Chapter 7: Beyond heteronormativity and towards intersectionality

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Introduction

The current chapter introduces the area of language and sexuality, which in many ways is closely connected to topics and approaches in language and gender studies. Early observations of language and sexuality mirror several of the issues in early language and gender scholarship. For example, language and gender pioneer Robin Lakoff's (1975) concept of 'women's language' has long since been critiqued for implying that all women use language in the same way (see Chapter 2). As we will see, early attempts to describe 'homosexual slang' or 'gayspeak' or 'gay men's English' have also been superseded by research that does not aim to correlate specific linguistic features with a speaker's sexuality, but instead views language as a resource for speakers to index sexual desires, practices and identities. In this chapter we will give a brief overview of the history of language and sexuality studies. We will look at a range of research and extracts of talk, mostly focusing on conversational style and discourse, although we will briefly also introduce some of the sociophonetic work on the idea of the 'gay voice'. This chapter will also introduce you to a range of important concepts which underpin research on language, gender and sexuality, including 'heteronormativity' and 'intersectionality'. The chapter will highlight the importance of language and sexuality scholarship to move beyond its historical focus on speakers from North America and Europe to include perspectives from the 'Global South'.

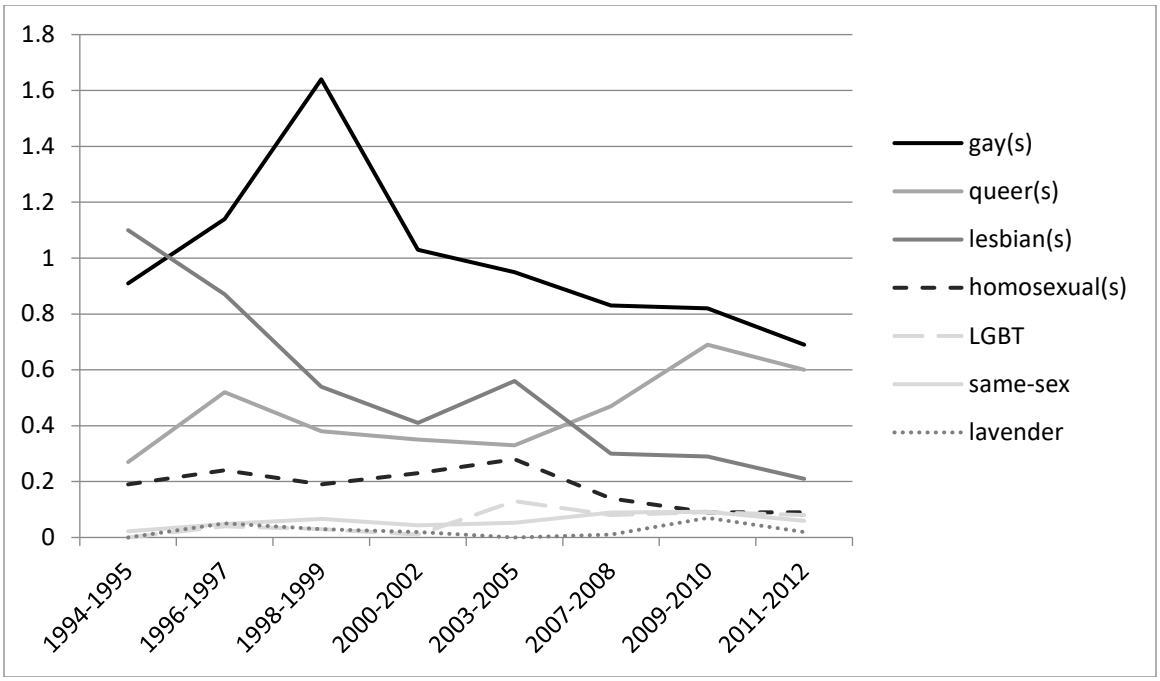
More than just terminology

Early commentaries on language and sexuality were often derived from medicalised or pathologized accounts of 'homosexuality'. This is also one of the main reasons why '*homosexual* is today hardly ever used as a self-identifying term by gay people themselves' as Heiko Motschenbacher (2021: 26) argues in his article entitled 'Language and sexuality studies today: why 'homosexual' is a bad word and why 'queer linguist' is not an identity'.

Activity

Paul Baker's (2013) analysis of two corpora provides an interesting insight into ingroup and outgroup use of sexual identity labels. His main corpus consists of 150000 words from conference abstracts for the annual Lavender conference on language and sexuality from 1994-2012. Based on the figure below (from Baker 2013: 191), consider the changing trends of these labels in the conference abstracts. What do you make of the trends of the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian'? Contrast them with one another and then compare both with terms which have been on the increase. What do you think are the reasons for these trends? How do you think this graph would look nowadays in the US and in your own country/language?

Table 1



Bear in mind that this graph is based on the results of conference abstracts of academics specialising in language and sexuality studies. Baker's second corpus consists of about one millions words of published written text in the so-called Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), that is, general written language use. There he found that the use of the term 'gay' remains consistently high and consistently far above any of the other identity labels, including the label 'lesbian', which is document to the comparative invisibility of lesbians in public discourse (e.g. see Jones 2018; 2021)

In both corpora there is a decline in the usage of the term 'homosexual'. The reasons for this are captured in the next table, which reproduces Baker's findings on the top 10 collocates of *homosexual* and *gay* in the COCA corpus, see table 2 below from Baker (2013: 198). Consider these findings, also in relation to Motschenbacher's (2021) verdict on the term 'homosexual', above.

Table 2. Collocates of *homosexual* and *gay* (COCA).

