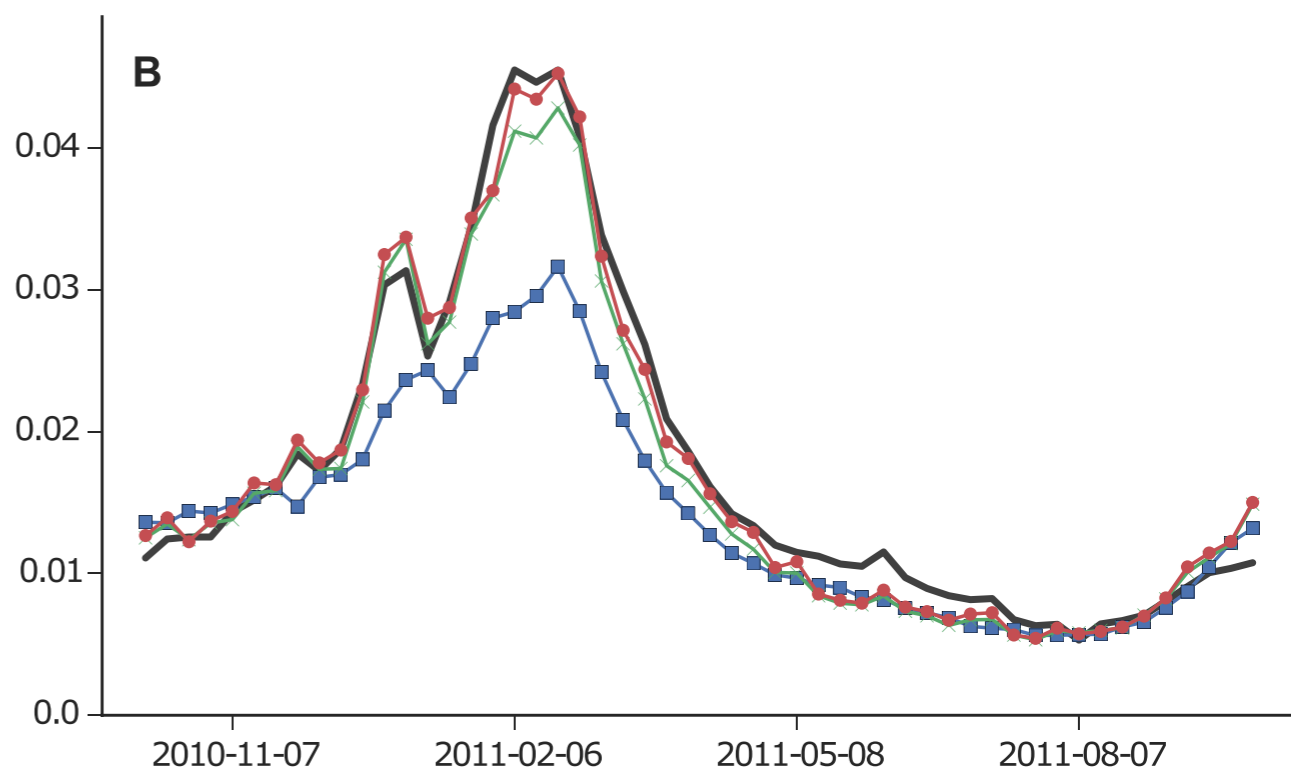
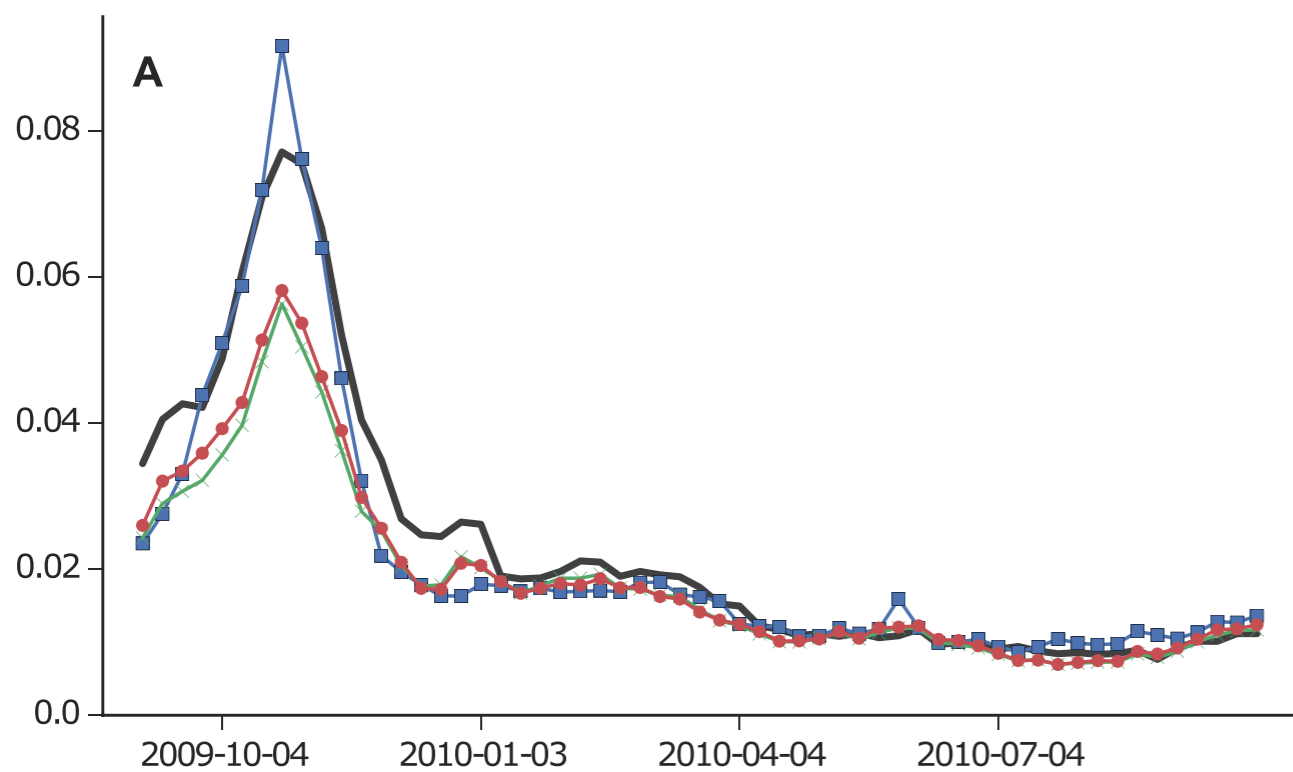
- Google Flu Trends old model
- Elastic Net
- Gaussian Process (10 clusters)



Mean absolute percentage (%) of error (MAPE) in flu rate estimates (2008-2013)

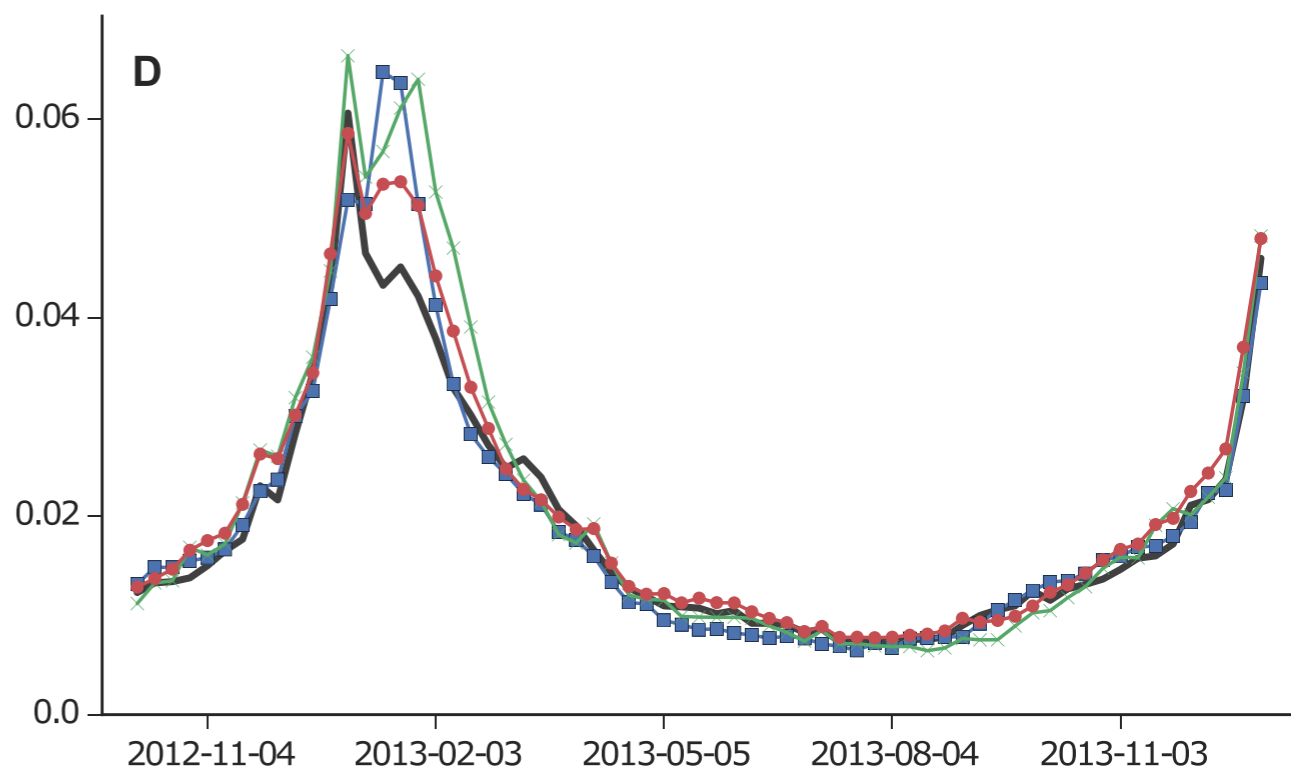
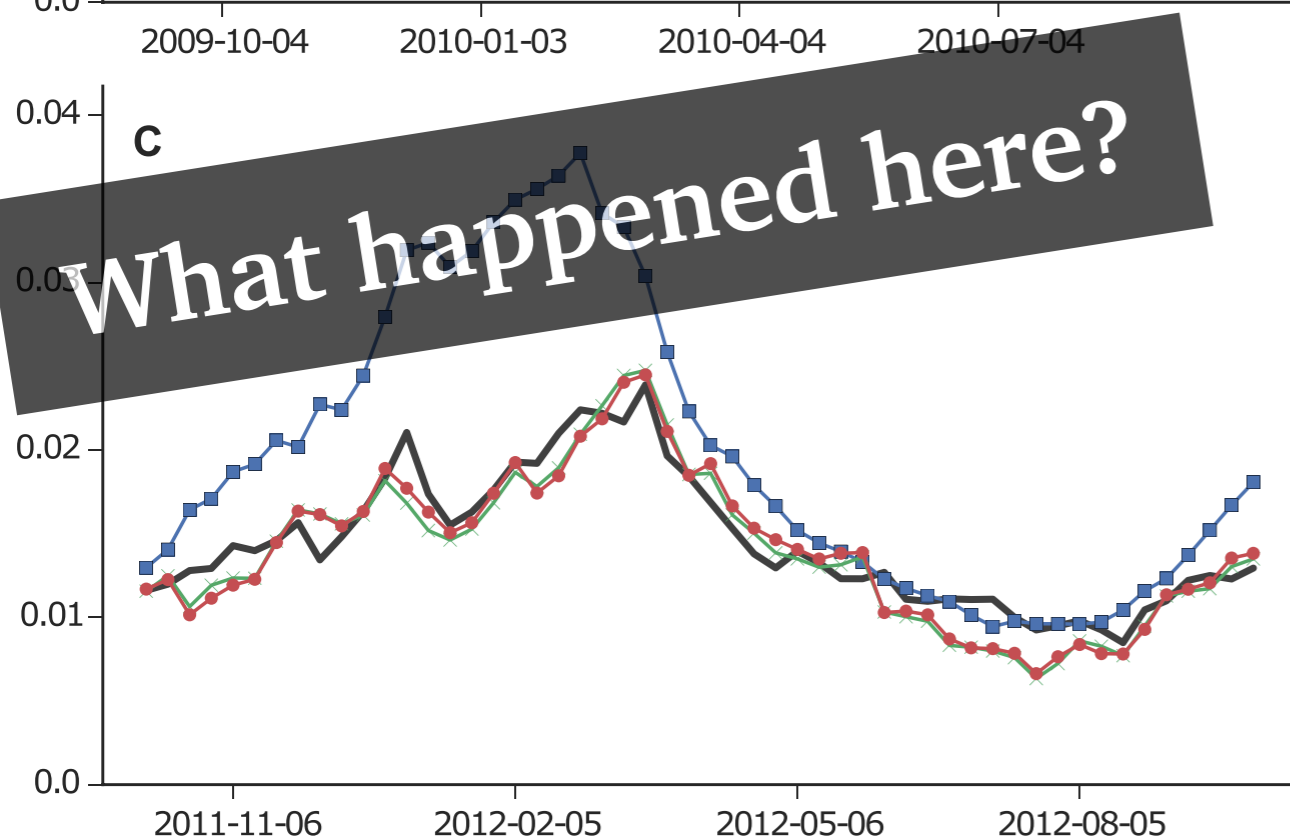
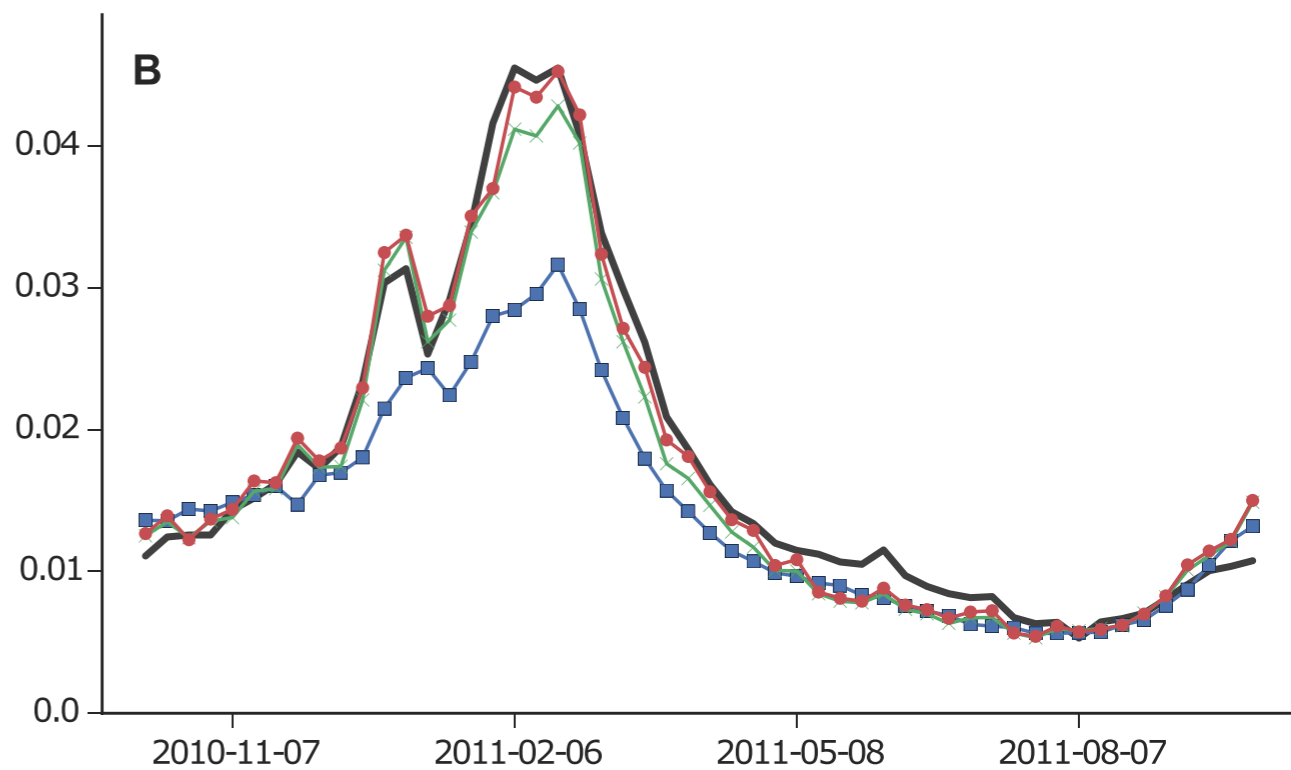
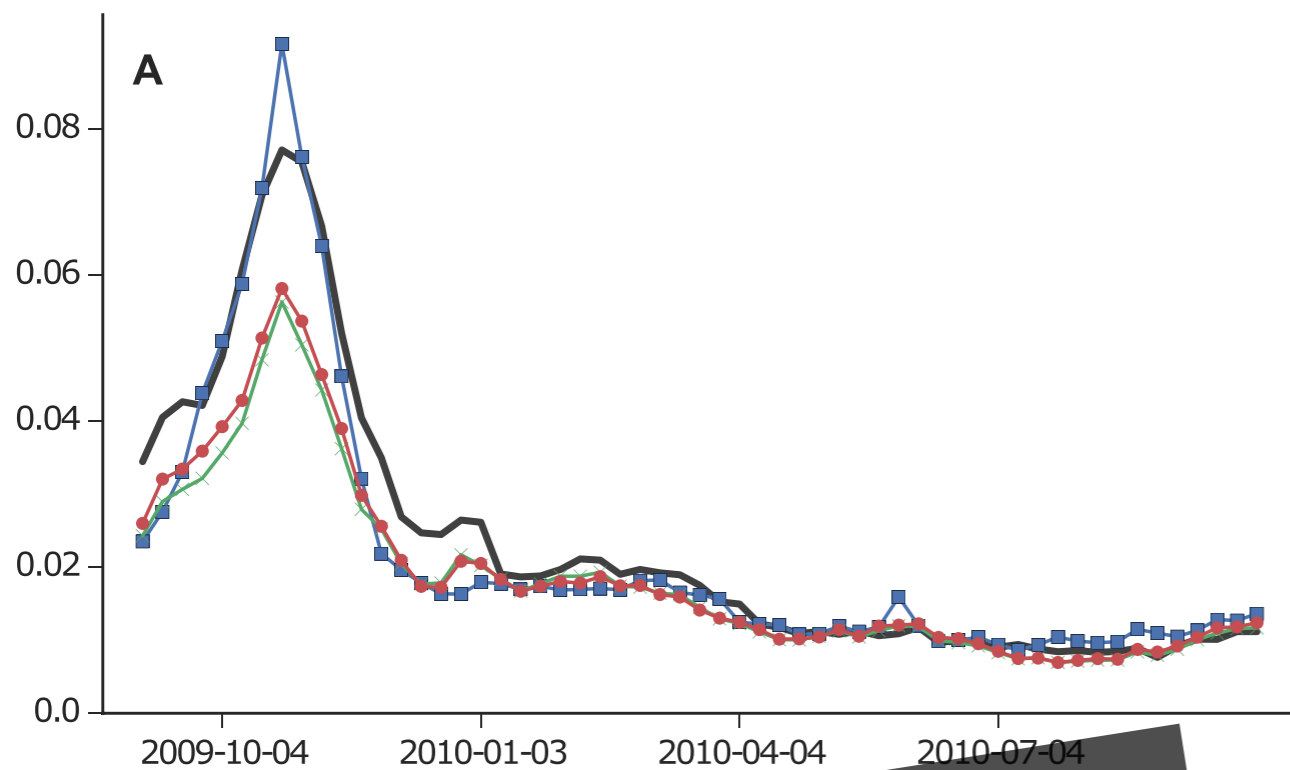
# Comparative inference plots

