Abstract
Studies have shown /s/ variation to be a powerful social cue, indexing gender, social class, and age (Stuart-Smith 2007), as well as sexual orientation or non-normative masculinity (Pharao et al. 2014; Zimman 2017). Based on speech data from nineteen gay and straight French and German bilingual men this paper explores the social meaning of /s/ variation across three task types: an L2 (English) sociolinguistic interview, an L2 reading passage, and an L1 reading passage. Furthermore, I examine shifts in /s/ productions related to topics discussed within the sociolinguistic interview (i.e. LGBT+ community involvement, coming out, and demographics).

Results reveal two subgroups of speakers: a group of gay speakers producing /s/ CoG averaging above 7,000Hz ([s+] speakers), and a heterogeneous group of gay and straight speakers with /s/ productions of approximately 5,500-6,700Hz ([s] speakers). Regardless of nationality, [s+] speakers not only exhibit significantly higher CoG values, but differences seen in task type and topic are shown to be greater for [s+] speakers than differences seen for [s] speakers. Furthermore, [s+] speakers produce significantly higher /s/ CoG when discussing their coming out stories and involvement within the LGBT+ community than topics of demographics. Speakers without this as a marked feature show no topic based style shifting.

I argue that these results, specifically those seen in the conversational topic shifts, not only indicate that /s/ is a socially meaningful marker for some gay French and German men, but that these differences are highlighted by a process of ideological stance taking by the [s+] speakers to, at least in part, construct their gay identity. This [s+] variant is only produced by some gay men as an act of constructing a contextually variable and specific kind of gay identity. It is not necessarily the case that those gay speakers without the [s+] variant are not linguistically constructing a gay identity, but rather /s/ is not a feature which is part of that linguistic construction. Conversely, the subtle shifts in conversational topic produced by the [s+] speakers, specifically relate to their own gay identity and reveal an association between the social meaning established through this stance taking and the linguistic construction of this identity.

References
