Language, identity and the interactional construction of self

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Thanks very much to the organizers for the invitation.

I am honoured to be here and in particular to have been given the opportunity to reflect on what it means to conduct research both "Inside and Beyond Binaries".

As we all know, binaries are a pervasive element of the social order, regimenting nearly every aspect of our lives, including our own academic and analytical practice. In my own area of specialization – research on language and identity – binary logics have long shaped how we approach our work, resulting in a tendency for us to seek explanations for variation in language use in terms of discrete and bounded social categories: man or woman, gay or straight. Yet, in the past 10-15 years, scholars have begun working beyond these binaries, focusing on how multiple intersecting and interanimating dimensions of experience come together to constrain social and linguistic practice.

(Steele 2019)
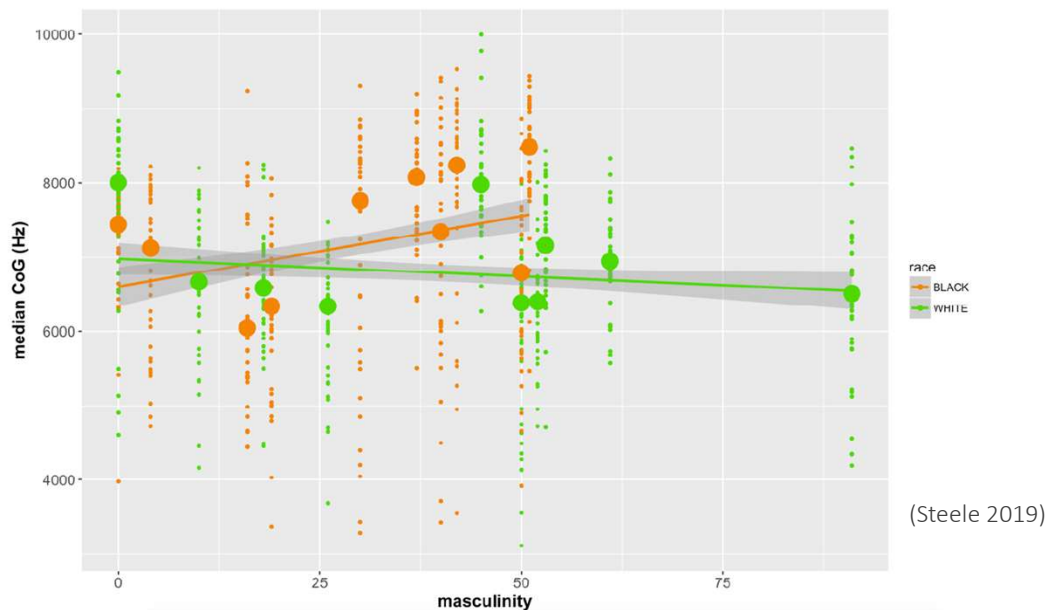
For example, in their examination of variation in the realisation of /s/ among nonbinary speakers of English in the US, Ariana Steele has shown that Black and White individuals in their sample orient to the indexical potential of /s/-fronting differently. Among White nonbinary individuals (plotted here in green), we find the expected pattern, whereby increased identification with masculinity (along the x-axis) correlates with progressively lower /s/ Centre of Gravity (on the y-axis). For Black nonbinary people, however, (in orange) we see the opposite pattern: the more they identify with masculinity, the higher their /s/ Centre of Gravity, despite higher Centres of Gravity being stereotypically associated with femininity.

Steele argues that the key to understanding this unexpected result lies in the oppressive stereotypes that circulate in the US (and elsewhere), which associate Black masculinity with hyperaggression and violence. Steele suggests that by avoiding more "masculine" realisations of /s/, Black nonbinary individuals are able to enact a specifically Black non-normative masculinity that rejects these dominant social stereotypes. Importantly then, for Steele, variation in /s/ among Black nonbinary speakers is not about race *or* gender, but about both at the same time, with race influencing how speakers understand and present their gender and vice versa

We can also see the effect of personal understandings of category membership on language use even in situations where the intersection of multiple categories is not necessarily at issue.

Beyond Binaries

(Monka et al. 2020)
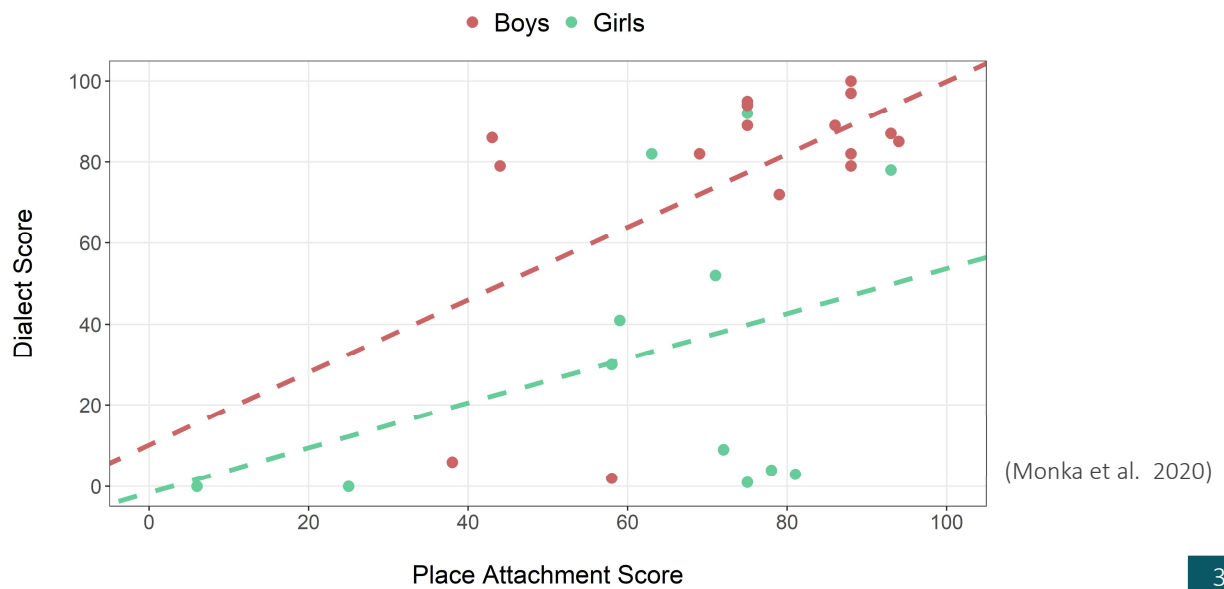
This plot is adapted from recent work by Malene Monka, Pia Quist and Astrid Skovse, who consider the relationship between dialect use and place attachment in the city of Bylderup in Denmark.

They find that, overall, there is a positive correlation between place attachment and the use of dialect features, as shown in the upward trend lines for both the girls and the boys (though that correlation is stronger for boys – in red – than for girls – in green). But while this pattern holds overall, there are some interesting exceptions. Consider, for example, the four boys in the middle of the plot.

