Perception and Identity: Stereotypes of Speech and Sexual Orientation in Puerto Rican Spanish

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1. Background

This paper offers an initial examination of stereotypes of speech and gay[1] male sexual orientation in Puerto Rican Spanish. The data presented were gathered as part of a larger project examining the association between sociophonetic variation and perceptions of sexual orientation using both explicit and implicit measures. The results of the first explicit task in the study protocol, the interviews, are reported here.[2]

There are several reasons why an examination of stereotypes is an important and useful starting point in the study of speech variation and sexual orientation. For one thing, there is a popular culture myth that gay men's speech is phonetically marked, and that a listener is able to determine a speaker's sexual orientation just by listening to his voice. This myth is widespread,[3] and it is intriguing because of the potential mismatch: while listeners may make evaluations of speakers based on speech stereotypes, these evaluations do not always correspond to speakers' self-stated sexual orientation. In other words, there are gay men who may be evaluated as stereotypically straight sounding, and straight men who may be evaluated as stereotypically gay sounding. A first step in disentangling stereotypes and real world variation, then, is to determine which variables affect the perception of a speaker as gay or straight and what pattern of phonetic variation indexes gayness in the minds of listeners. Perception studies in English have shown that sibilant characteristics, aspiration of voiceless stops, and vowel characteristics are correlated with listener judgments of speaker sexual orientation (Levon, 2007; Linville, 1998; Munson, McDonald, DeBoe, & White, 2006; Smyth, Jacobs, & Rogers, 2003; *inter alia*). Data from Brazilian Portuguese suggests that /s/ deletion and pitch dynamism are relevant cues (Mendes, 2007). However, the relatively recent development of this area and the methodological issues associated with production studies means that there is little systematically gathered data available to identify potential socioindexical cues in other languages. Consequently, there is little data upon which to build experimental hypotheses.[4] As Levon (2006), states, "…the only way to determine which features or combinations of features come together to index gayness for listeners is to continue conducting experiments that isolate specific linguistic variables and test these variables…" (p. 69). Examining the speech stereotypes associated with sexual orientation provides a way to document the

[1] As Kulick (2000) notes, "What to collectively call people whose sexual and gendered practices and/or identities fall beyond the bounds of normative heterosexuality is an unavoidable and ultimately unresolvable problem" (p. 243). The choice to use the term "gay" in this paper was made in consultation with several members of the community where the study data was gathered; it was determined to be the most accepted term in the community.

[2] Data from an explicit measures perception task is reported in Mack (2010), while data from an implicit measures matched guise timed response task is reported in Mack (forthcoming).

[3] For documentation of the myths related to gay speech in English, see Bowen (2002).

[4] This is may be due, in part, to the "serious conceptual difficulties" that plague work on gay and lesbian language (Kulick, 2000, p. 246), especially the idea that gay and lesbian language is necessarily represented in speakers who identify themselves as gay or lesbian.

linguistic resources that are consciously perceived as used by gay males and which may be relevant socioindexical variables. Once the conscious stereotypes are documented, that data can be used to inform the methods for a variety of explicit and implicit perception experiments.

The importance of consciously held speech stereotypes is also apparent when we take into consideration the evidence that stereotypes affect cognitive processing. The McGurk effect famously showed that visual input and auditory input interact in low-level speech processing (McGurk & MacDonald, 1976); an increasing number of studies have shown that similar types of interactions occur between listeners' ideas of speaker social identity (and the speech stereotypes associated with that social identity) and auditory input. For example, Niedzielski (1999) showed that stereotypes of regional origin affect processing. In her study, listeners labeled vowels differently depending on whether they were led to think they were listening to a native of Detroit, Michigan (U.S.A.), or neighboring Windsor, Ontario (Canada). In Strand's (1999) study, listeners identified fricatives differently depending on if they were led to think the speaker was male or female. Results of studies such as these show that stereotypes of speech variation associated with different social groupings are represented cognitively and used in low-level processing tasks. In other words, listeners' ideas about a speaker's social identity actually impact how phonetic information is processed. Therefore, documenting the elements that make up the conscious speech stereotype aids in the understanding of a source of input that has a role in cognitive processing.

