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Gay Male Speech and Dialects in Motion: Constructing Linguistic Identity in Southern New Hampshire

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**Gay Male Speech and Dialects in Motion: Constructing Linguistic Identity in Southern
New Hampshire**

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Senior Honors Thesis

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Abstract

The study of gay male speech has largely focused on fundamental frequency and various quantifiable aspects of /s/ (Campbell-Kibler 2012, Mack and Munson 2012, Munson 2007, Zimman 2013). In a study of the speech of three gay men from California, however, Podesva (2011) concludes that gay men may utilize salient aspects of regional dialects to express their gayness. The stylistic correlation between gayness and certain regional dialects supports Eckert's (2008) argument that linguistic styles are centered around ideologies, rather than rigid categorical identities and Podesva (2011) urges that this phenomenon be studied further.

Southern New Hampshire provides an ideal landscape to further this study, as the region and its dialect have undergone significant linguistic and ideological changes in recent decades (Stanford et al 2012, Nagy 2001). The current work examines the linguistic relationship between gayness and Southern New Hampshire ideologies in the speech of two 22-year-old gay men who grew up in Rockingham County, New Hampshire. I then quantitatively analyzed the speakers' use and/or avoidance of phonetic variables (including various vowels and qualities of /s/) that have been shown to be perceptually and/or productively salient in gay male speech or regional dialectology in Southern New Hampshire. The analysis found two significant findings. The first was that the speakers' /s/ was significantly "gayer sounding" in the reading task than the interview and when talking about being gay than not, showing an ideological link (at least for these speakers) between "gay sounding" speech and "proper" speech in the reading tasks. The second was that both speakers demonstrated a significantly unmerged LOT/THOUGHT, which is a salient feature of the New York City dialect and supersedes Southern New Hampshire dialect norms. Both demonstrate that social identity is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon.

Keywords: New England English, sound change, sexuality, sociophonetics, style, stance

The study of gay male speech has largely focused on fundamental frequency and acoustic qualities of /s/. However, it has been suggested that gay men may also utilize salient aspects of regional dialects to express their gayness. This paper examines the speech of two gay men from Southern New Hampshire, a region that has undergone significant linguistic and ideological changes in recent decades. To get the fullest picture of the linguistic relationship between gayness and ideologies about place, this study analyzes phonetic variables that have been shown to be salient in either gay male speech or the changing dialect of Southern New Hampshire from both an intraspeaker approach and in comparison to larger sociophonetic studies of the populations of interest. The findings support Eckert's (2008) argument that linguistic styles are centered around ideologies, rather than rigid categorical identities. The acoustic properties of the speakers' /s/ was found to be significantly gayer-sounding when the speakers were discussing experiences related to being gay than not, but also gayer-sounding in read speech than in interview speech. Confirming previous studies on the relationship between gay-sounding speech and ideologies about proper speech, this suggests that what has been referred to as a "gay-sounding" /s/ may be more indexically complex. Regarding regional dialectology, both speakers were found to have a significantly unmerged LOT/THOUGHT, which has been previously found to be merged across age groups in Southern New Hampshire. This suggests an ideological alignment with New York City that may be motivated by the speakers' identities as gay men and further supports the notion that sociophonetic variables are more indexically complex than they are sometimes treated.

Introduction

The field of sociolinguistics has developed analytical tools in the past couple decades that have helped to expand our understanding of the ways that language and identity interact with one

another. One such tool is the idea that speakers construct their identities via style, “a socially meaningful clustering of features within and across linguistic levels and modalities” (Campbell-Kibler et al. 2006, p. 1). Eckert (2008) argues that styles are centered around ideologies, rather than rigid categorical identities. Thus, Eckert also asserts that the perception and performance of styles are inherently linked: after isolating and assigning significance to a variable that others use, a speaker may incorporate it (or not) into their speech. The linking of all these ideological associations constitutes an “indexical field”: a constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable (Eckert 2008). As Eckert (2008) puts it, “acts of identity’ are not primarily a matter of claiming membership in this or that group or category as opposed to another, but smaller acts that involve perceptions of individuals or categories that fall under the radar of large sociolinguistic surveys” (ibid., p. 463). This does not mean that broad studies of the production of linguistic variables based on macro-sociological categories is not useful- speakers “produce and reproduce” these categories as they move through personae moment-to-moment and throughout their life course (ibid., p. 463).

Something like Podesva’s (2011) study of gay men in California exemplifies these tools and the ways that they can help to examine variation in the linguistic construction of identity across situations. This study compares the realization of phonetic variables of one gay speaker across three situations: a meeting with a supervisor, a dinner with a friend, and a “boy’s night out”. Podesva (2011) first noticed significant differences in pitch variables associated with certain gay personae (Podesva 2007) between these situations, such as the use of falsetto, F0 levels in falling declaratives, and the width of F0 ranges. Podesva (2007) found that these acoustic properties significantly varied across a different subject, Heath, in similar situations and argued that this variation can be accounted for by an indirect performance of gayness through

perceived expressiveness and a gay “diva” persona. In Podesva (2011), the use of these pitch variables across the three situations correlated with significant differences in the degree of the California Vowel Shift (CVS) used. The situations in which Regan (the subject) utilized more expressive pitch features (more frequent and high-pitched use of falsetto, higher F0 levels in falling declaratives, and wider F0 ranges) corresponded with more advanced or exaggerated uses of the CVS, which is associated with archetypes such as the valley girl or surfer dude. While gayness is not associated directly with geography, this shows that speakers constructing aspects of their identities not directly related to location may still use features of salient regional dialects as a part of their style. Podesva hypothesizes that gayness and more advanced variants of the CVS may be indirectly related through the CVS’s association with emotional expressiveness, which has been found to be associated perceptually with gayness (Podesva 2011). Podesva concludes that 1) examining intraspeaker variation is an effective way to understand the social meanings of linguistic phenomena like the California Vowel Shift and 2) it is important that work on the phonetic correlates of sounding gay take regional accents into account.

This study seeks to examine these conclusions in a different region which is also undergoing language change: southern New Hampshire (Stanford et al. 2012, Nagy 2001). The approach here applies previous findings about the perception and production of gay male speech and regional dialects to the region of southern New Hampshire, with the hopes of answering:

- What linguistic variables are utilized in gay male Speech Styles in southern New Hampshire? Is there a pronounced linguistic relationship between gayness and regional identities this region?
- How does the use of salient regional variables interact with and respond to the recent shift of New England’s dialect patterns?

- Does gay male speech appeal to a more pan-regional gay code? How would this style interact with the regional dialects that are salient for these speakers?

Speech data from the two gay men that was gathered for this study seems to show that there is an interaction between regional dialect, gay identity, and different situational styles of speech.

Additionally, there also do appear to be links to a more universal gay style of speech that supersedes Eastern New England regional dialect patterns.