Beyond Binaries
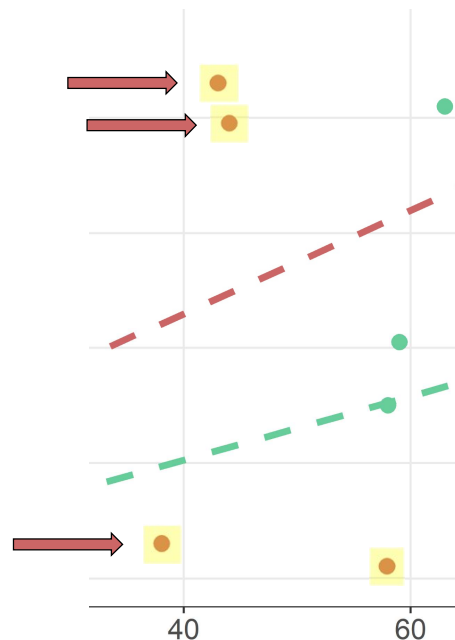
(Monka et al. 2020)

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They all have similar attachments to Bylderup (with scores between 40-60 on a place attachment index), but they show dramatically different uses of dialect features. Of these four boys, three have parents from outside of Denmark, and so we might assume that this would affect their use of dialect features similarly. But clearly, the boys interpret their socio-biographical experience differently, leading to starkly different uses of "local" linguistic forms.

I show these two examples to make the fairly simple point that category membership – or similarity of social positioning – does not necessarily translate to similarity of linguistic practice. Individuals are not merely conduits, mechanistically reproducing social structures or enacting identities with which they are associated. Rather, they play an active role in interpreting their social positions and in choosing the specific self they wish to project in the world. Now, it could be possible to argue that the way to address this kind of nuance – this diversity of social experience and its relationship to language use – is by coming up with better categories. Rather than simply looking at nonbinary speakers, we need to look at white versus black nonbinary speakers. And rather than looking at place attachment, we need to look at also need to consider individual's migration backgrounds and their future aspirations. While I agree that we do want to look at these additional dimensions, I believe that if all we do is fractally divide categories into more specific sub-categories, we run the risk of replicating the same kind of essentialized and mechanistic interpretations we were trying to avoid in the first place.

"fractals offer a magnification of the ideology that maintains the binary rather than a glimpse at the broader dynamics that sustain [it]." (Eckert 2014)

"for language not just to be *taken* as an act of identity or a projection of persona, but actually to be *offered* as one, there's much more to explain than what we've explained to date." (Woolard 2019)

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As Penelope Eckert has argued, "fractals offer a magnification of the ideology that maintains the binary rather than a glimpse at the broader dynamics that sustain it". In other words, sub-categorizing speakers does not help us to get beyond the binary logic or give us insight into what constitutes the categories themselves. To do this, I suggest that we need to ask how the individuals we study understand their own category memberships: what is their own theory of selfhood, their own frame of reference, and how does this understanding then relate to their linguistic practice?

Ultimately, I'm arguing that we need to take the self more seriously in sociolinguistics, to see the individual as a mediating link between structurally and ideologically generated potentials and actual uses of language on the ground. In a formulation somewhat reminiscent of Goffman's distinction between "giving" and "giving off", Kathryn Woolard has recently claimed that, "for language not just to be taken as an act of identity or a projection of persona, but actually to be offered as one" – for us not to just make assumptions about the kind of identity-linked moves that speakers *can* make but instead to model what they actually *are doing* – "there's much more to explain than what we've explained to date".

Through my talk today, I hope to take a first step in providing this further explanation.

Clearly, I am not the first person to have argued for the importance of the self in sociolinguistics. Over 40 years ago, Roderick Hart, Robert Carlson & William Eadie described a difference between what they termed "rhetorical sensitives" and "noble selves". This is a distinction that underscored Barbara Johnstone's famous discussion of ethos of persona versus ethos of self, as well as Woolard's recent arguments for a theory of sociolinguistic selfhood.

But I would like to go a bit deeper than these previous discussions and look at the internal organization of the self, and the properties that give rise to the different theories of selfhood that emerge. In doing so, I am inspired by an early comment by Erving Goffman, who, in his introduction to Interaction Ritual in 1967, stated "I assume that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and [their] psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another. None the less, since it is individual actors who contribute the ultimate materials, it will always be reasonable to ask what general properties they must have if this sort of contribution is to be expected of them … A psychology is necessarily involved, but one stripped and cramped to suit the sociological study of conversation, track meets, banquets, jury trials and street loitering. Not, then, [people] and their moments. Rather moments and their [people]."
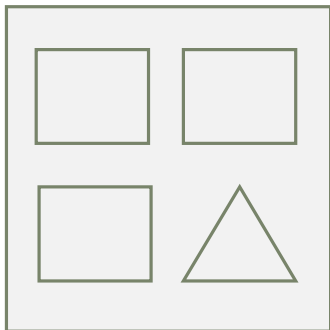
I suggest that Dialogical Self Theory, as developed by Hubert Hermans and colleagues over the past 30 years, provides just the sort of "cramped" model of selfhood that Goffman mentions.

Dialogical Self Theory (or DST) was originally developed in an attempt to unite two disparate models of selfhood that have predominated in the psychology and sociology literature. The first of these is what Stuart Hall has called Sociological models of the self, as described by people like William James and George Herbert Mead. In a sociological model of the self, there exists a coherent and integrated core of being, an "I-as-knower", as James describes it, that provides continuity to the self. This is represented by the large square on the slide. Sociological models recognise that selves can have multiple aspects or faces – represented by the smaller squares within the large square – and even that part of what makes up our understanding of self is a sense that we are different from others – represented by the triangle. But the central focus of sociological models is the idea of a coherent and sovereign self.

The second model of selfhood that circulates is what has been described as the Late-Modern self, elaborated in work by people like Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman. In late-modern selfhood, there is no sovereign centre, no all-knowing 'I'. Instead, the self is seen as multiple and dynamic and distributed across a temporal plane, such that the self that is presented and experienced depends on the dialectics of the local social context – as represented by the different shading of the squares on the slide.

What Dialogical Self Theory attempts to do is to preserve this contextual specificity, this dynamism in the self, while nevertheless recognising that we do experience a phenomenal continuity to who we are – that even if we are different in different contexts, we are still "me".

Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon 1992; Hermans 2001; Hermans & Gieser 2012)

I-positions

position repertoire
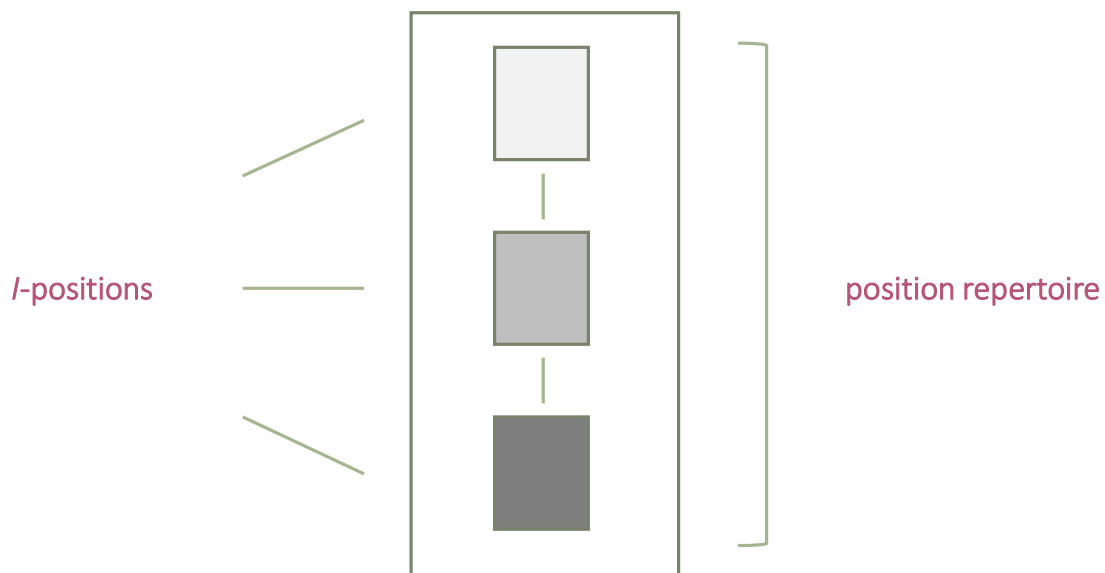
Dialogical Self Theory does this by contracting the temporal differentiation of late-modern selfhood into a set of spatial oppositions that are experienced simultaneously. Within DST, these different aspects of self are termed "I-positions", semi-autonomous locations for the 'I' to inhabit, each associated with its own history, values and practices. These positions can be compatible with one another, or they can conflict. DST does not assume any necessary integration across positions. Instead, DST posits that all of our I-positions are organised within a position repertoire, which provides an overall structural topography to the self. The position repertoire is understood as hierarchical, such that some positions are more prominent than others or bunched closer together than others. But the position repertoire nevertheless contains all of the different positions we inhabit.

