Oklahoma, Drag, and Language Regard: A study in Queer Folk Linguistics

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Oklahoma State University
Abralin Ao Vivo
A Queer(ed) Science of Language
28 July 2020
This work was carried out on stolen land and at an institution that benefits economically from the continued destruction of Indigenous sovereignty. Specifically, this project was finished on land in the unceded territory of the Osage and Wichita Nations.
Explicit language in speech samples (cursing)
OKLAHOMA: INTRODUCTION
RESEARCH ON DIALECTS OF ENGLISH IN OKLAHOMA (RODEO)

• Perceptual dialectological
• Socio-/folk linguistic interviews
  • Map tasks (Preston 1981)
Research on Dialects of English in Oklahoma (RODEO)

- Perceptual dialectological
- Socio-/folk linguistic interviews
  - Map tasks (Preston 1981)
I think that Oklahoma is still very set in the men and female gender roles and their stereotypes and so I feel like a lot of people if you don’t have a very deep voice for a man they think differently or if you don’t have a soft female voice they’re like <Q oh she’s not very classy Q> or something so
“Sounding gay” in Oklahoma
Darrin (24); Tulsa, OK

like if I immediately left a group of gay people and walked over no I think personally I would be more wary of how I sounded like literally last night I was walking and… and I kind of like bumped into someone and I said <Q sorry Q> my voice got really low I was like <Q sorry Q> you know like sometimes if I’m not paying attention, but also if I don’t feel secure I try to like present more masculine
THE GAYBORHOOD OF OKLAHOMA CITY

- This project began in 2016
- 3 years of observations and conversations
  - “the Gayborhood” (“The Strip” Bachhofer 2006)
  - History of queer culture (1920s)
  - Thrived in 1940s and 1950s
  - Police brutality and harassment in the 1960s and 1970s
  - Rioting and protesting
  - 1980s: majority of OKC’s gay/queer bars were located here
THE GAYBORHOOD OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Introduction | Oklahoma | Language Regard | Queer Folk Linguistics | Conclusion
## The Gayborhood of Oklahoma City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performer</th>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“Emo pretty boy”</td>
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“IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH?”

Gizele: I'd definitely say there is, um, there's a um, I feel like that we have a code, and a lot of people wouldn't understand it sometimes
“IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A \textit{DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH}?”

Foxxi: I mean \textit{there’s, so many terminologies}-- yes, it’s--,
\begin{itemize}
\item there’s \textit{drag slang} of course
\end{itemize}

Alexander: drag style of speech, we have like \textit{our own little slang}

Guin: \textit{do you mean slang}?

Kelly: \textit{there is},…not anything different than the real, you know \textit{like in the gay community}
“Is there such a thing as a drag style of speech?”

- jush
- okurr
- beat
- bitch
- wig
- tea

- *TONGUE POP*
- shade
- boots

- glitz/glam
- werk
- snatch/ed
“A proposal for the study of Folk-Linguistics” (Hoenigswald 1966)

Preston (1996): folk vs technical vocabulary

Folk Linguistics (Niedzielski & Preston 2003):
- Metalanguage & Language Attitudes
- Presupposition and implicata

*“nasalized* speech

*de-nasalized* speech

“nasal”
the folk
### Language Regard: *Bitch in Drag Stylistics*

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<td><em>shade</em></td>
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<td><em>jush</em></td>
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<td><em>boots</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>glitz/glam</em></td>
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<td><em>werk</em></td>
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<td><em>yas</em>s</td>
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<td><em>beat</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>snatch</em></td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **Nominatively**
- **Vocatively**
  - **Self-Reference:**
    
    Rae:  &lt;Q hey, how you doing child, yes, get turnt up, get a drink, be yourself, and tip a *bitch* &gt;  
    
    Foxxi: a *bitch* don't know no country by heart  

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Introduction | Oklahoma | Language Regard | Queer Folk Linguistics | Conclusion
**Language Regard: *Bitch* in Drag Stylistics**

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**Discourse Marker:**

Foxxi: you know *bitch*, I couldn’t lip sync to save my life *bitch*, if RuPaul’s-- if that show was back then *bitch* I sure would have left cause *bitch* I couldn’t, lip sync for shit

Gizele: I can do it in so many ways, you just learned the news, <Q ((gasps)) *bi:tch* Q>
LANGUAGE REGARD: IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT REGARD

"IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH?"

drag-style; drag-language connection

Focus: "slang"

"WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TALK LIKE A DRAG QUEEN?"

drag queens can talk in a certain way; you can “talk like” a category; drag queen-language

Hypothesized focus: drag (lg) beliefs, ideologies
Guin: to talk like a drag queen I mean it just, I mean I don't know **I've always been gay** as hell, so, I've always, I guess kinda talked like that, but I guess just like to have--., to use terminology and know what it means where it comes from, it’s—cause it’s funny, like if, like whether it's a **straight friend who, has never been out before** or like, **someone who's like, new to coming out**, or anything like that to hear them say stuff, you're just kinda like <Q oh, like ((laughs)), no that's like that, **that's not how you use that girl like that's not right** like hang on just second Q>
"Is there such a thing as a drag style of speech?"

drag-style; drag-language connection

Focus: “slang”; in-group language

"What does it mean to talk like a drag queen?"

drag queens can talk in a certain way; you can “talk like” a category; drag queen-language

Focus: ”correct” usage; in-group status; language-queer identity connection
A Queer(ed) Approach to LG Science and LG Regard

