

Now say ‘Ah’: Internal factors of shifting and the English low vowel space

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Contents

- Labov's theory of vowel shifting
- Historical examples of /a/ shifting
- Contemporary observations of /a/ shifting
- Conclusions (or rather, further questions!)

Internal factors of shifting

- ‘Internal’ in that they do not originate from borrowings, contact, etc.
- Not considering at *why* vowels change, but the patterns that emerge when we look at *how* vowels change
- As such, this investigation is more *exploratory* than *explanatory*

Labov's framework

- Aims to establish universal set of unidirectional principles of sound change to account for diachronic changes observed in vowel systems of all languages
- “There are no directions of vowel shifting that are forbidden to speakers of human language... some directions are taken far more often than others” (Labov 1991)

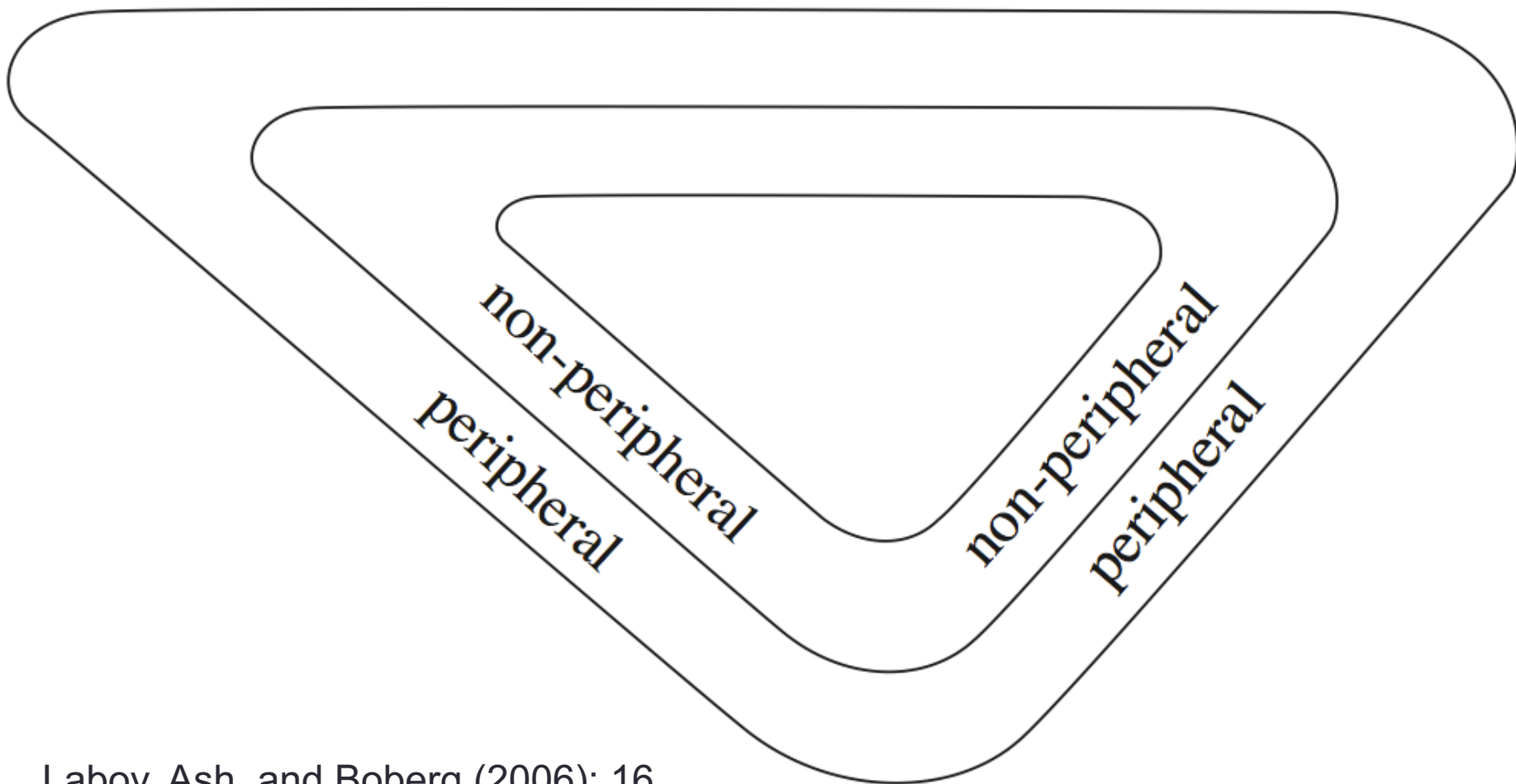
Labov's framework (basic)