Finally, and most importantly, DST argues that I-positions are constantly in dialogue. Inspired by Bakhtin, the idea is that positions are endowed with individual voices, and that what governs our self-concept is an ongoing dialogue between the different I-positions we maintain, a dialogue that can lead to the creation of new positions and the suppression of others in an ongoing process of position management. The notion of dialogue is thus what allows DST to model changes in our self-concept across time and situations while nevertheless preserving a sense of overall continuity of the position repertoire.

It is this in-built duality in the basic architecture of the self developed in DST that, I believe, provides us with a way of capturing the relationship between the self and socially meaningful language use.

How do dialogical models of selfhood help us to **trace individual's own understandings** of subjectivity?

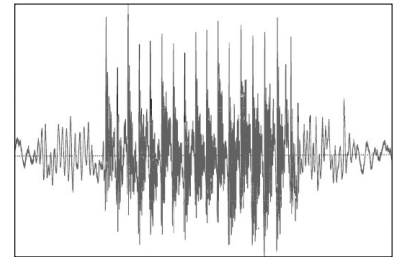How is language used to **organize the internal structure** of the self?

So in the remainder of my talk, I will be looking at how dialogical models of selfhood help us to trace individual's own understandings of their subjectivity and at how language is not only used to portray identities, but also to organize the internal structure of the self.

I will do this by looking at two empirical examples.

My first example comes from a study of mine that some of you may be familiar with, looking at how an individual whom I call Igal understands his own relationship to both religion and sexuality.

I interviewed Igal in 2005 as part of a broader sociolinguistic ethnography looking at language and sexuality in Israel/Palestine. Igal was in his mid-40s at the time of the recording, and came from an Orthodox Jewish family in Jerusalem, where he still lived. At the time of the recording, Igal lived a normative Orthodox Jewish life, which included being married to a woman for over 20 years. Igal also engaged in sexual and romantic relationships with other men, and it is the relationship between these two dimensions of his life – his Orthodox faith and his same-sex practice – that I will focus on here.

Linguistically, I look at Igal's use of creaky voice throughout the interview that I conducted with him. As many of you know, creak is a particular kind of phonation characterized by high adductive tension of the vocal folds, resulting in very low frequency and aperiodic vibration. Creaky voice is a natural linguistic phenomenon that is predicted to occur in specific phonological environments, and particularly phrase-finally when airflow may be insufficient to sustain regular vocal fold vibration. But creaky voice has also been shown to be used stylistically in non-phrase-final locations, where it has been linked to the expression of things such as masculinity, authority, emotional distance and restraint.

Sexuality & Religion: Igal
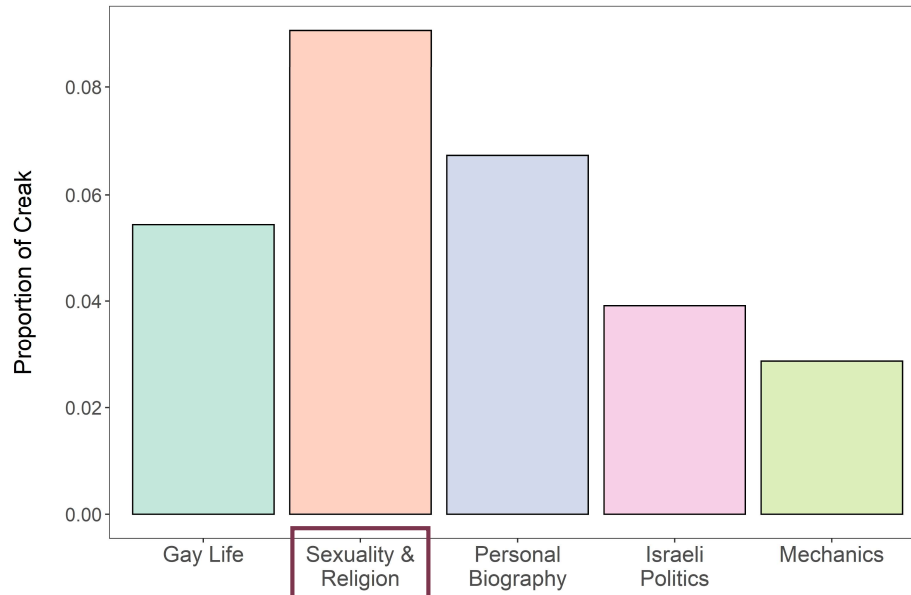
We find evidence of stylistic creak in Igal's speech, as we can see here in this plot of the amount of creaky voice Igal uses across different topics. While Igal is a generally creaky speaker across the board, we see that he uses significantly more creak when speaking specifically about the intersection of sexuality and religion in the interview. And while in the interest of time I'm not showing you the details here, analyses also show that the creaky voice that Igal uses when talking about sexuality and religion is acoustically different from the creaky voice that appears elsewhere. When speaking on these topics, Igal's creak is less constricted and contains more breathiness, thus making it qualitatively different from the creak that appears phrase-finally.

It's this pattern of Igal's stylistic creak that we will look at in more detail.

Category Positioning: Orthodox

Igal: A:::nd I finished my BA. And I decided that it's necessary, that the time had come to get married. So I started going out with women. People introduced me to women. Friends. Family. From here from there. Would go out with women [Heb. *haja jotse im baxurot*]. Sometimes I didn't like her sometimes she didn't like me. Once it's one thing, the next time it's another. e:m I have no idea how many women I went out with. And I hated it. I hated that whole period. You need to show yourself off and to sell yourself. e::::

EL: When was this? When you were in=

Igal: =24. I was 24. I finished my BA and said OK I have some time now to do this. e:m in the end I met- also there never really was this feeling of (1) yes this will work or no this won't work. You you (.) it's like with a man that you (.) you weigh all sorts of things. He looks good, he's smart, intelligent, he's interesting. He's serious. e:: if there's a chance or there isn't a <u>chance</u>. <u>A::nd</u> fine so at the end of the day I met <u>someone</u> (Heb. mišehi) <u>and</u>. We went out for three months <u>and then</u> we got engaged. And three months later we got married. <u>And a year</u> after that the eldest son was born, who's already 15 years old <u>now</u>. <u>e:</u> a year and a half after him the second son was born. <u>A::nd</u> (.) that's it.