— CDC    —■— GFT    —×— Elastic Net    —●— GP

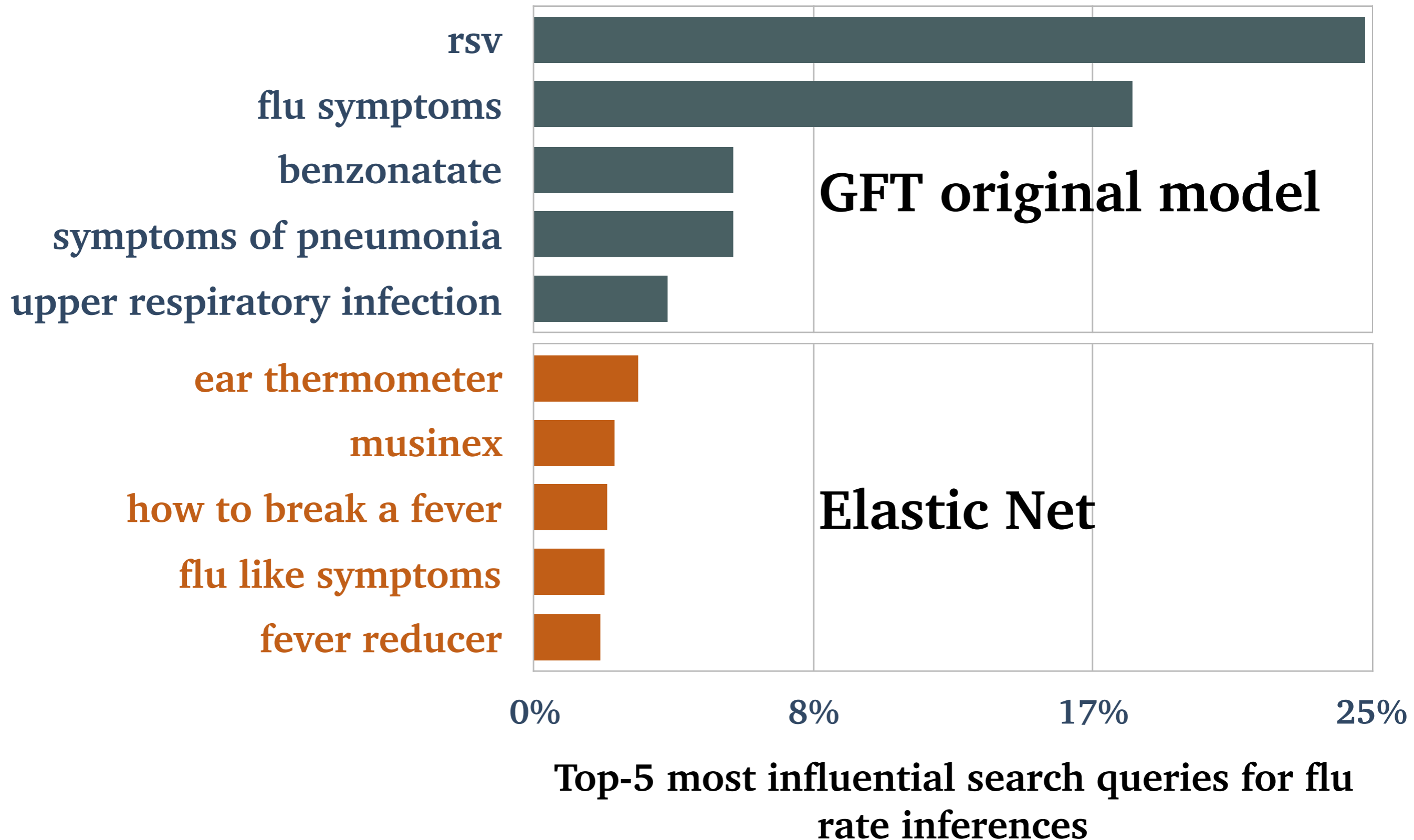


# Comparative inference plots

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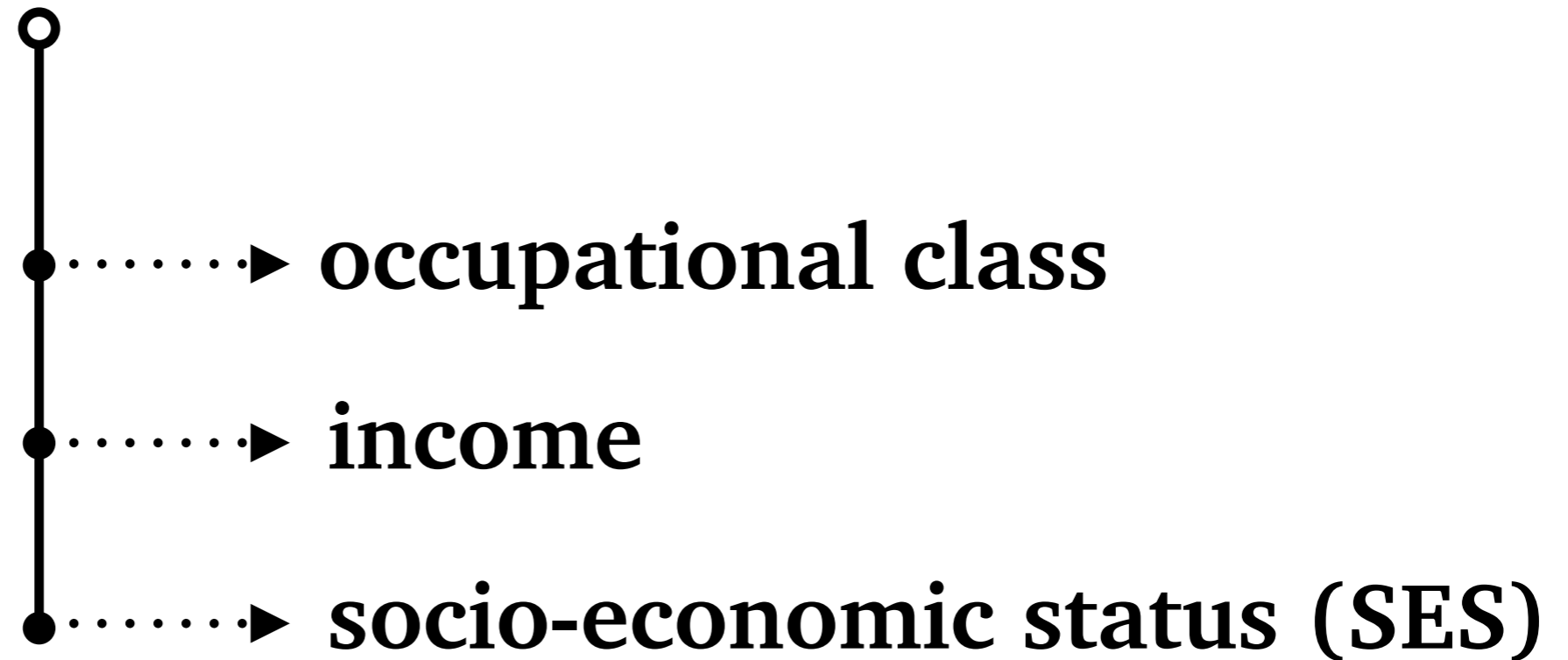
# From 4 Dec. 2011 to 28 Apr. 2012...



# I am skipping...

- (1) How, and, hence, why the GP-clustering works
- (2) The obvious auto-regressive extensions
- (3) How we incorporated statistical NLP to further improve models (*submitted paper*)

# Inferring user-level information from user-generated content

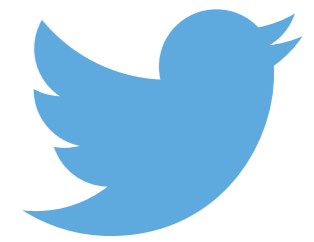


*Preotiuc-Pietro, Lampos & Aletras (ACL 2015)*

*Preotiuc-Pietro, Volkova, Lampos, Bachrach & Aletras  
(PLOS ONE, 2015)*

*Lampos, Aletras, Geyti, Zou & Cox (ECIR 2016)*

# About Twitter



And what about the statistical significance of the computed statistical significance?

[#inception\\_in\\_statistics](#)

 Reply  Delete  Favorite


RT if you love Justin Bieber. Delete ur account if you don't.

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite

**50**  
RETWEETS

**1**  
FAVORITE

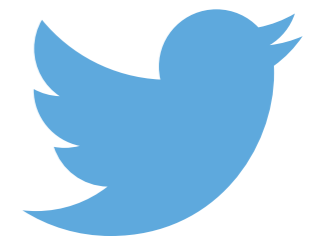
Why do I feel so happy today hihi.  
Bedtimeeee, good night. Yey thank You Lord  
for everything. Answered prayer ♥

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite

i think i have the flu but i still look fabulous

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite

# About Twitter



And what about the statistical significance of

- > **140 characters** per published status (*tweet*)
- > users can **follow** and **be followed**
- > embedded usage of **topics** (using #hashtags)
- > **user interaction** (re-tweets, @mentions, likes)
- > **real-time** nature
- > **biased demographics** (13-15% of UK's population, age bias etc.)
- > **information is noisy and not always accurate**

i think i have the flu but i still look fabulous

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite



# Linguistic expression and demographics

*“Socioeconomic variables are influencing language use.”*

*(Bernstein, 1960; Labov, 1972/2006)*

- + **Validate this hypothesis** on a broader, larger data set using social media
- + **Applications**
  - > research, as in computational social science, health, and psychology
  - > commercial

# Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)

*provided by the  
Office for National  
Statistics (UK)*

Major Group 1 (C1): Managers, Directors and Senior Officials  
Sub-major Group 11: Corporate Managers and Directors  
Minor Group 111: Chief Executives and Senior Officials  
Unit Group 1115: Chief Executives and Senior Officials  
•Job: chief executive, bank manager  
Unit Group 1116: Elected Officers and Representatives  
Minor Group 112: Production Managers and Directors  
Minor Group 113: Functional Managers and Directors  
Minor Group 115: Financial Institution Managers and Directors  
Minor Group 116: Managers and Directors in Transport and Logistics  
Minor Group 117: Senior Officers in Protective Services  
Minor Group 118: Health and Social Services Managers and Directors  
Minor Group 119: Managers and Directors in Retail and Wholesale  
Sub-major Group 12: Other Managers and Proprietors  
Major Group (C2): Professional Occupations  
•Job: mechanical engineer, pediatrician  
Major Group (C3): Associate Professional and Technical Occupations  
•Job: system administrator, dispensing optician  
Major Group (C4): Administrative and Secretarial Occupations  
•Job: legal clerk, company secretary  
Major Group (C5): Skilled Trades Occupations  
•Job: electrical fitter, tailor  
Major Group (C6): Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations  
•Job: nursery assistant, hairdresser  
Major Group (C7): Sales and Customer Service Occupations  
•Job: sales assistant, telephonist  
Major Group (C8): Process, Plant and Machine Operatives  
•Job: factory worker, van driver  
Major Group (C9): Elementary Occupations  
•Job: shelf stacker, bartender

**9 major groups**

**25 sub-major groups**

**90 minor groups**

**369 unit groups**

# Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)