	Homosexual	Gay
1	copulation	closeted
2	closeted	ambiguously
3	sodomy	openly
4	subculture	legalize
5	stigma	bashing
6	acts	self-identified
7	inclination	marriage
8	tendencies	legalizing
9	conduct	banning
10	orientation	marriages

'Gayspeak and lesbian language': the beginning of language and sexuality studies

Baker's findings on language and sexuality scholars' move from 'gay' and 'lesbian' to more inclusive and diverse identity labels such as 'queer' in many ways reflect developments in language and sexuality studies more generally. In their 2003 book *Language and Sexuality*, Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick dedicate one chapter to a historical overview of research on language, sexuality and identity. In this chapter they identify four phrases of language and sexuality research:

1. 1920s – 40s
2. 1950s - 60s
3. 1970s – 90s
4. 1990s – present

In the first phase, scholarship aligned itself with dominant medical and social discourses which pathologised and essentialised "homosexuality". The work of the time, as for example Gerson Legman's 'medical study of homosexuals' consisted mainly of a summary of vocabulary items and pronoun choices which were said to be used by gay individuals as a 'secret code' to communicate and signal attraction within the ingroup.

In the second phase, gay and lesbian scholars began to conduct research themselves as part of their activism during the beginnings of the Gay Liberation movement. Many of these activists/scholars distanced themselves from what they saw as 'old-fashioned and misguided homosexuals' and their 'retrograde' language use (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 76-77), which allowed the scholars/activists to position themselves as politically progressive. That is, although this research did not align itself with the view that homosexuality is a pathological condition, reflected also in the lexicon of its users, the newly advanced homosexual identity was 'formed in part by highlighting differences among homosexuals in order to valorise some of them, while subjecting others to critique' (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 77).

Activity

Critically discuss the idea of the "gay, lesbian and bisexual speech community" in the following quotation by Richard Mohr 1992: 27 (cited in Gray 2016: 229). Consider in particular terms such as 'natural' and 'community'. How much agency are individual speakers given according to this view?

> The gay community cannot be thought of as an artifice like, say, a stamp collectors' club or Alcoholics Anonymous … Rather, the gay community is a natural community in a way that English is a natural language but the computer languages Fortran and Cobol are not. If one is born in England of English parents, it is not an option to decide not to speak English as one's mother tongue but to set up linguistic shop instead in some artificial language, in the way one can, if one does not like some computer language, simply make up one's own.

In the third phase, activists replaced a rhetoric of division with one that highlighted a unified new gay and lesbian community. This scholarship was inspired by sociolinguistic work which argued that language reflects social group identities (rather than individual pathology), reviving the idea of

'Homosexual Language' or 'Gayspeak' and likening it to scholarship on the language use of other minority groups, e.g. 'women's language' and 'Black English Vernacular'. There was, however, considerably less work on and interest in the language use of lesbians than gay men, see Cameron and Kulick (2003: 97) and Jones (2018: 3) for a discussion of possible reasons. Some of this work revisited the notion of a (secret) code, for examples work on Polari, a list of words used in some UK cities in the early to mid 20th century by gay men.

Activity

Using online sources as well as your reading (e.g. Gray 2016: 230. Cameron and Kulick 2003: 91), research the British slang Polari. What do we know about the origins of Polari? How many words were there said to be? When, where, by whom and why was it used? How is it associated with camp talk?

In this third phase scholars also tried to move 'beyond the lavender lexicon', that is, terms relating to sexual preferences and identities, as William Leap argued in his edited book with the same title:

> There is more to lesbian and gay communication than coded words with special meanings, and more to lesbian and gay linguistic research than the compilation of dictionaries or the tracing of single-word etymologies (Leap 1995: xvii).

Despite this move beyond the lavender lexicon, research in this phase still tended to accept the view that there is a gay 'community' whose language use is largely homogenous. For example, Leap, a pioneer of language and sexuality studies and the founder of the Lavender Linguistics Conferences, argued that both lesbians and gay men's language use is characterised by cooperation, which he defined as 'carefully negotiated styles of turn-taking, the use of descriptive imagery and metaphor, inference strategies. And a range of additional techniques ensuring listener- as well as speaker-involvement in each exchange' (Leap 1996: 16).

Activity

Consider the following extract from a friendly conversation between six lesbian friends discussing the contents of a lunch pack. According to the authors, Ruth Morgan and Kathleen Wood (1995: 248), the extract captures typical 'lesbian talk'. However, subsequent critique by Cameron and Kulick 2003 (94) argues that 'confronted only with this transcript, an analyst might be hard pressed to identify its specifically lesbian content'. What does this conversational style remind you of? You may want to return to Chapter 4, especially the work by Jennifer Coates. Why do you think that Morgan and Wood see this extract as 'lesbian talk'? Would we see this extract as lesbian talk if we did not know that all of the speakers identified as lesbian? To answer this question re-read the section on 'Analysing gender in spoken interaction' in Chapter 2. Finally, consider why there might be much less work on the language of lesbians than of gay men.

1 Kathy: What else do you pack in lunches?
2 Mandy: (laughs)
3 Linda: Weeell …
4 Kathy: chips
5 Mandy: bananas
6 Linda: fruit
7 Tonya: and a sandwich

In the fourth phase of language and sexuality research, scholars began to view language and other semiotic practices as resources for individual speakers to construct or 'index' their (sexual) identities. This view, informed by performativity and queer theory on one hand, but also by socio(cultural) linguistic understandings of identity construction (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) foregrounds the heterogeneity of the 'community' and captures a wide range of non-normative identities, including those of drag queens, bisexuals and, more recently, transgender people. We will return to this fourth phase of the research further below.

Whilst there are considerable differences between the four phases summed up above, they are all unified by their understanding of 'sexuality' as 'sexual identity'. In the early 2000 there was a debate which challenged this consensus, arguing that language and sexuality studies should re-orient itself from an interest in identity to a focus on sexual desire, including fantasy, fear, repression, pleasure and the unconscious. Don Kulick (2000a: 272; 2000b) who led this debate argued that language and sexuality research should free itself from its 'unhappy fixation on identity', and instead focus on the exploration of 'language and desire'. In his later collaboration with Deborah Cameron, Kulick then accepts that identity research is still valid, however

> a focus on desire acknowledges that sexuality is centrally about the erotic. This may seem self-evident, but in practice it has not been central to research conceived in an 'identity' paradigm, where the key question is how social actors use language to index their membership of particular groups (e.g. 'gay men', 'lesbians').
> (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 106)

The challenge from this desire-oriented approach led to a defence of identity-centred studies of language and sexuality, which argue that 'the social meanings of sexuality are not just restricted to desire' and highlight the importance of investigating even sexual desire in the context of ideologies, practices and identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2004; but see also Morrish and Leap 2007; Sauntson and Kyratizis 2007). Kulick (2000: 270) also warns that research should not 'vaporize sexuality into gender', although Kulick's later collaboration with Deborah Cameron acknowledges the strong link between sexuality and gender, arguing that 'while gender does not subsume sexuality, it is clear that no absolute separation between them is possible. An investigation of either will involve the other as well. Whenever sexuality is at issue, gender is also at issue – and, importantly, vice versa' (Cameron and Kulick 2003a: 142).

