



EDITED BY

EREZ LEVON AND

RONALD BELINE MENDES

STUDIES  
IN

INTERSECTIONAL  
SOCIOLINGUISTICS

**LANGUAGE,  
SEXUALITY,  
AND POWER**

STUDIES IN LANGUAGE, GENDER, & SEXUALITY

## **Language, Sexuality, and Power**

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# **Language, Sexuality, and Power**

STUDIES IN INTERSECTIONAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Edited by Erez Levon  
and  
Ronald Beline Mendes

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## SERIES FOREWORD

Oxford's series *Studies in Language, Gender, and Sexuality* provides a broad-based interdisciplinary forum for the best new scholarship on language, gender, and sexuality. The mandate of the series is to encourage innovative work in the field, a goal that may be achieved through the revisitation of familiar topics from fresh vantage points, through the introduction of new avenues of research, or through new theoretical or methodological frameworks. The series is interdisciplinary in its scope: Volumes may be authored by scholars in such disciplines as anthropology, communication, education, feminist and gender studies, linguistics, literary studies, psychology, queer studies, race and ethnic studies, and sociology, and other fields.





## EDITOR'S PREFACE

The publication of *Language, Sexuality, and Power* marks the beginning of a new phase—with a new name—for Oxford University Press's Studies in Language, Gender, and Sexuality. Founded by Mary Bucholtz with the publication of *Reinvented Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse* (edited by Mary Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, & Laurel A. Sutton, 1999), the series has played a vital role in shaping the field of language, gender, and sexuality, and to take on the mantle of Series Editor is nothing short of an honor.

*Language, Sexuality, and Power* offers, in many ways, an ideal starting point for the series' new phases. Most simply, its specific focus on sexuality highlights the shift from the name *Studies in Language and Gender* to the more inclusive *Studies in Language, Gender, and Sexuality*. Sexuality has always been an important part of the books published in the series, but this change offers a more overt recognition of sexuality as a realm of human experience that is intimately connected with, but not wholly subsumable under, gender. Beyond this focus, however, Levon & Mendes' volume represents a marriage of sorts between the closely connected fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. For decades, one of the central disciplinary questions for scholars of language, culture, and society has been the relative positioning of these two academic traditions, which have sometimes been referred to as "twin fields." Despite a shared concern for the variable, multifaceted, and inherently social nature of language, the two disciplines grew in different directions during the latter half of the twentieth century, resulting in different theoretical frameworks, methodological priorities, and analytic tools. Though much can be (and has been) said about the relationship between sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, one of the differences most often highlighted is their differing orientations to quantitative and qualitative analysis. These varying alignments seem particularly salient in the study of language and sexuality, which at times has seemed like two parallel areas of research: the qualitative, discourse-focused queer linguistics that was birthed in the early days of 1990s queer theory and the quantitative, often phonetically oriented, research on sexuality as an important variable driving sociolinguistic variation, which has become an increasingly vibrant topic over the past fifteen years.

For those of us who hope for a more closely united future for sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, *Language, Sexuality, and Power* is an extremely promising example of the ways quantitative analysis of the distribution of linguistic forms can be brought together with a deep sensitivity to

sociocultural context and the insights of social theory. While employing methods common in variationist studies, such as acoustic and statistical analysis, the authors featured in this volume also offer discussions of social and interactional context that go beyond typical variationist fare. One clear reason for this depth is the variety of cultural locales in which the authors situate their investigations. This diversity inhibits the possibility of implicitly relying on the reader's social knowledge as a (presumed) member of the social groups most typically studied in sociolinguistics—namely, factions of dominant Anglophone cultural systems in North America and the United Kingdom. In this sense, contributors place themselves within an anthropological framework of cultural description that also reflects the ongoing internationalization of the field of language, gender, and sexuality—and sociolinguistics more broadly—in this age of globalization.

Finally, *Language, Sexuality, and Power* takes on one of the most central issues in the study of language, culture, and society: the locus for the production of social meaning. As the editors' introduction notes, one major challenge in sociolinguistics has been to move away from a correlational model of meaning, in which social characteristics statistically linked to particular linguistic features are assumed to be the cause of those features' use. The analysis of stance provides an alternative to this model with several advantages. To begin, it avoids the essentialism of claims that groups like "women" and "men" or "lesbians/gays" and "straights," as a whole, engage in a particular linguistic practices without respect for the way gender intersects with race, nationality, sexuality, class, and myriad other forms of social subjectivity. Incorporating stance into quantitative analysis provides a means for understanding why not all individuals participate in trends associated with their demographic characteristics. Most important, stance grounds the production of social meaning in the discourse that speakers produce in interaction. In other words, a consideration of stance demands that we go beyond counting the occurrence of linguistic variables in an interview or other speech event, and instead requires a deeper look at the discursive and interactional context in which those variants are deployed. A focus on stance reminds us that socioindexical meaning is always produced in concert with referential and interactional meaning, and that a focus on sociolinguistic variables without regard for what a speaker is saying or doing when that variable occurs provides, at best, a limited understanding of how social meaning emerges.

