



BOOK REVIEW

Language in Society (2024)
doi:10.1017/S0047404524000605

TYLER EVERETT KIBBEY (ed.), *Linguistics out of the closet: The interdisciplinarity of gender and sexuality in language science*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023. Pp. 279. Hb. €124.95.

Reviewed by PABLO M. TAGARRO 
University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)
Paseo Manuel de Lardizábal, 1, 20018 San Sebastián, Guipúzcoa, Spain
pablobec93@hotmail.es

Reviewed by CARLES NAVARRO-CARRASCOSA 
University of Valladolid (UVa)
Plaza del Campus, s/n, 47011 Valladolid, Spain
carles.navarro@uva.es

Tyler Kibbey's cutting-edge collection, a *sui generis* contribution, provides a breath of fresh air into the nascent field of queer linguistics. The tome is composed of eleven contributions divided into three sections. Accompanied by an introduction from the editor that contextualises the volume and an index of terms, this collection progresses the study of language's role within the queer community.

The 'Intersection' section of the book examines the intersection of the concepts of 'identity', 'sexuality' and 'language' within specific cultural and religious settings through three distinct narratives. It outlines the complex interplay between personal belief systems and societal norms. Chris VanderStouwe's 'Theoretically queer, practically straight' explores the lives of Mormon men who experience 'same-sex attraction' (SSA), but choose to live within the confines of heterosexual marriages. This chapter goes through the linguistic strategies these men employ to navigate their identities within both their religious community and broader societal expectations, questioning traditional notions of sexual orientation and identity. Dominique Canning's 'Unbreakable' offers a sociolinguistic portrayal of the character Titus Andromedon from *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. Canning explores how Titus's language use, both in the series and as depicted by the actor Titus Burgess, reflects and constructs racial and sexual identities in order to underscore the impact of media representations on Black gay identity perception. Ping-Hsuan Wang's 'Identity and desire in gay Indian immigrants' definition of coming out in the U.S.' researches the coming-out narratives of gay Indian immigrants in the United States. Through narrative analysis techniques, Wang reveals how these men articulate their sexual, cultural and immigrant identities, apropos of the critical

role of language in the expression of same-sex desire in different cultural contexts. Brenton Watts' 'Mountain magic' investigates the intersection of Appalachian folk magic and digital community-building and, in order to do so, focuses on a Facebook group that connects tradition with contemporary social issues. It explores the group's role in tackling identity and social justice within digital spaces and recognises the complexities of inclusivity and heritage in the modern era. Together, these chapters dovetail with each other to shed new light on how individuals articulate their identities in the face of societal norms by means of language as a key tool for negotiation and expression. In a way, they offer an understanding of identity at the intersections of marginalised experiences.

The 'Integration' section of the tome proposes a novel exploration of the intersections amidst linguistic studies (e.g., sociophonetics) and the lived experiences of queer and trans communities. J. Calder's 'Towards a queer and trans sociophonetics' promotes the expansion of sociophonetic research to more fully address the nitty-gritty of queer and trans linguistics. It advocates for a departure from traditional conventions that reinforce the everlasting heteronormative and cisnormative norms. Calder, in a sense, stresses the need for a socially conscious approach that incorporates the lived experiences of queer and trans individuals through the use of key phonetic variables to buttress identity construction. Bryce McCleary's investigation into the linguistic practices of queer and trans drag performers in Oklahoma, 'Queer+ Trans folk linguistics', views language as an indispensable resource for resisting oppressive structures. The author analyses the sociopolitical challenges faced by these individuals and how their linguistic agility acts as both a survival mechanism and a form of resistance. This study works to solidify the idea of intersectionality in appreciating these linguistic practices. Lex Konnelly's analysis of transmedicalism in transgender communities, 'Transmedicalisms, transnormativities, and semantic authority', exhibits the internal debates within transgender communities, particularly around trans identities and the role of medical transition. Konnelly ventures into how language serves as a battleground for identity, exemplifying the impact of transmedicalist ideologies on self-identification, inclusion and community belonging. These chapters, as a whole, argue for a more inclusive approach to linguistic research, one that embraces the diverse experiences of queer and trans individuals and recognises the transformative power of language in shaping and expressing identities.

