

“Mock Manly Speech”: Polyphonic Resources in the construction of hegemonic masculine personae

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There exists a strong body of research around the interpretive process involved in natural speech (Gumperz, 1992) and the ways in which speakers' stylistic choices cue particular social meanings (Eckert, 2002). One way of identifying the connection between style and identity is in stylized performances of an Other, by which a speaker may categorize the Other into a particular social group. The variables employed in this stylization are those that are salient to the speaker as indicators of the given social group. In the North American English speech community, a particularly common stylization is that of a certain male character, what I will call Mock Manly Speech (MMS).

MMS, a stylized form of constructed dialogue (Tannen, 2007), is invoked by speakers in humorous narratives to portray a man who is the object of scorn or ridicule. In this presentation, I explore the specific linguistic features employed in the performance of MMS, and whether these features index cultural ideologies of masculinity. The examination of this performance sheds light on the nature of the *contextualization cues* (Gumperz, 1992) involved, and how they may be used to construct a hegemonic masculine persona.

Data was taken from videos of female stand-up comedienne; segments were chosen based on auditory analysis and native speaker judgments. My analysis suggests that the use of MMS represents a 'discourse of alterity' (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 413). That is, MMS is employed to express disaffiliation with a represented character, and thus is a useful tool for constructing speaker identity while also creating group solidarity.

Tokens identified in the transcriptions are analyzed with several goals in mind: identifying the form based on auditory, acoustic, and prosodic characteristics, examining the function from the embedding context, and deciphering the effect on the audience. Methods of conversation analysis and interpretive sociolinguistics are operationalized.

Discourse analysis of each narrative uncovers various types of hegemonic masculinity indexed through MMS: the hypersexual male, the insensitive male, the oblivious male, and the immature male each arise from the various contexts. These types are not discrete categories: they can be used in a fluid, combinatory fashion depending on speaker goals. An examination of the prosodic features of the narratives has revealed that there are also various resources employed for performing MMS, including lower pitch, reduced pitch dynamism, narrow pitch range, and lowered larynx voice. Other resources that are found in MMS performances are phonetic reduction, syntactic brevity and simplicity, and stuttering. Each resource may be linked to the specific type of male character being created.

This analysis of MMS reveals how linguistic ideologies, whether based in fact or fiction, can carry significant macro-social meaning as constellations of linguistic variables are used to index social personae. Further, analyzing how speaker stylize others through constructed dialogue is an effective area for exploring the connection between linguistic variables and social categories, and for teasing apart the elements that make up these social categories.

References

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