

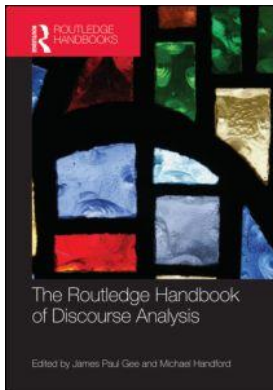
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Queer linguistics, sexuality, and discourse analysis

William L. Leap

Queer linguistics is a relatively recent academic formation, but one that has quickly become firmly embedded in the current conversations about language, gender, and sexuality. As is also the case in language and gender studies (see Coates, this volume), queer linguistics refuses to frame discussions of linguistic practices in terms of an assumed male/female binary (or on a limited set of identities based solely on erotic practices and preferences). Instead, queer linguistics exposes the assumptions that lead researchers to view gender in terms of a predetermined, static framework.

The term ‘queer’ is an especially suitable focus for such an inquiry. Here as elsewhere in queer theory,

queer does not name some natural kind of referent to some deterministic object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm.

(Halperin, 1995: 62)

Queer linguistics posits that gender is the normative reference in this discussion, recognizing that a society’s statements about ‘who men and women are’ are ideological formations; they constitute ‘a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ whose outcome of representation is ‘the “constituting” [of] concrete individuals as subjects’ (Althusser, 1971: 162, 171). These relationships are represented to individuals through discursive practices, but they are represented variously given how the particulars of race and ethnic background, class position, age, dimensions of (dis)ability, and attendant locations of citizenship, nationality, and diasporic flow shape discussions about gender in the social moment. Under such circumstances, while the persuasive power of the ideological formations remains, the everyday understandings of ‘who men and women are’ are unlikely to follow a uniform pathway and often become sources of disagreement and conflict.

By paying attention to the discursive practices through which these understandings, disagreements and conflicts unfold, queer linguistics confirms the limits of gender as an explanatory category in linguistic analysis and forces studies of ‘who men and women are’ to look beyond those discourses of certainty. The terrain of sexuality becomes an alternative space for inquiry at this point, since the ‘oppositional relations’ associated with gendered norms are often located and mediated in the form of in sexual desires, practices, and identities. But queer linguistics cannot be concerned solely with sexuality as its subject matter, just as it could not be concerned solely with gender. Sexual desires, practices and identities are also inflected variously across the social terrain, and in some cases they are inflected privately or silently rather than as components of public discourse. As a general task

that is mindful that certain ideological messages about ‘who men and women are’ circulate widely in the social moment, queer linguistics explores the discursive inflections of the sexual – desires, practices, and identities – as they unfold in the context of that circulation, and often (as Halperin suggests) in opposition to it.

To summarize: if, following Judith Butler, we think of gender as ‘repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance’ (1990: 33), then ‘what kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?’ (1990: 32). Queer linguistics looks to discursive practices to provide answers to Butler’s question.

Reading the discourses of sexuality queerly: an example

I turn now to an example that shows what a queer linguistics-based analysis of discursive practices – sexuality, gender, identity, and related themes – might entail. The narrative in this example is extracted from a life story narrative that I collected during a four-year-period of field work (1995–1999) in the metropolitan area of Cape Town, South Africa. Of interest to that project were the changes in urban sexual geography that were unfolding during the transition away from policies of ‘strict apartheid’ and into the beginnings of democratic rule. During the research period, I interviewed same-sex identified white men living in the city centre and suburbs and same-sex identified coloured and black men living in the townships on the Cape Flats.¹ I learned from these stories that gay life had been deeply segregated in Cape Town during the days of apartheid rule. But I also learned that, as early as 1990, apartheid regulations had begun to be relaxed in some city centre commercial venues, to accommodate the need of international travellers. Under the strict letter of the law, Cape Town area persons of colour were now granted access to these sites, and some of them attempted to make use of those opportunities. But strict apartheid remained preferred practice throughout the city centre business community, and some club owners found ways to maintain racial exclusion regardless of the change in legal policy.

Comments in life-story narratives like example 1 below suggest that some same-sex identified coloured and black men were aware of the contradictory conditions that emerged within this context. They understood that practices of exclusion positioned them as *refused subjects* at the same time as these initial changes in apartheid policy had finally made freedom from discrimination more attainable. Jameson, the narrator in example 1, was 35 years old at the time of our interview (1996) and was in his late twenties when he first encountered these contradictions. He grew up in one of Cape Town’s coloured townships, and was still living at home with his parents and working for a township-based social services agency when he told me this story. We were introduced by a mutual friend, who had told him about my interests in Cape Town sexual geography. Jameson was happy to speak with me, since he had many stories to tell about sexual sameness and spatial practices related to the townships and the city centre. Example 1 is one of those stories.

