

# Rootedness and politics: Ideology-based variation in Northeast Georgia vowel systems

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New Ways of Analyzing Variation (NWAV 53)

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# Setting

- Two Northeast Georgia counties
  - Clarke (city of Athens, GA)
    - University of Georgia
    - Arts scene
    - Ethnically and economically diverse
    - Liberal politics
  - Oconee
    - Historically rural but growing
    - Agricultural roots
    - Nationally ranked public schools
    - White, upper-middle-class, conservative



# Research Questions

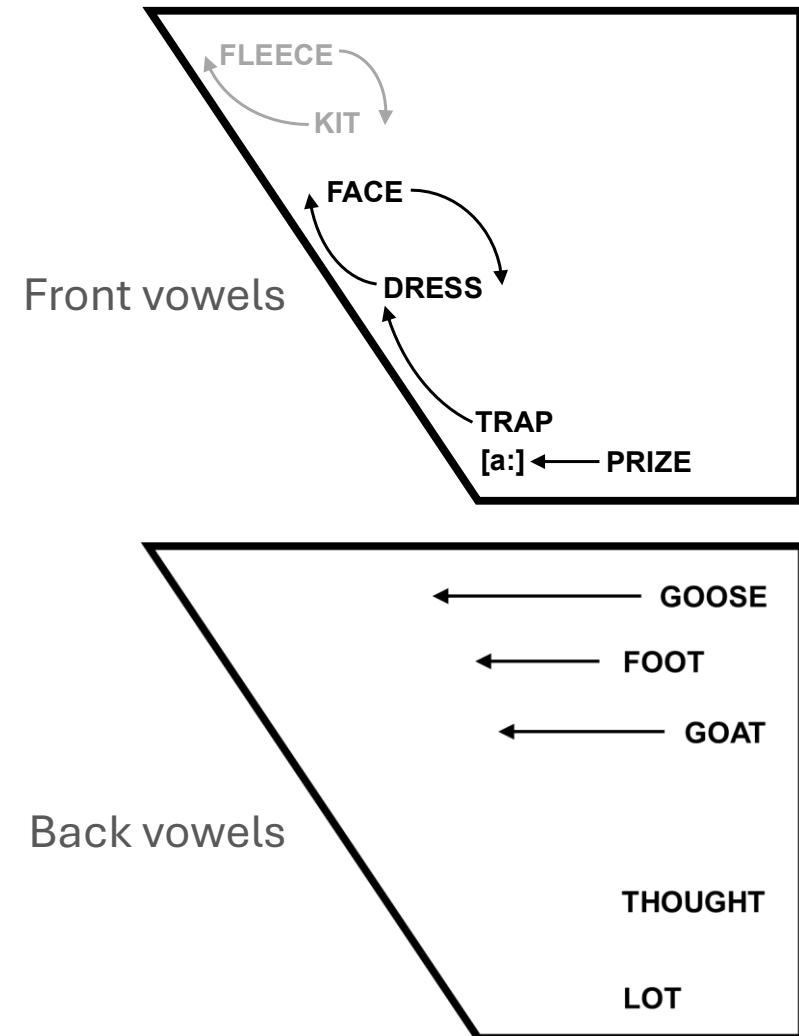
- Southern US English is perceived as rural and politically conservative (Preston 2018; Glass & Forrest 2024), traits of Oconee County but not Clarke
- Previously found no difference in FACE and PRIZE between counties, but differences across political beliefs (Bridwell 2024)
- Rootedness (Reed 2016), or place attachment, can affect the use of regional features (Labov 1963, Carmichael 2014, Reed 2018)

## Research questions

- How do rootedness and local community culture interact to predict linguistic behavior?
- Is rootedness or political affiliation a better predictor of linguistic variation?

# Southern US English Vowels

- Features of White Southern English in northeast Georgia
  - Southern Vowel Shift
    - Monophthongization of PRIZE
    - Lowering of FACE
    - Raising of DRESS
    - Raising of TRAP
  - Back vowel fronting (GOOSE and GOAT)
  - Distinct LOT and THOUGHT
- Retreating in urban areas (Prichard 2010; Dodsworth & Kohn 2012; Renwick et al. 2023)



# Methods

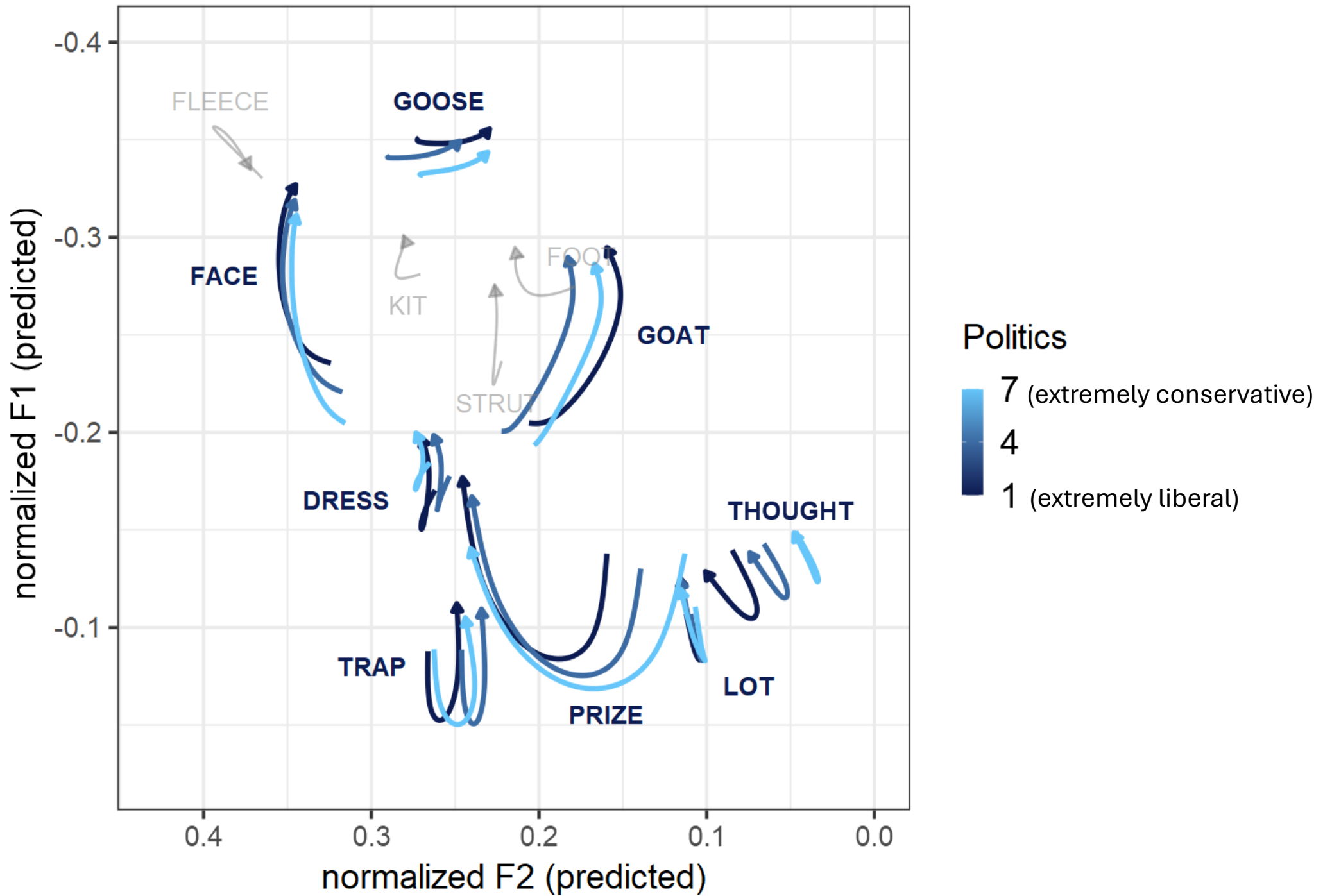
- Sociolinguistic interview
  - Participants: 20 from Clarke, 20 from Oconee
  - Ranked politics on a Likert scale (1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative)
- Rootedness metric (scale of -2 to 6)

