Part III

Language and the Communication of Identities
Language, Sexuality, Heteroglossia, and Intersectionality

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Introduction

Anthropological interests in language and sexuality began with studies that explored linguistic representations of differences, e.g., male vs. female speech, “third gender” categories, the “language(s)” of same-sex identities. Since the late 1990s, and inspired by emerging developments in queer linguistics (see Further Reading below), these interests have been reconfigured to ensure that linguistic inquiry is no longer anchored in single identities or in binary contrasts. Today’s studies examine connections between language and sexuality in relation to topics as diverse as embodiment (Hennen 2005, King 2008, Vidal-Ortiz 2011, Weinberg and Williams 2010), articulation (Podesva 2007, 2011, Zimman 2013), erotic practice (Adams-Thies 2012, Leap 2011, Morrish and Sauntson 2007a,b), public performance (Barrett 1999, Mann 2011, Motschenbacher 2012), homophobic/transphobic oppression (Edelman 2011, 2014, Murray 2009, Peterson 2010), migration and diaspora (Murray 2013), and sexual citizenship (Boellstorff 2005, Gaudio 2009, Provencher 2007, Rahman 2010, Leap and Boellstorff 2004).

Similarly, scholars in feminist studies have moved away from discussing race, gender, and class as isolated, identity-centered formations, and have begun to foreground attention to their “intersectionality” (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). In fact, current discussions extend these “intersections” of race, gender, and class to include sexuality, age, ability, mobility, place, and other social descriptors that, together with meanings of race, gender, and class, are now considered mutually constitutive rather than compartmentalized. Importantly, these discussions also show that the resulting intersections of social meaning unfold unevenly across the local social terrain. As Nash explains, intersectionality “…secures privilege and domination simultaneously” (2008: 10, citing Wing 1990: 191).

Anthropological studies of language and sexuality, like those cited above, provide ample indications that sexuality, along with age, ability, and similar descriptors, is implicated within the intersectional accumulations of race, class, and gender in the sense suggested in Nash’s discussion. Those studies also suggest that the details of intersectionality cannot be fully contained within single forms of linguistic practice or even within studies of “particular choices and combinations of linguistic forms drawn from several distinct linguistic varieties” (Barrett 2003: 558). What are required are discussions of language and sexuality that “…differentiate
carefully between different kinds of difference” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 198) and also specify “how many social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the intersectionality process” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 201) within any given setting. I propose that an analysis of language and sexuality that is attentive to heteroglossia (Vološinov 1972, Bakhtin 1981) will provide useful starting points for locating the social divisions that are relevant to local conditions of intersectionality. And, as this chapter shows, such an analysis connects studies of heteroglossia and intersectionality with current interests in queer linguistics and queer theory.

**Historical Perspectives**

*Introducing Language, Sexuality, and Heteroglossia*

Writing about gay life in Manhattan during the 1940s, Donald Vinning shares the following anecdote. A gay man at that time could say something like the following in a public gathering:

“I adore seafood. Gorge myself whenever the fleet is in. But I can’t abide fish”, and any gay man would instantly know that the speaker was turned on by sailors and turned off by women, while the puzzled Mr. and Mrs. Readers Digest, listening in, would assume this was a discussion about food preferences.

*Vinning (1986: 55)*

Chauncey (1986: 286–287) and others refer to the lexical practice displayed in this example as double entendre. That is, the speaker’s references to “seafood” and “fish” offers one set of messages to those who recognize the coded, sexualized distinction between seafood and fish; these references provide an entirely different message to those who are unfamiliar with the coded distinction and are left to respond to the statement strictly on face value. Similarly, the speaker uses the term “Mr. and Mrs. Readers Digest” to identify persons “unfamiliar” with the coded distinction, citing the publication that for years occupied a central place in a certain category of American homes to index a naiveté about sexual sameness. Those included within that category would likely agree that the phrase “Mr. and Mrs. Readers Digest” accurately captured their reading preferences. However, they might not recognize the more subtle sexualized allusion implied by that reference to middle-class American taste. So here, too, is another instance of double entendre, this time marking or disguising a particular moral evaluation. Think how differently the anecdote would read, if the couple had been named “Mr. and Mrs. National Geographic,” “Mr. and Mrs. New Yorker,” or “Mr. and Mrs. National Enquirer.”

