

# SUMMARY OF “PHONATION TYPE AS A STYLISTIC VARIABLE: THE USE OF FALSETTO IN CONSTRUCTING A PERSONA”

Podesva (2007)

## 1. VARIABLE

The paper focuses on the investigation of the styling of voice quality of one gay man.

## 2. SUMMARY

Voice quality or ‘phonetic setting’ is an under-investigated aspect of speech production, probably because of the methodological challenges. What research exists focuses on the VQ of groups not individuals. The same appears to be true of studies on gay speech. So the author presents the result of a case study, focusing on an individual’s VQ in various settings.

There are 3 situations: A BBQ with friends, a phone conversation with Heath’s (participant) father, and a meeting with a patient. Falsetto is coded impressionistically and then acoustically examined for duration, maximum f0, duration of creaky voice, range of f0 and f0 rate of change.

The results show that falsetto is both more frequent and longer in duration in the BBQ setting. Falsetto is accompanied by creaky voice which again is longer in the BBQ setting. The phonetic explanations of falsetto and creaky voice in this section are quite helpful.

In discussing the social meaning of falsetto for this gay person, P notes the following expressive functions:

- (1) Yelling
- (2) Expressing surprise or excitement
- (3) Offering evaluative commentary
- (4) Enlivening a direct quotation
- (5) Engaging the audience when telling a narrative

P then defines the term ‘diva’, and describes how H uses falsetto to construct such a persona in his interactions during the BBQ party. These incidents occur at moments of portraying image consciousness or otherwise flamboyant behavior.

P concludes by discussing the extent to which this behavior indexes gay-ness. P claims that the most accurate characterization is that H constructs an attitude more than pointing to his homosexuality.

This is an interesting article with some great refs about VQ and gay-speech studies. The methods are solid, but the results are not surprising or unexpected.

## REFERENCES

Podesva, R. J., 2007. Phonation type as a stylistic variable: The use of falsetto in constructing a persona. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11, 478–504.