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Let's begin with a short narrative that Igal told me early on in the interview, in response to one of my initial questions about where he was from. Igal took that question as an invitation to provide with me a brief "life story" and this first extract came as part of that.

[Note: I am only showing you English translations, though all of the interviews were conducted in Hebrew. I am also not playing recordings for you as Igal did not give me permission to do so.]

Igal starts off by describing marriage as something one has to do, something that is part of living an Orthodox life and that arrives in a particular chronological sequence. We get an affectless description of how it all worked – about being introduced to women by friends and family, which services as an implicit reference to arranged marriages. This is followed by an interesting, and detached analogy, between the "selection" process for women and for men. The story then ends with a catalogue of various "expected activities", indicating a somewhat resigned acceptance of (Orthodox) norms. There is a cluster of creaky voice at the end (indicated in the transcript by underlining and boldface), but all occur either phrase-finally or in places we would otherwise predict creaky voice to occur, so it's difficult to say whether this creak is stylistic or not. Nevertheless, the story overall demonstrates Igal's orientation to Jewish orthodoxy as a core position in his position repertoire, a position whose voice dominates the story and shows itself to be integral to Igal's understanding of self.

I:: (1) all this time nothing was clear to me about e (1) who I am or what I want or or (.) what it even means to be gay. e:::: and there wasn't any way to check it out or t- to ask anybody. u::m but e around around age thirt<u>y::</u> (2) there were two things. I went to <u>to</u> (.) abroad <u>to</u> (.) I went to study a language <u>and and</u> (.) there I met a man. We became really good friends. There was never anything between us. And only on the last day the day before the last day ((in English)) *it dawned on me* that that (.) that apparently I was in love with him. And and that there was something more there. And then uh I was already lying in bed, I couldn't fall asleep, I called him to me and (1) for an hour tentatively and circling around it and here and there tell me are you are you (.) straight o:r (.) not? So he said he didn't know a:nd. And that he had had experiences with men. And that's it, it ended at that. e he was the first person I had ever even talked to about it.

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Immediately after, Igal continues his story and we get pivot from the "Orthodox" I-position he had just established to a "gay" counter-position. This is the first (and only) time in the interview that Igal explicitly affiliates with the position "gay". And then shortly after doing so, we get two instances of stylistic creak: both in places where affective connection to same-sex desire is heightened (and hence the Orthodox Jewish position most threatened). Note too that creak doesn't occur when Igal mentions his "gay" positioning early on – we only see it when Igal describes a conflict or threat between desire and religion.

Category Tension

And even though we were (.) complete opposites. He came a few times to Jerusalem and we talked and we talked and we talked and we talked. A:::nd that's it. And then I went to him in Tel Aviv. And we slept together. And slowly something that he thought would just be this fun summer romance for him (.) e: turned into love that for me was the biggest love of my life. I never loved like I loved him. I guess I'd never truly loved anyone until I loved him. And also for him it was (2) things got a lot more complicated than he thought they would be. e:: uh u:::h I don't know how t- t- to explain it. I was really in love. And and (.) I I (.) for him I was ready e (1) I fought with my wife and (.) I would go stay at his sometimes and stay over the night and come back the next day. Which I had never done before. e::: but from his point of view after a few months it became intolerable. Because he wanted, he said that he couldn't be satisfied with once a week. And with all the patience, with all the that. And and he wanted me to come and live with him. And I said that there's no chance. We both knew the restrictions on our relationship from the beginning. And that I had no intention of breaking up my marriage for something unknown. e:: (1) that's it.

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This association of creaky voice with category tension occurs consistently throughout the interview, as in this extract where Igal is describing the "love of his life". Stylistic creak occurs in the extract in places where same-sex desire/practices threatens to exceed the place reserved for it in Igal's life. Before this story, Igal had described how he had compartmentalized his same-sex practice, keeping it clearly separate from (and subordinate to) the rest of his life. But here, when Igal describes a sense of deep reciprocal emotion and the possibility of a full-time gay relationship, creaky voice appears. So again, it's about more than just about emotion or distancing himself from a category – it's about the tension between two categories he maintains.

Category Tension

EL: I wanted to ask a few questions about within the Orthodox community, e like=

Igal: = look (.) in the beginning (2) it's it really bothered me. Later you come to understand that (1) e (.) as long as you don't get into having anal relations e (.) then you haven't really done anything worse than than masturbation. And that's fine. You've done it before, you'll do it again. If you find someone that you're happy with, fine. Nowhere is it written that you're not allowed to love a man or to hug him or to kiss him or to caress him. (1) e:: the the the: the other issue is much more problematic and. So some of the religious people (Heb. *ha-dati'im*) e (.) stop here. And say that I'm not going to do. And some of them (1) e everyone has (.) some some kind of different excuse some kind of different story (.) gets over it and says. OK. e: I don't care so I'll I'll get my punishment in the next world or I'll deal with it or it's not relevant to me and so on and so on and so on. And and this too passes.

Finally, we once again see this tension emerge in this extract, where Igal offers a re-analysis of the religious proscription on same-sex practice. We get extensive stylistic creak throughout this extract whenever Igal is pushing against normative Orthodox beliefs. In a sense, creaky voice acts as a materialisation of the tension between the two opposing world views Igal entertains.

Sexuality & Religion: Summary

◦ for Igal, creaky voice used to discursively contain identification with same-sex desire, and relegate it to hierarchically lower position than Orthodox Judaism (cf. McIntosh 2009; Levon 2016)

◦ creak voices an interactional meta-position

a position that provides a "distanced view of the repertoire of *I*-positions and an over-arching view of the self. ... Meta-positions provide opportunities for the evaluation and 'management' of contradictory perspectives" (Henry & Mollstedt 2021; cf. also Hermans 2013)

◦ creak is a tool for enacting a hierarchical repertoire of subjective positions

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Based on this patterning of creaky voice throughout the interview, I have argued previously that Igal uses creaky voice as a tool to discursively contain his identification with same-sex desire, relegating it to a hierarchically lower position than his identification with Orthodox Judaism. Casting this in terms of Dialogical Self Theory, creak helps Igal to voice a meta-position in interaction, that is, a position offering a distanced view of the repertoire of *I*-positions and an over-arching view of the self, providing Igal with the opportunity for the evaluation and 'management' of the contradictory perspectives he maintains. In other words, creaky voice is not a way that Igal does an "identity", be it gay or religious or religious gay. Rather it is a semiotic tool with which he organises the complex multiplicity of his position repertoire, and prioritizes his positioning as Orthodox above his positioning as gay.

Igal's use of creak thus provides an example of how speakers can use language to voice meta-positions with which they to organise their position repertoires in interaction.

Sexuality & Nation: Dimitris

Dr Stamatina Katsiveli

◦ Interview took place in December 2018 at Dimitris & Fotis' home in Athens

◦ Both men in their early 50s at the time of recording, had lived in Athens for 20+ years after having been raised elsewhere in the country

◦ Focus on Dimitris' negotiation of "gay" and "Greek" *I*-positions

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In my next example, I consider how speakers work to mediate between conflicting I-positions via a somewhat different strategy: the discursive enactment of what Dialogical Self Theory calls a Third Position that emerges in interaction to mediate between two conflicting I-positions.