But describing the references to sexuality in Vinning’s example as double entendre captures only part of the social message captured by this example. The pairing of *seafood* and *fish* is recognized by all three parties to the speech event, but is recognized in somewhat different ways in each case. Thus the use of double entendre marks a site where references to gender and sexuality combine with considerations as varied as class position and relative social naiveté to create interlocking social connections and social contrasts. In other words, references associated with sexuality in Vinning’s example are expressed variably – or, and more to the point, heteroglossically – in this example; and the use of double entendre itself takes the form of a heteroglossic formation. That is, the example’s references to sexuality are “not merely reflected but refracted through sign . . . [as] determined by an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community” (Vološinov 1972: 23).

Identifying these overlapping distinctions as heteroglossia suggests that relationships between language and sexuality are refracted across, among, and between linguistic and social relationships that are attested within the given setting. Studies of heteroglossia then examine messages...
about sexuality indicated through particular refractions while paying attention to how refraction as a whole displays facts about sexuality within the social moment. But, to do this, studies of heteroglossia must avoid foregrounding any single linguistic feature and the social importance of its message, while neglecting the significance of other features and their contributions to the message. To cite the most obvious example: noting that double entendre was “about sexuality” erases the subtle, but substantial, distinctions between the speaker’s work of disclosure and the acts of reception that characterize the informed listener’s participation in this example – and distinguish it from the participation of Mr. and Mrs. Reader’s Digest.

**Heteroglossia and Intersectionality: Feminist Theory with Queer Implications**

Crenshaw (1989, 1991) raised a similar argument in her classic discussion of intersectionality, where she cautioned against building discussions of gender that refuse to address attendant inflections of race and class. Crenshaw explained:

> many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as the boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately.

*Crenshaw (1991: 1244)*

Understandably, conditions shaping Black women’s experiences of racism and sexism in one social location are unlikely to apply in exactly the same way in other locations. In fact, Crenshaw cautions:

> a focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination.

*Crenshaw (1989: 140)*

Crenshaw’s arguments prompted considerable discussion in feminist studies, but a review of this work led McCall to observe: “... despite the emergence of [this] major paradigm of research..., there has been little discussion of how to study intersectionality, that is, of its methodology” (2005: 1771).

Yuval-Davis (2006) responds helpfully to that challenge, noting that race, gender, and class each have “... a different ontological basis” and thus are “irreducible to other social divisions” as well as to each other. So race, gender, and class are each shaped by conditions of social oppression – although, in some cases, they mutually contribute to that oppression, and they are never attested in social settings entirely in isolation. Thus,

> Being oppressed... “as a Black person” is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions (for example, gender, social class, disability status, sexuality, age, nationality, immigration status, geography, etc).

*Yuval-Davis (2006: 195)*

For Yuval-Davis, what results is an analysis of intersectionality that “... differentiates carefully between different kinds of difference” (2006: 198) but also specifies “how many social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the intersectionality process”
And, as Nash (2008) explains, what results is an analysis that highlights the mutually productive relationships connecting the privileged and the multiply burdened, even when the discussion addresses a particular formation of difference:

If intersectionality is solely an anti-exclusion tool designed to describe “the multiplier effect” or “the lifelong spirit injury of black women” then it is incumbent upon both feminist theory and antiracist work to develop a conceptualization of identity that captures the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and class, among other categories, are produced through each other, securing both privilege and oppression simultaneously.  
Nash 2008: 10, citing Wing (1990: 191)

What also results is an analysis of intersectionality that refuses to be defined by self-evident categories of social reference or oppression. In fact, by showing that privilege and oppression are simultaneously produced through the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and related formations, an analysis of intersectionality undermines the orderly logics that those categories and their neatly bounded references so often proclaim. In this sense, studies of intersectionality have much in common with the language-centered studies of heteroglossia (like that outlined in the preceding section). Adding discussions of intersectionality to discussions of heteroglossia enriches the analytical power of both modes of inquiry, as the examples in the following sections will suggest.