While there are several studies that examine language and sexual orientation in Spanish, they have focused on areas other than specific phonetic variation. Sívori (2005) describes language use in the gay community of Rosario, Argentina. He uses the term *el habla de las locas* to refer to the speech of effeminate homosexuals (*las locas*, 'the crazy ones,' feminine plural form) who imitate and exaggerate stereotypical feminine behavior, including stereotypical feminine speech. The linguistic tools utilized by las locas include changing all lexical gender markers of Rioplatense standard speech to feminine forms and using stereotypically feminine lexical items in place of masculine ones. In addition, Sívori documents the practice of code switching (performing gay identity in certain situations and switching to a more neutral code in others) in the community. Peña's (2004) study of the gay bilingual community of Miami examines the lexical tools used by that community to express identity and group membership. She highlights the innovative nature of gay bilingual speech, noting that group members use Cuban Spanish, English and "Spanglish" in order to construct communities and transnational identities. Speakers use Cuban slang when referring to the terms related with their gay identity and use code switching and word play as bilingual linguistic innovations, creating a transcultural gay identity. These studies provide important documentation and analysis of linguistic tools like gender switching and lexical innovation used by gay communities. However, there is very little data available on the relationship between phonetic variants and sexual orientation (for either sex) in production or perception studies in Spanish. While there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that there are indexical cues that mark male speakers, the anecdotal reports stop short of linking these cues to gayness, instead referring to "male effeminacy." For example, Zentella (2003), in a discussion of standard and local linguistic norms in Dominican Spanish, mentions the comic, often mocking phrase *hablar fisno*.[5] The phrase is a play on the expression *hablar fino*, 'to speak fine' or, as Roca (2005) terms it, 'posh speech' (p. 38), in which hypercorrective /s/ epenthesis occurs at the end of the first syllable in the word *fino*. There is a clear social implication for men who engage in *el habla fisna*: "males who speak with lots of final /s/ run the risk of being labeled effeminate" (Zentella, 2003, p. 60). While it is problematic to conflate effeminacy and gayness, these examples do suggest that listeners make evaluations based on socially stratified phonetic patterns; in other words, there are socioindexical cues that listeners use to evaluate male social identity (and likely, by extension, sexual orientation).

With these considerations in mind, the main goals for the current project were defined. One goal was to document the existence of a conscious speech stereotype associated with male sexual orientation. Although it is arguably evident from anecdotal evidence that there is a shared notion of speech variation related to gay male speech at a societal level, it is nonetheless important to establish its existence through an analysis of systematically collected data. The second goal was to document what specific patterns of variation are implicated in the speech stereotype associated with gay male

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[5] See also Núñez Cedeño (1986) and Terrell (1982, 1986), as cited in Lipski (1994).

speech. Since there are no known studies that have elicited production data on gay men's speech considering phonetic or phonological variables in Spanish, knowledge of the specific elements that make up the stereotype (and especially what patterns of phonetic variation carry socioindexical weight) will be very helpful in the design of future studies. A third objective, not discussed in this paper, was to provide an introductory perspective of the similarities and differences that exist between speech stereotypes of sexual orientation and gender, age, and social class. These data will also be of use in future studies that examine the complex relationships between speech variation and identification with multiple social groupings.

2. The study

The interviews were conducted as part of a larger project on implicit and explicit relationships between sociophonetic variation and sexual orientation. There were 88 interviewees (58 female, 30 male) who ranged from 18 to 30 years of age. All participants were native speakers of Spanish from Puerto Rico, and were undergraduate or Masters level students at a large public university in the San Juan, Puerto Rico, metropolitan area. The duration of the interviews ranged from five to 25 minutes. In the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on speech stereotypes related to five social classifications: age, gender, male sexual orientation, social class, and the existence of a regional variety of Spanish specific to Puerto Rico. Data from participant responses to the question on the speech stereotypes of male sexual orientation is reported here. The base script used in the interviews is found in the Appendix. To analyze the data, the transcribed responses were reviewed and main group-wise trends in the data were coded.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1. The existence of a stereotype associated with gay male speech

Since there is little systematically collected data on stereotypes of speech and male sexual orientation, it is important to note that the existence of a stereotype of speech and male sexual orientation was verified by all 88 participants. In other words, no participant rejected the notion that a stereotype of speech and male sexual orientation exists. One participant phrased it quite succinctly:

(1)
Participant 323, female: *El estereotipo, y lo hay, es que el hombre homosexual habla de una manera extremadamente afeminada.*
'The stereotype, and there is one, is that the homosexual man speaks in an extremely effeminate way.'

