

Beyond binary gender: creaky voice, gender, and the variationist enterprise

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Abstract

Creaky voice, a nonmodal voice quality involving slower, more irregular phonation, has been stereotypically associated with women in US English both in the academic literature and popular media. However, whether and how this phonetic feature is associated to different dimensions gender identity has not previously been explored in detail. This study promotes a sophisticated treatment of gender in variationism through a large-scale quantitative analysis of a large corpus of gender-diverse individuals in Portland, Oregon, USA, including cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary individuals. This analysis finds that gender surprisingly does not predict variation; all gender groups produce high rates of creak. However, gender does interact with style in predicting creak: all speakers use more creak in interview speech compared with read speech, but some gender groups style-shift more than others, suggesting that gender remains a relevant factor in capturing how creak is deployed as a resource in social practice. We use this analysis to advocate for a move beyond the gender binary in quantitative descriptions of sociolinguistic variables and call for the greater inclusion of trans+ individuals in sociolinguistics.

Bio

Sameer ud Dowla Khan (they/he; PhD UCLA '08) is a professor of linguistics at Reed College, a liberal arts college in Portland, Oregon (USA), focusing on graduate-level education and first-hand research for undergraduates. They are also the co-editor of the *Journal of South Asian Linguistics*, an open-access journal focusing on the diverse languages of the Subcontinent. Sameer's primary research specializations are intonation (prosody) and voice quality (phonation). Their current work has been on exploring the role and nature of creaky voice in American English, the typology of intonational systems in South Asian languages of different families, and how phonation varies both within and across languages, taking into account speaker gender and age.