

An investigation of 'short tongue' pronunciation in Korean

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October 22, 2018

Acknowledgements

- The research presented today is from fully collaborative work with Dr. Eunjong Kong of Korea Aerospace University.
- With funding provided by a grant from the Korean Ministry of Education and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2017S1A5A2A01024268) awarded to Dr. Kong.

How I first heard about
Korean 'short tongue'

- FROM THE ARCHIVES**
- Latin American baseball players train hard to build English skills
June 30, 2011
 - Trying to teach South Korea about discrimination
February 24, 2009
 - Helping with the first steps toward learning English
November 16, 2007
 - A 'C' Change in Spelling Sought for the Koreans
September 15, 2003
 - Koreans to Show Unified Front

S. Koreans Accent Surgery in Bid for Flawless English

A government movie shows tongue snipping in an effort to halt the practice on children.

January 18, 2004 | Sang-Hun Choe | Associated Press Writer

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SEOUL — South Korean mothers know few bounds in trying to give their kids a leg up in speaking English. They play them nursery rhymes in the womb, hire pricey tutors for toddlers, send preschoolers to America to pick up the accent.

But now they're even turning to surgery to sort out misplaced L and R sounds, underscoring the dark side of the crushing social pressures involved in getting a highly competitive society in shape for a globalized world.

- Either it fixes any foreign accent, or somebody's made a big mistake...
- But short tongue is blamed not just for problems in foreign accent, but also in Korean pronunciation.
- Specifically, certain misarticulations in children are blamed on a short tongue.

The Telegraph

British student has tongue lengthened to speak Korean

A student is so obsessed with Korean culture that she has had her tongue surgically lengthened to help her speak the language.



Student Rhiannon Brooksbank-Jones who is so obsessed with Korean culture that she has had her tongue surgically lengthened to help her speak the language Photo: PAUL TONGE

9:51AM BST 11 Aug 2011

Rhiannon Brooksbank-Jones, 19, plans to take Korean Studies at university and dreams of living in the country, even though she has never visited it. While taking language lessons, she struggled to pronounce certain sounds in Korean.

How about that?
 News » South Korea » UK News »

In How About That?



Pictures of the day



Pictures of the day



Types of misarticulations

Example word: 그랬어

“Oh really? / That’s what happened” etc

Standard pronunciation: [kɪ.rɛ.s*ʌ]

- Stopping
 - 그래떠 [kɪ.rɛ.t*ʌ]
- Affrication
 - 그래쨌 [kɪ.rɛ.t͡ɕ*ʌ]
- Fronting
 - 그래θ [kɪ.rɛ.θʌ]

Classic example: 기싱 꿈꼬또 “I had a ghost dream”

[kwiçin k*um k*wʌs*ʌ] >> [kiçin k*uŋ k*ot*o]

Original clip [here](#); adult rendition [here](#).

Social meaning of short tongue

Associated with
children's pronunciation



```
graph TD; A[Associated with children's pronunciation] --> B[cute, adorable; (also annoying)]; A --> C[underdeveloped; pathologized];
```

cute, adorable;
(also annoying)

underdeveloped;
pathologized

Thus, not all short tongue pronunciations by adults – by *all* adults, anyway – are evaluated equally.

업빵! 혀무디 또코케쿠랑
아투투코 머끄쉬쁘요!