The existence of a stereotype was not as clear in participant responses to the other interview questions; several participants stated there were no speech stereotypes corresponding to social classes, and several interviewees felt there was no stereotype of speech variation according to gender (e.g., that there were no differences between men's and women's speech). A possible explanation for this may be that a part of the gay male speech myth is that gay men are identifiable by their speech; as a key part of the myth, it is consciously known and therefore reportable. Myths about gendered speech, on the other hand, don't seem to entail the same degree of conscious acknowledgment of identification or differentiation, perhaps because differentiation is achieved in other ways. For example, several interviewees told stories of being surprised to find out that a friend or associate was gay, because they didn't "sound gay." In contrast, no participant reported surprise at finding out a friend was male or female based on how they "sounded;" identification of gender does not seem to have the same kind of conscious relationship to stereotypes of speech variation that sexual orientation does.

While participants acknowledged that a stereotype of speech and gay male speech exists, 54 of the interviewees (approximately 60%) explicitly mentioned that the stereotype of gay men's speech does not correspond to real world (experienced) variation, and that it is difficult to generalize among gay males. For example:

(2)
Participant 203, female: *Es que depende porque dentro de los gays uno también puede dividir en*

diversas clases. Están los gay profesionales, también los gays como locas, ¿no? Y entonces, también entre ellos tú lo puedes diferenciar.

'It's that it depends because within gays one can divide them into different groups. There are the gay professionals, also the gays that are like queens, right? And so, you can differentiate between them also.'

(3)

Participant 302, female: *Sí, hay un estereotipo, sí. Bueno, primeramente lo que se considera gay, por ejemplo, solamente aplica como a estas personas que son dramáticamente gay. No sé, aquí se les llama por ahí, locas. Que no es realmente el único tipo de homosexual, ¿no? Que son diferentes, no es como que tú los puedas encajonar en una sola categoría. Y esa categoría es la que tiene… o sea, esa es la categoría que se estereotipa como gay, ¿no?*

'Yes, there is a stereotype, yes. Well, what is primarily considered gay, for example, only applies to those people who are dramatically gay. I don't know. Here they're called *locas*. Which is not really the only type of homosexual, right? They are different, it's not like you can box them into one category. And this category [of *locas*] is the one that has, well, this is the category that is stereotyped as gay, right?'

The conscious distinction between stereotypes and real world linguistic experience was not present in responses to the other questions on stereotypes of gender, social class, age, and region of origin. Few participants made explicit distinctions between a stereotype and real world (experienced) variation; a more common reply was one like example (4), below, in which the participant acknowledges that there are societal expectations of men and women in terms of their speech, but makes no mention that there is a difference between the expectations or behaviors and real world practice:

(4)

Participant 304, female: *En Puerto Rico, sí, yo entiendo que los hombres tienden a ser un poco más bruscos en su manera de hablar. Tienden a usar palabras un poco más fuertes. Puede ser hasta que hablen palabras malas, más que las mujeres, usualmente es lo que pasa. Mientras que las mujeres tienden a ser más delicadas, me imagino que es lo que la sociedad espera de ellas. Tienden a usar palabras más finas. Y usualmente es lo que yo entiendo que las personas esperan que sea. Que ellos esperan que las mujeres sean más delicadas mientras que los hombres sean más* rough*, ¿entiendes?*

'In Puerto Rico, yes, as I understand it men tend to be a little brusquer in their way of talking. They tend to use a little bit stronger words. It could be that they use bad words, more than women do, usually that is what happens. Women tend to be more refined. I supposed that it is what society expects of them. They tend to use nicer words. And usually it is, as I understand, what people expect them to be. They expect that women be more refined while men are rougher, you understand?'

Why is it that participants made the distinction between real world experience and the stereotype for gay speech and not for other social categories? As in the case of acknowledgement that a stereotype exists (above), it seems that it is possibly because stereotypes of gay speech are a conscious element of the larger stereotype of male sexual orientation. Another possible explanation, related to the previous, is that there is a heightened awareness of GLBT civil rights and discrimination, especially among people in the younger generation who participated in this study. In Puerto Rico, as in other Western contexts, there have been recent conflicts between gay rights groups and those opposing equal rights. In 1998, Puerto Rico ratified the Defense of Marriage Act; in 2005, homosexuality was decriminalized and the University of Puerto Rico prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation. Hearings on a same-sex marriage ban began in 2007, and in June 2008, Puerto Rico's House of Representatives rejected a proposal to ban same-sex marriage (Lavers, 2007). The data for this study was gathered in Fall 2007 and Spring 2008, so it is possible that respondents may be aware of the distinction (and may be careful to state there is a distinction) because GLBT issues were part of the current public consciousness. There may be a critical assessment of stereotypes of gayness in general, and there also may be a desire on the part of the interviewees to project a certain image to the interviewer.

