Phonetic Cues in the Evaluation of Gay Male Speech in Canadian English and Québec French

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1.1 Introduction

Speech patterns associated with a speaker's sexual orientation are a fascinating component of sociolinguistics, which has only entered the limelight of study relatively recently. While most people agree that there is a recognizable "gay accent," there is nothing to suggest that this "accent" is produced by physiological differences. It remains then, that gay speech styles[1] are social constructions.

The origin of this style is still mysterious. Several gay men I spoke to[2] recalled stories of intentionally "putting on a gay accent" when they first came out, to make it very clear to everyone that they were gay. Some said that after a few weeks, they returned to their normal speech while others did not. On the other hand, one individual who sounded particularly gay to me, said that he had always spoken that way and that he and his straight brother are often mistaken for each other. Studying the actual development of gay-sounding speech is far beyond this study, but it is possible to study what factors influence speech popularly *judged* to be gay.

The study of gay speech can be a fragile and complicated task. In talking to people who are actively part of the gay community,[3] I learned that some people's reluctance to participate in research stems from a fear that findings will be used against them in some way, even if that was not the original intention. Study of gay speech also requires recognition of the fact that the gay

[1] I write the plural form, because there is wide variation in speech recognized as sounding gay.
[2] Queer McGill men's discussion group, Friday 18 October 2003
[3] Queer McGill group

community is in many ways a microcosm of mainstream society, meaning that in many ways it just as complex.

> *First, the assumption that there is a singular gay way of speaking homogenizes the diversity within the gay community, erasing, or at least deeming unimportant to sociolinguistic inquiry the many subcultures comprising the community... Membership in one of the subcultures often takes precedence over a more general affiliation with the gay community... Thus treating the meaning of a linguistic feature as generally as gay ignores the community that has worked to give the feature meaning.*[4]

Dealing with perceived-as-gay speech, rather than trying to identify traits of different subcultures of the gay community also serves to resolve this complexity. The test I use to determine what speech does indeed sound gay, distinguishes only between straight and non-straight sounding voices, without accounting for disparity between subcultures. For the purpose of brevity, I will refer to non-straight speech as gay speech.

In order to study perceived-as-gay speech, I used a subjective evaluation test in which I asked listeners about the confidence with which they felt that the speakers they heard were either straight or gay. The premise of this type of test is that "social attitudes towards language are extremely uniform throughout a speech community"[5] and so by asking a limited number speakers for their judgments, one can generalize about the probable judgments of the entire speech community represented by the listeners. In this study the speech communities used are Anglophone and Francophone Montréalers.

Another advantage to dealing with perceived-as-gay speech is that it gives more allowance to the variation in the speech community as a whole, by accounting for the overlap between gay and straight speakers. Even within a single language, such variation exists that

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[4] Podesva, Robert J, Sarah J. Roberts and Kathryn Campbell-Kibler. (2001) in Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn, Robert J. Podesva, sarah J. Roberts and Andrew Wong (Eds.*), Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice,* p 177.

[5] Labov (1972), 248.

some gay men do not sound gay at all and likewise that some straight men do sound gay. The subjective evaluation test allows me place all of my speakers on a straight-gay continuum. I can then compare the proportions of my phonetic variables to speakers' positions on the continuum to pinpoint some of the phonetic cues listeners use to categorize the sexual orientation of male speakers. In addition, the subjective evaluation test makes it possible to examine the listeners' accuracy of judgment.

By conducting my study in the largely bilingual Montréal speech community, I have been able to compare gay styles between the Canadian English and Québec French. The combination of the high degree of bilingualism in individual speakers and the common influence of media creates an environment in which some social patterns are shared. Because of these factors, I hypothesize that the two speech communities share some standards of evaluation and that correlations found in English will also be found in French.

1.2 Selection of Variables

Gay-sounding speech distinguishes itself from other speech styles on many levels.[6] While the most confident identification of gay-sounding speech no doubt arises from hearing a combination of specific discourse styles, word choice and phonetic variables, this study is limited to phonetic aspects of male speech.

The independent variables I chose to examine come from my own observations, discussions with peers about what makes people sound gay and also from previous studies[7]. The

[6] Rogers, Bruce. (1972) *The Queen's Vernacular : a Gay Lexicon*. San Francisco : Straight Arrow Books. as cited by Podesva on p 177.

[7] Crist, Sean (1997) Duration of Onset Consonants in Gay Male Stereotyped Speech. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 4.3.53 – 70. found that in imitations of gay speech /s/ and /l/ were longer. Rogers, Smyth, and Jacobs (2000) Vowel and Sibilant Duration in Gay- and Straight-sounding Male Speech. Paper presented at the International Gender and Language Association Conference 1, Stanford. found that /s/ , /z/ and /l/ are longer in gay sounding speech as well. These references were cited in Podesva on p 182.

most commonly reported attributes of gay sounding speech were wider pitch ranges and sometimes speaking with a lisp. Also, I learned that higher verbal ability is often associated with gay males and so I analyze the number of reading errors they made. In conjunction with a study by Podesva et al., I chose to examine the duration of /s/ rather than its place of articulation. According to Ladefoged in *The Sounds of the World's Languages*, the "English s usually has a constriction in the middle of what we refer to as the alveolar region,"[8] but for all English sibilants, /s/ and /z/, place of articulation can vary between apical and laminal while remaining non-contrastive[9] allophones of the same phoneme. Stereotypical lisps use an interdental /s/. I examine duration because I think that listeners will have more accurate judgment and more attention drawn by the length of the segment rather than its place of articulation. I chose onset /s/ as a variable because it is significantly longer than medial /s/, as I will show, and it therefore demands more of a listener's attention.

All of the variables analyzed are continuous. The first dependent variable is what I will call the gender ranking of the speaker. This is a number between 1 (representing a straight sound) and 4 (representing a gay sound) which I calculate for each speaker by averaging the judgments of listeners in the subjective evaluation test. The second set of dependent variables is as follows:

1) pitch range (measured in Hz)
2) fundamental frequency F0 (measured in Hz)
3) duration of onset /s/ (measured in milliseconds) - contrasted with the duration of medial /s/
4) number of reading errors

[8] Ladefoged (1996) 146.
[9] ibid, 150.