Critical Issues and Topics

Who Goes to a Lesbian Bar?

One of the shortcomings in earlier studies of language and sexuality was the practice of organizing the discussion of linguistic practices around a single category of social reference. Abe (2010, 2011) addressed this issue successfully in her studies of language use in the “lesbian bars” in Shinjuku Ni-choome, the “second block area” of Tokyo. At issue here are linguistic practices that are refracted variously across details of gender and sexuality, but also the fact that a category like “lesbian” submerges evidence of local heteroglossia and intersectionality beneath a single, inclusive sign, creating an appearance of uniform reference when the local linguistic practices actually indicate otherwise. Moreover, in the case that Abe describes, the inclusive category has US/European affiliations that apply uneasily to the urban Tokyo bar scene. As Halberstam (2012: 343) observes, only “when we refuse to verify the seemingly inevitable primness of US/European sexual economies,” does it become possible “...to recognize and learn from other modes of gender identification embedded in other kinds of sexual practice and productive of alternative forms of sociality and community and identity.” Abe’s research shows how studies of heteroglossia position these modes of identification and alternative forms not just as single formations, but as intersectional practices.

The sites in Shinjuku Ni-choome were called “lesbian bars” in popular descriptions of the area’s sexual geography. But Abe (2011: 376) admitted, “...the community served by [these] lesbian bars turned out to be much broader than I had expected.” In the main, the “lesbian bars” served a female, same-sex identified or bisexual clientele. However, some “lesbian bars” were frequented by rezu or rezubian, a female-bodied subject who maintains a female identity while being attracted to other women. Other “lesbian bars” were popular with onabe, a female-bodied subject who “loves women and who chooses a woman as partner, but [whose] social and emotional identity is male” (2011: 377). Rezu were less likely to frequent these sites.
And other “lesbian bars were meeting places for rezu, onabe, nyuu haafu (transgender people), nonke (straight women), and okame (gay male friends of any of the above).

Rezu, onabe, nyuu haafu, nonke, and okame spatialize particular linkages between desire and identity within the sexual geography of Shinjuku Ni-choome – but not in identical ways. So a “lesbian”–centered description is distortive, but so is a description that treats the Japanese categories as if they too are unified domains.

In the case of rezu, the linkages circulate around female identification; however, rezu linguistic practices do not rely on the linguistic markers that ordinarily indicate “female identity” in Japanese speech. Instead, rezu draws on references to chronological age and social seniority, object choice/preference, and gendered authority, while suspending widely circulating associations between language, gender, and sexuality.

For example, Abe found that employees at rezu bars (of younger age and rezu identified) prefer to use the pronoun jibun (“one’s self”) for first person reference. As they explained to Abe, using the first person pronouns boku or washi would index close connections with masculine identity, and rezu do not self-describe as onabe. At the same time, these employees preferred using jibun over watashi and atashi, because they found those pronouns to be associated with “too much femininity” (Abe 2011: 379). In effect, using jibun allows these employees to self-enregister as rezu, hence as female, but also outside of the conventional heteronormative masculine/feminine binary.

A different refraction of gender, sexuality, age, and economic status was reported by a rezu who was a bit older (mid-thirties) than the bar employees and who worked at a graphic design firm. Unlike the bar employees, she was willing to use a first person pronoun (atashi) with more feminine associations in ordinary conversation, but then shift to boku, a first person pronoun with strongly masculine associations when a forceful, persuasive message or a message with strong emotion was required. So, rather than being suspended, the heteronormative male/female binary has been incorporated into rezu discourse, in this case organizing the basis for heteroglossic distinctions between ordinary and emotionally charged conversational reference.