아투투코 머끄쉬쁘요



어떤남녀 ㄹㄹ

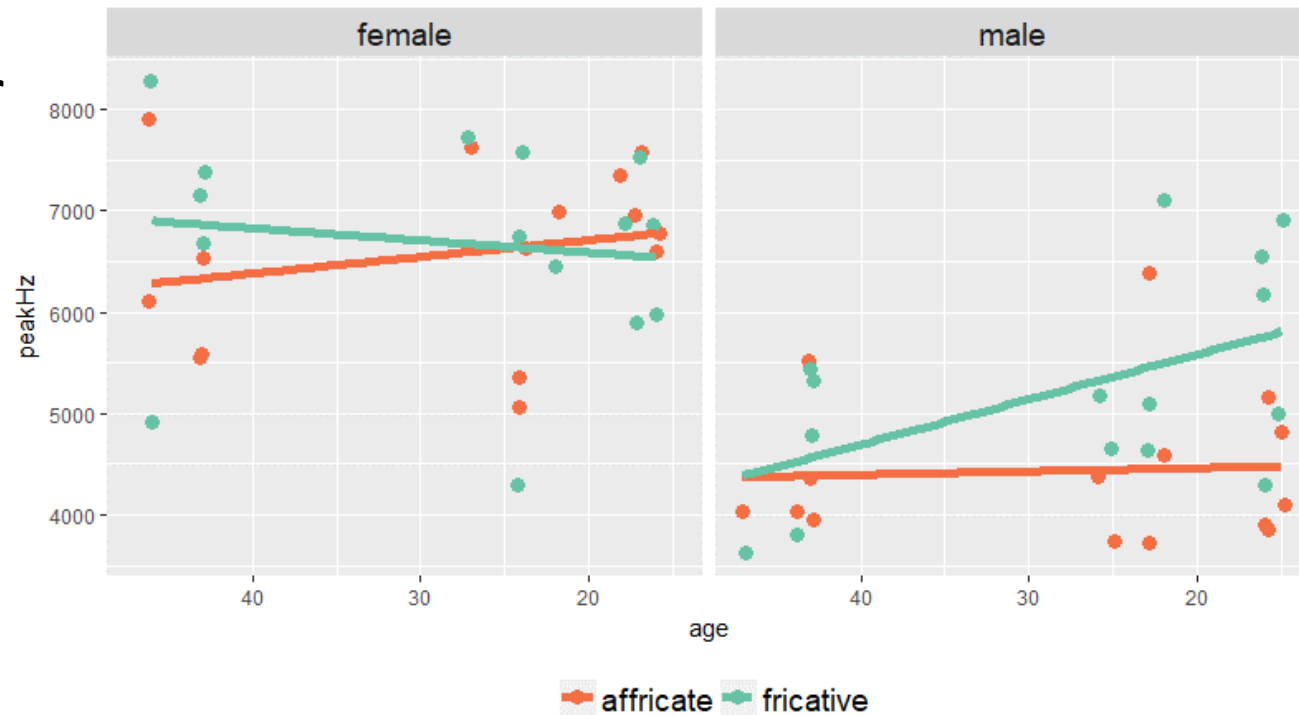
Short tongue in males

- Compare the previous (positive) reaction to “cute” speech, to reactions to (often male) “pathologized” speech.
 - [1] One famous actor is known for his “th” pronunciation, and is made fun of for having “bad” pronunciation. It is not considered cute. This is classified as a “short tongue” pronunciation.
 - [2] This YouTuber says people pointed out to him that he has a short tongue pronunciation, and he realized that he needs to correct his “th” pronunciation.
- I *have* heard males use this “th” pronunciation in real life, and not in the performance of cuteness. So, I do think some male speakers do have a fronted /s/ pronunciation – it is not just imagined or performed. But I do *not* think these males actually have shorter tongues.
- Thus, there is some gendered aspect to this phenomenon.

Is this (related to?) sound change?

- Acoustic analysis of affricates and fricatives from female and male Korean speakers in 10s, 20s, and 40s from the Seoul Corpus (Yun et al., 2015).
- Higher spectral peak frequency = fronter articulation

- Females: younger women have fronter affricates (not discussed today)
- Males: younger men have fronter fricatives



Is this (related to?) sound change?

- Differences across age groups could be due to either:
 - Sound change = permanent change in the language
 - Age grading = variant produced at a certain age, but as those speakers get older they will “grow out of it”
- We became curious whether there was a sound change going on in men’s fricatives, but because fronted fricatives in men are sociolinguistically salient (= a type of short tongue), we wanted to know:
 - What do Koreans believe about short tongue pronunciation?
 - Are people born with it, or is it learned? Can it be fixed?
 - If it is learned, is it a habit or a choice?
 - How is it socially evaluated?
 - How much does all this depend on the gender of the speaker?