Retrospectively, although the desire vs identity debate was intense and polemical, it is unlikely to qualify as the 5th phase of language and sexuality scholarship: sociolinguists' engagement

with desire has continued to be 'luke-warm' (Milani 2017: 413), whilst research on language and sexual identities has continued to flourish.

Queering gender and sexuality

In this section we return to the fourth phase of language and sexuality research, which sees language and other semiotic practices as a resource for speakers to position themselves in accordance with or opposition to a range of (dominant) ideologies about sexuality, sex, gender and identity. This approach has been influenced on one hand by Queer studies, which focus on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual communities and problematises dominant ideologies about (hetero)sexuality and gender, including binaries such as 'man' vs 'woman'. On the other hand, it has also been influenced by developments in sociocultural linguistic scholarship on language, indexicality and identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005; Hall 2011).

Activity: On the basis of the following quotation from Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013: 520), define the following terms and consider their relevance for current language, gender and sexuality research: Heteronormativity; Queer Studies; Queer Theory; Queer; Queer/ing perspective:

> Queer Theory is a cover term for various, often highly heterogeneous, approaches that are driven by a critical focus on heteronormativity (Wagenknecht, 2007/2004), that is, the discursive construction of certain forms of heterosexuality as natural, normal or preferable. The meaning of the adjective queer has changed considerably over time (see also Rauchut, 2008). While it was originally a highly derogative synonym of homosexual, it lost – at least in LGBT-friendly contexts – some of its negative meaning potential and came to be used as a positive umbrella term for all non-heterosexual identities. The (henceforth capitalised) academic use of the term in collocations like Queer Theory and Queer Studies has led to another meaning shift that places greater emphasis on the deconstruction of gendered/sexual binarisms and heteronormativity. It follows that the term Queer Studies is not equivalent to gay and lesbian studies. Even though the latter automatically possess Queer potential in the sense that they study non-heterosexual identities and desires, they do not necessarily conform to a Queer Theoretical framework in the narrower sense, which presupposes critical reflection on sexuality-related categories and their normativity [….] Using a Queer perspective (also when looking at heterosexualities) is not so much a matter of deciding what is Queer, but of choosing to view certain behaviours in a non-heteronormative light or from the perspective of the sexually marginalised.

Queer Theory is often described as taking an anti-identity stance, as identity is seen as fixed as well as 'always feeding into the project of heteronormativity' (Hall 2013: 635). However, Kira Hall argues that in linguistics, particularly ethnographic and/or sociocultural linguistic studies, identity is not seen as stable or linked to heteronormativity as in Queer Theory:

> In ethnographically informed accounts identity is not inherently 'bad', even if society prioritizes certain types of identity over others. Rather, identity just is. It emerges in all interactions, even very queer ones, in fleeting and often unpredictable ways. It materializes in the production of

> difference as well as sameness, anti-normativity as well as normativity, subversion as well as complicity.
> (Hall 2013: 636)

In the remainder of this chapter which is dedicated to recent and current scholarship in the study of language, gender and sexuality we will see many of the different understandings of 'identity' which Hall describes above.

Intersectionality

As we saw in the previous chapter, both Judith Butler's (1990) work on performativity and work on linguistic indexicality (Ochs 1992; Silverstein 2004) supports our understanding that language use does not reflect our pre-determined or fixed identities, but that instead we draw on certain linguistic features and styles to perform or construct a range of stances and positions. Rusty Barrett's study of African American drag queens is an excellent pioneering example of this work which also demonstrates how gender, sexuality and other aspects of identity such as race interlace or 'intersect'. The gay men whose language use Barrett observed during their work as drag queens in gay bars used a variety of speaking styles, including a 'white woman's style' as well as African American Vernacular English and 'gay male speech' (Barrett, 2011, pp.422–23). Their performances of identities as drag queens is thus a performance of a multifaceted or, as Barrett calls is, 'polyphonous' identity, indexing sexuality, gender, race and social class.

The interrelation of sexuality with a variety of other aspects of identity is also evident in Kira Hall's (2011) ethnographic work in New Delhi. Hall explores how sexuality, masculinity and social class emerge in the spoken interaction of a group of Hindi-English speakers who were born as biologically female but identify as 'Boys'. The Boys are attracted to other women, do not identify as lesbians but at the time of the research did also not use the label 'trans men', despite many of them viewing markers of male anatomy (a moustache, a penis) as ultimate goal. As Hall (2011, p 385) explains, the Boys 'orient to the other-sex models of gender eroticism long associated with rural India, aspiring to a semiotics of masculinity that has sexual reassignment surgery as its endpoint'. The linguistic resources that the Boys draw on in their local construction of masculinity include their marked use of Hindi (rather than English) for their discussion of sexuality, and their adversarial stance taking (indexed by playful verbal competition, and Bollywood villain intonation).

Hall's rich ethnographic data shows how the local linguistic and identity practices of the Boys are informed by larger-scale ideological association, for example, between Hindi and backwardness or even crudeness (whereas English is associated with femininity and elite stances). Together with their strong orientation towards biological/ physical signs of male sexuality, these resources allow the Boys to index an oppositional, non-elite class position which aligns them with the traditional masculinity which is central to boy identity. Boy-identity is therefore a class-based and gendered sexuality in this group.