This example comes from work I have been doing with Stamatina Katsiveli, based on her research looking at lesbian and gay identities in Greece. Stamatina's PhD examined how people who identify as lesbian or gay in Greece negotiate a perceived incompatibility between lesbian/gay identity and normative articulations of Greek identity – articulations which are themselves heavily influenced by the Greek Orthodox Church and a very traditional conceptualisation of heteronormative gender roles.

What I will present to you here is based on one of the interviews that Stamatina conducted in Athens in 2018 with a Greek gay male couple, who I'll be calling Dimitris and Fotis. Both men were in their early 50s at the time of recording, and both had been living in Athens for over 20 years (though they had originally been raised elsewhere in the country). I am going to focus on Dimitris, and first demonstrate how he navigates a tension between "Greek" and "gay" I-positions by establishing what psychologist Peter Raggatt has termed a dialogical triad.

Dialogical Triads

Experiencing the self as integrated requires manifold symbolic representations to be brought together … It follows that an integrated self can be considered an "effect" or an "achievement," and not an a priori state or transcendental object. (Raggatt 2010:401)

| Greek | - - - - - - - - - - | gay |

ambiguous third
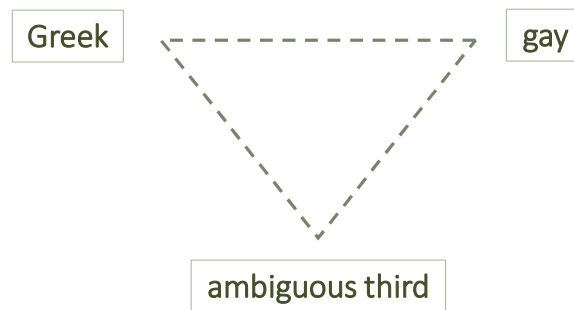
For Raggatt, as for Dialogical Self Theory more generally, the experience of self as an integrated whole is an outcome or achievement of social and symbolic practice, not some transcendental or *a priori* state. Negotiating conflict between I-positions is thus something that people do in situated social practice. According to Raggatt, one way in which people can do this is via the establishment of a relationship between three positions:

- First you have the two I-positions that are perceived as being in conflict: let's say an I as Greek and an I as gay

- Then, what individuals can do is marshal some third symbolic object – an external figure or event – which possesses some qualities of both of the two conflicting position. Raggatt calls this external object an ambiguous third.

The argument is that by bringing this ambiguous third into dialogue with the two conflicting I-positions, individuals can establish a triadic structure that helps to mediate the conflict, and create an understanding of self that is integrated while nevertheless structured by an internal dissonance.

So, I will start off by looking at the dialogical triad that Dimitris creates, focusing in particular on the specific membership categories and category-bound attributes Dimitris introduces. I will then, in a second part, look at how Dimitris uses laughter and other forms of non-serious speech to interactionally refine the categories he had previously positioned.

Stamatina: Now <an abstract question. Are you- do you feel> happy in Greece and in Athens?

Dimitris: Yes ↑very much so. Yes I do:n't- I don't see any difference I do:n't- I was saying this to a friend of mine who had been to London and lived the gay life and came over here and was like >oh how can we live here et cetera and I tell him-< ↓He's from Trikala, right? So: I tell him, have you been around Athens? He says no. ↑Come, I say, I'll give you a tour.

Stamatina: Yes yes indeed.
((laughing......))

Dimitris: And he go:t a culture shock. He says where has all this been, I had no idea.
((laughing..............))

Stamatina: $Incredible.$

Dimitris: I'm like here you are. The same. (.) That's all. yes it's- It's not different in anything=>because I've been abroad and I know.<

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We begin with Dimitris enacting his I-position as Greek, as in his response to Stamatina's question about whether he is happy in Greece and in Athens.

[Original Greek audio recording played – English translations on the slides]

We see here a clear orientation to the category Greek by Dimitris, which is based on a claim of epistemic rights, of knowing that Greece is not different than any other country.

Category Positioning: Greek

Stamatina: in general, so would we agree that the church is sti:ll .h <an element> of Greek ident- is Orthodox religion an element <of Greekness?>?

Dimitris: No. I don't accept it. I don't accept it at all. Neither Socrates was a Christian, nor Plato, nor Aristotle. (.) I don't accept it at all. No.

(1.5)

Fotis: But it is. (.) though.

Dimitris: It [is-]

Fotis: [We] don't like it but it is.

Dimitris: Of Greekness? [it's this bastard kind that we think it has-]

Fotis: [Unfortunately they are intertwined concepts.]

Dimitris: What man, Orthodoxy and Greekness?

Fotis: ↑Yes=↑unfortunately.

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Dimitris' epistemic right to define Greekness is further illustrated in this second extract, where he and Fotis disagree over the extent to which the Greek Orthodox church determines Greek identity. Rather than accepting the suggestion that the Church and Greekness are intertwined, Dimitris orients to an imagined ancient Greece of Socrates and Aristotle, seeing the influence of the church as a more recent "bastardization". In this way, Dimitris claims the right to define what being Greek means, thus positioning an implicit affiliation with the category label.

Dimitris: I also remembered my own turning point day. I was your age. (.) I was twenty six- °°twenty seven something like that. .hh a:nd I was going with my fiancée to Munich, .hh but before arriving to Munich, I also stayed in Budapest. I had to change planes,=so I thought I'd stay for two days. .h And there, (.) the world opened up. Suddenly, I found out that yes, there are also men- >good-looking men who have sex with men.< (.) >Because I found myself in a sauna something like that,< .hhh (.) uhm ↑I wa:s shocked. I didn't expect that. I mean, I didn't expect that these men I was watching and admiring, that they have sex with men. >I didn't-=I had in mind the stereotype the:- (…) what we would watch in Greek movies.< So:- ((laughs))

Fotis: I didn't expect <that> either.

Dimitris: And there when I saw it I say (.) <you were living behind the world. You're out of time and place.> You're completely- >uh:m that.<

Stamatina: So you had the stereotype of the gay:, the: effemina:te man etc.?

Dimitris: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Fotis: <Exactly.> I didn't expect it either.

((10 lines omitted))

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When it comes to Dimitris orienting to an I-position as gay, the situation is somewhat more fraught, and the theme of tension between gay and Greek positions arises, albeit somewhat implicitly. This extract comes after Fotis offered his own coming-out story, and Dimitris goes on to describe his so-called "turning point".

Category Positioning: Gay

Dimitris: Yeah, and it was all messed up at the time.=I mean, in '90 when this happened to me, '91. In '91, .hh (.) Imagine there were two channels on television. (.) two. (.) state-owned. Nothing else. (.) .h u:hm ((laughs)) Internet was not even a concept, .hh we didn't even have computers. So:: a:nd whe:n- I was- and I was telling myself that .hh I am gay but <↑I'm not like them.> So like I could see the difference.

Fotis: Yeah, exactly. ((laughs))

Dimitris: So I'm something else and ↑I don't know what it is. I haven't discovered it

Fotis: Yes, you're like am I something else? ((laughs))

Stamatina: ((laughs))

Dimitris: ↑Yes. (.) a:nd until then I thought I wa:s (.) .h a <hybrid,>

Stamatina: Yes yes yes. (.) $hybrid$

Dimitris: ((laughs)) that doesn't ha:ve a name yet. In Budapest, all right. I understood who I am now. I saw: my mirror opposite me. (.) And okay. from then on, things developed rapidly.