Example 1

- 001 J: ... and eventually I started going [to the Rondebosch Train Station] regularly,
and then
002 I met someone there. At the station. And I knew him from the university, and uh we
003 started chatted, and every Friday we saw each other at the place, gave him my
telephone
004 number and gave me his, told him I’ll meet you Rondebosch that time. We used to
cruise
005 around the area, lucky some nights, unlucky other nights.

006 Until he said what he heard about this gay bar in Cape Town. He said let's go, I
007 said no way I'm going to go into a gay bar. I had cold feet at that stage as well,
being very
008 tired, coming out at 11:00 and going to the station.
009 And then one evening he said, let's go and see what it's like. We got there, it was
010 packed ! [said in whispered excitement] *with men!* And as you walked past people
looked
011 at you and rubbed against you, and I thought, this is really for me. And we left.
And the
012 next week we said, OK now we know the place and are we going backthere
again? We
013 got there and it was closed.

(WLL: Which place was it?)

014 J: It was the [location 1.] It was closed. I though Oh no, where is this place now
015 now. And my friend, of course, inquired from other people, said now anew place
opened
016 up called [location 2.], and then eventually we found [location 2] and we
017 went there .The first night we went inside and we had a drink inside, westayed there for
018 about an hour and we left.
019 And the next week we came back and they said, you can't go it,it's only for
020 members. And we asked, you know how, members? We were here lastweek. No, only
021 for members. The bar in front is for the public, and the inside bar. At that stage, we
022 realized that it was a race thing, uhm, went to the bar and sat there the front bar
feeling
023 really rejected because we'd had a good time the week before. And we asked the
barman
024 how come we can't get in, and he asked, are you gay? At that stage, both of us did not
025 want to admit to anybody that we were gay, so we said, does it matter ? He said, it's a
026 gay bar so it matters a lot.
027 We left, and the next week we came back again, and we decided to go into the
028 members' bar, and we walked in, and uhm no one stopped us again.
029 And the barman said [names location 3], that was the bar we should go to. So
030 that's how I discovered the bar scene.

(*W. Leap field notes*)

Taken at face value, example 1 falls within a familiar genre of gay narrative: it is a coming out story, nested within a story of sexual/spatial discovery. Initially, according to the storyline, Jameson was unfamiliar with the city's gay commercial resources and is forced to meet people by cruising the cottages (public restrooms) and the parking lot at the Rondebosch train station.² Through this process he confirmed the same-sex identity of a man he had met while at the university, someone who became his partner in this urban exploration. The friend suggested the initial foray downtown, and through a process of trial and error they located several clubs, negotiated access, and thereby 'discovered the bar scene' (1:030). There was a difficult moment in the process of discovery. Jameson and his friend were excluded from a club because of what they 'realized was a race thing' (1:021–022). But the bartender saw things differently. He asked Jameson, 'Are you gay?', asking him to make a coming out declaration, which he was not yet prepared to make. Hence Jameson reworked the anticipated adjacency pairing – 'Does it matter?' – And abruptly

departed the site, returning at a later time to seek entrance under different circumstances, this time successfully.

Reading example 1 as a coming out story emphasizes the story's events prompted the formation of the subject's sexual identity. Not fully acknowledged in that reading is the significance of the racial question or the extent to which apartheid authority, even at the beginning of transition, may have framed sexual formation in racial terms. Jameson and his friend being denied entrance to the private club because of 'a race thing' (1:021–022) is an important reference in this regard, of course. But denied entrance has to be read beside the fact that Jameson and his friend had previously been granted entrance to the private club, and were allowed entrance to the private club on their next visit. Apparently, at this point in Cape Town's history, the apartheid practice of racial exclusion was no longer a matter of categorical denial, but involved a more arbitrary and unpredictable process of refusal. If so, then example 1's discussion of coming out and special/sexual discovery becomes a story of refused subject formation as well as a story explaining how two such subjects engaged the contradictory conditions of refusal once subject formation in those terms began to unfold.

The bartender's question: 'Are you gay?' (1: 024) assumes a particular significance under this reading. As Jameson explained:

... [we] sat there the front bar feeling really rejected because we'd had a good time the week before. And we asked the barman how come we can't get in.

(1: 022–024)

Jameson's response to the bartender's question reflected a reluctance to make a public statement about their sexuality, as he explained:

At that stage, both of us did not want to admit to anybody that we were gay, so we said, does it matter? He said, it's a gay bar so it matters a lot.