What this work as well as many of the studies we will introduce in this chapters show is that it is important to take an intersectional approach to the study of language and identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality in the context of anti-discrimination law highlights systems of power and (multiple, intersecting levels of) oppression experienced by Black women. Whilst outside linguistics much of the work on intersectionality has stayed true to its original focus on the ways in which race, gender and discrimination are intertwined (but see Nash 2008; Levon 2015), language and gender scholrship has

tended to explore intersections between gender and sexuality, as this chapter demonstrates. In fact, Bucholtz and miles-hercules (2021: 416) argue that both the focus on oppression and the focus on race have frequently been lost in language and gender studies. However, this does not always have to be the case, as Susan Ehrlich's (2021) analysis of sexual assault trials shows, which captures intersections of sexism and racism. It is also important to acknowledge that a range of work such as Hall's (2011) and Barrrett's (2011) above may not use the term 'intersectionality', but nevertheless explore important intersections of language, gender, sexuality, social class/caste and race as well as ethnicity. This also goes for the early work of Pichler (e.g. 2009) on the talk of British Bangladeshi girls in a working class area of the East End of London. Later work then explicitly adopts the term 'intersectionality' to explore the ways in which gender, class and race are intertwined both with respect to identity and oppression, e.g. in Pichler (2021) which analyses the way that young black working class fathers are pathologized despite adopting the positions of caring and involved fatherhood, even in the face of their considerable financial struggles. We will return to some additional work on intersections of gender, sexuality, class/caste, race and ethnic culture in the final section of this chapter.

The art of put down

One interesting example of how language can serve as a resource for some LGBTQI+ speakers in certain contexts is the use of playful insults. One type of playful insult that has been investigated by sociolinguists is the so-called 'ritual insult', which, according to Labov (1972) involves commenting on attributes of the target (or somebody close to the target) known to be untrue. Labov first observed these competitive verbal duels among young Black men in inner city Harlem and found that they often featured playful attacks about the young men's mothers, e.g. 'A: Your momma is/has …….' which then had to be countered (rather than challenged) by the other speaker in order not to lose face. Labov (1972) highlighted that on those rare occasions that the verbal competitions slipped from ritual and untrue to personal and true, the playful frame was lost. Murray (1997) describes the use of ritual insults as central to what he calls 'the art of gay insulting'. Rather than focusing on mothers, the ritual insults Murray describes tended to be about sexual behaviour. Murray (1979: 2019) sees ritual insults used by gay speakers as 'self-defence'. Moreover, he argues that

> insulting is a skill more developed among the 'doubly damned' – black gays and gay transvestites, both of whom are likely to encounter degrading remarks made by other gay men as well as those made by participants in the dominant culture. A sharp tongue is a weapon honed through frequent use, and is a survival skill for those who function outside genteel circles.
>
> (Murray 1979: 218)

Murray highlights that these playful insults are of course not used by all gay speakers (i.e. a feature of 'gayspeak' which we critiqued above), instead they are used only by some gay speakers in certain settings. One such setting has been described nearly 40 years later by Sean McKinnon in his 2017 study of drag queen's backstage talk. Differently from Murray, however, the insults produced by McKinnon's drag queens are not 'ritual' but instead focus on an attribute of the target that is known to be true. McKinnon therefore uses the term 'reading' or 'mock impoliteness' rather than '*ritua*l insults' (my emphasis). The following is an example from McKinnon's data collected in the backstage area of a drag queen club.

Extract

1. Melinda: . wait you nobody likes my attitude? uhhhhh ok\
2. Eva: \nobody likes [said quietly] your act either buddy [laughter from others] . .
3. we still keep you on
4. Melinda: awwwww mannnn well then maybe I should just sit back here and get shingles
5. from your mouth [coughing noise from James]
6. Eva: . . YOU don't even make any sense . like . the worst part about your whole life is
7. that you don't make sense
8. Melinda: . I DO MAKE SENSE!

(adapted from McKinnon 2017: 114)

McKinnon highlights a number of mock-impolite features in this episode of 'reading'. Some of these features are evident to us even without any prior knowledge of the context, for example, Eva's reply to Melinda in lines 2-3 clearly serves as an escalation of the dispute. Eva fails to reassure Melinda and escalates the insult by stating that people dislike not only Melinda's attitude but also her entire act. The same goes for the condescending 'we still keep you on'. This escalation is met with laughter, which shows that firstly these kinds of insults, just like ritual insults (Labov 1972, Pichler 2019), are set within a playful frame, and that secondly the audience has an important part to play in evaluating the verbal duel. Sometimes, however, we need a bit of background knowledge to fully understand the put-down, e.g. it is important to know that the usual in-group address term in Eva's group would be 'girl' rather than 'buddy', which connotes both distance and masculinity and is therefore used as a put-down. Equally, in line 4, we need background knowledge to understand Melinda's reaction, clearly an attempt to hold her own in this verbal competition. Her seemingly random comment about shingles is in fact a variation of a comment Melinda had made a bit earlier to Eva who had been panicking playfully and loudly about not being ready for her act. Melinda's comment 'if you just shut your mouth, your voice is giving me shingles' had earned her a lot of laughter, including from Eva herself, and this is perhaps why she tries to recycle it again in the hope of a successful response in the current reading duel (McKinnon 1917: 115). McKinnon's ethnographic work, which also included interviews with participants, demonstrates that 'these utterances, which could potentially be evaluated as genuine impoliteness outside of the appropriate context, are positively evaluated by in-group members who recognize the importance of "building a thick skin" to face a hostile environment from LGBT and non-LGBT people' (2017: 90).

Activity

Watch an episode of Ru Paul's Drag race or a similar show capturing also some backstage interactions of drag queens preparing for their performance. Are there any examples of 'reading', that is, mock impoliteness? When do they occur and what features can you observe? What are the reactions of the targets? Do these instances of mock impoliteness always stay within a playful frame, or do they sometimes escalate into a proper argument which participants cannot laugh off? If so, why do you think this happens?