Prior Work: Eastern New England English

To be able to study the relationship between gay identity and southern New Hampshire dialects, we must first identify the salient variables in this region. A great deal of work, led by Jim Stanford of Dartmouth, has been done to document the linguistic changes occurring in New Hampshire. Both traditional dialect boundaries and variables are changing rapidly in the region. Eastern New England English (ENE), spoken in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine, is characterized by several vowels. Stanford et al. (2012) describes a number of these characteristics. The pair BATH/TRAP is unmerged in traditional ENE. The pairs/trios HORSE/HOARSE and MARY/MARRY/MERRY are traditionally two-or-three-way unmerged in Southeastern New England English (SENE), which is spoken in southern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In Northeastern New England English (NENE), which is spoken in northern Massachusetts (including Boston), New Hampshire, and Maine, START is traditionally fronted and FATHER/BOTHER are traditionally unmerged. Alongside these vowels, syllable-final/post-vocalic rhoticity is absent in traditional ENE. Nagy and Roberts (2004) reports that LOT/THOUGHT have been merged in NENE since the 1930s, in contrast with Western New England English.

An apparent-time study in Claremont, New Hampshire, shows that younger speakers have completely merged FATHER/BOTHER, TRAP/BATH, MARY/MARRY/MERRY, THOUGHT/LOT, and do display word-final rhoticity (Stanford et al. 2012). However, there is not a statistically significant difference between the younger and older speakers in Claremont for START-fronting. This demonstrates that not all the linguistic features of this region are changing (or at least at the same pace) and suggests that these features have different levels of conscious salience than one another. Younger speakers in Claremont display a more merged NORTH/FORCE than the older speakers, but less dramatically than they do for the other traditionally distinct variables that younger speakers display merged vowels for. Nagy (2001) found similar results.

These changes, of course, are not random, and are linked to ideologies about place. Younger speakers in New Hampshire typically report that traditional New Hampshire variables as “backwoods” and “old-fashioned” and tend to have negative views on variables that remind them of rural Northern New England or Boston (Stanford et al. 2012), explaining why younger speakers in New Hampshire have begun to distinguish themselves linguistically from both these regions. Stanford et al. (2012) notes that some of these variables may be more consciously perceptually salient than others- explaining why FATHER and BOTHER are merging faster than NORTH and FORCE. Nagy (2001) notes that changes such as the merging of FATHER and BOTHER and MARRY and MERRY have become more drastic even as contact between Bostoners and Granite Staters has increased over time, contradicting an earlier “Gravity Model” that predicts that rural areas linguistically follow their closest metropolises. The dialect of southern New Hampshire appears to be fundamentally opposed to that of Boston and serves as a salient marker of these speakers’ anti-Boston (and anti-big-city) ideology. This set of

ideologically opposed but in-contact dialects provides an excellent backdrop against which people may construct identities such as gayness, especially given demographic links between gay men and urbanity. The proportion of self-reported Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual (GLB) residents of the “cities proper” of San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, and Minneapolis nearly double the proportion of self-reported GLB residents in their respective metropolitan areas (Gates 2006). Suggesting that GLB people tend to have a strong attachment to urban areas (including, notably, Boston), this phenomenon could result in an indexical link between gayness and urbanity that is worthy of exploration.

Prior Research: Linguistic Correlates of Gayness

Regional dialects aside, studies have shown that people reliably rate certain types of voices as sounding “gay”. Recent research has investigated the acoustic factors that influence those ratings (Campbell-Kibler 2011, Munson 2007, Mack and Munson 2012, Zimman 2013). The main points of interest in the study of the perception of gay male speech have been pitch, /s/, and vowels. There are acoustic factors correspond with these perceived sounds that allow us to study them quantitatively. f_0 and vowel formants are reliable indicators of perceived pitch and vowel height/backness, respectively. The acoustic correlates of /s/, on the other hand, are more difficult to pin down and have been investigated in a number of studies of perceived gayness.

Early studies on the perception of male gayness in speech largely focused on single words of read speech. Munson (2007) found that high F1 of low vowels, low F2 of back vowels, and negative spectral skew of /s/ (which correlated with the production of a fronter /s/) are perceived as gay, while higher f_0 correlates most with lower perceived masculinity (with small amounts of influence from the F1, F2, and spectral skew). Munson hypothesizes that the F1 and F2 variables are associated with gayness indirectly, via an association with regional dialect

patterns. Mack and Munson (2012) reported findings that a combination higher peak frequency and more negative spectral skew in /s/ (both of which correlated with a fronter /s/) work together to correlate with the perception of gayness. The findings of these two studies are important to this study, given the close relationship between the ideologies that influence perception and those that influence production. Similar to Podesva (2011), the study of /s/ variables alongside salient place-related variables can give us clues about how gay men in southern New Hampshire construct their linguistic identity.

The work of researchers such as Lal Zimman has expanded on Munson's work and also will inform the methodology and analysis of this study. Zimman (2013) found that higher perception of gayness correlated with higher /s/ peak frequency and more negative spectral skew of /s/ (both of which correlate with a fronter /s/). Munson (2007) and Mack and Munson (2012) found negative spectral skew to be more accurate predictors of perceived gayness than Center of Gravity (the mean frequency) or peak frequency. However, Munson's data for these studies relied on single read words. Zimman, on the other hand, finds that F0, COG, and spectral skew all account for perception as gay. These factors work in conjunction with one another. Interestingly, Zimman finds that certain factors, like creak, corresponds to extra-high perceptual gayness ratings in conjunction with negative spectral skew for /s/, but not otherwise, which suggests that the variables work together in a complex manner.

This ties in with Campbell-Kibler (2011), which analyzed the perception of s-fronting, s-backing and word-final <ing> ([iŋ] vs [in] in words like "running") via participants' rankings of speech samples of university students in California and North Carolina along the terms "smart", "knowledgeable", "masculine", "gay", "friendly", "laid-back", "country", "educated", and "confident". Campbell-Kibler finds that s-fronting and <ing> affect these ratings more

independently, while s-backing is more context-dependent and requires the presence of other variables to have a significant effect on higher ratings of perceived gayness. Two main effects emerge from Campbell-Kibler's data: a very strong positive correlation between degree of s-fronting and perception as more gay and less masculine and a correlation between the [in] version of <ing> and being rated as less smart and less knowledgeable. s-backing seems to be perceptually connected to the South and "sounding country", but only when other variables (such as <ing>) in the speech are more average in distribution. Most importantly, Campbell-Kibler's study shows the perception of these variables may not even be directly tied to sexual orientation. She observes a moderate positive correlation between ratings of competence and masculinity and a negative correlation between ratings of masculinity and gayness, but no direct correlation between sexual orientation and competence. Indirectly, she observes the categories of "unintelligent masculine straight man" and "intelligent effeminate gay man". Instead of with sexual orientation directly, Campbell-Kibler concludes that the variables in the study are associated with "recognizable ways of being in the world" (p. 54). This reaffirms the idea that style is related to an indexical field (Eckert 2008), that linguistic identity is inherently intersectional, and that it is difficult to parse apart discrete identities from indexically linked identities. These concepts are indispensable to this paper, which seeks to analyze how the "recognizable ways" of being gay and the "recognizable ways" of being a Granite Stater linguistically conflict or cooperate.

As seen in Munson's (2007) and Podesva's (2011) work with regional dialects and sexual orientation, gay male identity is not linguistically constructed in a simple way, but rather via a network of interrelated variables that correspond with multiple social identities, including geographic location. In conjunction with knowledge about the linguistic construction of gayness

from Zimman (2013) and Campbell-Kibler (2011) and our understanding of Eastern New England English from Stanford et al. (2012) and Nagy (2001), we have material to be able to quantitatively study the relationship between gay male identity and regional dialects in southern New Hampshire.