I use the second set to compare the data between straight and gay men. I also use it, in conjunction with the gender ranking, to find correlations as to which phonetic cues listeners use to judge the sexual orientation of a speaker.

My hypothesis is that the correlations found on the straight-gay spectrum in English will also be manifest in the French data. Specifically, wider pitch range, higher fundamental frequency, long onset /s/ durations and fewer reading errors will be associated with gay-sounding speech.

1.3 Style

A relevant stylistic distinction is made by Podesva et al in their 2001 study of gay styles. They discriminate between linguistically expressed social meaning "relating directly to the immediate context of the discourse participants" and meaning which involves "the construction of personal or stylistic identities."[10] In this paper, I address the latter aspect of style relating to the construction and categorization of stylistic identity, rather than context specific variation within a speaker's idiolect.

My analysis focuses on data collected from reading passages. I qualify style according to William Labov's theory which interprets style based on the speaker's attention to speech.[11] This one-dimensional approach to style has been criticized because "it does not reveal whether categories shape linguistic practice or are themselves derivative of language use."[12] In the case of this study, the attention to speech method for describing style is sufficient because I analyze only reading style and the relevant social categories of straight and gay are determined by the subjective evaluation test.

[10] Podesva, 175.
[11] Labov pp 79-85 on contextual styles
[12] Podesva, 178.

While the reading passage provides very little data on style shifts, it does make for a very rigorous test of the differences between gay and straight speech and the factors used to categorize them. It also provides continuous and controlled elicitation of the independent variables. Also, many situational factors for which the attention to speech theory is criticized[13] such as topic, the addressee, and the mode of interaction are controlled for.

2.1 Method, Data Collection

The data for the study was collected through brief interviews in which the speakers read a passage from a novel. For the reading, I selected an excerpt from a fight scene of S.E. Hinton's book, *The Outsiders*[14] because I thought that the description of the action would be appropriate for emotive reading. For the French sample, I translated the reading passage into French. Based on the reaction of the readers to my imperfect translation, I now realize that I should have selected something written originally in French.

To gather participants, I posted adds on the McGill classifieds, the Queer McGill list serve and bulletin boards around campus. This was relatively unsuccessful for Anglophones and completely unsuccessful for Francophones. I resorted to approaching men in cafés in Montréal's gay village and on the McGill University campus. This affected the interviews by making the ages of speakers inconsistent[15] between gay and straight as well as between English and French. Also, some interviews were conducted in quiet settings while others have background noises.[16]

The people selected were interviewed in their native language, which was either Canadian English or Québec French. The only exceptions to this were a few Anglophones who had actually grown up with another language (neither French nor English) but who had been

[13] Bell, Alan. (1984) Language style as audience design. *Language and Society*. 13 pp 145-204.
[14] pp 50-51 See appendix I
[15] see Table 2.1.1
[16] The background noise does not interfere with the analysis but it may have affected the subjective evaluation.

educated primarily in English and who insisted that English was their most comfortable means of expression. I could not detect a foreign accent in these cases.

I recorded the interviews on my laptop using a headset microphone and SoniClear® RecorderPro 3. Speakers were asked to read the passage "as if they were reading aloud to kids." After the reading passage which took approximately a minute and a half, we had a casual conversation for a few minutes. Off the record, I asked each man about his age, sexual orientation and degree of bilingualism in English and French.

	Straight		Gay	
	code	age	code	age
English	E001	20	E003 (bi)	19
	E002	21	E004	22
	E005	23	E012	42
	E006	20	E013	21
	E007	20	E014	23
	E008	19	E015	19
	E009	20	E016	51
	E010	19		
	E011	20		
French	F002	28	F001	42
	F004	22	F003	45
	F007	29	F005 (bi)	17
	F009	27	F006	40
			F008 (bi)	28

Table 2.1.1
For the 16 Anglophones interviewed, the average age was 24 years with a standard deviation of 9.15.

For the more limited French sample, the average age of the nine men interviewed was 31 years with a standard deviation of 9.44.

2.2 Subjective Evaluation

I chose young women as the listeners in my subjective evaluation test for several reasons. They are easy to identify, which was important because I conducted this part of the study by approaching university-aged[17] women in libraries and cafés in and around McGill University and Concordia University. Young women were also a good choice because they are generally status conscious and fully involved in societal norms while being personally uninvolved in what they

[17] see Table 2.2.1

were listening to, as they themselves are neither gay nor straight men. Additionally, "women are more sensitive than men to overt sociolinguistic values." [18]

	number of listeners	average age (years)	standard deviation
English	20	19.95	3.14
French	18	21.69	1.70

Table 2.2.1

After confirming that that the women I approached were native speakers of the same language as the men to whom they were listening, I explained that I was doing a linguistic study on gay male speech so I needed to know what sounded gay to people.

The women listened to a short sample from each speaker[19]. For this I used Praat[20] to cut out identical passages for speakers of the same language. I edited out major errors and deviations from the reading passage such as laughter, swearing and mistakes that caused the entire sentence to be reread. Later I will discuss the effect of the smaller errors that remained for judgment. The passages I used were approximately 30 seconds long and they were taken from the middle of the original reading passage.[21] The women were asked to rate each speaker on the following scale.

This man sounds straight	I **think** this man sounds straight	I **think** this man sounds gay	This man sounds gay
1	2	3	4

[18] Labov, 243.
[19] The women listened on my Sony minidisk player.
[20] version 1.4.1
[21] see Appendix I

I then calculated a gender ranking[22] for each speaker by averaging the score given them by each listener. That allowed me to make a continuous ranking of my English speakers and my French speakers.

English ranking	code
1.30	E009
1.60	E016
1.65	E010
1.80	E006
1.83	E008
1.85	E003
2.15	E001
2.20	E012
2.55	E007
2.60	E014
2.70	E015
3.00	E013
3.00	E011
3.50	E004
3.70	E005
3.70	E002

Table 2.2.2.a

Table 2.2.2.b

Tables 2.2.2.a and 2.2.2.b show where each speaker fits on the straight-gay spectrum made from the subjective evaluation test. The dotted lines separate scores between 1 and 2.5 which are taken to represent straight-sounding people and scores between 2.5 and 4 which represent people judged to sound gay.