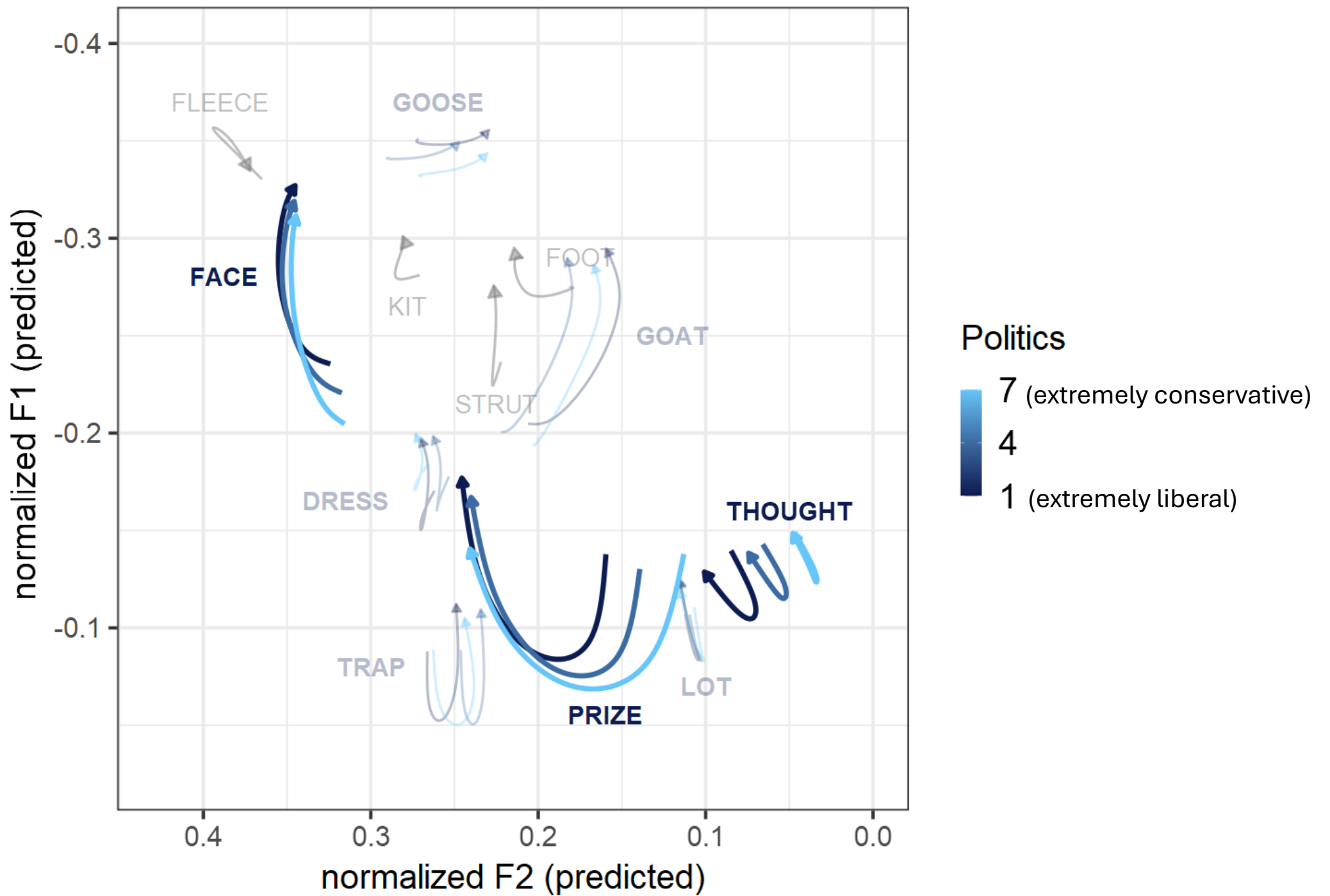
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Where would you describe as “home”?        | +1 [county]<br>+0 elsewhere                                                                                                                      |
| Do you participate in local organizations? | +1 yes<br>+0 no                                                                                                                                  |
| Length of family’s residence in [county]   | +2 participant and at least one parent grew up in [county]<br>+1 participant grew up in [county]<br>+0 participant moved to [county] as an adult |
| Do you like living in [county]?            | +1 clear yes<br>+0 expressed reservations<br>-1 clear no                                                                                         |
| Would you be willing to move away?         | +1 unwilling to leave [county]<br>+0 would not mind leaving<br>-1 actively wants/is planning to leave                                            |