Bridging Language Regard and Queer/Sociocultural Linguistics

- Identity
- A sociocultural approach to Language Regard
- A methodological supplement to research on LGBTQ+ populations
Alexander: which a lot of these are coming out into, normal speech, for, most of, most everyone
Rae: [yeah]
Alexander: [because] of RuPaul’s, um, but I'm tired of people comparing, drag, close to them, to RuPaul's, so like they’ll come up they'll see one of us in drag and be like, <Q werk Q>, and it's like <Q you don't even know what that means, fuck off, thank you, bye: Q>
Rae: if you don’t know the slur, don’t say it, okay, just
Alexander: ((laughing))
Rae: rewind that again , <Q if you don’t know the slur, do not say it Q>
Alexander: <Q say it again for the people in the back Q>
Rae: <Q if ya don’t know the slur, do not say it Q>
## Language regard and identity: Prescriptivism

### Introduction

**Oklahoma**

**Language Regard**

**Queer Folk Linguistics**

### Conclusion

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LANGUAGE REGARD AND IDENTITY

identity

language regard

stancetaking

footing/positioning

identity construction

practice

identity in interaction

(Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 2008)
**LANGUAGE REGARD AND IDENTITY**

1. **Intersectionality** (Crenshaw 1989, 1994):
   "intersectionality theory, or the belief that no one category (e.g., ‘woman’ or ‘lesbian’) is sufficient to account for individual experience or behavior" (Levon 2015)

2. **Raciolinguistics** (Alim, Rickford, & Ball 2016):
   analysis of “the ongoing rearticulation of colonial distinctions between populations and modes of communication that come to be positioned as more or less normatively European” (Rosa 2019)
THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Foxxi: on TV it’s all about, I mean, it’s, universal so, of course, there’s straight people, gay people, you know everybody watch TV so, if you never been around that before it’s like <Q oh my gosh but she’s so funny, I’ve never heard that before Q>…they looking at us like <Q girl have you heard what what’s-her-name said on the gay show Q>, <Q I said that last night ((CLAPS)) when I was drunk ((CLAPS)) Q> you know, <Q I said that last night at the bar with my homegirl Q> you know like bitch
THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

• Alex: *don’t use our slang incorrectly*
• Rae: *if you don’t know it, don’t say it*
• Guin: *that’s not how you use that*
• Foxxi: *the language on TV didn’t come from TV*
Kelly: they [audiences] have to understand that, you know what is seen on TV there's a lot of smoke and mirrors and, cuts and edits and, what we are doing here is live and raw

Kelly: there is,…not anything different than the real, you know like in the gay community
THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- Alex: *don’t use our slang incorrectly*
- Rae: *if you don’t know it, don’t say it*
- Guin: *that’s not how you use that*
- Foxxi: *the language on TV didn’t come from TV*
- Kelly: *TV isn’t real; we are real…drag lg is gay lg*
THE ORIGINS OF DRAG SLANG

Gizele: I'd definitely say there is, um, there's a um, I feel like that we have a code, and a lot of people wouldn't understand it sometimes, a lot of- I think a lot of it, actually comes, more from Paris Is Burning, and um, and then it's spreading out into mainstream, and RuPaul's Drag Race when you see it, now that it's on, in on the screens people are, seeing those words, and now they're rolling out into other, communities now, and a lot of, our slang and stuff, I think a lot of it comes from the South, cause I was watchin, when I was watchin the Housewives of Atlanta, they say a lot of stuff and I'm thinkin like, <Q they got this from the gay community Q>, I was like <Q you know what's funny, I think the gay community got this from the South Q> I think, like “what's the tea” and all that stuff, that's these, Georgia Peaches used to sit down and drink tea, so I think we get that a lot from, Black women
THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- Alex: *don't use our slang incorrectly*
- Rae: *if you don’t know it, don’t say it*
- Guin: *that’s not how you use that*
- Foxxi: *the language on TV didn’t come from TV*
- Gizele: *it’s spreading through pop culture but it came from Black women*
- Kelly: *TV isn’t real; we are real…drag lg is gay lg*
## The Spread of Drag Language and Culture

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"talk like a drag queen"

I mean I don't know I've always been gay as hell, so, I've always, I guess kinda talked like that, but I guess just like to have-- to use terminology and know what it means [and] where it comes from
## The Spread of Drag Language and Culture

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Discourse uses of *bitch*

**Discourse Marker:**

Foxxi: you know *bitch*, I couldn't lip sync to save my life *bitch*, if RuPaul’s-- if that show was back then *bitch* I sure would have left cause *bitch* I couldn’t, lip sync for shit

Gizele: I can do it in so many ways, you just learned the news, <Q ((gasps)) *bitch* Q>
# Discourse Uses of *Bitch*

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CONCLUSIONS: QUEERING LANGUAGE SCIENCE

• Nonlinguists’ regard for language is a crucial part of the study of language variation and change
  • 3rd wave sociolinguistic interest in the motivation behind variation and change

• Language regard is best studied when situated within the study of language and identity

• Queer Folk Linguistics (QFL) situates language regard within the study of intersectional identity
  • Requires sociocultural, queer, raciolinguistic, and trans linguistic perspectives
  • Requires sensitivity and intersectional approaches to the data (especially ethnographic work)

• QFL can inform where to observe and study linguistic phenomena

• QFL here demonstrates the importance of community/relational roles as a component of identity

• This project demonstrates the complexity of place as it intersects with other complex identity components


McCleary, B. (2016). How to trick respondents into revealing implicit attitudes – talk to them. Linguistics Vanguard, 5(s1).