French ranking	code
1.44	F007
1.89	F004
2.22	F002
2.44	F005
2.50	F001
2.50	F006
2.72	F003
2.78	F008
2.94	F009

2.3 Analysis of Variables

2.3.1 Pitch Range

Pitch range for each speaker was determined by finding the maximum and minimum pitch for each phrase in the section of the interview that was used in the subjective evaluation test. I determined phrase boundaries by listening and looking for the rise and fall of normal declarative phrases. The number of phrases varies slightly because of different reading fluency and style. In Praat I located the maximum and minimum Hertz[23] values for each phrase then I found the difference[24] between them. I then averaged the ranges for each speaker.

[22] To ensure that the order of the list did not influence the gender ranking for each speaker, I had half the women listen to the men in one order, then I reordered the same recordings again, being careful that the first and last speakers were differnt.

[23] A logarithmic semitone scale is closer than the linear Hertz scale to the peception scale of the actual human ear. This is particularly significant when comparing pitch between males and females because "A larger change in frequency at a higher absolute range of a female voice is needed to produce the same perceptual effect as a smaller change in the frequency of a lower

2.3.2 Fundamental Frequency (F0)

Using the same phrase boundaries as when analyzing pitch range, I used the "get pitch" feature in Praat to calculate the average pitch for each phrase. I then averaged the averages to find the overall average pitch, or fundamental frequency, of each speaker.

2.3.3 Duration of /s/

I first looked at the duration of onset /s/ in one-syllable non-functional words from the section of the interviews used in the evaluation test. I excluded longer words because they were more difficult to compare and functional words, such as *sa, sur*, and *se,* because they are very short and noticeably unstressed. In the English sample, the words used were *spit* and *soaked* and in French they were two tokens of the word *souffle*. Using Praat, I measured the duration of the entire word containing the /s/ in question. Then I measured the duration of the /s/ and divided them to get a percentage representing the relative duration of the /s/. I did this to account for differences in overall reading speed.

For the purpose of comparison, I also picked out one word with a medial /s/ and used the same process to get a measure of it relative to the word which contained it. In English, I looked at *gasping*, which fell at the end of a phrase, and in French I looked at *puissante,* which was not phrase final but was fully pronounced.

In many cases, the end of the underlying /s/ was regressively voiced by the following vowel. In my measurements, I included the surface representation of both the [s] and the assimilated [z].

2.3.4 Number of Reading Errors

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pitch voice." (Weatherall, 51) This disadvantage of using the Hz scale is less significant in this study because I am only comparing male voices and the absolute pitches differ less than between males and females.

[24] All calculations and statistics were done using Microsoft Excell spreadsheets.

It is difficult to quantify the number of errors because one cannot know the relative influence different types of errors will have on the listener. I gave each reader an error index value based on the following values. One syllable errors, such as "le… le visage" are worth 1 point. Extremely irregular pauses, such as "sweat…. shirt" are worth 1 point. Inserting a word which was not written, and hesitating when realizing the error is worth 1 point. False starts of two or three words which are repeated are worth 2 points. An example of this is "all got…. got all." Several readers had a generally choppy reading style which was not possible to account for in this index. The analysis of errors does not reveal anything about the actual differences between straight and gay speakers because this measurement of error accounts only for the errors which I was not able to edit out, not the number of errors that actually occurred during the reading.

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Accuracy of Judgment

In addition to uncovering correlations between cues used to judge the sexual orientation of a speaker, the subjective evaluation test revealed that inaccuracy of judgments based on identical reading passages. The women did report a high proportion of gay-sounding men. This is likely because they were concentrating on their judgments and also because of a methodological error. The headset microphone I used to record the interviews caused the /s/'s to sound more pronounced than they actually were, causing several women, in both languages to tell me that *all* of the men sounded like they had lisps, which are commonly associated with gay speech.

In English, the average gender ranking was 2.41 for straight men 2.49 for gay men. While the gay average is higher, the difference is not significant.[25] The French difference was more pronounced, but still not significant,[26] with the straight average gender ranking at 2.12 and the gay average ranking at 2.59.

When listeners assigned a 1 or a 4 to a speaker, it indicated a confident judgment about that speaker. In English, if we ignore scores of 2 and 3, there were 10 unanimous confident judgments made. Four of them were incorrect, as shown in table 3.1.1.1

code	unanimous judgment	strength of judgment	actual orientation	correct / incorrect
E002	gay	14	straight	incorrect
E003	straight	8	gay	incorrect
E004	gay	13	gay	correct
E005	gay	15	straight	incorrect
E006	straight	8	straight	correct
E008	straight	8	straight	correct
E009	straight	14	straight	correct
E010	straight	12	straight	correct
E013	gay	11	gay	correct
E016	straight	9	gay	incorrect

Table 3.1.1.1

The strength of judgment column indicates the number of confident judgments given to the speaker. The maximum number in that column is 20 because there were 20 judges.

By the same standards of confident evaluation, the French listeners correctly identified speakers F004 and F007 as straight with the 8 and 12 as the respective strengths of judgment.

3.2 Straight -Gay comparisons

Stepping away from the evaluation of gay speech, my data shows that although gay men used a slightly wider pitch range in the reading passage, there was no significant difference between the average pitch ranges of gay and straight in English or French. For English,[27] the average straight pitch range was 58.08 Hz and the average gay pitch range was only slightly

[25] one tailed t-test with two-sample unequal variance with $p = 0.425$
[26] t-test with $p = 0.119$
[27] t-test with $p = 0.287$

wider at 63.96 Hz. In French,[28] the average straight pitch range was 88.68 Hz and the average gay pitch range was 106.32 Hz.

There is also no significant difference in English or French in the average fundamental frequencies of gay and straight men in the reading passage selected. English straight men used an average frequency of 117.24 Hz which was insignificantly[29] higher than the English gay men at 111.40 Hz. The French men showed an even more insignificant[30] difference with straight average at 142.44 Hz and the gay men at 142.17 Hz.

Interestingly, the Francophones interviewed used a significantly higher fundamental frequency than did the Anglophones. Regardless of sexual orientation, the French men's average F0 was 142.29 while the English men's was 114.69. A t-test determines that this is a very significant difference with $p = 0.001613$.