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Dimitris: I also remembered my own turning point day. I was your age. (.) I was twenty six- °°twenty seven something like that. .hh a:nd I was going with my fiancée to Munich, .hh but before arriving to Munich, I also stayed in Budapest. I had to change planes,=so I thought I'd stay for two days. .h And there, (.) the world opened up. Suddenly, I found out that yes, there are also men- >good-looking men who have sex with men.< (.) >Because I found myself in a sauna something like that,< .hhh (.) uhm ↑I wa:s shocked. I didn't expect that. I mean, I didn't expect that these men I was watching and admiring, that they have sex with men. >I didn't-=I had in mind the stereotype the:- (…) what we would watch in Greek movies.< So:- ((laughs))

Fotis: I didn't expect <that> either.

Dimitris: And there when I saw it I say (.) <you were living behind the world. You're out of time and place.> You're completely- >uh:m that.<

Stamatina: So you had the stereotype of the gay:, the: effemina:te man etc.?

Dimitris: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Fotis: <Exactly.> I didn't expect it either.

((10 lines omitted))

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Dimitris reports having experienced a tension between his ideal of masculinity and his beliefs about gayness, as we can see in the surprise he describes in seeing good-looking men who have sex with men. He goes on to confirm that this tension was at least partially linked to an understanding of gayness as linked to femininity, an understanding that he implicitly defines as Greek.

Category Positioning: Gay

Dimitris: Yeah, and it was all messed up at the time.=I mean, in '90 when this happened to me, '91. In '91, .hh (.) Imagine there were two channels on television. (.) two. (.) state-owned. Nothing else. (.) .h u:hm ((laughs)) Internet was not even a concept, .hh we didn't even have computers. So:: a:nd whe:n- I was- and I was telling myself that .hh I am gay but <↑I'm not like them.> So like I could see the difference.

Fotis: Yeah, exactly. ((laughs))

Dimitris: So I'm something else and ↑I don't know what it is. I haven't discovered it

Fotis: Yes, you're like am I something else? ((laughs))

Stamatina: ((laughs))

Dimitris: ↑Yes. (.) a:nd until then I thought I wa:s (.) .h a <hybrid,>

Stamatina: Yes yes yes. (.) $hybrid$

Dimitris: ((laughs)) that doesn't ha:ve a name yet. In Budapest, all right. I understood who I am now. I saw: my mirror opposite me. (.) And okay. from then on, things developed rapidly.

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Dimitris then goes on to describe his experience of this - of feeling gay but not being like "them" – as an experience of hybridity, one that he didn't know how to embody until he saw the men in the sauna in Budapest, men who illustrated a third way for him to reconcile the tension he experienced.

Category Positioning: Dimitris

Greek		gay

I've been abroad and I know
it's this bastard kind [of Greekness]

but I'm not like them
*I'm something else ... a hybrid*

I am gay

men in sauna

I didn't expect that these men that I was watching and admiring have sex with men
I saw my mirror opposite me

Across these extracts then, we see Dimitris positioning and orienting to two categories, Greek and gay, through specific claims to epistemic rights. We also find a discussion of how these two positions are in tension, through mention of an implicit orientation to Greek gender norms and a rejection of popular stereotypes of gayness in Greece. Importantly – the way that Dimitris narrates his realisation of how to resolve this tension – his turning point – is via the story of seeing the men in the sauna in Budapest, men who shared aspects of both of the positions he affiliates with – normative Greek masculinity and same-sex desire.

Greek ← - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - → gay

men in sauna
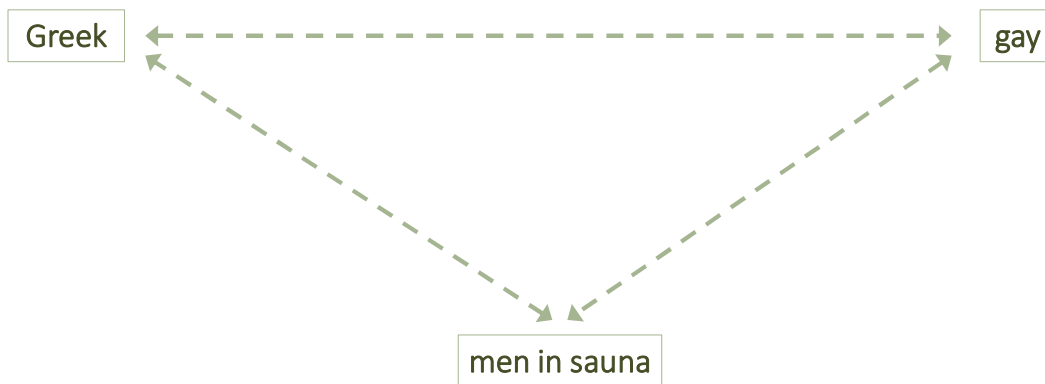
26

It's via internalizing the men in the sauna in Budapest as a symbol in his own position repertoire that Dimitris establishes a dialogic triad between the three positions: Greek, gay and the ambiguous third that the men in Budapest represent. It is then this entire triad that provides the subjective structure for Dimitris to integrate his Greek and gay positionings – not by resolving the tension between them, but by (in a sense) embracing them, and creating a new ambivalent structure that encompasses them both.

Category Positioning: Dimitris

gay

men in sauna

Greek

bear *I*-position

∘ gay male subculture emerged in 1980s
∘ based ideology of "natural masculinity" that draws heavily on working-class gender norms
∘ includes set of characteristic aesthetic (hair, body type) and social (cuddling) practices

(Wright 1997, 2001; Barrett 2017)
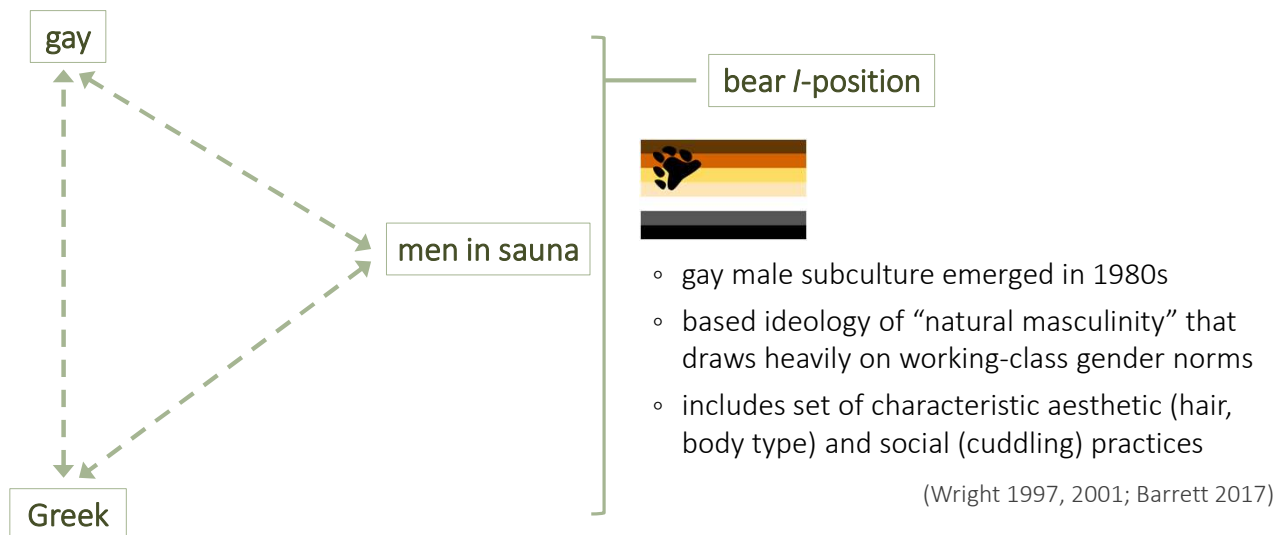
27

This dialogic linking is a generative process, giving rise to a new I-position that elsewhere in the interview, Dimitris labels as "bear" – a position that mediates between his Greek and gay identifications.