Found from comparison of historical vowel shifts across many languages

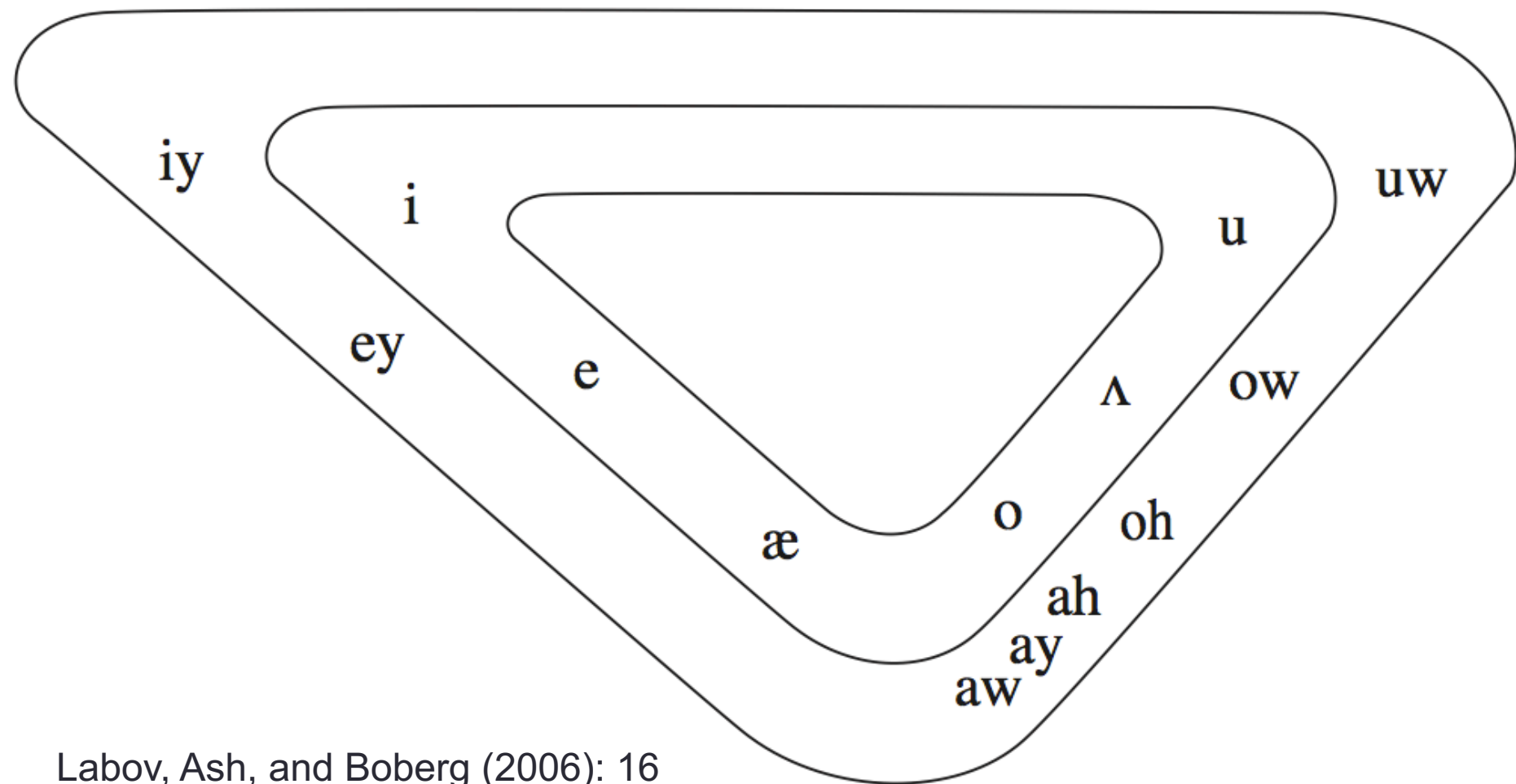
In chain shifts,

- I. Long vowels rise
- II. Short vowels and nuclei of upgliding diphthongs fall
- III. Back vowels move to the front

