

## Work that -S! Drag queens, gender, identity, and traditional Newfoundland English

Language change operates within a complex matrix of gender, class, identity, and urban-ness (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1995). The literature describes young, middle-class urban or suburban women leading change toward forms carrying overt prestige (D'Arcy 2005; Labov 1972, 2001; Trudgill 1986; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004), while men adopt urban working-class forms (Kiesling 2004, Trudgill 2001), or retain traditional and rural forms (Trudgill 1986).

In this paper, we study how a long-standing, traditional Newfoundland English speech feature, verbal s-marking outside third person singular contexts (as in 1-4), is being adopted and adapted by social groups not usually associated with traditional dialect: young urban women and drag queens. We mine three sources of data: multivariate analysis of sociolinguistic interview data (N=1090, informants = 24)) from an urbanizing community, language use questionnaires (N=225), and naturalistic recordings from the St. John's, Newfoundland drag community (N = 79, informants =8).

- (1) I always **goes** up to M's cabin on the weekends. (PH f)
- (2) We **knows** a lot of people out there too. (PH o)
- (3) I **loves** it. (PH d)
- (4) Taking pictures of me, too. **Loves**. (SJD D)

For older traditional dialect speakers, s-marking is found at high rates (43%-85%) (Clarke 1997) and is disfavoured with stative (durative) verbs, as in (2). Questionnaire responses and multivariate analysis of recorded data show that this constraint is eroded, or even reversed, in younger generations. Among young urban women, the traditional uses are almost absent, and s-marking is associated with a narrow lexical set of statives – *likes, hates, loves, wants, needs*, and especially the collocation *I loves* + object, as in (3). In the drag recordings, most speakers employ *only* this restricted use, and core members of the group have extended it to a fixed expression, Topic + *loves/hates*, as in (4).

We demonstrate how this progression reflects multiple steps in the reanalysis of the social indexing of verbal –s. The form's saliency as a stereotype of Newfoundland speech leads to the adoption of its previously most marked uses, with stative verbs, as a totem of local identity by non-dialect speakers, paralleling the adoption by white youth of AAE pre-nominal copula deletion (Cutler 1999). The association of lexicalized uses with young urban women leads to a reanalysis of the form as a gender marker, from which its most salient type becomes a resource for the performance of linguistic and social identity by Newfoundland's drag community (Barrett 1998). We show how this process relates to other gendered local speech, and more importantly how traditionally rural and highly indexed features can be adapted to perform new social work in rapidly changing communities.

## Selected References

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