Non-binary and queer speech in Southern England

Ynda Jas (they)

Queen Mary

University of London

Queen Mary University of London

y.j.law@qmul.ac.uk

@yndajas

THEY

Ynda

Jas

Outline

Broader study

> Non-binary linguistics

> Broad focus

> Additional considerations

> Data

> Speakers

Pilot

> Pitch and gender

> Overview

> Analysis

> Findings

> Conclusion

> **Bonus slide:** positionality

Non-binary linguistics

> "Researchers interested in the linguistic construction of gender and sexuality continue to frame their research in terms of the well-established binaries" (Zimman et al. 2014: 1)

> Sociolinguistics key to understanding binaries and what lies beyond (Bershtling 2014; Bucholtz 2014)

> **Until last few years:** small body of work on non-binary identities, mostly discourse-focused (e.g. Blackwood 2014; Davis 2014; Zimman et al. 2014); lack of sociophonetic and broader quantitative work on non-binary people

Broad focus

> How do non-binary/queer people use speech to construct gendered/sexual identities?

> Primarily quantitative patterning of sociophonetic variables

> > **/s/:** duration, intensity, peak and spectral moments
(e.g. Munson and Babel 2007; Stuart-Smith et al. 2003)

> > **Pitch:** level, span and dynamism (e.g. Jas 2015)

> > **Voice quality:** creak and falsetto (e.g. Podesva 2007;
Zimman 2015; Zimman et al. 2015)

> Complementary qualitative analysis
(e.g. Eckert 2012; Levon 2014; Podesva 2011a)

> > Conversation and/or discourse analysis for:

> > > situated meaning of patterned phenomena

> > > topic-based variation in context

> > Ethnographic insight through own community-internal position
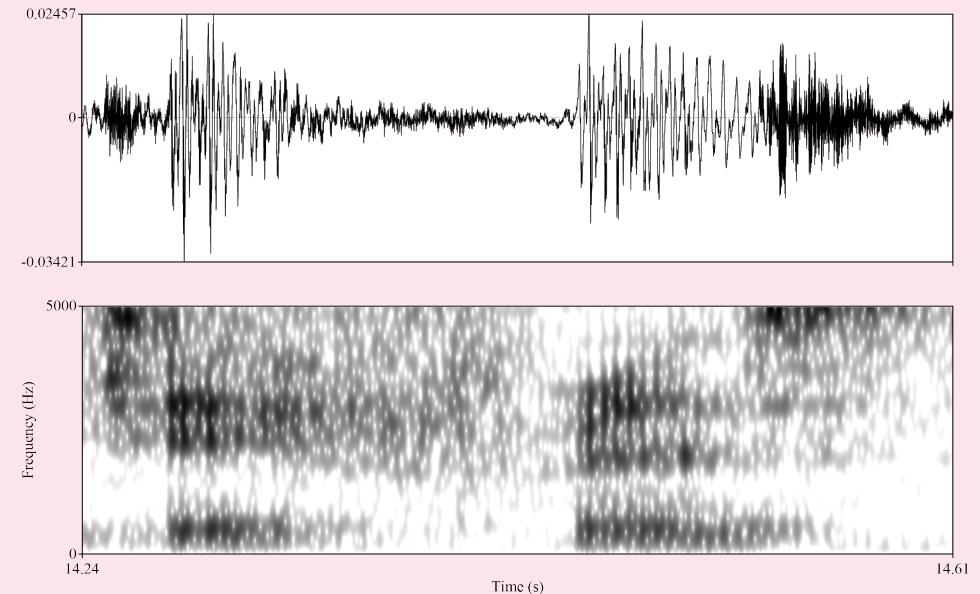
Additional considerations

> Individual/social/contextual factors

> > **Setting** (who/where; e.g. Bell 1984, 2001; Podesva 2007, 2011a, 2011b)

> > **Topic of discussion** (e.g. Coupland 2007; Levon 2009; Schilling-Estes 2004)

> > **Political/ideological alignment** (e.g. Levon 2010a, 2010b, 2011)

> > **Historical processes** (e.g. Levon 2014): social/legal advances (via age)

> > **Affect** (positive/negative/neutral stance)

