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Sociolinguistic Horizons: Language and Sexuality

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Abstract

In this essay, I examine the current state of research on the connections between language and sexuality and argue that the time has arrived for such research to adopt a more vigorous use of the scientific method, which will allow for testing the predictions made by the various theoretical interventions that have been proposed since the 1990s. I begin by outlining the major theoretical debate within the field, namely, the question of the place of social identity within a theory of language and sexuality and then detail several areas and trends in the research, including research focused on lexical and grammatical variation, language and sexual identity, language and heterosexuality, language and eroticism, and finally experimental approaches to language and sexuality. I conclude with a call for more integration of deductive and inductive approaches within the field.

Introduction

My interest in language and sexuality was first piqued on the day I walked into a fashionable men's clothing store in San Francisco's Castro District. I was wearing my father's old (authentic, Vietnam era) army coat, our last name printed boldly on the upper left-hand side. My friends were busy looking for attire for a party we were attending that evening and I was idly glancing at the jewelry counter when the sales clerk noticed my coat and asked me how much I would be willing to sell it for. After responding that it was not for sale, I asked him why he wanted it and he smirked, saying, 'Honey, if you really have to ask, then you probably wouldn't understand.' My friends were aghast that I had not immediately recognized the potential for camp that my father's army jacket represented.[1] I was mesmerized by the realization that my last name somehow carried the potential for social meanings I had not really considered before, meanings that were intricately bound to gender and sexuality.

The indexical possibilities of my last name represent one of the ways language can become entwined with sexuality,[2] and research that has explored these entanglements has been captured under the label 'language and sexuality.'[3] Although research that investigates these connections goes back to the early part of the twentieth century (Jacobs 1996), there has been a

veritable explosion of such material since the mid-1990s, and some of the most critical debates within sociolinguistics have played themselves out within research that queries such connections. The fundamental question underlying this area of research is how can we scientifically and rigorously explain the interrelationships of language, in particular language variation (either within or across individuals) with sexuality, where sexuality refers simultaneously to practices, identities, beliefs, and ideologies that are tied in one way or another to the eroticized body (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Far more specific kinds of questions can unfold from this very broad one, and answering any such questions ultimately serves to increase our understandings of both language and sexuality as human cognitive, historical, social, and biological phenomena.

Before proceeding too far with this survey, I want to be explicit about the meanings of some of the terms I will be using, as many of them are often poorly defined or not defined at all, a situation that can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. In this review, I distinguish *sex* as a descriptor used for the biological body (e.g. male, female); *gender* as a descriptor for the social and cultural expression of the sexed body (e.g. masculine, feminine, man, woman); and *sexual orientation* as a descriptor for the sex and gender of sexual object choices (e.g. heterosexual, lesbian). Furthermore, I distinguish sexual identity from eroticism. *Sexual identity* is a descriptor for the social framings through which individuals and groups are socially categorized (by themselves or others) based on their sexual orientation, beliefs about their sexuality, and/or their sexual practices. *Eroticism*, on the other hand, references the description or indexing of specifically erotic desires and erotic practices. I use the term *sexuality* as an umbrella term encompassing both sexual identity and eroticism, recognizing, of course, that sexual identity and eroticism as I am using them here are not and cannot be categorically distinct from one another (any more than can sex, gender, and sexual orientation), nor are they necessarily used as such in the studies and approaches I will be discussing.

Sexual identity and eroticism capture the two major approaches to the study of language and sexuality that appear in the literature as well as the major source of theoretical debate within this subfield. Although there are some very specific differences between the two types of studies, as I will argue in this review, there is much that they share, particularly in terms of their broad theoretical and methodological interventions. I have laid the review out in such a way that readers unfamiliar with this area of study will come away with a general sense of various threads of research that have emerged since the mid to late 1990s and those who are more familiar with it will come away with some new food for thought. I have included research available from standard print sources as well as some manuscripts, dissertations, and other difficult to obtain materials, as long as they are available for free download.[4] Given that this is an area that has already been amply reviewed (Jacobs 1996; Kulick 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2003;

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Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Wong 2005b), I have also tried not to re-review works that have been reviewed previously or to rehash the terms of long-standing, although largely settled, debates. I make reference to some canonical pieces of research; however, in general, the work that I present here represents work published subsequent to Cameron and Kulick's book-length survey, *Language and Sexuality* (2003). My own critical perspective with respect to this area of research, including my own contributions to it, is that the new insights developed from theories and methods coming primarily out of cultural studies and literary theory seem to have largely run their course and that the emergence of new directions with respect to language and sexuality (and by extension to sociolinguistics) will depend on the development of theories and especially methods, including methods of data collection, that meld the understandings thus far gained with standard social scientific and experimental approaches.

