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Constructing the "Cisgender Listening Subject":

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A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Anthropology

by

Dani Heffernan

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Constructing the "Cisgender Listening Subject":

Trans-Feminine Speakers' Commentaries on Voice and Being Heard

by

Dani Heffernan

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Norma Mendoza-Denton, Chair

This thesis examines metalinguistic commentaries of trans-feminine individuals about voice and voice modification as a site of language ideological work. Language ideologies are positioned, multiple, and mediating views on language and language use (Kroskrity 2004). Based on data collected through a recorded semi-structured conversation and from an online forum dedicated to trans voice modification, I illustrate how some trans-feminine speakers construe the pursuit of voice modification as affirming while simultaneously scrutinizing the practice of ascribing gender to someone based on their voice. Furthermore, I explore how these commentaries tacitly characterize the "cisgender listening subject" (Calder 2021) – an ideological position which apprehends voices through the logics of a binary gender system – and interrogate the listening practices of this subject. These discursive moves reflect the entanglement of creativity and discipline in voice practices (Weidman 2006), including voice modification, emerging here within and between views of gender as self-determined, on the one hand, and of gender as intersubjectively constituted, on the other.

The thesis of Dani Heffernan is approved.

Erin Katherine Debenport

Jessica R. Cattelino

Norma Mendoza-Denton, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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ONE: Introduction

Some transgender[1] individuals choose to pursue voice modification, such as voice feminization or masculinization, as part of their gender transition. This voice modification is aimed at altering aspects of the speaking voice associated with the perception of gender and is typically undertaken with the support of a professional, such as a speech-language pathologist or voice coach, and/or through a self-led process with the aid of community-developed resources. Trans speakers' voice modification practices have, with few exceptions (e.g., Zimman 2012), largely not been regarded as a "site of ideological work" (Gal and Irvine 2019). Instead, as scholars have noted, a substantial portion of the research on trans voice modification, which is primarily published in the field of speech-language pathology, takes for granted that a biologically determined division exists between women's and men's voices, and that such a division serves as a "natural" baseline upon which techniques of modification act (Azul 2013; Zimman 2016). The foci of such research have included the development and assessment of isolated voice modification practices, surveys of participants' satisfaction and quality of life, and documentation of cursory perceptions of gender in voice. While Zimman has reviewed much of this speech-language pathology scholarship and identified several of its ideological underpinnings, as well as beliefs about voice discernable in metalinguistic discourses of trans-masculine speakers that he obtained through ethnographic interviews (2016), less has been done to consider views on voice and gender held by trans-feminine speakers, especially outside of clinical or experimental settings. This remains the case even as a majority of the voice modification research in speech-language pathology centers on trans-feminine participants, an outcome likely attributable in part to the voices of trans-feminine speakers (unlike those of trans-

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[1] I use the terms *transgender* and *trans* interchangeably in this thesis.

masculine speakers) appearing unaffected by estrogen-based hormonal therapy (Davies, Papp, and Antoni 2015, 128).

This thesis begins addressing that apparent research gap by examining the language ideologies – speakers' positioned, multiple, mediating, and identity-forming beliefs about language and language use (Kroskrity 2004) – emergent in trans-feminine individuals' metalinguistic commentaries about voice feminization. Based on data collected from a recorded semi-structured conversation and from an online forum dedicated to trans voice modification, I attend to the ways in which these discourses perform language ideological work around the gendering of voices and their speakers, highlighting an epistemological tension between understanding gender as self-determined, which Zimman highlights as a prominent stance in North America among trans individuals (2016), and understanding gender as intersubjectively constituted, a view foregrounded by scholars of language and identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004).[2] In the recorded conversation, this tension surfaces through two distinguishable views of voice implicit within the participants' dialogue – that the voice can be consciously modified to shape others' perceptions of gender, and, conversely, that the voice is not an accurate or reliable representation of one's (gendered) self. These views are respectively indexed through two axes of differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019), or points of contrast, articulated by the speakers which draw distinctions, on the one hand, between other-directed attempts at modifying the voice and self-driven attempts at modification, and, on the other hand, between listeners who assume a person's gender based on voice and those whose gendered perceptions ideally supersede or otherwise disregard voice. In the context of the online forum, individual posts and comment threads unsurprisingly reinforce the transformational potential of voice modification, indexing

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[2] See the Methods section of this thesis for further discussion about the limitations on knowing the gender, among other intersecting identities, of individual users in the online forum given their relative anonymity.

the intersubjective nature of gendered meaning as emerging through communicative exchanges between interlocutors. Yet, at times forum users also raise concerns that probe at the gender-normative rubrics through which their voices are evaluated and assert the primacy of self-identification.

In my analysis of discourse in these two contexts, I illustrate that some trans-feminine speakers construe conscious voice modification as affirming while simultaneously scrutinizing the practice of ascribing gender to someone based on their voice. In this way, through various discursive moves – articulating the high stakes of gendered vocal performance, questioning the voice-related directives of (presumably non-trans) authoritative figures, and expressing bewilderment at listeners' seemingly inconsistent perceptions of gender in voice, among others – the commentaries considered here tacitly narrativize and interrogate what Calder (2021) refers to as the *cisgender listening subject*. Inferring from Calder's brief characterization, the cisgender listening subject can be understood as an ideological position which apprehends speakers' voices through the logics of a binary gender system, indexically linking and naturalizing vocal practices with either one of two supposedly immutable, biologically constraining sexes. This listening subject, while not representative of a biographical subjectivity (Flores and Rosa 2015), serves in these metalinguistic discussions to discursively encapsulate an indexical field, or fluid network of semiotic meanings potentially available to linguistic variables (Eckert 2008), of normatively gendered voices. Which variables attach to which meanings within that indexical field is a significant and explicit topic within discussions of trans voice modification, and this metapragmatic awareness facilitates the trans-feminine individuals whose conversations I examine to not only pursue modifying their voices if they so choose, but also to orient

themselves and their views of voice vis-à-vis the cisgender listening subject, invoked

metonymically as "cis people", "the cis universe," and as the act of "cis-passing."

While the listening practices of the cisgender listening subject are portrayed as deeply

consequential in the discourses examined here, this consequentiality is not attributed to a

cultivated metapragmatic awareness. On the contrary, through a related ideological contrast, the

cisgender listening subject is repeatedly depicted as relatively unaware in the trans-feminine

speakers' commentaries through the discursive moves discussed above. I argue that these

speakers' claims to their own relative metapragmatic awareness, which arises through and

supports cultivation and mastery of vocal practices aimed at successfully signifying within the

indexical field of the cisgender listening subject, concurrently reveals the possibility of

denaturalizing those same semiotic linkages and imagining other ways of making gendered

meaning. Thus, the very act of voice modification becomes a site in which ideologies about

voice and what it can or cannot communicate about an individual's interiority are negotiated.

The next section of this paper provides background on the methods used for this research,

including background information on the sources of the data and how the data were collected. In

the subsequent section, I review literature on language ideologies, listening subjects, and

(linguistic) anthropological perspectives on voice to ground my analysis of the metalinguistic

discourses that are the focus of this thesis. The discussion section turns to the data, utilizing

transcripts of the recorded conversation between two trans women and text from individual posts

and comment threads on the r/TransVoice subreddit, an online forum, to demonstrate the

presence of the aforementioned language ideologies and the semiotic linkages that comprise

them. Additionally, I explore how speakers narrativize and scrutinize the cisgender listening

subject in ways that both support their voice modification practice and dissect logics that see

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voice as a straightforward representation of interiority (Weidman 2006). Finally, the concluding section of this paper briefly discusses the limitations of the term "cisgender" and outlines plans for future research directions.

TWO: Methods

The data analyzed in this thesis come from two sources. The first is a semi-structured conversation between two trans women about their experiences with their own voices and with voice modification more broadly. The conversation was recorded over Zoom in the spring of 2021, and I recruited the participants through my social networks. The participants were in their respective homes during the recording. I provided "semi-structure" to the conversation through creating a list of open-ended questions about voice and voice modification (see Appendix II) that was provided to the participants a day in advance. Rather than be interviewed by me, the participants were instructed to ask each other the questions in an effort to facilitate a conversation-like exchange. I informed participants that they should feel free to vary the question order, skip asking or decline to answer certain questions, and initiate their own follow-up questions, all of which was done liberally without neglecting the topics that the questions were designed to cover. I did not participate verbally in the conversation except once to suggest a question when the conversation reached a point where most question topics had been covered, but I was present in the Zoom room for its duration in case such support was requested.