Neither the Anglophones nor the Francophones show a significant difference in between the relative duration of the monosyllabic onset /s/. The straight English men had an average of 44.61% /s/ duration. The gay English average was 43.80% which is not significantly different.[31] Similarly, the straight French average of 35.11% /s/ duration and the gay French average of 36.91% are not significant.[32]

[28] t-test with $p = 0.181$
[29] t-test with $p = 0.287$
[30] t-test with $p = 0.492$
[31] t-test with $p = 0.398$
[32] t-test with $p = 0.351$

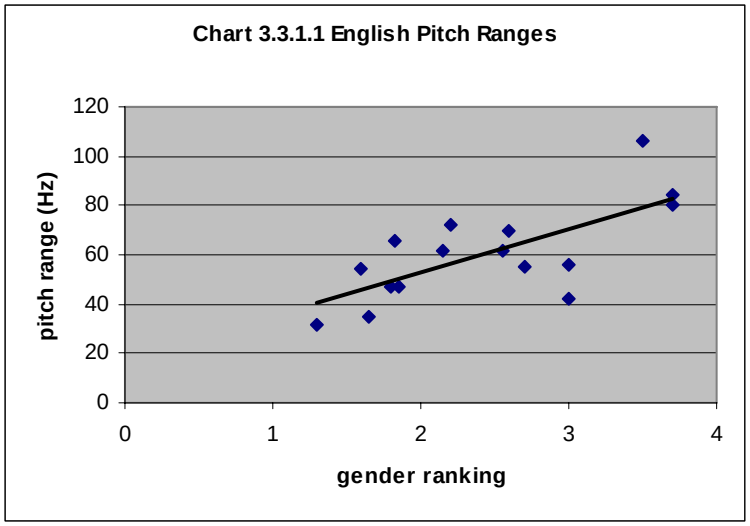
3.3 Judgment Scale Correlations

3.3.1 Pitch Range

Pitch range is one of the strongest correlates of emotion and a wide range is also associated with effeminate speech.[33] Some readers felt more comfortable reading aloud than others and this is manifest partly by the amount of focus they gave to reading "emotively," as they were instructed.

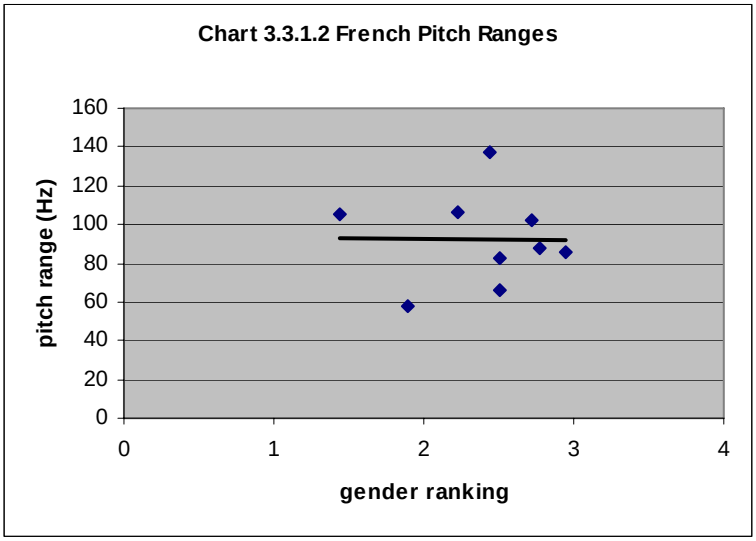
As noted in 2.3.1, the number of phrases used in calculating the average pitch range varied slightly based on the readers' fluency and style. In English, the number of phrases in the sample that was evaluated and analyzed ranged from 11 to 15. The number of phrases varied between 8 and 11, in French.

The English sample shows a strong positive[34] correlation between wider pitch ranges and higher confidence and consensus in judging a speaker to be gay. This correlation is shown visually in Chart 3.3.1.1. Recall from section 2.2 that the x-axis represents the straight-gay continuum where 1 is confidently straight and 4 is confidently gay.



[33] Yuasa, 193.
[34] Pearson product r = 0.714

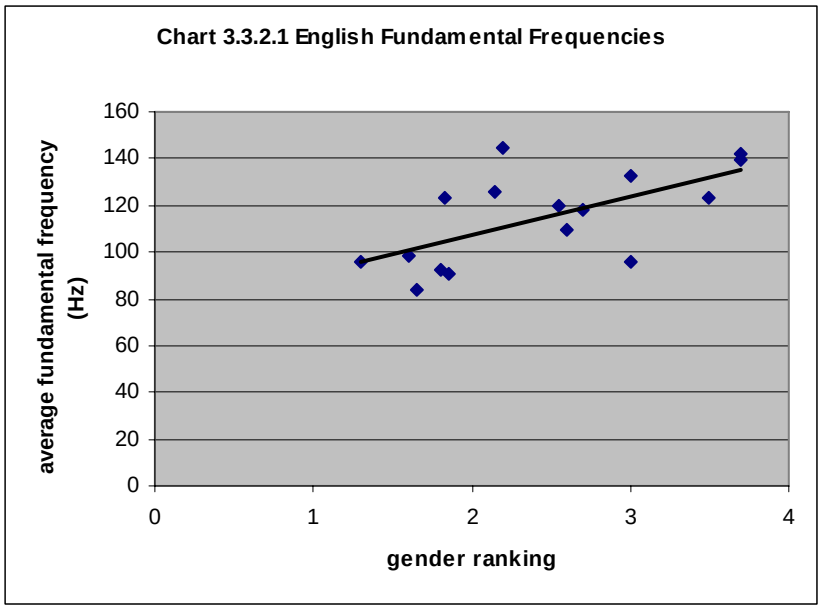
The French data does not concur with the English data. The Pearson product has r = -0.01921, indicating a weak negative correlation. Chart 3.3.1.2 shows this lack of correlation. It is unclear whether this discrepansy between English and French is due to different judgement cues in the two languages or to a lack of sufficient French data.



