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## “It makes It the Market”: Speech Styles and Personae of Food-Market Hawking

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# ***“It makes It the Market”*: Speech Styles and Personae of Food-Market Hawking**

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Food-market speech is an under-researched area of third-wave variationist sociolinguistic studies. This study addresses the gap by exploring food-market speech styles and hawker personae. Combining descriptive auditory analysis and online questionnaire data, I demonstrate that the situated discursive practices of prosodic variables construct both persuasive and aggressive speech styles, which are stereotypically associated with female and male hawker personae. Furthermore, this paper also explores the ideological construal of hawking as authentic market-ness, further revealing the semiotic saliency and social significance of food-market hawking as not only the language of a speech community but the language of the market.

## **1 Introduction**

The field of sociolinguistics has experienced an outpouring of interests in the examination of sociophonetic variables in the construction of speech styles and communal and intrapersonal identities (e.g., Eckert 2000, Podesva 2007, Zhang 2008). However, in spite of existing studies addressing different aspects of linguistic variation, no known examinations have been carried out on prosodic variations employed by different genders in food markets. This paper addresses the gap by exploring the stylistic use of prosodic variables and how uses of these variables by different genders help construct different personae and speech styles in food markets. Moreover, I infer social meanings of prosodic variables and show that strategic uses of prosodic variables such as intonation, intensity, and repetition could construct personae and gendered market hawker identities.

A food market is a marketplace where different kinds of food stalls gather and sell goods. This includes meat and seafood stalls, vegetable and fruit stalls, snack and delicatessen stalls, etc. Depending on the market size, some food markets may include both indoor and outdoor markets (e.g., Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne), wholesale, and retail businesses. In many countries, food markets may have different definitions and names, e.g., wet markets in some Asian countries and farmers' markets in countries like Australia. In this study, food markets refer to all kinds of indoor and outdoor wet, food, seafood, and farmers' markets. Chain supermarkets such as Woolworth or any other private supermarkets are not included in this study.

Goods and services' promotion is a common marketing strategy adopted by sellers to attract customers and increase sales. One such sales' strategy that employs calling, repetition, and sometimes loud voices is known as peddling, pitching, or hawking. In this study, I propose that such oral sales' performance that involves linguistic tactics constitutes unique speech styles. Situated in food-market moments, these speech styles are generalised under the term “food-market hawking”.

Food-market hawking, as a verbal performance and vehicle of information, is saturated with social and semiotic messages. Using sound as “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1992) to evoke embedded memories through iconic prosodic patterns (Pršir and Simon 2013), the prosodic data gathered can be analysed to interpret the interactional messages involved in social experiences (Sacks et al. 1978, Barth-Weingarten et al. 2010). Since most food markets have a clear demarcation of size and space, vigorous competition, great hustles, almost timed communication, and short interactions, these characteristics create a unique linguistic environment that engenders special communicative needs among sellers. Thus, through exploring the sociocultural meanings of food-market hawking and examining prosodic variations, this study seeks to explain how food-market “sounds” are associated with hawker personae and their different speech styles.

As the first sociolinguistic paper looking at food-market language use, this study examined prosodic variables such as intonation, pitch, intensity, etc., to answer following questions:

- (1) How do prosodic variables construct food-market speech styles and consequently perform stylistic work?
- (2) What are the social meanings and constructions of food-market hawking?

Through descriptive auditory analysis and online questionnaire data, this paper demonstrates that prosodic features could be used to construct persuasive and aggressive speech styles that invoke the association of female and male

food-market hawker personae. Finally, the connection between hawking and “true market” suggests the sociocultural significance of hawking as an inseparable and integral part of the market.

## 2 Third-Wave Sociolinguistic Studies: Gender and Stylistic Work of Linguistic Variables

This study is built on the third-wave sociolinguistic perspectives of linguistic variables and their construction of identities, styles, and personae. Third-wave sociolinguistics is “a theoretical perspective that puts the meanings of variation, in all its dynamism and indeterminacy, at the centre of analysis” (Eckert 2018:xi). Hence, many third-wave sociolinguistic studies (e.g., Podesva et al. 2002, Podesva 2007, Zhang 2005, 2008, Vickers and Goble 2014, Moore and Podesva 2009, Eckert 2000, D’Onofrio 2019, Walker et al. 2019) provide a finer-grained exploration of the semiotic potentials and “indexical mutabilites” (Eckert 2012:94) of linguistic variables. These studies focus on the ideological constructions of linguistic variables in “situated discursive practices” (Zhang 2008:202). They also discuss how linguistic resources can reflect one’s social identities and communicative styles, and evoke “stereotypes associated with the population” by non-members (Eckert 2012:94, Eckert 2008). Hence, in the complex bidirectional relations between gender stereotypes and language uses, the understanding of “linguistic gender” reflects not only the gender and language ideologies of the general public but are often entrenched by the speakers themselves through their tactful deployment of linguistic variables in the construction of a social persona.