The participants both live in the same US city, are trans women, are English speakers, and are friends with each other. The first participant, Anjali, is in her 50s, and the second participant, Olivia, is in her 40s.[3] Anjali is South Asian American and Olivia is White American. Neither Anjali nor Olivia had pursued voice feminization therapy provided by a speech-language

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[3] Anjali and Olivia are pseudonyms.

pathologist at the time of the conversation, a significant departure from the body of research in speech-language pathology that unsurprisingly involves trans-feminine individuals who are pursuing these services. However, as will be demonstrated in the conversation, Anjali does describe modifying the sound of her voice in some contexts, albeit without specifics about what that process entails, and both speakers disclose a tepid curiosity about pursuing voice feminization therapy. Following the recording session, I transcribed the conversation using conventions detailed in Appendix I. I will refer to segments of the transcription throughout my analysis below.

The second source of data is the r/TransVoice subreddit (on Reddit.com), an online forum dedicated to voice modification for trans speakers. Based on my findings from analyzing the recorded conversation, I chose to examine language ideological work in this significant site of trans speakers' metalinguistic commentaries on voice as well. Created in 2012, the forum currently has over 99,000 members and bills itself as, "A place to share your voice recording for constructive criticism by the community" (r/TransVoice, n.d.). In line with this directive, users typically post audio or audio-visual recordings of their own voices along with requests for feedback from other users. Each post has a title, and the feedback requested is usually an evaluation of whether the posting user's voice "passes," or perceivably affirms their gender, and/or what could be modified about their voice toward that goal. In addition to such posts, which may request other forms of specific feedback as well, users also ask questions about voice more broadly, distribute resources on voice modification, and even advertise voice coaching and voice therapy services, among other activities. While a cursory assessment suggests that a significant portion of posters are trans-feminine, the forum also sees posts from trans-masculine,

non-binary, and non-trans users. Posts to the forum are nearly always in English, and users occasionally identify themselves as native speakers of additional languages.

Given the sheer volume of posts on the forum, data collection was qualitative and targeted toward identifying posts and their attendant comments that metonymically referred to the ideological figure of the cisgender listening subject. Such posts were identified using the search function within the forum, along with display options that allow for arranging posts on the main feed and within search results based on various criteria, such as "new" (by the most recent post), "top" (by the post considered most popular based on the ability of users to "upvote" a Reddit post), and "most commented" (by the post that received the most comments), in addition to other options. I utilized the latter two display options along with the respective search terms "cis" and "pass" to locate posts. Results from searches using the aforementioned search terms and display features showed considerable overlap. From these results, several posts and their comment threads were collected using screenshots that will be referenced (but not displayed) in the analysis below.[4] The posts were collected in the winter of 2023, but the dates that individual posts were originally made vary. All posts discussed here were made within the last three years.

As on many subreddits, posts and comment threads on r/TransVoice are viewable to site visitors without creating an account. Usernames on Reddit are rarely individual user's offline names, but regardless, I avoid sharing actual usernames here in an effort to protect anonymity. Additionally, given Reddit's affordance of relative anonymity to its users, it is not always possible to know how individual users identify in terms of gender (or any aspect of identity, for that matter), though some users self-identify through the content of their posts or through their username. Because of this, I will largely avoid using pronouns to refer to individual users when

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[4] As discussed in the subsequent paragraph, relative anonymity is an affordance of the forum and I attempt to preserve it as much as possible. For this reason, I limit reproductions of verbatim text from individual posts.

discussing this data unless information about gender has been indicated by that user. I will refer to the user who authored a particular post as the "original poster" or the OP, and the users who are commenting on that authored post as "commenters." While this may mean that not all of the commentaries considered here are necessarily from trans-feminine speakers, examining both the original posts and their comment threads often reveals a given commentary's relevance to trans-feminine speakers. Thus, I include such commentaries in my analysis.

THREE: Literature Review

Having outlined my methods of data collection, this literature review will consider scholarly works from three distinguishable but interrelated areas of research relevant to my analysis of metalinguistic commentaries about voice feminization. First, I turn to the literature on *language ideologies* which considers views on language and language use, and the sophisticated semiotic processes through which those views are assembled, circulated, reproduced in new contexts, and, in turn, ignored or minimized (Gal and Irvine 2000). As views on language are always positioned (Gal and Irvine 2000, 36), one way of describing those positionalities is through the concept of the *listening subject* that aims to account for socio-historically situated hearing practices (Inoue 2003). In the second section of this review, I take up literature that has engaged with the figure of the listening subject in its various instantiations toward greater understandings about dynamics of power in language ideological work. Finally, what has alternately been termed vocal anthropology (Feld et al. 2004) or the anthropology of voice (Weidman 2014) comprises works that indispensably, though not always explicitly, bring the previous two bodies of work to bear on the materiality of the human voice and its social force.

Language Ideologies

As the literature on language ideologies is vast, rather than a thorough survey here, I provide a succinct overview of the concept's foundations before discussing works of particular relevance to my research. In his initial description, Silverstein describes language ideologies, or linguistic ideologies, as unignorable in the systematic study of language use (1979), outlining a broad new area for inquiry. For Silverstein, the term "language ideologies" is not a synonym for false beliefs about language, but refers to "…any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (1979, 193). He explains that that articulation comes in the form of metapragmatic discourse, or discussion of how language is used. Yet, Silverstein argues, the pragmatic awareness held by native speakers of any given language has limits that, while not absolute, exist to the extent that some aspects of language are not "…assimilable to reference, or…referential structure" (2001, 401). In other words, based on several factors he describes, speakers can more discreetly identify some aspects of language and how they function than others. In one of his examples, speakers of languages with a pronominal "deference vs. solidarity" system, such as French (*vous* vs. *tu*), are likely more able to discreetly identify the use and function of those pronouns than they would be regarding individual phonetic features associated with class (Silverstein 2001, 386-387). It is precisely these limits and their semiotic-basis, Silverstein holds, that should propel exploration not only of what speakers do with language, but also of those speakers' views about how and why they, individually and in comparison to others, do the things they do with language (2001, 401).

In conversation with Silverstein's scholarship, Gal and Irvine expand on the role of comparison, or differentiation, as essential to the emergence of language ideologies (2000; 2019). Emphasizing that all views of language are positioned and are thus ideologically

informed, from those of native speakers to those of scholars, Gal and Irvine turn their attention to

the processes through which language ideologies are assembled and become consequential

(2000).[5] They draw on the Peircean semiotic trichotomy of the *iconic*, *indexical*, and *symbolic*

signs– in brief, sign-object relations construed or taken up as formal resemblance, contextual co-

presence, and conventional association, respectively (Parmentier 1994) – to explicate "the way[s]

people conceive of links between linguistic forms and social phenomena" (Gal and Irvine 2000,

37). Those ways involve the conjectural organization of contrasts between signs that Gal and

Irvine call an *axis of differentiation* (2019, 18-19). In the process of *rhematization*, the contrast

of *indexical* signs within an axis is construed as a contrast of *iconic* resemblances in the sign-

object relationship. Their analysis of how French vowel pronunciation is depicted in a satirical

phrasebook for Americans illustrates the ideological outcome of such a process: "If the sound is

deemed alien and the expression sneering, then the [French] people are alien and sneering too,

while Americans and their speech are characterized in some contrasting way" (Gal and Irvine

2019, 19). The example also highlights their point that ideologies need not be made explicit

within a metadiscourse as '-isms' in order to be salient (2019, 13). When the same contrast

between signs is recreated with new objects, as the authors note might occur among Americans if

some choose to follow the satirical guidance of the phrasebook, a process of *fractal recursivity*

has occurred, reiterating the ideological work (2019, 20). Crucially, Gal and Irvine underscore

that forming ideological contrasts involves minimizing or ignoring the inevitable inconsistencies

within and between them through a process of *erasure*, facilitating the "totalizing visions" of life

worlds that ideological work entails (2019, 21).

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[5] Relatedly, Gal and Irvine emphasize that *ideology* is a loaded term, but as they, like Silverstein (1979), do not utilize it as a synonym for "false consciousness," their point is that everyone holds ideological views, or, put another way, that all views are ideological (2019). This is especially important to clarify given the ways the term *gender ideology* continues to be problematically mobilized in anti-trans and anti-queer discourses to foment moral panic.

