Lady Gaga and Creaky Voice
AUTHOR: Lewis Esposito

American female pop stars have been cited consistently in popular media articles as prominent users of creaky voice, a type of phonation characterized by the slow vibration of the vocal cords, but no studies have analyzed the extent of their use or what they may be using it to achieve. This study looks at Lady Gaga's usage of creaky voice. The methodological tools employed here are multifarious. While studies on creaky voice in American English are numerous (e.g., Yuasa 2010; Mendoza-Denton 2011; Zimman 2013; Podesva 2013), the vast majority adopt only one of the following approaches in determining creak's socio-stylistic and/or indexical meaning: (i) discourse analysis; (ii) quantitative comparisons across gender/speech context. Through an analysis of a single speaker's use of the phenomenon, this study combines statistical tools, discourse analysis, and ethnographic approaches to achieve a more nuanced understanding of creaky voice's social meaning for Lady Gaga and its broader indexical field (Eckert 2008).

Four speech samples of equal length – two interviews and two public speeches – were collected from YouTube and coded for the presence of creaky voice auditorily. Creaky segments possibly influenced by the IP-final position (Henton-Bladen 1988), other glottalized segments (Podesva 2007), or parenthetical phrases (Lee 2015) were separated from those not influenced by these factors and the two groups were compared with Pearson Chi-Square tests (R Core Team 2016). Lady Gaga uses the most creaky voice overall (29.92% of vowels were creaky) and the most creaky voice not influenced by one of the three aforementioned factors ($p < 0.0001$) in one of the interviews – the most personal sample in terms of content – in which she reflects on her rise to fame. Within this interview, Lady Gaga creaks most prevalently when recalling personal tribulations involving bullying, family relationships, professional failures, and her identity as a pop star. Recent fandom studies (e.g., Dilling-Hansen 2015) have shown that Lady Gaga's genuineness, and her identity as a "pained soul", are crucial to maintaining her strong fan base. Adopting a third-wave approach to stylistic variation, which emphasizes agentive persona construction through meanings associated with individual variables (Eckert 2012), I argue that Lady Gaga draws on creaky voice's flattened acoustic quality, which limits extreme fluctuations in pitch, amplitude, and intonation to index affectual "seriousness", thereby revealing the gravity and "non-joking" matter of the issues she discusses. Creaky voice's iconicity with understated affectual states is well attested (Zimman 2015; Podesva and Callier 2015). By talking about her troubled past, she reveals that her life, like those of her fans, was not devoid of struggles. "Seriousness", through ideological connections with "sincerity" and "truth-telling", comes to index "realness" for Lady Gaga, thereby reaffirming the authenticity of her "pained-soul." In this way, she uses creaky voice to appeal to fans.

This study, in addition to emphasizing the importance of considering iconicity in variation. proposes a meaning of creaky voice linked to "seriousness". It also offers an investigative foray into the speech of pop stars, and how / why they might alter it to appeal to audiences.

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