
Drag queens, the tongue pop, and the development of a translocal queer style

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This talk explores the rapid development of a special register that is quintessential of celebrated aspects of drag culture. “Reading” and “throwing shade” involves drag queens – typically LGBTQ+ performers who exaggerate the traditional gender stereotypes – engaging in a highly ritualised exchange of insults and mockery, not unlike the exchanges in joking relationships in diverse cultures. This multi-modal performance is a hot bed of extremely expressive and highly quotable expressions, feeding into new and distinct sociolects. Contextually, these expressions serve to undermine ones peers, as part of a culturally-specific code, their shared usage mark community membership.

In this talk, I exemplify this process with a salient yet non-verbal expression, the “tongue pop”: a click interjection that is part of a drag queen’s stylistic repertoire to construct a camp ‘diva’ persona. I describe how a combination of culture specific rituals, the tongue pop’s formal properties, and the current international visibility of drag culture, has established the tongue pop as part of a translocal queer style, whilst also driving variation on a local level. It is also powerful index of affinity with a translocal queer community.