The semiotic maneuvers defined by these scholars provide a foundation for systematically observing the emanation of language ideologies in metadiscourses. I now consider additional works that bring particular attention to the negotiation of identity as an ideological process. In their influential publication on theorizing identity in sociolinguistics, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) – focused largely on the interrelationship between gender and sexuality that figures prominently in Judith Butler's (1999) work on performativity – introduce a framework for understanding and examining identity as non-static and emerging within interactional contexts. Bucholtz and Hall describe "tactics of intersubjectivity" as a way of analyzing the functions of language use (and the use of other sign systems) by individuals or groups within their local contexts as relational, rather than fully autonomous, processes of identity formation (2004, 493). The tactics are grouped in three pairs that "…form continua along three intersecting dimensions: sameness versus difference, genuineness versus artifice, and institutional recognition versus structural marginalization" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 494). Rich with examples from their own and other scholars' analyses, Bucholtz and Hall illustrate speakers' utilization of various tactics, such as a group of lesbians and gay men who, in a tactic of *adequation*, demonstrate a level of sameness through a jocular collective iteration of stereotypically covert ways to ask about sexual orientation, e.g., "what team do you play for?" (2004, 496). As the authors themselves note, they are very much in conversation with work on language ideologies, not merely because of the role of semiotic processes like *erasure* in some of their tactics (2004, 495), but moreover given their recognition of the many ways language use organizes and is organized by its social context. In my consideration of trans-feminine speakers metacommentaries below, and in line with observations made by Zimman (2016), I illustrate how *intersubjectivity* is itself an ideological view of identity formation that is situated in contrast with views of identity as *self-determined*.

Bringing the theorizing of language ideologies into further dialogue with the data analyzed in this thesis, Zimman examines ideological work in the speech-language pathology literature on transgender voices, as well as in the metadiscourses of trans-masculine speakers (2012; 2016). Beginning with the former, Zimman finds that this literature, which overwhelmingly focuses on trans-feminine speakers, regularly indexes ideological views that essentialize gendered differences in voices; assert trans-feminine speakers' reliance on agentive voice modification; approach trans people's voices (and existence) as pathological and thus requiring expert intervention; and uphold a White, American, middle-class woman's voice as the exclusive goal (2012, 100-106). Among a small group of trans-masculine speakers, Zimman identifies two ideological views related to voice: a belief that testosterone will do the work of masculinizing their voices, and a rejection of efforts to achieve that masculinization through behavioral voice modification (2016). In a particular permutation of these perspectives, one speaker's commentary is summarized by Zimman, who explains, "…he wants trans men to have what he calls the 'privilege' of being perceived as men, if that is their goal, but he doesn't want that end to be achieved through limiting their self-expression or assimilating to hetero- and gender-normative standards for appropriate masculinity" (2016, 268).

Zimman notes that, by constructing the effects of testosterone on trans-masculine speakers' voices as non-agentive, hormone therapy can be understood among some of those speakers as non-assimilative and therefore a preferred option in contrast with agentive voice masculinization (2016). As I consider below in the metadiscourses of trans-feminine speakers, who are largely not expecting hormone therapy to feminize their voices, the loci of agentive constraints are articulated differently. While Zimman indicates "limits to self-expression" as a concern for some trans-masculine speakers when considering intentional voice modification, the

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commentaries I examine locate those limits not in the act of pursuing feminization of the voice, but in the inferred listening practices of an ideological gender-normative subject.[6] The next section of this literature review explores the formation of such ideological subjects and what they might hear.

Listening Subjects

The concept of a *listening subject* figures prominently in Inoue's scholarship on the ideological construction of "Japanese women's language" (2004; 2006). Inoue argues that what has been contemporarily described in popular discourses within Japan as a 'traditional' way of speaking for Japanese women is not traceable to a very distant past, but is instead a reimagining of the far more recent speech practices of schoolgirls in the Meiji period (2006). This reimagining is multifaceted in the sense that the speech of schoolgirls, a relatively small demographic population at the time, was cast as vulgar and corrupting through the listening practices of male intellectuals (Inoue 2006). Inoue emphasizes that these listening practices were historically contextual, coinciding with a modernizing collapse of the divide between public and private and the ambiguity of women's place within it. The male intellectual listening subject, Inoue argues, was an ideological position constructed through metapragmatic commentaries about (over)hearing in schoolgirl speech "…the echo of the voice that the Meiji intellectuals had jettisoned in order to attain their plentitude as modern subjects" (2006, 73). In other words, these commentaries retroactively produced both what was heard (which should not be conflated with actual speech practices) and, consequentially, the historically specific subjectivity of the listener.

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[6] To be sure, some of the trans-feminine speakers' metadiscourses examined here problematize certain types of voice modification, but, as will be shown, they do so through an *axis of differentiation* that contrasts those types of modification based on *by whom* and *with what awareness of context* they are directed respectively. It is not agentive voice change overall or some perceived effect of it on a speaker's authenticity that is problematized as limiting, but rather the traces of presumed cisgender listening practices that are recognized in the advice trans speakers receive from (non-trans) individuals positioned as authorities on voice.

Germane to the present analysis is Inoue's concerted use of the terms *subject* and *subjectivity*, both deployed in her analysis to refer to an ideological role or position inhabitable by those who were not demographically male intellectuals (2006, 40). She notes that some women who were intellectuals and had access to the same citational tools (e.g., print media) as men also "heard" and denounced schoolgirl speech (2006). Further in my analysis, I discuss how a similar inhabitability of the cisgender listening subject position that is not demographically exclusive is possible, yet fraught.

In another discussion of listening practices, Flores and Rosa (2015) critique the use of "appropriateness-based models" in U.S. educational settings that emphasize the importance of language-minoritized students cultivating "Standard English" language skills in addition to (at least perfunctorily) acknowledging their other linguistic practices. Flores and Rosa point out that even when language-minoritized students do acquire those skills, which are associated with the *white speaking subject* and have no empirical benefit in communication, their proficiency is nevertheless heard as deficient through the racializing perceptions of the *white listening subject* (2015). The authors connect those perceptions to language ideologies that valorize Standard English monolingualism as the unmarked norm and hear racialized speakers' linguistic practices as deviant regardless of their adherence to that norm (2015, 151). In this way, Flores and Rosa argue, educational models that foreground "…the appropriateness of different discourses in different settings" (2015, 168) do little to challenge the white listening subject or to empower the racialized and language-minoritized student, an outcome that could be averted, they suggest, through approaches to learning that steadfastly upend the unmarked status of "Standard English." Flores and Rosa's attention to the inconsistencies in the hearing practices of the white listening subject – the very inconsistencies that language ideologies often work to erase (Gal and Irvine

2019) – is instructive for reviewing how the metalinguistic commentaries of trans-feminine speakers narrativize and interrogate an ideological cisgender listening subject.

Calder brings together the concept of the listening subject with that of the *indexical field* (Eckert 2008), or network of meanings potentially available to linguistic variables, to explore "*for whom* signs carry social meaning" (2021, 40, emphasis in original). Turning to the Peircean semiotic model elaborated on by Gal and Irvine (2019), and particularly the process of indexicality, Calder stresses that a sign-object relationship must be construed in order for it be meaningful and that this construal happens in local epistemological contexts (2021). Considering the body of sociolinguistic variationist studies of the /s/ sound in North American English(es) and its different productions by speakers as an index of gender and sexuality, Calder points out that, "…it is rarely qualified in the literature that these social meanings…have been gained from White, cisgender communities, and it is rarely considered that other communities may not share these social meanings" (2021, 42). To illustrate the point, Calder reviews the /s/ productions in communities of English-speaking drag queens in two San Francisco neighborhoods: the Castro, where participating queens strove for a more "fishy" or "passable" feminine self-presentation, and SoMa, where queens presented far less conventional feminine styles that were not necessarily aimed at passing. Though the study's results showed SoMa queens producing a more fronted /s/ sound, sometimes understood as indexing feminine or gay linguistic styles, Calder resists interpreting these findings as evidence of an alignment with womanhood or gay identity by the antinormative queens. That is to say, they argue for apprehending the indexical meaning of the SoMa queens' production within a local context where a fronted /s/ co-occurring with a non-conforming self-presentation communicates a non-binary orientation to gender with which many of the queens identify. However, Calder notes, this is not to suggest that the queens in their

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study are always interpreted in an identity-affirming manner. On the contrary, they highlight the importance of considering a multiplicity of meanings in lieu of carelessly reproducing and projecting those gleaned from White, cisgender speaking and listening subjects (2021).