Theory

This subfield has been steeped throughout the early part of the twenty-first century in a major theoretical debate concerning the place of 'identity' for research on language and sexuality specifically and on sociocultural linguistic phenomena more generally. As are many such debates, this one is relatively simple at its root yet animated by fairly complex and intricate argumentation. Here, I layout only the basic contour of the debate and refer readers to Kulick (2000), Cameron and Kulick (2003), and Bucholtz and Hall (2004) for a thorough grounding in its details. The foundation of this debate is largely theoretical, and revolves around whether or not social identity provides a theoretically and methodologically sound grounding for studies of language and sexuality.

Research that uses social identity as a heuristic has been critiqued as fundamentally limited by its focus on data from speakers who self-identify (or are identified by others) as a particular type of person (such as a 'gay man') and as further limited by a lack of focus on the essence of sexuality: desire and eroticism (Kulick 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2003). Some have answered this critique with the argument that excluding identity and focusing on something like desire ignores the salience of socially constructed subject (and to some degree object) positions that are tied to sexual desire and practice and thus runs the risk of mystifying desire and ignoring altogether matters of power and other fundamentally social phenomena (Eckert 2002; Queen 2002; Barrett 2003; Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Psychoanalytic theory and discursive psychology form the primary theoretical foundation for most of the work on language and eroticism while post-structuralism, speech acts and performativity, and theories concerning ideologies about language provide the backbone for most studies of language and sexual identity. Both approaches rely almost exclusively on ethnography, conversational analysis, and discourse analysis as their methods of data collection and analysis.[5]

Because sexual identities are predicated on notions of eroticism (and sexual orientation), it is impossible to try and understand them as independent of or orthogonal to erotic desire and practice. Conversely, because eroticism and desires are organized in particular ways and are calibrated and considered through a social, historical, and political lens, it is equally impossible to assume that notions of identity, identification, and categorization are not centrally bound to them. As Cameron and Kulick (2003) illustrate, even studies that were initially framed at least in part in terms of identity can easily be re-analyzed in terms of desire,[6] a fact that makes it difficult to empirically evaluate whether eroticism or identity provides a better theoretical rubric for understanding the connections between language and sexuality. Because the arguments in favor of one or the other approach have been primarily theoretical while the data analyzed specifically selected to illustrate one position or the other, the ultimate conclusion embraced by most scholars in this area has necessarily been that our understandings of language and sexuality are more likely to advance by taking seriously a focus on both identity and eroticism.

Despite disagreements about the theoretical framing of sexuality (the framing of language is generally not at issue within these debates), most scholarship is unified in its decidedly anti-essentialist stance, assuming that sexuality is generally something that we 'do' rather than something we 'are'.[7] Research thus explores the place that language has in terms of the 'doing', regardless of whether that concerns the doing of erotic desire or of specific positions of identity. Such an orientation has been instrumental in illustrating how both eroticism and social identity emerge through processes of linguistic interaction rather than existing somehow independently of them; however, in so doing it has sidestepped answering a rather central question, namely, whether some social identities are different than others and subsequently whether language plays a role in any differences that may exist. Kulick (2000) and Cameron and Kulick (2003) in fact repeatedly raise this very question to suggest that social identities provide a fatally limited analytic starting point because social identities are not fundamentally different from one another. From an anti-essentialist perspective, they are more or less correct. As there is nothing essential that constitutes individuals as particular kinds of people, there is no real grounding for thinking that language is more likely to index someone as a 'lesbian' than, say, an 'oncologist'. And yet, societies do seem to treat some social identities in fundamentally different ways than others. For instance, there are no legal barriers to oncologists marrying other oncologists although there are plenty that make sure lesbians cannot marry other lesbians. The social categories that people construct around seemingly immutable characteristics such as gender or ethnicity often underlie the complex workings of social hierarchies and typically form the basis for enduring and very real inequities tied to various kinds of social power. Yet, serious research into how people perceive differences between kinds of social identities has been lacking.