The voice

Although this guide approaches the study of language and gender with a particular focus on conversational style, in this section it is worth also mentioning a different section on scholarship dedicated to exploring the so-called 'gay voice'. Interest in 'the voice' goes back to the early stages of descriptions of 'Gaypeak', but as Cameron and Kulick (2003: 90) argued already a couple of decades ago, '[n]ot all gay men have "the voice" and not everyone who has "the voice" is gay'. Moreover, in line with recent scholarship in language, gender and identity 'studies in the sociophonetics of sexuality have progressed beyond searching for the phonetic markers of the "gay sounding" voice, increasingly exploring the myriad ways queer speakers in particular communities and contexts articulate their identities using phonetic resources' (Calder 2021: 14).

In many ways this finding should not be surprising, as we know that all speakers style-shift, that is, change the way they speak to some extent, depending on the context, who they are speaking to and what they are speaking about. An early sociophonetic study capturing this was Podesva's 2007 exploration of the speech of a gay, white medical student, 'Heath' who he instructed to record himself in a wide range of settings throughout his day. Focusing in particular on Heath's use of 'falsetto', Podesva finds significant context-dependent variation in Heath's language use, i.e. double the amount of utterances in falsetto produced at a barbecue with close friends than when Heath is meeting with an older male Parkinson patient. As Podesva (2007: 496) argues, the use of falsetto is an important resource for Heath's 'diva performance' when he is with his friends.

Topic choice is also an important aspect of context. Levon (2011) shows that lesbian women in Israel vary their pitch levels in their spoken narratives. When they speak about 'gay' topics, their average mean pitch level is higher than when they speak about 'non-gay' topics. Supported by his data which included also non-narrative instances of talking about 'gay topics' where these variations of pitch were not observed, as well as by his ethnographic study of both 'mainstream' and 'racial' lesbian women, Levon is able to argue that this change of pitch is meaningful (rather than simply an expression of heightened emotionality) in the women's constructions of intersectional gender and sexual identities. Another feature which has been discussed frequently is the so-called 'gay lisp', that is the voiceless sibilant /s/ which 'is produced by placing the tip of the tongue behind the top teeth [….] and passing air over the tongue' (Calder 2021: 5). This feature, tends to be interpreted as 'gay-sounding' by English listeners (but not by German or French listeners, see Boyd et al 2018, cited in Calder 2021: 7). There is a body of sociophonetic research indicating that this particular linguistic feature (unlike many others stereotypically associated with gayness) does actually consistently demonstrate articulation differences according to the gender and sexual identity of the speaker. However, this feature has been described as largely socially conditioned, that is, not influenced by biological differences such as size of vocal tract. In fact, fronted /s/ articulation in transgender speakers have been shown to be closer to their identified gender already pre-puberty (Hazenberg 2012; Zimman 2012 cited in Calder 2021: 6). Calder's research in the San Francisco drag queen community also highlights how we need to consider the indexicality of individual features in the context of others linguistic and non-linguistic resources speakers draw on (see also Eckert 2008). Thus, whilst the 'gay lisp' can be interpreted as indexing negatively connoted masculinity and femininity such as 'sissy' or 'faggot', this does not always have to be the case. For the drag performances of the so-called 'fierce queen' who 'embodies larger-than-life, over-the-top, and extreme femininity that challenges normative gender ideals' (Calder 2021: 8) in San Francisco, fronted /s/ becomes an important features to index 'fierce queen' identities as part of their performances when they are in full drag. As Calder argues, [t]through drag, the "gay lisp" becomes fierce'.

Discourses as resources for the construction of sexual identities

In the previous chapter we introduced what has become known as the 'turn to discourse' for language and gender studies. The importance of 'discourse' as well as the interplay of gender and sexuality is captured in one of Deborah Cameron's most famous papers. In this paper Cameron investigates the talk of five male university students who gossip about their fellow students, in particular one male student who they refer to as 'the really gay guy' despite the student most likely being heterosexual (Cameron 2011: 254)

Activity

Read Cameron's (2011) chapter and then try to answer the following questions, which will also be helpful in your summary of the main issues addressed in this chapter.

- In what way does this chapter challenge traditional views on and approaches to language and gender?
- Does the label 'gay' really mean 'homosexuality' when it is used by the young men? What type of masculinity is being performed by the young men?
- How is this performance accomplished by them, that is, what linguistic and discursive resources do they draw on?
- How do gender and sexuality interact in the identity-performance of these young men?
- What is Cameron's view of the notion of gendered conversational styles?

To answer these questions also consider the following extract and quotation from the chapter: '[..] I hope it makes us think twice about the sort of analysis that implicitly sees the meaning (and sometimes the value) of an interaction among men or women primarily in the style, rather than the substance, of what is said' (Cameron, 2011, p.261).

Extract: 'The antithesis of man'

BRYAN: uh you know that really gay guy in our Age of Revolution class who sits in front of us? he wore shorts again, by the way, it's like 42 degrees out he wore shorts again [laughter] [Ed: That guy] it's like a speedo, he wears a speedo to class (.) he's got incredibly skinny legs [Ed: it's worse] you know=

ED: =you know like those shorts women volleyball players wear? it's like those (.) it's l[ike

BRYAN: [you know what's even more ridicu[lous? When

ED: [French cut spandex]

BRYAN: you wear those shorts and like a parka on . . .

(5 lines omitted)

BRYAN: he's either got some condition that he's got to like have his legs exposed at all times or else he's got really good legs=

ED: =he's probably he'[s like

CARL: [he really likes

BRYAN: =he

ED: =he's like at home combing his leg hairs=

CARL: his legs=

BRYAN: he doesn't have any leg hair though= [*yes* and oh

ED: =he *real*[*ly* likes

ED: his legs=

AL: =very long very white and very skinny

BRYAN: those ridiculous Reeboks that are always (indeciph) and goofy white socks always striped= [tube socks

ED: =that's [right

ED: he's the antithesis of man

Cameron reminds us that the way people speak, their style, is only one resource for their performances of (gender and sexual) identities. What they speak about, and the kind of discourses/ideologies they draw on, is at least equally significant. Thus, it would be wrong to argue that these young men construct alternative masculinities, simply because they adopt features of a conversational style which has often been associated with femininity, i.e. conversational support and gossip. More importantly, the young men use their talk about their classmate to construct themselves in line with hot-blooded heterosexual masculinity (Cameron 2011: 161). Not only does this paper show how sexuality and gender are intertwined, but it also captures the important of extending our analytic scope to the level of discourse/ideology. The same goes for language and sexuality studies as the remainder of this section will demonstrate.

