SEXUALITY AS A FACTOR FOR SOCIOPHONETIC VARIATION

Douglas S. Bigham,
University of Texas at Austin
(douglas.s.bigham@gmail.com)

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A LITTLE BACKGROUND...
DIALECT CONTACT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

- Dialect Contact
  - What happens when speakers of two different dialects interact with each other?
  - Trudgill, 1986; 2004

- University Students
  - Close, persistent, intimate contact
  - Population is transient and dynamic, but “anchored”

- Emerging Adulthood
  - Period between High School and “true” Adulthood
  - Roughly 18-26 age range
  - Marked by exploration, self-discovery, and change
  - J. Arnett, 2001
Dialect Geography for This Study: The Northern Cities Shift (NCS) in Illinois
Female vowel space is, on average, larger than male vowel space

- Anatomical differences cannot account for the kinds or magnitudes of difference (Diehl, et al., 1996)

Men and women *participate* differently in lg. variation

- women lead change; women are more conservative lg. users
- women adhere more to overtly proscribed norms (Labov, 2001)
- women prefer community-level, wide-solidarity forms...
  ...while men prefer group-level, close-solidarity forms (Milroy & Gordon, 2003; see also Coates, 2003)

Problems...

- Implicit heterosexuality / heteronormativity
- Begging the “why?” question...
SPEAKER CATEGORIZATION:

SPEAKER SEXUALITY

- Kulick (2000): “search for gay and lesbian language”
- Discourse-based Approaches
  - What do “gays” talk about & how do they talk about it?
  - Leap, 1996; Barrett, 1999; Cameron & Kulick, 2003
- Perception-based Approaches
  - What does a speaker do that makes him “sound gay”?  
  - Gaudio, 1994; Levon, 2007; Munson & Babel, 2007
- Sexuality as a factor in sociolinguistics
  - Speaker sexuality as a factor for categorization has largely been ignored.
**Speaker Categorization:**

**Speaker “Gender”**

- Sex+Sexuality = GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX→</th>
<th>biologically male</th>
<th>biologically female</th>
<th>n/a</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEXUALITY↓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>normative</td>
<td>“man”</td>
<td>“woman”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-normative</td>
<td>“gay”</td>
<td>“lesbian”</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>“trans”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- Problems...
  - define “normative”...
  - trans individuals...
Vowel Variants: Production & Perception

- Vowels (using Wells’ Key Words):
  - TRAP
    - raised & fronted in NCS-influenced dialects
    - high front DRESS-like variant = Chicagoland identity
  - LOT
    - fronted and/or lowered in NCS-influenced dialects
    - fronted variant = Chicagoland identity
  - GOOSE
    - fronted in Midlands speech, but not NCS dialects
    - no variants are salient
  - FOOT & KIT
    - not undergoing NCS-related shifts (~FOOT may be fronting)
    - completely non-salient
“Straight” Men & Women

Boxed vowels = most common target
“GAYS” & “LESBIANS”
SUMMARY: “GENDER”-BASED VARIATION

- “Gays” show the most progressive linguistic variants, regardless of salience

- After “Gays”, “Women” show the most progressive non-salient forms, followed by “Men”

- Which speakers show the most progressive salient forms, however, depends on the “meaning” of a variable

- “Lesbians” show the least progressive / most conservative variants
Explain the patterns: Reconsidering “Gender”

- Ta-da!
- But why?
  Why would “gays” be among the first adopters of linguistics changes and “lesbians” among the last?

- Reconsidering what we “know”:
  - Women are ‘community-oriented’
  - Men are ‘group-oriented’
  - Can a person be both? Neither?
“Gender” Patterns: A Tentative Explanation

“Community”-level vs. “Group”-level
- “community” = global, society, out-group-oriented, sex…
  professional/public-level issues…status, power
- “group” = local, self, in-group-oriented, sexuality…
  personal/private-level issues…solidarity, affect

Active vs. Passive Identity Construction
- Active = aware, self-constructed, oriented towards
- Passive = subliminal, society-constructed, oriented away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community → Group ↓</th>
<th>active “community”</th>
<th>passive “community”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>active “group”</td>
<td>“gay”</td>
<td>“male”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passive “group”</td>
<td>“female”</td>
<td>“lesbian”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE EXCEPTION...
GRAND CONCLUSION:  
“GENDER” RE-REVISED

- Vanguard Speakers
  - Actively creating “community” and “group” identities

- Progressive Speakers
  - Actively creating “community” identity; passively creating “group” identity

- Old-guard Speakers
  - Passively creating “community” identity; actively creating “group” identity

- Conservative Speakers
  - Passively creating “community” and “group” identity
THANK YOU!

Contact Info for References, Further Questions... job offers...

Douglas S. Bigham, Ph.D.
University of Texas at Austin

douglas.s.bigham@gmail.com