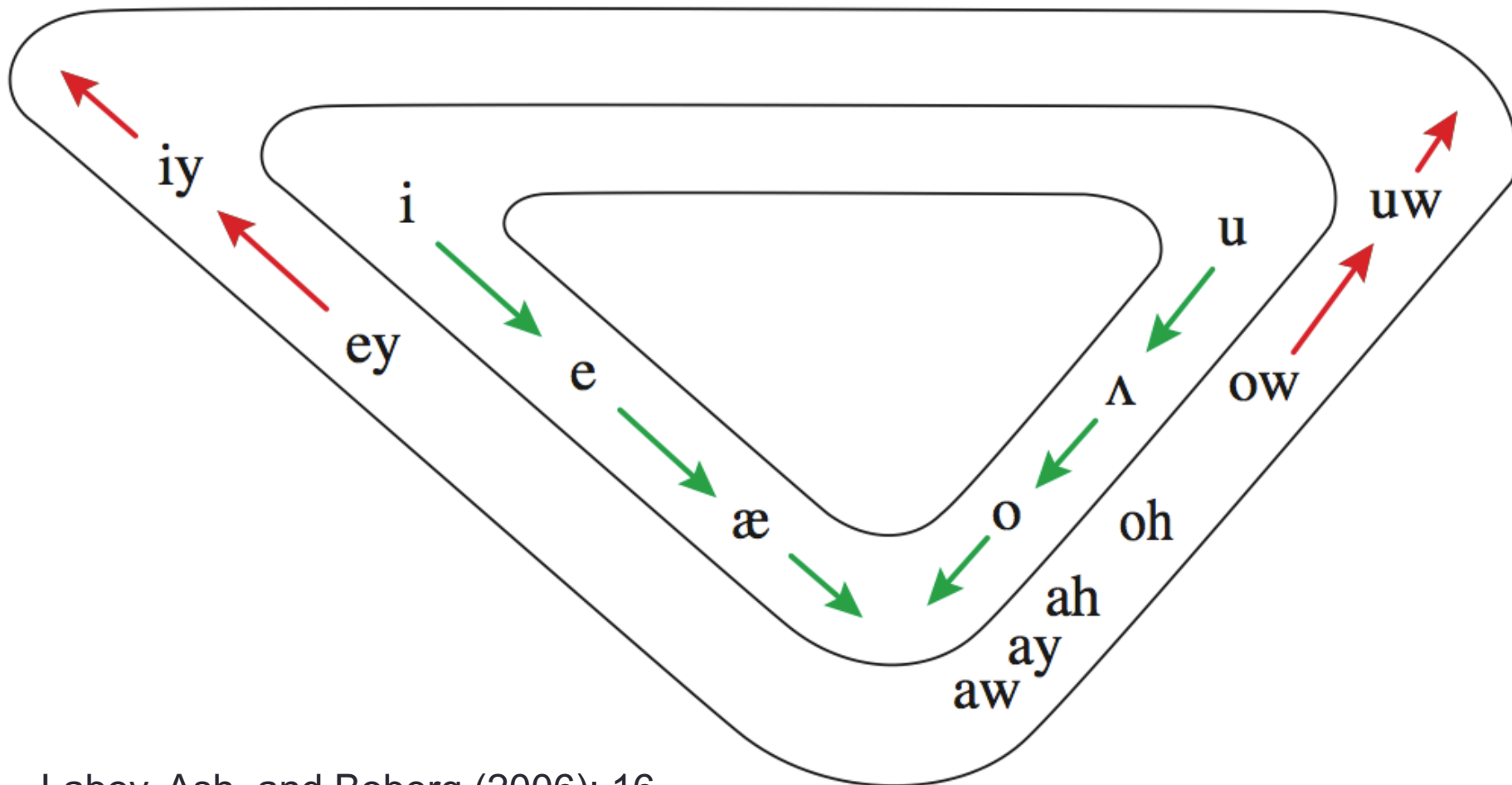
Peripherality hypothesis



Peripherality hypothesis



Peripherality hypothesis

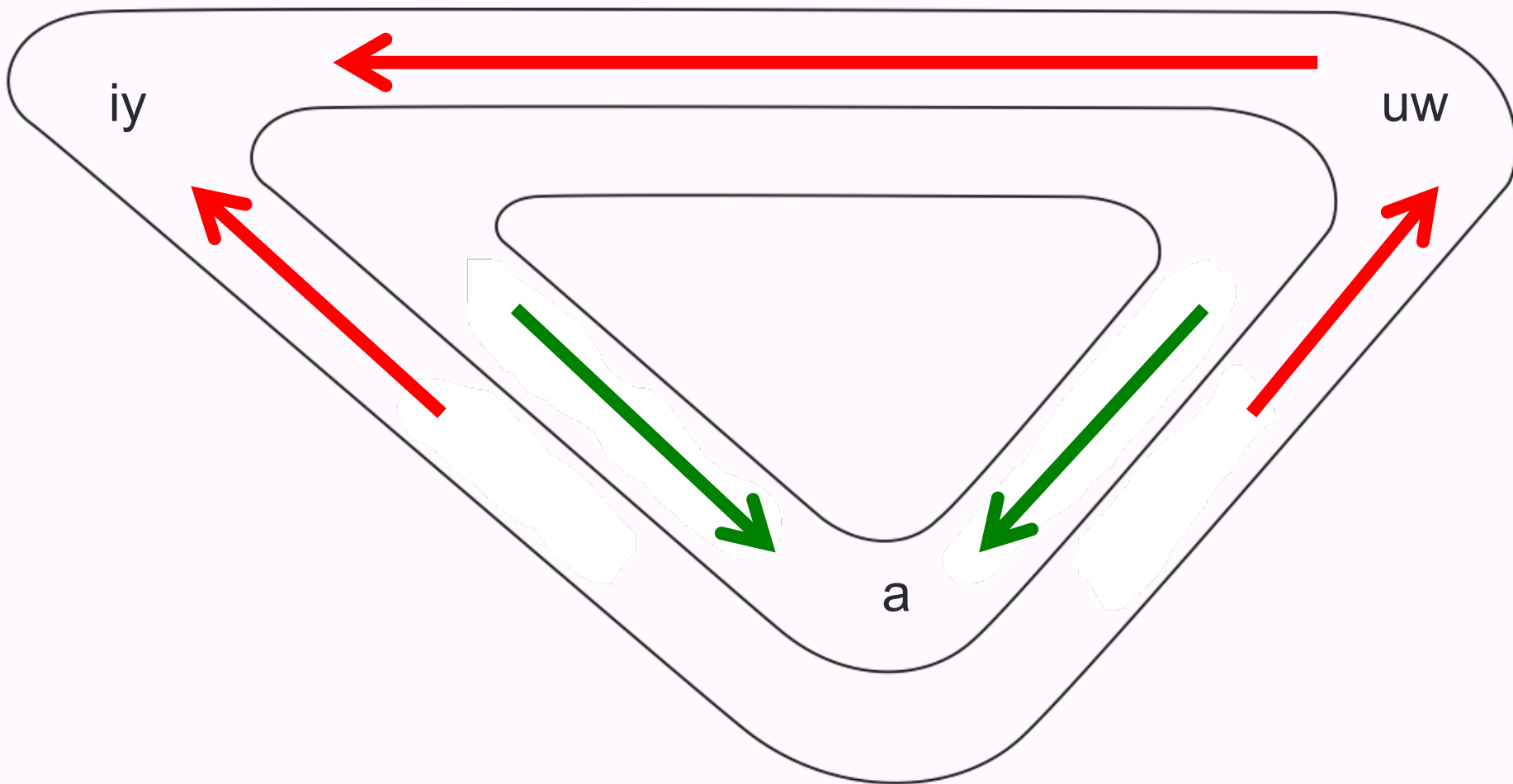


Labov's framework (more detailed)

In chain shifts,

- I. Peripheral nuclei rise
- II. Non-peripheral nuclei fall
- III. Tense vowels move to the front along peripheral paths, and lax vowels move to the back along non-peripheral paths

But then wouldn't we have...?



Labov's framework

In chain shifts,

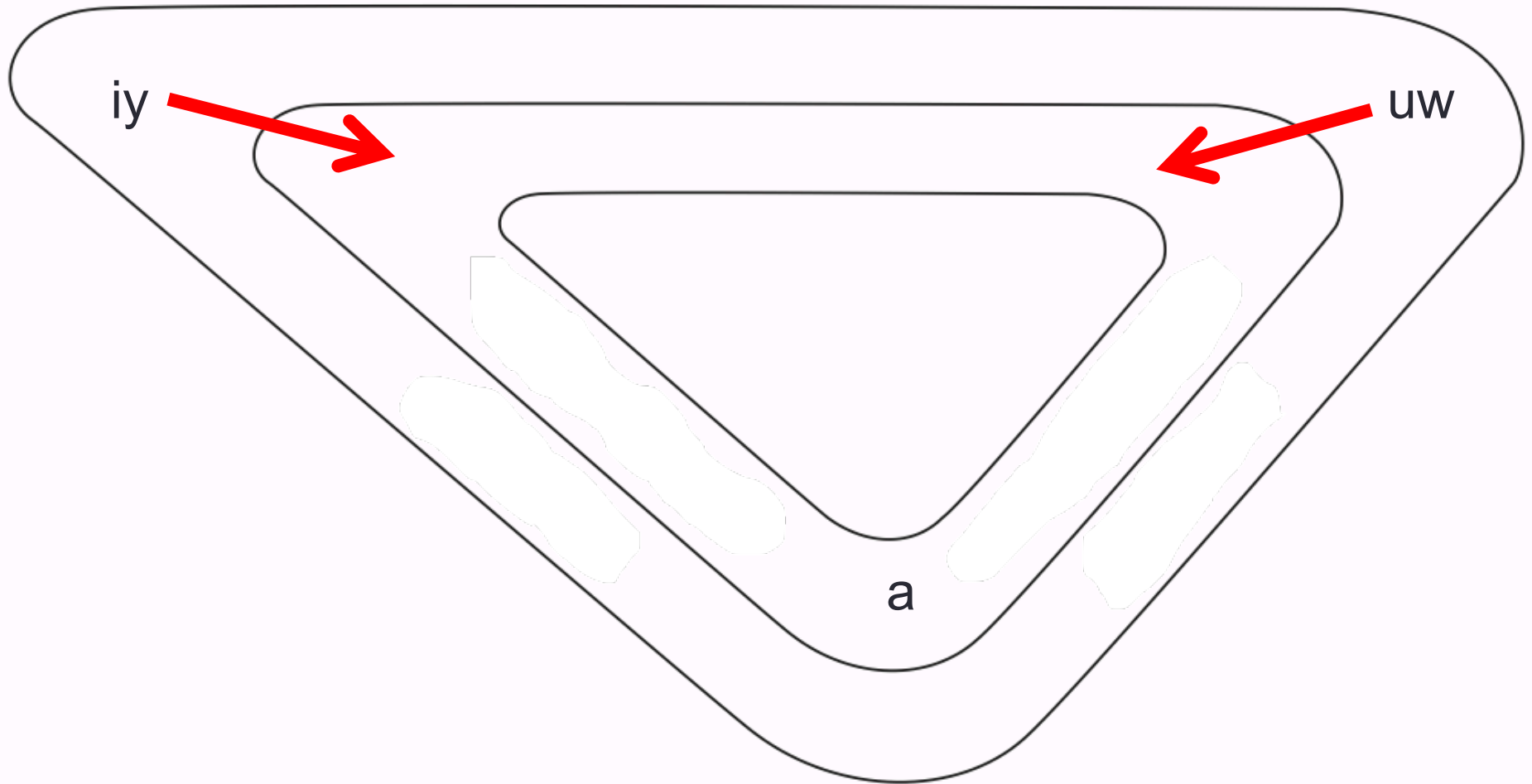
- I. Peripheral nuclei rise
- II. Non-peripheral nuclei fall
- III. Tense vowels move to the front along peripheral paths, and lax vowels move to the back along non-peripheral paths