(1:024–026)

But Jameson's response says more than that: the bartender's question implied that Jameson and his friend could gain access to the private club if they admitted that they were gay. Saying 'yes' to the barman's question would not change the fact that they had previously been refused on racial grounds, but it would give them admission to the private club and terminate their status as refused subjects. At the same time, saying 'yes' to the barman's question would also admit that sexual sameness erases racial differences in the city centre's gay terrain, that gay men of colour are now allowed to 'pass for white' in the context of late apartheid. By saying 'no' to the bartender's question, Jameson and his friend maintained the integrity of their racial status even if they also remained in the status of refused subjects and at distance from the sexual venues initially of great interest to them. And by endorsing this status, Jameson and his friend also underscored the ideological stance expressed in the doorman's act of refusal: 'gay' is implicitly a white person's status, and persons of colour acquire that status only under context-specific and other exceptional circumstances.

So there is nothing inappropriate about discussing example 1 as a coming out story, but making such an appeal to genre predetermines the references that are relevant to the storyline and, as a more careful reading of the text reveals, the scope of relevant references proves to be much more complex than a trajectory of self-discovery. Similarly, example 1 could be called a 'gay' narrative in the sense that the narrator is same-sex identified, defines himself as a gay man, and is telling a story about experiences (coming out, discovery) that are familiar to same-sex identified men in any number of locations worldwide. But, here again, the term 'gay' can not have a predetermined meaning within the context of this narrative. In fact one of the components of the 'bar scene' that

Jameson ‘discovered’ (1:030) through this experience in the city centre commercial terrain was what the category ‘gay’ could mean for him in this particular moment of Cape Town’s social and political history.

Queer linguistics as a part of a broader ‘queer project’

Finally, example 1’s continual weaving of sexuality, race, and responses to apartheid regulation can also be read as instances of ‘subversive repetition’ whose effects ‘call into question the regulatory practice of identity’ (Butler, 1990: 32). Importantly, repetition and subversion are not properties ‘of’ text but reflect the engagements of speakers and audiences with text production and reception: Jameson and his friend, the doorman, the bartender, as well as the researcher – and now the reader of this article – become deeply invested in the process of refused subject formation as described in this text. This is another reason for arguing that example 1 is not just a story about coming out, sexual/spatial discovery, or some other form of gay narrative. What is at stake here are uneven inflections between discursive practice and structures of power, with sexuality so often used as the signpost to indicate the critical points of intersection: ‘we realized it was a race thing ... [but] the bartender asked, are you gay?’ (1:021–022, 024).

Queer theory as a whole is also interested in the uneven inflections between sexuality, discursive practices and structures of power. And, like queer linguistics, queer theory pays attention ‘not just what is said, but also the context within which narratives unfold’ (Giffney, 2009: 7). In fact, as Giffney explains, queer theory itself can be described as ‘an exercise in discourse analysis’ in the sense that ‘[i]t takes very seriously the significance of words and the power of language’ (2009: 7).

For example, in the opening of *The Epistemology of the Closet*, one of the anchoring texts in the queer canon, Eve Sedgwick wrote:

Modern Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth and knowledge ... (and) the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know.

(Sedgwick, 1990: 3)

Not content merely to produce discussions of ‘the sexual’, queer theory began by taking note of the ways that ‘sexuality’, as a named category, imposes meaning on, and thereby helped to regulate, other dimensions of human experience. In this sense, a long-standing goal of queer inquiry has been to provide

a deepened understanding of the discursive structures and representational systems that determine the production of sexual meanings and that micromanage individual perceptions, [and to show how they] maintain and reproduce the underpinnings of heterosexist privilege.

(Halperin, 1995: 32)

Admittedly, and the discussion of example 1 had confirmed this, there are forms of discursive practice outside of language, which help to ‘determine the production of sexual meanings and ... micro-manage individual perceptions’ related to sexuality and heterosexist privilege. For that reason, and

[g]iven its commitment to interrogating the social processes that not only produced and recognized but also normalized and sustained identity, the political promise of [queer] resided specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality and religion, in addition to sexuality.

(Eng et al., 2005: 1)

As time passed, the ‘broad critique’ engaging the ‘production of sexual meanings’ and its attendant ‘multiple social antagonisms’ has assumed a variety of formats, including critical race theory and the queer critique of colour, crip theory (queer disability studies), transgender studies, new statements of post-colonial theory, migration/diaspora studies, studies of (homo)phobia/ hate speech. Queer linguistics is adding its own insights to this ‘broad critique’, and in the following sections I examine some of these insights and the projects on which they are based.