While I would in no way advocate becoming an essentialist on these questions, I do believe that taking essentialism more seriously as an analytic building block could prove quite fruitful and might, for instance, provide a means of empirically exploring the question of whether or not language connects to social identities like 'lesbian' in ways that differ from its connection to social identities like 'oncologist' (see also Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 466–7). Thus, rather than stipulating via theoretical intervention the place of social identity within research on language and sexuality, sociocultural linguistic research could forge a different path by generating specific hypotheses concerning language and social identities and then testing them. For instance, it is my suspicion that those categories of identity that societies treat as essential are more likely to be associated with significant linguistic variation than are those categories that societies do not treat as essential. Sexuality presents an excellent such category, particularly in Western contexts, precisely because it appears to be making a shift in exactly this dynamic, moving from being understood as primarily a set of behaviors to being understood as something fundamental to people, like gender or ethnicity. This shift can be seen in a wide variety of institutional and cultural venues of social life.

Shifting research to take societal essentialism more seriously could have wide-ranging benefits within linguistics as a discipline. For instance, should research be able to show that language connects differently to some categories than to others, it could lead to a more dynamic modeling of linguistic competence that places sociocultural knowledge on footing similar to that of purely linguistic knowledge and that shows how sociocultural knowledge provides a key component of linguistic production and perception. Furthermore, such a finding could provide an additional empirical basis for the assertion that linguistic variation must be accounted for within models that seek to address the cognitive underpinnings of language. Similarly, for research more interested in cultural phenomena like eroticism than specifically in language, such an exploration could help explain the relative costs and benefits of voicing certain kinds of erotic desires and practices and thus help predict which sorts of desires might be unarticulated and/or unarticulatable (cf. Kulick 2005). In any event, research into language and sexuality, like any other research, needs to be more transparent about the ways in which its theoretical commitments may circumscribe the kinds of questions it chooses to ask, or indeed is able to ask. As I show below, however, much of the research in this area has nonetheless been fairly innovative in trying to overcome certain kinds of circumscription and has greatly enhanced the possibilities for understanding language and sexuality.

Language, Codes, and Sexual Identities

Most nonliterary studies of language and sexuality that existed prior to 1990 focused on issues related to the lexicon, particularly in terms of lexical items

with covert or culturally specific meanings, such as 'friend of Dorothy' to indicate that a man is gay, or 'breeder' as a derogatory term for heterosexuals; or wholly new lexica such as that found in Polari, a more or less secret language used among gay men in the nineteenth-century England and revived in the 1950s and 1960s (Lucas 1997). Much of this work has a dictionary-like quality with very little analysis, and dictionaries of 'gay slang' remain widely available in both print versions and on the Internet.

Labeling conventions for different kinds of social identities and practices represent another area of the lexicon that has attracted scholarly attention. For example, research has explored kinship terms being reconfigured away from biogenetic ties and toward other kinds of social and erotic relationships (Queen 2006), sexual practices, and preferences being captured with terms like 'top' and 'bottom' (Barrett 2003) or discussions of the boundaries of terms like 'queer' and 'gay' (McConnell-Ginet 2002). More recent work that focuses on questions related to the lexicon has addressed the questions more centrally in terms of social meaning. For instance, both Wong (2002, 2005a) and Murray (2003) deal with the shifting meanings of particular terms (*tongzhi* in Chinese and *takatāpui* in te Reo Maori) from general meanings dealing with close friendships (roughly 'comrade' for *tongzhi* and 'intimate same-sex companion' for *takatāpui*) to specific meanings tied to same-sex sexualities and their social manifestations. Similarly, McConnell-Ginet (2002) discusses the ways in which the shifting meanings of terms like 'queer' 'promote the pursuit of different kinds of social action, cultural values, intellectual inquiry' (138).

