Gendered Gestures
An Experimental Approach to the
Linguistic Embodiment of
Masculinities

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Hegemonic masculinity

- **Hegemonic masculinity** (Connell, 1987)
  - the most dominant/normative ideal masculinity
  - We prefer the Comaroffs' (1991, 1997) notion of *hegemonic ideologies* as naturalised, universalised and invisible – those which *appear* to transcend history (by being constant across all contexts).
  - (Note: The context *and* participants (values, beliefs, ideologies) shape what is presumed universal/hegemonic at a given site.)
  - Thus, a *hegemonically masculine* (HM) performance is one which, relative to other gender performances:
    - (1) enables audiences to quickly, automatically classify its performer as male;
    - (2) is invisible as a *performance*, so that the performer's gender is *natural*; and
    - (3) is invisible as *gender*, i.e., tends not to be read as abnormal or incongruent.
  - In other words, a hegemonically masculine (HM) performance succeeds in indexing its performer as masculine without drawing attention to the performance itself.
  - One specific behaviour associated with HM is **low gesture** (Adler et al, 1992).
Gesture and accommodation

- **Entrainment/accommodation**
  - Speech, gesture and posture entrain automatically during interaction (Nagaoka et al, 2007).
  - People accommodate even to phenomena not perceptually present (Fowler et al, 2008; Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998).
  - "Negative interactions" inhibit accommodation (Komori et al, 2007).
  - Since **HM** performances are naturalised, congruent and easy to classify, then **non-HM** performances may be seen as unnatural, incongruent and difficult to classify. Given that incongruence, unnaturalness and difficulty slow down automatic processing (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Hoosain, 1974; Fischler & Bloom, 1979, 1980; Schuberth et al, 1981; Foss, 1982; Ehrlich & Rayner, 1981; Balota et al, 1985; Stanovich & West, 1981, 1983), how will a **non-HM** performance interfere with accommodation?
Hypothesis

- People "accommodate" to stereotypical gestures ideologically associated with *gendered* primes.
  - Produce an **HM** and a **non-HM** stimulus (matched-guise, Lambert et al, 1960), and people's change in gesture from baseline to experimental task will reflect such stereotypes.
  - Accommodation to **non-HM** stimulus: higher velocity, less space.
  - Since **HM** stimulus is congruent with experimental context, accommodation will be weaker than for **non-HM** stimulus.
  - **However**, **high-HM** participants (rated for ideation or performance) will have a "negative interaction" with **non-HM** stimulus, preventing accommodation.
Stimulus

- cooking video
  - Both **HM** and **non-HM** video consist of same physical cooking procedure, thus controlling gesture.
  - Videos' relative **HM**-ness independently verified by students in ling. anth. classes

- embodiment,
  - phonology, discourse style, knowledge of cooking
- 7-point scale
Method

• Sample (n=8)
  - UA undergrads; friends of LL's friends

• Participant tasks
  - Baseline: How to cook spaghetti with marinara sauce
    • rated in same manner as stimulus videos – measure of HM performance
  - Stimulus: View cooking video (randomly assigned)
  - Experimental task: Narrate contents of video
  - Reflective globes fixed to 5th metacarpals, wrists, elbows, shoulders and sternum, measured by motion cameras as points in 3D space at 100 frames/s.

• Why space and velocity?
  - spoken of impressionistically in gender literature
  - What measurable physical phenomena underlie these impressionistic claims?
Measures

- Two measures of gesture obtained significant results:
  - space measure (avg. width of central 2/3 of each coordinate)
  - log avg. velocity of wrist relative to sternum

- Remove P2 and P5
  - Both used overt, metapragmatic strategies, rejecting stimulus video.
  - Consciousness of prime interferes with accommodation, which proceeds automatically absent inhibiting factors (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998).
  - Overt strategies are such inhibiting factors
  - Metapragmatics too individually variable for small samples.

- Hypothesis rejected!
  - No significant interactions between HM rating and change in gesture for either condition.
What did we find, then?

