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Giving face and body: Language, sexuality and bodily hexis in Japanese parodic performance

Phonetic variation has been linked to socialised differences in articulatory setting, which are salient enough to be the subject of parody (e.g. Pratt & D'Onofrio 2017). Concurrently, it has been argued that affect is embodied in phonetic variation, such as through audible compression/expansion of the vowel space (Gratton 2023). Yet the movement of articulators as part of broader socialised body movement, or *hexis* (Bourdieu 1979), and the interaction of linguistic and gestural performances of affect are under-theorised.

I present time-aligned phonetic, facial tracking and arm gesture data to argue for a unified account of bodily hexis, affect and phonetic variation. The data come from a series of comedy skits by Japanese gay male YouTube duo *Second Street* (2024), parodying and juxtaposing the figures of the *straight guy* (*nonke*) and gay *queen* (*o-nee*). These skits capitalise on the divide between mainstream heteronormative Japanese culture that prizes careful restraint of emotion and body movement, and the *queen* figure iconised in Japanese media as "brash" and "excessive", outside the norms of respectable society (Maree 2020).

Midpoint F1/F2 of peripheral vowels ≥50 ms were measured from force-aligned recordings and transcripts in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2025), plus F0 and loudness. 3D co-ordinates of facial landmarks were captured frame by frame in OpenFace (Baltrušaitis et al 2018) to measure lip aperture and jaw-nose distance - both measures of jaw displacement in speech (Yehia et al 1998) - controlled for head pitch, yaw and roll movements. Magnitude of arm gesture was impressionistically coded per utterance, as quantitative measurement was hindered by high-impact subtitles overlaying speakers' torsos.

Between-styles comparison of both comedians' vowel space area, F0 range, mean loudness, mean jaw displacement and gestural magnitude shows that all variables stylistically shift together: all are reduced in the *straight guy* style and increased in the *queen* style. From this, I argue that the parodic styles are achieved through differences in restrained vs dynamic bodily hexis, indexing restrained vs excessive affect, and phonetic production is implicated in this visually (jaw movement), sensually (the sensation of pitch and loudness) and symbolically (vowel space size). This parody and its positive audience reception indicate that speakers perceive style as the co-variation of speech and hexis that are mutually constitutive and contextualising, and I therefore call for increased attention to bodily hexis and multimodality in the study of spoken variation.

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