Queer linguistics on its own trajectory: beyond identity to performativity and desire

Work in queer linguistics began in the late 1990s by as a critique of studies ‘that conflates what some (again, usually white, middle-class, educated) gay men says in some contexts with a general “Gay English” ’ (Kulick, 1999: 616) and of other studies that assumed that linguistic practices indexed the fact of gendered identity and/or sexed body. Rather than asserting that gay language had certain indexical properties in such instances, queer linguistics problematized those properties. As Livia and Hall explained, it was not enough to argue that certain forms of utterance not only describe the world but act on it – a way of ‘doing things with words’ (1997: 11). What makes the performative effect possible in every instance cannot always be named, and attempts to pinpoint linguistic features designating texts or speech acts as uniquely queer usually proved unsuccessful. The ‘queerness’ of linguistic practices derives as much from the audience response to linguistic practice as from any formal representation that speakers give to intended message or meaning.

Example 2, extracted from the verbal monologue of an African American drag queen while performing on stage in a drag bar in Austin, Texas, shows how the construction of a sexual message depends on a subtle interplay of speaker intention and audience recognition.

Example 2

- 001 Are you ready to see some muscles [audience yells] ... Some dick?
 002 Excuse me I’m not supposed to say that ...
 003 Words like that in the microphone ...
 004 Like shit, fuck, and all that, you know?
 005 I am a Christian woman.
 006 I go to church
 007 I’m always on my knees.

(Barrett, 1999: 324)

As Barrett notes, the performer has adopted a ‘white-woman style of speaking’ (hereafter WL), modelled after the white female behaviour and its attendant discursive practices described in Lakoff (1975: 53–56). Use of WL discourse while in drag persona encodes the performer’s intention to present herself as a woman of middle-class refinement while on the stage (Barrett, 1999: 321). But part of the point of drag is to be larger than life, to surpass and critique rather than imitate the object of performance. The contradiction between the performer’s African American embodiment and her white-lady verbal practice reflect this point: if a black man can ‘be’ a white woman on the drag club stage, than someone else can ‘pass for white’, and thus the category ‘white woman’ begins to lose its appearance of authority. Also underscoring this point is the performer’s introduction of an oppositional discursive stance. In line 2:001, the performer uses a vernacular term for the male genitalia that a woman of middle-class refinement might not employ in a public setting. In lines 2:004, the performer adds additional expletives, equally incongruous with her WL assertions. WL discourse returns in 2.005–006, using a reference that situates WL refinement

within a performative Christianity, while line 2:007 either extends or subverts that references, depending on whether the audience aligns the remark with piety or erotic posture.

The point is that, the performer has including nothing within the textual detail that states, explicitly, 'I am a drag queen.' That message is encoded through the performer's accumulation of discursive materials within the indicated passage, but that accumulation has to be read in relation to the embodiment of the performer within the context of performance site and against the contradictory statements that the discursive materials themselves display. As in example 1, sexuality is one component through which the work of queerness is expressed and, as in example 1, the text has to be read broadly and not in a foreclosed fashion.

Under such conditions, discussions of linguistic practices closely tied to sexual identity – e.g. the discussion of 'gay English' in Leap (1996) and related writings – had to be retheorized, if not rejected entirely. Cameron and Kulick (2003b: 74–105, and see also Kulick, 2000) offered especially strong proposals to that end. They were critical of studies of gay and lesbian language, or of any project that 'remains invested in the idea that "queer language" is somehow linked to queer (i.e. non-heterosexual) identities' (2003: 102): the focus on sexual identity, whatever its orientation, 'leaves unexamined everything that arguably makes sexuality sexuality: namely fantasy, repression, pleasure, fear and the unconscious' (2003: 105). Alternatively, Cameron and Kulick proposed that 'language and desire' become the entry point for studies of language and sexuality. This shift in emphasis 'acknowledges that sexuality is centrally about the erotic' and indicates 'the extent to which our erotic lives are shaped by forces which are not wholly rational and of which we are not fully conscious' (2003: 106, 107).

Equating sexuality and 'desire', where desire is a cover-term reference for 'fantasy, repression, pleasure, fear and the unconscious', opened a broad terrain for studies of queerness as an identity-free 'becoming'. But whether queer linguistics could operate within this framework was another question. Some scholars argued that dedicating linguistic analysis entirely to such decontextualized inquiry artificially segregates sexuality from political economy and history, yielding what Penelope Eckert termed 'the mystification' of the study of sexuality (2002: 100).

The challenge then is to adopt an approach that focuses on the social mediation of desire: to construct a view of desire that is simultaneously internal and individual and eternal and shared
(Eckert, 2002: 100).