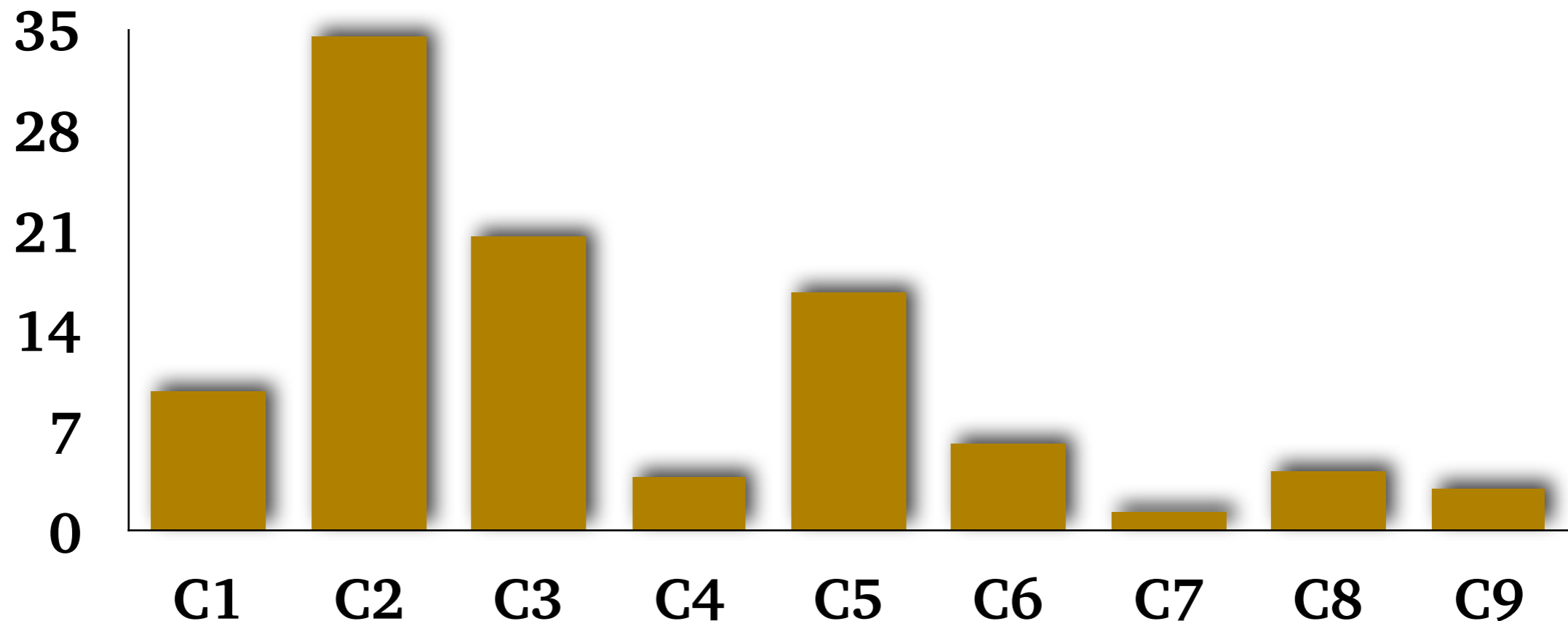
## The 9 major occupational classes (C1-9)

- C1** — Managers, Directors & Senior Officials  
*(chief executive, bank manager)*
- C2** — Professional Occupations *(postdoc, pediatricist)*
- C3** — Associate Professional & Technical  
*(system administrator, dispensing optician)*
- C4** — Administrative & Secretarial *(legal clerk, secretary)*
- C5** — Skilled Trades *(electrical fitter, tailor)*
- C6** — Caring, Leisure, Other Service  
*(nursery assistant, hairdresser)*
- C7** — Sales & Customer Service *(sales assistant, telephonist)*
- C8** — Process, Plant and Machine Operatives  
*(factory worker, van driver)*
- C9** — Elementary *(shelf stacker, bartender)*

# Forming a Twitter user data set

- + 5,191 Twitter users mapped to their occupations, then mapped to one of the 9 SOC categories
- + 10 million tweets
- + [Download the data set](#)

% of users per SOC category



# Twitter user attributes (*18 in total*)



## number of

- followers
- friends
- followers/friends (ratio)
- times listed
- tweets
- favourites (likes)
- unique @-mentions
- tweets/day (avg.)
- retweets/tweet (avg.)

## proportion of

- retweets done
- non duplicate tweets
- retweeted tweets
- hashtags
- tweets with hashtags
- tweets with @-mentions
- @-replies
- tweets with links
- tweets in English

*Similarly to our paper  
for user impact estimation*

*(Lampos et al., 2014)*

# Twitter user discussion topics (I)

**Topics — Word clusters (#: 30, 50, 100, 200)**

- + ***SVD*** on the graph laplacian of the word by word similarity matrix using ***normalised PMI***, *i.e.* a form of spectral clustering  
([Bouma, 2009](#); [von Luxburg, 2007](#))
- + ***Word2vec*** (skip-gram with negative sampling) to learn word embeddings; pairwise ***cosine similarity*** on the embeddings to derive a word by word similarity matrix; then spectral clustering on the similarity matrix  
([Mikolov et al., 2013](#))

# Twitter user discussion topics (II)

Topic	Most central words; <i>Most frequent words</i>
Arts	archival, stencil, canvas, minimalist; <i>art, design, print</i>
Health	chemotherapy, diagnosis, disease; <i>risk, cancer, mental, stress</i>
Beauty Care	exfoliating, cleanser, hydrating; <i>beauty, natural, dry, skin</i>
Higher Education	undergraduate, doctoral, academic, students, curriculum; <i>students, research, board, student, college, education, library</i>
Football	bardsley, etherington, gallas; <i>van, foster, cole, winger</i>
Corporate	consortium, institutional, firm's; <i>patent, industry, reports</i>
Elongated Words	yaaayy, wooooo, woooo, yayyyyy, yaaaaay, yayayaya, yayy; <i>wait, till, til, yay, ahhh, hoo, woo, woot, whoop, woohoo</i>
Politics	religious, colonialism, christianity, judaism, persecution, fascism, marxism; <i>human, culture, justice, religion, democracy</i>



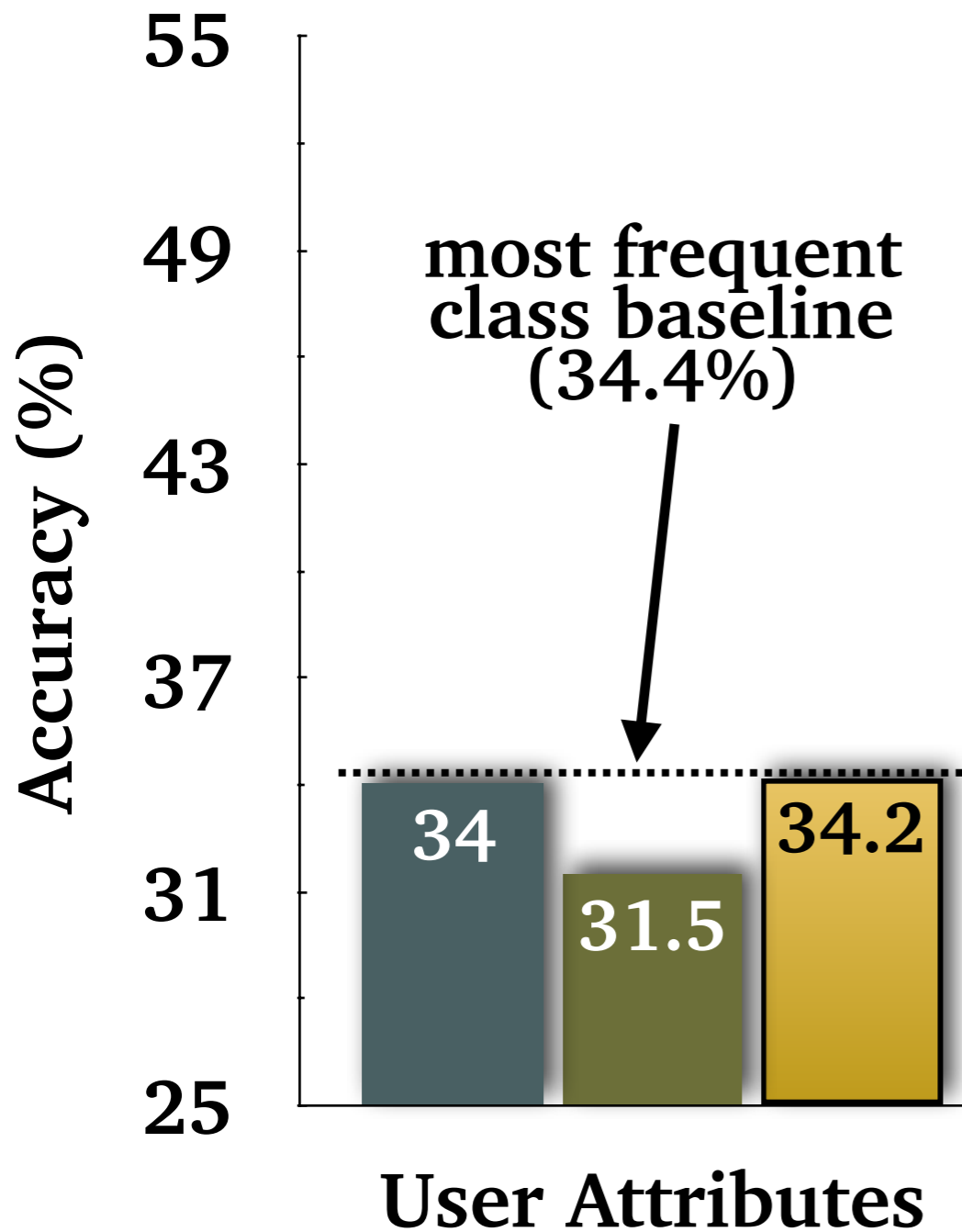
# Gaussian Process classifier

$$k_{\text{ard}}(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') = \sigma^2 \exp \left[ \sum_i^d -\frac{(x_i - x'_i)^2}{2l_i^2} \right]$$

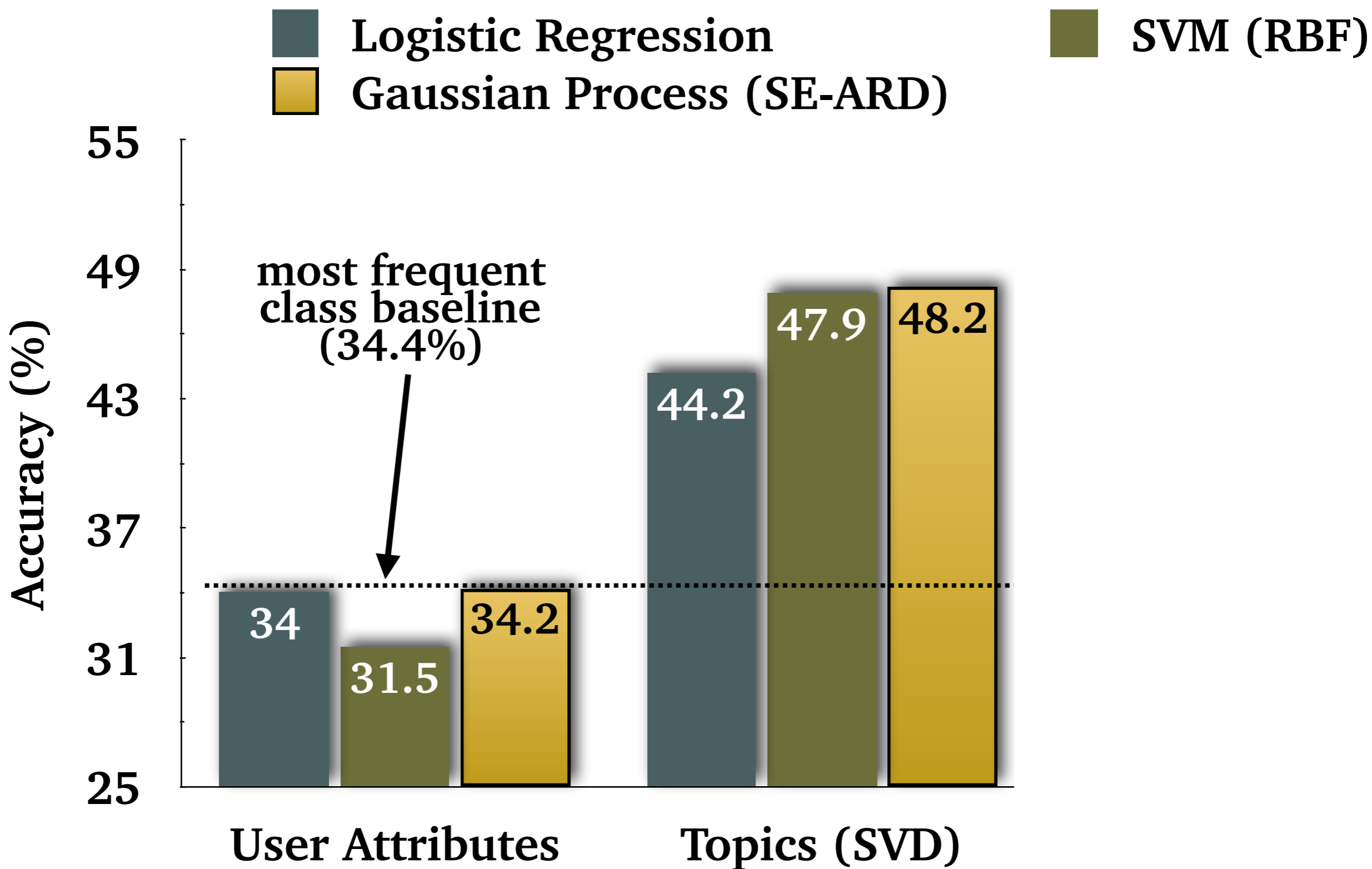
- + Squared-exponential ARD covariance function: determines (quantify) the relevancy of each user feature, *i.e.* **the relevance of feature  $i$  is inversely proportional to the length-scale hyper-parameter  $l_i$**
- + **9-class classification** using one vs. all
- + GP hyper-parameter learning with **Expectation Propagation**
- + Inference using **FITC** (500 inducing points)