Prior Work: Stance

This study also utilizes the concept of stance as a factor to analyze the speech data. Stance is defined as the different “subject positions” that mediate the link between a linguistic variable and an essentialized social category (Ochs 1993). Stances concretely describe the ways that Eckert’s (2008) notion that style is links to ideology: styles of speaking are treated as indexes of a speaker’s stance towards the subject matter, the audience, and their own identities. Kiesling (2009) notes that there is no set “list” of stances, but that “Stances are... connected both to the ways we relate to the content of our talk and to the socialness of our talk” (p. 4). The stances used in the analysis of the data procured in this study were therefore determined by either prominent subject matters from the interviews, particularly those related to the linguistic variables being studied (gayness, locations, etc.) or social actions that the speakers carried out in their interviews (reading, responding to interview questions, stereotyping, etc.).

Methodology

To attain speech data to analyze, I conducted and recorded interviews and reading tasks with two 22-year-old gay males who grew up in southeast New Hampshire in Rockingham County. Subject 1 is White and had attended college in western Massachusetts for the previous four years and had recently graduated, while Subject 2 is Black and had recently graduated from college in New Hampshire. These participants are both friends of mine. I believe that this added

to their level of comfort in the interview and allowed me to obtain more “genuine” speech. However, this configuration only allows us to observe one type of speech: a one-on-one conversation with a young friend who also identifies as gay. All speech observed is under this context, and does not allow us to see how these participants speak in formal settings, group settings, to older people, to straight people, etc.

The interview questions pertained to opinions about the gay community, opinions about Southern NH, opinions on stereotypical gay language use, and more emotional topics such as coming out and were designed both to elicit the widest possible range of stance situations and to gather as much pertinent ethnographic information as possible. The read speech tasks were modeled after those used in Stanford et al. (2012). Due to COVID-19 regulations and concerns, these interviews were conducted over Zoom (a video conference system). The subjects were provided with a Shure head-mounted microphone and a Zoom NH4 recorder.

The quantitative analysis aims to compare the presence of variables that have previously been found to index a gayness with the presence of salient Eastern New England English variables. measured with Praat. For /s/, I measured Center of Gravity and spectral skew (only for pre-vocalic and/or post-vocalic variables). For vowels, I measured the F1, F2, and fundamental frequency of FATHER/BOTHER vowels, BATH/TRAP vowels, HORSE/HOARSE vowels, MARY/MARRY/MERRY vowels, and START vowels. Acoustic analysis of these variables was carried out using Praat (Boersma & Weenick 2020).

For the sake of quantitative analysis, the speech data was coded along a number of potentially influential stance variables based on speech content and/or type of speech “activity”. For both participants, the variable of Speech Style compares interview vs reading task speech, excluding the data collected during conversation that occurred in between different parts of the

reading task. The Gay stance variable corresponds with whether the subject was discussing being gay, either directly or giving opinions about phenomena such as “gaydar” (see example 1), or experiences pertaining to being gay, such as coming out and dating men (see example 2) The “Urban/Rural” variable corresponds with whether the subject is discussing experiences in or opinions about urban vs rural environments (or N/A, if neither) (see example 3). Based on the unique content of their interviews, I coded for a unique City stance variable for Subject 1 corresponding with whether the subject was discussing experiences in or opinions about Boston vs NYC (or neither) (see example 4). I coded for a unique Stereotyping stance variable for Subject 2, corresponding to parts of the interview where the subject was summarizing or giving opinions about demographic groups of people as a whole (LGBT identity, racial identity, locality, etc) (see example 5)

(1)

When, like, I'm discerning if, like, a man is gay, it's usually, um, because of, what's it called, like, body language

(2)

[the participant's boyfriend] is straight. I don't believe he's gay. I just think he happens to be attractive-- attracted to me

(3)

I feel like in New York there's a lot more of a grind going on, and there's a lot more, like, artists

(4)

“Um, people in the-- in like, the country, like in Derry New Hampshire, um, they're more likely to be, like, um, a little more laid back usually”

(5)

like, gay black men, I do-- like, sometimes, you know, we do kind of, like, play it up a little bit, you know, we'll be like, ‘oh girl, like, let's go kiki’.

For statistical analysis, I build linear mixed-effects models for the acoustic variables of interest to see how they varied based on the above style variables. I included the speaker and word as random effects, and, for the models involving /s/, the phonetic environment as an additional fixed effect. Models were developed using the lmer package (Bates et al 2014) in R (R Core Team 2020). Results are considered significant if they result in a t-value that is greater than |2|.

/s/ Results

I found two statistically significant effect of /s/ Center of Gravity and Skewness based on stance variables. There was a significant effect of Speech Style on Center of Gravity ($\beta = 655.89$, $SE = 65.58$, $t = 10.002$), in which Center of Gravity was higher for /s/ in the reading passage data (see Figure 1). There was also a significant effect of Speech Style on Skewness in a parallel model ($\beta = -1.62078$, $SE = 0.13862$, $t = -11.692$), in which Skewness for /s/ was more negative

in the reading passage data (see Figure 2). See Figure 3 for examples of spectrograms of /s/ tokens with higher and lower COG and Skewness.