The different approaches to the lexicon are roughly mirrored by work with a central focus on other forms of grammatical and discursive variation, and work focused on such variation constitutes the bulk of research on language and sexuality. On the one hand, some of the work dealing with grammatical and discursive variation focuses on a basic typology of features associated with some kind of sexual identity, primarily gay male, although occasionally also lesbian or transgendered. For instance, William Leap has proposed that there are unique codes associated with sexual identities (e.g. 'Gay Men's English') and that those codes circulate in culturally and historically grounded ways. These codes are made up of both grammatical and discourse-related elements, such as the use of sexual euphemisms and innuendo the use of feminine grammatical markers (e.g. *she*) to reference males (and *vice versa*) and styles of conversational turn-taking involving significant overlap between speakers. Similarly, much of the work found in the volumes *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon* (1995) and *Queerly Phrased* (1997) orients around the variable use of particular linguistic features and discourse elements by gay men, lesbians, and transgendered folks from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

There is also a relatively sizable body of research that uses the tools of narrative analysis to understand particular genres that have been associated with sexual identities such as coming out stories (Chirrey 2003), fuck stories

(Kiesling 2002), and various other narrative genres. Peebles (2004), for instance, explores ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives as a strategy for highlighting the tensions around questions of desire and identity as well as those around constructivism and essentialism. In her analysis, to be ex-gay does not necessarily mean eschewing particular kinds of desires, rather it means not acting on them. Ex-gays recognize their own gay identity, but their religious and moral convictions conflict with that identity and thus lead them to shun what they perceive to be gay practices. Ex-ex-gays, on the other hand, have realigned their religious and moral convictions and do not shun such practices. As Peebles demonstrates, most of the work of realignment on the part of both groups occurs discursively through discussion groups and other similar meetings.

Yet a third body of research in this general tradition focuses on how individuals use linguistic variation to index sexual identities and other social meanings, generally assuming that there are no direct mappings between specific linguistic features and specific identities (e.g. Ochs 1994). For instance, work that explores indexicality typically orients around the basic question of how speakers use language to help activate social personae that are recognizable. For instance, a researcher working within this tradition might analyze the language use found in films such as *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* or *Bound* to see how various characters distinguished themselves linguistically. In so doing, this work generally addresses complex questions of intentionality and authenticity and their relationships to language. The scholars behind this body of work generally assume that linguistic indexicality emerges in local contexts of interaction and also interpret the emergent social meaning as evidence of the fluidity of social meaning more generally. For instance, Kitzinger (2005) and Land and Kitzinger (2005) discuss the ways in which particular aspects of the grammar, specifically certain lexical items and pronouns, are used to indicate a speaker's sexual orientation during activities otherwise not tied to the display of sexuality. Other solutions to the problem of indexicality have been sought in terms of stylistic and intraspeaker variation (Podesva et al. 2002), performativity and intertextuality (Livia 1999; Barrett 2003; Hall 2005), and stylization and representation (Queen 1997, 2004). In addition to exploring the ways in which language connects to sexual identities, much of this work is also concerned with connections to other social identities such as class, ethnicity, and, of course, gender. The relationship to gender is a particularly thorny one given the general inextricability of gender and sexuality (Queen 2004). This is particularly true in research that explores questions of language as they relate to transgenderism (White 1998; Besnier 2003, 2007).

LANGUAGE AND HETEROSEXUALITY

One of the strongest critiques of the identity-linked and code-based approaches to the study of language and sexuality has been that such studies

make it difficult to really explore heterosexuality as a sexual orientation and thus reify the so-called sexual minorities as something exotic while underscoring heterosexuality as an unmarked norm. Thus, many researchers have called for a more explicit exploration of the ways in which heterosexuality (and to some degree homosociability) are constituted (Cameron and Kulick 2003; Kitzinger 2005). The work that has emerged on language and heterosexuality tends to be similar in terms of method and theory to the work done on sexual minority communities in that its focus is primarily on the ways in which language can be used to index a heterosexual sexual identity or orientation.