That a difference in blue collar vs. white collar employment coincides with the contrast in age and linguistic practice here is also worth noting. This is additional evidence that those who claim rezu “identity” may also occupy different relationships to structures of (heteronormative) power and privilege; here again, while rezu may appear to be a single category of desire, appearances alone do not provide an adequate basis for social or linguistic analysis. What is needed is an analysis that will “. . . differentiate carefully between different kinds of difference” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 198) and then specify “how many social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the intersectionality process” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 201). As Abe’s analysis suggests, paying attention to heteroglossic linguistic practice – that is, to linguistic differences “. . . intersecting [with] differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community” (Volosinov 1972: 23) – provides a useful entry point for such analysis.

“Theorizing” Penetrative Sex in Delhi

Bakhtin alluded to some of these properties of heteroglossic refraction in his discussion of the dialogic properties of text. He wrote, for example: “the living utterance” – that is, concrete discourse that takes shape within a specific social and historical moment – “. . . cannot help but brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance” (1981: 276–277). Of interest to Bakhtin are the cumulative properties of such encounters and also their diachronic implications: “The utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it; it does not approach the
object from the sidelines” (1981: 277). Or, in Jaffe’s wording, “all utterances carry the traces of past utterances [as well as] the social and cultural contexts of talk and action in which they were embedded” (2009: 20).

Lawrence Cohen’s report of a “remarkable conversation” (2005: 286) between a group of same-sex identified men in Delhi (India) in 1993 shows how traces of past utterances combine with the social/cultural contexts of talk and action in current time, and how the resulting heteroglossic fusion of antecedent and current practice created a critical moment of intersectionality.

The conversation in question centered around the management of (safe) sex practice in response to the AIDS pandemic. Two people were the key participants in that conversation: Giti Thadani and Shivananda Khan. Thadani was a writer-philosopher and actively involved in a project aimed at retrieving nonpatriarchal themes in Vedic scripture. The project’s goal was to recover fragments of heritage now absent from current discussions of Indian sexuality. Shivananda Khan, initially a self-styled mystic and ascetic, had recently become an AIDS activist and was now seeking innovative ways to fuse sexual identity and pan-Asian citizenship. Khan’s wilful transgression of national boundaries made him a person of interest in the eyes of the Indian state. While he had been residing in India for some time, he was born in London and was of Pakistani heritage. Still, Khan saw his project as similar to Thadani’s, in that both of them were attempting to develop a “critical non-western genealogy of relation, subject, object, and sex” (Cohen 2005: 286). Their shared modernist interests provided a starting point for the evening’s discussion, even if Thadani and Khan approached modernist issues on quite different historical terms.

Cohen was also a participant in the conversation. He is an anthropologist who had spent several years becoming familiar with local cultures and sexualities in Varanasi and other locations in India; AIDS activism was a part of his research agenda and also his personal politics. Finally, there were also several younger men who were searching for a “gay life” in locations other than Delhi’s public parks (the city’s popular sites for gay cruising) or its party circuit (elite locations where these young men usually felt out-of-place). Alok, one of the young men, was also a local gay activist, but someone whose politics was shaped by practical experiences of struggle and not by abstract political discourse.

As the conversation began, Khan started praising the virtues of nonpenetrative sexual practice and soon Thadani and Khan began discussing the usefulness of nonpenetration as a strategy for HIV protection. They saw nonpenetration as an alignment with a primordial, but now forgotten Vedic logic (Thadani) but also as a strategy for diffusing lingering traces of patriarchal violence in their personal lives (Khan). Cohen internationalized the discussion by introducing a (Western) feminist critique of patriarchal violence, which strengthened the emerging intellectual consensus against penetrative sex.