In these ways, *Language, Sexuality, and Power* pushes forward the study of language, gender, and sexuality, and it is with these strengths in mind that I am delighted to present this volume with the hope that it marks a new chapter not only for the series but for the field itself.

Lal Zimman  
Series Editor

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## Introduction

### LOCATING SEXUALITY IN LANGUAGE

Erez Levon and Ronald Beline Mendes

Research on language and sexuality has come a long way since the inception of the field some thirty-five years ago. Even our choice of the title for this introductory chapter can be taken as evidence of how work in this area has developed from one focused primarily on the linguistic behavior of specific groups of speakers (lesbians, gay men, etc.) to one that focuses instead on how sexuality (in all of its guises) emerges through linguistic practice. As Queen (2014) notes, this change in how the field conceptualizes its object of study is due in large part to the increased integration within sociolinguistics of theoretical models of self and society drawn from related disciplines, including cultural studies and anthropology. At the same time, research on language and sexuality has also grown increasingly prominent in areas outside sociolinguistics, notably in laboratory phonology (see Munson & Babel 2007; Eckert & Podesva 2011), where critical social theory has less of a foothold. This expansion of disciplinary approaches to the topic is a welcome development and has helped to solidify the empirical foundation of research in this area. Yet we would argue that it has also had the effect of making it at times more difficult to see how all the research conducted under the rubric of language and sexuality studies contributes to a common scholarly endeavor. One of the goals of this book is to demonstrate that it does, and to illustrate how studies emanating from various methodological perspectives all contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship between sexuality and language. For this reason, we aim in this chapter to take stock of where we currently stand, both theoretically and empirically, in relation to the study of language and sexuality. We do so not to establish prescriptive boundaries around this particular field of inquiry but rather to situate the different strands of existing research in a comprehensive and inclusive analytical framework. Put somewhat more simply, our goal is to

demonstrate how all the different pieces fit together, and, as a result, to highlight fruitful avenues for taking language and sexuality research forward.

The framework we propose, which we describe in detail in this chapter, is grounded within an approach to the study of language that focuses on examining how the distribution of discrete linguistic features—be they phonological, morphosyntactic, lexical, or discursive—participates in the construction and perception of social meaning. Aware of the extent to which the naming of a methodology is itself a meaning-making practice (Wong, Roberts, & Campbell-Kibler 2002), we choose to avoid using a label like “variationist” to describe this approach in order to highlight that the framework we have in mind involves bringing together quantitative, qualitative, and experimental methods. We simultaneously wish to emphasize, however, our belief that it is only by investigating the systematic distribution of socially meaningful linguistic forms that we can come to understand the relationship between social structure and individual subjectivity and the ways in which language mediates between the two. In other words, we maintain that a distributional focus on linguistic form provides us with the most robust and empirically reliable means for uncovering the linguistic processes through which sexuality is socially materialized. This is not to say that (critical) discourse analytic approaches are unimportant. Past research has shown that they are immensely useful in teasing apart the sociocultural intricacies of interaction and in identifying the ideologies that constrain and inform how sexualities are experienced. Yet, we nevertheless wish to reaffirm the importance of “sociolinguistic empiricism” (Woolard 1985) to this endeavor—not just in providing a complementary perspective but also in tying down our interpretations (Rampton 2007) and making them accountable to systematic patterns of language-in-use.