The empirical observations and objective interpretations of speakers’ utterances and their underlying implications are often achieved through references to the content of discourse and the situation context — in other words, “what is encoded, what is said, and what implied” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:195). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet argue that “what is encoded” is often readily referenceable from linguistically conveyed content, while the full meaning and its underlying messages could be comprehended by drawing upon what is said and what implied by the speaker(s). As such, illocutionary acts, e.g., direct commands and requests, and perlocutionary acts, e.g., persuasions and suggestions, could be interpreted together with the intention of the speakers, namely, what speakers intend to achieve and how listeners are influenced externally, e.g., in action, and/or attitudinally, perceptually, and ideologically. Thus, various uses of language and the perceivable changes in listeners are, arguably, often products of gendered differences (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Prosodically, “the tempo and the variations in pitch and loudness” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:63) and “tone and pitch of voice, patterns of intonation (or “tune”), choice of vocabulary [...] can signal gendered aspects of the speaker’s self-presentation” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:60). While men’s speech has arguably relatively fewer variations in fundamental frequency but more in intensity and directness, females on the other hand, tend to speak with more intonational variations, e.g., “singsong” intonations, and more persuasively, often through polite indirect expressions (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:177). In particular, the use of a High Rising Terminal (HRT) contour in Australian English is often stereotypically associated as a feature of women’s speech for declaratives in an interrogative intonation (Guy and Vonwiller 1984). Often, the connotated meanings of “deference or self-effacement” embedded in “Australian questioning intonation” (AQI) (Guy and Vonwiller 1984:3) has greater connection with females. AQI is frequently employed to avoid conflicts by shifting authority and decision-making power to the listener(s), at the same time, requesting permissions or negotiations with impressions of uncertainty (Guy and Vonwiller 1984). The frequent employment by a certain gender of speech tactics is said to have entrenched the stereotypical understanding of gendered prosodic features and their constructions.

## 3 Literature Review: Market Sales’ Language and Hawking as Speech Style and Persona

The analysis of speech style in the business context has rarely been conducted in anything resembling its full linguistic and contextual richness. A limited amount of relevant work, including Sherry Jr.’s (1988) swap market pitching in America and Malefakis’ (2015) work on street vending in Dar es Salaam, touches on the importance of language in market sales. Sherry Jr. (1988) examines the persuasive rhetoric of market pitchers through the lens of a linguistic anthropologist. Through naturalistic inquiry methodology and observations in competitive open-air markets, Sherry argues that as a conventional and convenient conveyor of information, market pitching is not only a creative verbal art or commercial performance but a powerful rhetorical linguistic strategy that a market pitcher could employ to create meaningful direct sales’ encounters and seller-buyer communications. This point resonates in work by Malefakis (2015). Although his focus was on local economic structures and struggles, Malefakis sheds a new light on social meanings and the understanding of *market* by connecting it to salespeople and their language. Through ethnographic fieldwork and extensive interviews with shoe vendors, Malefakis argues that *market* is a creative social product and epistemic landscape built largely upon creative sales’ strategies such as peddling. Thus,

an associative market experience is one valuing “rhetorical tactics and which corporeal demeanour was most likely to lead to successful sales” (Malefakis 2015:7).

Both Malefakis’ (2015) and Sherry Jr.’s (1988) papers highlight the cultural and communicative importance of market salespersons’ language from different perspectives and diverse cultural backgrounds. This paper will draw on third-wave variationist sociolinguistics to interpret market speech and demonstrate how the stylistic employment of prosodic variables could generate associations of different gendered speech styles and different food-market hawker personae. For example, the prosodic variables of falsetto used by males would often invoke associations of “diva persona” as illustrated in Podesva’s (2007, 2011) studies on one male’s stylistic construction. Similarly, Zhang’s studies (2005, 2008) on the stylistic work of a Beijing dialect feature, rhotacisation, is a typical speech feature of male Beijing smooth operators. By associating the linguistic quality of “smoothness” with slick and glib characteristics, Zhang argues that rhotacisation is often a linguistic feature avoided by females, but emblematic of Beijing males’ speech style. Hence, uses of this linguistic variable strengthen the stereotypical understanding of speech styles employed by Beijing males and their constructed personae. Through examination of prosodic variations in politeness in regimen consultations, Vickers and Goble (2014) explore how uses of “humour, high rising terminal and hypothetical construction” (2014:221) index an “egalitarian communicative style”, and thus a caring doctor identity, whereas the less friendly and likeable “authoritarian communicative style”, which indexes a less approachable but all-knowing doctor identity, is enregistered with repetitive “unmitigated commands” (2014:213) and high pitches with low boundary tone. All these studies illustrate prosodic potentials in constructing contrastive speech styles and personae, with new light shed on analytical approaches to interpretations of variable meanings through examinations of listeners’ reactions and responses as style receivers and persona perceivers.