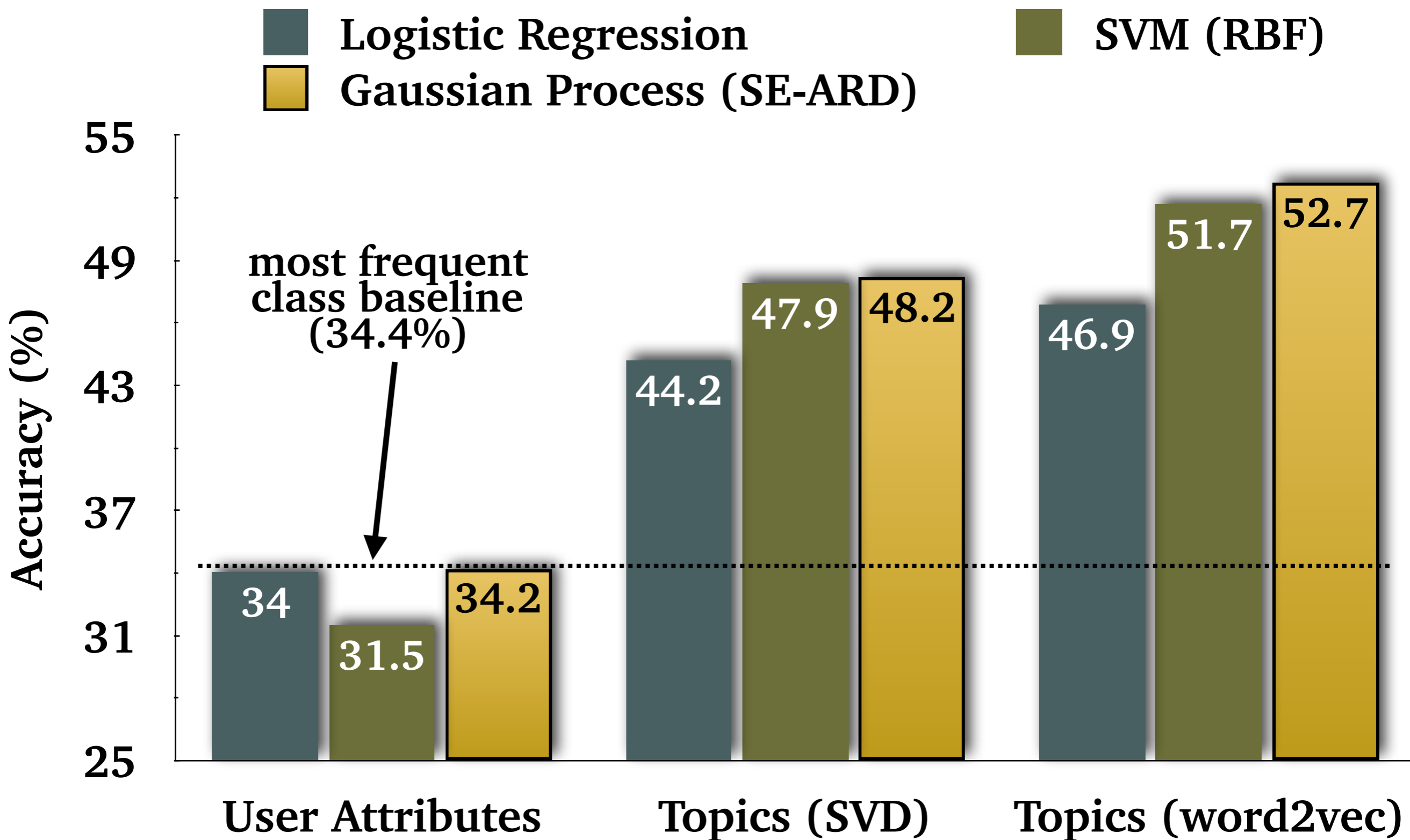
# Occupation classification performance



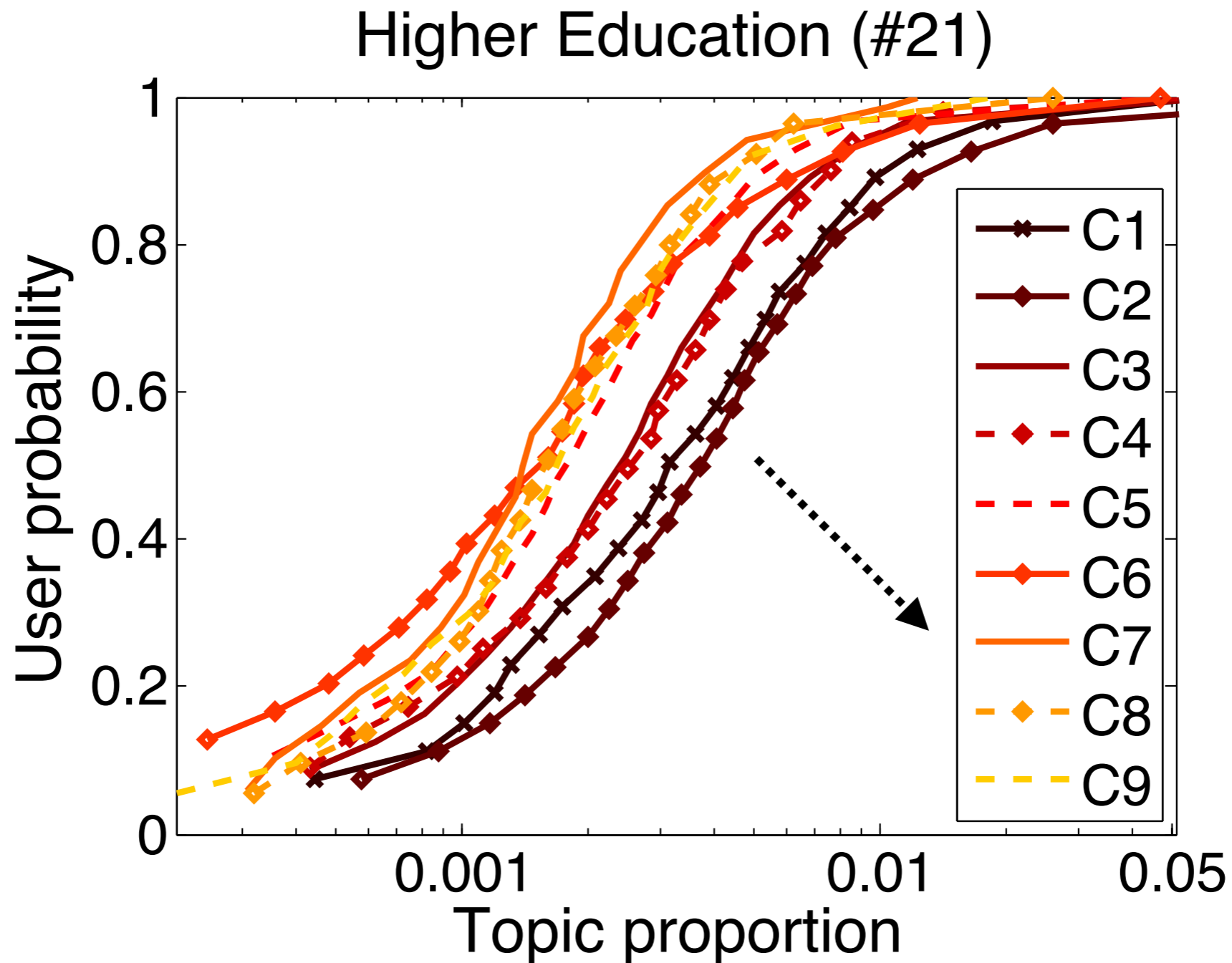
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# Occupation classification performance



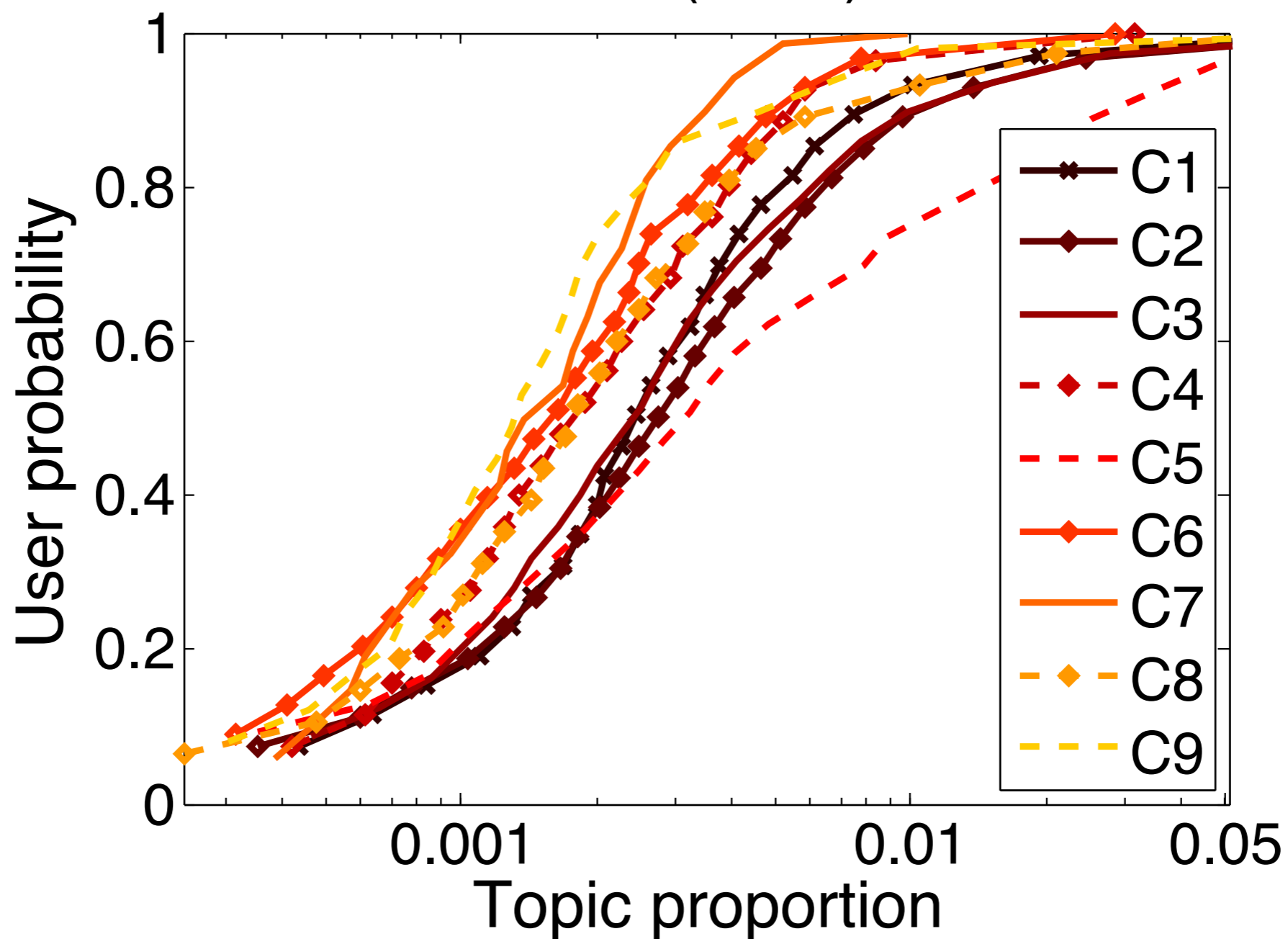
# Occupation classification insights (I)



**CDF of the topic “Higher Education”:** Topic more prevalent in the upper classes (C2, which includes education professionals, and C1), and less so in the lower classes

# Occupation classification insights (II)

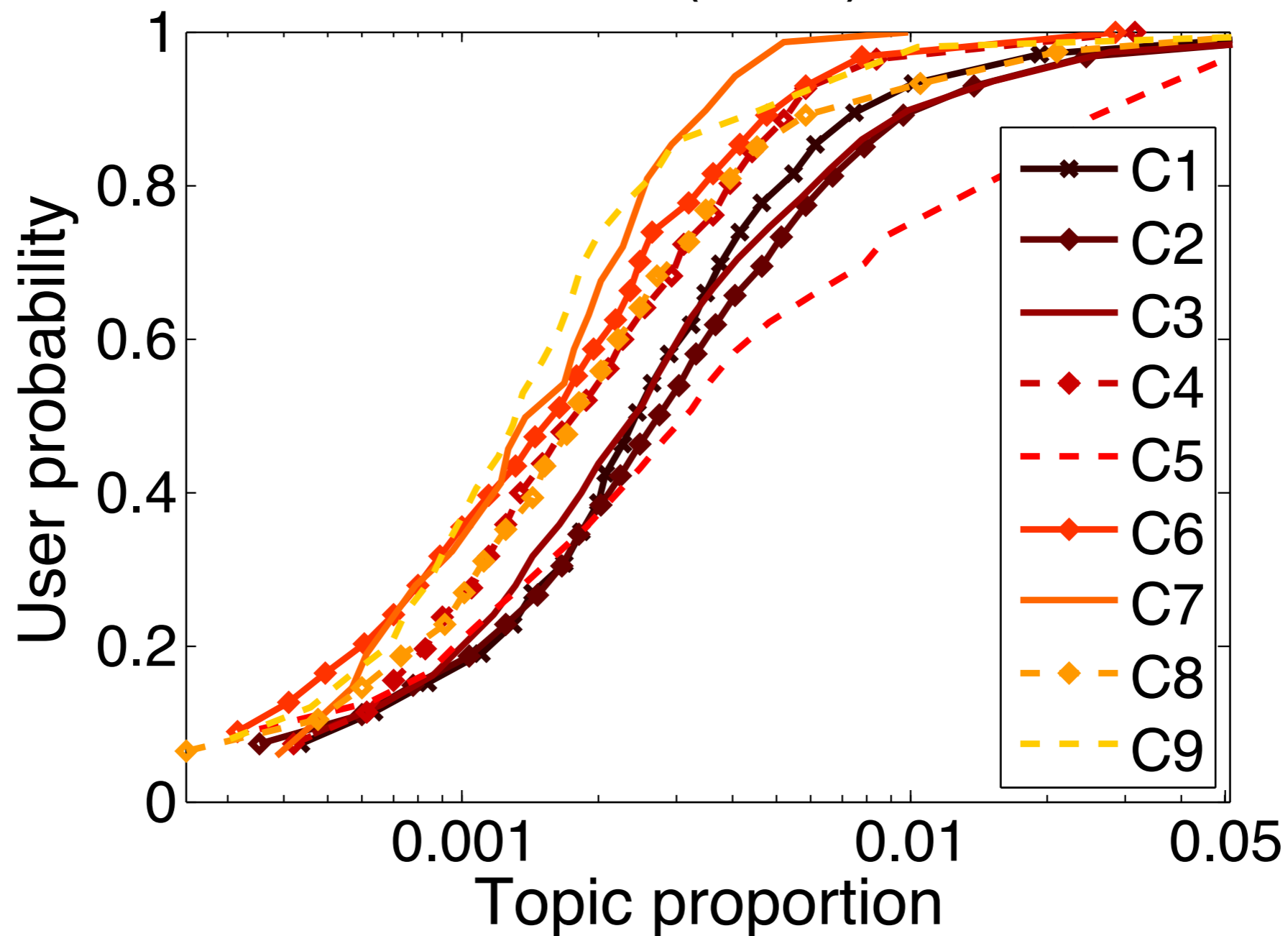
Arts (#116)



CDF of the topic “Arts”: Topic more prevalent in C5 (which includes artists) and the upper classes

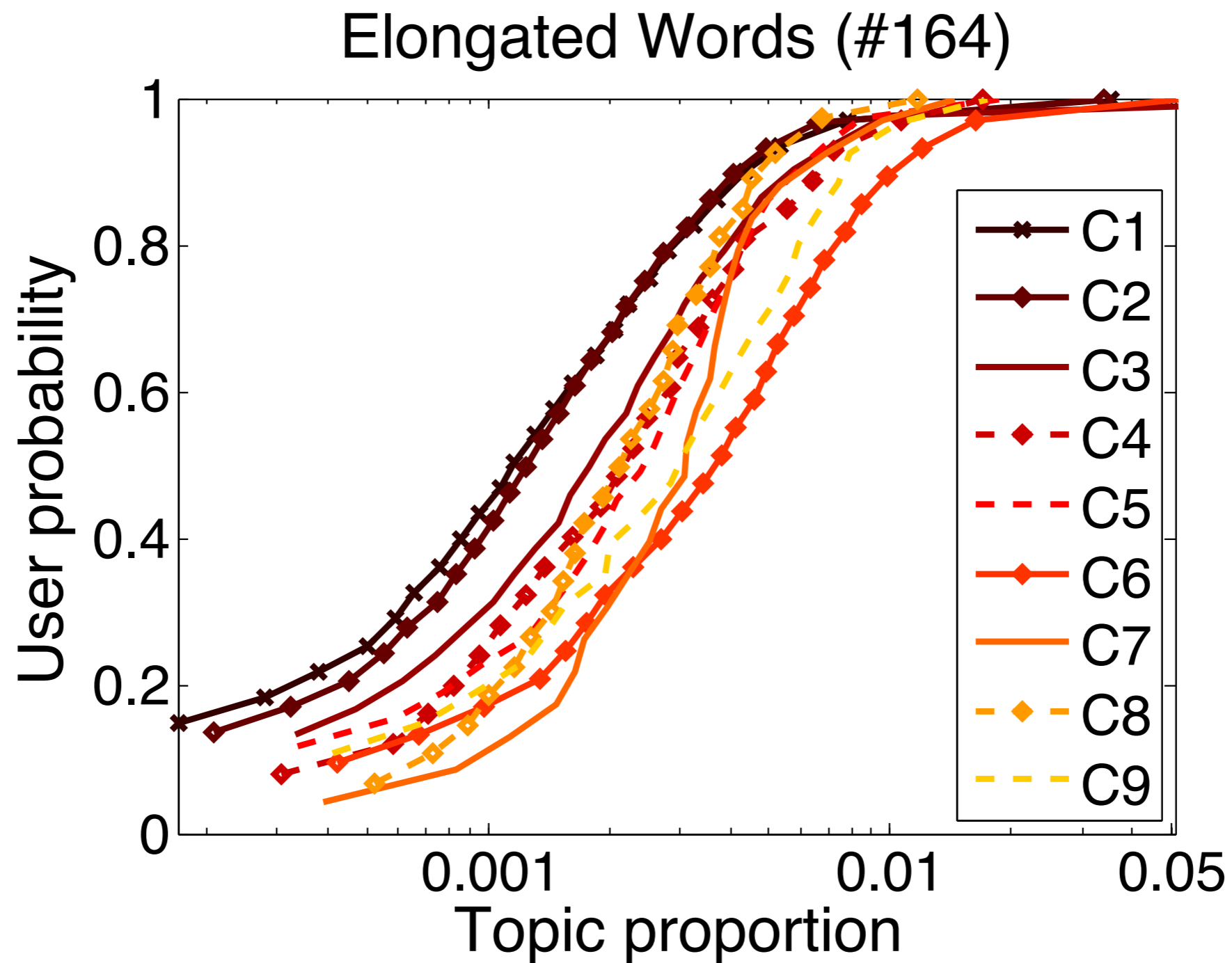
# Occupation classification insights (II)

