

### **Operationalizing Sexuality within Sociophonetic Variation**

Although many studies focus on speaker sexuality, most comprise what Kulick (2000) calls the "search for gay and lesbian language", either in discourse-based or perception-based research (e.g., Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Munson & Babel, 2007). Outside this research in "queer linguistics", however, speaker sexuality remains largely ignored, with sociolinguistics continuing to use biological sex as the sole measure of gender (e.g., Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006; Milroy & Gordon, 2003; Eckert, 2000).

Because gender-based differences are at the core of much sociolinguistic inquiry, research on language variation and change must begin incorporating sexuality as a component of gender classification within larger studies of language variation. I propose an operationalization of speaker sexuality as an external independent variable for standard sociophonetic data. Based on word list citation and interview data from emerging adult speakers in Illinois and Texas (15 gays and lesbians, 30 heterosexuals, ~25 tokens for each of 6 vowel variables = 6,750 total tokens analyzed), my research finds that "SEXUALITY" shows significant differences regarding vowel variation, and that the interaction of sex & sexuality (i.e., a combined GENDER variable) provides new and important ways to view language change.

For example, although women are said to lead sociolinguistic change (Labov, 2001), in my data, gay men actually show the most advanced variants of sound changes, followed by heterosexual women and men, followed by lesbians. Further, by analyzing instances of "gender crossing" discourse (i.e., heterosexual men flirting with other men; gay men flirting with women), we see that these differences are salient aspects of a speaker's repertoire of variation. That is, speakers seem able to expand their own range of variation to adopt the forms of some gender out-groups in a process similar to class-based hypercorrection. This evidence calls into question not only assumptions regarding the meaning of "gender" in linguistics, but also long-entrenched notions for explaining the different patterns of variation found for (heterosexual) men and women.  
(300 words)