3.2. Specific patterns of variation implicated in the stereotype

The second goal of this investigation was to determine what specific patterns of variation are implicated in the speech stereotype associated with gay men. The specific elements cited as key to the speech stereotype were divided into three main categories, termed suprasegmental cues, lexical cues, and phonetic cues. Each category is described in detail below, and Table 1 presents a summary of the data. It should be noted that in many cases the interviewees listed several different elements, so there was overlap between the categories.

		Number of participants who mentioned the cue (of 88 total participants)	Percentage of participants
Suprasegmental cues	Sounds "feminine"	54	61.4%
	Distinct "tone," "pitch" or "intonation"	39	44.3%
	Careful or "better" pronunciation	29	33%
	Distinct gestures or mannerisms	23	26.1%
	"Nasal" voice	3	3.4%
Lexical cues	Use of specific words or slang	36	40.9%
Phonetic cues	Distinct pronunciation of /s/	8	9.1%
	Distinct pronunciation of /r/	3	3.4%

Table 1. Summary of interview data.

3.2.1. Suprasegmental cues

Although the exact descriptive words varied by respondent, the greatest point of uniformity in responses was that an essential element of the stereotype of gay men's speech is that it is "feminine." This was mentioned by 54 of the 88 study participants (61.4%). Representative examples of this are found in quotes (1), above, and (5), (6), (9) and (26), below.

(5) Participant 508, male: *El estereotipo en cuanto al habla del hombre gay se tiende a pensar que por el simple hecho de que un hombre sea gay tiene que ser afeminado o tiene que mostrar ciertos manierismos o tiene que hablar como mujer.*

'The stereotype in terms of gay men's speech one tends to think that because of the simple fact that a man is gay he has to be effeminate or he has to show certain mannerisms or he has to talk like a woman.'

(6) Participant 320, male: *Pues sí, dicen que los gays tienen que hablar de una manera específico, como más afeminado que otros.*

'Well, yes, they say that gays have to talk in a specific way, like more effeminate than other [men].'

This finding parallels the available data on speech and sexual orientation documented in the linguistic literature such as Sívori (2005) and Peña (2004), as discussed previously. While being labeled effeminate should not be taken to be a direct correlate to being labeled gay or homosexual, the concepts have been found to be distinct, yet correlated, perceptual parameters in English (Munson, 2007). Outside of English, effeminate speech styles have been linked to stereotypes of homosexuality in francophone Canada (Higgins, 2004), as well as in Indonesia (Boellstorff, 2004). In his volume *Latin American Homosexualities*, Murray (1995) leaves little doubt of his assessment of the social consequence of being effeminate: "In the Spanish-speaking cities of both Old and New Worlds, there

is a consistent derogation of male effeminacy and a widespread assumption that such effeminacy is the mark of homosexuality" (p. 180).

While the conscious stereotype links gay male and (presumably heterosexual) women's speech patterns, perception studies in languages other than Spanish suggest that the acoustic factors that cue evaluations of gender and sexual orientation are not the same (Munson & Babel, 2007). In addition, the data that is available from production studies shows little evidence of acoustic correlates between gay men and straight women's speech (Munson et al., 2006; Pierrehumbert, Bent, Munson, Bradlow, & Bailey, 2004). More investigation of the indexical cues associated with both gender and sexual orientation in Spanish is needed.

Many respondents in the study reported that gay men speak with a distinct "tone of voice," "pitch," or "intonation." While these terms may refer to distinct variables in popular speech (and certainly are distinct in linguistic analyses), in many cases they were mentioned as related concepts in the interviews, and therefore were grouped into a single category in the analysis. They were mentioned specifically by 39 of the 88 participants (44.3%). The following are representative examples:

(7)

Participant 312, female: *En la tonalidad es más afeminado, trata de afinar más la voz, como que arrastra más, como que "ayyyy." Como que esos son estereotipos que se tiene, yo estoy consciente que no todo el mundo. Y también mucho en los gestos, no tan solo en lenguaje. Más corporal y eso.*

'In tonality it's more feminine, [a gay man] tries to refine his voice more, like he drags it out more, like *ayyyyy*. As these are stereotypes that are held, I am aware that it's not everyone. And also [it is notable] in gestures, not only in language. More body language and that.'