In the remainder of this chapter, we describe the basic contours of our theoretical and methodological approach. We begin with a brief review of the major developments in the field of language and sexuality over the past thirty-five years (for more extensive reviews, see Cameron & Kulick 2003; Queen 2007, 2014). Through this review, we identify two inter-related areas that we believe require further critical attention. The first involves the relationship between structure and agency in constraining sociolinguistic practice, or, put another way, the central role of power in shaping linguistic behavior. This is by no means a new concern in language and sexuality research (Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Cameron 2011), and we offer suggestions for how to re-center this issue in our work via the adoption of a multilevel framework for conceptualizing social practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). The second area that we identify involves the imbrication of sexuality with other dimensions of lived experience, including those shaped by gender, nation, race, and social class. While, once again, this is not an entirely new critique (e.g., Cameron & Kulick 2003), we claim that language and sexuality research needs to adopt a more sophisticated approach to the ways in which

these different dimensions interact. We argue here that *intersectionality theory* (Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011b) provides us with an analytical framework for doing so. We describe how, because of its insistence on the mutual constitution of socially relevant categories, intersectionality prevents us from considering sexuality in isolation. Instead, it pushes us to critically examine how both the positioning of sexualities in particular social and historical contexts (i.e., structure) and the ways in which individuals negotiate these positionings (i.e., agency) are the product of multiple and intersecting systems of social classification (Choo & Ferree 2010). Our use of intersectionality theory thus complements our arguments with respect to the structure/agency divide, and enables us to illustrate a method for examining the “total linguistic fact” (Silverstein 1985) of sexuality. Finally, we close the chapter with a brief outline of how the various contributions to the volume serve to illustrate the theoretical arguments we make here.

### Mapping the Field of Inquiry

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact date when the field of language and sexuality began. For our purposes, we identify the publication of Chesebro’s (1981a) volume titled *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication* as the first major publication in which the issue of lesbian and gay language was situated within a broader theoretical framework. Prior to this, scholarly work on language and sexuality was restricted primarily to the compilation of lists of lexical items or phrases that could be said to comprise a gay or lesbian “argot” (e.g., Legman 1941; Stanley 1970), though a handful of studies also examined certain discursive and/or interactional phenomena (see Livia & Hall 1997 for a review). Building on this earlier work, Chesebro (1981b) sets out to initiate “a new research approach to an old topic . . . [by providing] a framework . . . for viewing homosexuality as a communication phenomenon and as a communication system” (xiii–xiv). To that end, Chesebro enumerates six questions that the field of language and sexuality should address, the second of which is relevant to us here: “What constitutes the intersubjective reality of those who label themselves gay or lesbian?” (xiv).<sup>1</sup> In Chesebro’s formulation, this intersubjective reality is itself reflected in shared linguistic practice. Identifying how lesbians and gays use language would thus allow research to understand what it means to *be* lesbian or gay. While Chesebro’s framework allows for variation among lesbians and gays, such that there may be varying levels of the use of so-called Gayspeak, this variation is conceptualized as resulting from differential levels of integration in the lesbian and/or gay community, or, as Hayes (1981) puts it, “subculture.”

The theoretical framework that Chesebro describes relies on two foundational assumptions. The first is that there exists a lesbian/gay community or



subculture, and that it is membership in this community and the shared experiences therein that define lesbian/gay “identity.” The second assumption is then that this shared identity gives rise to a set of distinctive social and linguistic practices. In this respect, Chesebro’s framework is *correlational* in nature (cf. Eckert 2012). It assumes that an underlying social structure is the cause of distinctive linguistic practice, meaning that we as researchers can account for any practices observed by correlating them with the social structure from which they purportedly emerge. This correlational approach predominated in language and sexuality research throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (as it did in much sociolinguistic work of the period more generally). During that time, a series of influential studies appeared that examined both the phonological (Moonwomon 1985; Fai 1988; Avery & Liss 1996; Taylor 1996) and the discursive (Day & Morse 1981; Hayes 1981; Leap 1993, 1996) characteristics that could arguably constitute a “lesbian” or “gay” way of speaking. This work on language production was coupled with a growing body of research on perception, in which scholars employed experimental methods in an attempt to correlate listeners’ abilities to (correctly) identify the sexual orientation of a speaker with the presence of specific features in the speech signal (e.g., Moonwomon 1985; Gaudio 1994).

Beginning in the 1990s, a confluence of developments in both linguistic and social theory challenged the theoretical underpinnings of the correlational model. The most prominent of these was the advent of *queer theory* (Butler 1990, 1993), which destabilized the very notion of identity and its connection to group membership. Inverting the causal relationship between identity and social practice, the queer theoretic approach argued that individuals draw on socially meaningful symbolic resources (including language) in the performative enactment of identity. In other words, identity is not the cause of observed behavior but rather its result. This process is enabled by the fact that practices are already linked to identifiable social categories and positions, making them available to speakers in the active construction of identity. The *constructionist* approach advocated by queer theory was further extended within linguistics by a reconceptualization of the relationship between language and social meaning. With her theory of indexicality, Ochs (1992) popularized the notion that the link between language and a social category is rarely, if ever, a direct one. Rather, Ochs argues that linguistic forms serve to index particular stances, acts, and activities that are then ideologically linked to salient social categories. According to this approach, tag questions, for example, do not directly index the category *woman*. Instead, they are taken to signal a stance of “uncertainty,” which is itself linked to stereotypes of womanhood. Together then, queer theory and Ochsian indexicality undermined the basic premise of Chesebro’s correlational approach, arguing that we cannot view practice as emerging from identity just as we cannot interpret patterns of linguistic variation without situating them in relation