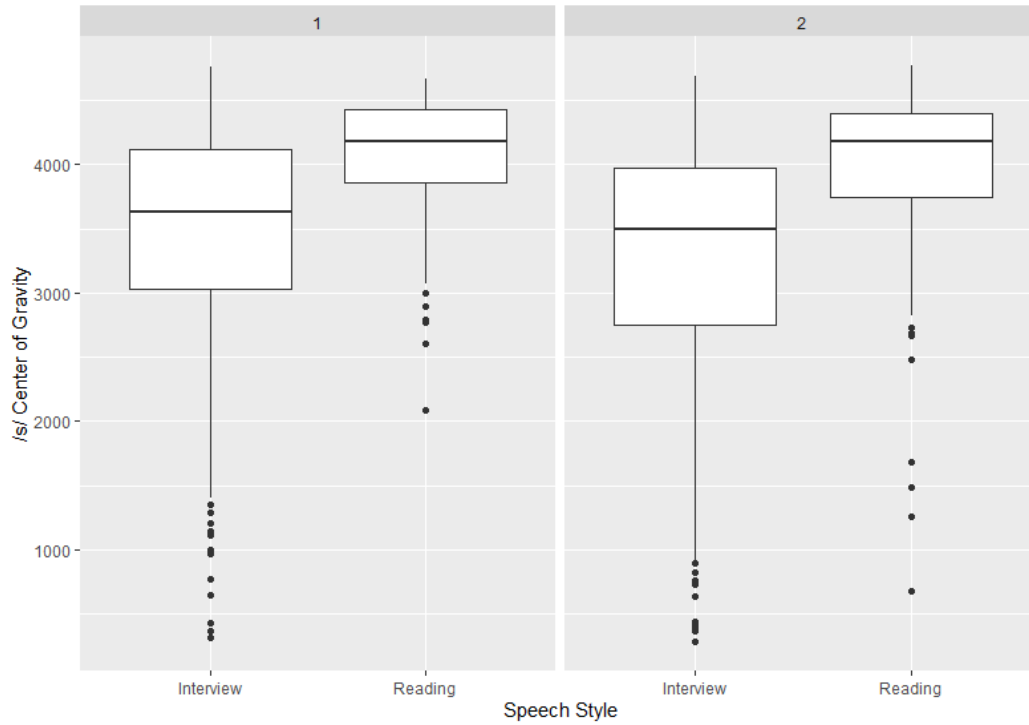


Figure 1: /s/ Center of Gravity by Speech Style and Subject

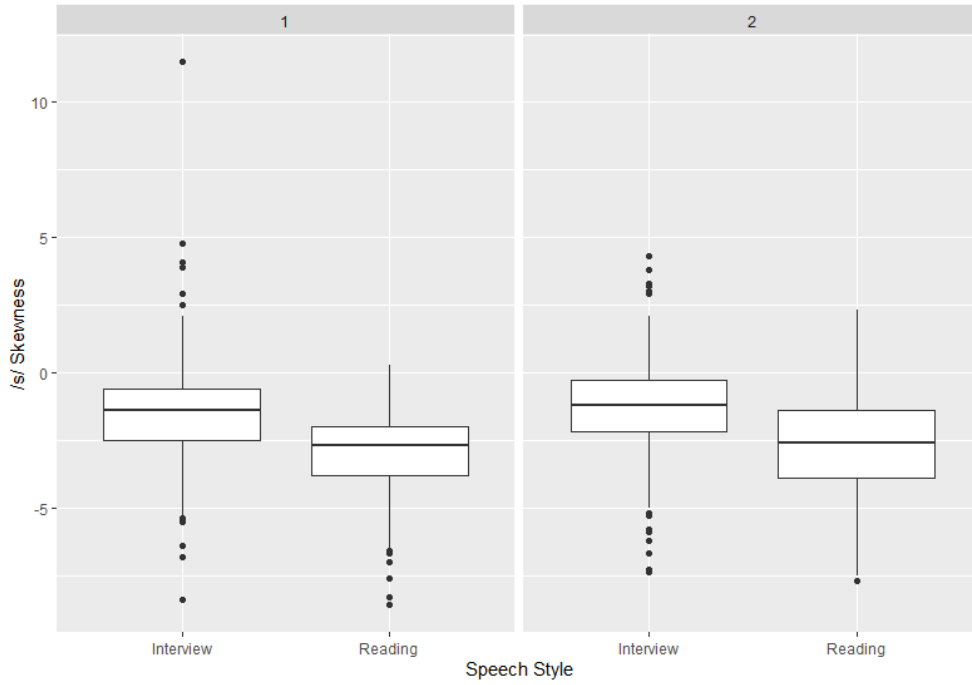


Figure 2: /s/ Skewness by Speech Style and Subject

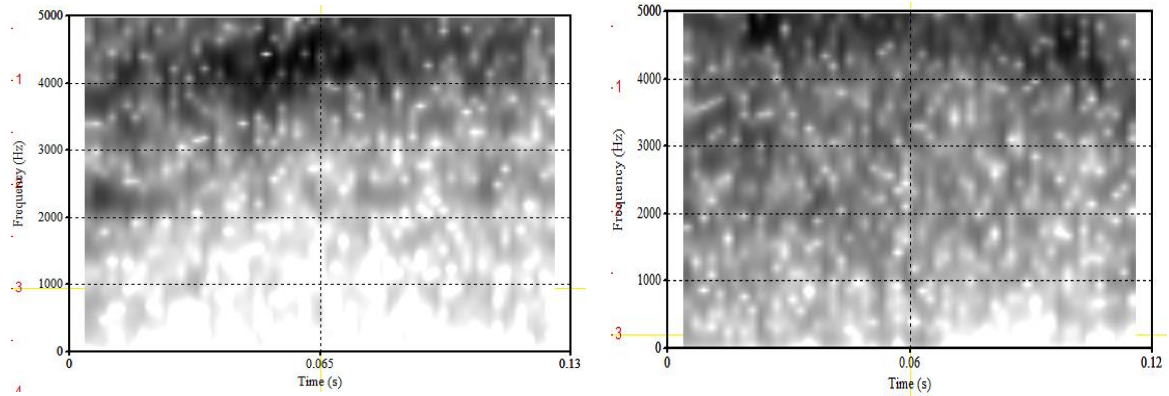


Figure 3: sample /s/ (LEFT: COG = 4440, Skewness = -4.7; RIGHT: COG = 3387, Skewness = -0.9)

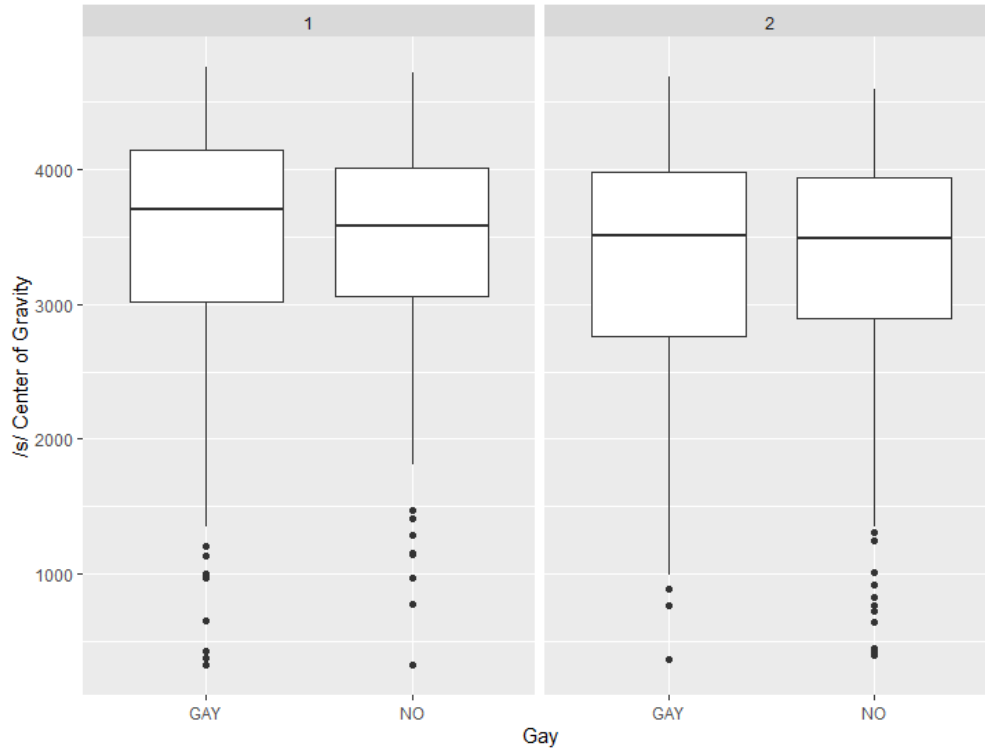


Figure 4: /s/ Center of Gravity by Gay Stance Variable and Subject

There was also a significant effect of the Gay stance variable on /s/ Center of Gravity ($\beta = -151.870$, $SE = 74.122$, $t = -2.049$). It is not surprising that the stance variable that pertains to gayness is the only one (other than Speech Style) that shows some sort statistically significant difference regarding /s/ Center of Gravity. This difference is noticeably more present in the speech of Subject 1 (see Figure 4), but in both the mean Center of Gravity is higher when both subjects are talking about gayness and being gay rather than not. On the contrary, the model did not show statistical significance based on /s/ Skewness along the Gay stance variable ($\beta = 0.24522$, $SE = 0.13317$, $t = 1.841$).