For those who are less familiar with it – the bear community is a well-known gay male subculture. It was founded in the 1980s in San Francisco, but since then has spread throughout the world. Originally, bear identity was set in opposition to more traditional gay male subcultures – including a more effeminized "queen" subculture and a more polished, hypermasculine "circuit" culture. In distinction from these two, the driving force of bear identity is what Rusty Barrett describes as an ideology of "natural masculinity" – that is, regular guys, doing regular guy things. In reality, bear culture is highly codified, and associated with specific social, bodily and aesthetic practices. But the veneer of unforced masculinity remains central to bear conceptualizations of self.

It is this bear norm that Dimitris aligns with dominant discourses of gender in Greece, thus giving him a way to link gayness and normative articulations of Greekness.

Category Refining: Laughter

"Sequences of interaction involving laughter and nonserious turns are recurrently used to accomplish serious tasks." (Holt 2013; see also Drew 1987)

"Laughter is heard as referring to something, and hearers will seek out its referent." (Jefferson 1972)

"The phrases *laughing at* and *laughing with* suggest a long-recognized distinction between the power of laughter to promote distancing, disparagement or feelings of superiority; or conversely to promote bonding and affiliation." (Glenn 1995; see also Jefferson 1972; Glenn 2003; Billig 2005)

"Laughter enables participants to treat a formulated membership category as conflicted while still allowing the speaker to index it." (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain 2013)

Having established these categories and this dialogical triad via category labels and claims to epistemic rights early on in the interview, Dimitris then spends much of the rest of the interview refining what these membership categories mean for him, and the bound attributes they are associated with.

Interactionally, Dimitris does this via laughter and other forms of non-seriousness in talk. Based on the work of Philip Glenn and Elizabeth Holt, among others, we know that nonseriousness in interaction does not necessarily have to do with humour and that "Sequences of interaction involving laughter and nonserious turns are recurrently used to accomplish serious tasks (Drew 1987)". Laughter itself is an action that functions as indexical, "[it] is heard as referring to something, and hearers will seek out its referent", thereby interactionally constructing that referent as "laughable". In doing so, shared laughter among participants in an interaction can serve both to build in-group solidarity and affiliation – what Gail Jefferson described as "laughing with" – and at the same time to exclude the laughable target – so-called "laughing at". Finally, as Grit Liebscher & Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain have argued, laughter – and particularly solo laughter – can also allow participants to mark certain categories as ambiguous, thereby "enabling them to treat a formulated membership category as conflicted while still allowing the speaker to index it".

So, in the time that I have left, we're going to look at how Dimitris uses both shared and solo laughter to refine the self that he presents. In particular, we'll see how Dimitris initiates shared laughter about emblematic figures associated with different categories as a way of redefining the contours of what membership in a given category entails.

Category Refining: Greek normativity

Dimitris: she was never homophobic,=or she had always been homophobic, I don't know which of the two.

Stamatina: ((laughs))

Dimitris: U::hm (.) ever since she went back to church and so on I felt that she was experiencing this contradiction. Because she was asking me- She was like you know what I heard? There are some camps in America where you go and you get well. ((laughs))

Stamatina: ((laughs))

Dimitris: ((laughs)) I say you get well from what? She says you're getting well, dude. Come on, you know what I mean. ((laughs)) One time we went to Stelios' birthday party. She says you had a good time? I say good. Who were you there? I say >him, him, him.< She says just men? Yeah. <Normal men?> she says- Weren't there any Regular men? I say no, we were a:ll-

Stamatina: $irregular.$ ((laughs))

Dimitris: $Regular and (…)$ ((laughs)) She lets some of these out.

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He starts off in this clip by using the figure of his sister to laugh at normative Greekness and the role of religion in Greece. We see shared laughter throughout this story, laughter that is initiated by Dimitris and that Stamatina then joins. The laughter also appears in a particular structural template: first introducing the laughable narrative – hence marking it for Stamatina – and then closing it – thus acting as an assessment of the previous story as laughable.

Category Refining: Greek homonormativity

Fotis: Uh:m look, I know (1.5) Manos and u:hm (.) Simos.

Dimitris: I don't know them.

Fotis: Of course you know them. They've been togethe:r for years-=

Dimitris: =Who? The one from Kalithea you mean?

Fotis: Yes.

Dimitris: ((laughs)) $What, they're- they've made an agreement?$

Fotis: They've made an agreement, too.

Dimitris: $Oh, yeah, man, he had told me. As soon as the pact is passed, we'll do it$ immediately.
                                                                                    ((laughing...))

Stamatina: ((laughs))

Fotis: We're talking about a couple who've been together for 30 years.

Stamatina: $O:h I see I see.$

Dimitris: Yes, yes. $They're both grandparents.=Okay, not grandparents, but anyway yes.$ ((laughs))

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We find this same kind of "bookends" structure to shared laughter in this next extract, where Dimitris refines his understanding of the category "gay" and particularly gays who orient to Greek heteronorms of family.

Category Refining: Bear normativity

Fotis:	Most people <u>don't</u> stand up fo:r diversity.
Dimitris:	No no.
Fotis:	They should do <that.> I'm gay I'm something different from the ordinary. ↓So I have <to defend the unordinary> the different. Not just <my own> particular kind of gay and specifically the kind of bear.=.h=No. The different.
Stamatina:	Right.
Dimitris:	Vasili's permanent excuse is that I don't come to pride becau:se it's humiliation.
Stamatina:	Yes, it's a ↑classic. I've heard that a lot.
Dimitris:	Yes. when- when- Was it last year that the others hid behind the bushes? ((laughs)) do you remember?
Fotis:	The year before that. yes.

Finally, we see this same template of shared laughing and nonseriousness used to critique a particular articulation of bear identity, one that's characterized by a lack of visibility and political engagement.