to the normative forces that frame how social practice gets interpreted and assigned meaning.

This constructionist approach to language and sexuality spawned a new type of sociolinguistic research on sexuality (and in many ways drove a shift in sociolinguistics more broadly). Rather than attempting to catalogue a characteristic lesbian or gay way of speaking, research in this paradigm sought to identify the ways in which people use language to construct sexual personae. In other words, these works sought to map out a field of social and linguistic behavior in order to understand how certain linguistic practices come to be identified with certain identities, and to demonstrate the ways in which individuals make use of these salient links in their daily lives (Livia & Hall 1997). Barrett (1995, 1997), for example, describes how African American drag queens in Texas juxtapose features that are stereotypically linked to both white women in the US South and African American men in order to variably construct themselves as gay men, as African Americans, and as drag queens. In a similar vein, Hall (1995) details how “fantasy makers” (telephone sex workers) strategically adopt linguistic forms associated with various racial and gender categories in order to present selves that match their customers’ sexual desires. Finally, the constructionist model also gave rise to burgeoning research on perceptions of sexuality. Unlike previous work in this area, which sought to determine how listeners succeeded in identifying speakers’ sexual orientations, newer studies aimed instead to isolate those features that are indexically linked to sexuality regardless of the sexual orientations of the speakers themselves (e.g., Crist 1997; Smyth, Jacobs, & Rogers 2003; Levon 2006).<sup>2</sup>

The move from a correlational to a constructionist model notwithstanding, language and sexuality research continued to come under critical scrutiny. In their book *Language and Sexuality*, Cameron & Kulick (2003) argue that research in the field to that point was beholden to a reified understanding of sexuality that equates it with sexual identity (see also Kulick 2000). In other words, Cameron & Kulick claim that while sexual identity implies a stable (self-)categorization, sexuality describes a field of desires, contradictions, and repressions, and that research on sexuality should not ignore these aspects. Put more succinctly, Cameron & Kulick claim that sexuality is about more than sexual identity because it is a phenomenon that exceeds conscious control (Kulick 2005). In order to model what they mean by this, Cameron & Kulick introduce the concept of *identifications*. Unlike identities, which represent a conscious claiming or rejection of a particular category or position (though cf. Bucholtz & Hall 2005), identifications denote all the different social and cultural affiliations, both recognized and repressed, that an individual maintains. As described by Laplanche & Pontalis (1973), individual identifications are not by themselves determinative; they contribute one piece to the puzzle. Because of this, individuals can maintain conflicting identifications, all of which (including those which are repudiated or repressed) come together to

shape social practice. For Cameron & Kulick, capturing the underlying complexity of sexual subjectivity and how that complexity is materialized linguistically requires looking beyond the confines of “identity” (for further discussion of these arguments, see Eckert 2002; Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Cameron & Kulick 2005; see also Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Bucholtz & Hall 2005 for further discussion and alternative conceptualizations of “identity”).

At about the same time that Cameron & Kulick’s critique appeared, developments elsewhere in sociolinguistics also began to challenge some of the theoretical foundations of the constructionist approach. These developments focused primarily on the assumptions that constructionism makes about the relationship between language and social meaning, arguing that while constructionism had succeeded in inverting the causal relationship between identity and linguistic practice (such that identity was seen as the result of practice rather than its cause), the social meaning of variable forms was very often still reduced to the cultural formations it was used to construct. “Gay language,” for example, though not necessarily viewed as the inherent correlate of gay identity, was nevertheless understood as that set of linguistic features used to construct a gay “self.” In practice, this understanding of the social meaning of linguistic forms is not that different from the correlation view, since both see the “meaning of variation as incidental fallout from social space” (Eckert 2012: 94). To overcome this, Eckert (2008, 2012) proposes a renewed emphasis on Ochs’s (1992) argument (introduced briefly earlier) that language indexes identities indirectly and through the mediating level of stance. Moreover, Eckert adds to this framework the claim that the indexical links between language and stance are themselves indeterminate and only fully emerge in the context of styles that are relevant to the current interaction. This means that a feature like /t/ release, for example, can potentially be linked to a number of different stance-level meanings (e.g., “emphatic,” “articulate,” and “exasperated”) and that its particular meaning in a given interactional moment (and hence the *persona*, or situationally relevant social type, that the feature serves to index) will depend on other social and linguistic factors in the immediate context.<sup>3</sup> In formulating her framework in this way, Eckert manages to bypass the mechanistic assumption that speakers use language to “do” identity, and instead provides us with a mechanism for modeling how identities can emerge in interaction (see also, e.g., Bucholtz 2009; Kiesling 2009).