While Calder explores how those who might inhabit the ideological role of the cisgender listening subject can resist doing so, my analysis considers the metalinguistic commentaries of those who understand their voices as interpretable through that subject position. Specifically, I examine how the English-speaking trans-feminine individuals who expect to be – or recount having been – heard by the cisgender listening subject imagine and scrutinize their ideological hearer's listening practices.[7] They do this at times through metonyms that locate the cisgender listening subject in personified, operational, and even spacial forms, while at other times the maneuvers of this role are yet more implicit within the speakers' dialogue. It is not my goal to empirically investigate the existence of discreet listening practices that could be designated "cisgender." Instead, I am concerned with the figure of the cisgender listening subject as (nonetheless) meaningful and consequential in the metadiscourses explicated in this thesis and the social worlds they narrate. Though there are parallels between how I understand the function of characterizing the cisgender listening subject in metadiscourses with Agha's concept of the "characterological figure" archetypally representing a given speech register (2003), this thesis focuses less on speakers' commentaries about how a theoretically cohesive group *speaks*, but instead considers commentaries about how a theoretically cohesive group *listens*.[8] In other

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[7] I do not seek to discredit trans speakers' experiences of how their voices are heard with words like "imagine" or "ideological." I repeatedly choose these and similar words to delineate my focus on *discourses about* specific listeners and their practices, which should be analytically distinguished from the listening practices themselves.
[8] Speaking and listening are not mutually exclusive roles. Yet, even as the metadiscourses I examine include accounts of the cisgender listening subject *speaking*, what the listening subject *speaks about* in those accounts is portrayed within the trans-feminine speakers' metadiscourses as indicative of that subject's listening practices.

words, I explore how the *listened to*, the *heard*, characterize the practices of the *listener* in a context where those practices are quite consequential.

How might the cisgender listening subject *listen*? Zimman's review of speech-language pathology literature (2012) suggests some listening practices, but those are relatively specialized among pathologists who isolate features of voice in their analyses in ways that are not necessarily reflective of, or replicable in, life outside a laboratory setting.[9] For more popularized beliefs about how the cisgender listening subject attaches meaning to speech through a gender-normative indexical field, revisitation of a foundational text in the study of language and gender is enlightening. In the editor's introduction to a revised and expanded edition of Lakoff's groundbreaking 1975 volume, *Language and Woman's Place*, Bucholtz (2004) suggests that the original text was misunderstood by critics who believed it to solely be descriptive of how (implicitly White, middle class, and American) women empirically speak.[10] Instead, Bucholtz contends that the "women's language" analyzed in the text is also helpfully conceptualized as an assortment of ideologies about how women stereotypically speak (2004, 11). Though some of the examples Lakoff provided may be seen as antiquated, e.g., that women use more "empty" adjectives like *divine*, many remain available to metapragmatic depictions of how women speak even as they diverge from actual speech practices. However, nearly all of the aspects of "women's language" discussed by Lakoff are, through Silverstein's framing (2001, 401),

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[9] It is also worth recognizing that the speech-language pathology literature reveals little about what happens interactionally in those speech pathologists' voice therapy sessions with trans clients. The speech therapy session and the scholarly publication are distinct discursive contexts.

[10] As Bucholtz implies (2004, 8), while the topic of the original volume is often simply referred to as "women's language," what Lakoff describes, along with the examples she provides, might more accurately be called "White, middle class, American women's language." The lack of specificity of who is speaking in which language(s) is perhaps part of the ideological power of "women's language" as, what Gal and Irvine call, a "totalizing vision" (2019, 21).

relatively more "assimilable to reference."[11] Much of the discourse about voice modification practices among trans speakers on the online forum addresses suprasegmental features of speech that are less metapragmatically available to those not apprised of them. These speakers are getting at what Harkness recounts having described, when asked by English speakers about his ethnographic research on Christian singing practices in South Korea, as, "the voice voice," an attempt to discreetly name what is ultimately difficult, if not impossible, to truly separate from the metaphorical meanings of the term *voice* in English (2014, 11). To further ground discussions of voice and meaning, and how they surface metadiscursively, I review linguistic anthropological literature that addresses that quandary.

Linguistic Anthropology of Voice

Many linguistic and sociocultural anthropologists address questions of voice, whether metaphorically or through discourse analyses, yet they do not necessarily consider instances where voices become an explicit topic of discussion. In the concluding section of this literature review, I examine additional works by anthropologists who investigate what their interlocutors say about the meanings of voice(s) in their social worlds.[12] In opening their discussion of "vocal anthropology," Feld et al. (2004) foreground the relationship between language and music and point to a history of intellectual exchange between the fields of linguistic anthropology and ethnomusicology. The authors draw examples from their respective research, from exploring discourses about timbre in sound recording studios for contemporary pop music in the southwestern U.S., to analyzing voice practices among country music singers in both working-class South Texas communities and on the San Carlos Apache reservation in Arizona. In the

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[11] Two important exceptions are Lakoff's discussion of the stereotypes that, in comparison to men, women use more "uptalk," or high rising terminal, and that women use a greater range of intonation patterns overall (1976, 53-56).
[12] I specify "additional" because several works already discussed in this literature review consider metadiscourses on voice (e.g., Inoue 2006), which gestures to the interdiscursivity within and between these genres of literatures.

recording studios, interlocutors orient to a specialized, often onomatopoeic lexicon for discussing timbre that "…constitutes a critical bridge between the musicality of language and verbal discourse about sound" (2004, 328). With regard to singing, the authors note a conspicuous absence of the diphthongization associated with country music in renditions of canonical songs by Apache singers, highlighting the potential of this practice to defy both rhyme schemes and the singers' immersion into the American class system. For Feld et al., such attention to the social character of voice is crucial, and they further argue that song, by also bringing focus to the material production of voice, "…stands in an explicitly critical and denaturalizing relationship to 'ordinary' speech" (2004, 332). This point is especially salient to transgender voice modification practices, which offer a relatively rare opportunity for speakers to metapragmatically examine the materiality of voice in a speaking, rather than singing, context. In the discussion section below, I explore the "denaturalizing" that such an examination of the voice facilitates.

In her monograph-length treatment, Weidman (2006) attends to the role of voice in the historical formation of classical South Indian music and its underlying tensions between the traditional and the modern in a postcolonial context. Like Feld et al., Weidman highlights the importance of addressing the voice's materiality in analyzing its social constitution and problematizes scholarship that overlooks this materiality in favor of referential content, thereby missing the significance of their interrelationship. She connects both material practices of voice and what is said about those material practices to what she calls "ideologies of voice" (10), drawing from the theorizing of language ideologies to specifically delineate views of vocal practice. Critiquing an overemphasis on voice as indexical of creativity and agency in Feld et al. (2004), Weidman offers that, "…practices of voice, while creative, are also a mode of discipline – embodied and performed – through which subjects are produced" (2006, 14). Indeed, the

metalinguistic commentaries of trans-feminine speakers reflect this entanglement of creativity and discipline in voice feminization, emerging within and between conflicting ideologies of gender as self-determined, on the one hand, and of gender as intersubjectively constituted, on the other.

For Harkness (2014), in his ethnography of South Korean Christian singers of European-style classical music, metalinguistic commentaries on voice among the singers focus less on vocal technique than on the religious motivations for taking up song in the first place. Harkness finds that views on the singing voice that idealize cultivating a quality of "cleanliness" in that voice are tied to narratives of the country's Christianization. Theorizing approaches to the study of voice in anthropology, he introduces the concept of the *phonosonic nexus*, or the "…ongoing intersection between the phonic production, shaping, and organization of sound, on the one hand, and the sonic uptake and categorization of sound in the world, on the other" (2014, 12). While emphasizing this linkage of sounds' production and uptake, he critiques the idea of distinguishing an *a priori* voice that exists before and apart from semiotic meaning. Harkness also brings a close attention to the pedagogical interaction between a voice teacher and her student during a voice lesson in Chicago, describing a process through which the teacher supported the student to realize abstract qualities potentially attachable to voice as instantiated qualia of his voice (2017). A key element of this process, Harkness explains, is a semiotic circuit that is both open, in the sense of being available to any uptake, and closed, in the sense of relying on the student's internal sense of awareness (2017).

I include a sampling of this body of literature here because, though largely focused on the singing voice, these works bring a particular attention to the material voice (Weidman 2006), or the voice as phonosonic nexus (Harkness 2014), that is implicated in trans speakers' voice

modification practices as well. It is worth noting, however, how the nature of singing as an act

relatively demarcated from everyday speech might invite different possibilities for analysis than

the speaking voice. This raises a second reason for considering this literature here, which is the

role of pedagogy in both singing and voice modification. The pedagogical context that focuses

on the material voice is an important aspect of trans voice modification that, while not taken up

as a site of study in this thesis, holds implications for future research.

Through an analysis of how some trans-feminine speakers talk about their voices and

about those who hear them, this thesis aims to contribute to the broader research on language

ideologies, listening subjects, and the linguistic anthropology of voice.

