

### **Beyond lispng: A preliminary look at the linguistic correlates of gay styles**

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Abandoning the assumption that categorical differences exist between the speaking styles of gay and straight men, we argue that rather than speaking a monolithic sociolect (Gay Speech) gay men use linguistic resources to construct a multitude of styles and stances. This paper represents our preliminary ideas about the ways that gay styles (and styles in general) are linguistically constructed. The paper consists of two parts: (1) a theory of style and (2) an acoustic experiment exploring the use of linguistic resources to construct gay styles.

Departing from tradition, we do not treat style as a product of attention paid to speech (Labov 1966) or audience design (Bell 1984). Drawing on the work of Ochs (1991), we argue that linguistic resources can be used to construct stances, the speaker's emotional or interactional position or attitudes in a situation (e.g., formality, refinement). Linguistic resources can also be used to construct style, the linking of a configuration of linguistic variables to a particular group (e.g., vernacular culture, working class). This notion of style corresponds roughly to Coupland's (forthcoming) definition of 'dialect style'. We also suggest a link between styles and stances (e.g., *-in'* used to construct a stance of informality, which is in turn used to construct a working class style).

We conducted an acoustic experiment to explore the link between linguistic resources and gay styles. After listening to six users of a particular gay style (the educated gay activist) on the NPR talkshow *Talk of the Nation*, we identified four potential variables used to construct this style: duration of /æ/ and /eɪ/, the burst duration of aspirated stops, and the release of word-final stops. We obtained a tape recording of one of the shows, featuring a user of a gay style (EW, a lawyer for Lambda Legal known to be gay) and a control subject (DB, a libertarian author whose sexuality is not explicitly stated), discussing whether gay should be allowed in the Boy Scouts. Results indicated that while both subjects use similar ranges for the duration of /æ/ and /eɪ/ and burst duration, EW uses his range to a much greater extent (significant at  $p < 0.05$  for the durations of /æ/ and /eɪ/). We further hypothesized that the word 'gay' might be a locus of style and found that the vowel /eɪ/ lasted on average 162 ms in 'gay', as compared to 108 ms in all other tokens. Finally, EW exhibited a greater tendency to release stops word-finally (significant at  $p < 0.05$ ). More work is necessary to determine whether the difference between the speech patterns of EW and DB functions as part of a larger cohesive style.

This paper illustrates how four phonetic variables can be used to construct a particular style and how they are used to vary degrees in the speech of a single speaker. We are thus moving away from treating Gay Speech as a monolithic sociolect and beginning to arrive at a more complete model of how variables group together to index different types of gayness.