## 4 Data and Methodological Considerations

This study has adopted two qualitative approaches. The first qualitative approach involves using online YouTube videos that provide full food market scenes without any video uploaders’ or narrators’ voices. The selected video clips were transformed into MP3 files before being analysed using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2020) for prosodic information such as intonation, pitch, and intensity. The second approach is through an online questionnaire focusing on food market shoppers’ understanding of and attitudes towards food-market hawking. Since no sociolinguistic research on food markets has been conducted before, the qualitative data from videos offer the first window into an understanding of the linguistic characteristics of food-market hawking, while questionnaire data yields insights into the social meanings of variables beyond the interpretations of the researcher. Three hawking clips were selected for analysis: one produced by a female and two produced by males. The reason for analysing more male hawking is because the instances for female hawking are very limited. Whether or not female hawkers are statistically fewer than male hawkers across all cultures and societies is beyond the current research, but it is possible that males have physical and physiological advantages in producing loud hawking.

### 4.1 YouTube Videos

There are a few considerations regarding the data collection method. Firstly, COVID-19 and its lockdown in Melbourne has significantly reduced the number of shoppers to markets and restricted all kinds of non-essential market activities including fieldwork and interviews. Since there were a number of suitable amateur videos filmed by tourists available on YouTube, using online YouTube videos has become the most feasible method to collect pre-COVID-19 data. Secondly, the videos were not filmed with the express intent to film market hawking but instead the experience of attending the market. Therefore, they provide natural and authentic data for analysis. Thirdly, the environment and settings, physical appearances of hawkers, and their body language in transactional interactions with shoppers recorded in the videos are all important social messages that could potentially assist in the interpretations and discussions of this study.

The instances of live hawking analysed in this study are taken from two YouTube videos, produced by The Travel Mentor (2018) and Discovery Walking Tours TV (2019), of tourists visiting the Queen Victoria Markets (QVM) in Melbourne, Australia. These selections are motivated by the following three reasons. Firstly, QVM is the largest and one of the oldest 19<sup>th</sup> century food markets in Australia (City of Melbourne 2018). It has an indoor and an outdoor market which encompasses all major varieties of food stalls (e.g., meat and fish, fruit and vegetables, delicatessen), with each variety grouped in the same location (City of Melbourne, n.d.). Thus, it generates great competitions among sellers. Secondly, QVM is the nation’s iconic food market that carries great cultural and historical significance. Since 2018, QVM has been added to Australia’s National Heritage List (City of Melbourne 2018). Thirdly, QVM is a landmark. Its location in the heart of the Melbourne city has not only provided it with

great accessibility for many locals but also turned it into one of the most popular tourist destinations of Melbourne (City of Melbourne 2018, City of Melbourne n.d.). Hence, the resulting vigorous competition as propelled by all the aforementioned reasons has led to a stronger demand and more occurrences of hawking in the videos.

## 4.2 Online Questionnaire

Food-market hawking is a special speech style with embedded intentions and aims for interactions. As such, the shoppers/participants who are the hawkers' target audience can provide greater insight into the social meanings of food-market hawking through their responses. One major advantage of using online questionnaires is that it enables such responses and impressions from participants to be collected within a short time (Milroy and Gordon 2008). Furthermore, it also provides an effective way to "accumulate vast amounts of incredibly high quality data" (Rasinger 2008, cited in Bijeikienė and Tamošiūnaitė 2013:80) to complement the existing audio data.

A survey with a total of 24 questions including demographic questions was hosted online via Qualtrics (n.d.). The estimated completion time was 10 to 15 minutes, and participants were required to give consent before proceeding to the survey questions. The survey questions involved both closed questions and open-ended questions, which were organised into four parts. Part 1, *Your experiences of hawking*, aimed to elicit information on the attending market and the stores' participants associated with hawking. Part 2, *Characteristics of hawking*, comprised 15 questions. Three open-ended questions in this part asked participants about their perceptions, understanding, and attitudes towards hawking employed by hawkers of different genders. The remaining 12 closed questions targeted participants' understanding of linguistic characteristics of hawking such as informativeness, repetitiveness, pitch, rhythmicity, tempo, clarity, attractiveness, etc. Four open-ended questions in Part 3, *Your impressions of hawking*, asked participants about their attitudes and perceptions of hawking. Finally, Part 4, *About yourself*, asked participants about their age, gender, and first language. The answers from the open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively using thematic content analysis. All other questions were optional in this study. This was because the survey of the current study could only remain open for up to 2 weeks. Given the time constraints posed by the duration, non-compulsory design was thus aimed to encourage participation from potential participants.

