

Department of Linguistics
Colloquium Series

Friday, September 5, 2008
3 pm
332 Cathedral of Learning

Kris Geda
University of Pittsburgh

Title: The enregisterment of gay-sounding speech in non-gay media.

Abstract:

Work on gay-sounding speech has focused on its characteristics: whether there are identifiable variants that gay-sounding speakers produce, and whether the manipulation of these proposed characteristics cues gay-identifications by naïve listeners. From pitch variation and contours, sibilant duration and consonant VOT to the vowel spaces of gay-sounding men, current research focuses on what features of speech are used by gay-sounding speakers to index their identity, and conversely what features of speech are used by the broader population to identify speakers as gay-sounding. This study aims to identify what features of gay-sounding speech are available to non-gay speakers, particularly as used by comedians in their routines when performing "gay." Whether or not the resources utilized by performers in the popular media actually parallel gay-sounding speech as studied by linguists, they identify what features are salient. In this, it mirrors perception studies that aim to see if the manipulation of one feature will result in listeners identifying the speakers as gay. In order to perform gay, it is not necessary to utilize all of the elements that may be present within a system of gay-sounding speech; rather, only a minimum of them and only the most salient. By tracking the features used when comedians perform gay characters in their routines and comparing the features by several comedians, it is possible to see what linguistic resources are at play in the creation of a gay identity. The features chosen by performers reveal themselves as essentially "gay" and as these features become more consistently connected with gay-sounding speech (and gay-identified people), they are entrenched more deeply into the system, resulting in the enregisterment of certain features of gay-sounding speech.