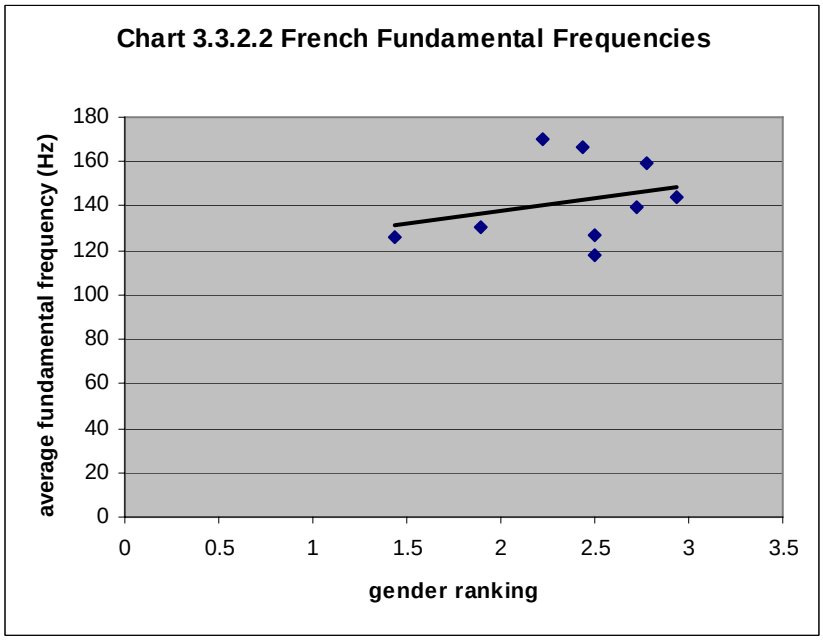
3.3.2 Fundamental Frequency (F0)

The fundamental frequency (F0) of a sound is generally measured in Hz and can be equated to the pitch of that sound which is used by the human ear to place the sound on a scale ranging from high to low.[35] English shows a strong positive[36] correlation between a speaker's F0 and his ranking on the straight-gay perception spectrum. Chart 3.3.2.1 shows this correlation.

[35] Ladefoged (2001) 164.
[36] Pearson product with r = 0.641



French shows a weaker positive[37] correlation between higher F0's and the speaker's gender ranking.

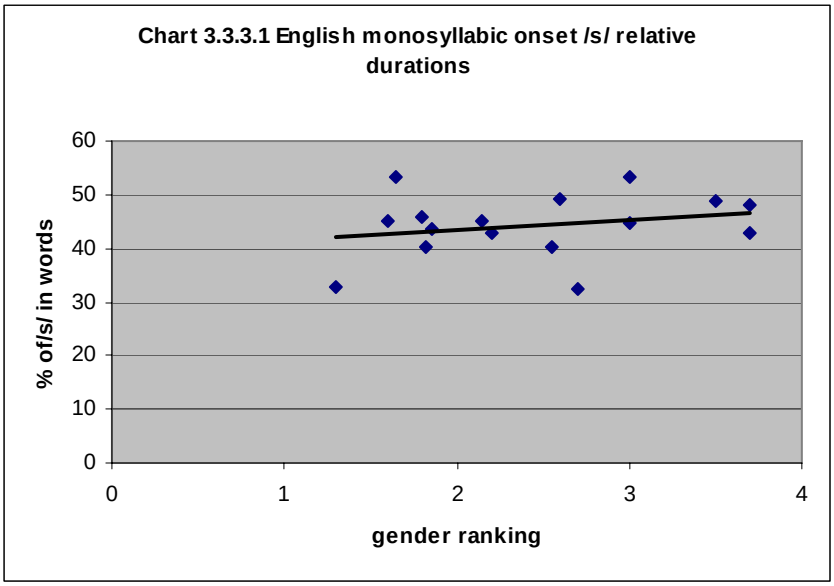


[37] Pearson product with r = 0.285

3.3.3 Duration of /s/

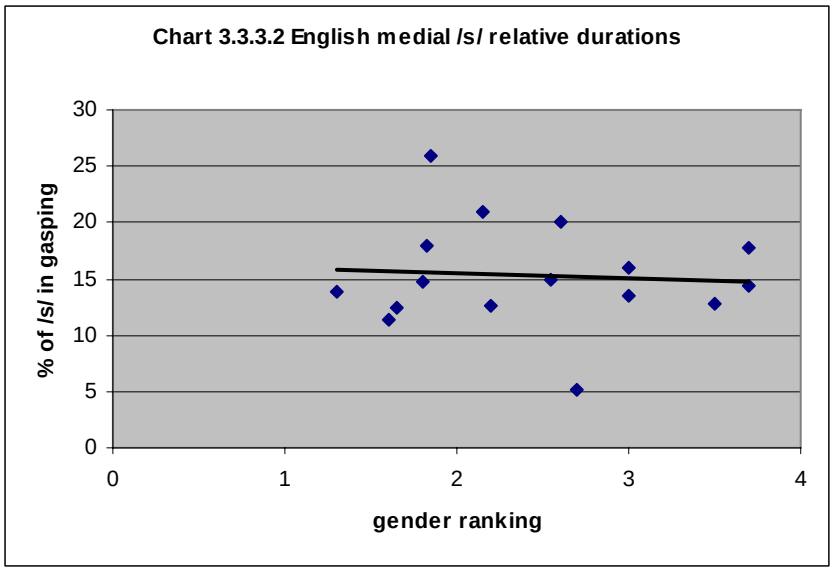
Both English and French showed some correlation between the relative duration of onset /s/ in monosyllabic words and the speaker's gender ranking. This correlation does not appear in the relative duration of medial /s/ in either language.

In English, the average of the relative durations of the /s/ in the monosyllabic words *soaked* and *spit* shows a slight positive correlation[38] with the gender rankings of the speakers. This correlation is shown in Chart 3.3.3.1.

