Ciao! Identifying Conventionalized Linguistic Variables used for Feminine Style Practices

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics, General

By

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December 2023
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Dedication

Regarding the completion of my master’s and ongoing creative work

“But are you happy?

That’s really irrelevant. Why don’t we just do something constructive, something creative, and then if that makes us happy, fine. If it doesn’t, at least we still have tilled the garden, baked the bread, written the book.”

Toni Morrison
Abstract

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Variation in the field of sociolinguistics has become analyzed as completely performative and indexical. Indexical, in the context of linguistics, is what Eckert (2008) refers to as a sign pointing to, or indexing, a specific social meaning in interaction, known as indexicality. The indexical values, or associations, a variable carries does not come from a societal vacuum but rather interaction. “These associations come about as individuals collectively fashion themselves within the constraints of place in the social order” (D’Onofrio & Eckert 2020). Our construction of our own personhood is then informed by the communities we engage in and as variables become iconically tied to specific personas, their conventionality continues to grow outside of local groups and begin to represent macro-socio cultural ideologies. The production of nasalization and labialization in variation has been observed cross-linguistically to be semiotic resources for indexing a feminine persona but has yet to be observed, within this framework, among Italian speakers. This paper examines the production of the variants, nasalized vowels, roundedness, and the bi-labial glide [w], in the Italian greeting *ciao* and proposes a new indexical model to account for interaction of the variants as well as the local and cross-cultural conventionalized social meanings.