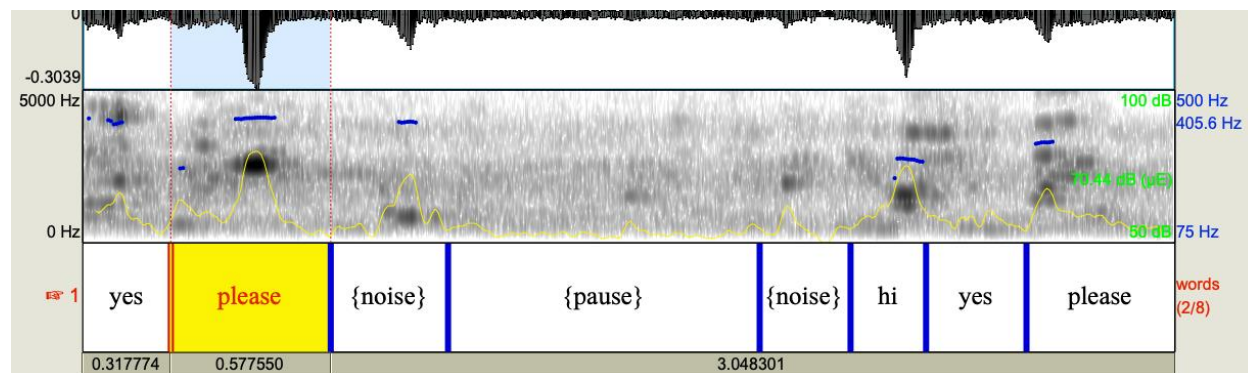
The recruitment method for this study was the nonprobability sampling technique, and the survey was advertised on social media such as Facebook's personal page and community pages, e.g., Southbank Community Hub, as well as through word-of-mouth recommendations from friends to their other friends. Participants were required to indicate whether they had been shoppers of any kind of food markets in Australia or China and were above 18 years old and currently living in Australia. However, due to insufficient respondents with overseas food-market experiences in China, this study was not able to carry out comparisons between food-market hawking in different cultures. Thus, responses that involved Chinese food-market experiences were not included in the analysis. While 93 respondents attempted the questionnaire, only 49 respondents gave participation consent and submitted sufficient responses. As such, responses from participants who did not give consent and/or only attempted one or two questions were removed from analysis. In addition, the non-compulsory design of the survey resulted in some inconsistency of responses. Hence, meaningful quantitative statistical analysis of the closed questions (12 questions from Part 2) could not be carried out in this study.

## 5 Findings

This section aims to demonstrate how speakers' employment of prosodic variables such as intonation, pitch, loudness, and repetition construct two food-market speech styles: a persuasive speech style (Section 5.1) and an aggressive speech style (Section 5.2). It also considers how participants' understanding and impressions of food-market hawking assist in interpretations of the data, before briefly illustrating the sociocultural meanings and associations imbued in food-market hawking (Section 5.3).

### 5.1 Female Hawkers' Persuasive Speech Style

Figure 1 (Discovery Walking Tours TV 2019) captures the "rapport-oriented" hawking employed by a female hawker at an indoor bakery/delicatessen of QVM. It is argued that the interpretation of such "rapport-oriented" hawking is built upon the female hawker's intention and shoppers' reactions and actions as a result of hawking.



**Figure 1:** Pitch track of an excerpt of delicatessen stall hawking, *yes please (1.6) hi yes please* (18:00–18:40).

Figure 1 shows that both tokens of *yes* have a relatively low pitch (405 Hz and 304 Hz, respectively) compared to both tokens of *please*, which rise in f0 (fundamental frequency; 423 Hz and 355 Hz, respectively). The clip used to generate Figure 1 underwent noise reduction in order to obtain an accurate pitch track, but was originally recorded against a very high level of noise in the food market. Due to the speaker’s adaptation to that noise, the maximum intensity (yellow line) for this speaker was around 80 dB, which could be understood as the level produced by alarm clocks (American Academy of Audiology 2010). Her average pitch does not vary too much from the mean adult female pitch range, e.g., 228 Hz (SD 60) (Bogdanova-Beglarian et al. 2016). The movement from low (L) on the first *yes* followed by a low to high accent contour (L-H\*) on the first *please* constitutes a high rising terminal (HRT) indicating a typical interrogative-declarative Australian intonation (Guy and Vonwiller 1984). After a short 1.6-second “pause”, a subsequent *hi yes please* observes a change in the intonation of *please* to a level tone with no changes in pitch. As indexical meanings are often constructed in layers (Eckert 2018), the construal of such prosodic changes in hawking could also be interpreted in three layers, as follows.

In the first layer, the hawker uses an HRT intonation with *please* to imply a conversation initiator or invitation, aiming to receive shoppers’ consensus for responses. As mentioned by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), the interpretation of linguistically conveyed content often relies on what the speaker intends to accomplish and the listeners’ responses. In this case, the use of HRT conveys hawkers’ invitations or “requests” to shoppers to visit their stall or initiate a conversation but with uncertainty regarding who will respond. This corresponds to one of the functions of HRT, namely, to express uncertainty and ask for permission (Guy and Vonwiller 1984). Research on intonations and pitch effects also suggests that a HRT could help construct “a gentle request” (Vickers and Goble 2014:211). Moreover, hawking deployed in the form of questions is immediately accompanied by a smile to indicate signs of amicability. The intention of such hawking is to elicit responses from any passing customers in the form of eye contact or reciprocated smiles, through which a basic rapport can be achieved. This interpretation and observation was corroborated by questionnaire respondents: “*I’m very attracted to personal hawking*”, “*hawker uses it to connect with customers / build relationships with regulars*”. Hence, by paying “deference”, female hawkers aim to transmit friendly messages and attract shoppers. Such intentions could then contribute to an understanding of a persuasive speech style among shoppers.