Lucy Jones's ethnographic work with a lesbian hiking group in the North of England explores a range of the discourses the white, university-educated women in their 50s- and 60-s draw on in their

construction of what they see as authentic lesbian identities. Positioning ourselves in opposition to other groups is one essential strategy for identity construction (see also Bucholtz and Hall 2005), and this goes not only for Cameron's young men, but also for the middle-aged lesbian hikers Jones worked with:

> One of the Stompers' strategies was to produce an ideological binary between what was authentically lesbian (styles or practices which they referred to positively as being 'dykey') and those that were synonymous with heteronormative femaleness (which they negatively evaluated when employed by lesbians, and which they viewed as 'girly' and inauthentic for the Stomper group). (Jones 2014: 176)

In one of the conversations the 'Stompers' reflect on whether they preferred teddies or dolls when they were children. Jones argues that love of teddies is positioned as indexical of authentic dykey lesbian identity, as it allows the 'Stompers' to position themselves om opposition to a girly, heterosexual femininity which they associated with love of dolls. This also shows that the construction of lesbian identity for the group is not in any way an alignment with masculinity, but instead simply a distancing from dominant heteronormative femininity (ibid. 183).

In another study with an LGBT youth group in a working-class area of a Northern English town Jones found that young people distanced them from what they saw as flamboyant 'camp' queerness, in particular if this was displayed overtly and proudly or 'flaunted'. Instead, the young people saw their sexuality as something private and argued that 'being gay does not define me, being gay is just a part of me' (Jones 2018b: 63). Jones argues that the positions the young people construct are influenced by homonormative discourses which allow them to construct themselves as largely in line with dominant gender norms at the same time as downplaying the significance of their sexual identities and desires (ibid 64). The fact that the young people were neither open nor proud about their sexuality needs to be understood in the context of their conservative town in which they were often recipients of abuse.

Activity

In the following extract, Lucy, the researcher, speaks to Emma, one of the young people from the LGBT youth group about Gay Pride Events. Read through the following extract and think about Emma's complex positioning towards Pride, as well as, by extension, her own lesbian identity. What does she mean when she says that 'I don't think we are at that stage yet' and 'maybe we are jut throwing it in people's face'? Why do you think she produces so many disfluency features such as repetitions, pauses and hedges such as 'just', 'like', 'I mean', 'I think' in lines 7-11?

Extract:

1	E	I-I'm really happy that we can like have Pride but I'm not the one
2		who'll go round and celebrate it 'cause I don't think we're at that
3		stage yet.
4	L	we as in::
5	E	(.) like as a group like (.) I don't think we are.
6	L	do you mean like this group or do you mean like all gay people?
7	E	no I just mean like I just like generally gay people I mean we are:: as
8		a like general group I- just the entire community I think'd be better
9		like I- as like a like gay community I don't think we are. (1) and it's
10		not something that I- I mean- I don't know how to explain it without
11		sounding so homophobic @(.)
12	L	it's alright you're not (.) I'm not gonna think you're homophobic.
13	E	<@I just@> (3) I don't know because like I obviously like all my
14		friends are straight and I get it a lot like why do you have Pride? (.)
15		because you don't get a straight pers- straight people like big
16		celebration about it and then when you sit and you're trying to explain
17		to them that it's because it's never been- like you've always been
18		supported whereas (.) you know it's never really been acceptable (.)
19		erm:: like when I see that people still actually think like that I think
20		maybe we're not ready (.) yet. maybe we're just throwing it in people's
21		face
22	L	okay/
		[one minute omitted]
23	L	so if you- right so there's something about actually are you just making
24		yourself a target?
25	E	yeah (.) and that's our- like (.) I think I think that someti::mes (.) you
26		possibly could be (.) because we're all in the same place at the same
27		time.

Jones's research contributes to the body of work which captures the heterogeneity of discursive performances of queer identities. Whilst some, such as McKinnon's or Barrett's drag queens but even the middle-aged lesbian hikers position themselves in opposition to mainstream, heterosexual gender performances, others, such as the young people in a working-class area of a conservative northern English town, seek to align themselves with mainstream norms to some extent. Not wanting to stand out is a strategy adopted by the young people to reduce their risk of being positioned as 'other' and of becoming a target for homophobic abuse. It is important that research continues to capture this risk, the discrimination and many other challenges described by LGBTQI+ people.

More recently there has been a surge in sociolinguistic and discourse analytic work on transgender identities. Whilst a significant amount of this work is on representations of trans people and trans(phobic) discourses in social and print media as well as in public debate, there is also an increasing body of work investigating the role that language plays (among a range of other resources and markers of identity) for speakers to construct trans identities. This body of research includes Zimman (2017) on the complexity of gendered phonetic styles among transgender speakers in the US; Borba (2019) on the discursive positioning of transsexuality as disorder in a Brazilian gender identity clinic; Jones (2019) on the role that heteronormative gender discourses play in the construction of transgender vlogger personas (Jones 2019). In a different study, Jones (2022) explores the affective stance-taking in narratives by young people who experienced challenges to their trans identities, as for example the experience of a 15-year-old trans boy in the men's toilet at a motorway service. Narratives are also central to Gray and Baynham's (2018) study of 'queer migration', exemplified by the migration story of

Lukas, a Spanish trans man. Whilst Lukas 'felt from an early age that his body did not correspond to his sense of his own body' (Gray and Baynham 2018: 5), his journey was a long and complex one. After his first migration from a Catalan village to a Catalan city in the 1980s, Lukas, who at this stage was still known as Maria, accepted the identity as butch lesbian which he had been ascribed due to his love for women, without ever fully identifying in this way. Only many years after his second migration from Spain to the UK in the mid-1990, Lukas became aware of female-to-male (FTM) transitioning and began to re-explore his own identity, which eventually led to his own process of transitioning. Gray and Baynham's study highlights the importance for researchers to consider language, gender and sexuality performances in their cultural and historical context. This is a topic which we will return to in the final section of this chapter.