Low Exit Principle: Low non-peripheral vowels become peripheral

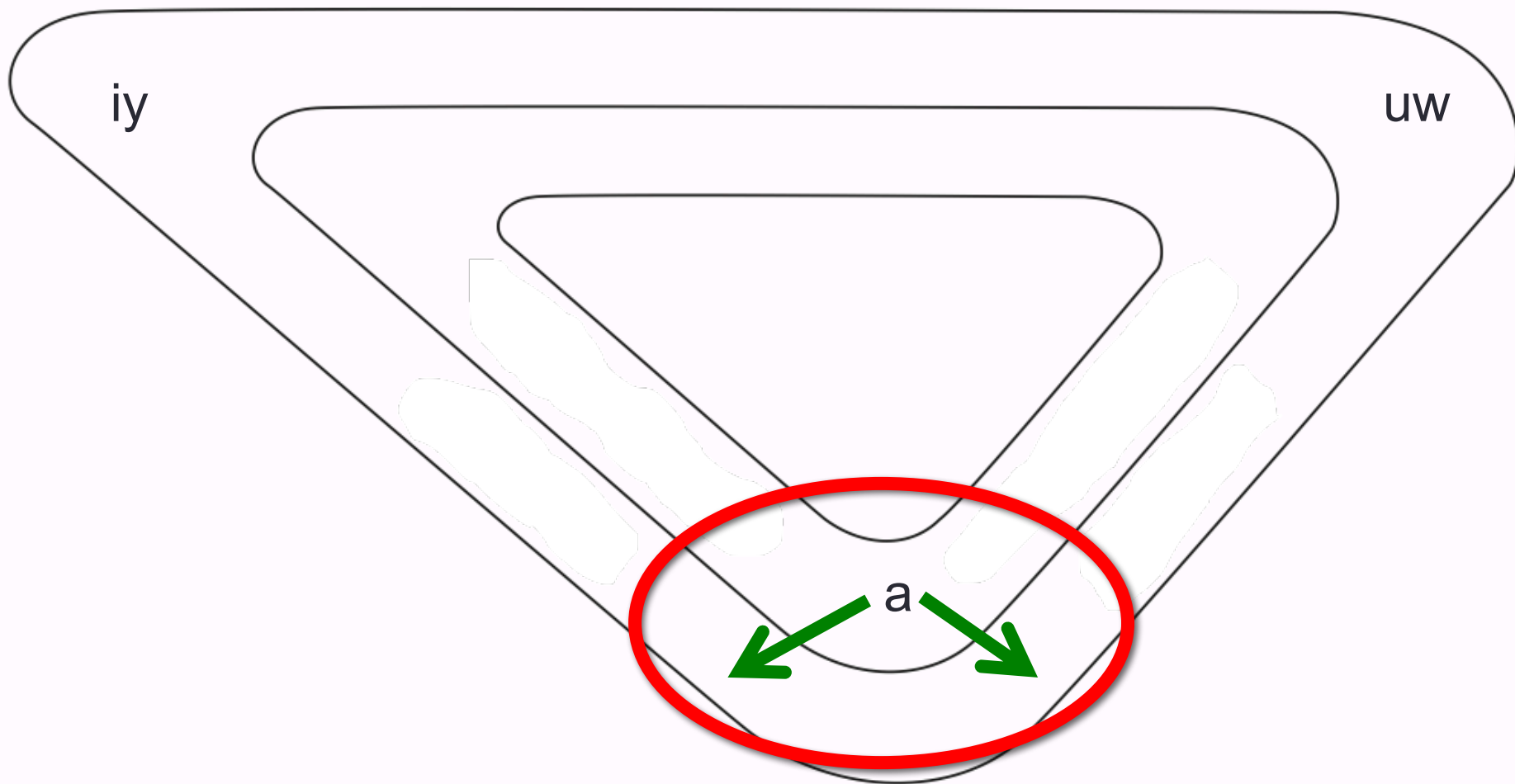
High Exit Principle: One of two high peripheral morae in long vowels becomes non-peripheral

“Many apparent counterexamples... are accounted for by the fact that a set of short or lax nuclei had shifted to peripheral position” (Labov 1991: 7)

High exit principle



Low exit principle



Pre-history of English

- Proto-Indo-European (or dialects approximating our reconstructions) spoken ~6,000 years ago
- Proto-Germanic spoken ~2,500 years ago
- Despite lacking direct evidence as to vowels' exact pronunciations, Labov's principles allow us to model how the reconstructed systems might have moved
- Though some movements seem contradictory to the principles if we assume that long = peripheral

PIE to PGmc

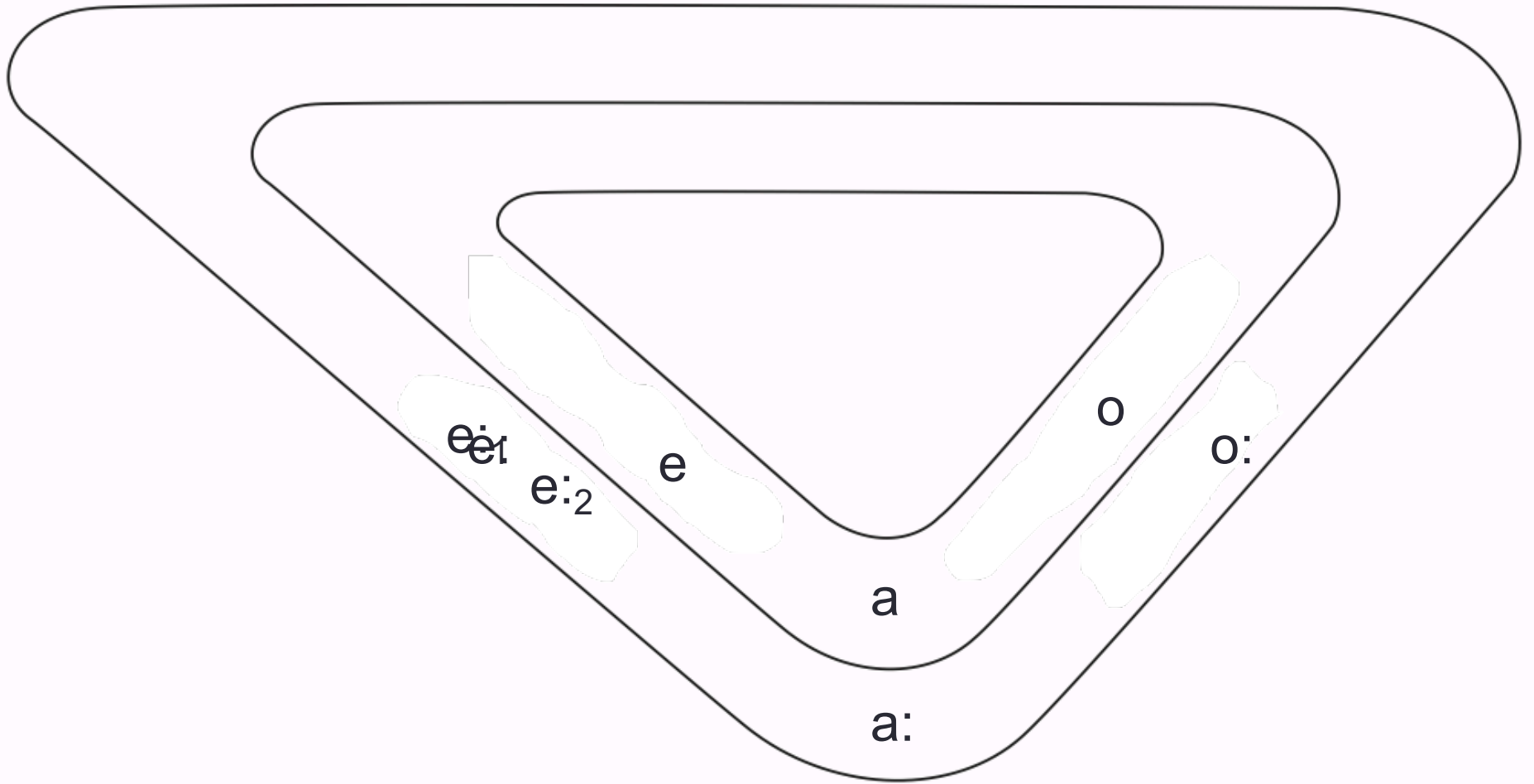
MOTHER PIE *māter > PGmc *mōdēr

NAME PIE *hneǵmn- > PGmc *namō

BATH PIE *bher- > PGmc *baþa

EIGHT PIE *oktōw- > PGmc *ahtoū

PIE to PGmc



PGmc to OE (West Saxon)