Penny Eckert's groundbreaking work on the emergence of the heterosexual market is among the most important of these types of studies (1996, 2002, 2003). For instance, Eckert (2002) shows how sexual activity, in particular one girl's first sexual experience, is tied to the girl's desire for a particular kind of heterosexual identity. Similarly, Scott Kiesling has explored expressions of heterosexuality and homosociability among fraternity men (1997, 2002, 2005), showing that particular discursive practices used to index heterosexuality are also bound to displays of dominance and power. Finally, Ingrid Piller ties heterosexual desire to matters of language learning and bilingualism (Piller and Takahashi 2006; Piller forthcoming a,b).[8] In a series of articles, she discusses the ways in which people's desire for a partner who speaks a specific language and their desire to learn that language are intertwined. Her participants explain that their desire for a particular language led them to look for speakers of that language as potential mates. As one of her participants notes, 'I wanted to be like people who could talk to Tom Cruise or people who looked like Tom Cruise' (12). Piller's work on the complex relationships between different kinds of desire is an illustration of a growing body of work that seeks to specifically understand how language gets entangled in expressions of eroticism and helps organize desire through discursive interaction.

Language and Eroticism

There is a book collection (Harvey and Shalom 1997) and an edited issue of the journal *Language and Communication* (issue 23) that focus specifically on questions of language and sexual desire, and research with such a focus continues to expand. For the most part, this body of work is concerned with how people express sexual desires and the relationship of sexual desires to other aspects of social life. For instance, David Valentine's (2003) discussion of the ways in which erotic desires may not be framable in terms of identity categories illustrates some of the promise of a focus on erotic desire, particularly when taken in tandem with questions related to sexual identity. He shows how participants in an alternative lifestyle's support group attempt, but ultimately fail, to find coherence in identity as a means of dealing with various kinds of erotic desire.

Despite the theoretical interest in exploring eroticism, it is difficult to find appropriate methods for collecting and analyzing linguistic expressions of erotic desire (see, however, Channell 1997). As a consequence, much of the work that does attempt such an exploration uses introspective data, such as in Kulick's (2003) discussion of the use of 'no' in a variety of different contexts, or relies primarily on written expressions of desire or on ritual.[9] For instance, Kang (2003) discusses the ritual use of magic spells that highlight linguistic expressions of erotic desire as a means for Petalangan women to ensure fidelity by their husbands. Ahearn (2003), on the other hand, shows how an emerging genre of love letters among villagers in Nepal interweaves discourses of modernity with discourses of desire and many studies that deal with language on the Internet address issues of the expression of erotic desire (Thorne and Coupland 1998; del Teso-Craviotto 2005; Groom and Pennebaker 2005). Ahearn's work on Nepali love letters further shows how written conventions can be used to analyze aspects of desire that are not or cannot be articulated. In her study, writers used strategies such as ellipses as a means of indicating desires that cannot be written down (Ahearn 2003: 114). This is one of the few works that engages in an empirically grounded way with the call implicit in the psychoanalytic framework that underlies much of the work on language and eroticism to explore what is unsaid.

Thorne and Coupland (1998) explore how dating advertisements can be a site for the construction of desire. Although their focus is primarily on comparing how people with different sexual orientations use somewhat different strategies for writing their ads, their study shows how social norms exert specific pressures on the framing and expression of desire. Groom and Pennebaker (2005) also use dating ads to explore expressions of desire and to show that popular ideologies about the relationships between gender and sexual orientation (for instance that gay men are linguistically more similar to straight women than to straight men) do not hold in their data. Additionally, they show that gender and sexual orientation have independent effects on language choice within the ads. Their study differs from most of those thus far described in that it was set up as a standard social science study based on predictions made by different theories. Thus, rather than use theory as a guide to their data selection and analysis, they relied on theory to generate specific predictions, which they then tested.[10] In this way, their work is quite similar to the phonetic and perceptual studies that have tried to understand connections between language and sexuality.

Experimental Approaches to Language and Sexuality

Within the body of research that explores language and sexuality experimentally, the details of social meaning are largely unconsidered and the focus of interest is fundamentally on linguistic variation rather than on sexual identity or eroticism. Most of this work takes the assignment of speakers into particular kinds of identity categories as unproblematic and/or focuses

