

Dude, Let's Go Shopping: the Performance of Gay and Straight Speech

Intro

In this work I look at the different ways that gay and straight men perform the linguistics of Gay and Straight speech. From here on, "homo" and "hetero" will be used as descriptions of the actor, while "gay" and "straight" will be used as descriptions of the character being performed.

Background

On the importance of Performance Register, Shilling-Estes (1998:54) states, "performance speech may help answer questions related to the perception of language features – since in performing their own or another dialect, speakers may seize upon features of that dialect that are 'important' or 'noticeable' to them at some level, whether conscious or unconscious". Likewise, Trester (2004) points out that improvised performances are fertile grounds in which "the production and reproduction of [these] identities" can develop as the interaction unfolds.

On the issue of sexuality and speech, it has been noted that stereotypical "gay speech" is often thought to share the same patterns and variables as "women's speech" (Barrett 1999), but "straight speech" has not received much attention. This is likely because "normative heterosexuality is seldom explicitly presented as an identity, where as being gay [is]" (Cameron & Kulick 2003:11). Kiesling (2001, 2005) considers "straight speech" as existing only in relation to other, marked, categories, while Coates (1986) points out that, for heterosexual men, something other than "straight man" will be more important to straight male speakers in terms of personal identity.

Methods

Male dyads, both members of the same sexuality, performed a conflict resolution scenario (1) using sock puppets. This scenario was performed once as if their characters were gay males, and once as if they were straight males. The gay performance always came first, followed by the straight performance, and finally a short interview.

(1)

Scenario One: Chris and Jesse

Chris and Jesse are two friends who met each other at UT last year. This year, they're both very busy and haven't seen each other much, but today, they bumped into one another outside the union. Both of them have a couple of hours free and they have decided to hang out. Unfortunately, they can't decide what to do. Chris wants to go to a movie, but Jesse wants to go get lunch. Eventually, they decide to just go downtown.

Your job is to show how Chris and Jesse talk through their different ideas and eventually reach a solution that neither one had thought of at the beginning. Take as much time as you like.

The recordings were then transfer to computer as *.wmv files and transcribed (as in Bigham 2003). After transcription, several things were noted.

-Phonology. The only phonological variable under consideration was the velar vs. alveolar nasal in participials (e.g. *walkin* vs. *walking*). However, other phonological considerations are noted qualitatively in the General Overview.

-Terms of Reference. These were grouped as either masculine (e.g. *dude, man, bro*) or feminine (e.g. *girl, bitch*) terms, with the accompanying labels REF-masc and REF-fem.

-Topics. Since the overall topic was constrained by the exercise, a more micro-level analysis was considered. (Micro)Topics were broken into four groups:

- Top. 1: SEX, which included any reference to sexual relationships or sexual acts;
- Top. 2: STEREOTYPES, when a speaker would mention something commonly associated with either gay or straight men, such as shopping and fashion, beer and sports;
- Top. 3: SPACES, overt mention of gay bars or (more difficultly) straight bars;
- Top. 4: SUSPICIONS, things which seemed to be marking a gay or straight identity, but not as obviously or certainly as the other topics.

-Discourse Markers (DMs). DMs were broken into two major groups, markers of Certainty (*actually, kinda, maybe, a little bit, etc.*), which could also be considered to indicate a mitigating of the force of the utterance, and markers of Intensity (*very, super, totally, etc.*). Finally, other DMs of a more general variety (*oh, yeah, y'know, cool, like, I mean, well*) were considered separately (see Fuller 2003).

-General Overview. Finally, in addition to the token-counting approach, a more qualitative view of the overall discourse was considered.

Results

Table 1 lists the variables that were most salient by actor sexuality and character sexuality. Note that aside from REF-fem, these resources are available and used by everyone; it is only a matter of the degree of use that is represented in the table below.

Hetero acting gay	Hetero acting straight	Homo acting gay	Homo acting straight	GAY	STRAIGHT	The OTHER
PHON-ing		PHON-ing	PHON-in	PHON-ing		
	REF-masc	REF-fem	REF-masc		REF-masc	
Top.1 Top. 4	Top. 2 Top. 3	Top. 4	Top. 1 Top. 2	Top. 4	Top. 2	Top. 1
DM-oh DM-Certainty DM-so DM-yeah DM-y'know	DM-come on DM-cool DM-hey	DM-well DM-like	DM-come on DM-cool DM-yeah		DM-come on DM-cool	DM-yeah

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Homosexual Actors, Gay performance

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4m: I wanna go get a drink but I can't, cuz I have a test tomorrow .

4n: Bitch we got

5m: hhh It was so fun, we should hang

5n: fucking drunk last year, like crazy . It was

6m: out more

6n: I know but like . hhh Why don't we go to the movies tonight?