# Data

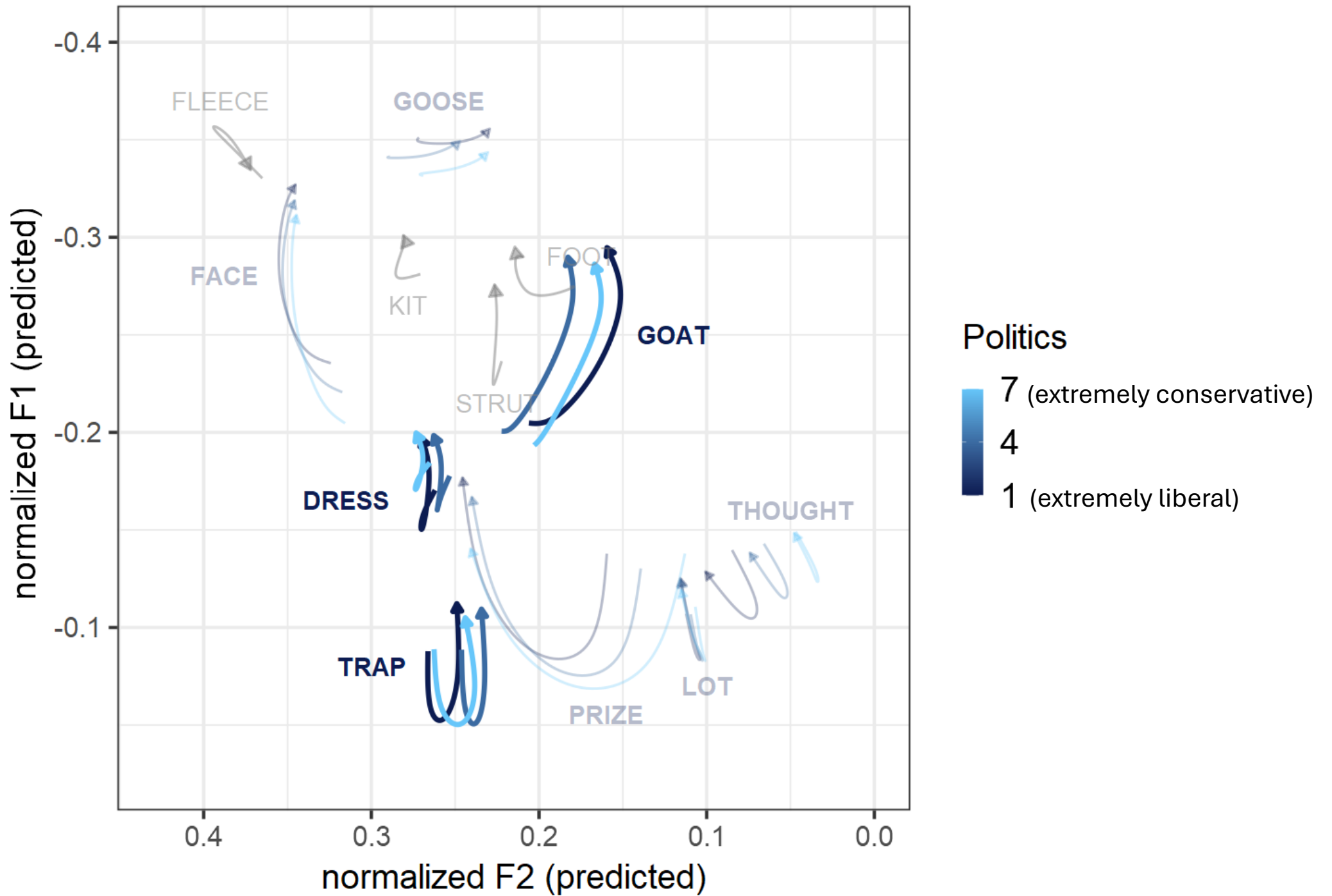
- 20+ hours of audio manually transcribed, forced-aligned with DARLA (Reddy & Stanford 2015), and vowels extracted with FAVE (Rosenfelder et al. 2014)
  - F1 and F2 at 20%, 35%, 50%, 65%, 80%
  - Normalized using log-means (Barreda & Nearey 2018)
  - Filtered out pre-sonorant tokens
- Vowel trajectories modeled using GAMMs
  - $DV \sim \text{generation} + \text{gender} + \text{ethnicity} + \text{politics} + \text{county} * \text{rootedness} + \log(\text{duration}) + (1|\text{speaker}) + (1|\text{word})$
  - Tested models for the significance of each variable

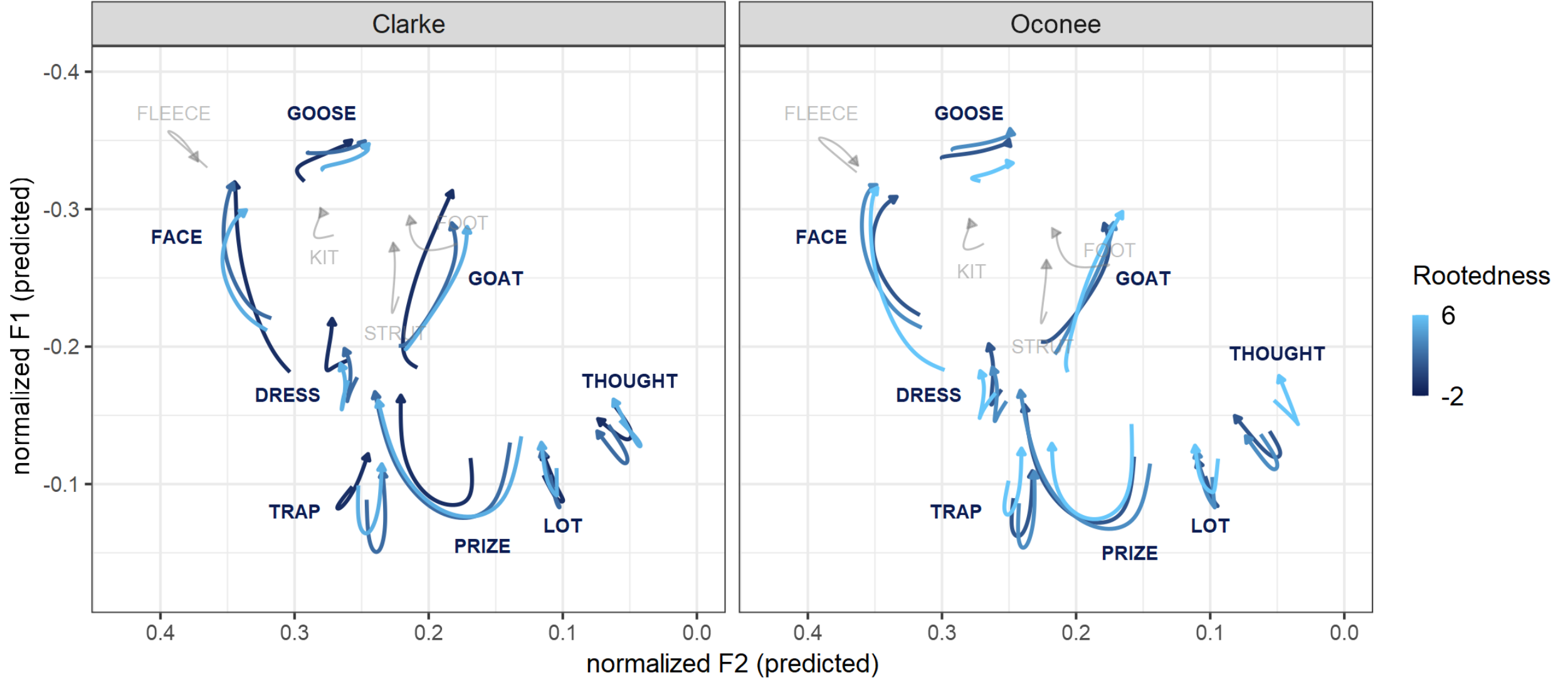
| Vowel   | n    |
|---------|------|
| FACE    | 5925 |
| DRESS   | 4372 |
| TRAP    | 8424 |
| PRIZE   | 2029 |
| GOOSE   | 6198 |
| GOAT    | 8511 |
| THOUGHT | 1368 |
| LOT     | 3780 |

