

SHARING RESOURCES AND INDEXING MEANING IN THE PRODUCTION OF GAY STYLES*

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INTRODUCTION

- (1) Most sociolinguistic approaches to style directly associate the production of style to reified social categories, such as race, gender, and class, failing to examine how linguistic practice produces and reproduces social meaning. Most studies of gay styles have followed this approach.
- (2) Drawing on work on the dynamic ways in which speaker- and situation-based social meanings interact (e.g. Ochs 1991, California Style Collective 1993, Irvine to appear), we propose a semiotic approach to style that distinguishes between situational and identity-based meanings and posits indexical relationships between social meaning and linguistic resources.
- (3) Two problems with the idea of a singular ‘gay’ way of speaking:
 - a. It homogenizes the diversity within the gay community, erasing the many subcultures comprising the community.
 - b. It reifies as gay certain linguistic practices that are shared throughout society.

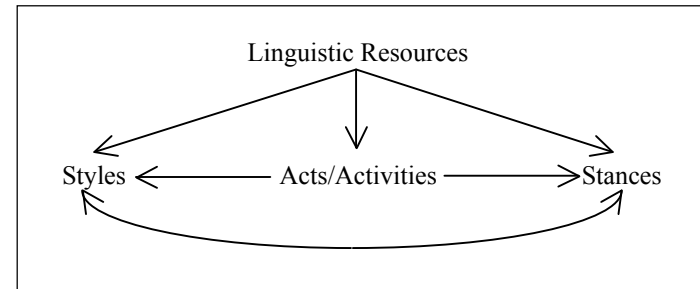
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e.g. Cooperative Discourse – found in speech of gay men (Leap 1996), heterosexual men (Cameron 1998), and women (Coates 1998, Tannen 1990).

OUR MODEL OF STYLE

- (4) **Style**
Style is a dimension of linguistic practice which discursively produces identity through the marshalling of symbolic resources and the meanings they index. A style may be viewed as a collage of co-occurring linguistic features which, while unfixed and variable, work together to constitute meaning in coherent and socially intelligible ways. Style simultaneously gives linguistic substance to a given identity and allows the identity to be socially meaningful.

(5)



(inspired by Ochs 1991)

THE STUDY

- (6) Data: Radio discussion on discrimination of gays in private voluntary organizations.
- (7) Speakers: A – openly gay attorney, well-known gay rights activist
B – libertarian expert

(8) Variables

- ⊙ Duration of /æ/, /eɪ/
- ⊙ Duration of onset /s/, /l/
- ⊙ Fundamental frequency (f0), or pitch, of stressed vowels
- ⊙ Voice onset time (VOT) of voiceless aspirated stops
- ⊙ Release of word-final stops

RESULTS

(9) Results for duration variables (in ms)

	Mean		Standard Deviation	
	A	B	A	B
/æ/	93*	76	44	39
/eɪ/	107	131*	46	53
/s/	111*	100	36	30
/l/	70	66	20	31
VOT	73*	59	25	23

* Significantly longer (alpha level = 0.05)

(10) Results for pitch variables (in Hz)

	Mean		Standard Deviation	
	A	B	A	B
V midpoint	131	137*	31	39*
max	142	152*	33	41*
min	122	130*	28	36*
range	21	21	19	18

* Significantly higher (alpha level = 0.05)

(11) Percent of released word-final stops

	A (N = 248)	B (N = 202)
Released	22.4%	12.9%
Unreleased	77.6%	87.1%

($\chi^2 = 7.04$, dF = 1, p = 0.004)

CONCLUSION

- (22) Speaker A does not exploit pitch or the duration of /l/ to produce a gay style, even though these phonetic resources have been linked to stereotypically gay speech. We attribute this finding to the fact that there is no one gay style. Speaker A is performing a non-stereotypical gay identity, and his performance illustrates that linguistic styles — including gay styles — are as diverse as the individuals and communities producing them.
- (23) Speaker A uses the release of final stops, a feature which also constitutes part of a geek girl style, in the production of his gay identity. This finding shows how a feature can be used in the production of gay styles without evoking solely a gay meaning, highlighting also the importance of contextualizing the features that express social meaning.

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