Category Refining: Bear normativity

Dimitris: In Sidagma ((laughs)). So we're meeting our friends from Byrona . We say are we going to pride? We are. Nice. So: we arrive as planned, .hh they call us. .h I'm like where are you I can't see you. Uhm we:ll, in- McDonald's? what's there? some coffee shop. outside Sidagma. And I go and I see them behind so:me bushes a:nd stu:ff.
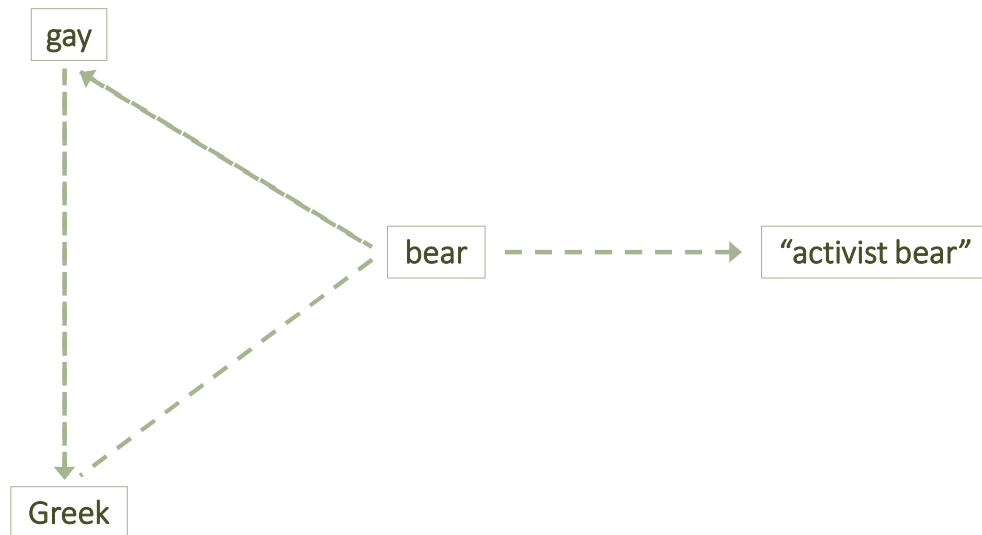
Fotis: They were ashamed.

Stamatina: <Really?> Why? ((laughs))

Dimitris: $Yes. Hiding and drinking coffee. They were ashamed.$

Stamatina: $Incredible. Incredible$

Dimitris: I say why, guys. U::hm okay, not in there, here it's mo:re, it's bette:r. Meaning let's say that they won't know we're here.

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gay

bear — → "activist bear"

Greek

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So putting this together, we see that through shared nonseriousness, Dimitris challenges particular normativities that are associated with each of the positions in the dialogical triad. The gay position laughs at and excludes normative elements of Greekness. And then the bear position laughs at and excludes homonormative gayness. Lastly, via a mocking description of bears as unengaged and non-political, we get an emergent category of an "activist bear", with which Dimitris finally aligns.

He signals, however, his awareness that this new position – the activist bear – is an ambiguous one, one characterized by tension. We see this in his use of solo - not shared - laughter in his response to Stamatina's question about whether he is involved in community activism. Or in his description of his politics as more "mainstream" than that of queer anarchist groups. In both of these extracts, and others like it, the structure of nonseriousness is different. It does not bookend descriptions of others. It is instead self-initiated solo laughter (though Stamatina also then uses laughter as a receipt token of Dimitris' claim), but essentially solo laughter that I argue, following Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, Dimitris uses to mark his "activist bear" positioning as an ambiguous and conflicted one.

Sexuality & Nation: Summary

- Dimitris enacts complex presentation of self involving the intersection and reinterpretation of multiple positions

- Category labels and epistemic rights used to orient to Greekness and gayness and the tension between them (Stivers et al. 2011; Stokoe 2012)

- "bear" *I*-position helps Dimitris mediate subjective tension and promote integration within the position repertoire

- Nonseriousness materializes dialogue between positions, allowing Dimitris to define his understanding of category membership – an understanding he recognizes and marks (cf. Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain 2013) as ambivalent and conflicted

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To summarize, in the course of over three hours of recorded conversation – of which I've only shown you small fragments here - Dimitris works to collaboratively enact a complex presentation of self based on the intersection and re-interpretation of multiple positions within his position repertoire. Via specific category labels and epistemic claims, Dimitris demonstrates an orientation to both Greekness and gayness, but also narrates the tension that exists between the two. He then posits the position of the "bear" as what DST would label a Third Position, which helps him to resolve, or at least manage, this tension. Finally, Dimitris uses shared laughter and nonseriousness strategically throughout the interview in order to further refine his understanding of the categories in question, materializing the dialogical evaluations among positions in his repertoire that characterize his dynamic and emergent sense of self, while at the same time acknowledging – through solo laughter – the ambivalent and potentially contingent nature of the subjectivity he has created.

So, unlike Igal in my previous example, I don't believe that Dimitris is working to hierarchically organize the various positions he entertains. Nevertheless, the subjectivity that emerges is one based on an internal complexity – an internal multidimensionality – that is realized and made manifest through talk in interaction

Summary

"if one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered 'person' transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which is it inevitably produced and maintained." (Butler 1990)

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By way of conclusion, and in order to summarize the main argument I am trying to make, let me end with two quotes, which – while both now nearly 30 years old – encapsulate my primary message.

The first comes from Judith Butler in the first chapter of Gender Trouble, where she remarks:

> "if one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which is it inevitably produced and maintained."

Butler's comments speak to the heart of intersectionality – as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw and those working in her footsteps, who maintain that any analysis of identity and identity-linked practice is incomplete if we do not take into account the various dimensions and forces that interanimate in the production of subjective experience.

One point that Butler does not address, and that I also think is important, is that these interlocking forces affect people differently. In other words, it is not possible to read lived experience off structural patterns alone. Instead, we also need to ask how people understand their own intersectional positioning, an understanding that is itself dynamic and under constant negotiation both through and beyond language.

Summary

"People are a product of their social and cultural context, but this does not mean that people are merely 'social dopes', passive victims of their social circumstances. The social constructionist perspective on the person … stresses joint action, dialogue, debate, conversation, conflict and discussion, both between and within people as they try to reconcile the diverse 'voices' or internal dialogues which make up their mental lives." (Wetherell & Maybin 1996)

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And this is where the second quote comes in, from a paper by Margaret Wetherell and Janet Maybin in 1996, who claim that:

> "People are a product of their social and cultural context, but this does not mean that people are merely 'social dopes', passive victims of their social circumstances. The social constructionist perspective on the person … stresses joint action, dialogue, debate, conversation, conflict and discussion, both between and within people as they try to reconcile the diverse 'voices' or internal dialogues which make up their mental lives."

Through my discussion of Igal and Dimitris, I hope to have shown that this dialogue and debate between voices in not only a mental phenomenon, but one that is enacted and accomplished through systematic patterns of variation in linguistic practice.

Summary

- Language as a critical resource in management of the self, including both dynamic negotiations of the architecture of the position repertoire (cf. Levon 2016) and dialogue between *I*-positions (cf. Hill 1995)

- DST provides method for tracing processes through which individuals enact selfhood in interaction

- Explicit theory of selfhood is crucial for mapping subjective complexity and how it is materialized through language (Johnstone 2009; Levon 2017; Woolard 2019)

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In other words, I contend that language serves as a critical resource for individuals to create, manage and position complex selves, whether that be by dynamically negotiating the architecture of their position repertoire (as in the case of Igal) or by engaging in debate and negotiation between *I*-positions (as for Dimitris). I further suggest that Dialogical Self Theory offers a useful analytical toolkit for tracing these subjective processing as they occur, ultimately enabling us to go beyond descriptions of different types of selves to understand the processes that give rise to these subjective distinctions.

Yet even abstracting away from the methodological details of DST, my main point is to argue that we need to seriously and explicitly theorise the notion of the self in sociolinguistics as that which mediates between social structure and social practice. Doing so will enable us to develop a more nuanced appreciation of the complex subjectivities of the individuals we study and of the crucial role of language in materialising that complexity.

Thank you.