Arts (#116)



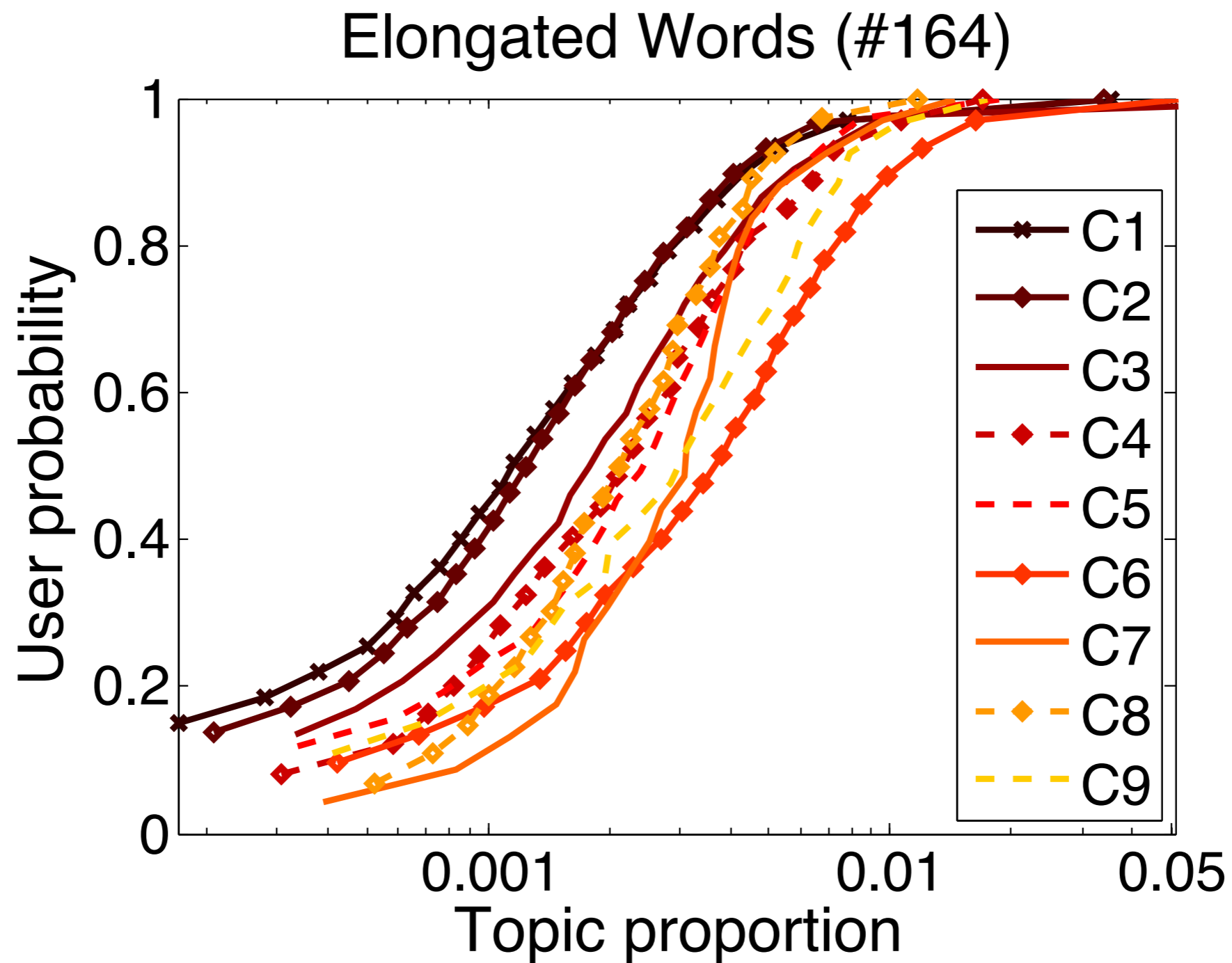
**CDF of the topic “Arts”: Topic more prevalent in C5 (which includes artists) and the upper classes**

# Occupation classification insights (III)



CDF of the topic “Elongated Words”: Topic more prevalent in the lower classes, and less so in the upper classes

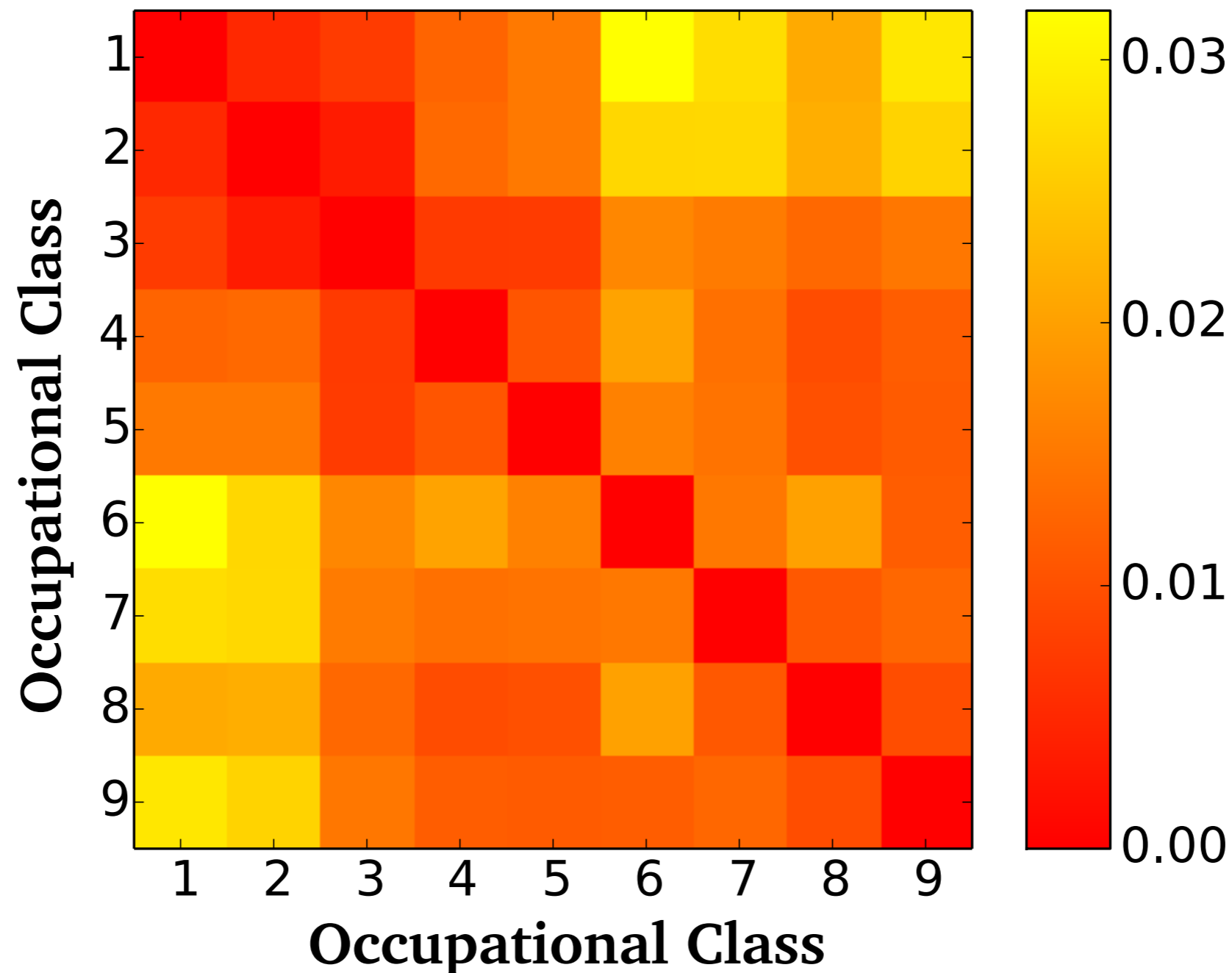
# Occupation classification insights (III)



**CDF of the topic “Elongated Words”:** Topic more prevalent in the lower classes, and less so in the upper classes

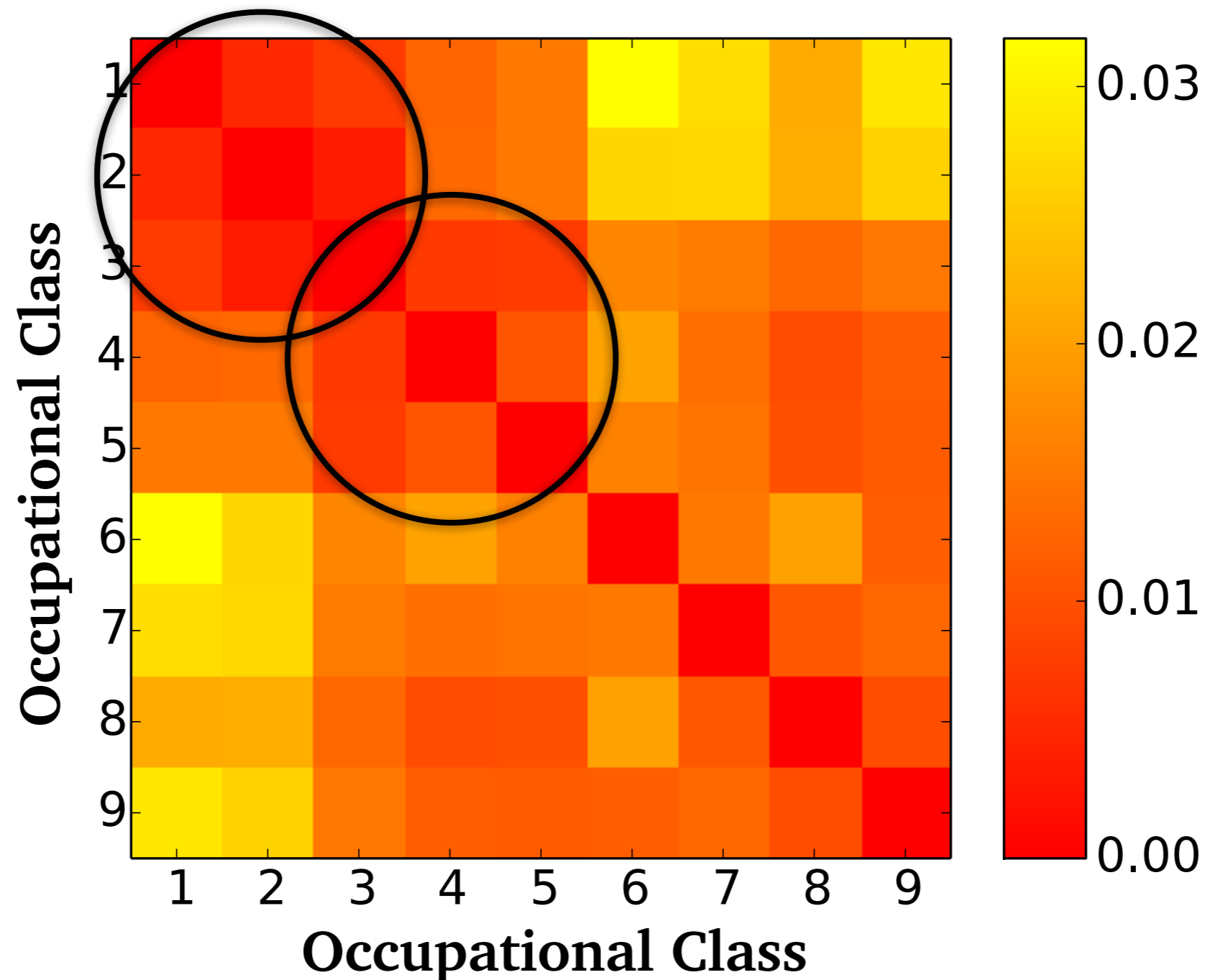


# Occupation classification insights (IV)



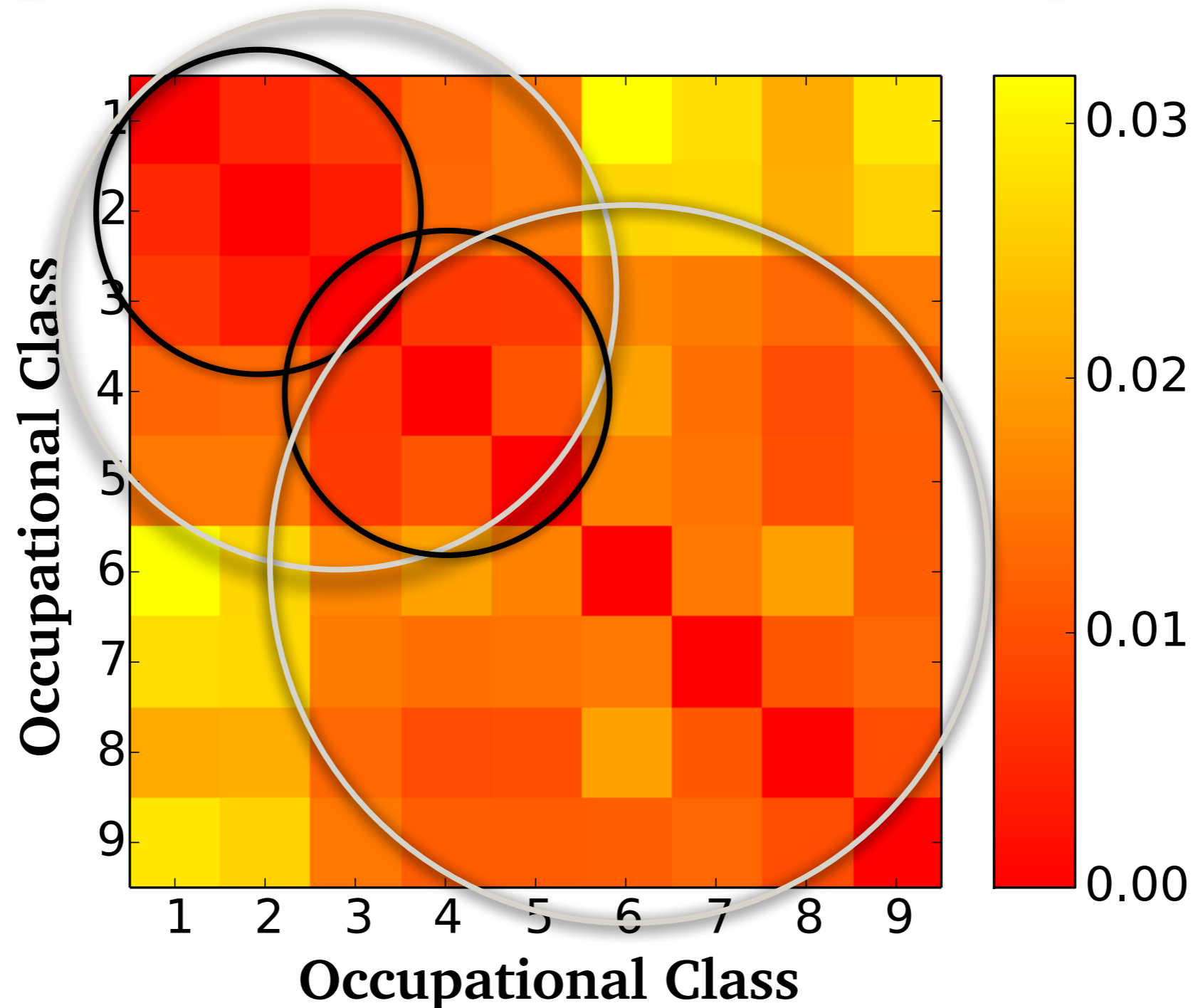
**Topic distribution distance (*Jensen-Shannon divergence*)**  
for the different occupational classes (1-9)

