

The Use of Embodied Creak by Young Men at an Arts High School

Teresa Pratt

Much has been made in both popular discourse and sociolinguistic research about the use of creaky voice by women (e.g. Yuasa 2010, Podesva 2013), or as compared to men (Becker et al 2015, Podesva et al 2015). Additionally, creak has been shown to convey speaker stance and align with broader stylistic practices (Mendoza-Denton 2011, D'Onofrio et al 2013). This paper sheds light on the use of creak by young men and ties its use to locally-relevant stances, and further elaborates the social meaning of creak in this context by investigating the speakers' embodied practices.

Drawing on a year-long ethnography of a public arts high school in the Bay Area, where students spend the morning in academic classes and the afternoon in one of twelve arts disciplines (e.g. dance, theatre), I examine audio and video-recorded ethnographic interviews with twelve young men to show that one subset makes greater use of creak than another. Though all speakers in the current sample are considered part of the school's party-oriented social scene, the two subsets of speakers hold oppositional stances toward their curricular pursuits. One group is less academically oriented yet heavily engaged in their art outside of school, devoting many hours beyond what is required. The other group is more academically and institutionally-oriented, taking advanced-level classes and involving themselves in student activities, and investing less in their artistic discipline.

Interviews were segmented by intonational phrase and coded auditorily for phonation type. The same data was then force-aligned, and measurements of cepstral peak prominence (CPPS) were taken for each stressed vowel (Podesva 2015). Although additional acoustic measures of phonation type were taken (e.g. H1-H2), the extreme aperiodicity of the data made such measurements unreliable. Both phrase-based auditory analysis and CPPS analysis reveal that the young men who are less academically-oriented and more singularly focused on their artistic pursuits use creak at a significantly higher rate than the young men who are more academically- and institutionally-oriented (both $p < 0.05$).

Analysis of the video-recorded data, along with ethnographic observation throughout the academic year, reveals that speakers' embodied practices are meaningfully aligned with their use of creak. The speakers who exhibit a higher rate of creak also exhibit a more slouched posture in the interview, move more slowly around the school, and have a demeanor widely described as "chill." Speakers who use less creak tend to sit upright in their interviews, and have a higher-energy demeanor.

Taken together, these results show that the use of creak has a locally-relevant social meaning regarding both stance and gender. In contrast to recent work examining young women's use of creak, I show that young men in particular make use of creak to construct institutionally-detached and independently-ambitious personae, and that their extra-linguistic embodied practices align with this stance. Though sociolinguistic variables are often theorized to reflect and reproduce social categories, I argue instead that these young men use voice quality as well as embodied practice to construct *affective* styles which reflect and reproduce their ideological and institutional orientations to academics and art.

References

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