- Measured change in log avg. velocity for both conditions.
  - significant difference between conditions \((p<.05)\)

- Log avg. velocity in **non-HM** condition decreases by an average of \(.22\) (approx. \(40.1\%\), \(p<.0025\)).
  - Although this was true across participants, it did not stand out to us impressionistically: *quantification helps.*

- Space measure in **HM** condition increases by \(101\) mm. (3.98 in. more space in all 3 coordinates, \(p<.025\)).
Where's the accommodation?

- Increase in space in **HM** condition reflects increase in participant comfort with progress of task (cf. Labov, 1972, 1984).

- Decrease in velocity in **non-HM** condition
  - **non-HM** decreases comfort?
    - stigma/respect – taking more time figuring out how to represent marked stimulus; perhaps worrying about political correctness, mocking
    - matched-guise weakness (does performance reflect ideologies of participant, or what is appropriate for the context? cf. Gardner & Lambert, 1972)

- If accommodation is happening, other effects dwarf it.
Overt metapragmatics: P5

- P5: Mocking **non-HM** stimulus
  - Mocking doubly voices mockee and mocker and produces a distance between the two voices (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984; Chun, 2004, 2007).
  - wrist angle, So. phonology, 1st person
  - metapragmatics: "All I'm gonna do is make fun of this guy."
  - only participant in **non-HM** condition with gesture increase
  - Rated **most HM** performance of all ptcpts

  - If **extreme HM** performance reflects **HM** ideation, mocking may be a creative deployment of stigma.
  - less attention to "context appropriateness" – answering phone, use of space, "doing a favour", **ownership**

- **Lesson:** Incongruency can produce different effects.
Overt metapragmatics: P2

- **P2: Rejecting HM stimulus**
  - devalues stimulus ("doesn't cook a lot", looks odd in kitchen, "painstaking detail"); avoids talking about it (pauses, deliberating over words, "or as short as I want"); distance: "gentleman"
  - only participant in **HM** condition with gesture decrease
  - **Important**: For P2, the "hegemonic" video was incongruent!
  - Rated **most HM** of the **4 women**
    - Masculinity stigmatised for women (Halberstam, 1998; Hoyt, 2005; Schippers, 2007) (Bear in mind that femininity is stigmatised, too!)
    - For P2, given her stigmatised performance, it is possible that she recognises a **source** rather than target of stigma in **HM** stimulus, and rejects it as such.
      - (but speaks of cooking skill rather than gender, congruent with what is appropriate in experimental context, cf. Gardner & Lambert, 1972)

- **Lesson: Incongruency can be incongruent with theory!**
How universal is universality?

• If hegemony involves a pretext of universality, the pretext itself is a site of contestation (as P2 shows us).
  - If we assume participants' behaviour reflects meanings of gender and gesture, and that meaning is locally constructed, what is the relevant meaning and where does it come from?

• Needed: ethnography of gender socialisation!

• Future sampling
  - Age (<5 yrs span)
  - select within communities of practice relevant to gender socialisation
    • frats, Eon kids, trans activists, anarchists, physics nerds, country club members
  - Look at P1 and P4, who share a community of practice:
Conclusion

- Although non-HM stimulus was less congruent, our specific predictions were too simplistic:
  - Incongruence is not a simple matter of standing out prominently enough to facilitate accommodation.
  - It can lead to slowing down, discomfort or overt metapragmatic strategies.
  - Different participants, e.g. P5, have different considerations of the roles of context-appropriateness, respect and stigma.

- Hegemony effect observable:
  - Participants more comfortable in HM than non-HM condition.
  - This is expected of a stimulus that is more hegemonic – i.e., natural, congruent and easy to classify – relative to the other.
  - P2 and P5 orient to hegemony – P2 by rejecting, P5 by producing it.

- Will "ethnographic sampling" reveal significant interactions between gendered performance and accommodation?
Thank you!

Contact us if you'd like our slides (or a recipe)!

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