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Physiological and sociolinguistic change in transmasculine speech

Interest in the speech of transgender men was previously mostly restricted to fields of medicine and speech therapy (see, e.g., Azul 2015, Azul et al. 2017), but has recently also found its way into sociolinguistics (e.g., Zimman 2017). In this study, we explore this further by investigating different linguistic features in the speech of three young transgender men during transition.

The administration of testosterone to transgender men brings about physiological changes that result, among other things, in lower pitch. Some other changes in speech, e.g. in vowel formant frequencies, may in turn result from this lower pitch, but may equally be socially motivated.

We investigate a set of sociophonetic variables longitudinally throughout the transition process. Because we chart change in both Dutch (in which the speakers are linguistically socialised) and English (in which they are much less so) we hope to tease apart physiological and social factors in change, and determine in what way transgender men adapt sociolinguistically during transition. This is particularly interesting because transgender men, unlike transgender women, are typically not offered speech therapy, under the (disputed) assumption that the effect of hormone replacement therapy are sufficient to create a convincingly masculine voice.

During the project we intend to look at both traditionally gendered and non-gendered features, and at stable features as well as features undergoing change.

We present an overview of the project and some initial results.