

Center for Cognitive Science

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

280 Park Hall
North Campus
2:00 pm –4:00 pm

Ron Smyth, Ph.D.

Division of Humanities and Division of Life Sciences

University of Toronto, Canada

(Sponsored by the Department of Linguistics, UB)

"Sociophonetics, Gender, and Sexual Orientation"

This talk will give an overview of the sociophonetics research I have been conducting with Henry Rogers for the past few years at the University of Toronto. In this work we extend the restrictive notion of gender as typically found in phonetics and sociolinguistics -- namely, the distinction between speakers who are biologically male vs. female -- to considerations of sexual identity. This involves comparing the voices of gay/lesbian speakers to those of straight speakers, and, perhaps more importantly, examining how acoustic and articulatory parameters correlate with how gay/lesbian a voice is judged to be, regardless of the actual sexual orientation of the speaker. These variables include mean pitch, intonational variability, sibilant duration and frequency, /l/ velarization, voice onset time, vowel duration, formant structure, and (coming soon) voice quality characteristics. In addition to these correlational findings we have also done multivariate analysis to identify which properties are intercorrelated vs. those that seem to be independently available to speakers (Arnold Zwicky's "Menu Hypothesis"). Deeper questions involve how and why sexual identity affects speech, the extent to which 'gay' speech is 'female' speech, how and when gendered speech is acquired, and both the advantages and the limitations of laboratory-based research as compared to more subtle sociolinguistic interview methodologies.

Refreshments will be available; Open to the public!

Center for Cognitive Science, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, 201 Bell Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260, Phone: (716) 645-2177 ext. 795, Fax: (716) 645-3825, Email: ccs-cogsci-contact@buffalo.edu