Heterosexuality, intersectionality and locality: beyond the Global North

Not all language and sexuality research explores the linguistic construction of gay, lesbian and queer identities. A substantial body of research problematises heterosexuality and/or explores the performance of heterosexual identities in talk. The extract from Deborah Cameron's (2011) paper on 'the really gay guy' captures some of the misogynist and homophobic discourses young American university students draw on as they co-construct their heterosexual masculinities within their friendship group. Kiesling's (2011) US university fraternity members voice similar discourses in their all male talk, as for example then they engage in the telling of graphic 'fuck stories' in ritualised and highly private story telling sessions about their sexual exploits over the weekend. Kiesling highlights that these stories serve as a resource for cohesion building within the group but are of course also performances of hegemonic, that is virile and heterosexual, masculinity.

Whilst some have argued that 'overt sexism is now largely seen as anachronistic and so it has been driven underground' (Mills 2008: 135), much of the research discussed in this section demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. Zhang's (2023) multi-site ethnographic study of young male Chinese university students demonstrates that the telling of stories about casual sex is employed in a similar way by young male university students in China. Interestingly, however, the young upper-middle class men in Zhang's study are very concerned about 'playing it cleanly', that is, casual, no-strings attached sex which does not risk their reputation, especially as they held high positions in local government, business or state-owned institutions (Zhang 2023 190). Because of this concern they choose women from areas far away from their own cities and those of their parents, ideally from tourist areas. These women are not permitted to expect emotional ties or to cause 'drama' after break-ups. What they are allowed is to perform sex acts such as fellatio which the young men would consider to be degrading for their future or actual (upper middle class) wives. Keeping casual sex "safe", especially when the men are already in long-term relationships was part of the 'playing it clean' discourse that Zhang observed in her ethnographic work (ibid 175-223). Zhang argues that social class plays an important part in the young men's construction of their virile, playboy masculinities, as on one hand the women they had sex with were usually not only from a different area and background to their own (and that of their future wives), and on the other hand the men considered being able to pay for dinners, clubs and hotels for the sexual conquests as the honourable thing to do. Zhang (2023:222) concludes that 'virile masculinity still penetrates dominant discourses of masculinity, and, in the Chinese socio-cultural context, it closely links to wealth and social class. Women are often seen as men's sexual objects and are constantly evaluated based on their appearance, age and sexualised bodies'.

All-male groups /talk at university, particularly in halls of residence, seem to offer a fertile ground for the construction of hegemonic masculinities, that is, 'the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832)'. Bodo et al 's (2019) investigation of all-male dorm talk in Hungary provides evidence of the way in which the young men use misogynist and homophobic remarks as a means to construct their masculinities. Grace Diabah (2020) employed male research assistants to study insults and profane expressions about and towards women in the songs and talk of male university students in Ghana. In the interviews the young men state clearly that they are aware that their verbal behaviour breaks Ghanian sociocultural norms, but present it as 'bit of fun' and also argue that this is central to their unique 'Vandal' identity as members of the only all-male hall of residence on campus. In fact their songs about ruthless domineering sex and frequent references about their own 'big' and 'poisonous' penises which have the potential to 'tear vaginas apart' (Ibid 108-110) are a prime example of the kind of language which is used by some groups of men who continue to adopt misogynist discourses and identities with the ultimate aim to exert power over women. The real-life effect of these discourses is also immediately noticeable as the 'Vandals' tend to hurl misogynist abuse at those women who dare to reject their advances on campus.

Activity

Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach informing several of the discourse studies about gender and sexuality cited here. In your reading of this work make sure you also pay attention to the ways in which scholars approach their analysis, e.g. which lexical and grammatical features of analysis they focus on. If you would like to find out more about how CDA can help you to critically analyse misogynist, homo- and transphobic discourses, you can also look up some of the feminist CDA work, including Michelle Lazar (2005; 2007) and Jane Sunderland (2004) *Gendered Discourses,* especially her chapter 'Discourse, discourse identification and discourse naming', pp 27-50.

The relationship between gender discourses/ideologies and the treatment of women is evident in much of the work carried out by language, gender and sexuality researchers, as for example Jie Yang (2011) study of the discourse of zuiquian or 'deficient mouth' which is used to justify domestic violence against women who are considered to have loose mouths as they complain or speak back to their husbands rather than holding their tongue. Another example is Yating's (2019) analysis of the way in which Chinese media depicts single women above 27 as 'leftover women' who fail to gain their full social status despite their educational and professional achievements, simply because they are not married. In India Vandana (2020) study of young Dalit women's experiences at university found that these lower caste young women experience verbal and physical sexual harassment from both fellow students and male tutors frequently. Although Vandana was surprised to find that the young women were ready to speak about their experiences, challenging this abuse was risky not only as it jeopardised their academic progression but also because it could 'result in further harassment, public humiliation and violence' (ibid 39). Being silent about their experiences was therefore considered by many, including well-meaning boyfriends, the proper and safe thing to do. These experiences of sexual harassment of the Dalit girls were different from those experienced by upper-class female students.

This study, as well as multiple studies mentioned above, including Barret (2011), Hall (2011), Zhang (2023) etc, demonstrates the importance of taking an intersectional approach to the study of language, gender and sexuality which highlights how the experiences of women (and men or nonbinary people)

from different class, caste, age, ethnic and racial groups can vary considerably. A considerable amount of the research summed up in this chapter has been carried out by and about members of the 'Global South'. It is important that the field of language, gender and sexuality becomes more inclusive of and inspired by perspectives from the Global South for many reasons, not least because an exclusive focus on current topics and debates in North America and Europe is extremely limiting. As Singh (2021: 209) argues, it is likely that 'topics discussed in, say, North America thirty years ago might still or again be relevant in Asia, Africa and Central and South America today. Academic research and the cultures it describes develop at different speeds and relative to different cyclical paradigm shifts'. This underscores the importance of considering location as an important intersection of gender and sexuality performances. Language, gender and sexuality norms vary according to the sociocultural and historical context (see also Pichler 2021b). They also vary according to the situational context. For example, Kiesling (2011) found that the same young men who construct hegemonic masculinities by denigrating women and other (gay, younger, lower status etc) men position themselves differently when interacting with women or even when talking individually to the researcher. Moreover, there are, of course always a range of different discourses available to speakers, which allow them to position themselves in a range of different ways even in the same conversations.