The current study

- Internet-based survey
- Data collected from 452 native speakers of Korean
- Two versions, with identical questions, but asking about only one gender. Respondents were randomly assigned to the “female” or “male” version.
 - If asked about both genders simultaneously, respondents might be reluctant to provide different responses for different genders (i.e. reluctance to be perceived as “sexist”).
 - As a result, some respondents pointed out the perceived inherent sexism of the survey itself (e.g. “Why are you only asking about women’s pronunciation? Don’t you know that men do this too? This survey is sexist, etc”)

Questions to be discussed today

We asked them several questions, a subset of which will be discussed here:

[given a list of examples] “Choose from the list the short tongue pronunciations that you think people use.”

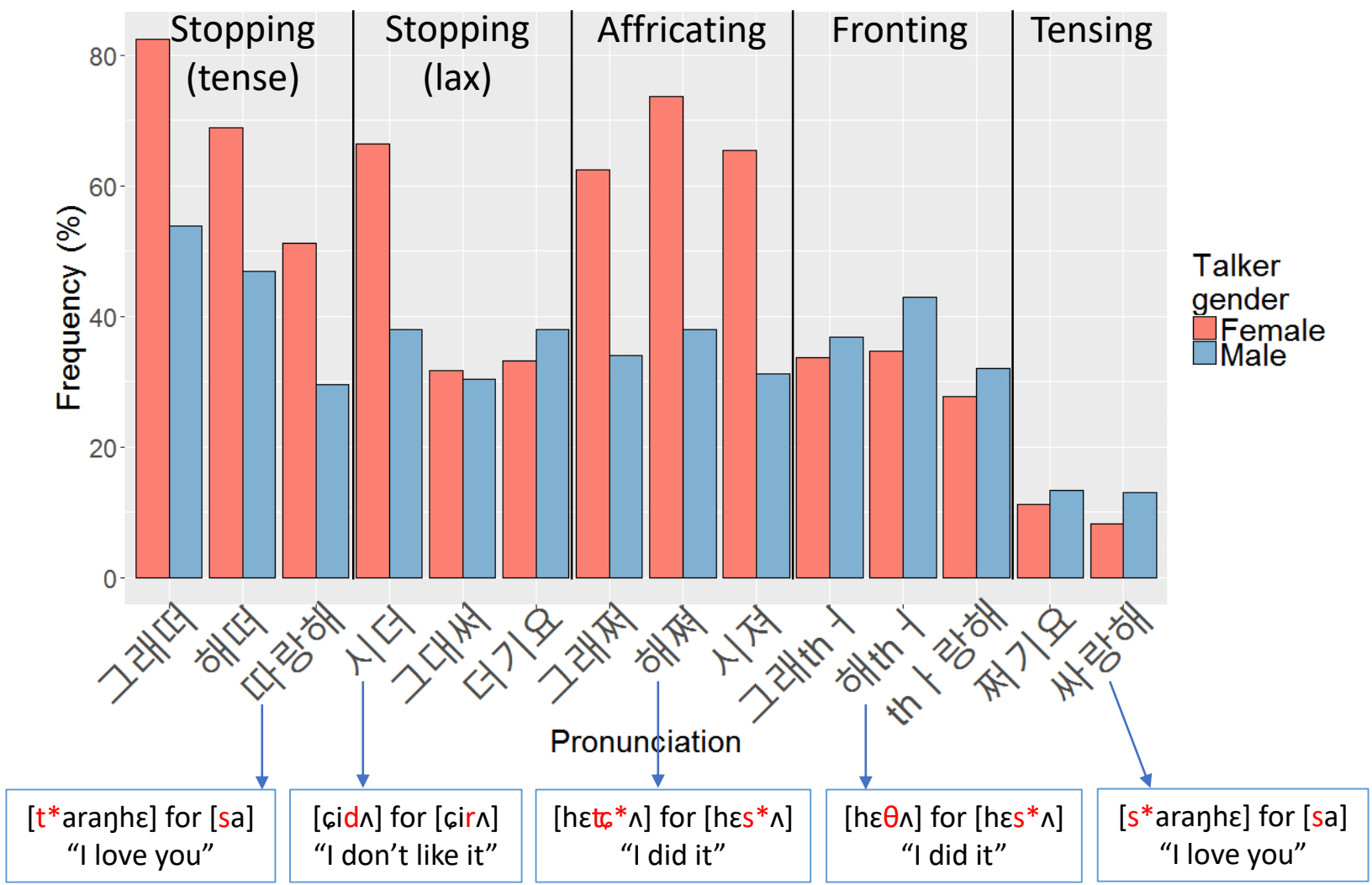
“When you hear someone use short tongue pronunciation, how does it make you feel?”