# Occupation classification insights (IV)



**Topic distribution distance (*Jensen-Shannon divergence*)**  
for the different occupational classes (1-9)

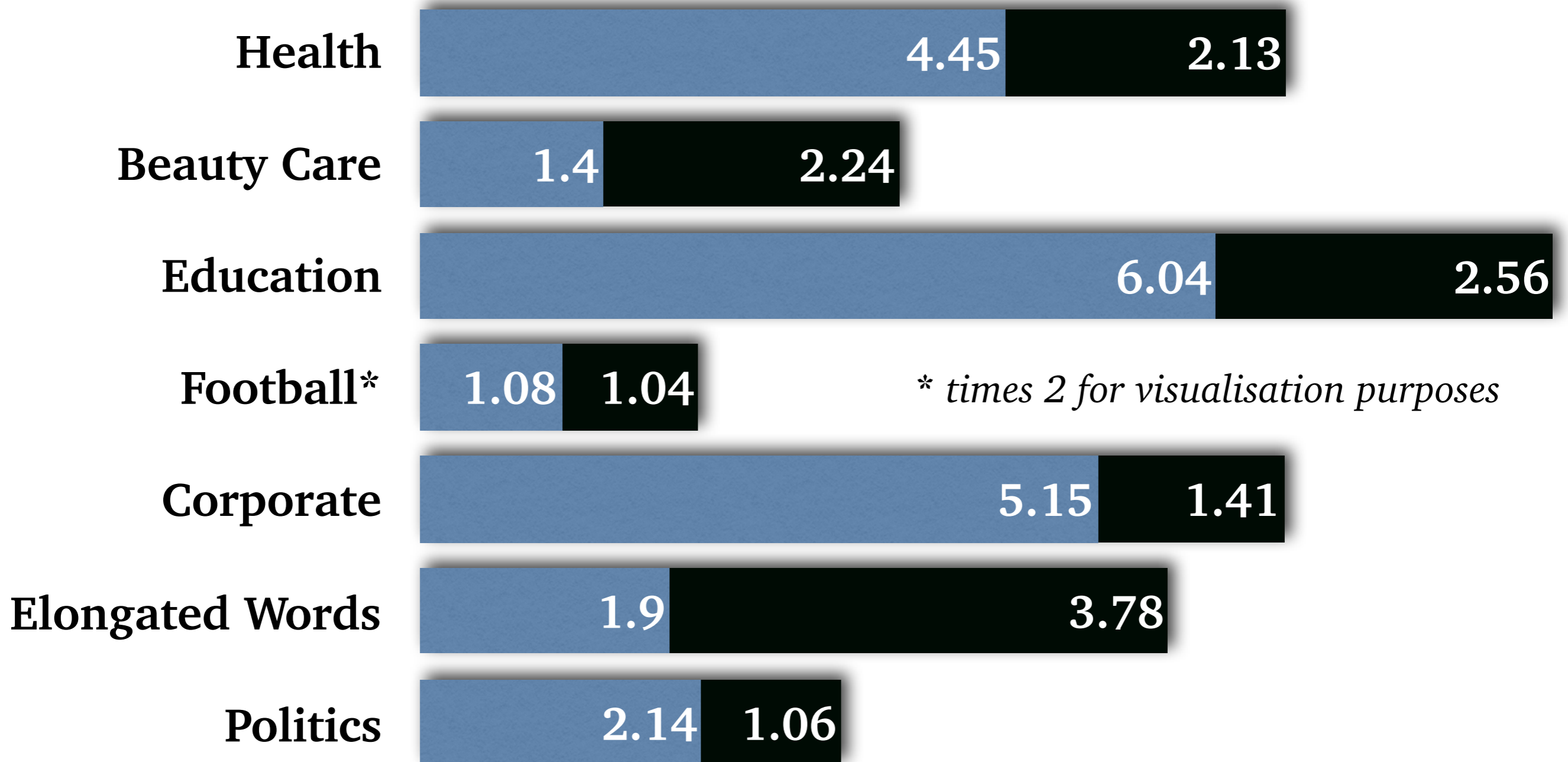
# Occupation classification insights (IV)



**Topic distribution distance (*Jensen-Shannon divergence*)**  
for the different occupational classes (1-9)

# Occupation classification insights (V)

■ Classes 1-2    ■ Classes 6-9



*\* times 2 for visualisation purposes*

Topic scores for occupational class supersets

# Additional 'perceived' user features

- + Previously used features: **Profile** features, **Shallow** profile features, and **Topics**
- + Based on the work of *Volkova et al. (2015)*, we also incorporated:
  - > **Inferred Psycho-Demographic features (15)**  
*e.g.* gender, age, education level, religion, life satisfaction, excitement, anxiety etc.
  - > **Emotions (9)**  
*e.g.* positive / negative sentiment, joy, anger, fear, disgust, sadness, surprise etc.

# Defining the user income regression task

**Group 112:** Production Managers and Directors (50,952 GBP/year)

•Job titles: engineering manager, managing director, production manager, construction manager, quarry manager, operations manager

**Group 241:** Conservation and Environment Professionals (53,679 GBP/year)

•Job titles: conservation officer, ecologist, energy conservation officer, heritage manager, marine conservationist, energy manager, environmental consultant, environmental engineer, environmental protection officer, environmental scientist, landfill engineer

**Group 312:** Draughtspersons and Related Architectural Technicians (29,167 GBP/year)

•Job titles: architectural assistant, architectural, technician, construction planner, planning enforcement officer, cartographer, draughtsman, CAD operator

**Group 411:** Administrative Occupations: Government and Related Organisations (20,373 GBP/year)

•Job titles: administrative assistant, civil servant, government clerk, revenue officer, benefits assistant, trade union official, research association secretary

**Group 541:** Textiles and Garments Trades (18,986 GBP/year)

•Job titles: knitter, weaver, carpet weaver, curtain maker, upholsterer, curtain fitter, cobbler, leather worker, shoe machinist, shoe repairer, hosiery cutter, dressmaker, fabric cutter, tailor, tailoress, clothing manufacturer, embroiderer, hand sewer, sail maker, upholstery cutter

**Group 622:** Hairdressers and Related Services (10,793 GBP/year)

•Job titles: barber, colourist, hair stylist, hairdresser, beautician, beauty therapist, nail technician, tattooist

**Group 713:** Sales Supervisors (18,383 GBP/year)

•Job titles: sales supervisor, section manager, shop supervisor, retail supervisor, retail team leader

**Group 813:** Assemblers and Routine Operatives (22,491 GBP/year)

•Job titles: assembler, line operator, solderer, quality assurance inspector, quality auditor, quality controller, quality inspector, test engineer, weightbridge operator, type technician

**Group 913:** Elementary Process Plant Occupations (17,902 GBP/year)

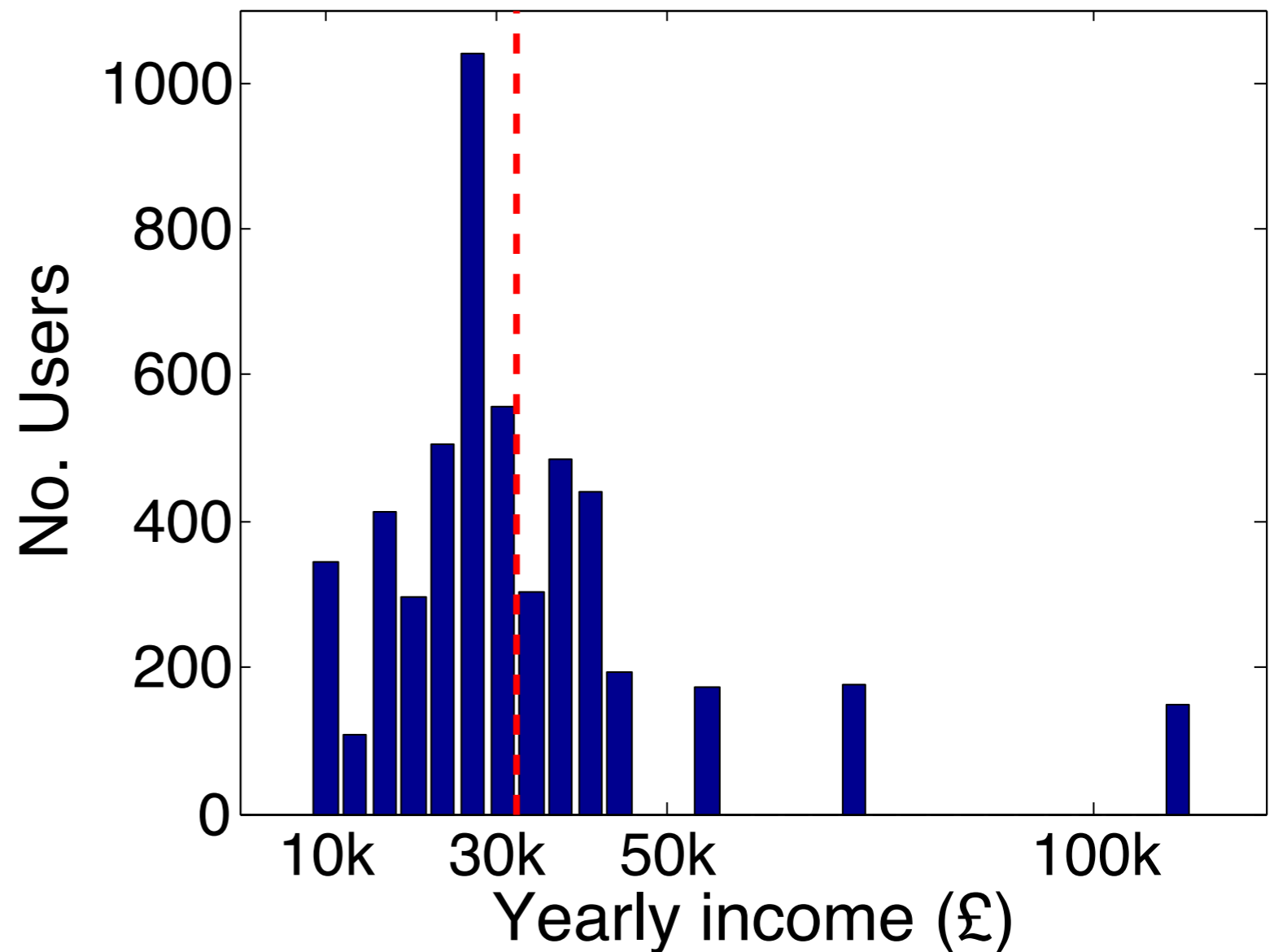
•Job titles: factory cleaner, hygiene operator, industrial cleaner, paint filler, packaging operator, material handler, packer

*Same Twitter data set as in the job classification task*

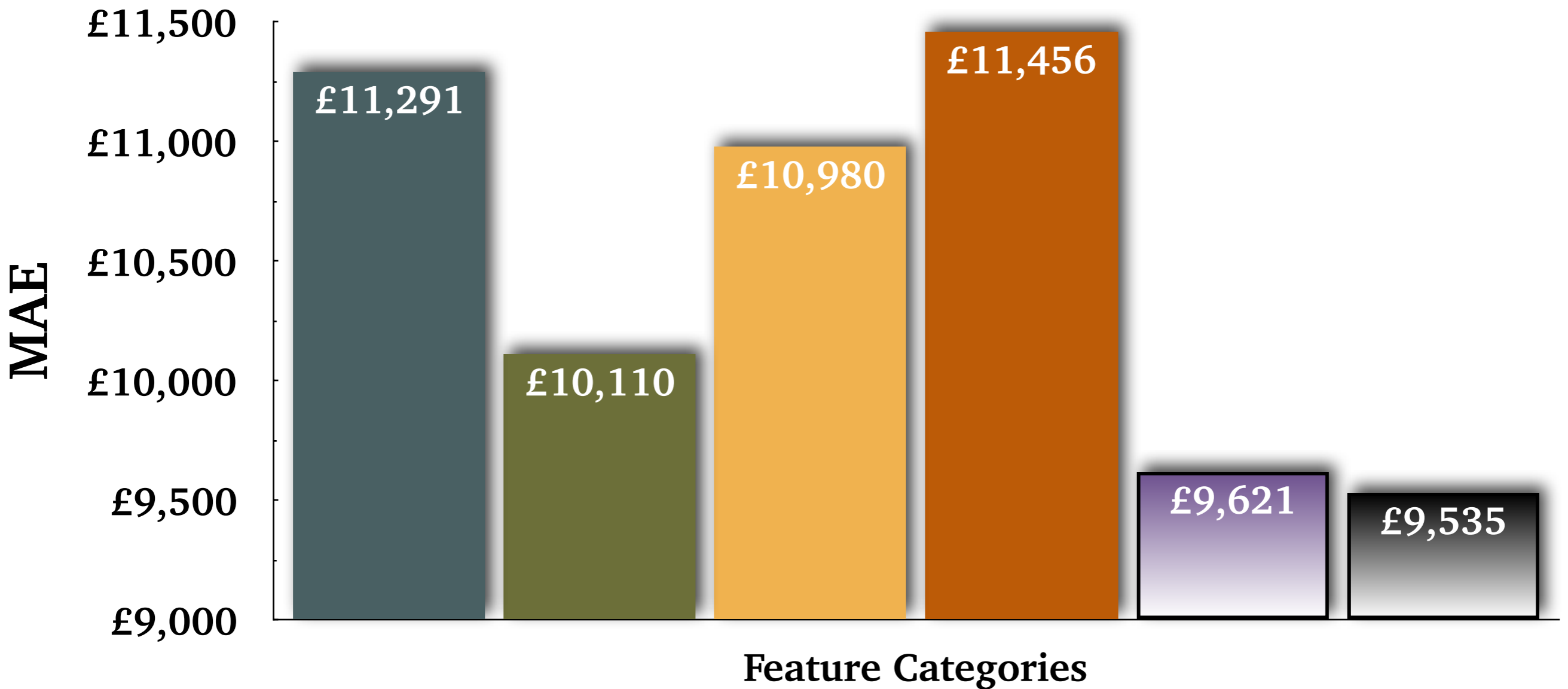
*Use an income mapping from SOC to create real-valued target data for the regression task*