Cameron and Kulick's discussion of language and desire spoke directly to Eckert's 'challenge'.³

Although we may experience sexual desire as uniquely personal and intensely private, their form is shaped by social and verbal interaction.

(2003b: 131)

Recognizing that that desire is a 'socially mediated' formation revealed two things about the relationship between language and desire (and about language and sexuality, more broadly framed). First, desire is specifically

made intelligible [in language] because it draws on codes of signification that circulate within the wider society – in Eckert's terms, they are 'external and shared' [Secondly], 'individuals cannot chose *not* to have their desires understood in terms of prevailing social norms'.

(Cameron and Kulick, 2003b: 132)

While not directly referenced, this statement acknowledges the interest in language and ideology that had been central to discourse analysis for some years (see Fairclough and Van Dijk chapters, this volume), but was now becoming integral to the explorations of language and sexuality in other areas of queer theory. But the ideological processes that were of interest there could not be

described simply in terms of the interpolation or ‘hailing’ of the subject form. Sexual ideologies promote obedient subjects in some cases, but sexual ideologies also prompt conditions of ‘disidentification’ (Muñoz, 2000: 11–34) in which speakers step outside of the normative terrain and ‘work’ the subject form imposed on them by ideology, thereby forcing ideology to ‘operate in reverse, i.e. on and against itself through the overthrow–rearrangement of ...[its] formations (and of the discursive formations ... imbricated with them)’ (Pêcheux, 1982: 159).

Because transgender subjects are so frequently caught up in the work of disidentification, relationships between transgender and language became an especially productive research area in queer linguistics. In earlier times, studies of ‘transgender language’ were concerned with assessing how closely transgender subjects conformed to linguistic norms of their gender of choice. Queer linguistic inquiry immediately called into question the limited vision of language that such research displays and became even more critical of the assumed obligations of conformity that motivate it.

As Valentine (2007) shows, part of the problem lies with the growing popularity of the term ‘transgender’ itself. While this term purports to designate subjects according to their ‘gender of identification not their ascribed birth gender’, it has also become ‘a useful shorthand for describing non-normative genders as a whole’, and thereby ‘a way of describing a diverse group of people both in the United States and beyond its borders’ (2007: 23, 19). In this sense ‘transgender’ is an artificial formation, imposing a single description onto a range of experiences whose details are now obscured by the unifying effects of the category. And, while a range of linguistic practices can be associated with transgendered experience, it is equally artificial to suggest that these practices constitute a single ‘transgender language’, since transgender subjects draw variously on a range of linguistic practices along with other kinds of discursive encodings to encode their claims to a gender or sexual identity different from that assigned to them at birth.

For example, some linguistic practices allow speakers to mark a transgender status in a speech event by ‘bending the rules’ that ordinarily govern the gender-marking functions of adjectives, pronouns, and verb-endings, playing with metaphoric references, or manipulating other elements of linguistic surface structure (Kulick, 1998: 206–211; Morial, 1998; Hall, 2002). But there is also ‘stealth’, a creative synthesis of word choice and intonation, posture and gesture, clothing style, and other markers by means of which post-operative trans-subjects encourage a normative rather than transgendered reading of their embodiment, thereby deflecting potentially awkward questions about their birth gender (‘Is he or isn’t he?’) before they arise in the public arena (Edelman, 2009).⁴ Queer linguistics explores how speakers employ these practices, when they employ them, and which speakers do so. Queer linguistics also examines the forms of audience reception that these practices engage and the messages about gender (local and ideological) that become validated and/or contested through these processes.

Intentionality, (inter)subjectivity, belonging, and citizenship

Implied in these discussions of transgender and language was some degree of speaker intentionality. This was a fundamental theme in early discussions of language and gay identity (Leap, 1996: 24–73), and in the initial queer critique of performativity as well (Livia and Hall, 1997: 11). But intentionality was anathema to the interrogation of language and desire as Cameron and Kulick originally proposed it, since the wilful decisions that the individual speaker might make during textual practice can always be upstaged by failure, forgery, misuse, or other ensuing feature of iteration (Cameron and Kulick, 2003a; Kulick, 2003: 112–122).

To resolve this problem, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) looked beyond the work of the individual speaker and considered ‘identity, sexual and otherwise’ as ‘the outcome of intersubjectively

negotiated practices and ideologies' (2004: 469).⁵ Linguistic practices are deeply embedded within every level of these intersubjective negotiations. But, rather than being drawn from some predetermined inventory, the form that these practices assume and the functions that they serve are shaped through the dynamic engagement of speakers and interlocutors.