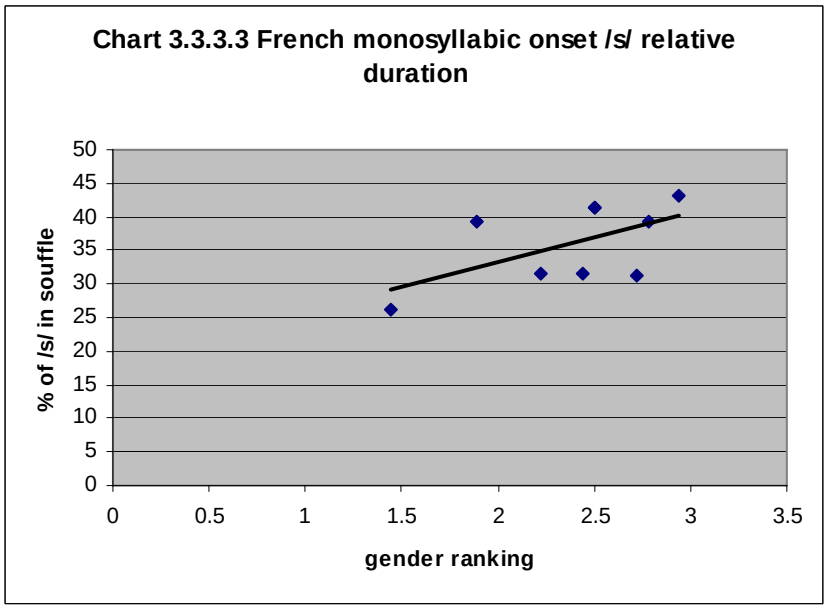


The relative duration of /s/ does not show even a slight positive correlation when we examine medial instances of /s/. In fact, there is a very weak negative correlation[39] between /s/ duration and gender ranking. In terms of actual length, medial /s/ are generally much shorter than onset /s/.

[38]Pearson product with r = 0.2502
[39]Pearson product with r = - 0.08173

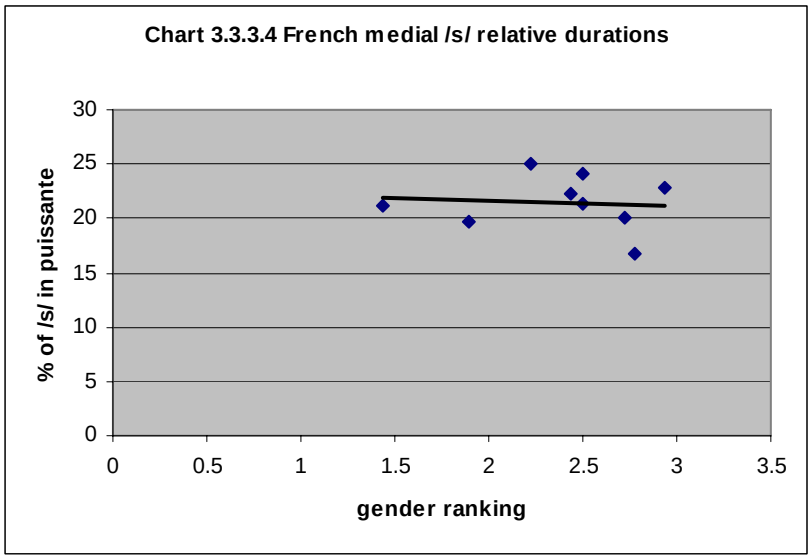


For the average relative duration of the two monosyllabic tokens of *souffle*, French shows a fairly strong positive correlation[40] with the gender ranking of the speaker, as shown in Chart 3.3.3.3. It is surprising that souffle shows a stronger correlation than the other words containing /s/ because the Francophones were inconsistent as to whether they pronounced the schwa at the end of the word, making more variation in the overall length of the word and thus the relative duration of the onset /s/.



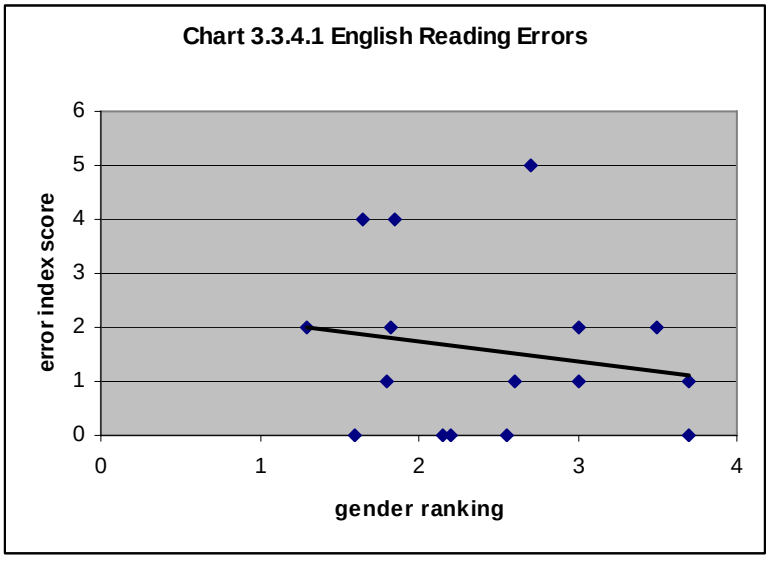
[40]Pearson product with r = 0.571

As in the English data, the relative duration of the medial /s/ in *puissante*, does not show the same correlation. It shows a similarly weak negative correlation[41] to that of the English medial /s/.

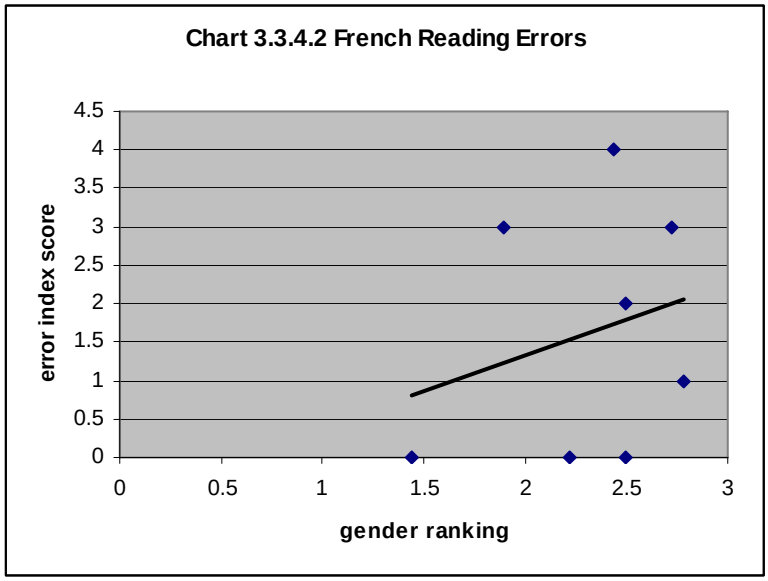


3.3.4 Number of Reading Errors

Neither English nor French showed a correlation between the number of quantifiable errors and the gender ranking of the speakers. English shows a very slight negative correlation[42] while French shows a comparably slight positive correlation,[43] as shown in Charts 3.3.4.1 and 3.3.4.2.