“Why do you think people use short tongue pronunciations?”

“Do you ever hear people say [kɪ.rɛ.t*ʌ]? [kɪ.rɛ.t̚*ʌ]? [kɪ.rɛ.θʌ]? If so, how does it make you feel?”

Results

- Female version (n = 205); Male version (n = 247).
- Which pronunciations have you heard people use?



Summary of most common responses

- Tense stopping ($[s] \rightarrow [t^*]$) and affrication ($[s] \rightarrow [tʃ^*]$) are:
 1. Very frequently mentioned
 2. Far more associated with female speech than male speech
- Fronting ($[s] \rightarrow [\theta]$) is:
 1. Note as frequently mentioned, BUT
 2. Relatively much more likely to be associated with male speech
- Conclusions
 - Tense stopping and affrication are most stereotypical examples
 - People cite different examples depending on speaker gender
- Before this question we also asked respondents to provide (free response) the first example that comes to mind (rather than choose from a list), but we have not analyzed these responses yet.

How are these responses evaluated?

- “When the {male/female} you are speaking with uses short tongue pronunciation, how does it make you feel?”

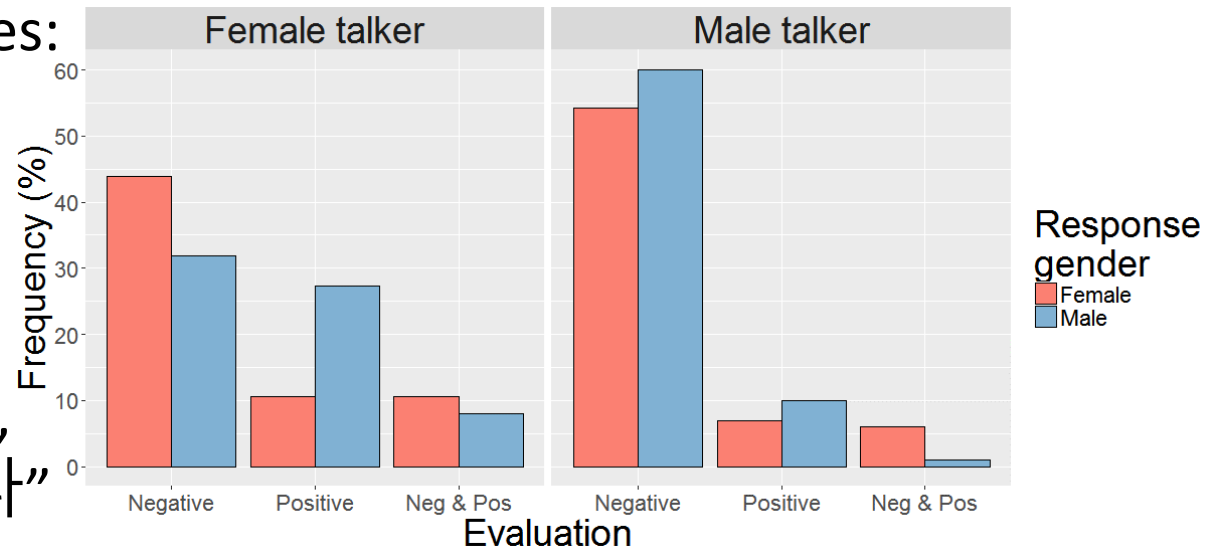
Responses coded for keywords and grouped into categories:

Negative

“짜증나 / annoying”,
“거슬린다 / unpleasant”,
“극혐 / absolutely hate it”,
“뭐 얻기 위해서 쓰는거다”

Positive

“귀엽다 / cute”,
“재미있다 / fun”,
“사랑스럽다 / loveable”,
“앙증맞다 / adorable”



Negative & Positive

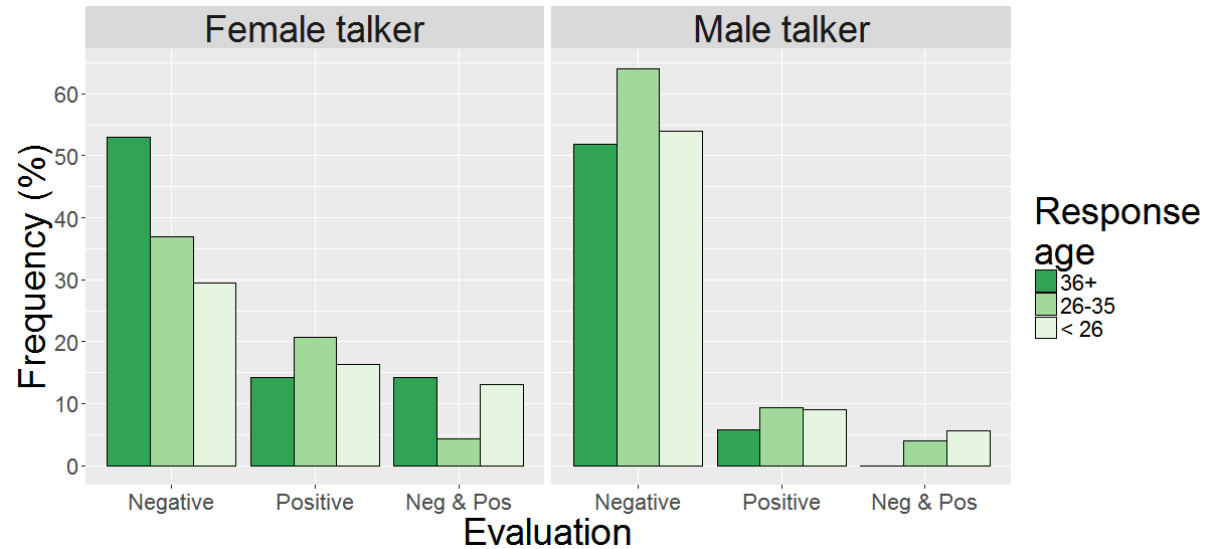
“귀여우나 과하면 거슬린다 /
It’s cute, but unpleasant if too extreme”

(Notice the gender interaction!)

How are these responses evaluated?

- The age of the listener may matter, especially with respect to evaluation of female speech.

- Positive and mixed responses similar across age groups.



- Older respondents more likely to dislike female short tongue; or, rather, younger folks more likely to be OK with female short tongue.
- All respondents dislike male short tongue.

Summary of evaluations

- The top 6 evaluations per gender:

Female	Male
Cute 귀엽다	Annoying 짜증난다
Annoying 짜증난다	Don't really like it 별로다
Differs from person to person 사람마다 다르다	Cute 귀엽다
Why are they doing that 왜저러지	Looks deficient 모자라 보인다
Childish 애같다	Nauseating 역겹다
It's so-so 그냥 그렇다	Disgusting 징그럽다

Summary of evaluations

- The evaluation of short tongue pronunciation seems clearly related to the gender of both the speaker and the listener.
 - Respondents sometimes liked short tongue in the opposite gender, but males were more likely to like it in females than vice versa.
 - The 11 violent evaluations (e.g. “I want to smack/kill them”), 9 of which were male-on-male (plus one f-on-m and one m-on-f).
- Older speakers are more critical of female speech, but it’s not clear whether society is actually changing, or if people just become less tolerant as they get older.
- Condemnation of male short tongue pronunciation was consistent across age groups.