Vowel Results

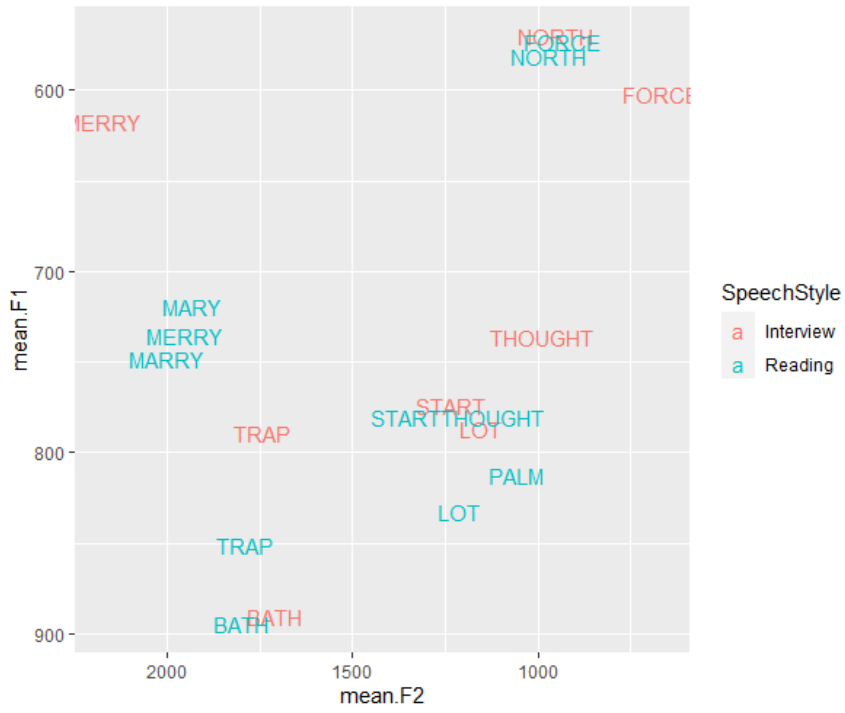


Figure 5: Mean F1 and F2 by Speech Style and Word Class (Subject 1)

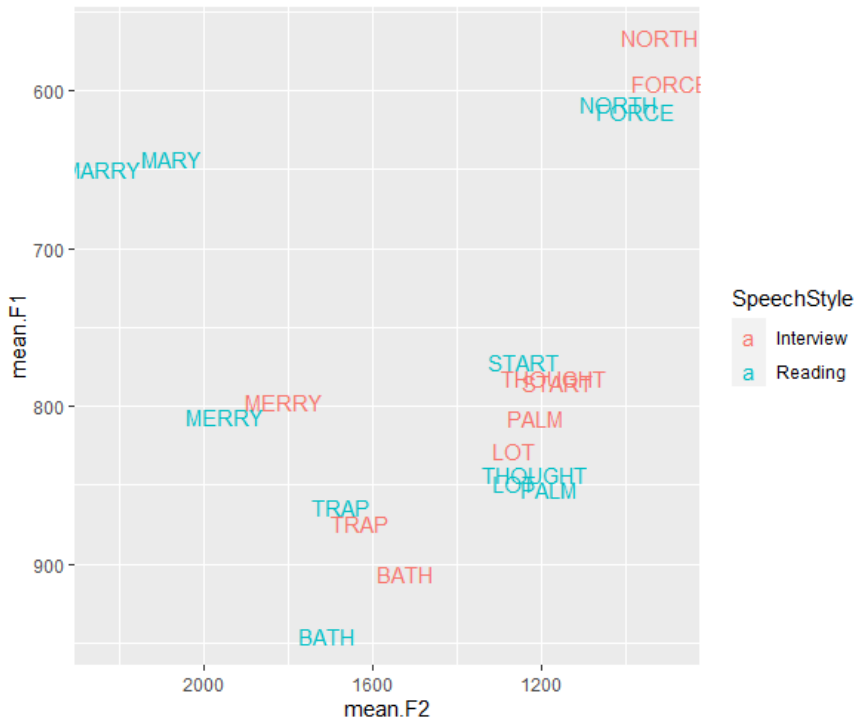


Figure 6: Mean F1 and F2 by Speech Style and Word Class (Subject 2)

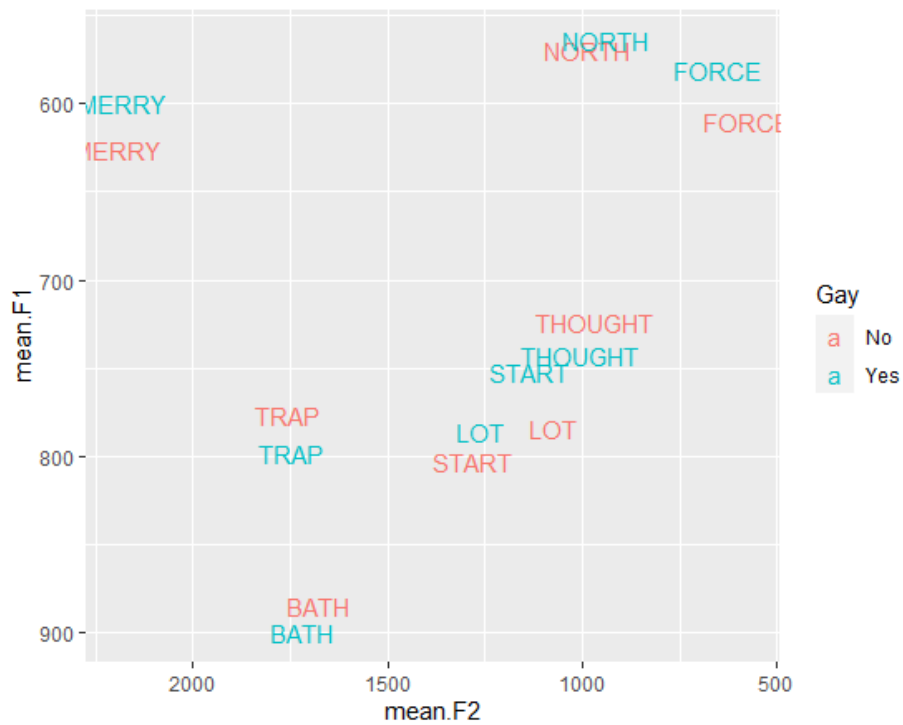


Figure 7: Mean F1 and F2 by Gay Stance Variable and Word Class (Subject 1)