Barrett's discussion of African American drag queen performance (example 2 above) provides a rich illustration of how 'tactics of intersubjectivity' unfold, particularly how tactics of intersubjectivity gain representation in linguistic practice through polyphonous connections between specific forms of linguistic genre, including African American vernacular and 'white woman speech'. Brian King (2008) makes a similar point when showing how same-sex desire encouraged the learning of English as a second language among some Korean men in New Zealand. The men that King interviewed reported feelings of discomfort when talking English with 'white people' generally, but also noted that discomfort disappeared when they started talking English with gay white men. For example, King cites comments like the following from Hyoung, a 35-year-old middle-class self-identified gay man, who reported consciously attempting to maintain his distance from the local Korean community because 'especially being GAY they wanted to know where am I and so detail' (2008: 241), and therefore spending his time interacting with his (non-Korean) boyfriend's social network. King asked if Hyoung was 'comfortable with all of those people? speaking //English?' and example 3 shows Hyoung's reply.

Example 3

- 001 ... mmm actually straight people is like a little more difficult really ... it's very
 002 difficult sometimes and not very much comfortable and then we talk like much
 003 comfortable is like GAY people like they know our LIFE and they ... know the
 004 y'know experience and we can SHARE.

(King, 2008: 242, *histranscription retained*)

Hyoung refers here to a discursive sexuality shaped in response to tensions between social sameness and difference, which Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 494) term 'tactics of adequation and distinction'. Here, however, sameness and difference do not coincide with the broader English vs. Korean linguistic contrasts, but indicate a more nuanced struggle to establish claims to place within each linguistic and social terrain. That is, by his report, Hyoung struggles with others in the local Korean community to demonstrate conformity with the expectations of heteronormative ideology, and his own sense of difference is heightened when he finds himself in those settings even if the (Korean) discursive practices are otherwise familiar. When he is with 'Gay people', any uncertainties that he and others might have about his sexual status are swept away by the expectations of shared gay experience and by the assumed familiarity with linguistic practices through which those expectations are encoded. These are English-based linguistic skills, however, and skills that Hyoung has just begun to master. So here is a different kind of linguistic difficulty, but this time a difficulty made less serious by the cordiality of the social setting.

English becomes a kind of 'gay language' in Hyoung's example, but it does so in a fashion that is very different from the linguistic playfulness encoding 'gay identity' in English (Leap, 1996: 12–23) or the more carefully mediated encoding that allows 'yan daudu in Northern Nigeria to integrate a 'feminine male' identity in colloquial Hausa (Gaudio, 2009: 89–116). Similarly, given the complex negotiation of public and private identities that Hyoung confronts, but also the relative freedom he has to move between the indicated locations, what 'gay' means as a discursive inflection of sexual identity in Hyoung's example is very different from what 'gay' meant in the context of Jameson's experience in late apartheid Cape Town's city centre (example 1).

Other work in queer linguistics has looked beyond tactics of intersubjectivity and has situated individual formations of desire within an even broader social dynamic. Particularly important has

been the work that examines sexuality, social responsibility and ‘good citizenship’, asking how subjects who claim a non-conforming sexuality are also able to minimize an appearance of threat to mainstream governance. For example, as Puar and Rai (2003) explain, when US-based messages about terrorism during the years immediately after 9/11 demonized homosexuality, those messages also opened a space for US ‘homosexuals’ to condemn terrorist acts by showing that their loyalty to the state took precedence over commitments to sexual sameness.⁶ Such responses have not offset a noticeable increase in anti-gay verbal or physical assault in the US and other national settings since that time.

Understandably, discourses related to homophobia are rapidly becoming a site of interest in queer linguistics. Like nationalism, these discourses are broadly cast, in this case assigning meanings of disdain, disgust, or hatred to certain experiences of sexual sameness that immediately draw connections with other forms of social marginality. Thus Murray defines homophobia as ‘a socially produced form of discrimination located within relations of inequality’ (2009: 3), making no reference to its connections to sexuality at all. For Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz, such an erasure of the sexual may be a problematic move. They find that violent acts directed against identified same-sex subjects are sometimes described as homophobia, other times described as assault or robbery, and sometimes not reported at all. Contrary to its ‘taken-for-granted understandings and uses’, homophobia is not a static, predetermined formation, but a discursive position whose uses have ‘unintended and sometimes less than libratory consequences’ and often carry their ‘own forms of violence’ (discursive and material) (2008: 391).