[41] Pearson product with r = - 0.0819
[42] Pearson product with r = - 0.178
[43] Pearson product with r = 0.1712



4.1 Analysis and Discussion

4.1.1 Subjective Evaluation

The subjective evaluation test showed that given data from a conservative test, such as a reading passage, listeners cannot consistently pick out the straight or gay speakers. The English subjective evaluation test shows a higher degree of confidence than does the French, but a lower degree of accuracy. The English test did result in gender ranking scores of 3, 3, 3.5, 3.7 and 3.7 which reflect general agreement as to the gay-sound of the speaker. At the same time though, table 3.1.1.1 shows that 4 out of 10 very confident unanimous judgments[44] in English were incorrect.

The French data shows a higher degree of accuracy in the strong unanimous judgments, but no French speaker was assigned a gender ranking score higher than 2.94. On the scale between 1 and 4, where 2.5 to 4 represents a gay judgment, event the highest French score of 2.94 does not confidently rank the speaker as gay.

[44] Confident unanamous judgments are those where, ignoring 2's and 3's, a speaker was unanamously assigned 1's or 4's.

4.1.2 Straight Gay Comparisons

The comparisons between straight and gay men showed no significant distinctions on any of the variables in either language. Although this is based on limited data, it confirms the theory that existence gay-sounding speech stems from a stylistic creation, rather than any physiological difference between straight and gay men. Tables 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.1.2 show the comparisons between straight and gay men, none of which are significantly different.

Table 4.1.1.1

English	
variable	t-test p value
pitch range	0.287
F0	0.287
relative duration of monosyllabic onset /s/	0.398

Table 4.1.1.2

French	
variable	t-test p value
pitch range	0.181
F0	0.492
relative duration of monosyllabic onset /s/	0.351

4.1.3 Correlations

As shown in Tables 4.1.3.1 and 4.1.3.2 the order of importance and the significance for subjective evaluation of straight or gay speech of the variables studied is not the same between French and English. Contrary to my hypothesis, the most important variables in English are pitch range followed by F0, while in French the only significant correlational variable is the relative duration of the onset /s/, which is questionable due to the variable pronunciation of the schwa at the end of *souffle*.

The tables above show that longer relative durations of onset /s/ are perceived to be markers, which are consciously associated with gay speech in French. English did not show onset /s/ as a strong marker. This may have been due to a methodological error such as not sufficiently taking stress patterns in to consideration. As cited in the introduction, Crist (1997) and Rogers et al (2000) did find patterns which associated longer sibilant onsets with stereotypically gay speech.

My interviews elicited conservative speech, which was not stereotypically "flamboyant" and that could be why English shows no strong correlation with the duration of /s/. It is clear in both languages that the relative duration of medial /s/ is not correlated to a speaker's gender ranking.

Pitch range and errors could be considered together as a measure of the readers' skill and ability to keep the attention of the listener. It is difficult to combine the two measurements into a quantifiable variable of reading fluency. Here, Labov's theory of style as attention to speech comes into play because some speakers were considerably more uncomfortable being recorded. The observer's paradox, which says that it is impossible to collect true vernacular speech if the speaker knows that he or she is being recorded, is relevant only for the comparison between actual straight and gay speakers, because the subjective evaluation test eliminates the problem for the correlations between variables and gender ranking.

Table 4.1.3.1 **Table 4.1.3.2**

These tables show the order the correlations found between the variables listed and the ranking of the speakers on the straight-gay spectrum. Pearson products with r greater than 0.5 indicate fairly strong correlations.

English

variable	**Pearson product**
pitch range	0.714
F0	0.641
relative duration of monosyllabic onset /s/	0.250
reading errors	- 0.178
relative duration of monosyllabic medial /s/	- 0.0817

French

variable	**Pearson product**
relative duration of monosyllabic onset /s/	0.571
F0	0.285
reading errors	0.172
pitch range	- 0.0192
relative duration of monosyllabic medial /s/	- 0.0819

There are many possible reasons for these differences. Most importantly, the French sample of only 9 men was considerably more limited than the English sample of 16 men.

The differences could also reflect real differences in the standards of evaluation of the two languages. To take a social constructionalist approach, different standards of evaluation are likely a result of different standards of masculinity. As shown in 3.2, regardless of sexual

orientation, French men use a higher F0 than English men. This could explain why F0 has strong positive correlation with gay-sounding speech in English, but not in French. A speaker's basic fundamental frequency is the product of the fundamental frequency at the larynx and the changes made to it by the resonators,[45] but it can be altered, both consciously and subconsciously.

Evidence of a speaker's ability to alter his fundamental frequency for social reasons can be seen within individuals, between speakers of a single language and cross-linguistically. A 1992 study by Ohara found that Japanese women who also spoke English used a higher pitch when they were speaking Japanese "because of the different expectations about femininity and pitch in those two cultures."[46] Transsexuals, both male-to-female and female-to-male, successfully change their F0 to match a pitch appropriate to the gender which they adopt.[47] Cross-culturally, Graddol and Swann (1989) controlled for physical size differences and found different average speaking pitches across different cultures.[48]

4.2 Discussion

My data suggests that there is no real difference between straight and gay men as a whole in a conservative reading style. Nonetheless, the subjective evaluation test shows that standards exist by which people are willing to judge the sexual orientation of a speaker. Because these standards and stereotypes exist, it follows that the "gay accent" also exists and that it must be a social construction on some level. While still recognizing that some straight men sound gay, and that some gay men sound totally straight, one can presume that a gay-sounding style emerges at

[45] Weatherall, 49 – 50.
[46] ibid, 52.
[47] ibid, 51.
[48] ibid 51.

or after puberty, perhaps in conjunction with the speaker's coming out. Thus, it is likely that the markers of gay speech are lower-level phonetic rules which are analyzed to be closer to the surface representation of the speech[49] and more likely to be contextual than the other social and ethnic trends acquired by the speaker at a younger age.