7m: I hate the movies, why don't we just go eat right now .

7n: Because I'm not hungry .

8m: But I'm starving, wouldn't you like to go get lunch with your friend that

8n:

9m: you haven't seen in a long time you little bitch .

9n: Not really, but . um .

10m:

10n: Look . Why don't we go get lunch, and then we can go, watch the movie .

11m: Neeh . But I hate the movies they're so loud and there's so many

11n: Yeaahh .

12m: people and I have to sit next to smelly people It is to loud,

12n: What the fuck are you talking about? It's not loud .

13m: and there's popcorn (XXXXX) and there's carnies and also

13n: Oh what ever . You're a fucking

14m: I am not a carnie . Let's go get food .

14n: carnie, bitch . Let's g- no I'm kidding .

15m: Yeah! That's a great idea and we can

15n: Um, why don't we go, downtown .

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Homosexual Actors, straight performance

16m: Whoa hey dude what's up I haven't seen you in forever since that party
16n:

17m: a couple years ago . Oh I got me some
17n: I know, fuckin' shit, I got some pussy that night .

18m: bitches, yeah it was great, those hos, oh, way, and beer, man .
18n: Dude .

19m: I was so hung over . I love me some bitches .
19n: I know . Fuckin' . Shit .

20m: Yeah! We should
20n: Um . So . D'you wanna go watch a movie or somethin?

21m: totally hang out, uh I think maybe we should get food though . I'm kinda
21n:

22m: hungry and I haven't eaten in five minutes .
22n: You're always fuckin hungry .

23m: Yeah well you know me I eat everything in sight, cuz I'm a guy .
23n:

24m: Well what'd'you wanna do?
24n: Dude I- I don't wanna have fuckin lunch dude .

25m: Well I don't really give a shit . Well let's
25n: Let's go fuckin watch a movie . Well fuck you man .

26m: go eat . Um . Wait h- how 'bout we go s-
26n: Fuck you I'm not hungry .

27m: downtown and get us some bitches . Yeah yeah bitches?
27n: hmm . Dude .

28m: Let's go . Dude .
29n: I want some man .

Heterosexual actors, gay performance

1e: Hey Jesse how ya doin'? Ah nothin'
1f: Hey hey s- Hey Chris, what's goin' on?

2e: I just had a wild night last night . What about you, where'd you go?
2f:

3e:
3f: Oh not much, uh . I was just, uh . I was hangin' out . With with uh, With some

4e:
4f: of my friends, at at my apartment . Um . We didn't do much, I've I've had

5e: Ah that's alright,
5f: a pretty hard week with classes .

6e: It's good to see you, man, how's it goin? [hug] Um . So uh . What'a'ya doin tonight?
6f:

7e: Well . Actually .
7f: We::ll, um . I dunno, what'do you wanna do tonight?

8e: I'm kinda busy . Would you like, just like to get, some lunch?
8f: Hmm . See the

9e:
9f: thing is I already ate, s' like, just a little while ago/
.

10e:
10f: y'know I real- I'm really that hungry . um . Um . Maybe . Uh . Maybe we

11e:
11f: should, uh, go see a movie . How about that?
.

12e: uh, Well y'know, um . I'm kinda busy tonight, as I said, so
12f:

13e: Why don't we just go downtown?
13f: OH down- that would be *wonderful*.

14e: Down to BoyzCellar . Alright . Pick you up at seven .
14f: Awesome . See ya dude.

Heterosexual actors, straight performance

15e: Jesse. Hey man. Haven't seen you for a while.
15f: What's goin' on dude?

16e: Not much. I've
16f: Yeah man it's been too long, whatcha been d- up to dude?

17e: uh . Just been really busy with schoolwork. But hey man, uh. It'd be good
17f:

18e: to chatch up . Y'know hang out with some friends.
18f: Yeah I got some time free.

19e: How 'bout, uh, we go see a movie tonight.
19f: ssss a movie dude, I dunno,
.

20e:
20f: I just saw Kill Bill, ah-ech-ii- it wa- it was alright dude, but I- I don't wanna

21e:
21f: waste my money, y'know/ I gotta be savin' up, I gotta get some new speakers

22e:
22f: in my car. Um . Why don't we go get something to eat, dude?

23e: Naw man I just ate, I've got this .
23f: Let's get some lunch. I'm starving.

24e: and I've got this date tonight, so . Dinner's pretty much out . for me.
24f: Oh tot- Yeah

25e: But hey, y'know,
25f: I totally understand dude, good luck with that bro.

26e: like uh . Once I'm . done with my stuff why don't we just go downtown?
26f:

27e: uh I would
27f: Hhh, that'd be awesome, dude . Yeah, uh, What time dude?

28e: say about 9 o'clock . fine .
28f: Sweet . Alright
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