Judgments of American English male talkers who are perceived to sound gay or heterosexual: Certain personality traits are associated with each group of talkers

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Introduction and Objective

- As described by Campbell-Kibler (2011), linguistic styles allow for connections among clusters of acoustic features, personality traits, and group identity.
  
  - For example, listeners associated /s/-fronting with gay male talkers. However, when utterances included both /s/-fronting and −ing, perception of other traits (e.g., smart and effeminate) became stronger.
  
- Other researchers also investigated which traits are associated with gay and heterosexual male talkers. Gaudo (1994) found that listeners connected masculinity with heterosexual talkers and femininity with gay speakers. Levon (2006) discovered a connection between gay talkers with friendliness and neatness, while heterosexual talkers were connected with aloofness and messiness.
  
- Tracy and Charlton (2016) discovered that gay talkers were more likely to be described as outgoing and stuck-up, while heterosexual talkers were more likely to be described as bored and sad. Both groups of talkers were described as mad and intelligent.
  
- The main objective of the current experiment was to assess how participants would rate different groups of speakers along those traits identified by Tracy and Charlton (2016).

Experiment

- Stimuli. The utterances were a concatenated string of three monosyllabic CVC words (e.g., close-wet-soap and sell-tone-niece). They were produced by four groups of talkers collected by Tracy, Banter, and Satariano (2015).
  
  - Gay talkers perceived as gay-sounding
  - Gay talkers perceived as heterosexual-sounding
  - Heterosexual talkers perceived as gay-sounding
  - Heterosexual talkers perceived as heterosexual-sounding

  - There were 48 stimuli (2 utterances × 24 talkers).

- Participants and Procedure. After hearing each utterance, 63 listeners indicated, using a 7-point scale, how strongly the talker was associated with one of eight personality traits (e.g., boring, confident, intelligent, mad, old, outgoing, sad, and stuck-up).
  
  - For instance, listeners heard close-wet-soap and indicated how sad the talker sounded (7 = very sad; 1 = not sad).

Future Directions

- Future experiments could investigate two further research questions.

1. Campbell-Kibler (2011) found that clusters of phones are connected with intelligence. It is unclear if other traits (e.g., stuck-up, boring) are associated with other clusters of phones.

2. If listeners are aware of the talker’s sexual orientation, it is unclear if a stronger connection between sexual orientation and certain traits could emerge. For example, if listeners knew that a talker was gay, then they may perceive the talker as being more stuck-up. If listeners did not know that a talker was gay, then they may perceive the talker as being less stuck-up.

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