In the second layer, the female hawkers receive responses from shoppers who show acknowledgement of the hawking. When shoppers turn back or look at the female hawker, the hawker immediately indicates that she is ready to serve. This is confirmed via eye contact with the customer and actively engaging with them by introducing her goods or asking if they need any particular item. Such experiences were also reported by respondents: “*Often I’m very attracted to personal hawking — like if someone sees you and says ‘hey! Black rice is good for promoting women’s health, young lady do you want to have a look?’*”.

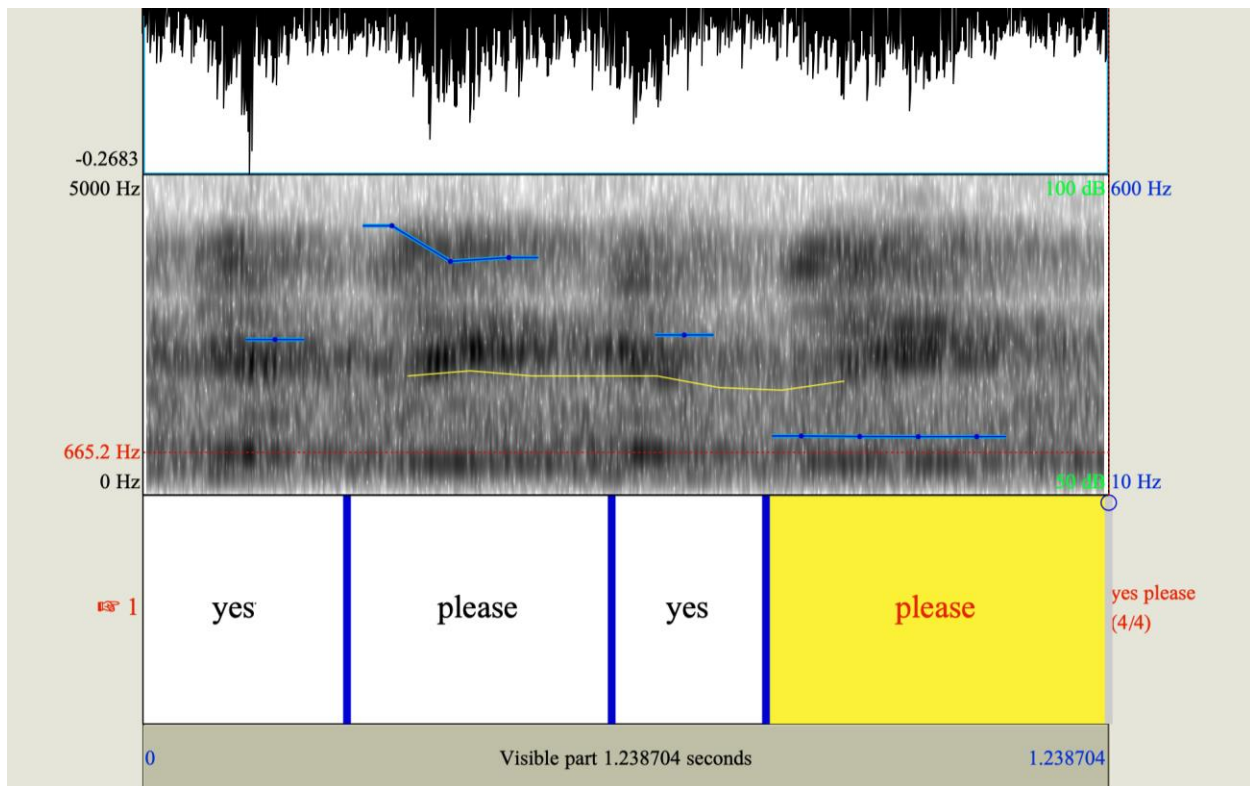
In the third layer, if successful, the hawker will then hand the customer over to other stall helpers for the transaction and continue her hawking (i.e., *hi yes please*) to previously attracted customers before they turn away. The informal salutation *hi* is delivered in rising intonation, signalling that the hawker’s attention is directed to the shopper. As shown in other parts of the same video, female hawkers often also employ informal friendly address forms, such as *darl(ing)*, to convey endearment, which makes the hawking become more personalised. The *yes please* following *hi* uses a rising and falling intonation pattern, which is a “singsong” intonation stereotypically recognised as a feature of female speech (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:86). Such “singsong” invitation is gentle and not information-laden, representing a tactful manipulation of HRT stereotypical of the female rapport-oriented persuasive speech style.