NAME PGmc *namō > OE nama [namə]

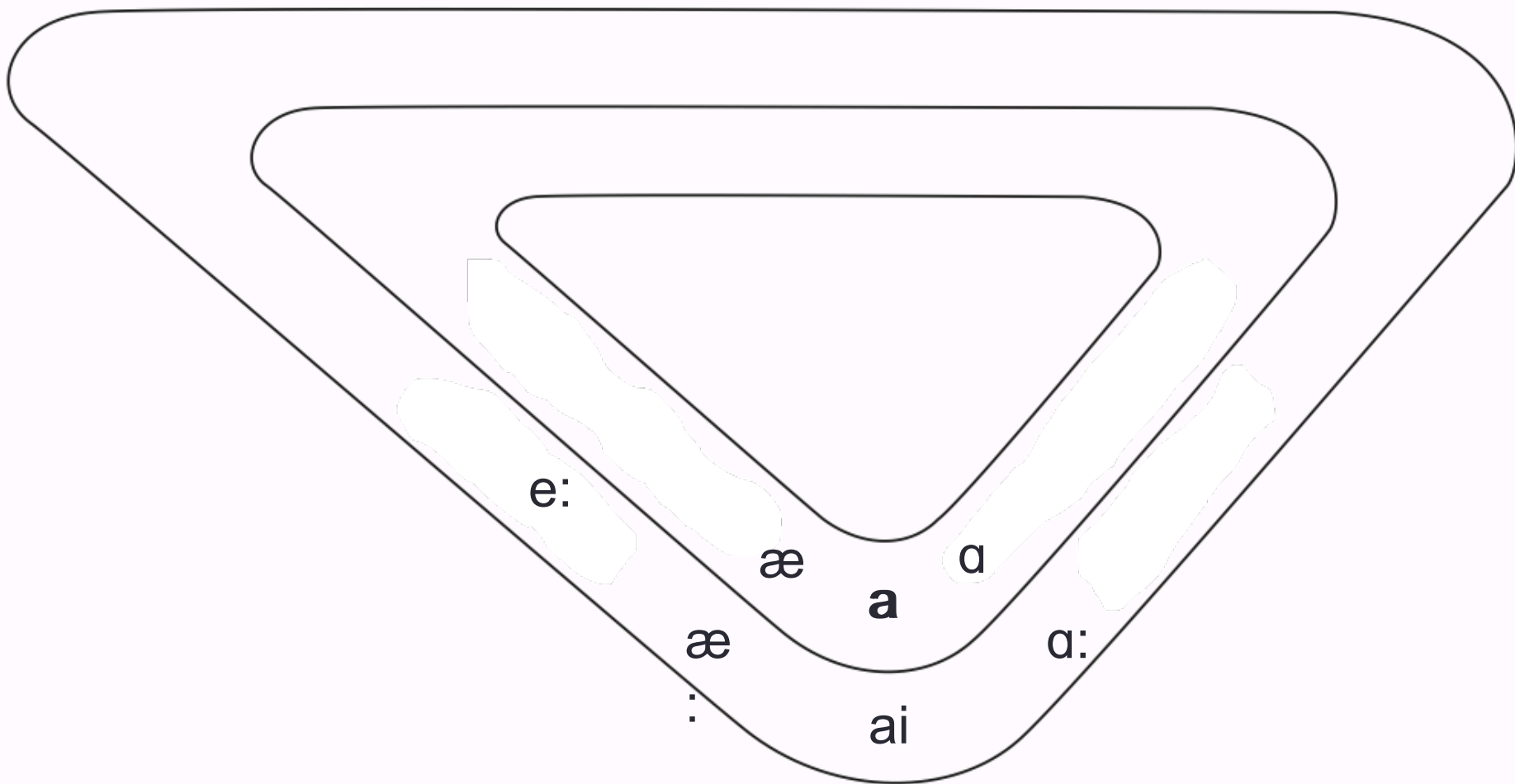
BATH PGmc *bapa > OE bæp [bæθ]

EIGHT PGmc *ahtōu > OE eahta [æxtə]

GOAT PGmc *gait > OE gāt [gɑ:t]

DEED PGmc *dēdiz > OE dæd [dæ:d]

PGmc to OE (West Saxon)



OE to ME

NAME OE nama [nɑmə] > ME [næmə] > [næ:m]