on perceptual questions, not asking about a speaker's actual sexual orientation but rather about their perceived sexual orientation and the correlations between such perceptions and various phonetic factors. In general, most perception-based studies find that listeners are reasonably successful at labeling speakers' sexual identities in ways that correspond to the speaker's own self-assessments (Gaudio 1994; Linville 1998; Smyth et al. 2003). Paradoxically, however, few studies have shown significant differences in the acoustic signals produced by speakers of differing sexual orientations. In particular, differences in the fundamental frequency (i.e. pitch), which have been widely theorized as indexical of sexual orientation (with gay men assumed to have greater pitch range than straight men and lesbians assumed to have narrower pitch ranges than straight women), have been inconclusive and few significant differences in pitch range have been found (Gaudio 1994; Moonwomon 1997; Waksler 2001; Smyth et al. 2003; Levon 2006).[11] Pierrehumbert et al. (2004) found, however, that there were specific differences in the vowel spaces of speakers who identified themselves with different sexual orientations and concluded that those differences provided evidence that gay men and lesbians' manipulations of the vocal tract are learned behavior rather than somehow biological in nature.[12] This finding is based on the lack of any crossover effect between sex and sexual orientation (e.g. it was not the case that gay men's vowel spaces were similar to straight women's or that lesbians' were similar to straight men's), a finding that was also true in Groom and Pennebaker's (2005) study of word choice in Internet dating ads.

Similarly, the work of Benjamin Munson and his colleagues (2006) has tested the relationship between self-assessed sexual orientation, the perception of sexual orientation, and differences in various acoustic parameters, most notably formant values for specific vowels for both gay men and lesbians and spectral qualities in the articulation of /s/ for gay men. They found that acoustic variation correlated with both self-assessed sexual orientation and perceived sexual orientation. For instance, gay males produced non-high front vowels with higher F_1 frequencies (i.e. lower vowels) than heterosexual males. Furthermore, their work showed that the perception of sexual orientation correlates to perceptions of other characteristics such as gender typicality, speech clarity, and perceived stature, and in many cases those correlations were stronger than were correlations with self-assessed sexual orientation. The linkage of perceived sexual orientation, clarity, and perceived height is somewhat unexpected; however, it likely demonstrates that listeners rely on several social percepts in their social classification of speakers.

While experimental studies such as these have the benefit of the scientific method, they fall somewhat short in providing an understanding of how language is actually meaningfully tied to the social identities in question. For instance, Munson et al. (2006) group male bisexual speakers with their gay male participants and female bisexual speakers with their lesbian participants; however, it is entirely unclear whether or not such a decision is motivated and Munson et al. do not discuss why this particular choice

was made. Levon (2006), on the other hand, attempts to include the question of social meaning in his experimental study, as well as to find a solution to the problems of using speakers' self-assessment and categorization, by using digitally altered speech from a single speaker. In the original recording, the speaker was assessed as 'extremely gay' and 'extremely effeminate' by one group of listeners. Levon then tested whether digitally manipulating the fundamental frequency and the spectral qualities of /s/ would have an effect on a different set of listeners' judgments about a number of social characteristics and found that they did not. Although Levon's findings are difficult to evaluate due to several design flaws,[13] it does show the enormous potential for combining an experimental approach with an approach informed by theories of social meaning.

Where Should This Subfield be Headed?

Approaches such as Levon's that seek to be both rigorously experimental and committed to the advancement of social and cultural theory are critical to the continued advancement of this area of the field and to sociolinguistics more generally, particularly as it relates to linguistics as a discipline. Since the mid-1990s, we have seen astonishing advancements in the theories designed to explain connections between language and sexuality; however, with the exception of a few sociophonetic studies, there has been very little change in the methodologies and analytic tools used to test those advancements. Furthermore, as Livia (2002) points out, because the theories themselves are tied largely to cultural studies and literary theory, the methods have also tended to resemble the methods used in those disciplines. This means that many of the analyses read as if they were literary analyses, with the primary difference being in terms of the origin of the 'texts'. Furthermore, these methods tend to position language as simply the vehicle for the phenomena of interest rather than seeing language itself as the focus of interest. Indeed, a great deal of the argument for shifting the study of language and sexuality to the study of language and eroticism has been in the service of better understanding eroticism. While this is in itself an important goal, it is not a particularly linguistic goal.

We can and should be trying to understand language as a human phenomenon with the same vigor and interest that we seek to understand desire (or social identity or performativity) as human endeavors. One of the ways of doing so would be to start testing theoretical advancements following a more standard scientific method, meaning generating hypotheses based on those theories and then collecting data that can address those hypotheses. In other words, one way of bringing language back into the center of analysis is to develop and use deductive methods in conjunction with the more common inductive ones.