Activity

The following extract is taking from the talk of four 15/16-year old British girls from working class backgrounds, living in the East End of London in 1998. Pat, Natalie and Jenny were from white English and/or Irish and/or European backgrounds whilst Susan is black British. In the extract below, consider the different discourses/ideologies that the girls tap into when they discuss the topic of 'losing your virginity'. How do the individual girls position themselves in this debate? Do you recognise these different discourses and positions from your own environment/county when you were growing up? Do you think these discourses are still around or have they changed? If you want to read up on this group or on the talk of other groups of girls, including Bangladeshi girls in London's East End and upper-middle class girls at a prestigious private school in London's West End, see Pichler 2009).

Extract 'Losing your virginity'

(1)
Pat (saying) for (like [inci]dent) if you did (lose
Susan [yeah]

(2)
Pat vigi-) virginity with John you can say .hh "I lost

(3)
Pat with my virginity to someone I was with for a

(4)
Pat long time and I loved him" .hhh yo[u can't] just
Susan [yeah]

(5)
Pat say *{dismissive}*"yeah (.) yeah I lost it" and you .hhh

(6)
Pat you can't be one of the girls that say I don't even

(7)
Pat re**mem**ber when I lost it [(you have to)] grow up
Susan [oh yeah]

(8)
Pat say to your kids like=
Jenny ="oh yeah that was e:r

(9)
Pat *{laughing}*[yeah] *{laughs}*
Jenny was *{singsong}*worth having oh [don't] be scared"

(10)
Pat *{laughter}* but you
Susan yeah*{laughing}*
Jenny *{laughter}* (you) know what I mean *{laughs}*

(11)
Pat can't you don't wanna be one of them like "oh yeah

(12)
Pat it just happened and that"=
Natalie ="(yeah) it happened

(13)
Pat [ye]ah*{laughing}* in the
Natalie in the back of a stree[t] (%d'you know what I mean%)
Jenny *{laughs}*

(14)
Pat pu[b toilet] *{laughter - - - - - - -}*
Susan [(right)]
?Jenny in the back seat*{squeaky voice}*

(15)
Pat .hhhh [hhhh]*{laughing, high}***wha::t** *{laughs}*
Susan [*{unconvinced laugh}*] true true

[….]

(18)
Susan yeah but (I) true it ain't (.) I don't

Natalie *{laughs}*

(19)

Susan think- (.) I don't think it's a big thing as people

(20)

Pat [it's not [like-] (-)

Susan make it out (to b[e honest)

?Natalie [yeah] (-) cause (I'm

(21)

Natalie not being funny) everyone says (.) "oh:: it oh::

(22)

Natalie (it oh:: it you got y-)*{raucous voice}*

(23)

Natalie you do it this (.) you do it like tha::t

(24)

Natalie .hh and (then) when it comes down to it you think

(25)

Pat [it's] nothing \/**bi::g** (i[t's noth]ing

Natalie it's erm (.) [erm] [(no::]

(26)

Pat like ["is that it" *{laughing}*yeah] like [two minutes

Jenny [(it is

Natalie [it ain't that (xxxxxxx)]

(27)

Pat lat]er like~

Susan no but (I [don't know /that]

Jenny \big)] [%it **is** big%]*{gentle}*

{sharp bang}

(28)

Pat yeah but [(xxxxxxx-)]

Natalie [yeah it's]

Jenny %it's a big thing%

{sharp bang}

(29)

Natalie a big thing (.) **right** (OK) but when it comes down to

(30)

Natalie i::t .hh y- when you've done i::t you think to yourself

(31)
Natalie when you've you think to yourself "right (1)
Jenny *{laughs}*

(32)
?Pat [*{laughs}*]
Susan [yeah]
?Jenny *{laughs}* (.) *{laughs}*
Natalie I got all worked **up** over **that** (.) and I worried
? *{snorts}*

(33)
Pat *{laughter- - - -}*
Susan *{amused}*Miss experience (eh)
Natalie myself sick over **that**

This chapter has focused in particular on language and sexuality in an effort to move beyond and/or critique heteronormativity, at the same time as demonstrating how important it is to consider intersections of gender, not only with sexuality but also with race and ethnicity, age, social class and caste and locality. Similarly to language and gender studies, early observations of what was supposed to be 'Gayspeak' have long been replaced by scholarship which examines how speakers use language (as well as other non-linguistics markers of style) as a resource to construct their (sexual and intersectional) identities. These linguistic resources can be phonetic and phonological (see research on 'the voice' above), or they can be features of 'conversational style' (see 'the art of put-down'). Finally, it is important to recognize that not only how we speak but also what we speak about constitutes a resource for the indexing of positions and identities, as many of the examples of research on (hetero)sexist discourses in this chapter demonstrate.

Learning outcomes

After working through this chapter and having done a substantial amount of reading on the topic you should:

- have an understanding of the relationship between language, gender and sexuality
- have an understanding of the concept of 'intersectionality' and its relevance for language, gender and sexuality studies
- be able to reflect critically on the various stages of language and sexuality scholarship
- be able to sum up some of the contributions made by language, gender and/or sexuality scholarship considered to reflect 'perspectives of the South'
- have reflected on the connotations of labels such as 'homosexual' in various contexts

Sample examination questions

- How does gender intersect with sexuality and other sociocultural or situational factors? Draw on (linguistic) theory and empirical studies in your answer.
- Critically sum up the history of language and sexuality studies.
- What are some of the resources speakers use to construct their own sexuality and/or evaluate the sexuality of others?
- What are the contributions of scholarship from the Global South to language, gender and sexuality scholarship?
- What does the term heteronormativity mean and how does it effect sociocultural norms, practices and identities?