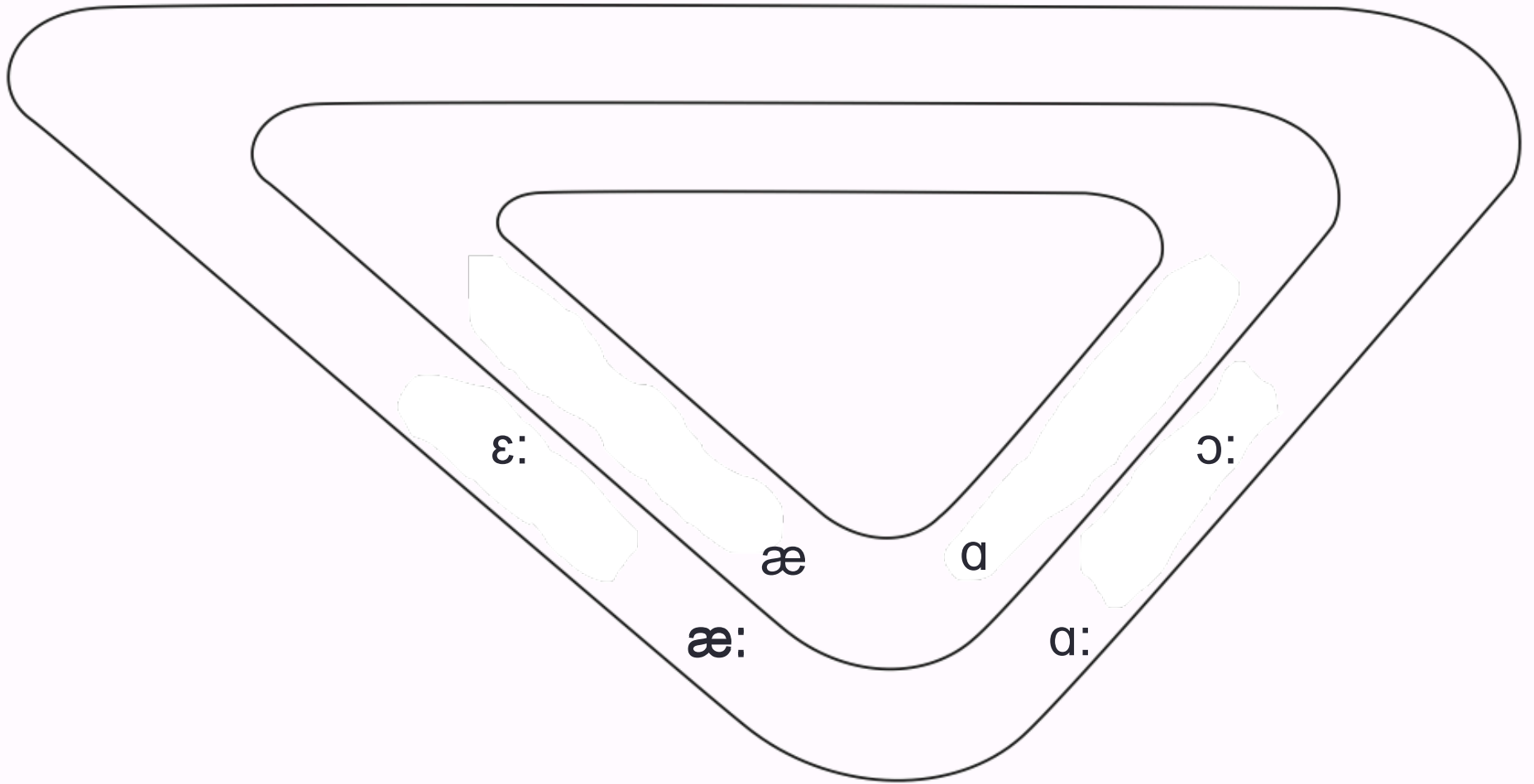
BATH OE bæþ [bæθ] > ME [bæθ]

EIGHT OE eahta [ææxtə] > ME [ɛ:xt]

GOAT OE gāt [gɑ:t] > ME [gɔ:t]

DEED OE dæð [dæ:d] > ME [dɛ:d]

OE to ME



ME to ModE

NAME ME [næ:m] > EModE [neɪm]

EIGHT ME [ɛ:xt] > EModE [eɪt]

DEED ME [dɛ:d] > EModE [di:d]

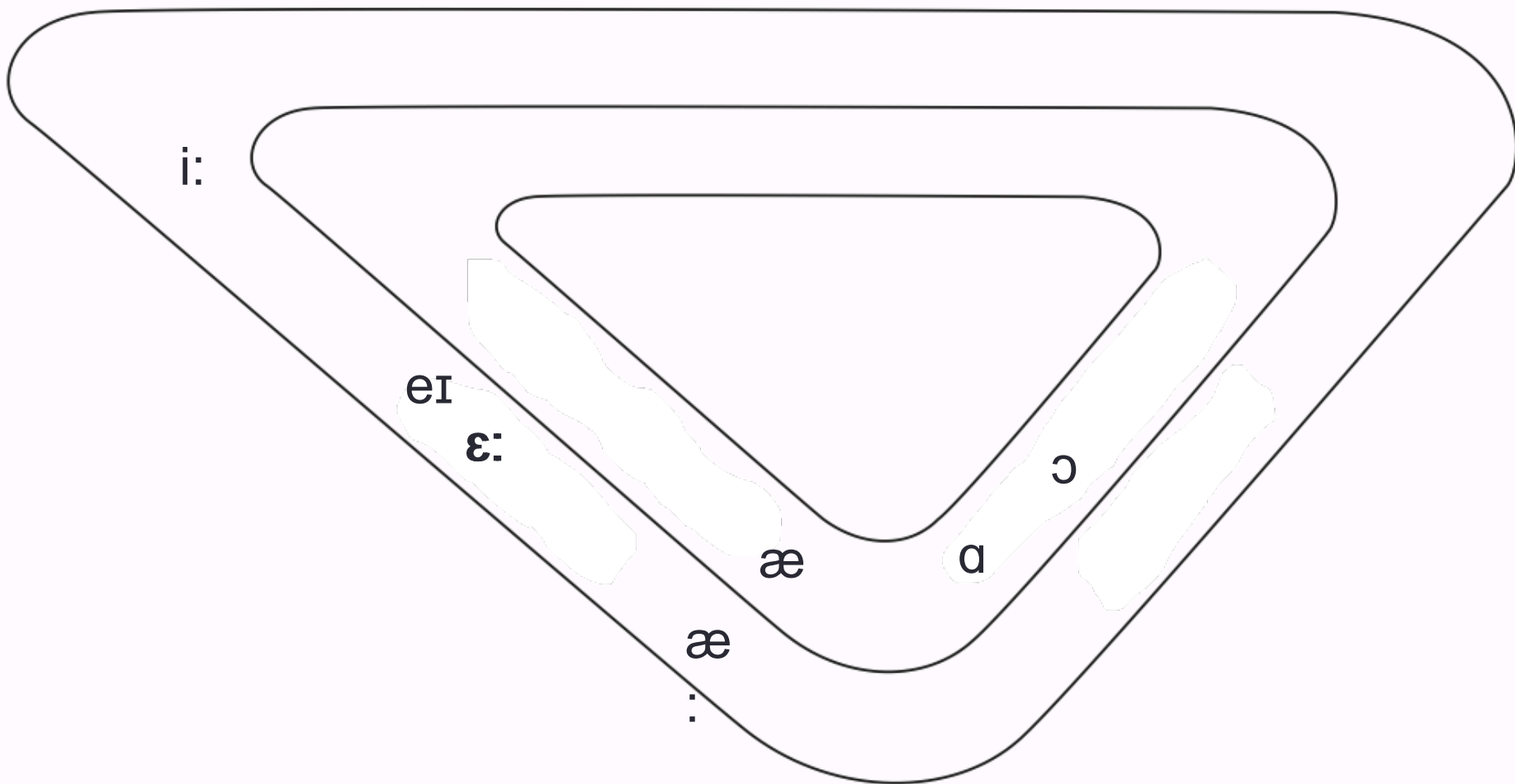
BATH ME [bæθ] > EModE [bæθ]

> ModE [bæθ] (Std AmE)

> ModE [bɑ:θ] (Std S BrE)

> ModE [beəθ] (NYC, NCS)