(8)

Participant 327, female: *Si el tono es más finito, pues dicen que es gay. Aunque no lo sea.*

'If the tone is more refined, then they say he is gay. Even if he isn't.'

(9)

Participant 306, female: *Tienden a afinar más la voz para ser más mujeres o para ser más delicados; que engolan la voz.*

'[Gays] tends to refine their voice to be more like women or to be more genteel; they put on an affected voice.'

(10)

Participant 323, female: *Que habla en tonos más altos. Porque un tono más alto denota un cierto rango de feminidad.*

'[The stereotype is] is that a gay man speaks with a higher tone. Because a higher tone denotes a certain level of femininity.'

In the case of (10), the respondent links the "tone of voice" of gay men to female speech. Although the popular notion of "pitch" or "tone" is not perfectly mirrored by the technical F0 measurement, it is arguably the closest corresponding single factor. Many studies have documented the role of mean F0 as a "very robust cue for distinguishing male and female adult voices" (Smyth & Rogers 2002, p. 303). However, available data from languages other than Spanish has not shown similar effects in terms of perception of sexual orientation; in other words, mean F0 alone has not been documented as a cue for distinguishing between "gay sounding" and "straight sounding" adult male voices (Gaudio, 1994; Smyth & Rogers, 2002). Nonetheless, these data indicate it is part of the conscious speech stereotype.

Another element of the stereotype that was mentioned by approximately one-third of participants (29 of 88, 33%) was that gay men are stereotyped as having more careful speech and/or "better" pronunciation. Some participants made general mention of "correct" speech (see example (11), below), while others make a specific link to phonetic variables, as in examples (12) and (13), below. [See also examples (14) and (26).]

(11)

Participant 104, male: *Y por ejemplo, en los programas de radio, cada vez que un hombre habla correcto, piensan, le dicen que es gay…*

'And for example, in radio programs, every time a man speaks correctly, they think, they say that he's gay…'

(12)

Participant 211, female: [Los hombres gay] no eliminan algunas consonantes como los hombres heterosexuals.

'[Gay men] don't eliminate some consonants like heterosexual men.'

(13)

Participant 332, male: [Los hombres gay] tratan de pronunciar hasta las "s", tratan de pronunciar todo.

'[Gay men] try to pronounce even the "s's", they try to pronounce everything.'

There is correspondence between this specific element of the stereotype and work done on perception of sexual orientation in other languages. Studies in English document that gay men are evaluated as more clear-sounding than straight men (Munson et al., 2006); in addition, Babel and Johnson (2006) report that evaluations of reading ability were correlated to evaluations of sexual orientation, with good reading ability corresponding to sounding gay. In Portuguese, Mendes (2007) found that gay men were perceived to speak "better" and more carefully. Although interviewees in the current study did not link careful speech to "feminine" speech in the same explicit way they did for "tone of voice" and lexical items, the sociolinguistic literature supports a link from the production perspective. As Milroy and Milroy (1997) note, "females tend toward the careful end of the continuum and males toward the casual end."

Specific gestures and/or mannerisms were cited as another key element of the stereotype, mentioned by a little over a quarter of the participants (23 of 88, 26.1%). Illustrative examples are (7), above, and the following:

(14)

Participant 101, male: *Bueno, siempre tiene el estereotipo de que el hombre gay habla súper bien. O sea, que pronuncia todas las letras, que tiene un rico vocabulario. Pero es que no solamente es la forma en que habla sino los gestos, la* extravaganza*, como dicen por ahí.*

'Well, there is always the stereotype that the gay man speaks really well. Or rather, that he pronounces all the letters, that he has a rich vocabulary. But it is not only the way in which he talks but also the gestures, the "extravaganza", as they say around here.'

(15)

Participant 332, male: *Y la forma en que se expresan también corporalmente cuando hablan.*

'And in the way in which [gay men] express themselves in body language when they talk.'

Finally, three participants (3.4%) specifically mentioned nasality as an element of stereotype. For example:

(16)

Participant 304, female: *Lo que yo he visto usualmente con mi experiencia es que los hombres gay tienen la voz…tiende a ser más nasal.*

'What I have usually seen in my experience is that gay men have a voice…it tends to be more nasal.'

(17)

Participant 324, female: *Y [los hombres gay] hablan hasta más nasal de lo que hablan las mujeres.*

'And gay men talk even more nasal than women talk.'