Visibility and tacit subjects

A particularly important new direction in queer linguistics has emerged from Carlos Decena’s discussion of tacit subject formation, a discursive position evidenced in narratives of same-sex identified Dominican men living in New York City. Tacit subject formation speaks directly to the assumption that, to be same-sex identified, the subject must be ‘out of the closet’, visible, and explicit about sexual sameness. In the Dominican Republic and in settings of the Dominican diaspora, such public statements are unnecessary and unwanted, because anything about a person’s sexuality that is worth knowing publicly is already known by family members and other relatives already bound together by ties of dependence and respect. Unlike in the US gay mainstream, the Dominican same-sex identified men that Decena interviewed faced a normative obligation to ‘exercise ownership of their sexual identities by negotiating the degree to which their sexual and romantic lives become (or not) points of discussion in family settings’ (Decena, 2008: 340). Part of their response to that obligation invoked the rules of tacit subject formation in Spanish grammar. ‘The sujeto tácito is the subject that is not spoken but can be ascertained through the conjugation of the verb’ or through some other linguistic means, Decena explains. ‘What is tacit is neither secret nor silent’, although it may already be understood or assumed and, ‘if people have the requisite skills to recognize and decode [the] behavior’, the tacit message may not require explicit statement (2008: 340).

‘Tacit subject’ formations are attested among Spanish-speaking subjects elsewhere in Latin America (Wright, 2000). Similar discursive principles guide the ‘coming out’ process in urban and rural France (Provencher, 2007: 85–149), where same-sex identified men and women do not just tell their parents and friends that they ‘are gay’ (since parents and friends may already suspect this fact and do not need to have it articulated). Instead, they tell about their involvement in a committed relationship with a same-sex partner – information that parents and friend may not have grasped (or been willing to grasp) through other means. For example, Gabriel, a 29-year-old self-identified gay man, described the following ‘coming out’ experience with his father. Gabriel

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lives in Paris and keeps his personal life separate from any interaction that he had with his natal family. But one weekend he was visiting his father (his parents are divorced) and during an evening discussion his father raised the topic of marriage, family life, and children. Gabriel continues the story in example 4, where, rather than stating explicitly, 'I am gay', he adds a statement to an ongoing discussion that forces his father to make the desired inference: 'No, dad, you do not understand. I will not have any children because two men cannot have children' (4:004–005).

Example 4

001 ... I was saying 'well, I don't believe in marriage ... I don't think I will ever have
002 children' and he said, he didn't understand, he didn't want to understand, he looked at
003 me and said: 'Why? You seem s sure, I do not understand, why, you don't know,
004 perhaps you will have some' 'No but dad, you don't understand. I will not have any
005 children because two men cannot have children'. And it was there that
he understood.
006 And since I'd had a bit to drink it was a bit easier to tell him. And I asked him if I had
007 shocked him' I asked he if he resented me and he said 'no' And he said to me, 'you
008 know, I have always left you to live the way you wanted, do what you wanted ... I
009 would have preferred it if you were heterosexual instead of homosexual but that is
010 the way it is. I cannot stop you.'

(Provencher, 2007: 127)⁷

It is tempting to think of Gabriel's reluctance to name to his social status explicitly as an enduring allegiance to 'the closet'. But what is at stake here is an entirely different discursive stance, one that sets the French example apart from the mainstream US-based expectations of 'out and proud' sexual subject and aligns it with the public mediation of sexual sameness associated with a responsible Dominican sexual sameness in diaspora.

Paradoxes of visibility: a queer linguistics of colour, globalization and shame

Until recently, queer linguistics has largely been predicated on discursive practices that were visible and accessible to audiences and to researchers, or on discursive practices that, for particular reasons, were deliberately withheld. Growing interest in electronic media as formats for communicating 'queer messages' both locally and throughout the global circuit (e.g. Berry *et al.*, 2003; Mowlabocus, 2010) has required new ways of discussing turn-taking, identity-management, language socialization and other properties traditionally associated with face-to-face, spoken language use. New studies of visibility have extended these interests, by reminding us that discursive processes relevant to textuality need not be explicit displayed. Hence, in queer linguistics as in queer theory as a whole, 'unpacking the latent content is as important a task [for queer theory] as understanding that which is stated directly' (Giffney, 2009: 7). Under these circumstances, statements like 'if we can't say it, how can we be it?' – for years, the informal motto of the American University Lavender Languages and Linguistic Conference⁸ – assume an entirely new meaning: what does 'being' entail, when access to the attendant discursive practices of 'saying' is mediated or foreclosed, rather than unproblematically accessible?