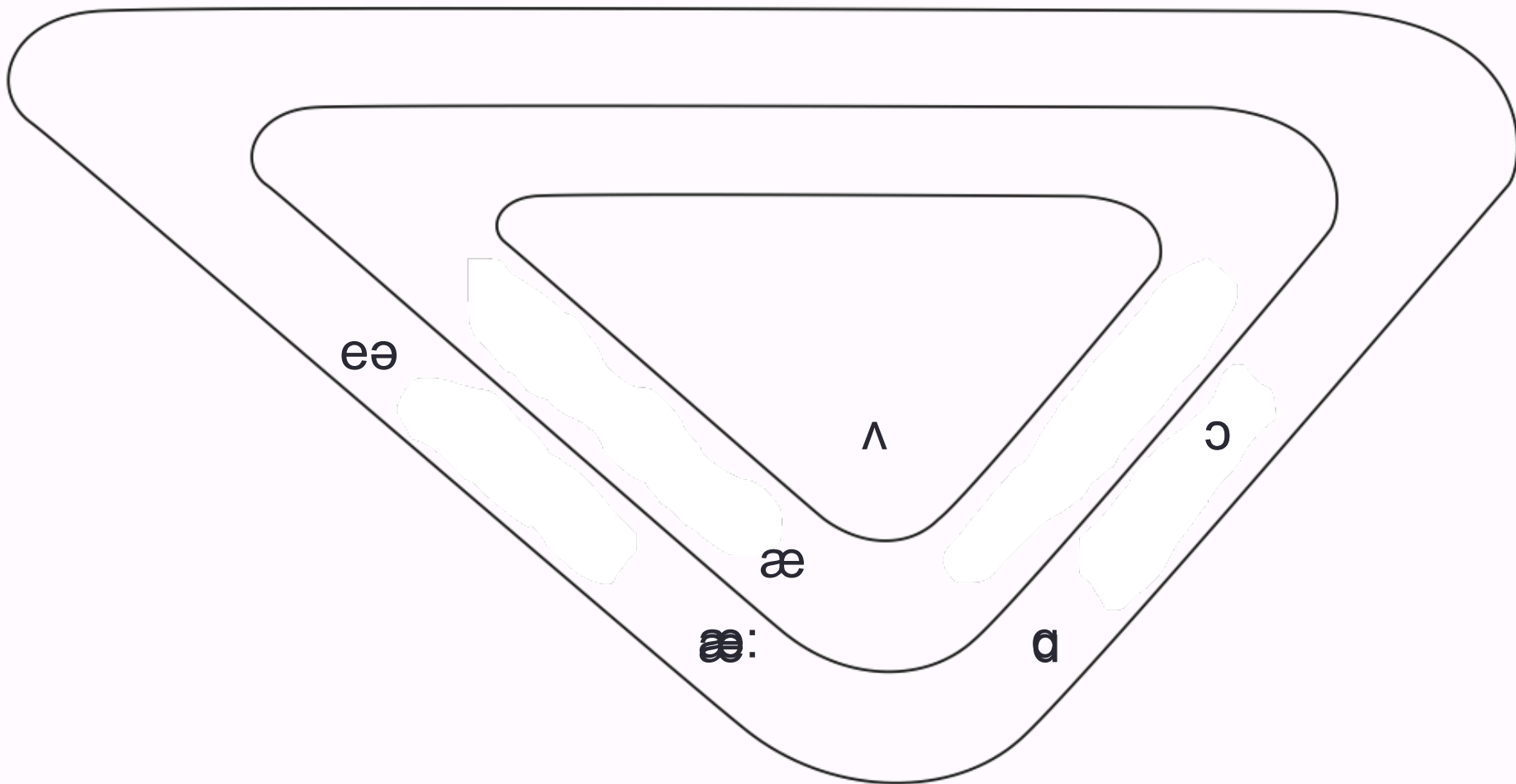
ME to EModE



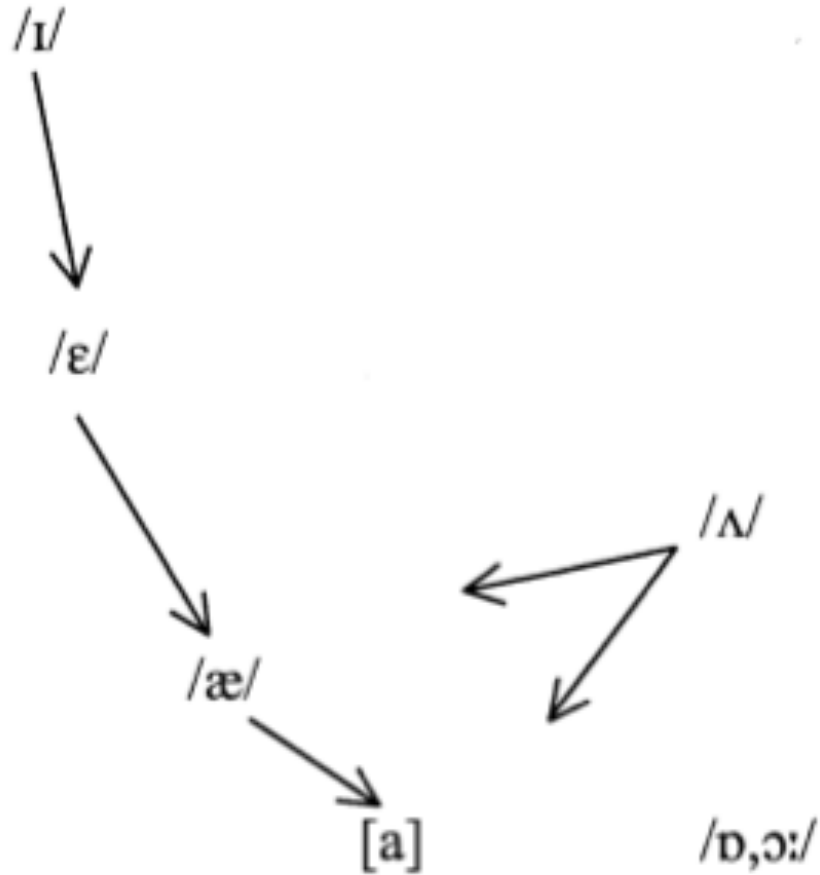
Within Mod English dialects

Vowel class	ME	RP	StdNAE	NYC	NCS	Canada
FATHER	[fæðəɪ] > [fa:ðəɪ]	[fa:ðə]	[fɑðəɪ]	[fɑðə(ɪ)]	[fɑðəɪ]	[fɑðəɪ]
START	[stɑɪt]	[stɑ:t]	[stɑɪt]	[stɔət]	[stɑɪt]	[stɑɪt]
NAME	[nɑmə] > [næ:m]	[neɪm]	[neɪm]	[neɪm]	[neɪm]	[neɪm]
BATH	[bæθ]	[ba:θ]	[bæθ]	[beəθ]	[beəθ]	[baθ]
TRAP	[tɹæp]	[tɹæp]	[tɹæp]	[tɹæp]	[tɹeəp]	[tɹæp]
THOUGHT	[θɔwt]	[θɔ:t]	[θɔt]	[θɔət]	[θɑt]	[θɔt]
LOT	[lɔt]	[lɔt]	[lɑt]	[lɑt]	[læt]	[lɔt]

Northern Cities Shift



Canadian Shift



Clarke, Elms & Youssef (1995)

Canadian Shift – Montreal

Boberg (2005)

Kettig (2014)