As with other indexical cues such as "tone of voice," there is not a clear indication of precisely what it means to have a "nasal" voice. We might speculate that it specifically refers to a tendency to nasalize vowels in contexts other than where they are normally nasalized, or it could mean that a nasal voice is simply one that has inappropriate airflow through the nasal cavity at all times. Again, more investigation is needed in order to reliably link this element of the popular stereotype with linguistic measures.

3.2.2. Lexical cues

Another element of the stereotype mentioned by many participants (36 of 88, 40.9%) was that gay men tend to use specific words, phrases, or slang, as in the following examples:

(18)

Participant 322, female: *Que [el hombre gay] diga palabras que usualmente solo usarían mujeres como "ay, nena", "qué lindo", "qué bello"…*

'That [the gay man] uses words that usually only women would use like "oh, little girl", "how pretty", "how beautiful"…'

(19)

Participant 305, male: *"...están los extravagantes que son, '¡Ay! ¡Cosa loca!'"*

'…there are those that are extravagant, that are like, "Oh, crazy thing!"'

(20) Participant 502, female: *Y si usan una palabra como femenina, como aquí pasa mucho, dicen "ay, nena, pero no te preocupes", ese "ay, nena" es básicamente de nosotras y si lo usa un varón es rápido como que él yo creo que esta extendiéndose por otro lado.*

'And if they use a word as feminine, as happens a lot here, they say "oh, little girl, don't you worry", that "oh, little girl" is basically from us [women] and if a man uses it, it's not too long before I think that he is on the other side.'

(21)

Participant 309, male: *[Los hombres gay] utilizan palabras como "bonito", "fabuloso", ese tipo de palabras. Utilizan esas palabras porque tienen más libertad de expresar lo que sienten, y el hombre [estraight] no puede expresarlo...son palabras que no se usan, palabras afectivas mayormente.*

'[Gay men] use words like "*bonito", fabuloso",* that type of words. They use those words because they have more freedom to express what they feel, and a straight man is not able to express it…they are words that are not used [by straight men], emotional words primarily.'

This finding mirrors previous work on the salience of lexical items as identity markers. As Trudgill (1986) notes, "lexical differences are highly salient, and are readily apparent to all speakers of the varieties concerned without any linguistic training or analysis" (p. 25). Indeed, most early analyses of gay language have focused on in-group terms (Kulick, 2000). In the case of this study, participants suggested that lexical items normally used by women are used by gay men, as in (18) and (20). This corresponds production data of the gay communities described in Sívori (2005) and Peña (2004). However (similar to the case of acoustic correlates mentioned earlier), although certain lexical items used by gay men are popularly linked to women's speech stereotypes, it certainly does not necessarily follow that women's speech stereotypes correspond with real world use.

3.2.3. Phonetic cues

There were also comments that specifically singled out certain phonetic variables. Sixteen participants (18%) cited one or more specific phonetic variants as elements of the stereotype. The single phonetic variable cited most (by 8 of the 16 participants that cited any specific phonetic variant) was realization of the /s/. This is illustrated in (13), above, and in the following:

(22)

Participant 203, female: *La "s", lo he notado mucho, como que [los hombres gay] tratan de hacer una pronunciación más correcta, creo yo.*

'The "s", I have noticed it a lot, like [gay men] try to do a more correct pronunciation, I think.'

(23)

Participant 302, female: *"...reponen más "s"..."*

'They put the "s" back in more.'

(24)

Participant 322, male *"Y como que a veces [los hombres gays] hasta arrastran la "s". Me ha pasado mucho porque tengo bastantes[amigos gays] como que… "Porque mira pues::" y como que siempre hace mucho más fácil la "s". Tengo algunas amistades que son, pues homosexuales y siempre hacen eso."*

'And like sometimes [gay men] even drag out the "s." It has happened to me a lot because I have a few [gay friends] that are like *"Porque mira pues::"* and the "s" is always pronounced much better. I have some [gay] friends that are, well, homosexuals and they always do that.'

(25)

Participant 346, female: *"...como que por lo menos las "s" o las "c" hacen as::í, como que las*

pronuncian mucho.

'…like at least the "s's" or the "c's" they do like this::, like they pronounce them a lot.'

(26)

Participant 502, female: *Hay unos [gays] que afinan la voz y tratan de hablar bien correcto y bien femenino, las eses y todo.*

'There are some [gays] that refine their voice and try to speak real correct and real feminine, the s's and all.'

(27)

Participant 512, female: *...pronunciando las "s" un montón, tú sabes.*

'…pronouncing the "s" a lot, you know.'

