

TITLE: **Lesbians as leaders of linguistic change in Philadelphian English**

ABSTRACT:

Many studies demonstrate that language change is sensitive to social organization within the speech community, which interacts with sex differentiation in various ways (Eckert, 1989, 2000; Labov, 2001; Milroy, 1987). The data from the Linguistic Change and Variation in Philadelphia project (LCV) support the commonly found observations that women and the interior social classes lead linguistic change from below (Labov 1994, 2001). However, not all of the variables identified as "new and vigorous" changes reflect this situation (i.e., while the variables (eyC) and (aw) do support these common findings in the LCV data, the variable (ay0) does not pattern in this way). Although speaker sex has been found repeatedly to be a significant social factor in predicting production of sociolinguistic variables involved in change, little to no studies have investigated the possible role that sexual orientation plays as a predictor of sociolinguistic vowel production. While there has been an increase of studies examining the linguistic production of gay men and lesbians, as well as the identification of gay- and lesbian-sounding speech (Jacobs, 1996; Kulick, 2000; Moonwomon-Baird, 1997; Gaudio, 1994), these often do not include situating gay and lesbian speakers within their speech communities in terms of vocalic production. Furthermore, few studies investigating linguistic change within the variationist framework attempt to explore gender beyond the binary distinction of speaker sex and ignore sexual orientation completely.

In order to address these gaps in the literature, a sociophonetic re-study of the Philadelphia speech community was conducted following the methodology of the LCV. 65 Philadelphians were interviewed (9 self-identified lesbians, 5 self-identified gay men, and the remainder heterosexual men and women). Then, single-point vowel measurements were taken for an acoustic phonetic representative sample of each speaker's vowel system. This paper reports on both the apparent and real time analyses of these data. This paper also reports on the creation of a Gender Index (GI) created for this project and used in the analysis. The GI is modeled after the Socioeconomic index and includes a composite of different static elements contributing to a speaker's gender.

Supported by real time analyses, the apparent time analyses shows that the 3 "new and vigorous" changes from the LCV data are still involved in language change. While the analysis of (ay0) does not show sexual orientation to play a statistically significant role as predictor of vowel production, the analysis of both (aw) and (eyC) shows that lesbians are leading linguistic change for these variables (i.e., for women, sexual orientation DOES play a significant factor in predicting vowel production). These findings suggest a necessity of a more thorough examination of gender within the variationist framework.

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