For these reason, a study with more complex stylistic elicitations would likely be more revealing. For this, Labov's attention to speech theory would not be sufficient. Rather, Bell's theory of style as audience design should be used. In my study, for example, the men might have been influenced by me, a young, straight, female so that they produced less extreme straight or gay styles. The most interesting data might come from interviewers who are males of the same sexual orientation as the speaker. Regardless of the interviewer and the stylistic context, I predict that there would still be imperfect accuracy of judgment when it comes to sexual orientation of the speaker. Another possible future study could compare the accuracy of judgment between reading styles and conversation styles.

Future studies could also examine the affect of age on the evaluation of sexual orientation. In English, the second straightest-sounding person was gay, but he was also the oldest man in the data. It may be that some quality of his voice was associated with both older age and straight orientation. This individual lives with his partner and said that he avoids the gay village and the bar scene. A study which controlled for age and used an index of activity within the gay community and among the subcultures referred to in the introduction could be used to better account for the variation among gay speakers such as the older gay man who was judged to be straight.

Although it should be confirmed by a larger study, my data shows that speakers of Canadian English and Québec French do not share consistent evaluative norms in their

[49] Labov, 251.

judgments of sexual orientation. In addition seems that the ability to judge sexual orientation with even the slightest degree of accuracy based on conservative speech is an ability that requires a native speaker's degree of fluency in the language. Foreign accents in Montréal also complicate the standards of evaluation. Several gay Anglophones explained to me that they often have difficulty determining whether someone is "gay or French Canadian."[50] While this phenomenon is a combination of speech and appearance, it still shows that significant differences exist cross-linguistically and that a speaker's style (indicating sexual orientation) does not necessarily operate successfully in other languages.

The study of gay speech is a huge potential field of study. The recognition that our society operates with more than two genders[51] opens the door to more detailed sociolinguistic studies. Studies as far back as Fischer (1958) could be replicated to place gay men in comparison to straight men and women on variables such as the use of non-standard /in/ in comparison to standard /iŋ/. It would be very interesting as well, to study gay men in relation to change in progress and hypercorrection. The study of gay men could add considerably to the theory of the role of covert prestige in change in progress.

5.1 Conclusion

This study reveals that people cannot accurately distinguish straight and gay men based on their reading style which allows for very little personal expression. Also, neither English nor French manifest a significant difference between straight and gay men's usage of the phonetic variables analyzed in this study. English showed relatively strong correlations between gay-evaluated speech and pitch range and fundamental frequency. French showed a strong

[50] Queer McGill group
[51] gender is a social construction which goes beyond biological sex

correlation only with the relative duration of /s/ in monosyllabic words. From the straight-gay comparisons and the correlations found, it is clear that none of the variables I analyzed are specifically gay features and that when it comes to identifying gay men, the whole voice is more than the sum of its parts. The comparison between French and English does not show parallel correlations in the variables used to evaluate gender-identified speech.

Appendix I Reading Passages

The italicized portions were used in the subjective evaluation section.

I was getting mad. I was hating them enough to lose my head.

"You know what a greaser is?" Bob asked. "White trash with long hair."

I felt the blood draining from my face. I've been cussed out and sworn at, but nothing ever hit me like that did. Johnnycake made a kind of gasp and his eyes were smoldering.

"You know what a Soc is?" I said, my voice shaking with rage. "White trash with Mustangs and madras." *And then, because I couldn't think of anything bad enough to call them, I spit at them.*

Bob shook his head, smiling slowly. "You could use a bath, greaser. And a good working over. And we've got all night to do it. Give the kid a bath, David."

I ducked and tried to run for it, but the Soc caught my arm and twisted it behind my back, and shoved my face into the fountain. I fought, but the hand at the back of my neck was strong and I had to hold my breath. I'm dying, I thought, and wondered what was happening to Johnny. I couldn't hold my breath any longer. I fought again desperately but only sucked in water. I'm drowning, I thought, they've gone too far…A red haze filled my mind and slowly I relaxed.

The next thing I knew I was lying on the pavement beside the fountain, coughing water and gasping. I lay there weakly, breathing in air and spitting out water. The wind blasted through my soaked sweatshirt and dripping hair. My teeth chattered unceasingly and I couldn't stop them. I finally pushed myself up and leaned back against the fountain, the water running down my face. Then I saw Johnny.

J'étais en train de devenir furieux. Je les détestais assez pour perdre le contrôle. « Tu sais ce qui est un Crotté? » Bob a demandé. « Pouilleux avec les cheveux long. »

Je me sens le sang qui se draine de mon visage. Je me suis fait traité de toutes sortes de noms, mais rien ne m'a blessé autant que ça. Johnny a fait un type de halètement et ses yeux étaient rouges de haine.

« Tu sais ce qui est un Frais-chier? » J'ai dit, ma voix tremblante de rage. « Pouilleux avec les Mustangs et manteaux de cuire. » Et puis, car je ne pouvais pas penser à quelque chose d'assez méchant pour les insulter, j'ai lui crashé à la figure.

Bob a secoué la tête en souriant graduellement. « Heille le crotté, tu as besoin d'un bain. Et une bonne raclée. Et nous avons toute la nuit pour le faire. Donne-lui un bain, David. »

J'ai esquivé et commencé à courir, mais le Frais-chier m'a attrapé par le bras et lui a fait une prise de bras derrière le dos, et m'a poussé le visage dans la fontaine. J'ai essayé de me défaire mais sa main sur mon cou était puissante et j'ai dû garder mon souffle. J'étais en train de mourir, je pensais et je me suis demandé ce qui se passait avec Johnny. Je n'ai pas pu retenir mon souffle plus longtemps. J'ai lutté de nouveau en désespérant mais je n'ai fait qu'avaler de l'eau. J'étais en train de me noyer, je pensais. Ils ont poussé l'idée jusqu'à la limite…. une brume rouge a rempli l'esprit et lentement j'ai commencé à relaxer.

Après, tout ce dont je me souviens, c'est d'être allongé sur l'asphalte à côté de la fontaine, crachant de l'eau en grande quantité. Je suis resté allongé, à reprendre mon souffle et à cracher de l'eau. Le vent passait à travers mon chandail et mes cheveux étaient dégouttants. Je claquais des dents sans arrêt. Finalement, je me suis levé et en m'appuyant sur la fontaine. J'avais de l'eau qui dégoulinant sur mon visage. Puis j'ai vu Johnny.

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