This strengthens the association in the food-market environment of such speech style with a gentle female hawker persona.

Compared to male hawking (e.g., in Section 5.2), hawking produced by female hawkers is commented on by respondents as “*not overbearing, not too loud*” and “*informs but does not harass potential customers*”. Myriad studies on gender and language ideologies have expounded on the sociocultural connotations that each gender embodies through their uses of intonation, pitch, and tone (e.g., Kendall and Tannen 1997, Irvine et al. 1987, Cameron 2014, Lakoff 1973). Similar to Zhang’s (2005, 2008) observation of the gendered use of rhotacisation, certain linguistic variables or language expressions are generally avoided by females due to their stereotypical associations. Since “gendered ways of framing are [...] resources for accomplishing the speakers’ purpose” (Kendall and Tannen 1997:82), in workplaces such as food markets, the female hawkers’ persuasive speech style is a linguistic strategy to influence market shoppers’ purchase decisions. Adopting it could reinforce the shoppers’ impression and understanding of the female hawker persona.

## 5.2 Male Hawkers’ Aggressive Speech Style

Conversely, the same phrase used by the male hawkers with less intonational variation but greater intensity tends to create different linguistic associations. Figure 2 (The Travel Mentor 2018) shows a pitch track of an excerpt produced by a male hawker from an outdoor egg stall from QVM.

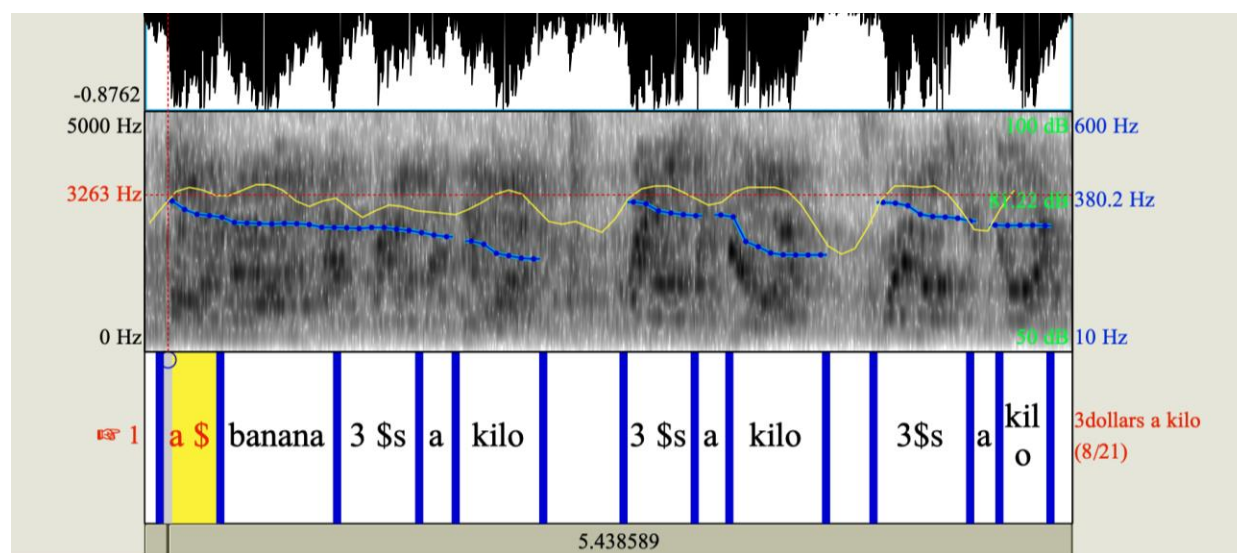


**Figure 2:** Pitch track of an excerpt of egg stall hawking *yes please yes please* (8:40–49).

Instead of an HRT intonation on the first *yes please*, Figure 2 shows that the egg stall hawker has a level tone on *yes* and accented high to low (H\*-L) intonation on the first *please*. The average f0 of this hawking is 302 Hz, varying from a maximum of 511 Hz to a minimum of 117 Hz. The intensity shown is generally constant around 70 dB. The fact that this male hawking has a lower amplitude than the female one is very likely due to the far distance between the video taker and the male hawker as well as to greater background noise in the outdoors, rather than due to gender differences. The phrase *yes please* was repeated continuously without a pause in 1.2 seconds (and many times after, but those parts were not included in the analysis due to space). Research on the effects of repetition has found that repetition enhances involvement and is often a linguistic strategy to increase participation (Tannen 2007, Koike 1998).

Given the clamour in food markets, repetition is the most employed linguistic tactic to convey information to, and attract, shoppers. Since loudness (intensity) is also often stereotypically loaded with gender information and the social characteristics of the speaker (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, Stepanova 2013), the combinatory effect of intensity and repetition tend to generate a stronger impression of a tough male hawker with an unpleasant speech style among its listeners. As confirmed by respondents, being “*louder*”, “*aggressive*”, and “*more assertive*” are general impressions that male hawkers impart on shoppers. As such, impressions of a loud and repetitive voice without much intonational change would likely reinforce the connections to male hawker personae and their aggressive speech styles among shoppers.