FOUR: Data Analysis and Discussion

Having reviewed literatures relevant to the topic of this thesis, I now turn to a discussion

of the data collected. In this section, through reference to transcripts of a recorded conversation

and to posts and comment threads from an online forum, I outline several related arguments. I

will show how a tension between understandings of gender as intersubjectively constituted, on

the one hand, and as self-determined, on the other, surfaces within the metalinguistic

commentaries of trans-feminine speakers about voice. This tension, I argue, emerges through

sets of contrasts, or *axes of differentiation*, that index respective ideologies about the voice: that

it can be modified to influence perceptions of a speaker's gender, and, somewhat conversely, that

the voice is an unreliable indicator of gender. Additionally, bolstering these axes of

differentiation, cisgender listening practices are repeatedly problematized, and, in tandem, the

cisgender listening subject is construed as a metapragmatically unaware figure in relation to

trans-feminine speakers. This construal, in which trans-feminine speakers lay claim to a relative

metapragmatic awareness, has implications not only for what it means to inhabit the cisgender

listening subject position, but for denaturalizing the underlying logics of this ideological role. The first subsection of this discussion examines the recorded conversation, while the second subsection considers discourses in the online forum. A third and final subsection discusses the implications of these findings.

Analysis of Recorded Conversation

In this first subsection, I examine segments of the recorded conversation between two trans women, illustrating how the ideological tension between self-determination and intersubjectivity manifests in their dialogue, indexed through the speakers' construal of sets of contrasts, or *axes of differentiation* (Gal and Irvine 2019). These contrasts position the speakers in relation to the cisgender listening subject, characterizing the latter as in I identify two language ideologies that emerge in the conversation between Anjali and Olivia. One ideology is a belief in the potential to modify the sound of the voice in a manner that influences others' perceptions of a given speaker's gender.[13] This is exemplified in comments from Anjali about her experience modifying her own voice in interactions with (presumably non-trans) people. The following transcribed segment follows immediately after Olivia's previous turn at talk, in which she states that thoughts of deliberate voice modification mostly do not occur to her until she has to "interface with the cis universe."

Transcript 1:[14]

```
92    A:          yes, which is- which is when ↑I find that I um sort of slip into the mode
93                of- of- um deliberately modulating my  [voice]
94    O:                                                 [mm  ]
95    A:          making it ↑more- more girly umm and that just comes um- kind of uh- (.)
```

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[13] This is not to say that influencing others' perceptions of a trans speaker's gender is the only motivation for that trans speaker to modify their voice, but it is one prominent view within this dialogue.

[14] Line numbers in the transcript segments displayed here refer back to line order in the transcript of the full conversation.

96		well not unconsciously but- you know I just do it
97		as a kind of survival tactic?
98	O:	((nodding))
99	A:	=um but you know I just- I um- to try and avoid any possibility
100		that I'll get misgendered I'll just sort of like ↑p(h)ut on this performance
101		to like make the waiter think- you know to make them- um not um (.)
102		address me incorrectly or something um (.)
103		and that's when I'm most conscious of it um

--

Anjali here articulates a view that, through making her voice more "girly," she might avoid being misgendered, or assigned a gender category to which she does not belong. Olivia responds affirmatively, an unsurprising stance given her comments about interacting with the "cis universe" that preceded the above transcribed segment.[15] Underlying Anjali's metalinguistic commentary is a tacit acknowledgement of how identity is formed intersubjectively (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Rather than see identity as pre-determined and constant, intersubjectivity illustrates the co-construction of identity within and across interactions. This account can be understood as an example of a particular tactic of intersubjectivity that Bucholtz and Hall call *authentication* (2004, 498), wherein speakers interactions lay claim to the authenticity of their identities through various discursive practices. In their example of phone sex workers taking on several stereotyped speech styles during calls with clients, Bucholtz and Hall demonstrate that *authentication* does not necessarily involve the signification of a speaker's convictions about their own identity. Rather, the tactic denotes a speaker's utilization of common associations between identities and speech practices toward their interactional goals (2004, 499). Put another way, this tactic relies on a speaker's degree of metapragmatic awareness regarding an indexical

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[15] Olivia's preceding comments will be addressed later in this discussion, but I attend to Anjali's first for analytical clarity.

field (Eckert 2008) of potential meanings attachable to their speech. In Anjali's case, her comments reveal not only an awareness of the iconic link (Gal and Irvine 2000) between a "girly" sounding voice and the gender category of woman in the indexical field of the cisgender listening subject, but also her utilization of that connection in a deliberate act of voice feminization that might influence that subject's perceptions of her gender – or, as she plainly states it, "as a survival tactic."

Notably, Anjali's account of her voice feminization practices in the above example presents them as what I call *self-directed*. The notion of self-direction is not meant to negate the role of intersubjectivity, nor to suggest whether or not Anjali would have enacted these practices outside of the context of interactions that she describes. Anjali's practices are self-directed in the sense that, given the circumstances, she chose to adopt the "more girly" voice that she did. Self-directed voice modification practices like this are contrasted during Anjali and Olivia's conversation with *other-directed* modification, or practices that are explicitly advised by others. Specifically, Anjali and Olivia both present narratives of other-directed modification produced as guidance for trans people by individuals positioned as "experts" – a psychotherapist in one instance, and a meeting facilitator in another. In turn, Anjali and Olivia negatively evaluate the guidance provided by those individuals as misinformed. In other words, these narratives characterize the cisgender listening subject whose counseling about voice is the product of highly unaware listening practices. The following transcribed segment highlights one such narrative from Olivia who reports on having seen a performance many years prior in which the trans artist and activist Kate Bornstein recalled receiving voice feminization advice.

Transcript 2:

129 O: >I d'remember if-< if- who- maybe she was talking to a therapist?
130   or [something]

```
131   A:                [ye::ah      ]

132   O:                =or, you know, probably some kind of- at that point some kind of

133                     like gatekeeping for- fo::r like access to hormones or something- um-

134                     but this person was basically like coaching her to just- to-

135                     to ↑speak in a very high pitch voice all the time.

136   A:                [↑oh my ↓god]

137   O:                [and like-    ] yeah, and she was [like-  (…)      ]

138   A:                                              [that's a lot of-]

139                     takes a lot of energy

140   O:                (.) yea::h, totally, and she was like this is also not like- what (0.3)

141                     like the female people I know sound [like ]

142   A:                                                  [right]

143   O:                you know? [like ]

144   A:                         [yeah] yeah
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Olivia's recounting of Bornstein's narrative about receiving voice feminization guidance

from a psychotherapist, or another figure of authority, construes that guidance, through

paraphrasing Bornstein, as out of touch with reality in lines 140-141 ("this is also not, like- what

like the female people I know sound like"). Yet even before Olivia reports on Bornstein's

evaluation, Anjali preempts her with an exasperated reaction of her own in line 136 ("oh my

god") to the suggestion of consistently speaking in a "high pitch voice." While it is not entirely

clear what material qualities might distinguish the "high-pitch voice" discussed by Olivia from

the "girly" sounding voice utilized by Anjali, the two manifestations of voice are nonetheless

evaluated differently by the speakers. What is distinct, if not necessarily aspects of voice quality,

is that the "high-pitched voice" is prescribed by someone in a position of relative authority, or an

expert, demonstrating an example of other-directed voice modification. Moreover, Olivia

emphasizes the context-free nature of this guidance in the sense that Bornstein was advised to

speak in a high-pitched voice "all the time" (line 135). Another narrative of other-directed modification introduced by Anjali later in the conversation, which is not transcribed here due to space constraints, is similarly negatively evaluated for the lack of attention paid to context by an (also presumably not trans) expert's guidance. In that instance, Anjali recalls how a facilitator of voice exercises at a workshop for trans artists, who advised everyone to "make their voices be heard and loud," was met with dismay from participants for such a homogenizing approach. As Anjali explained, "you can't ask us to all adopt a kind of loud voice because it's not going to work for everybody." Olivia adds to the characterization of this advice as demonstrative of the facilitator's lack of a baseline level of attention to the context, jokingly suggesting the facilitator's need for a "trans awareness 101" training.

The contrast between self-directed and other-directed modification represents an axis of differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019) in which advice provided to trans speakers by outside experts without regard for context is demarcated from the context-specific and selective modification practices pursued by trans individuals. I am not suggesting that either Anjali or Olivia view all other-directed modification negatively, or all self-directed modification positively. At one point in the conversation, Anjali even briefly expresses curiosity about pursuing voice feminization therapy in the future, which would likely entail other-directed modification from a non-trans "expert". However, I do argue that this axis of differentiation between self-directed and other-directed voice modification is developed through scrutinizing the practices of the cisgender listening subject, and that, thus constituted within Anjali and Olivia's conversation, it indexes a language ideology that affirms the potential for trans speakers' context-specific voice modification practices to influence listeners' perceptions of gender. Though the experts in Anjali and Olivia's respective narratives are critiqued as *speaking* subjects

who give uninformed guidance, and indeed they are, those critiques nonetheless foreground *listening* practices. Whether in Anjali's voicing of the facilitator – "make your voice be *heard* and *loud*" – or Olivia's voicing of Bornstein's rebuttal to her therapist – "not, like- what like the female people I know *sound* like" – both problematize advice informed by sonic uptake. While this problematizing of the cisgender listening subject serves to privilege self-directed voice modification, implicitly acknowledging a view of gender as intersubjectively formed, I will demonstrate next how interrogating that subject can, somewhat conversely, justify a view of gender as self-determined.

The other ideology that emerges in Anjali and Olivia's conversation frames the speaking voice as an unreliable indicator of that speaker's gender – at best, prone to unintended inaccuracy. The following comments from Anjali provide an example of such a case through comparison of how her voice was perceived before her gender transition to how it is perceived now.

Transcript 3:

231	A:	cer- there were certain times on the phone? when I would get um-
232		ma'amed or she'd or whatever? and u:h- I was like- (.)
233		I:: I would cor↑rect those people ev- b- because it was in the before times?
234	O:	=yeah yeah.
235	A:	um and ↑now that kind of happens in the opposite direction on the phone
236		(.) where um, and I'm like, do I- you know, and I'll be like talking to
237		someone o- some like customer service p- person and they'll mis↑gender
238		me and I'm like- ↑that's ↓odd ↑too because I don't think I- I mean what-
239		what trace or what markers or signals are there in my voice
240		that would make you think? (.) ↑unhn I dunno, I mean-
241		the way I sound to myself I don't- (.) I sound kind of n- like I could-
242		I don't know it certainly doesn't sound ~male~ to me, you know?

--

Here, Anjali points to the inconsistent perception of her voice by listeners, noting how she would be perceived by others as female while speaking even before necessarily identifying this aspect of herself. Yet, now that she has transitioned, she reports that she is sometimes perceived as male based on her voice. Anjali's self-analysis of her voice and questioning of what "markers or signals" (line 239) might have led to these disparate perceptions both gestures to her intersubjective navigation of an indexical field of potential meanings attachable to her voice, while also interrogating how that meaning is made by the cisgender listening subject. A response from Olivia, transcribed below, reinterprets Anjali's narrative as underscoring a pervasive flaw within the practice of perceiving someone's gender based on voice altogether.

Transcript 4:

272	O:	I feel like there's a way- there's a way of interpreting your- your-
273		your story about like (.) people perceiving your-
274		your voice over the ↑phone at different points in time as kind [of li]ke-
275	A:	[yes]
276	O:	right like- it's kind of just always incorrect to-
277	A:	[((laughing))]
278	O:	[(to assume someone's)] ↑gender, right? l(h)i:ke [it-]
279	A:	[right] r(h)ight
280	O:	(h)li:ke- like y- you- yeah- like, y(h)eah y(h)ou just can't ↑<u>know</u> until-
281	A:	=uhuh
282	O:	(.) until someone ↑tells you. ((laughing))

--

Olivia's assertion that "you just can't know until- until someone tells you" (lines 280-282) characterizes gender perceptions based on the sound of a speaker's voice as imprecise. She connects this view to a broader point that "it's kind of just always incorrect to- to assume

someone's gender" (lines 276-278). This represents a significant departure from Anjali's and Olivia's discourses analyzed earlier in this paper. Whereas the first language ideology considered in Anjali and Olivia's conversation acknowledged the intersubjective nature of identity and gender attribution, in this segment Olivia articulates a conflicting ideological position that recognizes self-determination as the primary source of information about a given speaker's gender identity. The outbreak of laughter during this segment suggests mutual recognition of the obviousness of Olivia's interpretation, particularly given the wide circulation of discourses advocating gender self-identification among trans communities in North America (Zimman 2016, 268). However, this tension between intersubjectivity and self-determination is not the only ideological divergence apparent in Olivia and Anjali's conversation. Just as the ideology about the potential to influence others' perceptions of gender through voice modification was demonstrated by metalinguistic commentaries contrasting self-directed and other-directed practices, so too is the ideology problematizing gendered perception based on voice indexed by another axis of differentiation.

To clarify the relationship of Olivia's problematizing of gender assignment based on perceptions of a speaker's voice in Transcript 4 to the practices of the cisgender listening subject, I return to her aforementioned utterance of a metonym for that subject position, "the cis universe." That utterance occurs in the following segment, which was preceded by Olivia's account of an earlier time in her life when, during interactions, she felt she "would pass until they heard [her] voice." Anjali responded with surprise, not that such a thing happens, but that it would happen to Olivia, and this segment begins with Olivia's subsequent turn at talk.

Transcript 5:

| 75 | O: | yea::h (1.0) ↑YEA:H, well n- thank you, I mean that is- I feel like it's like |
| 76 | | (1.0) really nice to get to- t- t- like- yeah that right?- that like most of the |

77		time I want to be thinking about (.) my voice and my (.) self and- and like,
78		myself in the world through uh- like the lens of other trans people? right?
79	A:	[yeah]
80	O:	that [tha::]t's like- that's l(h)ike the preferred audience in my head? to-
81	A:	=right=
82	O:	=to cis people? um, and so yeah- you know, there have been (1.2)
83		I feel like it's something I've kind've th- gone back and forth about
84		like, of being like do I- do I want to kind've like (.) rea:ll:y deliberately do
85		some kind of like (.) voice ~training~ [um]
86	A:	[right]
87	O:	and (.) um (1.0) and ↑yeah, when I'm hanging out with- like- people
88		who I:: feel seen by, th- it like- it doesn't come ↑up, you know? but [then]
89	A:	[uhuh]
90	O:	it's like- having to interface with (.) the cis:: univers::e

--

Here, Olivia draws a contrast between types of audiences. This dichotomy is most
discreetly categorical in lines 77-82 when Olivia states a preference for an audience of "other
trans people" over "cis people," but a slightly altered form contrasting the "people who I feel
seen by" with "the cis universe" occurs in lines 87-90. The latter of each contrasted pair
metonymically invokes the cisgender listening subject, whose listening practices are scrutinized
in the remainder of the conversation that I discussed above. As with my analysis thus far, I do
not highlight this segment to claim that Olivia and Anjali hold essentializing views of trans
people and non-trans people respectively, and the adjustment Olivia makes in lines 87-90 to that
stark division introduces such nuance. However, it appears that such categorizations are
(ideologically) useful in articulating an axis of differentiation between listening audiences who
seem to rely on normative associations between voices and gender and those who seem to
acknowledge speakers' self-determination of gender. Within Olivia's comments, the former

characterization is iconized with "cis people" as she constructs this identity category in opposition to another audience – "other trans people" or "people [she feels] seen by" – around whom the thought of pursuing her own voice modification in an effort to influence perception "doesn't come up" (line 88). Thus, Olivia's stated desire to see herself and her voice "through the lens of other trans people" imagines a kind of perception that disavows the listening practices of the cisgender listening subject, in alignment with an ideology of voice that prioritizes a speaker's self-identification rather than an unreliable signifier of identity, the material voice.

