

RESEÑAS

LANGUAGE, SEXUALITY AND POWER. STUDIES IN INTERSECTIONAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Edited by Erez Levon and Ronald Beline Mendes

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The publication of *Language, Sexuality, and Power* coincides with the beginning of a new phase for Oxford University Press's Studies in Language, Gender, and Sexuality. The theme of these papers is to focus on sexuality as a realm of human experience and to connect sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. As Lal Zimman says in the Editor's Preface, this volume is an example of the ways quantitative analysis of the distribution of linguistic forms can be brought together with a sociocultural context and a social theory. In addition, this volume takes on the production of social meaning, one of the most central issues in the study of language, culture, and society, and at the same times gives an alternative of a correlational model of meaning, in which the cause of particular linguistic features' use is linked with social characteristics. For this reason, this volume avoids the essentialism of etiquettes like "women" and "men" or "lesbians/gays" and "straights" as a whole and engages in a specific linguistic practice beyond the limits of race, nationality, sexuality, class, and myriad other forms of social subjectivity.

The volume is divided into eleven parts: ten papers related to language, gender and sexuality around the world, and a brief introduction that explains how work in this area has developed. As Erez Levon and Ronald Beline Mendes say in the first chapter, "Locating Sexuality in Language", it's important to know that this work is developed from the linguistic behavior of specific groups of speakers (lesbians, gay men, etc.) to one that focuses. This proposal is a change that we have to understand like an integration within sociolinguistics of theoretical models of self and society drawn from cultural studies and anthropology. In addition, it demonstrates that studies with various methodological perspectives contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship between sexuality and language. The framework the authors propose is focused on examining how the distribution of discrete linguistic features (phonological, morphosyntactic, lexical, or discursive) participates in the construction and perception of social meaning or, in other words, the relationship between social structure and individual subjectivity across the mediation of language. Besides, this chapter offers a brief review of the major developments in the field of language and sexuality over the past thirty-five years and identifies two interrelated areas that require attention: firstly, the central role of power in shaping linguistic behavior, and later, the imbrication of sexuality with other dimensions of lived experience such as gender, nation, race, or social class. The authors emphasize intersectionality as a

great concept to position sexualities in particular social and historical contexts and to understand these positionings as the product of multiple and intersecting systems of social classification. Bourdieu's three-level method provides the framework for an inclusive approach to the study of language and sexuality because it recognizes the crucial and interrelated importance of structure, agency, and power. Thus, the first three papers examine how sexuality is positioned in relation to the local fields of power; the next four papers involve the second level of analysis and consider the topography of the social fields by examining the perception of sexuality-linked features; and, finally, the last three chapters are situated at the third level of analysis, and explore how people use language to negotiate conflicting pressures and identifications as they relate to gender, sexuality, and same-sex desire.

The second chapter of this volume is also the first paper, "How Does Oppression Work? Insights from Hong Kong Lesbians' Labeling Practices", by Andrew D. Wong, examines the labeling practices of activists and non-activists Hong Kong lesbians to demonstrate how power operates through language at the intersection of gender and sexuality like oppression. Hong Kong lesbians who are not part of the *tongzhi* (an umbrella label similar to *LGBT*) movement use ellipsis, deictic expressions, and circumlocutions to keep same-sex desire unspecified. That way, non-activists participate in their own subjugation and reinforce the heterosexist ideology that same-sex desire has no place in the public domain. In the case of female activists', the adoption of the label *tongzhi* puts them in a double bind because, for both male and female activists, the use of *tongzhi* serves as a mode of resistance against heterosexism and Western gay and lesbian ideologies but, to some male activists, this term imposes their androcentric viewpoint on lesbians and practically erase them from the movement.

In the third chapter, "Social and Linguistic Representations of South African Same-Sex Relations: The Case of *Skesana*", Stephanie Rudwick and Thabo Msibi do a semiethnographic research in the *eThekweni* area (Durban metropolitan area) of South Africa focusing on the situation of African men who engage in same-sex relations and who have knowledge of a linguistic variety that indexes the gender or sexual identity of a speaker, *isiNgqumo*. In that case, the *isiNgqumo* lexicon transcends a mere sexual register and is understood as a genderect, a secret code, a language of belonging. In a context where gender and sexuality are heavily policed, and where a very strict gender order exists, *isiNgqumo* is a salient marker of the gay subgroup of *skesana* ("ladies") identity.