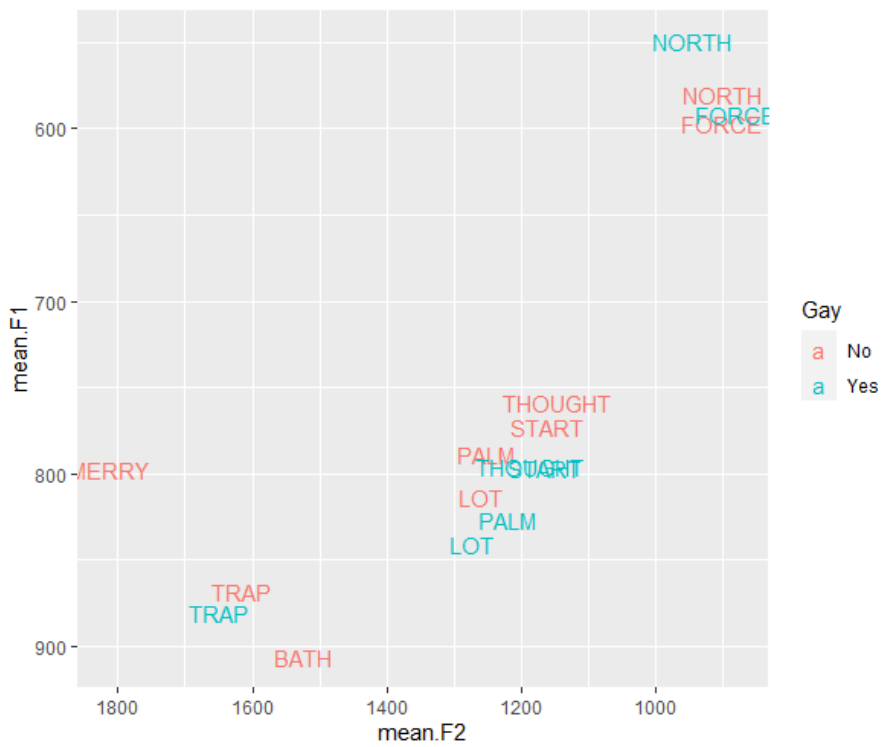


Figure 8: Mean F1 and F2 by Gay Stance Variable and Word Class (Subject 2)

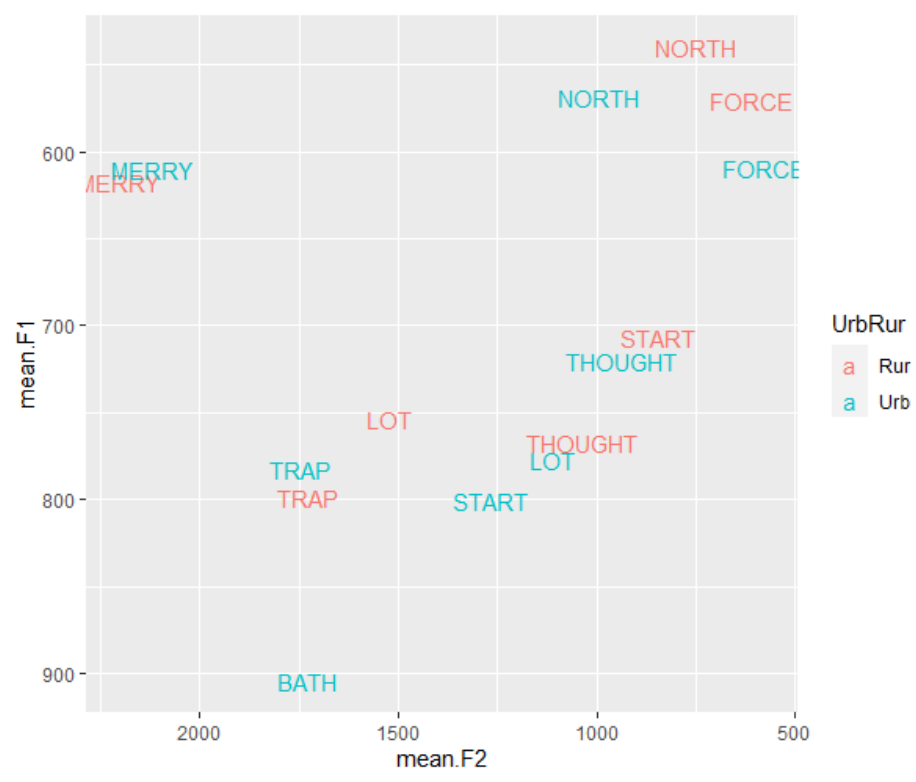


Figure 9: Mean F1 and F2 by Urban/Rural and Word Class (Subject 1)

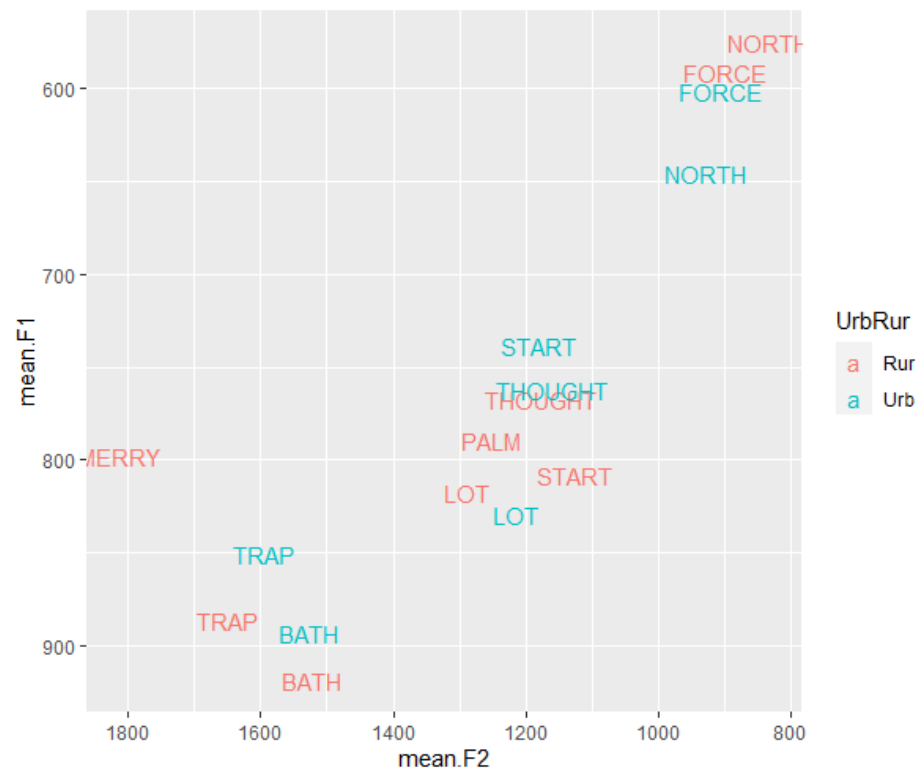


Figure 10: Mean F1 and F2 by Urban/Rural and Word Class (Subject 2)