# User income regression: data

- + **5,191** Twitter users mapped to their occupations, then mapped to an average income in GBP (£) using the *SOC* taxonomy
- + ~11 million tweets
- + [Download the data](#)



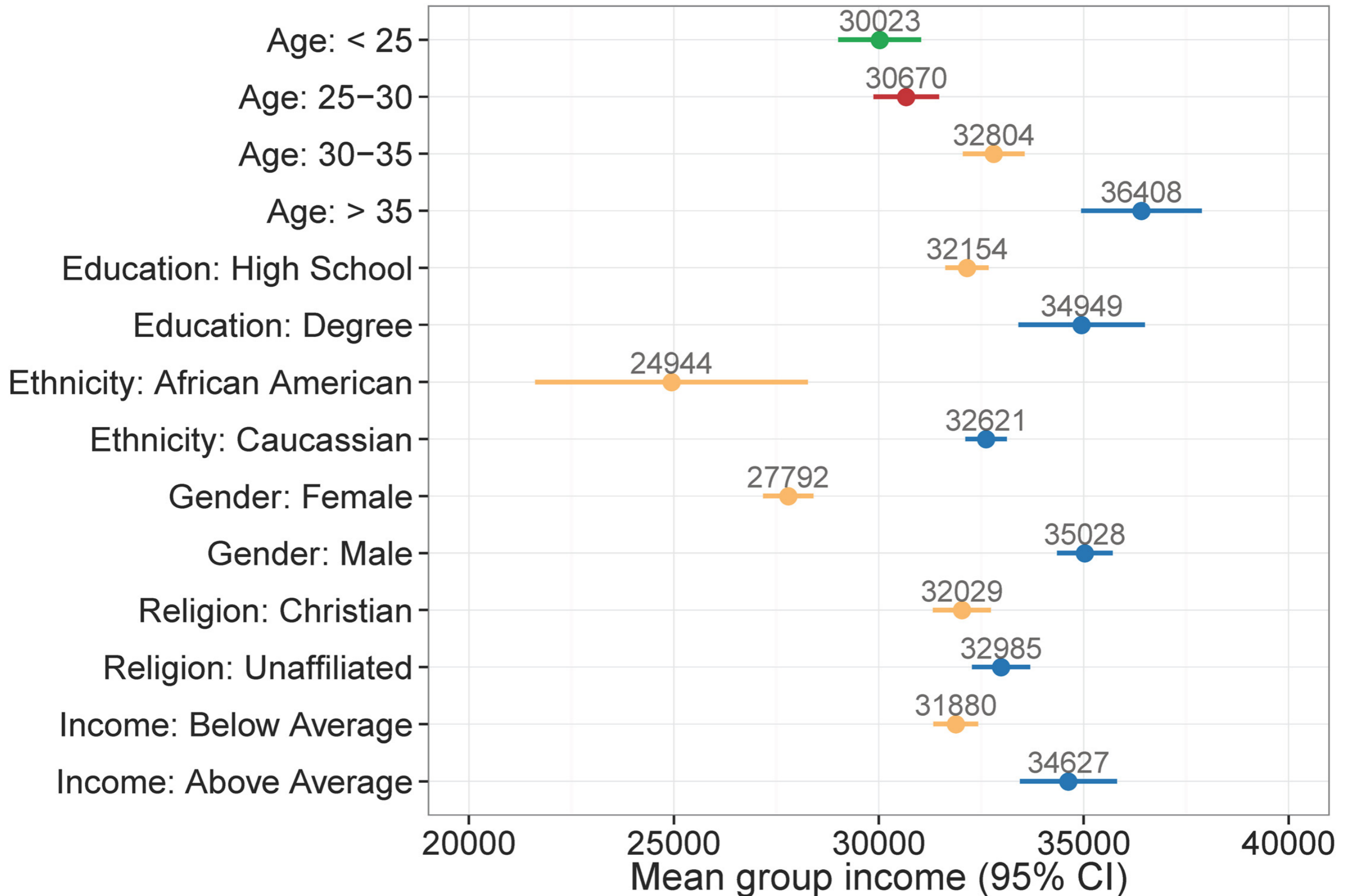
# User income regression performance



Income inference error (Mean Absolute Error) using GP regression or a linear ensemble for all features

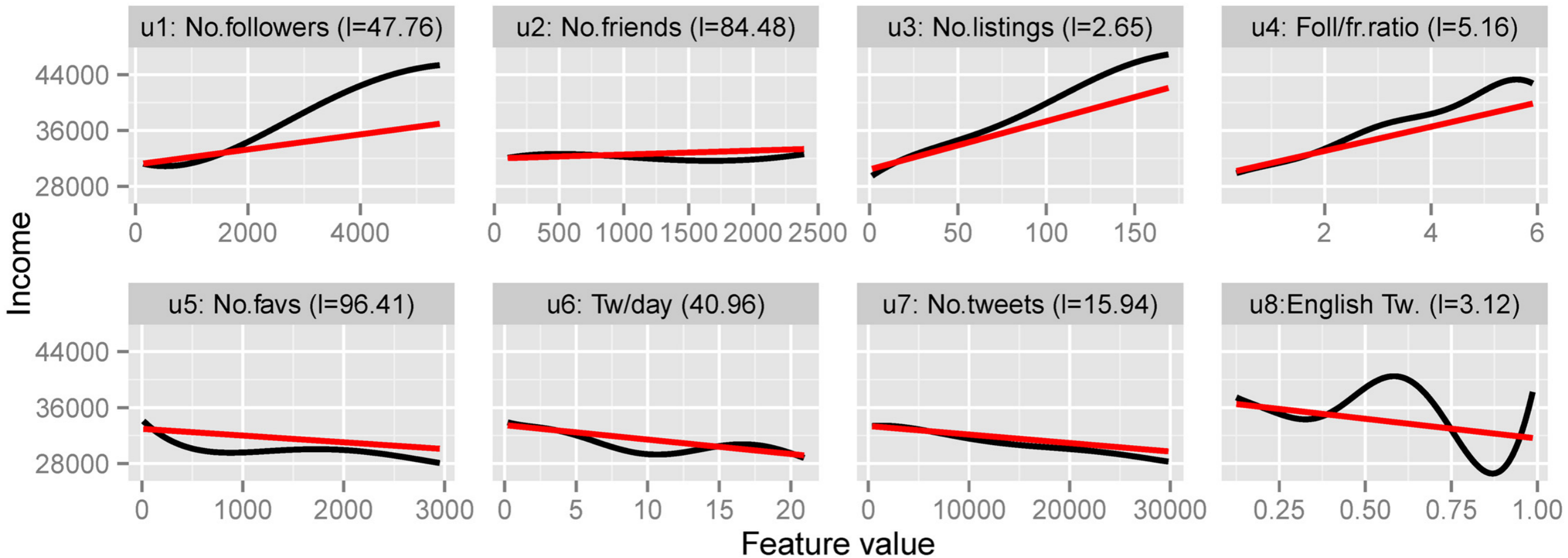


# User income regression insights (I)



# User income regression insights (II)

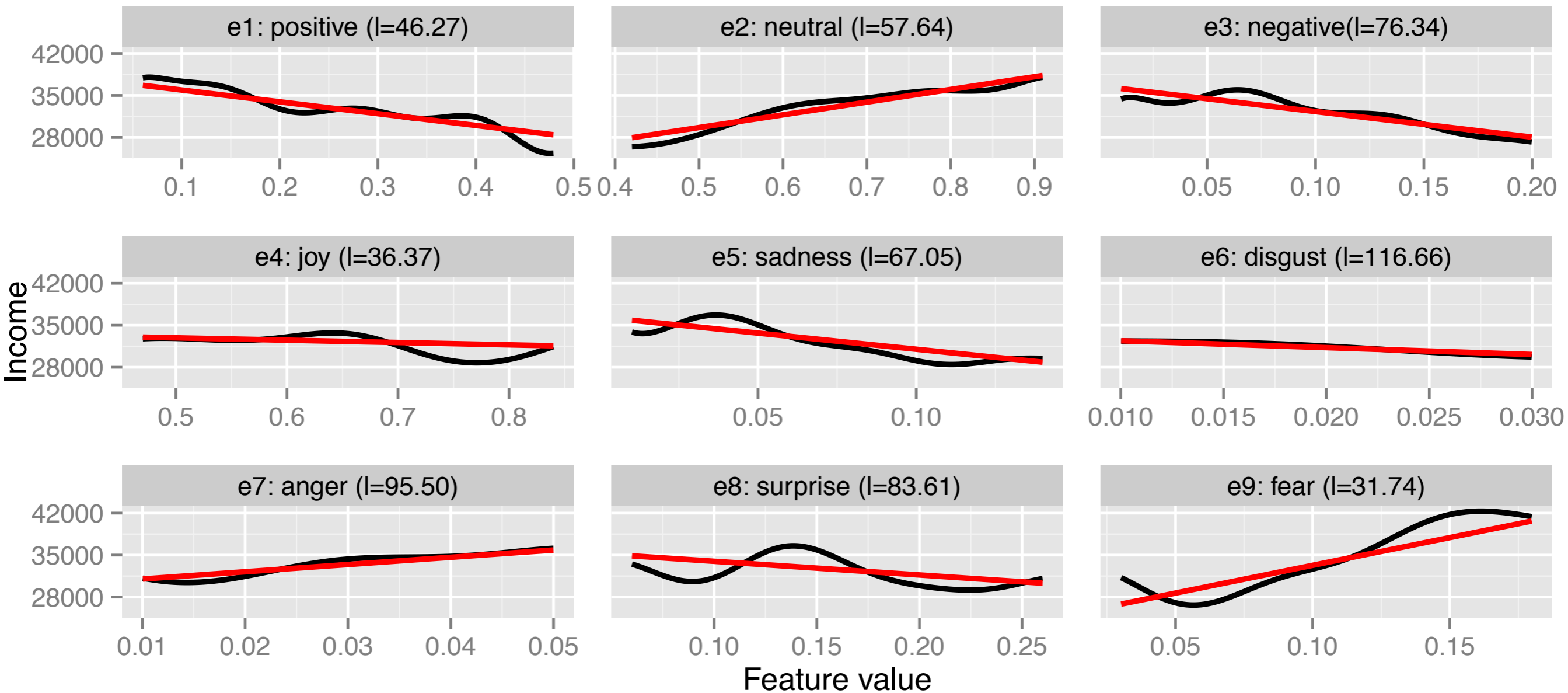
## Relating income and user attributes



**Linear** vs **GP** fit

# User income regression insights (III)

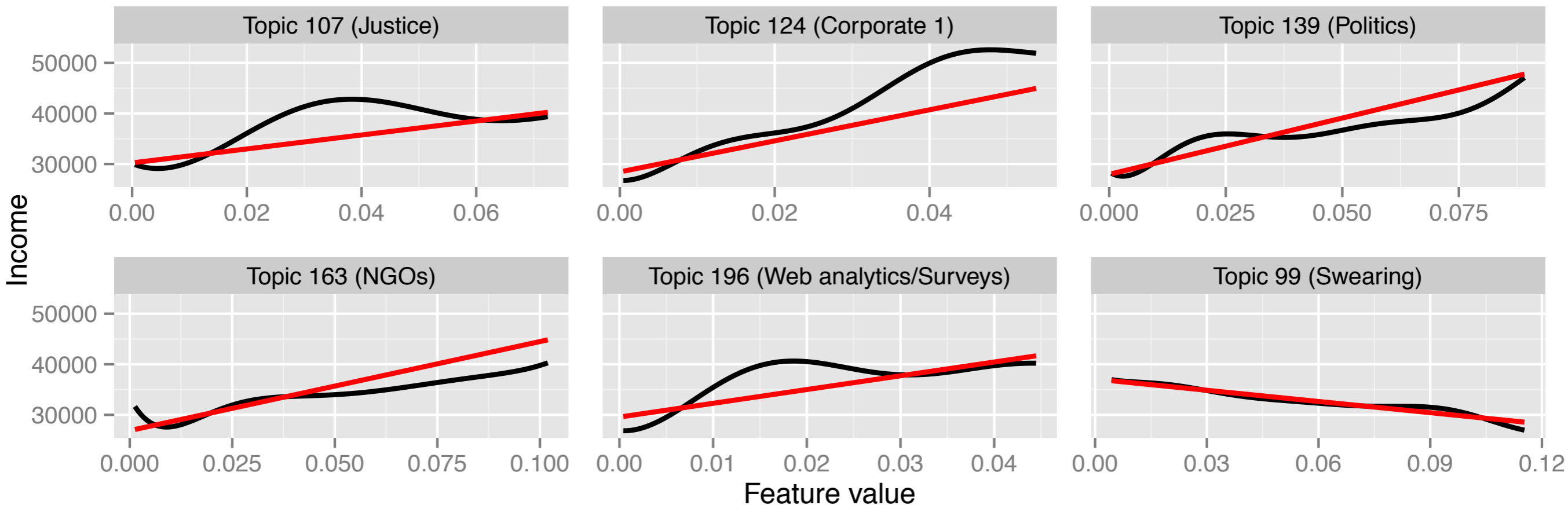
## Relating income and emotion



**Linear** vs **GP** fit

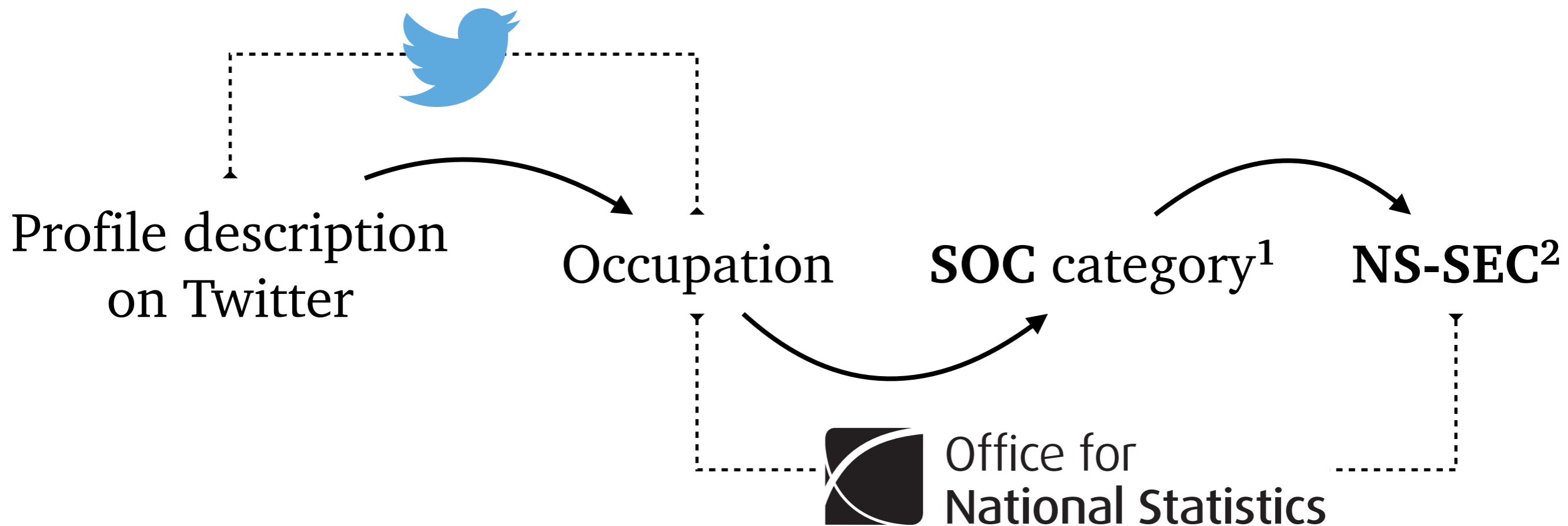
# User income regression insights (IV)