> > **Presentation** (femme-/masc-leaning)

Data

> Interviews (50-150 minutes each; 45 hours total)

  > A: **Demography**

    > A1: Personal background

    > A2: Family

  > B: **Growing up and life now**

    > B1: Education and work

    > B2: Friends and social life

  > C: **Gender/sexuality, non-linguistic**

    > C1: Identity/gender and sexuality

  > C2: Gender and sexuality in London

  > C3: Gender and sexuality in the UK

  > C4: Popular representation of LGBT/queer people

  > D: **Gender/sexuality, linguistic**

    > D1: Language, gender and sexuality

> Self-recordings (5+ minutes)

Speakers

Pseudonym	Gender		Assigned	Sexuality		Age		Ethnicity
	Group	Specific		Group	Specific	Group	Specific	
Kayla	NB	agender (non-binary umbrella)	female	Q	pansexual (but unsure)	Y	19	White British
Luke	NB	demi male/male and agender (non-binary umbrella)	female	Q	demisexual/queer	Y	23	White British
Zara	NB	female (with a "sprinkle" of non-binary, largely unexplored)	female	Q	bisexual/queer	Y	25	White other
David	NB	transmasculine (sometimes demiboy/transman)	female	Q	polysexual/queer	Y	22	White British
Kirsty	NB	genderqueer	male	Q	queer	Y	22	White British
Aiden	NB	non-binary/trans feminine	male	Q	gay/queer	Y	20	Mixed British/Asian
Amanda	NB	gender queer	female	Q	queer	O	31	White/Asian
Stuart	NB	genderqueer	female	Q	bisexual/queer	O	47	White British
Thom	NB	non-binary	female	Q	queer	O	31	White British
Leela	NB	non-binary	female	Q	queer	O	32	White British
Paul	NB	non-binary/fluidish	girl	Q	queer greysexual	O	30	White British
Casey	NB	bio male/trans	male	Q	queer	O	45	White/Jewish
Kira	NB	non-binary	male	Q	pan/ace	O	33	White British
Chiara	NB	non-binary/genderqueer	male	Q	queer	O	30	White Mediterranean
Polly	NB	genderfluid (currently femme)	female	LGB	bisexual	Y	28	Cornish
Levi	NB	non-binary	female	LGB	bisexual	Y	19	White British
Jak	NB	nonbinary	male	LGB	gay	Y	20	White British
Mack	NB	non-binary	male	LGB	gay	Y	18	White British
Ludo	NB	genderqueer	girl	LGB	gay	O	34	White Other/Jewish
Fiona	NB	genderfluid	male	LGB	bisexual	O	41	White
Nina	NB	non-binary woman	male	LGB	bisexual	O	35	Polish (2nd generation immigrant)
Stan	BT	male	female	Q	pansexual/queer	Y	21	White British
Harry	BT	man	female	Q	pansexual	Y	25	White British
Martin	BT	transgender male	female	Q	queer	O	38	White British
Alexa	BT	female	male	LGB	bisexual	Y	20	White British
Melanie	BC	woman	female	Q	pansexual/queer	Y	28	White British
Jasmine	BC	woman	female	Q	queer/bisexual	Y	22	White
Peter	BC	man (mostly)	male	LGB	bisexual	Y	27	White British

> **Gender**
21 non-binary; 7 binary

> **Sexuality**
19 queer; 9 LGB

> **Mostly schooled in**
Southern England (majority South East)

> **Ethnicity**
majority White British

> **Year turned 18**
16 > 2005; 12 <= 2005 (2005: royal assent of Civil Partnership Act and Gender Recognition Act)

Pilot: pitch and gender

> Customary to assume average pitch differences exist between the speech of women and men (e.g. Titze 1994)

> Sociolinguists recognise interactions with factors like sexuality (e.g. Gaudio 1994; Levon 2009, 2010b, 2012; Russell 2015; Smyth et al. 2003)

> However, assumption that pitch properties of women's and men's voices differ in fundamental ways relatively unchallenged

> Why? Underlying belief in the existence of inherent physiological differences between (binary) genders. Trans people complicate this!