Furthermore, both repetitions of *yes please* follow the same intonation contour of almost equal pitch and intensity on both *yes*, supporting Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s (2003) finding that men’s speech is often associated with relatively less intonational variation. The only changes fall on the two uses of *please*, with the first *please* receiving an emphatic accent and the second *please* ending with an L% boundary tone. Such changes of a high pitch (H\*) to an L% boundary tone and with many repetitions often constitute “command intonation”, resulting in the association of a less amicable persona (Vickers and Goble 2014:216). Similarly, these prosodic variations used by male hawkers correspond to the “command intonation”, potentially reinforcing the impression that men’s speech style is less friendly, and thus heightening the connection between assertive speech style and male hawker persona.



**Figure 3:** Pitch track of an excerpt of fruit stall hawking *a dollar banana 3 dollars a kilo 3 dollars a kilo 3 dollars a kilo*, \$=dollar (29:10–30:15).

Respondents also commented that male hawking is “*more direct*”. This suggests that, rather than showing endearment or request, male hawkers are often information-oriented. Figure 3 (Discovery Walking Tours TV 2019) shows an excerpt of hawking produced by another outdoor male fruit stall hawker. It shows that the highest pitch falls on the prices *a dollar* and *three dollars*. The intonation is high to low from the price to *kilo*, starting from *a* and falling all the way through *kilo*. By accentuating the pitch that associates with the price, such prosodic strategies help draw and maintain the public’s attention to the low sales’ price. Moreover, the mean  $f_0$  of this hawking is 305Hz, which is about three times higher than a mean adult male pitch (e.g., 100Hz in Podesva 2007). This high tone register with a high pitch and high intensity also signals astonishment (Barth-Weingarten 2010), as the hawker emphasises the low price of the banana, while the repetition aims to impress the shoppers and dynamically influence the buyers’ choices. By repeating this information-oriented hawking continuously (similarly to the other parts of the continuous hawking that were not included in this study), the hawker urges shoppers to hasten themselves into purchases. Thus, the resulting pressure tends to make shoppers feel “*forced on*”, which in turn, may create the stereotypical connection between the speech style of male hawkers with aggressiveness.

In addition, despite the interferences from the background noise outdoors, Figure 3 shows that the recorded intensity of this male hawking is constantly above 80 dB, with the highest intensity reaching the threshold of dangerous noise level of 85 dB (American Academy of Audiology 2010). Such high intensity could be driven by the surrounding noise and/or vigorous competition engaged with other stores and hawkers, since all stores of similar nature were



located in the same area. As such, the level of noise was often commented on as “*a bit intimidating/ overwhelming*”; in other words, it was “*overwhelming to have a lot of noise stimulation*”. Hence, ambivalent feelings towards hawking as a result of loudness and repetition were often mentioned by shoppers: “*Sometimes the price being offered draws me in, but often the volume of shouting drives me away*”. Since social factors such as environment and event can all impinge upon and critically determine linguistic choice and production (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003), intensity may often be the key prosodic variable for outdoor male hawkers to create dynamicity and gain competitiveness, which may be unfavourably interpreted as exerting pressure on customers into purchases. Eventually, such “discomfort” is very likely to be attributed to male hawkers’ aggressive speech style, thus associating it with their persona.

Moreover, Figure 3 shows that this hawking, *3 dollars a kilo*, was repeated with similar intonation patterns. Once again, such intonation patterns illustrate the general gender stereotype that men speak with fewer intonational changes. Similar observations were also reported by respondents: “*men tend to be more monotonous*”, “*they tend to be more soldier like*”, and “*more men than women hawk in a very fast, repetitive style (almost sounds like an auctioneer)*”. Such perceptual recollection substantiates male hawkers’ prosodic manipulations of repetitions with intensity and less variation. By intertwining the sound with a sense of “last-piece” urgency and regret of missing out on a valued buy, male hawkers strategically impose such a mentality onto passing shoppers without their awareness. Respondents recounted: “*sometimes [hawking] made me buy something I wouldn’t have been aware of before hawking*” and “*the sound of a good price [...] has definitely swayed me!*”. Even if the goods are not on the purchase list, respondents stated: “*I will at least go and look at it*” and “*I want to see if it’s by a good deal*”. One respondent particularly recollected a “regretful” purchase they made in South Melbourne Market:

One stall had lots of flowers that looked high quality but expensive. The other stall just had what looked like leftovers in about 8 buckets on the ground [...]. As I was choosing and deciding [...] one of the stall holders at the other stall, started hawking [...]. I did end up buying 3 bunches of flowers from this stall rather than the expensive stall. I did not enjoy it as much though as I felt rushed by the vendor and lured in!!! [...] I should have chosen those that I really wanted rather than the ones I’d been lured into buying because of the spruiking!!!!