This is not a question to be debated in the abstract, but must be explored 'at the site'. Here emerging work in queer linguistics overlaps with new projects in radical cartography and experimental geography (Paglen, 2008). Here, also, queer linguistics intersects with the body of work associated under the general rubric, the *queer of colour critique* (Ferguson, 2004: 1–30). Even more

than in queer theory, queer of colour critique notes how long-standing ascriptions of whiteness and privilege dominate the categories of reference in vernacular and scholarly discourses, especially so where discourses pertain to sexual sameness. That 'queer' 'acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm' (Halperin, 1995: 62) has additional significance, if the 'norm' is a privileged discursive terrain embracing heterosexuality as well as whiteness, and if the 'oppositional relation' includes a range of positions only some of which are explicitly articulated in discursive practice (in the sense of Decena's argument).

Strengthening the queer of colour critique are arguments from two other areas of queer linguistic inquiry: studies examining the movement of North Atlantic-based 'gay English' discourse within the global circuit and studies examining how diasporic subjects encounter 'gay English' discourses when the diaspora brings them into the North Atlantic terrain (Manalansan, 2003; Peña, 2004; Boellstorff, 2005; Leap, 2008). As in the domestic arena, these globalized discourses of sexual sameness and privilege underscore 'race's imbrications with sexuality'. Further, the speed with which these discourses travel within the global circuit points to the 'great evasions, silences and distortions of nationalist formations' (Ferguson, 2009: 114) even as the national, like the racial, becomes deeply embedded within linguistic intersubjectivity and even as yearnings of desire remain unaddressed, in spite of those negotiations.

Work in queer linguistics is also exploring these yearnings of desire through studies that connect textual practices with broader discourses of 'gay shame' (Mundt, 2007; Halperin and Traub, 2009) and 'queer trauma' (Cvetkovic, 2003). Such research engages forms of popular culture, pulling the inquiry even further from a traditional linguistic interest in verbalized discourse, and engaging more fully forms of message-making that work with, through, and in spite of the spoken language and its attendant expression of sexual norms.

Further reading

- Cameron, D. and Kulick, D. (2003) *Language and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- A useful, if at times partisan, review of twentieth-century studies of language and sexuality, and a persuasive argument in favour of using a desire-centred paradigm to remedy the shortcomings of earlier work.
- Gaudio, R. (2009) *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic City*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Explores the linguistic and social practices associated with two forms of non-normative Hausa masculinity: 'yan daudu (primarily same-sex identified, and often feminized men) and masu harka (the more masculine, sometimes married men, with families, who 'do the deed' with yan daudu). Shows how Hausa/ Islamic nationalism is reshaping language, sexuality and citizenship in northern Nigeria.
- Kulick, D. (2003) 'No!', *Language and Communication*. Special issue on Language and Desire. D.Cameron and D.Kulick (eds.), 23 (2): 139–151.
- How the act of 'saying "no"' in the context of a hetero-erotic encounter confirms the subject position 'woman' – or confirms a subject position 'man' whose masculinity is now suspect.
- Leap, W. (2008) 'Queering gay men's English', in K. Harrington, Lia Litosseliti, H. Sauntson, and J. Sunderland (eds.) *Language and Gender Research Methodologies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 408–429.
- An analysis of a coming-out story, where the analysis treats identity as a 'product of the speaker's linguistic practices rather than the foundation on which they are based' (2008: 285).

Notes

- 1 The city centre includes the central business district and adjacent residential and commercial areas. These areas were 'proclaimed' white space under apartheid rule. Coloured and black residents were removed to township communities on the Cape Flats, the vacant lands extending to the east of the city centre.

- 2 During strict apartheid, several train stations were popular cruising areas for same-sex identified men, particularly because, being heterotopic locations, train stations were places where men from different racial/ethnic backgrounds could meet in relative safety. This tradition continued into the democratic period.
- 3 See also the research agenda outlined in Kulick (2003: 130).
- 4 Edelman writes: 'within the academic literature, stealth is most commonly defined as the non – disclosure of one's trans history or present ... The narratives collected in this project show that stealth is a dynamic and situated practice of ideological negotiation ...' (2009: 168–169).
- 5 Bucholtz and Hall organize their tactics of intersubjectivity in three pairs: adequation and distinction, 'processes by which subject construct and are constructed within social sameness and difference' (2004: 494); authentication and denaturalization, having to do with 'truth ... vs. pretense and imposture in identity positioning' (2004: 498); and authorization and illegitimation, which distinguish uses of power to legitimate or withhold legitimacy from social identities (2004: 503).
- 6 Similarly, the bar-tender in the Cape Town city centre gay club (example 1) opened a similar space for Jameson and his friend when he asked: "Are you gay?"
- 7 Provencher (2007: 126–127) cites the French (original) version of Gabriel's text as well as this translation. I have renumbered the English translation in the presentation of this example.
- 8 www.american.edu/lavenderlanguages.

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