**Hand/s/ome women:**
**the role of /s/ in multi-modal gender performances among SoMa drag queens**
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In sociolinguistic research, the production of /s/ has been shown to be conditioned by gender, with female speakers producing /s/ with higher centers of gravity and more negative skewness than male speakers (e.g., Stuart-Smith 2007, Podesva and Van Hofwegen 2014). In addition, the frontness of /s/ has been shown to perceptually correlate with gender, with front /s/ being perceived as less heteronormatively masculine than back /s/ (Zimman 2013). Given that /s/ variation significantly correlates with gender in both production and perception, the question of whether /s/ frontness can be taken up as an indexical resource among individuals with variable visual gender presentation remains unexplored. I explore how /s/ production is conditioned by gendered presentations of the body in multi-modal semiotic constructions among drag queens in SoMa, San Francisco.

I examine the speech of four drag hostesses from SoMa, a queer performance art community in San Francisco, characterized by a subversive anti-normativity. Each queen participated in a sociolinguistic interview, during which they transformed from a male presentation to a more feminine presentation. In addition, interactional data was collected from each queen during an entire night at a club event they host. From both the interviews and interactional data (approximately 5 hours of data per queen), spectral measures were taken for each token of /s/ (center of gravity and skewness) within a 40ms window of the segment midpoint, with each token being band-pass filtered to a 1000-22050 Hz bandwidth. A mixed-effects linear regression was run to explore how these spectral measures were conditioned by context.

While all four hostesses produced relatively front /s/ when compared to speakers from previous production studies (e.g. Hazenberg 2012, Podesva and Van Hofwegen 2014), /s/ was shown to be significantly conditioned by context. /s/ tokens late in the interview were produced with higher centers of gravity and more negative skewness than tokens early in the interview (p<0.01). In other words, as the drag queens' visual presentation became more feminine, /s/ pronunciation became fronter. In addition, /s/ during the club event was produced with significantly higher center of gravity and more negative skewness than /s/ during the interview (p<0.01).

The fact that queens produce fronter /s/ tokens when feminine visual presentations are more explicit suggests that /s/ is an indexical resource available for use in the construction of multi-modal gender performances. In other words, both linguistic and visual resources can work in tandem to create a semiotic gender performance. A feminine visual presentation serves as a backdrop that enables productions of a linguistic variable that is otherwise gay-sounding (Zimman 2013) or "sissy". Furthermore, when in feminine visual presentation, queens use even more dramatically fronted /s/ tokens in witty, humorous, or particularly cutting speech acts (e.g. "she'/s/ a hand/s/ome woman"), suggesting that the stigmatized variable is being strategically repurposed in the construction of anti-normative feminine gender performances. In other words, a linguistic variable that may have a negative index when produced from a male-presenting body acquires a more positive index when produced from a feminine-presenting body.

# References

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