Another means of bringing language back into the center of analysis is to try and scientifically integrate the biological, the social, and the cognitive

aspects of it. For instance, Pennebaker et al. (2004) have shown that increased testosterone levels resulted in the use of fewer linguistic markers of social connection in written diaries based on data drawn from a heterosexual man being treated for deteriorating upper-body strength and a female-to-male transsexual. While their study does not do a conventional linguistic analysis, such an analysis could illuminate interesting social and cognitive dimensions to the variation they saw following the testosterone treatments. Finally, moving the study of language and sexuality to include both deductive and inductive approaches could also begin to dislodge the distinction in so many socio-linguistic studies between quantitative and qualitative data analysis (see Ochs et al. 1996 for an example of a deductive approach that relies on qualitative data analysis), a distinction that tends to limit the degree to which researchers working in different fields and disciplines interact with one another.

Conclusion

As I was writing this essay, I was also constructing a written survey for a separate research project. Along with the standard demographic questions concerning family income and ethnicity, I asked a question, the third of the survey, about sexual orientation. This decision was theoretically motivated by a specific hypothesis about the relationship of sexual orientation to the other phenomena the survey was addressing and yet, the statistician who was helping me design the survey told me that putting the question at the beginning with all the other demographic questions would almost certainly lead respondents to discontinue taking the survey. He suggested instead that if I was going to ask about sexual orientation (which he recommended against), then the question should be moved to the very end and be preceded by an additional disclaimer reminding the participants that they were not required to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. I asked him why asking about sexual orientation would make people more uncomfortable than asking them about ethnicity or family income and he responded that people were more used to being asked about those things and thus answered more or less without thinking much about it. Plus, he said, sexual orientation is just inherently more 'charged'.

In considering whether to take the statistician's advice and omit the question, my co-author and I found ourselves facing a dilemma that illustrates some of the interest and some of the frustration with taking questions of sexuality seriously in social science research, including linguistic or sociolinguistic research (see also Livia 2002). To ask the question was to potentially lose some of our respondents; to not ask it was to potentially lose some of our data and implicitly capitulate to the potential that our respondents were heterosexist and/or homophobic. In the end, we decided to leave the question where it was because we had a specific hypothesis about a correlation between sexual orientation and some of the other components of the survey. Time will tell what the consequences of our

decision will be, but in the end, we will be able to say that we made the choice that was motivated by our research design.

My hope is that as research on language and sexuality continues to evolve, it, too, will make choices largely motivated by theoretical predictions and the testing of hypotheses and that those choices will lead to new methods of data collection and analysis. In the end, the study of language and sexuality, like the study of sociolinguistics more generally, has to be tied to the desire for an accurate model of language variation and its ties to cognitive, social, and historical landscapes. Such a model has to take seriously the emergent properties of social meaning and the idiosyncrasies of local experience and individual particularity while at the same time recognizing that humans live in a world that shapes and constrains the contours of those idiosyncrasies through institutions, political economies, norms of social engagement, histories, cultures, and even biology, thus making at least some aspects of those contours generalizable and predictable. Finding ways to blend our theory building more concretely with scientific methods would thus go far toward reconciling one of the inherent problems of trying to study language, namely, that it is at once a property of individuals and a property of groups of individuals.

Suggestions for Teaching About Language and Sexuality

As the literature on issues related to language and sexuality continues to expand, deciding between the different options one has for using this research in the classroom becomes somewhat more difficult. I have found the following to be useful and accessible to a wide variety of students. For a longer unit dealing with this subject, Cameron and Kulick (2003) provide an excellent, accessible, and reasonably short book-length overview. For a shorter unit (one to three class sessions) on these issues, Cameron (1997), Barrett (1995), Queen (1997), and Hall (1995) provide a solid overview of the types of work people have done on language and sexuality. For those interested in including an experimental approach as well, Munson et al. (2006) is an excellent choice. Kulick (2000) and Bucholtz and Hall (2004) are well suited to more in-depth engagement with the theoretical issues surrounding language and sexuality research.