The young men in the room had been sitting quietly as Thadani and Khan abstractly theorized diverse forms of male nonpenetrative intercourse. Alok was made increasingly uncomfortable by this discussion – so much so that he finally interrupted the two men mid-sentence, to exclaim: “But I like to be fucked” (Cohen 2005, 286).

Cohen’s description of the conversation ends with Alok’s spontaneous comment. While we do not know whether Alok’s remark affected what was said about safe sex, Vedic restoration, and anti-patriarchal practice during the remainder of the evening’s conversation, there are ample indications that it heightened the heteroglossic inflections that were already present in the exchange, and reshaped how the remainder of that conversation unfolded in other ways.

Both Thadani and Khan were (in Cohen’s words), “radically self-made persons” (2005: 286) and, like Cohen, were familiar with the conventional logics of same-sex geography in Delhi. Like his friends, Alok had placed himself at distance from that geography and its logics,
eschewing both the parks and the elite party circuit. And being actively engaged in locating and creating a new politics of place, Alok understandably did not find erotic intimacy to be a site that was for abstract, intellectual musings, much less a site amenable to temporal displacement. And Thadani and Khan, for their part, were busy making statements about appropriate sexual practice that paid no attention to what real-life sexual subjects (like Alok) had to say about desire, object choice, or satisfaction.

There is more at stake in Alok’s comment than the message conveyed by the explicit statement of desire, and Halberstam’s (2005) discussion of queer temporality offers a useful entry point for looking beyond appearances. As noted, Thadani and Khan are part of a social terrain shaped by willful compliance with normative authority and regulation, while Alok and his friends have placed themselves at a distance from that terrain. As Halberstam reminds us, there are “all kinds of people” who, like Alok and his friends,

will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production, [and . . . ] outside the logic of capital accumulation . . . ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed.

Halberstam (2005: 10)

This positioning “outside” and “on the edges” of conventional practice makes it unlikely that any of these people would voluntarily subordinate their sexual freedom to demands of consent and compliance coming from mainstream authority. For that reason,

[they] could productively be called “queer subjects” in terms of the way they live (deliberately, accidentally, by necessity) during the hours when others sleep, and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned; and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that others assign to privacy and family.

Halberstam (2005: 10)

And, in some instances, a “queer” status is confirmed not only by spatial/temporal positioning but “by the risks they take, either by choice or by necessity.” Halberstam includes here “the transgender person who risks his life by passing in a small town” and also “the queer performers who destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe . . .” (2005: 10).

Alok qualifies as a “queer subject” under Halberstam’s definition. Like his friends (who might also be termed “queer” here), Alok has placed himself outside of the conventional domains of Delhi’s homosexual geography. Moreover, the effect of Alok’s comment “destabilize[d] the normative values that were making everyone else (in the conversation) feel safe” (Halberstam 2005: 10). Stated more accurately, perhaps, Alok and his friends represent a particular type of queerness, one that “. . . stands against homogenizing and contests normativity, whether such practices descend from hegemonic heterosexual discourses or mainstream lesbian and gay politics” (Fotoupoulou 2012: 25, citing Seidman 1997).

The writer-philosopher and the ascetic-activist (plus the anthropologist) are excluded from Halberstam’s rendering of “queer” in this case. Given what Cohen’s remarks reveal about discursive practice, their freedom to transgress boundaries stems from their “insider” status – as established figures in the Delhi artistic and countercultural scene and from the protected visibility and privilege that this status affords them. Even if they self-identified as “queer,” their claims to queerness would not be based on allegiance to marginal location, or on any other component of queerness as Halberstam describes them. Indeed, the refractions of linguistic and social
practice attested throughout the conversation – who spoke, who was silent, whose arguments aligned, whose arguments conflicted, and so on – confirm that heteroglossic queerness can be powerfully dissident, even as it is one part of a larger intersectional display.

