

# “I adopt my freshness”: Exploring style shifting by a Rainbow Māori New Zealander

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## 1. Introduction

Previous research on the phonetic production of Rainbow (LGBTQ+) New Zealanders has examined gender ([1]; [2]) and sexual orientation ([3]) but has not included Rainbow Māori participants. The present study adds to this body of research through the case study of a Rainbow Māori non-binary person.

## 2. Methodology

This study takes a 3<sup>rd</sup> wave variationist ([4]) approach to the study of sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity by examining intra-individual variation in the case of Corrine (pseudonym), who identifies as pansexual, non-binary, gender fluid, and Māori. The data presented in this study are part of a larger project on style shifting by Rainbow women and gender diverse people using a combination of laboratory and field recordings (see also [5]). The phonetic variables assessed are measures of pitch and pitch variation (including uptalk), use of creaky voice, and vowel dispersion (as mean Euclidean distance from the centre of the speaker’s vowel space).

The speaker, Corrine (pronouns they/them), recorded herself in the field with their whānau and hoa (friends, family, and acquaintances). The recording contexts are coded based on Corrine’s interlocutors’ alignment to the Rainbow community. These determinations were made by the researcher, drawing on knowledge of Corrine’s relationships with their interlocutors and upon contextualization cues in speakers’ discourse. For example, contexts with other Rainbow people or supportive allies are considered safe, Rainbow aligned contexts that allow Corrine to position herself as a member of the Rainbow community. Rainbow aligned contexts in Corrine’s recordings include recordings with their Rainbow Māori friends. Corrine also recorded herself with their older family members who have voiced stances against diverse gender and sexual orientation identities. These are considered Rainbow disaligned contexts as their interlocutors create an unsafe space for Rainbow identities. In the recordings discussed here, all Corrine’s interlocutors are Māori. Corrine is aware of their own style shifting, or “adopting freshness”, particularly with other Māori people. Corrine discusses the relationship between their speech and Rainbow and Māori identities in recordings with Rainbow Māori women in the Rainbow aligned context.

## 3. Results

Preliminary findings suggest that, compared with disaligned contexts with their older family members who have voiced negative opinions about the Rainbow community, in Rainbow aligned contexts Corrine uses a lower average pitch,

more creaky voice, and a slightly less dispersed vowel space (Table 1).

Speech data was analysed alongside Corrine’s responses to surveys about their Rainbow identity ([6], [7]). Corrine reports low feelings of connection and support from the Rainbow community broadly but has a close network of friends, many of whom are Rainbow. They report generally feeling accepted and free to be open about their Rainbow identity.

Table 1. Average pitch in Hertz, use of creaky voice, and vowel dispersion (Bark normalized) by Corrine in Rainbow aligned (Rainbow +) and in Rainbow disaligned contexts (Rainbow -).

Recording Context	Avg pitch (Hz)	Creaky voice use (%)	Vowel dispersion (Bark)
Rainbow +	234.59	6.91	2.18
Rainbow -	254.22	1.84	2.22

## 4. Discussion

Table 1 findings are indicative of the results to be presented at the conference. These preliminary findings suggest that Corrine may shift their speech style in response to the perceived alignment of their interlocutors towards Rainbow people. In the Rainbow aligned contexts, Corrine has two salient identities validated by their Rainbow Māori interlocutors and adopts their “fresh” speech style using more creaky voice, a wider pitch range and a less dispersed vowel space. By using this speech style with Rainbow interlocutors, Corrine may be aligning themselves with shared Rainbow Māori identities to debate acceptable presentations and behaviour for Rainbow people based on gender and ethnicity.

## 5. References

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