Overview

> Focus:
>> non-binary people
>> role of social and physiological factors in pitch patterns

> 8 speakers split evenly by individual factors: assigned gender; sexuality; age; presentation

> ~300 intonation phrases (IPs) per speaker taken from interviews (total dataset: 2,437 IPs)

Pseudonym	Gender			Sexuality			Age		Presentation
	Group	Specific	Assigned	Group	Specific		Group	Specific	
Kayla	NB	agender (non-binary umbrella)	female	Q	pansexual (but unsure)		Y	19	femme
Kirsty	NB	genderqueer	male	Q	queer		Y	22	femme
Paul	NB	non-binary/fluidish	female	Q	queer greysexual		O	30	masc
Kira	NB	non-binary	male	Q	pan/ace		O	33	femme
Levi	NB	non-binary	female	LGB	bisexual		Y	19	masc
Jak	NB	nonbinary	male	LGB	gay		Y	20	masc
Ludo	NB	genderqueer	female	LGB	gay		O	34	masc
Nina	NB	non-binary woman	male	LGB	bisexual		O	35	femme

Analysis

> Initial mixed model regressions focused on effect of four individual factors on:

>> mean pitch (average pitch across IP)

>> pitch range (difference between highest and lower pitch in IP)

>> pitch dynamism or slope (how varied the pitch is across IP)

> Subsequent analyses examined whether affective content of talk (positive, neutral or negative) further conditioned observed patterns

Findings

> Mean pitch: no significant predictors (birth assignment closest: p=0.0838)

> Pitch range: only birth assignment significant (p=0.0234)

> Pitch slope: social factors play a bigger role
> > sexuality (p=0.0260) and age (p=0.0338) significant predictors
> > presentation nears significance (p=0.0597)
> > birth assignment clearly non-significant

Findings with affect

> Incorporating affect, interaction with presentation acts as best predictor of both mean pitch and pitch range – masc-presenting speakers have:
>> significantly lower mean pitch in affect-neutral IPs (p=0.0011)
>> greater pitch range in positive contexts (p=0.0442)

> All social factors feature in at least one significant interaction with affect for pitch slope, with the best predictor the interaction with birth assignment and age:
>> younger speakers assigned male show significantly less dynamism in neutral (p<0.0001) and positive (p<0.0001) contexts relative to negative

Conclusion

> Findings highlight that while physiology – *better* captured by birth assignment than gender itself – does play a role in determining some pitch characteristics, social and contextual factors also condition how the resource is strategically employed by speakers in interaction.

> Support for Zimman's (2017) call for more nuanced approaches to studying gendered voices, taking account of birth assignment, identity, presentation and more.

Non-binary and queer speech in Southern England

Ynda Jas (they)

Queen Mary University of London

y.j.law@qmul.ac.uk

@yndajas

Queen Mary
University of London

THEY
Ynda
Jas

Positionality

> Who gets to talk about and represent non-binary/trans people?
>> Popular debate around the politics of representation in film/TV
>>> *The Danish Girl* (cis playing trans)
>>> *Nina* (Latina playing Black/African American)
>>> *The Theory of Everything* (able-bodied playing disabled)
>> Standpoint epistemology/feminist standpoint theory
(e.g. Harding 2004; Harding and Wood 2014; Rolin 2009; Rouse 2009)
>> Own community-internal position as queer and non-binary

> But not always simple: "we can do better than 'cis = problematic and trans = not problematic'" (Vincent 2016)

> Stance
>> "research *on, for and with*" (Cameron *et al.* 1992: 14–22)
>> Most importantly: we should seek to represent the plurality of lived experiences

Bell, Allan. 1984. Language style as audience design. *Language in Society* 13(2):145-204.

Bell, Allan. 2001. Back in style: reworking audience design. In: Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford (eds.). *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bershtling, Orit. 2014. "Speech creates a kind of commitment": queering Hebrew. In: Lal Zimman, Jenny L. Davis and Joshua Raclaw (eds.). *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Blackwood, Evelyn. 2014. Language and non-normative gender and sexuality in Indonesia. In: Lal Zimman, Jenny L. Davis and Joshua Raclaw (eds.). *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bucholtz, Mary. 2014. Editor's preface. In: Lal Zimman, Jenny L. Davis and Joshua Raclaw (eds.). *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cameron, Deborah, Elizabeth Frazer, Penelope Harvey, Ben Rampton and Kay Richardson. 1992. *Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method*. New York: Routledge. 14-22.

