Abstract

KATHERINE A. CONNER. Reverse Engineering the LGBTQ+ Voice: Utilizing Prototype Theory to Construct Linguistic Stereotypes of Sexual Identity. (Under the Direction of Dr. Robin Dodsworth)

While the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community has become more visible in recent years in the United States, linguistic study has continued to homosexual men and trans\* people, in addition to focusing on correlations between LGBTQ+ categories and directly observed linguistic features. This study investigates linguistic characteristics of imagined voices in order to better understand the prototypes concerning the voices of gay, straight, and bisexual males and females. This study builds upon previous research focusing on correlates of masculinity and femininity in sexuality perception (Munson 2007; Linville 1998), research focusing on gay and lesbian speech (Levon 2006; Moonwomon-Baird 1997; Munson et al 2005; Pierrehumbert et al. 2004), and prototype theory (Fox 2011; Rosch 1978; Rosch 1975; Rosch 1973).

Principal Components Analysis and regression analysis support the initial hypotheses that gay males would show stronger prototypical profiling, and that females (both bisexual and lesbian) would not have as well defined a prototype. The data also supports the hypothesis that age will affect participant responses, to an extent. Initial conclusions include the fact that lack of visibility for bisexual women and lesbians might be contributing to the lack of definition of a prototype between them and heterosexual women. This study also concludes that while some prototypes were found, it is important to consider the ways in which defined prototypes might further essentialize the LGTBQ+ community and erase nuanced and contextualized speaker variation.