To summarize, in this section of the discussion, I have argued that at least two language ideologies about voice modification and perception are evident in this conversation between Anjali and Olivia. The first ideology attests to the possibility for speakers to influence listeners' perceptions of gender through voice modification. This belief undergirds an axis of differentiation in which Anjali and Olivia negatively evaluate the decontextualized voice modification guidance provided by "experts" (i.e., other-directed) as uniformed in juxtaposition to their own context-specific, self-directed practices. Specifically, the two speakers provide narratives of such experts embodying the problematized sonic uptake of the cisgender listening subject. A second ideology problematizes routines of perception that assign gender to speakers based on voice, which is discounted as a reliable indicator of identity. Demonstrating this view is a contrast articulated by the speakers between types of listening audiences, where those audiences ostensibly composed of trans people are imagined as showing deference to a speaker's self-determined gender rather than to preconceptions about women's and men's voices, which are positioned as the listening practices of the cisgender listening subject. While the former ideology corresponds to an intersubjective view of identity, the latter veers toward self-identification. This tension will be explored further below, but first I turn to data the online

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forum to consider additional metalinguistic commentaries about voice and the language ideological work that shapes them.

Analysis of Online Forum Posts

This subsection focuses on individual posts and comment made on the r/TransVoice subreddit, an online forum dedicated to voice modification for trans speakers. I analyze multiple posts form the forum that address cisgender listening practices and index the tension between intersubjectivity and self-determination. In concluding this subsection, I consider the implications of how the cisgender listening subject is characterized for the possibility of interpellating (Althusser 1971, 173) fellow forum users into this ideological role, a frequent occurrence. While the recorded conversation allowed for analysis of a durational dialogic exchange between two speakers, analysis of discourse within the forum requires a different approach. Every post on the forum is made by a single user (the "original poster," or OP, as I will refer to that user), and that post can be commented on by other users. Each comment can, in turn, also be commented on, possibly beginning a comment thread that may be topically relevant to the original post or become relatively tangential. In addition to commenting on both posts and other comments, users can either "upvote" or "downvote" any given post or comment. This affects not only how original posts are displayed in the main feed of the subreddit and on Reddit over all (which did not affect my data collection as I used the search feature to locate posts), but also how the comments on a given post are displayed. The default display of comments on a post is by the comment considered most popular based on upvotes. For the posts I examine here, while I have considered each comment, I focus my analysis of each post on the original post and the top comment for the sake of brevity.

The tension between intersubjectivity and self-determination discussed above in Anjali

and Olivia's conversation also emerges in the first post I consider from the forum. The text of the

original post, which I refer to as "Post A," is significantly greater in length than posts tend to be

on the forum.[16] To summarize, the OP, a trans-feminine speaker, introduces Post A through its

title as a statement of stance on voice practice to fellow forum users, expressing that, while such

users may feel pressure to produce a voice that is "cis-passing," such pressure can be resisted.

After narrating her own experience of femininizing her voice, the OP explains that she later came

to "fully embrace" her voice as it was prior to feminization as well, through recognizing that the

gendered meanings attached to voices as "social constructs." In alignment with the view of

gender as self-determined, the OP writes, "The gender you identify as isn't indicative of how

your voice needs to sound" (Post A). As her comments further on in the post clarify, the OP is

not rejecting voice modification practices as antithetical to that view, and she identifies herself as

a voice teacher in the post. However, the following transcribed text from Post A explicates an

uneasiness about the aims of that modification:

> "I'm not saying we can't or shouldn't modify our voices to further affirm our identities.
> We absolutely should if we want to. But I believe this should come first from a place of
> wanting to more accurately express ourselves- not to appease the expectations of society.
> "passing" [*sic*] should not be our primary goal, sounding a way that reflects our internal
> identities should be instead. If having a cis-passing voice is included in that, that's totally
> valid, but we shouldn't stop there when modifying our voices" (Post A).

The OP's comments present a view of how intentional voice modification ought to be

pursued, where a goal of "passing" is sublimated (though not ignored) to an inner sense of

authentic expression. In this way, the OP's comments are similar to those of the trans-masculine

speaker discussed by Zimman, who expresses understanding that speakers may be affirmed in

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[16] The labeling system for individual forum posts used here (i.e., Post A, Post B, etc.) refers to my own system of
organization. I utilize this system in lieu of referring to the actual titles of posts.

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masculinizing their voices, yet also holds misgivings about a perceived limiting of self-expression that intentional voice masculinization practices may entail (2016). Unlike the trans-masculine speaker in Zimman's study though, the OP here articulates the potential for engaging in intentional voice modification in ways that "feel authentic," even if those ways are not further elaborated on.[17] Still, the OP emphasizes that she "definitely understand[s] the need and want to pass," and, after acknowledging her own experiences feeling unsafe, adds, "sometimes in those situations we have to do what we have to do to survive" (Post A). Not unlike Anjali's reference to a "survival tactic," the OP indexes an intersubjective view of gender and voice, implicitly pointing to the possibility of influencing the gendered perceptions of the cisgender listening subject. Thus, while a more active participant in pursuing intentional voice feminization training than either Anjali or Olivia (neither of whom had pursued such training at the time), similar ideological tensions regarding voice emerge in the OP's metalinguistic commentary.

I do not present Post A as an example of a widely held view on the online forum, nor even to claim that the post has an unambiguous argument. Several commenters challenge the OP's claims about passing as a motivation for voice modification, stating instead that their pursuit of voice modification was motivated by an internal sense of disidentification with their voice. However, though these responses are positioned as oppositional to the OP's discourse, a motivation of internal disidentification is at least discursively aligned with the OP's imploring to center authenticity as a goal. I highlight this post to demonstrate the presence of a similar ideological tension to that present in Anjali and Olivia's conversation in a related but different discursive context. Before turning to the discussion subsection where that tension will be more

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[17] Further in Post A, the OP does discuss, as a voice teacher, encouraging her students to find "vocal role models" to emulate, but it is not immediately clear if or how such a practice is distinctive from voice feminization practices.

closely examined, I consider two shorter posts from the online forum that characterize the cisgender listening subject and consider the implications of such characterization.

In what I refer to as Post B, the OP (a different user than that of Post A, though also trans-feminine) poses a question to fellow forum users in the title of the post about whether they ever receive comments from cis people on their voices. This premise is somewhat similar to a question included in the list provided to Anjali and Olivia (Appendix II, Question 9), though I did not specify any aspect of potential commenters' identities in that question. In the main text of Post B, the OP elaborates that while other trans people and her non-trans speech pathologist acknowledge changes in her feminized voice, cis people in general only seem to notice and only overtly acknowledge transition-related differences in her appearance (e.g., clothing and makeup). She explains how this had led her to doubt her voice modification progress before asking if others on the forum have similar experiences. While a few comments share anecdotes acknowledging individual responses received from a non-trans person on their voice after modification, the top commenter and several others assert that non-trans people simply are not cognizant of such changes.

Relatedly, Post C also scrutinizes the awareness of the cisgender listening subject, albeit in more definitive terms. In the title of Post C, the OP describes experiences of anxiety while speaking that "cis people will never know" while on the phone or using voice-chat applications during multiplayer videogame play. Regarding the latter case, the OP references such a scenario and experiencing a heightened self-consciousness about speaking during the game. Upon reflection, the OP considers "how amazing it would be to just talk" without that anxiety, ending the post with an assertion that "99% of people can do that." While that assertion does not account for various reasons individuals may feel speech-related anxieties, the post receives affiliative

responses from commenters, including the top commenter who affirms the post's title, writing, "They have no idea" (Post C). Here, the cisgender listening subject is cast as possessing a taken-for-granted assuredness that speaking will not lead to scrutiny of their gender, the implicit concern in the OP's post.

These two posts and others add to the repetitive, though slightly varying, portrayals of the cisgender listening subject as paradigmatically unaware. While the listening practices of this subject are construed as consequential for trans people, as evidenced in the commentaries examined thus far, this ideological figure is nevertheless depicted in ways that question the epistemological stances undergirding those listening practices. How can this figure hear the same speaker at different times and assign that speaker a different gender, as Anjali ponders, or imply that all women speak in a high pitch voice, as Olivia describes, or seemingly not notice significant changes in a speaker's voice, as the OP of Post B queries? To be clear, I do not suggest that any of these behaviors attributed to the cisgender listening subject are either surprising, uncommon, or exclusive to that subject position. All are arguably indicated by Silverstein's description of how the relative limits of metapragmatic awareness function (2001). My interest is in the ideological work these attributions might be doing in the metalinguistic commentaries of trans-feminine speakers. I argue that these characterizations, in construing contrasts (Gal and Irvine 2019) between the cisgender listening subject's metapragmatic incomprehension and the trans speaker's relative metapragmatic awareness, serve to denaturalize the listening practices of that subject position. In other words, these metalinguistic commentaries on the cisgender listening subject from the trans speaker's perspective make that subject's

listening practices an object of scrutiny and, thus, a site of ideological contestation (Gal and Irvine 2019, 165).[18]

