

**Acoustic correlates of performed sexual orientation in Thai media**

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A growing body of sociophonetic research has highlighted the interplay of pitch and voice quality in the indexing of sexual orientation [1, 2, 3]. While many such investigations have focused on English and other non-tonal languages, relatively little is known about how these cues operate in tonal contexts, where pitch encodes lexical contrasts. This paper presents an acoustic account of the phenomenon by studying how Thai male actors modulate their speech when performing gay versus straight roles in televised dramas, thereby expanding our understanding of sociophonetic variation in tonal environments.

We draw on data from two native speakers of Thai, each portraying both heterosexual and homosexual characters in two TV series (one featuring both as straight roles and the other featuring both as gay roles). We extracted fundamental frequency ( $f_0$ ), jitter, shimmer, harmonics-to-noise ratio (HNR), and corrected spectral tilt ( $*H1-*H2$ ) from level tone open-syllable vowels at non-reducing prosodic positions. Linear mixed-effects models reveal that performed orientation consistently drives the observed acoustic variation. Once role is taken into account, there is no significant effect of speaker identity on these measures (all  $p \geq .80$ ). Specifically, their straight-role speech exhibits lower pitch ( $\beta = -1.008$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), higher jitter ( $\beta = 0.676$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), higher shimmer ( $\beta = 0.618$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), lower HNR ( $\beta = -0.871$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and a lower  $H1*-H2*$  value ( $\beta = -0.872$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) relative to gay-role speech. In other words, when playing straight characters, the actors' speech is characterized by reduced pitch and less breathy voice compared to their gay-role speech, converging with previous work linking pitch and phonation to socially salient personae [4, 5].

Crucially, these patterns emerge even in a language that imposes substantial demands on pitch for lexical contrasts, underscoring the extent to which sociophonetic stylization can operate in prosodically complex systems. By situating these Thai data within broader debates on language variation and change, we reaffirm the fluid and performative nature of identity construction [3]. Our results call for further cross-linguistic research into how pitch, voice quality, and related phonetic variables become instrumental in the social indexing of identity, particularly in underexplored tonal languages.