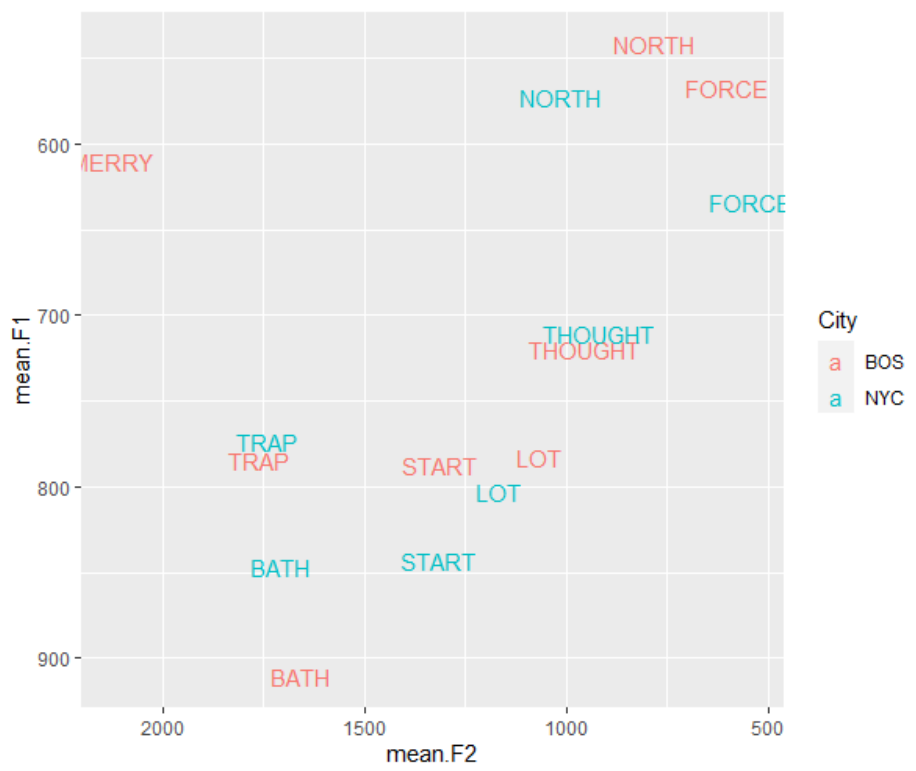


Figure 11: Mean F1 and F2 by City and Word Class (Subject 1)

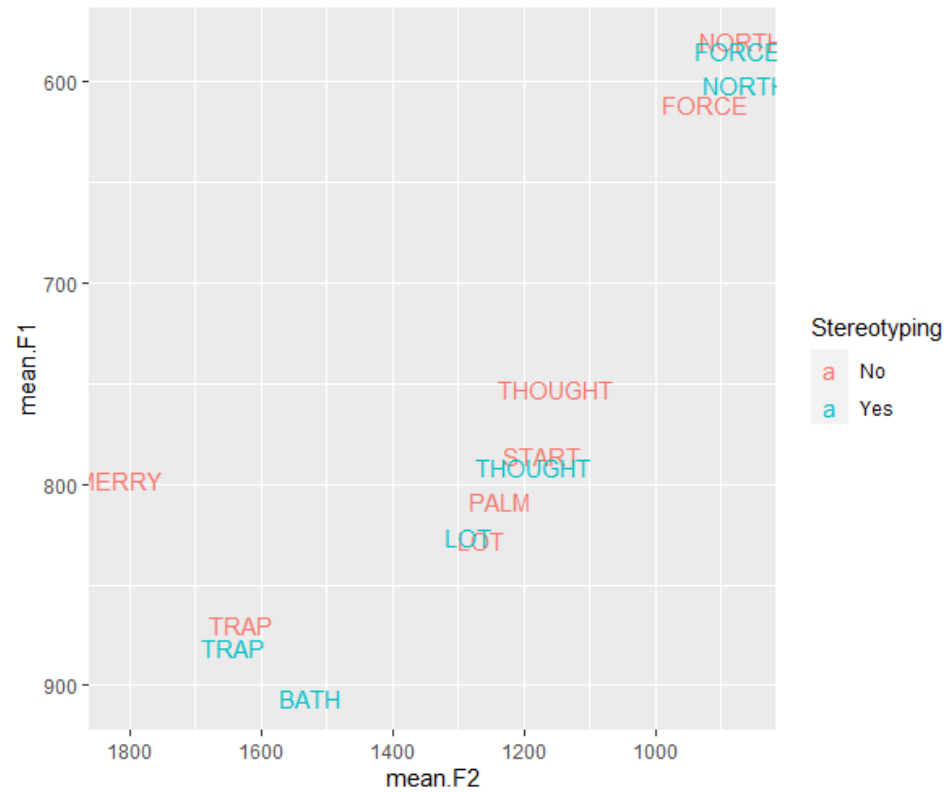


Figure 12: Mean F1 and F2 by Stereotyping and Word Class (Subject 2)

NORTH/FORCE

Figures 5-12 show the mean F1 and F2 of the vowel variables of interest. Subject 2 demonstrates more fronted NORTH and FORCE than Subject 1. Both speakers show a more merged NORTH/FORCE in the reading task than in the interview, Subject 1's being completely merged in the interview. Subject 1 demonstrates a higher mean NORTH than mean FORCE in his interview, which is unusual as FORCE is usually higher than NORTH unless the pair is merged. Subject 2 also demonstrates a less merged NORTH/FORCE for Stereotyping, vs Not Stereotyping. Neither speakers seem to show a difference in the degree of merging in the category of Gat (vs Not). There were insufficient tokens (<5) to compare the Urban and Rural categories for both speakers.

Linear mixed-effects models were built comparing the F1 and F2 of the non-high back vowels NORTH, FORCE, LOT, and THOUGHT. These models did not reveal statistically significant differences in the F1 and F2 of NORTH/FORCE along the Speech Style variable, the Stereotyping variable, or the Gay variable.

START

Subject 2's START is overall backer than Subject 1's, which is consistent with past findings on the distinction between Black and White Boston speakers of all age groups (Stanford 2019). In New Hampshire, START has been found to be backing in younger speakers, but Subject 2 (the Black speaker) still has a more backed START than Subject 1. Subject 1 shows a fronter START for Gay than Not Gay, which interestingly aligns the Gay category with older speakers and White speakers. Subject 2 shows equal backing for the Gay and Not Gay categories. There were not enough tokens (<5) to compare the Stereotyping vs Not Stereotyping

categories for Subject 2, the Boston vs NYC categories for Subject 1, or the Urban vs Rural categories for Subject 2.

In a linear mixed-effects model that compares the F2 of START to LOT, however, neither the Speech Style nor Gay stance variables appear to have a statistically significant ($t > |2|$) effect on START-fronting.

LOT/THOUGHT

Subject 1 has less merged LOT/THOUGHT than Subject 2 overall. This is interesting, given that Stanford (2019) has found more merged LOT/THOUGHT for White speakers than Black speakers in Boston. For both speakers, the merger is more advanced in the reading task vs in the interview (but for Subject 1, this distinction is less drastic) and Subject 2 shows a more advanced merger for Not Stereotyping than Stereotyping. Both speakers do not appear to vary in the Gay vs Not Gay categories, and Subject 2 does not show variation between the Rural vs Urban categories. There are not enough tokens (< 5) to compare the Boston vs NYC distinction for Subject 1.

In a linear mixed-effects model which compared the F1 and F2 of high-back vowels LOT, THOUGHT, NORTH, and FORCE, LOT and THOUGHT appear to be significantly unmerged along F1 ($\beta = 41.28$, $SE = 13.73$, $t = 3.006$) and F2 ($\beta = 112.38$, $SE = 43.16$, $t = 2.604$), with insignificant ($t < |2|$) variation across the Speech Style variable. This is very notable, as this variable is merged both in New Hampshire and in Boston, and likely indicates an ideological alignment with New York City that supersedes dialect ideologies within New England. There does not appear to be a statistically significant effect ($t > |2|$) on this lack of merger based on the Gay, Urban/Rural, or Stereotyping stance categories.

Discussion

As seen above, the results of this study have shown several interesting (and some surprising) phenomena in the realms of gay speech, Eastern New England English, and the relationship between the two. The measurements taken of the two subjects' /s/ and salient vowels tell a rich story about the way that speakers' identities interact linguistically.