## Relating income and topics of discussion



**Linear** vs **GP** fit

# Defining a user SES classification task



1. **Standard Occupational Classification** job groups
2. **National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification:**  
Map from the job groups in the SOC to a socioeconomic status (SES): *upper, middle* or *lower*

# UK Twitter user data set for SES classification

- + **1,342** UK Twitter user profiles
- + **2 million** tweets
- + Date interval: Feb. 1, 2014 to March 21, 2015
- + Labelled with a **socioeconomic status (SES)**, using the occupational class proxy from SOC and NS-SEC: *upper, middle, or lower*
- + **1,291 user features** following the previous paradigms, *i.e.* quantifying behaviour, impact, profile info, text in tweets and topics from tweets
- + **Download the data set**

# SES classification performance

## 3-class classification

	T1	T2	T3	P
O1	606	84	53	81.6%
O2	49	186	45	66.4%
O3	55	48	216	67.7%
R	85.4%	58.5%	68.8%	75.1%

## middle & lower merged

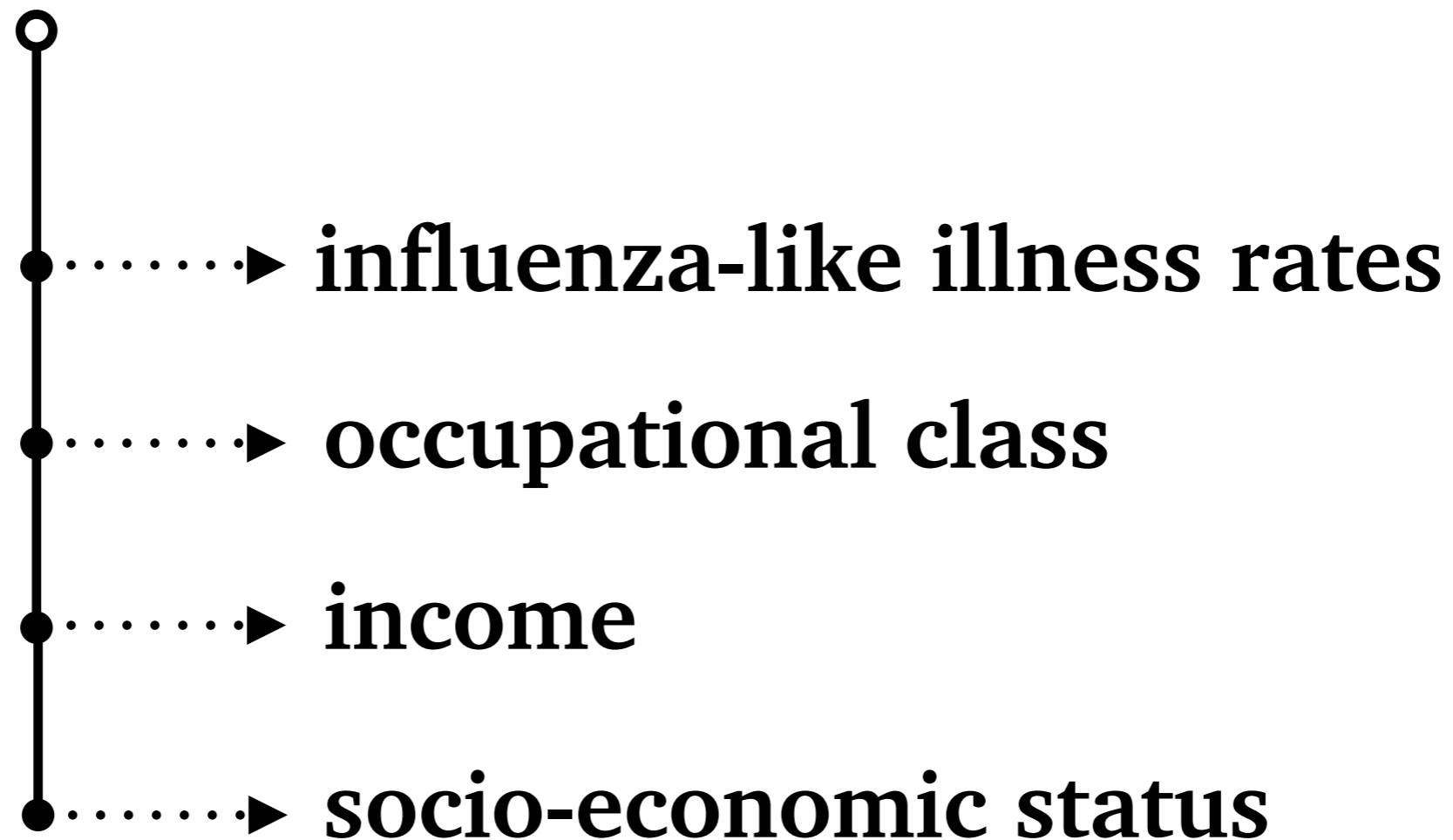
	T1	T2	P
O1	584	115	83.5%
O2	126	517	80.4%
R	82.3%	81.8%	82.0%

*... using a Gaussian Process classifier*

Classification	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1
2 classes	82.05 (2.4)	82.2 (2.4)	81.97 (2.6)	.821 (.03)
3 classes	75.09 (3.3)	72.04 (4.4)	70.76 (5.7)	.714 (.05)



# Conclusions — UGC mining: From collective disease rates to individual demographics





# Further thoughts

- + **User-generated content** is a valuable asset
- + **Nonlinear models** tend to perform better given the multimodality of the feature space
- + *Deeper* representations of text tend to improve performance
- + **Qualitative analysis** is important
  - > Evaluation
  - > Interesting insights

# Some of the future research challenges

- + Work closer with **domain experts**

<http://fludetector.cs.ucl.ac.uk>

- + Better understanding of online media **biases**,  
*e.g.* demographics, external influence etc.

- + **Generalisation**, defining **limitations**, more  
rigorous **evaluation** frameworks

- + Methodological improvements

- + **Ethical concerns**

# Acknowledgements

All collaborators (*in alphabetical order*)  
in research mentioned today

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**Christian Stefansen** (*Google*)

**Svitlana Volkova** (*PNNL*)

**Bin Zou** (*UCL*)

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**Thank you!**  
*Any questions?*

**Slides can be downloaded from**  
[lampos.net/talks](https://lampos.net/talks)



**@lampos**



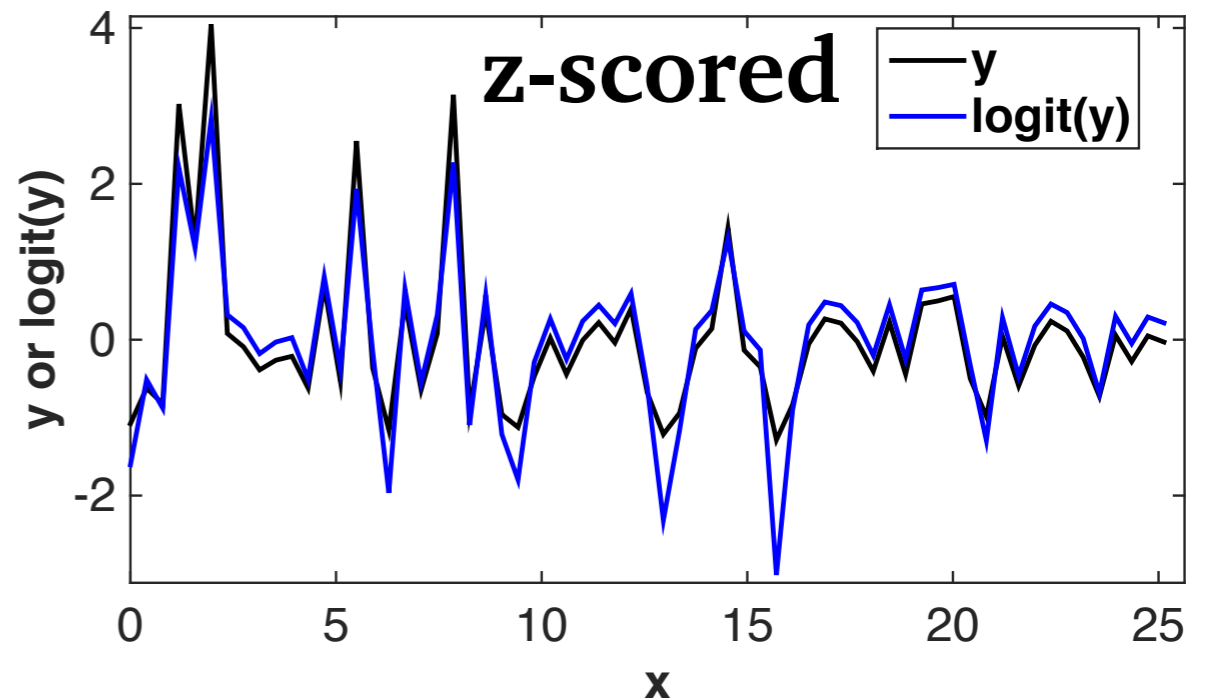
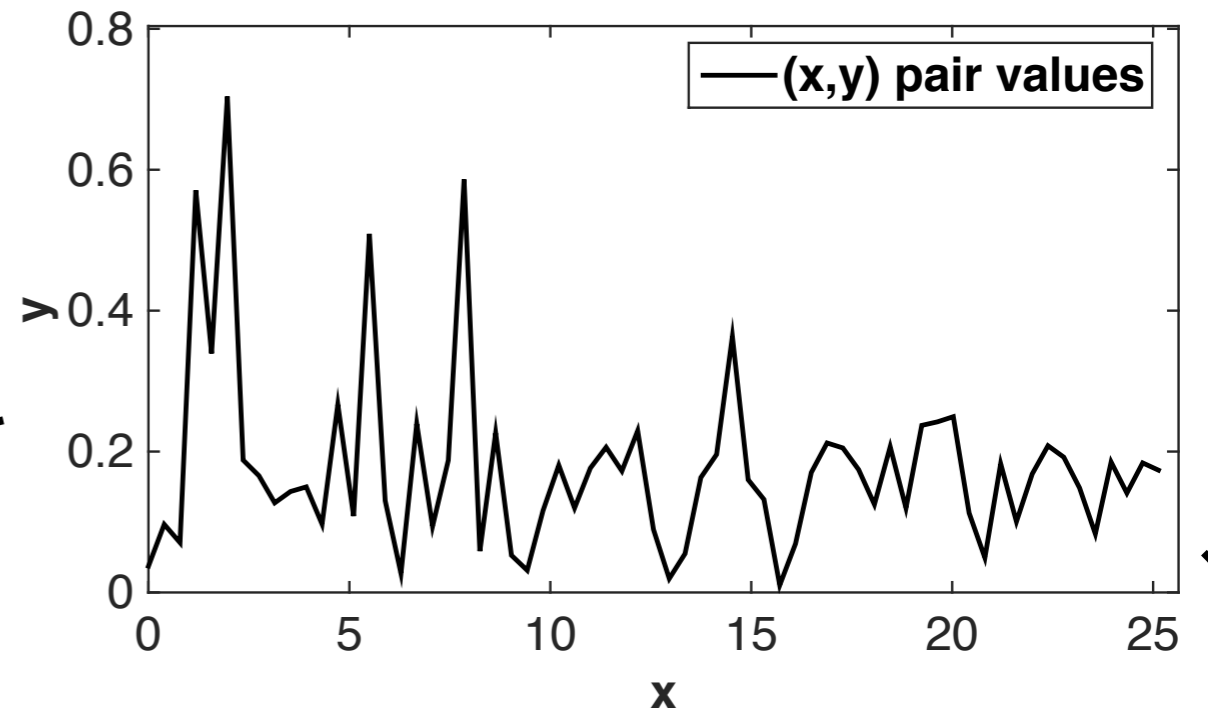
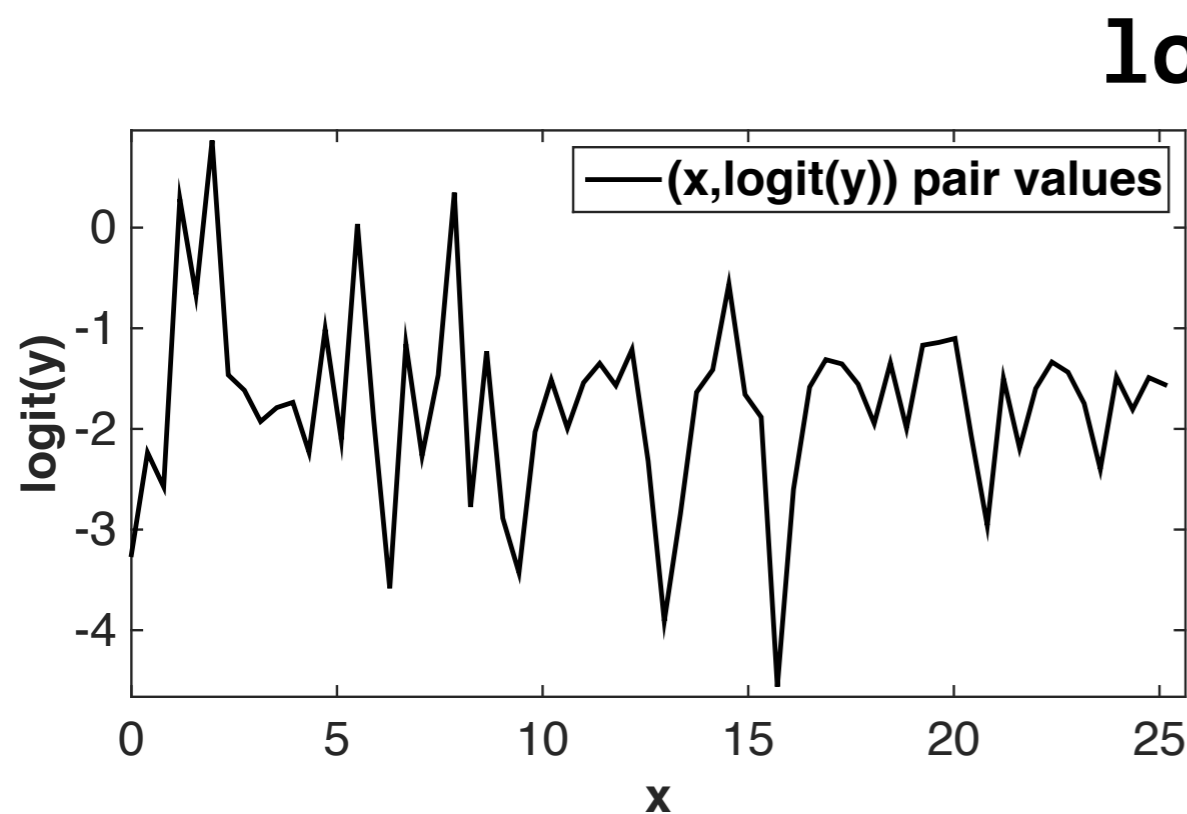
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# Logit function

$$\text{logit}(a) = \log(a/(1-a))$$



- intermediate values are 'squashed'
- border values are 'emphasised'

# More information about Gaussian Processes

- + Book: “*Gaussian Processes for Machine Learning*”  
<http://www.gaussianprocess.org/gpml/>
- + Video-lecture: “*Gaussian Process Basics*”  
[http://videlectures.net/gpip06\\_mackay\\_gpb/](http://videlectures.net/gpip06_mackay_gpb/)
- + Tutorial tailored to statistical NLP tasks: “*Gaussian Processes for Natural Language Processing*”  
<http://people.eng.unimelb.edu.au/tcohn/tutorial.html>
- + Software I — *GPML* for Octave or MATLAB  
<http://www.gaussianprocess.org/gpml/code>
- + Software II — *GPy* for Python  
<http://sheffieldml.github.io/GPy/>