

# Talking beyond the binary: the sociophonetics of Southern English queer and genderqueer speech

Ynda Jas/Andy Law (they)

# Outline



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- > Previous research
- > Research questions
- > Data
- > Analysis
- > Speakers

Bonus slide:

- > Positionality



- > “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
- > **Beginning to change:** a number of postgraduate researchers in the West
- > **In trans studies:** traditional focus on phenomenological, humanities-based approaches over empirical, social scientific – again, beginning to change

# Research questions



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- 1a How do queer and genderqueer individuals use speech to construct and present gendered and sexual identities?
- 1b How does this practice vary by context, topic and political/ideological affiliation, and what can such variation tell us about contemporary structures of gender and sexuality in Britain?
- 2 To what extent are gender and sexuality indexed differently across age groups? In particular, have recent changes in British society's treatment of gender and sexuality affected the ways in which queer, lesbian/gay/bisexual, genderqueer and trans individuals use language to construct their identities?

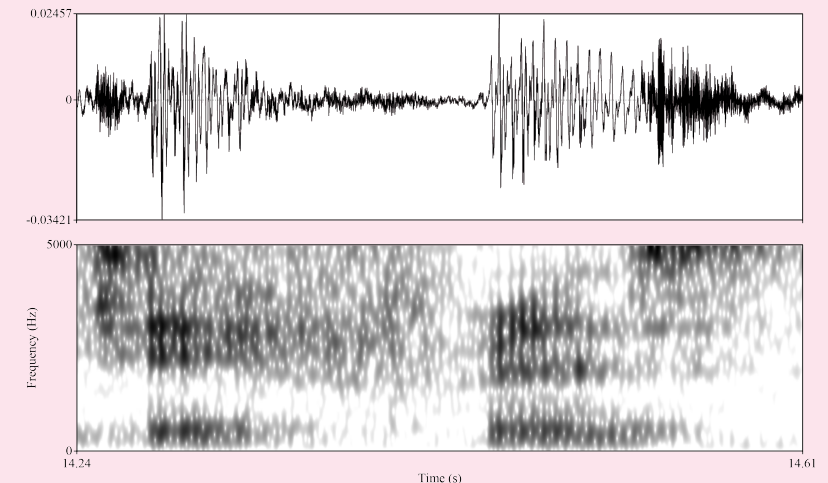


- > Interviews (50-150 minutes each; 45 hours total)
  - > **A: Demography**
    - > A1: Personal background
    - > A2: Family
  - > **B: Growing up and life now**
    - > B1: Education and work
    - > B2: Friends and social life
  - > **C: Gender/sexuality, non-linguistic**
    - > C1: Identity/gender 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)

# Analysis (broad: RQ1A)



- > 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/Law 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



# Analysis (context: RQ1B/2)



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- > 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)

# Speakers



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Pseudonym	Gender			Sexuality		Age		Ethnicity
	Group	Specific	Assigned	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)



# Talking beyond the binary: the sociophonetics of Southern English queer and genderqueer speech

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- > 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



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