The 'Institution' section scouts how language intertwines with institutional norms and practices, affecting gender and sexual identities. This collection of chapters comes to reinforce how linguistic norms and ideologies shape and are shaped by social structures and policies. William Leap's 'Queer language before', for example, examines the historical relationship between language and gender diversity prior to the emergence of queer and trans linguistics. Leap calls attention to how early linguistic research, mainly influenced by Eugenics and Social Darwinist agendas, contributed to the classification and treatment of individuals based on sexual orientation during World War II. This chapter pinpoints the malleability

of gender identities and the closely connected nature of language and sexuality in historical contexts. The analysis of Tennessee's theopolitical landscape, in Tyler Kibbey's 'The state of Tennessee and the Kingdom of God', unmasks the politicisation of gender identity through legislative and religious discourses, assessing the resistance to non-binary pronoun usage and the Nashville Statement. The chapter illustrates the complex semiotic systems through which conservative agendas are distributed, with effects on LGBTQ+ individuals and the broader societal debates on gender and sexuality.

In Nicholas Mararac's 'Queering the military' the intersection of gender, sexuality and military culture in the US Armed Forces is investigated. The chapter examines the historical roots of compulsory cisheteronormativity within the military service and the impact of the oft-quoted 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy. It brings to light how military discourse perpetuates heteronormative and gendered expectations, which affects leadership roles and the identities of LGBTQ+ service members. Through queer theory and the tools of sociolinguistic analysis, the chapter calls for a more inclusive comprehension of military culture and its principles. Rusty Barrett & Kira Hall's 'Closet monsters' critiques the discursive practices within academic linguistics that marginalise queer and trans scholars. They categorise exclusionary actions into 'naysayers', 'gatekeepers' and 'bullies' *ex post facto*, each contributing to the degradation of LGBTQ+ research and identities. The chapter reasserts the need to challenge these scenarios to foster a more inclusive and diverse academic environment and, therefore, advocating for an intersectional approach to linguistics that values the contributions of queer and trans scholars. Collectively, these chapters bring to the forefront the complex interactions between institutions and the formation of language and identity, which thereby advances inclusive linguistic research.

Kibbey's collection constitutes a welcome contribution to the blossoming field of queer linguistics (see, e.g., Baker 2019, 2022, 2023; Leap 2020; Motschenbacher 2022; Turton 2024; Marzullo & Leap 2024; Zottola 2024; Barrett 2025, just to mention some recent contributions), weaving through the interplay of identity construction, culture and language across three self-contained parts. It illustrates the power of language in shaping, negotiating and expressing queer identities against the backdrop of societal, institutional and cultural norms. This collection not only pushes the boundaries of linguistic research to reflect the diversity of human experiences, but also serves as a useful resource for grasping the mechanics of language at the juncture of underrepresented identities.

REFERENCES

- Baker, Paul (2019). *Fabulosa! The story of Polari, Britain's secret gay language*. London: Reaktion.
 ——— (2022). *Outrageous! The story of Section 28 and Britain's battle for LGBT education*. London: Reaktion.
 ——— (2023). *Camp! The story of the attitude that conquered the world*. London: Footnote Press.
 Barrett, Rusty (2025). *Language, gender, and sexuality*. Abingdon: Routledge, to appear.

BOOK REVIEW

- Leap, William L. (2020). *Language before Stonewall: Language, sexuality, history*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marzullo, Michelle, & William L. Leap (eds.) (2024). *Critical sexuality studies, lavender languages, and everyday life*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Motschenbacher, Heiko (2022). *Linguistic dimensions of sexual normativity: Corpus-based evidence*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Turton, Stephen (2024). *Before the world was queer: Sexuality and the English dictionary, 1600–1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zottola, Angela (2024). *LGBTQ+ and Feminist Digital Activism: A linguistic perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(Received 9 May 2024)