**Current Contributions and Research**

**Racializing Erotic Desire in Gauteng**

As Abe’s and Cohen’s examples have indicated, intersectionalities are connected to broader formations that Yuval-Davis calls “different kinds of difference” (2006: 198), which do not always correspond neatly with categories of sexual identity or with other predetermined points of social reference. Studies of heteroglossic refraction, as just suggested, provide useful entry points for specifying “how many [such] social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the intersectionality process” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 201).

This was one of the tasks that Milani addressed in his study of preferred terms for “self” and “other” used in personal advertisements posted to Meetmarket, a South African “on-line . . . meeting place for men who are seeking other men.” Meetmarket charges no membership fee to those who use the website, thereby ensuring that the site “attract[s] as wide a pool of users as possible in the context of South Africa’s high poverty rate” (2013: 616). To create a manageable corpus for this analysis, Milani limited his focus to postings from South Africa’s Gauteng province (specifically from the Johannesburg-Pretoria area). A computer-assisted corpus scan then determined the most frequently used terms to describe the person posting the advertisement (“self”) and the object-of-desire that was the target of the intended search (“other”).

Milani’s analysis of these terms and frequencies showed that MAN and GUY featured prominently as terms for self and for desired other in these personal ads (2013: 623). Importantly, part of what gave each term prominence was its distinctive collocation with references to racial identity. For example, in contexts of self-reference, “GUY collocates with Indian and black, whereas MAN is linked to black and white, “although “the collocational strength of the phrase black man (320.24) is much higher than that of white man (43.59).” The collocation link between MAN and the adjective African is also statistically strong in this corpus (log-likelihood value of 72.450).

MAN retained “. . .[its] robust tendency to co-occur with black” in instances where personal ads referred to the desired other. In those references, MAN also collocated regularly with references to men who are older and more mature, and with references to real, hairy, strong, and married. In contrast, GUY as a reference to desired other also collocated with “a plethora of racial descriptors (white, black, Indian), physical attributes (hot, slim, good-looking) and general characteristics (decent, nice, fun, next-door).” Moreover, GUY collocated regularly with references to younger men and with references to (straight/str8) acting and to top (the penetrating partner in anal sex).

That the personal ads make repeated references to this heavily masculinized framework of power, dominance, and control is understandable, perhaps, given that Meetmarket is an “on-line . . . meeting place for men who are seeking other men” (2013: 616); masculine men usually figure prominently in on-line homoerotic discourses of desire. Importantly, Milani finds, references to segregated racial preference has an even greater salience in these personal ads. Of the men who self-identified as Black in the personal ads, 59 percent “. . . overtly refer to blackness in their descriptions of the desired other,” Milani reports, while a comparable 64.9 percent of the men who identified as white “. . . explicitly state that they are looking for white men” (2013, 628).
To say that masculinity is racialized in roughly 60 percent of these on-line postings is to suggest that apartheid era practices of racial segregation are still being maintained in some sectors of post-apartheid South African gay society – Black as well as white, Milani argues. Given how greatly South Africa has changed since the 1990s, the continuity of racial exclusion is troublesome. For Milani, this means that “queers” are not really “queer” in the South African case (2013: 629–630); if they were, desire would not embrace such strict segregation.

But roughly 40 percent of those posting ads on Meetmarket show a refusal to define desire in racially segregated terms. Instead, those ads use terms like GUY that embrace multiple racial categories or they refer to physical attributes without assigning them any racial coding. If, instead of generalizing, the analysis “. . . differentiates carefully between different kinds of [queer] difference” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 198), as attested within these texts, the analysis begins to suggest that homoerotic interests unfold heteroglossically across indications of race, gender, age, class, privilege, and other social refractions.

**Intersectionality, Desire and Social Difference**

But, more than that, differentiating between types of difference requires that the analysis explain how notions of shared desire become embedded within particular sites of linguistic and social difference.