Short Biography

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take . . . ?": Jokes, teasing and the negotiation of stereotypes about lesbians', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* (2005); and ' "Du hast jar keene Ahnung": Dubbing African-American English into German', *Journal of Sociolingistics* (2004). She holds an M. A. and a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin.

Notes

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[1] Although notoriously difficult to define, 'camp' refers to a general aesthetic associated with over-the-top performances that make reference to popular culture, kitsch, and, especially, irony (see Harvey 2000 for details).

[2] A linguistic index is a linguistic sign in which the meaning of the sign varies with respect to context. For instance, pronouns and demonstratives are grammatical indexes because their meaning varies depending on matters of context such as who is speaking or the spatial orientation of the speaker and the listener. Within sociocultural linguistic inquiry, 'indexicality' generally refers to a sign relationship involving socially or culturally relevant meaning. For instance, the use of a linguistic form like 'ain't' can index various social meanings (or combinations of them) for speakers in the USA: 'uneducated', 'Southern', 'masculine', 'folksy', 'friendly', etc.

[3] Naturally, this is just one label that has been used to reference this body of research. The other major label that has been used is 'queer linguistics' (see Campbell-Kibler et al. 2002). For reasons tied to both theory and convenience, I use the term 'language and sexuality' as my label of choice.

[4] The URLs for such publications are included in the bibliography.

[5] Conversational analysis (CA) differs from discourse analysis (DA) primarily in terms of its interest in the structure and patterning found through the sequential analysis of interactional linguistic data. DA typically involves a much broader set of theoretical and analytic approaches than does CA, and is best captured by the generalization that it focuses on the analysis of written or spoken linguistic data that is larger than a single sentence.

[6] They reanalyze both Cameron (1997) and Hall (1995) from the standpoint of desire. Hall and Bucholtz (2004) subsequently argue that these same studies are best understood with at least some attention paid to identity and suggest that the desire in question in both studies is fundamentally a 'desire for identity' (479).

[7] 'Essentialism' in social theory refers to the belief that people have inherent characteristics (such as being female or being blond) that govern their behavior. In other words, people do what they do because of who they are. The opposite, or anti-essentialist, position is that people are who they are because of what they do. In other words, one is a 'man' by virtue of specific actions and practices rather than because of some intrinsic property of maleness.

[8] I would like to thank Deborah Cameron (personal communication) for pointing this body of research out to me.

[9] This critique is not meant to prioritize nonwritten over written usage *a priori*; however, given that much of the research on language and identity has shown the importance of a variety of features associated with spoken rather than written discourse and given that the expression of desire is likely to differ between spontaneous and less spontaneous situations, the use of written materials for understanding expressions of desire may be limited and certainly may not quite satisfy the theoretical aims that such a project envisions.

[10] I am not suggesting that their analysis is independent of theory (or that any analysis could be), but rather that one of the differences between theory in the humanistic sense and in the experimental sense has to do with the goals of theory. In the humanities, theory is used more or less hermeneutically whereas within experimental approaches, it is used to generate predictions about phenomena not yet observed.

[11] In Wachsler's study of variation in the fundamental frequency of lesbians and nonlesbians, she used 0.01 as the threshold for significance, which her data did not meet. However, they were significant at the 0.05 level. Interestingly, however, the differences went in the opposite direction of those hypothesized with the lesbians showing greater pitch range than the nonlesbians.

[12] 'The vowel space' refers to the different spatial orientations of the tongue (and to a lesser extent the lips and jaw) within the mouth during the production of vowels and to the different acoustic dimensions of different vowels.

[13] Levon himself notes several problems with the study design, including a relatively small listener sample size and the fact that listeners were not subdivided into stimulus groups. Levon also discusses the likelihood that single features such as sibilance or pitch are unlikely to work alone toward achieving social indexicality, a fact that naturally falls out from the theoretical paradigm he is using. In addition, it is not clear that pitch range (as compared, for instance, to interpolation between various pitch phenomena or the interaction between pitch range and interpolation) is the right linguistic cue for testing indexical links between language and sexuality. Finally, it is generally quite difficult to evaluate listener responses to a single speaker when the social (and linguistic) phenomena involved are so complex because it is impossible to know whether or not listeners were keying into idiosyncrasies tied to this particular speaker or to more general social phenomena, such as gender expression and sexuality.

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