Once the prosodic variables become the “dynamic motor icon”, they will act “as a direct experience driver” (Hancil and Hirst 2013:9) that controls and influences the experiencers’ decision based on the intended information of the utterance. Hence, unavoidably, the ambivalent feelings generated during and after the hawking will likely reinforce the impression of the hawkers’ aggressive speech style, thereby strengthening the association with the male hawker persona.

### 5.3 Social Values of Hawking and the Hawker Persona

Be it persuasive or aggressive, food-market hawking is constantly associated with authentic market speech styles. When participants were asked if hawking is necessary to a food market and, if so, why, 19 out of 36 (53%) who answered indicated *yes* explicitly, with another 5 feeling neutral but recognising that hawking is “*part of the atmosphere*”. Although 33% of respondents did not think hawking was “necessary”, they pointed out that there is social and cultural significance in food-market hawking. For example,

No; but it is something many people associate strongly with good markets, and often fondly. And I would think that it plays a role in price setting/profit/competition in a food market. Both of these points lead me to think that market hawking is one of the biggest features that set food markets apart from supermarkets and other “modern” forms of shopping/selling — with a standardised range of products, set prices, etc.

On the one hand, this merging of hawking with “true” market-ness, heightens the social and cultural prominence of the speech style deployed by a certain social group; on the other hand, it further suggests the social significance of hawkers as an inseparable and integral part of the market. For participants who agree that hawking is necessary, they also explain that it is “*because culturally that’s what differentiates [food markets] from a supermarket*”. The construal of social and cultural significance of hawking as “*a part of the culture in the markets*” to the extent that “*it*

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<sup>1</sup> According to Collins English Dictionary, “spruik” is Australian archaic slang which means a kind of public speech used by salespersons. In this case, “spruiking” refers to hawking.

*makes it the market*” reveals a transformational understanding of food-market hawking, from the speech styles of only a particular group to the true language of all authentic markets. As further elaborated by respondents, “*it [hawking] adds colour and a fun atmosphere*” and is “*a factor in the atmosphere of a market*”. One respondent clearly stated that such enhanced atmosphere “*is one reason I shop at markets*”. Such ideological construal of hawking as the true market language would appear to underpin shoppers’ understanding of hawking as a natural reflection of food-market hawkers’ speech styles.

This ideological connection between gender and speech types could again be demonstrated through respondents’ immediate recollection and descriptions of the characteristics of hawking and the gender of the hawker. In explanation of their associations of genders and hawking styles, male hawking and thus male hawkers were more frequently identified: “*I think though I’ve generally experienced more male hawking than female. Possibly because they tend to have louder voices*”; “*Men tend to yell more. I’ve had more women smilingly hawk than men, generally? [...] When they [men] don’t try to be friendly it can come across more threatening*”; and simply put, “*[m]en usually hawk in louder voice, lower pitch, higher speech*”. As one respondent mentioned, “*I mainly remember men hawking so I can’t say... But then, that says a lot in itself!!!*”. Such immediate and ideological association of sounds with the speakers is the indexical force of “sound symbolism” (Eckert 2010), or what Irvine and Gal (2000) refer to as “iconisation” (Irvine 2001). This represents “a semiotic process that transforms the sign relationship between linguistic features and the social images to which they are linked” (Irvine 2001:33). By naturalising the relationship between linguistic variables and the speakers, the linguistic features that “somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence” (Irvine 2001:33) could then further contribute to the public understanding of food-market hawking employed by both male and female hawkers, thus highlighting the connection between hawkers’ personae and their sociocultural saliency in the construction of “true” market-ness.

## 6 Conclusion

This study offers a preliminary exploration of food-market language use and its social meanings, styles and personae in the social context of food markets. Male and female hawkers manipulate prosodic variables to generate hawking that constitutes two different speech styles: an aggressive speech style and persuasive speech style, respectively. Social elements can be stylistic motivators that lead to varied employment of prosodic variables and thus enact different speech styles. While this study has explored the social meanings of food-market hawking, it also attempts to shed light on the emotional attachments people have to food-market hawking as a speech style and as a cultural activity. Associating this with an authentic market speech style, food-market hawking is not only a symbolic reflection of true market-ness but also a stylistic representation of food-market hawker personae. In addition, this study aims to address the gap in sociolinguistic studies of the semiotic saliency and meaning potentials of food market language and its stylistic construction. However, the current small sample size, with an inconsistent number of participants answering questions, prevents the study from making any meaningful statistical analysis and robust conclusions. In addition, this micro-scale study has only looked at hawking from food markets in Melbourne with online videos of unsatisfactory quality. The results obtained are thus less representative, especially for food markets in other parts of and outside Australia. As such, good recording through ethnographic observations and/or interviews with food-market hawkers would yield more insightful results. This study calls for further studies on food-market hawking with attention to both linguistic features and constructions as well as their cultural significance across many different social and linguistic contexts.

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