While language and sexuality studies may be concerned with “fantasy, repression, pleasure, fear and the unconscious” and the other features that “arguably make sexuality sexuality” (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 105), these features and their linguistic representations cannot be discussed as if they were independent, self-contained elements of social experience. Fantasy, repression, pleasure and the like are “not merely reflected . . . through sign”; they are “refracted . . . by an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community” (Vološinov 1972: 23). These context-specific refractions, along with the social interests that organize these refractions and assign them value, are part of the research agenda in language and sexuality studies.

As it is used in this argument, the reference to “community” has normative, regulatory associations, more so than references to spatial and physical locations. Cohen’s example shows that participants and researchers may hold expectations of a cohesive, unified social group, but those expectations are all too often fractured by conflicting claims to belonging that include and exclude membership from each site. In homoerotic desire and pleasure, but quickly dissolved into competing discourses that pit Alok’s enthusiastic endorsement of penetration against Vedic and feminist endorsements of sexual abstinence, and also pit those forms of abstinence against each other. Abe’s and Milani’s examples addressed the same issue. Both examples demonstrate that common interests disguise refractions, and that the social group seemingly united by common interests may prove, upon closer inspection, to be shaped by a refraction of interests rather than by their unified circulation.

Under these circumstances, discussion of (socio-)linguistic processes that ignore details of refraction – or submerge evidence of refractions in favor of references to a more inclusive linguistic process – are likely to be discussions that accept normative practices on face value. Non-normative linguistic practices and the intersectionalities associated with them will likely be omitted from that discussion. And the same is true for an “intersectional analysis that has the potential to reveal both privilege and oppression” (Nash 2008: 10).

To cite one such example: Agha uses the following Lakhota (Sioux) sentence to make a distinction between enregistered and entextualized voice:
The sentence contains an opening interjection ordinarily associated with “male speech” in Lakhota (wąlewą) and an adverb-final particle ordinarily associated with “female” speech (wele:).

As in other linguistic contexts (Hall 2005), Lakhota syntax indicates a speaker’s rejection of a rigidly defined gender-binary by allowing differing gender markers within the same syntactic form. Anticipating that linguistic fact, Trechter (1995) introduced her discussion of this example with the caption: “Lakhota atypically gendered speech.” But Agha’s commentary does not address atypicality. Instead, he explains how a bystander observing the comment is able to normalize its contradictory material, to ensure that “the enregistered voice associated with the form wele: – namely, that the speaker is female – is detachable” and “the entextualizing voicing effect – that male speaker is maternal, affective etcetera – is recoverable” (Agha 2005: 48, emphasis in original).

Trechter describes the social context surrounding this Lakhota sentence in the following terms: “a man sees his two-year-old nephew who he was not expecting at his house that evening and he calls to the child” (1995: 10). Agha’s discussion of audience reception is consistent with that context, yet Agha’s discussion does not consider the message that the bystander is constructing. And, as in any audience reception context, that message is multiple and refracted. There could be a “mixed gender” message, whereby a male speaker is enacting/embodying a typically female role; if so, that message might invite the bystander to implement the work of “repair” (e.g. some form of normalization along the lines that Agha describes). A “mixed gender” message might also invite the listener to accept the speaker’s self-representation as a claim to sexuality rather than as a momentary disruption of gendered linguistic norms. Trechter provided examples (1995: 13–16) where associations between “mixed gender” clinic usage and “sexual preference of speaker” were the likely outcomes. In one of those examples, a female speaker of Lakhota in her mid-forties overheard her brother claim that “men say yo, and women say ye,” and she replied: “Yeah, well I say yo and yelo, but I’m not gay, . . .” (1995: 14).