The next chapter, the fourth, "Sorry Guys! The Discursive Construction of Queer Spatiality in Japanese Women-Only Club Flyers", deals with a multimodal analysis and argues that the use of image, graphics and text constitute stances that style the event and position women-only space as a desirable alternative to normative spatiality. As Claire Maree says, the uses of bold logos, English and nonconventional combinations of scripts, and conversational stance combined with eye-catching imagines of sexualized female forms contribute, on the one hand, to create an alternative to the image of the "lesbian" in popular Japanese culture away from a pornographic fodder for (heterosexual) male fantasy. On the other hand, these promotional flyers create a sense of the pleasure that will be experienced within the women-only spaces and

help to constitute a change of meaning of “women only” against heteronormative gender and sexuality.

Chapter five, “/s/ Variation and Perceptions of Male Sexuality in Denmark”, by Marie Megaard and Nicolai Phrao, presents the two sides of categorization, stereotype and identification, to present a study that is focused on the way in which different clusters of categories are being evoked by listeners depending on the linguistic variation they hear. Specifically, they analyze the relation between seven specific categories (*confused*, *intelligent*, *homosexual*, *feminine*, *immigrant*, *gangster*, *Nordsjælland* [Northern Zealand, affluent suburbs of Copenhagen], and *Vestegnen* [the western area, poorer suburbs of Copenhagen]), the varying meanings and the boundaries between them, according to the different social meanings of fronted /s/ uses in Danish by female and male speakers. Fronted /s/ in Danish is often presented as linked to social meanings like “feminine” and “girlish” when used by female speakers, and social meanings like “feminine” and “gay” when used by male speakers. But, although this variation of /s/-quality, in “modern Copenhagen”, changes the perception of the speaker quite dramatically, in street language”, it has no or little effect. This is possible, as the authors say, because the fronted /s/ is actually part of “street language” and it does not make any difference whether a speaker includes it or not in his speech or because speakers perceived as “immigrants” are simultaneously perceived as heterosexual males, and this categorization makes it very difficult to interpret the fronted /s/ as indexing (feminine) gender or (gay) sexuality.

Ronald Beline Mendes analyzes in “Nonstandard Plural Noun Phrase Agreement as an Index of Masculinity” the use of nonredundant plural in spoken Brazilian Portuguese, a nonstandard variant that is negatively evaluated—nominal number agreement is optional—but that could be seen as marker of masculinity, “against” the other standard form that is perceived of male speakers in terms of effeminacy, education, class, formality, intelligence, friendliness, and gayness. Thus, an ideological relationship between sounding more or less “gay” and speaking “correctly” would be possible. Finally, the study demonstrates that individuals in São Paulo perceive male speakers as less effeminate when listened to in their nonstandard form. However, for female listeners, though, ideas of class and intelligence are more significant (after education) in their perception of male speakers, so the relationship between perceived masculinity/effeminacy and perceived lower/higher level of education is less indirect for male than it is for female listeners. For this reason, nonstandard form is a useful resource in the expression of masculinity, while for women it may be perceived more directly as an index of lower social class or intelligence.

Next chapter, the seventh, also talks about the relationship between a linguistic variation and sexual perception. In that case, “Phonetic Variation and Perception of Sexual Orientation in Caribbean Spanish”, examines the connection between this social perception and distinctive patterns of /s/ production, known as aspiration and deletion. According to the results, perceptions of sexual orientation are correlated with perceptions of height, but not with perceived social class or perceived age, and that there is no correlation between perceived sexual orientation and perceived social class. However, this study observes a significant correlation between a particular stressed

vowel (/e/) and perception of sexual orientation in Puerto Rican Spanish, and it can be a relevant socioindexical cue in Spanish varieties, against the idea from traditional analyses that Spanish vocalic system is more uniform than the consonantal one.