These findings are further support of Zentella's (2003) statement (above) about the perception of the socioindexical value of the sibilant [s] in syllable-final position in aspirating and deleting dialects, and are similar to Mendes' (2007) findings in Portuguese. They also correspond with the numerous production studies that identify syllable-final /s/ realization as a variable use that has a high degree of social stratification. It suggests a link to feminine speech styles as well: in production studies, the use of sibilant [s] in syllable-final contexts in Puerto Rican Spanish is correlated with women's and higher SES speech (López Morales, 1980, 1983). However, it should be noted that no participant noted /s/ variation as a differentiating factor when they were asked about stereotypes of men's and women's speech. In addition, from the data available we cannot assume that the mention of the /s/ as a key element of the speech stereotype is limited to the /s/ in syllable-final contexts. Although some comments, such as (24), included examples, no speaker said that the syllable-final /s/ specifically was the differentiating factor. Therefore, future investigations of the /s/ as an indexical cue should include syllable-initial as well as syllable-final /s/.

Finally, three participants mentioned a specific realization of the /r/ as an indexical cue, citing the "English r" (retroflex [ɻ] or alveolar approximant [ɹ]) as an allophone preferred by gay men, according to the stereotype.

(28)

Participant 101, male: *...como mujer* [mu.héɻ]…[*el hombre straight] no va a decir: "Ay, es que eso es una mujer* [mu.héɻ]

'…like "*mujer*" [mu.héɻ]…[a straight man] isn't going to say *"Ay, es que eso es una mujer"*'

(29) Participant 104, male: *La "r,"[los hombres gay] siempre usan el "r"* [ɻ], *"mujer"* [mu.héɻ]

'The "r", [gay men] always use the "r", "*mujer*" [mu.héɻ]'

The use of the retroflex /r/ is likely due to contact with English, and the perceived use of this variant by gay men may be due to the relative prestige of English in different social strata. For example, several respondents reported that one difference in stereotypes of SES is that higher SES speakers use more English words. From the data gathered, it appears to be limited to syllable-final contexts, but, as in the case of the /s/, no specific comments on the specific linguistic context were made.

4. Summary and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to document the existence of a conscious speech stereotype associated with gay males and to identify what specific patterns of speech variation are implicated in it. Unsurprisingly, there was confirmation that a stereotype of gay male speech exists. More interestingly, a majority of respondents made a conscious distinction between the gay speech stereotype and real world linguistic experience; the same level of conscious distinction was not made for stereotypes of speech and gender, age, SES, or regional origin. As discussed earlier, this could be due to the heightened awareness of gay civil rights issues and the concurrent public debate. Regardless of the cause, this awareness mirrors the discussion about "gay language" occurring in the linguistic literature. There is increasing evidence from production studies that gay speech production depends not only on a speaker's self-stated sexual orientation, but variables such as interlocutor and community of practice (Wong, 1999), as well as context (Podesva, Roberts, & Campbell-Kibler, 2002). Clearly the participants in the study understand that these variables play a role, and that there is no single pattern of variation that all gay men follow.

The study also found that the greatest point of uniformity in responses was that the speech stereotype is that gay men are thought to use "feminine" speech. The specific elements associated with the stereotype include a distinct tone, pitch, or intonation, the use of specific phrases or slang, careful or "better" pronunciation, the use of specific gestures or mannerisms, and distinctive production of specific phonemes, including the /s/ and /r/.

Since this is a relatively new area of inquiry, there are many directions for future study. One important direction is to determine if the socioindexical cues that are cited as important parts of the conscious speech stereotype make a difference in listener evaluations. In addition, there may be cues that are relevant in perception and production but that are not part of the stereotype. For example, both Sívori (2005) and Peña (2004) document the use of code switching in their communities of study. In the interview data in this study, there was no mention of code switching as part of the gay speech stereotype (but it was mentioned as part of the stereotype of upper class speech). Similarly, there was no mention of the lateralization of the /r/ or the glottal stop as differentiating gay and straight men's speech, although both of these were mentioned in the interviews as differentiating gender, social class, and region of origin. Finally, as in English, some of the relevant indexical cues may be acoustic cues outside of conscious knowledge, such as VOT, spectral peaks, or vowel formants. Since speech stereotypes impact cognitive processing, an awareness of both conscious and unconscious factors is necessary to understand what actually takes place in perception of this social category.