A final set of posts on the forum that I consider in their collective, rather than individually, are those that request feedback or criticism from fellow forum users on their voice modification efforts. As discussed in the methods section of this thesis, such posts requesting feedback might be considered most in line with the stated purpose of the forum. These posts frequently utilize in their title some version of the questions, "do I pass?" or "is my voice passing?" In one sense, these posts can be understood as attempts to interpellate forum users into the role of the cisgender listening subject, asking to be heard and semiotically apprehended through a normatively constrained indexical field of available meanings (Calder 2021). Yet, the possibility of inhabiting such a role is already foreclosed in the asking. Forum users are impeded from being the cisgender listening subject, not because they are trans – again, such ideological subject positions are not demographically exclusive (Inoue 2006) – but because they are, by and large, aware. Somewhat paradoxically, to be the cisgender listening subject as figured in the commentaries examined here is to lack awareness on multiple fronts, including the metapragmatic awareness to provide the kind of feedback forum users seek. I do not mean that trans speakers are intrinsically prevented from accessing a specialized knowledge of voice that is "cisgender" in nature.[19] Rather, I propose that, in the ideologizing of the cisgender listening subject's listening practices, the knowledge sought by forum users is not within the purview of that subjectivity. This is not to suggest that such a view portends utopic or liberatory

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[18] Importantly, I am not suggesting this is an intentional process (on the emergence of ideology irrespective of intentionality, see Gal and Irvine 2019, 172-176).

[19] Forum users regularly demonstrate a range of knowledge of, and facility with, voice modification, whether through providing feedback on each other's voice modification efforts, or reporting on and evaluating the results of those efforts.

consequences for trans speakers, but that it denaturalizes cisgender listening practices, unsettling

epistemological claims about voice and meaning that ground them.

Discussion

Having analyzed the two sources of data centered in this thesis, I conclude this discussion

by returning to the ideologies of voice that index intersubjective and self-determined views of

gender respectively. The tension between intersubjectivity and self-determination would seem to

disallow both a view of the potential for voice modification to influence other's perceptions of

gender in the voice and the disavowal of listening practices that treat the voice as a reliable

indicator of gender. Yet, Anjali and Olivia's conversation, as well as Post A from the forum,

indexes the two simultaneously. As Gal and Irvine explain, inconsistencies and discrepancies are

an unsurprising outcome of ideological work in which the conjecturing of contrasts means

paying attention to some differences while giving less attention to others – a process they call

erasure (2019, 20-21). Erasure, the authors clarify, is a way managing those inconsistencies.

Their theorizing sheds light on the role of the cisgender listening subject in the two axes of

differentiation described above. Whether being decried in the form of advice from those

positioned as voice experts in the first axis discussed, or being directly challenged with a

metapragmatic critique of sonic uptake in the other, the speakers distance themselves from the

cisgender listening subject's practices. In this way, the two axes can be understood as fractal

recursions (Gal and Irvine 2019, 20) of the same contrast. While erasure manages the

discrepancies between them, in both cases, the listening practices of the cisgender listening

subject are derided as misinformed or relatively unaware in comparison to the trans speaker's

own claims to metapragmatic awareness. As discussed above, these stances facilitate

articulations of multiple possibilities for addressing cisgender listening practices, such as through agentive voice modification or through an assertion of self-determination.

This is not to claim those possibilities as a straightforward form of resistance to the cisgender listening subject. Here, I echo Weidman (2006) in recognizing that voice practices, whether modifying the material voice toward influencing gendered perception or employing the referential voice to self-identify, are both creative and disciplinary. However, these possibilities can be understood as each embedded within a view of voices in the world that supports fulfilling needs which the other cannot. The metalinguistic challenges to listeners' attribution of gender based on voice that these trans-feminine speakers bring do not directly address the concerns expressed by Anjali of trying to "…avoid any possibility that [she'll] get misgendered" (lines 99-100). At the same time, agentive voice feminization practices, while understood as potentially useful (when not homogenizing) in influencing intersubjective gender attribution, do little to realize Olivia's preferred interactional state, where the idea of pursuing such modification "…doesn't come up" (line 88). In this way, the two ideologies of intersubjectivity and self-determination need not represent irreconcilable subject positions, but may complement each other. Two seemingly disparate views – seeing the ascription of gender to speakers based on perceptions of voice inherently problematic, on the one hand, and trying to influence those perceptions through intentional voice modification on the other – might coexist where some trans-feminine speakers are changing voices and challenging listeners all at once.

FIVE: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have considered metalinguistic commentaries of trans-feminine speakers about voice and being heard. Drawing from a recorded conversation and from posts to an online forum dedicated to trans voice modification, I locate language ideological work in a series of

recursive contrasts that characterize the cisgender listening subject as a (relatively) metapragmatically unaware figure in comparison to trans speakers. These contrasts simultaneously index understandings of gender as self-determined and understandings of gender as intersubjectively constituted. Within the recorded conversation, these respective views of gender also facilitate various approaches to contending with the listening practices of the cisgender listening subject that are not mutually exclusive, such as through intentional voice modification or through an assertion of the primacy of gender self-determination. Moreover, the online forum users' seeming attempts to interpellate each other into the role of the cisgender listening subject reveal an epistemological paradox: that, in characterizations of the cisgender listening subject, the listening practices of that subject position are rendered largely devoid of the awareness forum users are seeking in efforts to cultivate "passing" voices. While not dismantling the stakes for trans speakers in interactional contexts where they face misgendering or worse, the narratives of the cisgender listening subject's listening practices considered here constitute an "ideological site" (Gal and Irvine 2019, 165) in which those practices and their imputed inherence become contestable.

While this analysis approaches the term "cisgender" as it is observably salient in the metalinguistic commentaries of some trans-feminine speakers, it does so at the risk of reinscribing the term's increasingly widespread uptake as a self-evident identity category, including in academic scholarship. As discussed by Enke, who traces the emergence and circulation of cisgender through activist and academic discourses alike, the term is regularly positioned in a discreetly binary relationship to transgender (2013, 237). Yet, Enke illustrates, this dichotomy overlooks "…the multiple hierarchies on which cis status depends. Although trans studies increasingly acknowledges the extent to which sex/gender is constituted through

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class hierarchies, racializations, nationalisms, ableisms, and so forth, cisgender has thus far remained impervious to theorizations of the multiple dimensions of dominance inherent to its privilege" (2013, 240). Enke's analysis raises questions not only about the meaning(s) of cisgender as it is taken up in discourses like those examined here and what the term reveals and obscures, but also about how, if at all, one could come to actually assume the role of the cisgender listening and speaking subject within interactions, a situation which remains largely unexplored.

In continuing to investigate trans voice modification practices as a site of ideological work for both trans and non-trans individuals, I identify two important directions for future research. First, such analyses would be enriched by deeper ethnographic engagement with participants to further grasp the role of voice modification in their everyday lives and the stakes involved in this pursuit. Additionally, as Harkness examines with regard to vocal pedagogy for singers (2017), direct attention to the pedagogical interactions involved in voice modification would fill in the picture that has thus far only been traced by the previously discussed speech-language pathology literature. To both of these ends, I plan to explore interactions between providers of voice modification therapy, such as speech-language pathologists, and their trans clients. While existing anthropological and sociolinguistic literature considers dynamics of power in trans people's interactions with physicians (Plemons 2017) and psychologists (Borba 2019), these dynamics remain underexplored in the rather different (i.e., not only therapeutic and diagnostic, but also overtly pedagogical) interactional context between speech therapists and their trans clients.

Appendix I. Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions used in this paper are based on a modified version of the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (2004).

[	Point of speech overlap onset.
]	Point where speech overlap ends.
=	Latching speech, or no break/gap between words.
-	Speech is cut off.
(0.0)	Elapsed time between speech in tenths of seconds.
(.)	Brief interval between speech, less than a tenth of a second.
(h)	Aspiration.
<u>word</u>	Stress or emphasis.
.	Falling intonation.
,	Slightly falling intonation.
?	Rising intonation.
↑word	Rising pitch.
↓word	Falling pitch.
>word<	Rapid speech.
<word>	Slower speech.
WORD	Louder speech.
°word°	Quieter speech.
wor::d	Elongated vowel or consonant.
~word~	Creaky voice.
(word)	Inexact or plausible transcription of speech.

((word))   Transcriber's description of non-linguistic actions.

Appendix II. Interview Questions

1. What comes to mind when you think of "voice"?

2. Have your feelings about your own voice changed over time?

3. Are there particular things about your voice that you like or dislike?

4. Are there times or situations when you are more aware of or self-conscious about your voice?

5. Have you ever tried (or thought about trying) to change something about your voice, such as the pitch or the loudness/softness? If so, what were your goals for those changes?

6. Have you ever interacted with a speech-language pathologist in your lifetime, and if so, how was that?

7. Do you know any trans people who have (or tried to) change the sound of their voice? How did that go for them?

8. Has your voice changed in unintended ways over time? How have you felt about those changes?

9. Have you received comments (positive, negative, or neutral) about your voice before? In what contexts were those comments made?

10. Do feelings about your voice play a role in how often, or in what situations, you choose to speak or not?

11. How, if at all, do you think about voice in relationship to your gender/gender identity, or other aspects of your identity?

12. When did you first learn about voice feminization as a process that trans women/trans-feminine people pursue? How did you feel about it then, and have your feelings changed since then?

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