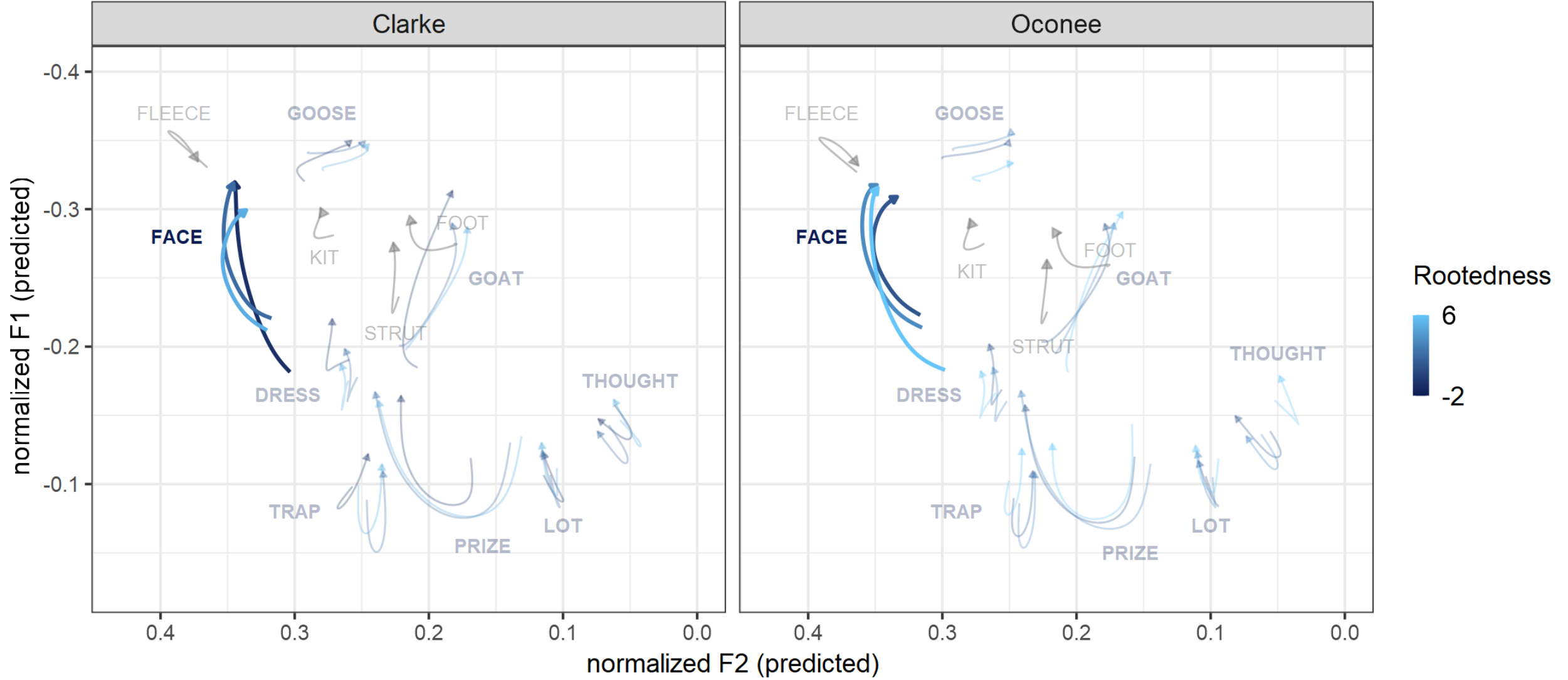


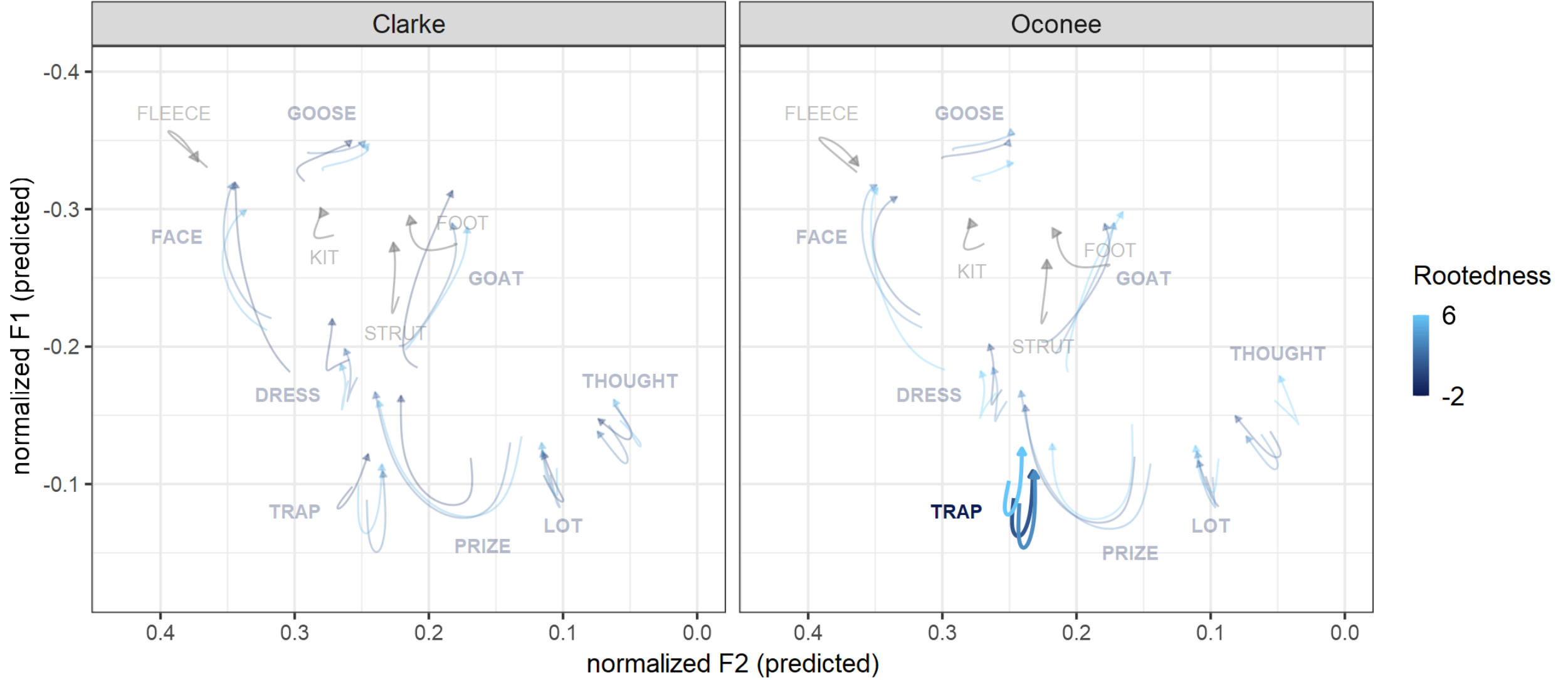


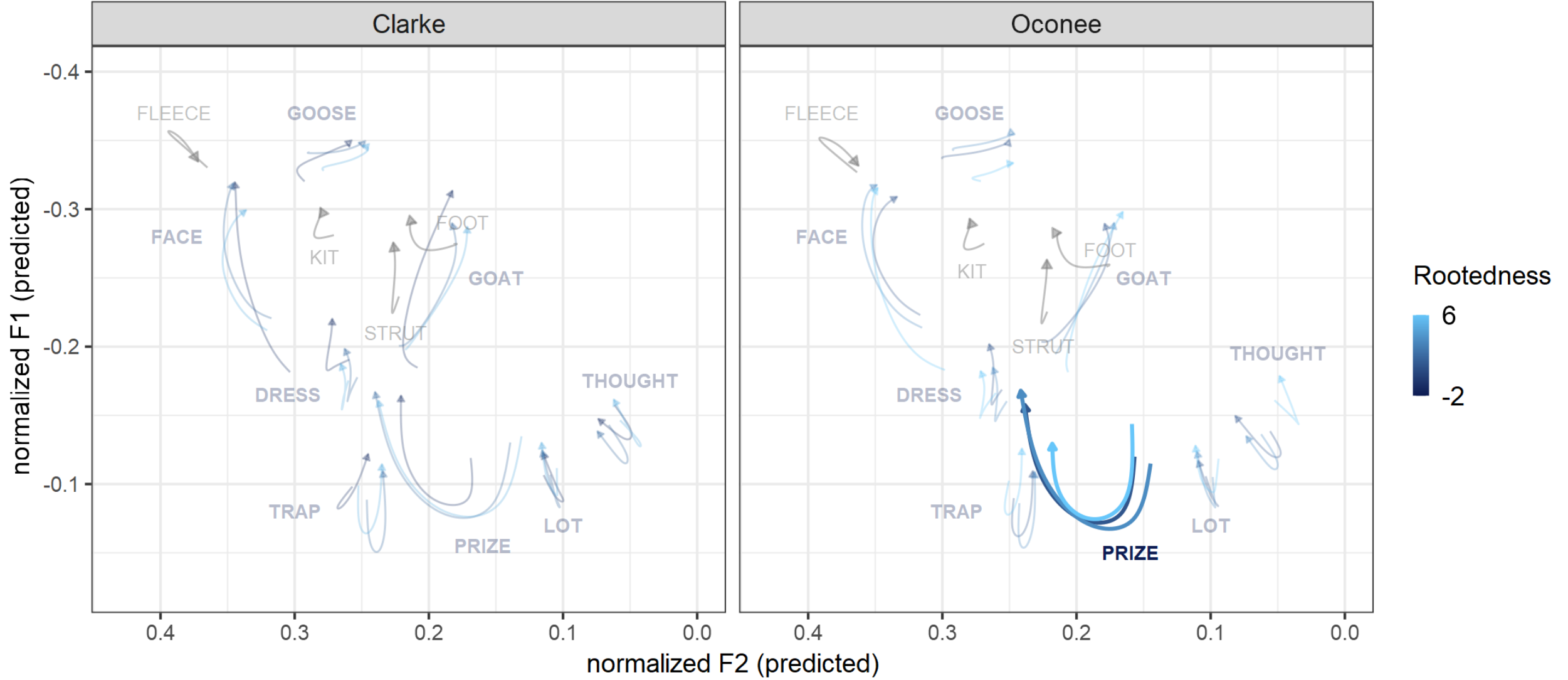


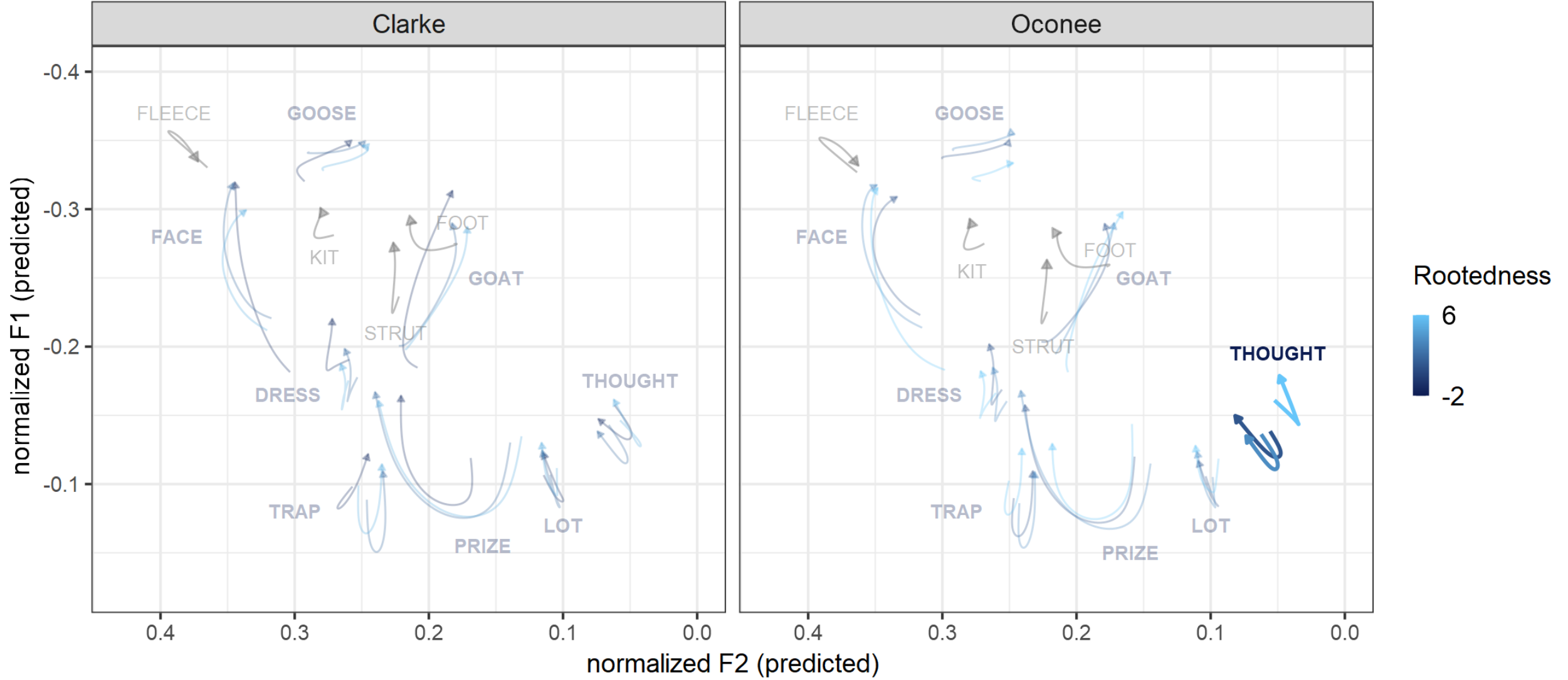


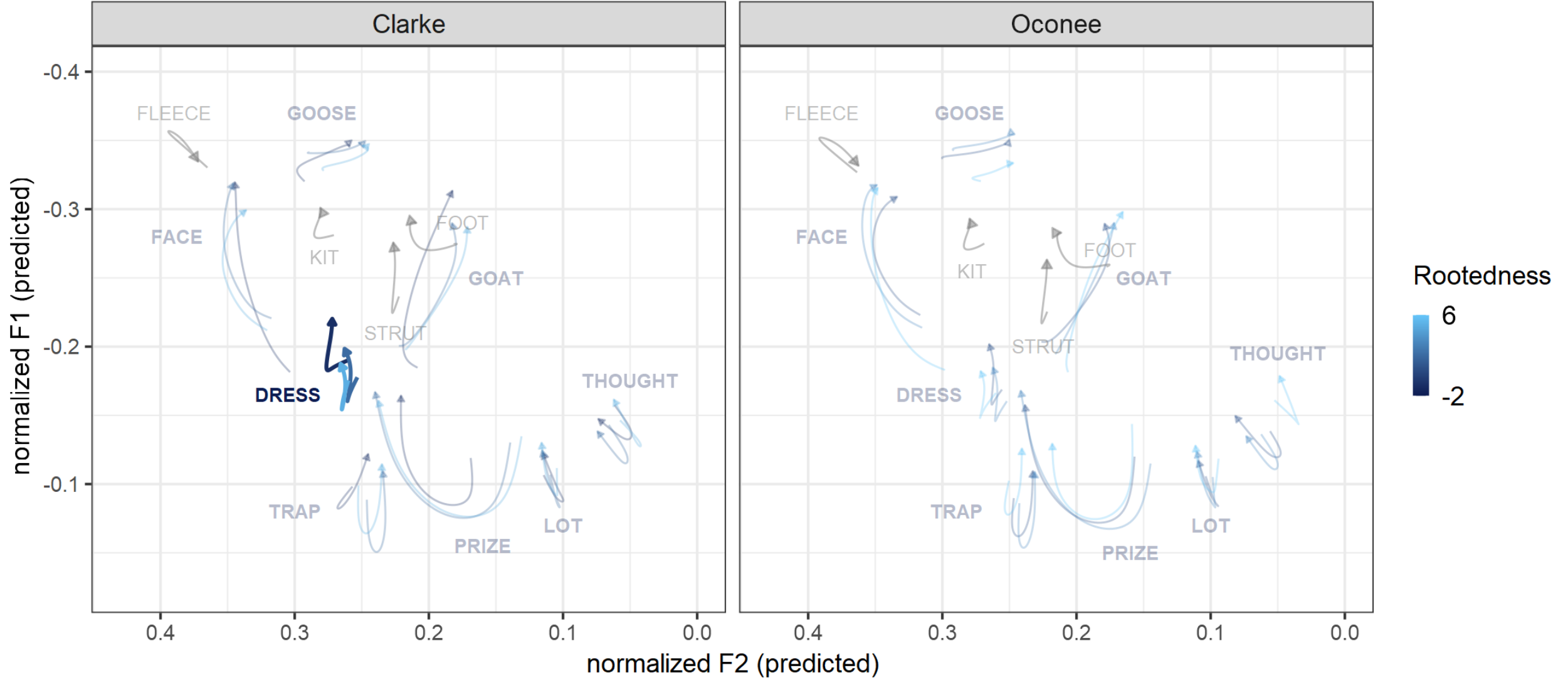


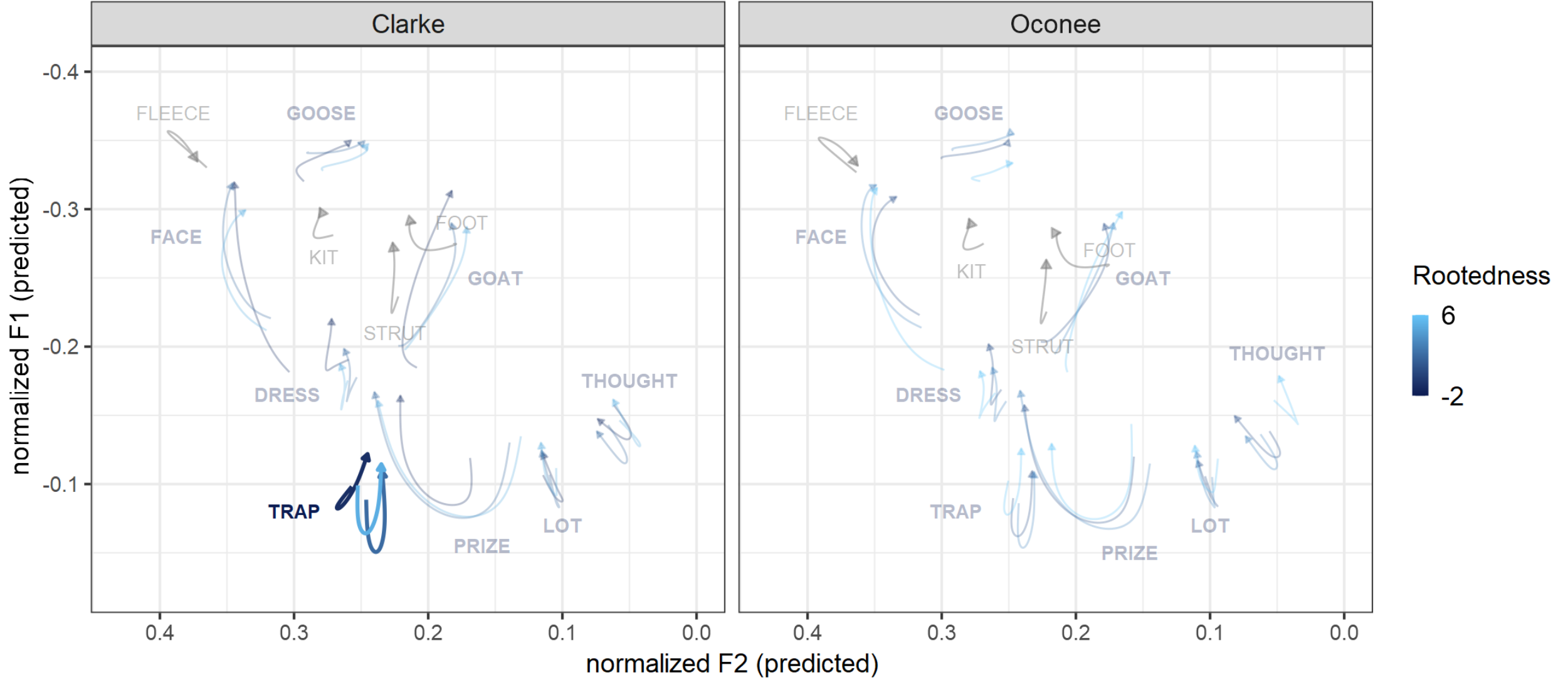




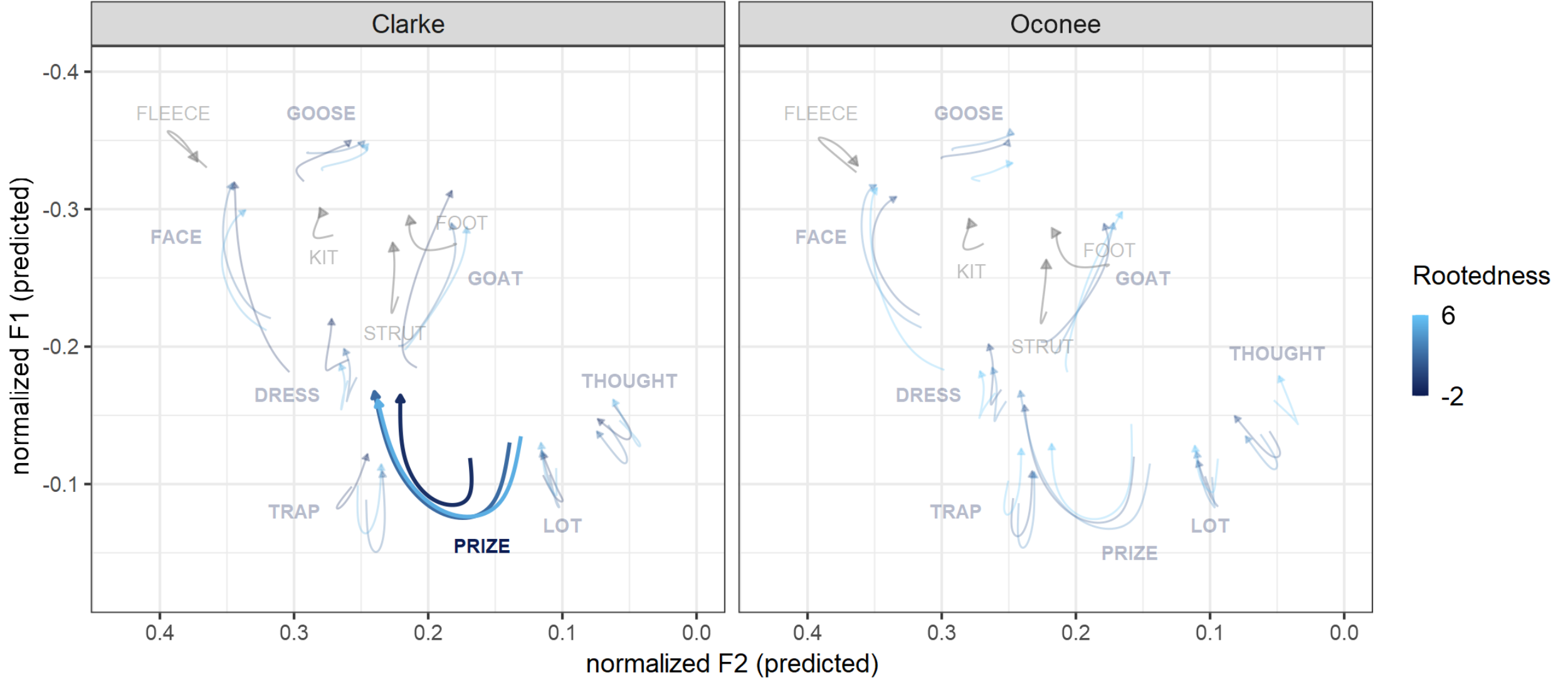