Beliefs about the cause of short tongue

Cause	Female	Male
They were born with that pronunciation and cannot change it. // 원래부터 그런 발음을 가지고 태어나서 고칠수 없음 (일종의 질병임)	3.9%	19.5%
They picked it up as a habit and if they want they could change it. // 습관적으로 얻은 발음이므로 원하면 (혀짧은 소리가 아닌) 다른 발음도 할 수 있음	25.9%	20.7%
They picked it up as a habit, but it's become fixed and therefore they cannot change it. // 습관적으로 얻은 발음이며 이는 고착되어 (혀짧은 소리가 아닌) 다른 발음은 불가능함	3.9%	7.3%
They were born with that pronunciation, but could change with practice. // 원래부터 그런 발음을 가지고 태어났으나 연습하면 고칠 수 있음	5.4%	24.0%
They can freely switch back and forth between "short tongue" and other pronunciations depending on the situation. // 상황에 따라 혀짧은 소리로 혹은 그렇지 않은 소리로 전환해 발음하는 것이 가능함	61.0%	28.5%

Summary of beliefs

- Personally, this result was what I found most interesting.
- Males were much more likely to be thought of having been born with the pronunciation (43.5% vs. 9.3%).
- Females were much more likely to be thought of using the pronunciation intentionally (61.0% vs. 28.5%).
- If we asked about both genders together in a single survey, I do wonder whether we would get the same result.

Reactions to specific examples

- Lastly, we gave respondents three specific examples of short tongue and asked them whether they think a {female/male} could say that.
- If they heard their {female/male} interlocutor use that pronunciation, how would it make them feel?
- The three examples were variations of **그랬어** [ki.rɛ.s*ʌ]:
 - Stopped [ki.rɛ.t*ʌ] **그래띠**
 - Affrication [ki.rɛ.t͡ɕ*ʌ] **그래찌**
 - Fronted [ki.rɛ.θʌ] **그래th** †
- Responses options included:
 - Annoying
 - Arrogant
 - Funny
 - Concerning
 - Cute
 - Totally normal
 - Formal

Reactions to specific examples

- The most common responses are summarized here:

Pronunciation	Who uses it?		Most common reaction?	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Affrication	86.8%	58.1%	I wouldn't think much of it because this is a normal pronunciation for a female talker // 여성화자라면 누구나 할 수 있는 발음이라서 별다른 느낌이 없다	It would be extremely annoying // 매우 짜증난다
Stopped	82.9%	65.4%		
Fronted	51.0%	69.1%	I would be concerned, and pity them for their strange pronunciation) // 걱정된다 (발음이 이상해서 안스럽다)	

Overall summary

- “Short tongue” can refer to several different pronunciations, which are almost certainly not due to the tongue actually being short.
- Short tongue can be a part of gendered performance, at least for females, which can be evaluated positively by some listeners.
- In males, short tongue is evaluated mostly negatively, and as more of a disorder than a stylistic choice.

Relationship to sound change?

- The finding that fronted [s] is associated relatively more with males than females is in line with our finding that young males' fricatives have increasing spectral peak frequencies, but females' fricatives do not.
- The finding that stopping and affrication are viewed more as stylistic choices and associated more with females suggests that they are probably not part of a sound change, but gender marking.
- As for fronted [s], the data are consistent with a sound change in males, but not in females. In coming years, if negative evaluations change, it could become simply a form of male gender marking.

Future directions

- Eunjong has collected spontaneous speech data from female and male speakers in pairs with both same- and opposite-gender interlocutors who are both familiar and unknown.
 - These data will help us see how the use of these variants plays a role in style shifting.
 - She has also collected read speech and word list data from the same speakers.
- We would like to do some sort of perception experiment in which we manipulate these forms and get judgements of gender-typicality, or other talker evaluations.

Thank you!