An entirely different reading is also possible: that a male-bodied subject is momentarily adopting attributes stereotypically associated with women. In the uncle/nephew example cited above, these can be labeled attributes of “caring,” whose presence is indexed linguistically in this setting by yele. Importantly, however, the indexing has occurred in specific circumstances: the uncle expresses “caring” in relation to the nephew, in a setting where the presence of the nephew was unexpected, and where the uncle was able to voice his affective reactions to his surprise. In a public location — a grocery store, a religious meeting house, a government building — the uncle’s reaction might have been phrased differently. In this sense, yele indicates performative and iterative as well as affective dimensions of the social moment, rather than attributes that are intrinsic to the social subject or attributes that copy practices of his gender-opposite. Trechter’s (1995) comments are again worth citing. She recognizes that Lakhota scholars commonly describe wąlewą as a “male” interjection and describe yele: as a marker of “female” affect. But Trechter cautions against relying too heavily on predetermined gendered usage or on references to a predetermined gender binary as the sole framework for linguistic description. She explains: “ . . . [I]t is clearly difficult to generalize the meaning of . . . affective and social connotations” associated with wąlewą and yele:.
The use of the clitics is dependent upon the age of the speaker and addressee, their kinship relation, knowledge of the language, social stance, and the perception of a third party (audience) in addition to the content of the utterance and affective disposition of the speaker in the speech event.

*Trechter* (1995: 16)

Trechter continues, anticipating the appeal to intersectionality argued throughout this chapter:

An operative scheme of gender deixis in Lakhota would necessarily require . . . [that] the particles which index gender must be interpreted in the overall ground of the speech event, which . . . is constantly created and changing according to the factors listed above and the interactive influence that constitutive gender exerts over the speech event.

*Trechter* (1995: 16)

In other words, rather than simply commanding entextualized voicing or enregistered voice, as Agha proposes, forms like *wəlewag* and *wəleː* identify sites where “kinds of difference” cluster, only one of which may be properly encoded in gendered or in gender-transgressive/sexualized terms. Foregrounding “gender” – or any type of entextualized/enregistered binary when multiple kinds of difference are evidenced at the site of refraction ignores the presence of heteroglossic refractions and their intersectional significance. Worse yet, it endorses speaking – and speech community – as a singular, normative formation.

**Future Directions**

**Intersectionality as Queer Linguistics**

Queer linguistics begins by refusing to make such singular endorsements. Instead, while work in queer linguistics often studies relationships between language and sexuality, it always addresses a broader question: how do structures of power assign vulnerability to some forms of sexuality while surrounding other forms of sexuality within privilege and protection (Motschenbacher 2011, Leap 2013, Milani 2013)?

Sexuality’s alignments with race, ethnicity, class, age, citizenship, and other forms of heteroglossic refractions, as examined in this chapter’s discussion of intersectionality, are some of the means through which vulnerability and privilege/protection are secured in those instances. Recall here how Abe’s (2011) example shows linguistic differences combining with differences in appearance, and other social ascription, to distinguish the *rezu* working at the bar and the *rezu* working in a white collar setting. Language marks the distinction in this case, but linguistic practice is not the only element encoding difference, and queer linguistic inquiry cannot be defined solely by studies that connect the specifics of sexuality to the specifics of linguistic practices. Indeed, as Barrett (2003: 558) has argued, where sexuality is concerned, “... identity (and desire) might be found not in the use of a particular variety but rather in the particular choices and combinations of linguistic forms drawn from several distinct linguistic varieties.”

Still, the discussion in this chapter has pushed for an analysis that moves beyond choices and combination across distinct varieties. The point has been to use heteroglossic refractions as an entry point for situating linguistic practice, linguistic choices, and combinations of forms within socially and historically constructed intersections of difference. It is through attention to intersectional formations that anthropological linguistics is able to determine (in Barrett’s
wording), “when and how language itself becomes an important resource for indexing one’s sexual identities and desires” (2003: 558) but also why certain types of linguistic resources are shared unevenly within the same linguistic/social setting.

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Related Topics

7 Language Ideologies (Kroskrity); 8 Social Subordination and Language (Huayhua); 13 Language, Gender, and Identity (Pichler); 14 Discursive Practices, Linguistic Repertoire, and Racial Identities (Baugh); 15 Language and Racialization (Chun, Lo); 19 Language and Political Economy (McElhinny); 24 Discrimination via Discourse (Wodak).

References


Further Reading