In «Percepts of Hungarian Pitch-Shifted Male Speech», Péter RÁCZ and Viktória PAPP aim to report on the results of an online study on the perception of male pitch in Hungarian. The main result is, as the authors emphasize, that, contrary to the expected outcome based on the Western sociolinguistic literature, the voice with the lowered pitch was rated as significantly more *feminine*. In fact, the study indicates that respondents rate the lower-pitched voice as *more feminine* than the higher pitched voice and that the ratings on the *straight-gay* scale correlate with ratings on other scales, maybe because of a sign that Hungarian listeners prize a non-Western type of masculinity or that the norms of masculinity are changing or have changed. In any way, the study of RÁCZ and PAPP provides a new paradigm of Western concepts of masculinity and their linguistic manifestations, different from what is generally reported in the literature.

The acoustic realization of /s/ also represents well-chartered territory in studies of language and sexuality, because in the next chapter Robert J. Podesva and Janneke Van Hofwegen talk about “/s/exuality in Smalltown California. Gender Normativity and the Acoustic Realization of /s/”. This paper examines the acoustic realization of /s/ among residents of Shasta County (California) and how ideologies about the country, gender, sexuality, and their inter-relations play out in this rural community. In fact, ideologies about rurality are tied up with ideologies about gender, and they work together to constrain patterns of linguistic variation, in this case the realization of /s/. The study aims to demonstrate that ideologies of gender are influenced by conservative sociopolitical ideologies that privilege a country lifestyle, against city life. The realization of /s/ appears to participate in constructing sexuality only insofar as the construction of sexuality does not stand in the way of constructing normative gender. Thus, retracted /s/ can index masculinity, non-normative femininity, and perhaps a lesbian identity. One more time, a connection between sociopolitical ideology and linguistic variation is evident because gay men can (but needn't) produce slightly less retracted /s/ variants than straight men, thus maintaining some distinction between themselves and straight men without explicitly violating the gender norms that are policed in their town.

In the tenth chapter, “*Kathoey* and the Linguistic Construction of Gender Identity in Thailand”, Pavadee Saisuwan identifies how *kathoey*, male-to-female transgender individuals, use personal reference terms to position themselves within the Thai sex/gender inventory. *Kathoey* and women share access to the same set of Thai first-person feminine pronouns but, however, using the same pronouns does not always mean that these two groups of speakers do and want to represent the same thing with them: while women use the two feminine pronouns /nǔ:/ and /dichǎn/ for nongendered purposes, *kathoey* use the gendered pronouns in identifying with femininity. In this second case, /dichǎn/ is reinterpreted as an informal feminine pronoun among *kathoey*, who use it for their own purpose of presenting femininity. This personal adoption has an effect

to position themselves within the binary of masculinity and femininity. They select certain feminine forms and reanalyze those forms for their own use.

Finally, Erez Levon develops, in the last chapter, “Conflicted Selves. Language, Religion, and Same-Sex Desire in Israel”, the role that linguistic variation plays in the construction of some sorts of multidimensional understanding of self, based on the study of the case of Igal, a forty-year-old Orthodox Jewish man who is married, has children, and also engages in sexual and romantic relationships with other men. A quantitative distributional analysis of creak demonstrates that Igal uses it more frequently and in more unexpected linguistic contexts when talking about the intersection of sexuality and religion than when talking on other topics. Thus, Igal is using creaky voice as a deontic stance-marker in order to achieve some social and/or interactional goal related to his sexual and religious identifications, but it does not coincide with all instances of Igal orienting to homosexuality; in fact, creak only occurs when the specific orientation to homosexuality that Igal adopts, for instance, is too affective or personal.

Despite the variety of themes and methodologies that this volume explores, these papers are a perfect example that considers language and sexuality inside numerous locations around the world (specifically, this volume keeps in mind gender and sexual issues developed in Japan, South-Africa, Denmark, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Hungary, United States, Thailand and Israel) and in a variety of languages other than English, from very different approaches to the study of this relationship between language and sexuality such as experimental research, critical discourse analysis and third-wave variation research. In addition, those different papers include and combines phonology, morphosyntax, lexicon and critic discourse across a variety of linguistic research. On top of all, like Zimman says and all the authors underline in their respective papers, this volume promotes the intersectionality theory as a focus on sociolinguistics research. Thus, sexuality is not considered in isolation but interacting with other social variables such as gender, ethnicity, and social class. Consequently, this is a very recommendable book for scholars that want to explore and to know a new way to understand the power of language to understand or to construct a new world view.

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