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1919-1946

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1946-1965

↓

→

1965-1981

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1937-1961

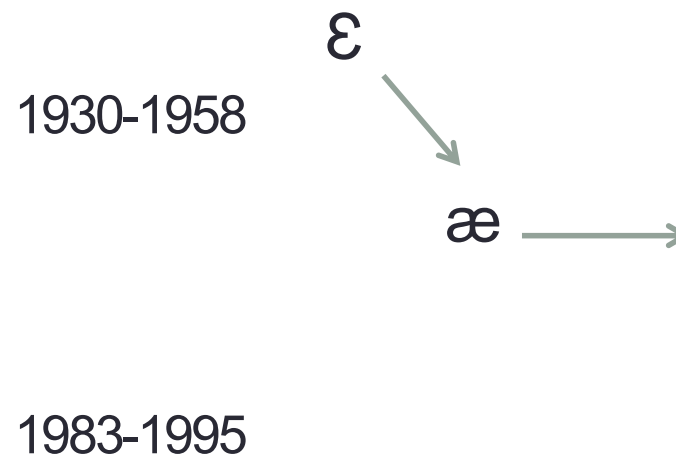
1984-1995

Canadian Shift – Toronto

Roeder & Jarmasz (2009)



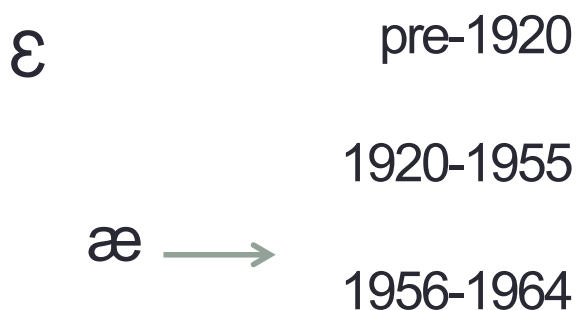
Hoffman (2010)



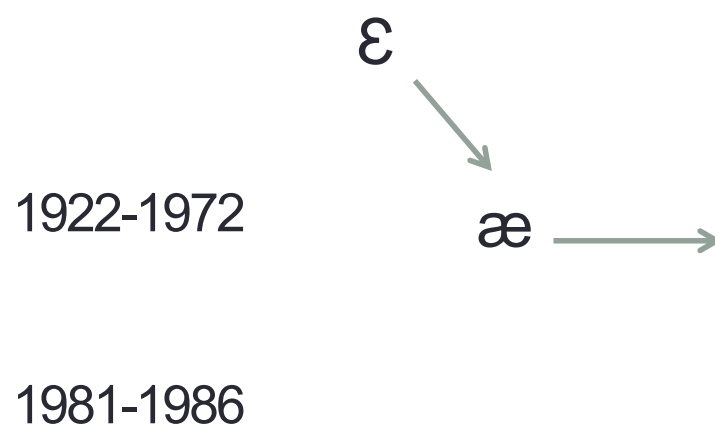
(middle and youngest
groups pattern together)

Canadian Shift – Vancouver

Esling & Warkentyne (1993)

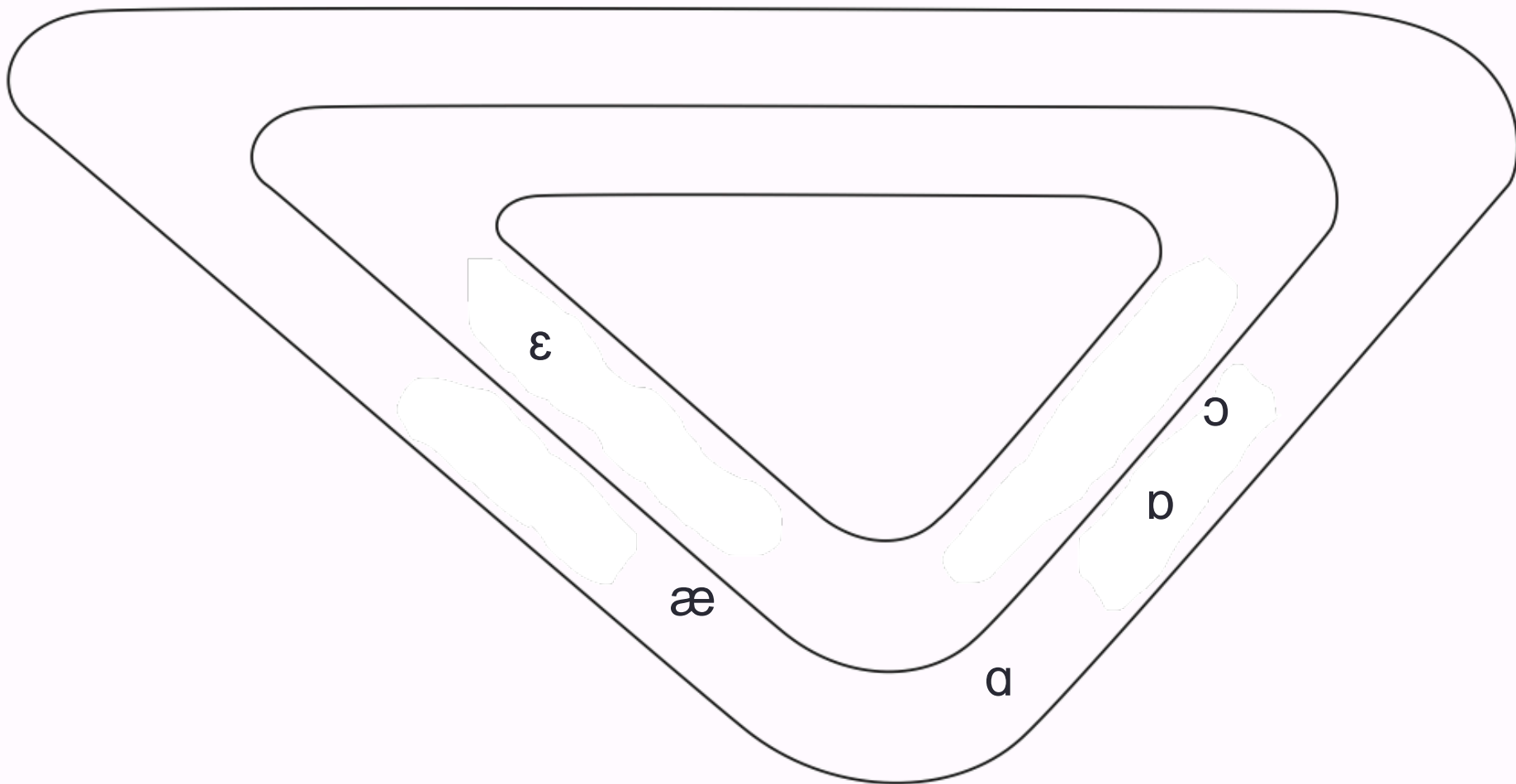


Sadlier-Brown & Tamminga (2008)



(oldest and middle groups
pattern together)

Canadian Shift



Questions that emerge

- Is there a direct relationship between long vowels and peripherality?
- In the NCS, how does a low lax vowel both become peripheral and move to the back along a non-peripheral path?
- Does backing in the Canadian Shift undermine the universality of these shifting rules?

Thank you!