One of the most straightforward and clearly significant findings is the differences between /s/ Center of Gravity and Skewness between the interview and the reading task. Perhaps surprisingly, the Center of Gravity and Skewness are, respectively, significantly higher and significantly more negative in the reading task, displaying a more stereotypically gay /s/ than in the interview. This shows the importance of the stance-based perspective. One might expect that the interview speech would be more “authentic” and, given that the subjects both identify as gay, show more markers associated with gay speech. Instead, the results show that there is an ideological link between the performance of a reading task and gayness. The intermediate indexical link between the two is likely carefulness. Eckert (2008) finds that gay men (alongside nerd girls and young Yeshiva students) disproportionately hyper-articulate the release of word-final /t/, which is concluded to be associated with ideologies about carefulness and what “proper” speech sounds like. Since stereotypical gay male variables appear to correspond with these ideas of “proper” speech, it is not surprising that the subjects utilized more variables ideologically related to “gayer” speech in the reading task than the interview.

Interestingly, although the model showed a significant difference between /s/ Center of Gravity based on whether the subjects were talking about being gay or not, this difference was less drastic than the differences between the reading and interview tasks. However, I do not think that this means that higher Center of Gravity corresponds more closely or directly with careful

speech than gayness. The performance of the reading task may simply trigger a more dramatic performance of gayness than talking about being gay does. The interview also may trigger a more varied degree of registers within it than the reading task.

Another extremely interesting result was the statistically significant lack of THOUGHT/LOT merging in both subjects. This variable has been merged in southern New Hampshire both traditionally and contemporarily. This demonstrates something interesting: it appears that some sort of ideological link to New York is superseding the local New Hampshire/Massachusetts dialect system. As vowels cannot “unmerge” once merged (aside from a small number of historical instances influenced by immigration) (Labov et al. 1972), I do not believe that this is indicative of a change in Eastern New England English as a whole, but rather a stylistic choice of these two speakers who seems disillusioned with both Boston and New Hampshire. According to ethnographic interview data, this is likely at least partially influenced by the perceived lack of acceptance of their gay identity in both of these regions. Subject 1 had spent one summer living in Boston and another living in New York as a part of internships. In his interview, he described two occasions in Boston where individuals had made rude remarks to him regarding perceived gayness, in contrast to a potentially more welcoming atmosphere in New York City (example 6)

(6)

rubbed (me) [him] the wrong way [...] I don't think there would be a kid in New York that would do something like that, um, 'cause I feel like it's much more normal to see something like that.

Subject 1 also seemed to feel like an outsider more generally when living in Boston, often describing Bostoners from a distance (example 7).

(7)

um, they're a special kind of people and I-- I-- I appreciate them for, like, staying true to that.

Subject 2 had not lived in Boston but did discuss his perception of it. While he did note that Boston was a “regional mecca” for gay men, he also described it as “horribly racist”- a strong reason that he would not feel comfortable in the city, as a Black man.

In contrast, both participants demonstrate explicitly positive ideas about New York City. In comparing New York City and Boston directly, Subject 1 expressed his preference for New York City (example 8)

(8)

I preferred personally living in New York, which is kind of traitorous maybe, but, um, I felt like-- there's a lot more, uh. oh, I don't even know. I don't even know how to put it.

Subject 2 noted that New York City was one of the two best places for gay men to live (example 9)

(9)

I think the two big ones that, like, everyone for-- if you're gay in the United States, you know, you're either gonna go to New York, or, like, California. Those two

have the biggest pull in term of, like, you know, just, like, you know, history, and, like, being accepted and stuff like that.

This rupture from regional dialect norms is could be, as well, a product of a world with such a large access to media that transmits spoken word — e.g., film, television, YouTube, Facebook, etc. Instead of being confined to hearing mostly local speakers, people have access to a wide variety of role model, and perhaps, for these speakers, an over-abundance of gay New Yorkers.

There are also a number of interesting phenomena that are observable on the charts that did not show up as statistically significant from the linear mixed-effects models, but are not necessarily statistically *insignificant* (and may have simply been underpowered due to the smaller amounts of data). Both subjects demonstrate more merged NORTH/FORCE, a less fronted START, and a less merged THOUGHT/LOT for the for the reading task over the interview (see Figures 5 & 6). The more merged NORTH/FORCE and less fronted START align with younger speakers in the Eastern New England region (Stanford et al. 2012), demonstrating that these speakers are utilizing, on average, more conservative vowels in conversation than in the reading task. This may seem surprising but is ultimately not surprising given that the reading task also had significantly higher Center of Gravity and more negative spectral skew for /s/, and, if these variables are associated with gayness (even indirectly), less conservative vowels would be expected to follow. It could also be explained by previous research on the relationship between read speech vs conversational speech and regional accents, which has found that plain speech (such as the interview task) tends to promote a smaller vowel space and more accentuated regional features and careful speech (the reading task) tends to promote a larger vowel space and less marked regional features (Clopper et al. 2017). We also see less merged LOT/THOUGHT, which patterns with New York City and supersedes both New Hampshire and Boston ideologies,

as explained above. These differences may also be an indication of what these speakers consider to be prestigious speech: not the speech of their older Eastern-New-England-English-speaking in-person childhood role models, but media figures that either align with some sort of less-regionalized Mainstream American English and/or gay role models from various media who may express their gayness with New York City accents or are disproportionately from NYC.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data from these interviews and subjects is very revealing of the relationship between regional dialects and other social identities. It is both equally surprising what is found and what is not found. Overall, stance variables based on subject matter did not seem to affect the variables at investigated much at all, aside from a slight, but statistically significant, difference in /s/ Center of Gravity when talking about being gay or aspects of being gay. Kiesling (2009) describes two different categories of stance: the ways speakers relate to the “content” of their speech and those that relate to the “socialness” of their speech. While the study of the latter produced results that better answered the research questions of this study, I do not believe that this means that the study of content-related stance was completely pointless. Most of the content-related stances studied here worked with less data than socialness-related variables like Speech Style and were, perhaps more importantly, less easily definable than a clear-cut variable like Speech Style.

Speech Style was the most fruitful variable results-wise, especially regarding the statistically significant differences in /s/ Center of Gravity. The significantly higher distribution /s/ Center of Gravity and apparently less conservative vowel variables in the reading task than the interview would be surprising using a model of “authenticity”. This is a testament to more intersectional models such as Eckert’s (2008) indexical field: the subjects are not necessarily

acting as less gay and more conservative in the interview or acting, in contrast, more “authentically” in the reading task, but rather are utilizing these variables to perform different styles of gayness to align with their ideological goals in each situation.

Lastly, the lack of merged THOUGHT/LOT in both speakers is an important observation at the intersection of regional identity and sexuality. This phenomenon would not be expected, given that THOUGHT and LOT have been merged across North Eastern New England English since the 1930s (Nagy and Roberts 2004) and that merged lexical sets cannot unmerge aside from extenuating circumstances not mirrored in Northeastern New England (Labov et al. 1972). As do the findings of Nagy (2001), this finding confirms that regional dialectology is less predictable than early models such as the Gravity Model would predict. Instead, linguistic styles that index regional dialectology are strongly influenced by ideology: here, perhaps, a pro-NYC ideology that is influenced by the participants’ apparent anti-rural-NH and anti-Boston ideologies that may be, in turn, influenced by their membership in minority groups that the participants perceive as marginalized in New Hampshire and Boston alike. This phenomenon, especially, would be an interesting route for further study with a wider array of participants.

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