References

Coupland, Nikolas. 2007. *Style: Language Variation and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davis, Jenny L. 2014. "More than just 'gay Indians'": intersecting articulations of Two-Spirit gender, sexuality, and indigenousness. In: Lal Zimman, Jenny L. Davis and Joshua Raclaw (eds.). *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Eckert, Penelope. 2012. Three waves of variation study: the emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41:87-100.

Gaudio, Rudolf P. 1994. Sounding gay: pitch properties in the speech of gay and straight men. *American Speech* 69(1): 30-57.

Harding, Sandra. 2004. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge.

Harding, Sandra and Julia Wood. 2014. Standpoint theory. In Em Griffin, Andrew Ledbetter and Glenn Sparks (eds). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. 9th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Jas, Ynda. 2015. *Sexual Orientation, Phonetic Variation and the Roots and Accuracy of Perception in the Speech of Northern England English-speaking Men*. Master's thesis, University of York.

Levon, Erez. 2009. Dimensions of style: context, politics and motivation in gay Israeli speech. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13(1):29-58.

Levon, Erez. 2010a. *Language and the Politics of Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays in Israel*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Levon, Erez, 2010b. The politics of prosody: language, sexuality and national belonging in Israel. *Queen Mary's Occasional Papers Advancing Linguistics* 16:1-27.

Levon, Erez. 2011. Teasing apart to bring together: gender and sexuality in variationist research. *American Speech*. 86(1):69-84.

Levon, Erez. 2012. The voice of others: identity, alterity and gender normativity among gay men in Israel. *Language in Society* 41(2): 187-211.

Levon, Erez. 2014. Sexual subjectivities and lesbian and gay narratives of belonging in Israel. In: Lal Zimman, Jenny L. Davis and Joshua Raclaw (eds.). *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

References

Munson, Benjamin and Molly Babel. 2007. Loose lips and silver tongues, or, projecting sexual orientation through speech. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1(5):416-449.

Podesva, Robert. 2007. Phonation type as a stylistic variable: the use of falsetto in constructing a persona. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11(4):478-504.

Podesva, Robert. 2011a. Salience and the social meaning of declarative contours: three case studies of gay professionals. Journal of English Linguistics 39(3):233-264.

Podesva, Robert. 2011b. The California Vowel Shift and gay identity. American Speech. 86(1):32-51.

Rolin, Kristina. 2009. Standpoint theory as a methodology for the study of power relations. *Hypatia* 24(4):218-226.

Rouse, Joseph. 2009. Standpoint theories reconsidered. *Hypatia* 24(4): 200-209.

Schilling, Natalie. 2004. Constructing ethnicity in interaction. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8(2):163-195.

Stuart-Smith, Jane, Claire Timmins and Alan Wrench. 2003. Sex and gender differences in Glaswegian /s/. In: *Proceedings of the 15th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences*. 1851-1854.

Titze, Ingo R. 1994. *Principles of Voice Production*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Vincent, Ben. 2016. Don't listen to me because I'm non-binary [web page]. *Beyond the Binary*. Available at: http://beyondthebinary.co.uk/dont-listen-to-me-becauseim-non-binary [accessed 7 November 2016].

Zimman, Lal. 2015. Creak as disengagement: Gender, affect, and the iconization of voice quality. Paper presented at *New Ways of Analyzing Variation 44*, University of Toronto.

Zimman, Lal, Kara Becker and Sameer ud Dowla Khan. 2015. Creaky voice in a diverse gender sample: challenging ideologies about sex, gender, and creak in American English. Paper presented at *New Ways of Analyzing Variation 44*, University of Toronto.

Zimman, Lal, Jenny L. Davis and Joshua Raclaw (eds.). 2014. *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1.

Zimman, Lal. 2017. Variability in /s/ among transgender speakers: evidence for a socially grounded account of gender and sibilants. *Linguistics* 55(5): 993–1019.