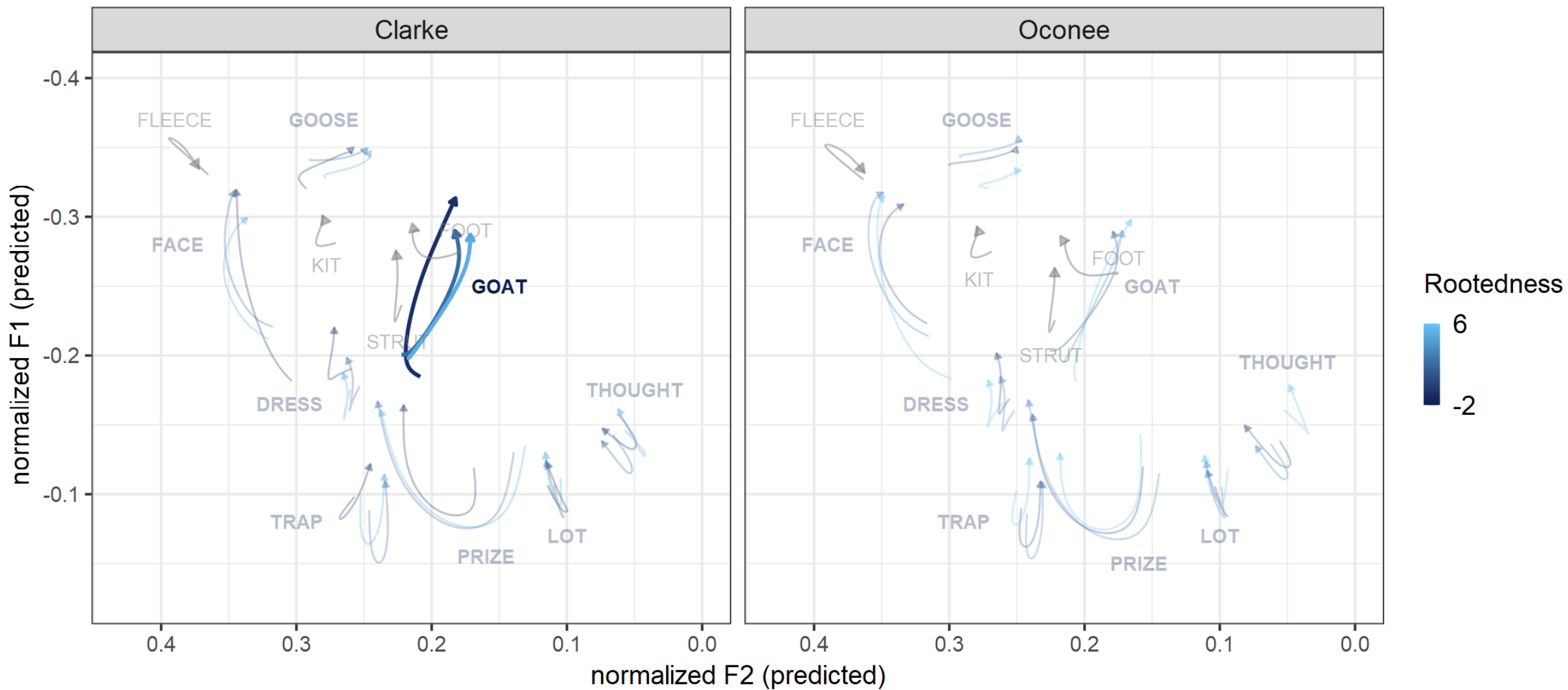


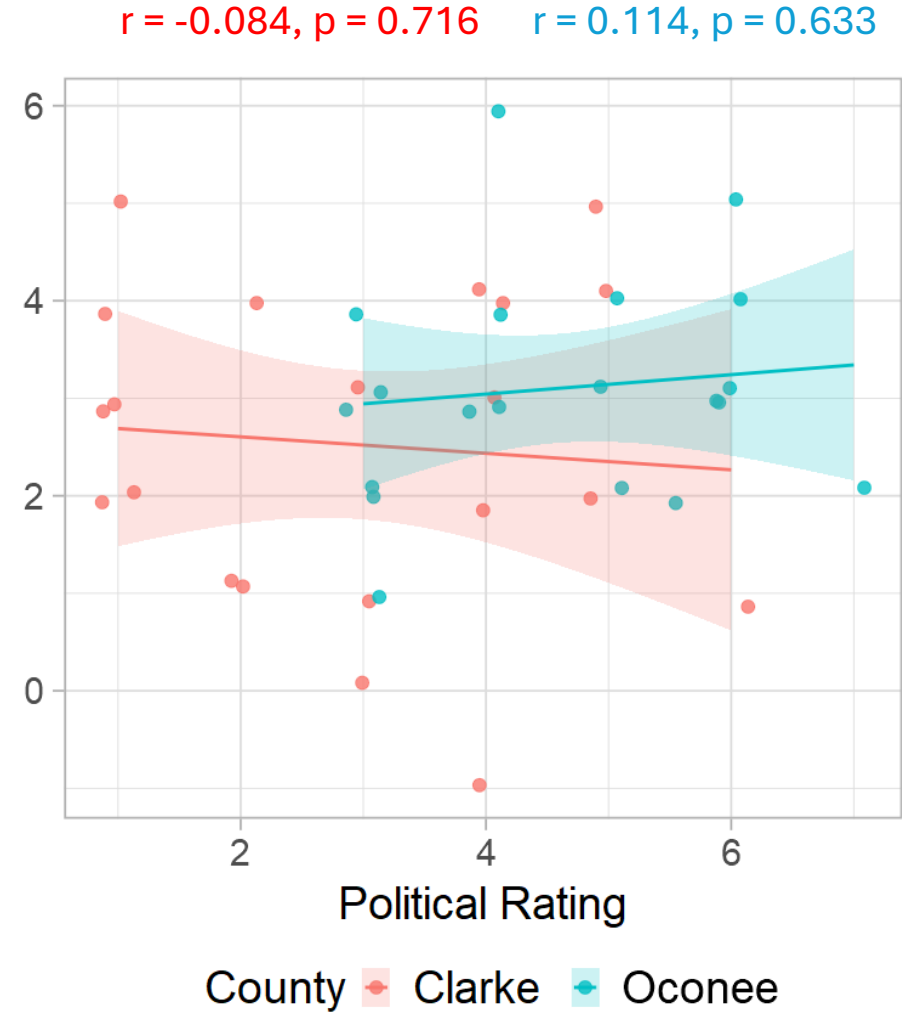
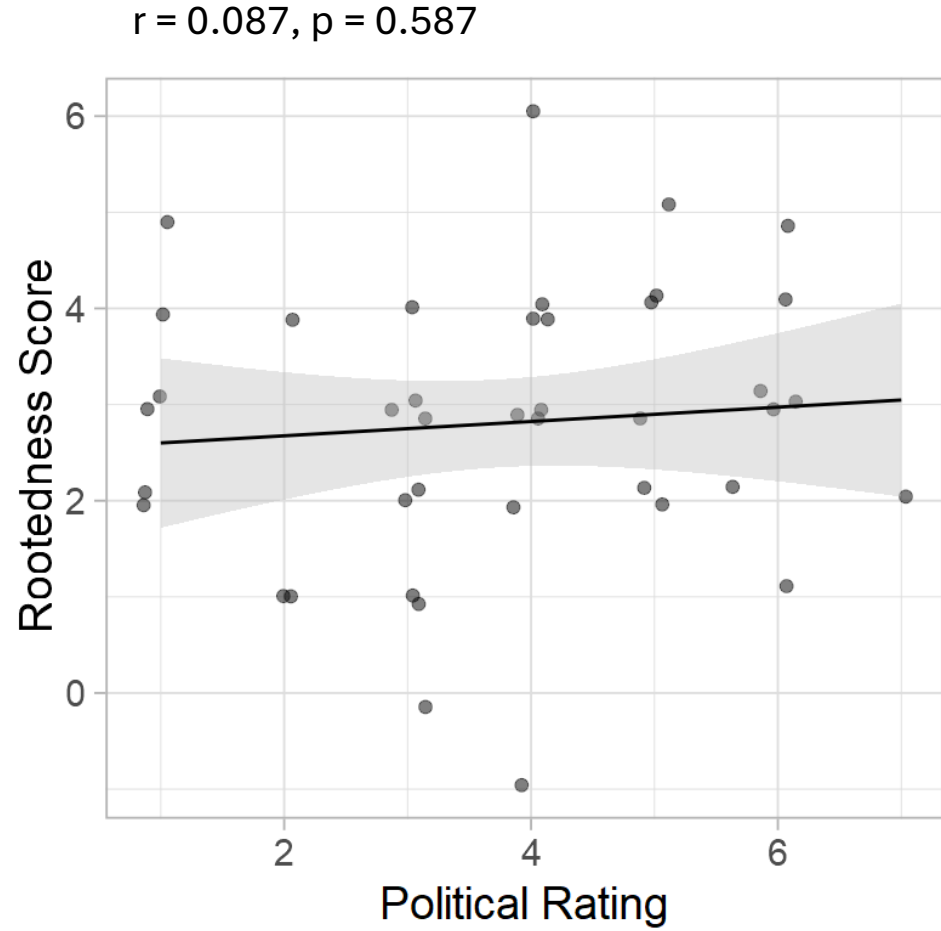












# Conclusions

- High rootedness in Oconee and low rootedness in Clarke correspond to the use of more Southern features
  - Rootedness to the ideological imagined place, rather than the geographical location (Sneller 2024)
- More conservative speakers tend to use more Southern features
- The rootedness and politics metrics appear to both be valuable operationalizations of ideology that can be used to predict linguistic variation

| High Rootedness (Oconee)                                                                  | Low Rootedness (Clarke)                                                                                                 | High Conservatism                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>*Lowered FACE</b><br><b>*Raised TRAP</b><br>More monophthongal PRIZE<br>Raised THOUGHT | <b>*Lowered FACE</b><br><b>*Raised DRESS</b><br><b>*Raised TRAP</b><br>More monophthongal PRIZE<br><b>*Fronted GOAT</b> | <b>*Lowered FACE</b><br><b>*More monophthongal PRIZE</b><br>Raised THOUGHT |

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# Thank you!

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