

Paper Title: Creaky voice: An interactional resource for epistemic stancetaking

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Creaky voice has recently received much negative attention in the media, being characterized as a “mindless affectation” [1], but sociolinguistic research has revealed its use for a wide variety of social functions: signaling detachment or distancing from talk [2,3,4]; negative affect [4]; bored resignation [5]; toughness [6]; authority[2,7]; and, in combination with falsetto voice, expressivity [8]. This paper takes a “third wave” variationist approach [9] to explore the social meaning potential of creaky voice to uncover the motivation of this feature.

A case study is used to examine intraspeaker variation in the use of creak both quantitatively and qualitatively. Participants are a male and a female from Victoria, BC, both university graduates in their late twenties with similar social networks and backgrounds. Each recorded five interactions from a variety of everyday conversational settings. From these materials, a total of 1159 creaky-voice utterances were identified. Tokens that were linguistically (or, positionally) conditioned [3,5,10] (n=270) occurred at an overall rate of 6% across participants, which was stable across settings. The greater portion of creak was not linguistically conditioned (NLC; n=746). The frequency of NLC creak did not differ significantly across participants: both the male and female speaker used it at the same overall rate. However, creak did vary across settings: the greater the speakers’ self-reported intimacy with their interlocutors, the lower the frequency of creak. This suggests that NLC creak serves an interactional function that is conditioned by conversational context. Qualitative analysis of the NLC tokens revealed a frequent correlation with sequences expressing opinions or explanations, as in (1) and (2), where creak is underlined:

1. (1) I would say a lot of the time it's (.)
it's pretty harmful to their characters and who they are . as
like a human being sort of thing . (Ivan/Girlfriend)
2. (2) well you're supposed to take about twenty-five seconds to do
it ? but usually because there's air in the chamber ?
it is quite slow going . (Chloe/Parents)

Tokens were coded for the presence of features associated with epistemic stance [11,12], which accounted for nearly half (>44%) of NLC tokens for both participants. Remaining tokens were coded for co-occurrence with evaluative and affective stance-taking [11,12] and parentheticals [3], but no significant difference was found. Epistemic tokens were most frequent for both the participants across all settings, suggesting that the expression of epistemicity drives the variation.

These findings suggest that creak is an interactional resource available for taking an authoritative position in interaction [cf. 2,7], especially in situations where speakers feel less intimately connected to their interlocutors. This study adds to the body of work that contributes to the understanding of the functions of creaky voice [e.g. 2,3,4,5,6,7,8], as it is the first to report a connection between creak and epistemicity. Further, this study

reinforces the validity of a case study approach in the examination of stylistic variation and social meaning [13].

References

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