Future perception studies are also needed to determine whether the same socioindexical cues that trigger evaluations of gayness also trigger evaluations of female gender. This is especially intriguing in light of the fact that data from other languages has shown that listener evaluations of gender and sexual orientation do not correspond to shared cues, and that gay men's speech is not correlated acoustically to women's speech. In other words, although sounding "feminine" is part of the speech stereotype for gay men, it is certainly possible that there is little correlation between women's and gay men's speech, either in production or perception. There is also a need for follow-up studies on the specifics of speech stereotypes, especially studies that more precisely match popular terms like "tone" and "pitch" with their linguistic counterparts. In addition, future studies should investigate speech stereotypes for a range of sexual and gender identities, including lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. Finally, there is a need for studies that use methods and instruments (for example, surveys and questionnaires) that would allow for a robust statistical analysis that was not possible with the interview data as collected in this study.

The findings of this study underscore the nearly axiomatic fact that the relationship between identity and language is complex. As is clear from many of the responses quoted here, there are various consciously known socioindexical cues that potentially play a role in the perception of male sexual orientation. It is possible that it is the combination of cues, more than a single element, that is key to perception of social identity. Documenting the diverse elements that make up the speech stereotype is a first step in understanding the relationship between phonetic variation and perception of sexual orientation.

Appendix

Interview Script:
Este estudio tiene que ver con las creencias que tiene la gente, en cuanto cómo la manera de hablar refleja identidades distintas. En otras palabras, con los estereotipos.
This study has to do with the beliefs people have, in terms of how people speak reflect different identities that people have. In other words, with stereotypes.

Por lo tanto, tengo unas preguntas enfocadas en este tópico. No hay respuestas correctas ni incorrectas, me interesa más tu opinión individual, sea lo que sea.
Therefore, I have some questions focused on this topic. There are no correct or incorrect answers, I am most interested in your individual opinion, whatever it may be.

En la entrevista, puede que haya tópicos delicados, según tu punto de vista. Si llegamos a una pregunta y no la quieres responder, dímelo, y pasamos a la siguiente, sin problema.

In this interview, it is possible that there are delicate topics, depending on your point of view. If you encounter a question and you don't want to respond to it, tell me, and we will go on to the next question, no problem.

¿Alguna pregunta antes de empezar?
Any questions before we start?

1. A veces la gente habla del "acento Puertorriqueño." ¿Qué quiere decir cuando alguien habla del "acento" puertorriqueño? ¿Cómo es?
Sometimes people talk about "the Puerto Rican accent." What do you think it means when someone talks about the Puerto Rican "accent"? What is it like?

2. A veces la gente dice que los hombres hablan de una manera distinta de las mujeres, y vice versa. ¿Qué diría que significara, en términos del habla, cuando alguien dice que alguien "habla como hombre" o "habla como mujer"? ¿Hay unos ejemplos?
Sometimes people say that men talk differently from women, and vice versa. What would you say it means, in terms of speech, when someone says someone else "talks like a man" or "talks like a women?" Can you give any examples?

3. A veces la gente dice que los hombres gay, o, por lo menos, hombres que se consideran como gay, hablan de una manera distinta de los otros hombres. ¿Qué diría que significara, en términos del habla, cuando alguien dice que alguien "habla como gay"? ¿Hay unos ejemplos?
Sometimes people say that gay men, or at least those men who consider themselves gay, talk differently from other men. What do you think it means, in terms of speech, when someone says someone else "talks like a gay"? Can you give any examples?

4. A veces la gente dice que la gente mayor, habla de una manera distinta de los jóvenes. ¿Qué diría que significara, en términos del habla, cuando alguien dice que alguien "habla como una persona mayor" o "habla como una persona joven"? ¿Hay unos ejemplos?
Sometimes people say that older people talk in a way that is different from younger people. What would you say it means, in terms of speech, when someone says someone else "talks like an old person" or "talks like a young person?" Can you give any examples?

5. A veces la gente dice que las personas de la clase alta hablan de una manera distinta de las que son de la clase media o de la clase baja. ¿Qué diría que significara, en términos del habla, cuando alguien dice que alguien "habla como rico (o miembro de la clase alta)" o "habla como pobre (o miembro de la clase baja)"? ¿Hay unos ejemplos?
Sometimes people say that people from the upper class talk in a way that is different from people from the middle class or from the lower class. What would you say it means, in terms of speech, when someone says someone else "talks like a rich person (or member of the upper class)" or "talks like a poor person (or member of the lower class)"? Can you give any examples?

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