Though developed from somewhat different theoretical perspectives, both Cameron & Kulick’s and Eckert’s interventions opened up a space for what we term an *emergentist* approach to language and sexuality. Rather than taking the construction of sexual identity as its analytical point of departure, work in this framework examines how speakers recruit the meaning potentials of variable forms in order to adopt locally meaningful stances. In certain cases, speakers do this kind of stance-taking as a means of constructing contextually relevant personae. Podesva (2007, 2008), for example, discusses how a

man he calls Heath draws on the ability of falsetto voice to index “expressiveness” to construct distinct personae in different settings. When at a barbecue with his friends, Heath uses falsetto to help adopt an expressive stance that, in conjunction with other relevant features, results in the creation of a “diva” style. At the medical clinic where he works, in contrast, Heath’s use of falsetto serves instead to index expressivity as part of the creation of a “caring doctor” persona. Crucially, while the same linguistic feature is deployed in both contexts, the ultimate meaning of the feature, in terms of the persona it helps to construct, is context-dependent. Moreover, while he acknowledges that the perception of “gay identity” may emerge from Heath’s use of falsetto, Podesva argues that this is in a sense a potential by-product of Heath’s use of the feature and that the primary motivation behind Heath’s observed practice is the construction of situational-relevant personae.

Jones (2011, 2012) makes a similar point in her examination of language and self-positioning among women in a lesbian hiking group in the north of England. In that work, Jones demonstrates how the women use a variety of interactional strategies to adopt specific evaluative stances with respect to different behaviors and physical characteristics (including dress, hairstyle, sexual activity, and even finger length) as a way of disaligning themselves from normative, heterosexual models of femininity. Jones argues that in doing so, the women are able to construct a “dyke” persona that they then subsequently position as the true and “authentic” articulation of lesbian sexuality. Like Podesva, Jones’s analysis illustrates how individuals use stance-taking to create locally relevant personae. Jones also extends these arguments a step further, and delineates the ways in which the local personae that the women construct (like “dyke” and “girl”) are explicitly cast by the women in relation to broader macro-categories of sexual identity (like “lesbian”).

While both Podesva’s and Jones’s analyses treat stance as a means to construct a persona, other work in this paradigm sees the adoption of interactional stance as an end in itself. Levon (Chapter 11, this volume), for example, examines the use of “creaky voice” by a speaker he calls Igal, an Orthodox Jewish man who has sexual and romantic relationships with other men. Levon argues that Igal deploys creaky voice in conversation as a means of suppressing an expression of affect when discussing same-sex desires. In doing so, Levon claims, Igal is able to adopt a deontic stance (Shoaps 2004) that conforms to the dominant valuative framework of Orthodox Judaism while recognizing that he engages in (same-sex) practices that transgress this framework. Creaky voice therefore acts as the linguistic materialization of the conflict between Igal’s identification with both Orthodox Judaism and same-sex desire but, as Levon argues, is not used to construct a persona that is directly linked to either.

Finally, as in the previous approaches described, work on the emergence of sexuality in linguistic production has also been accompanied by work on its emergence in perception. This research has focused on understanding the

mechanisms underlying the attribution of meaning to variable forms from a range of underspecified possibilities, and, as a result, has paid special attention to how listeners process multiple and potentially contradictory sociolinguistic cues. Campbell-Kibler (2011), for instance, describes how the phonetic fronting of /s/ in US English serves to signal sexuality in men's voices, but only when combined with other phonetic features that themselves signal stereotypically compatible traits. Similarly, Pharoa et al. (2014; see also Maegaard & Pharoa, Chapter 5, this volume) demonstrate how perceptions of male sexuality in Danish are tightly linked to the simultaneous perception of both ethnicity and social class, such that variables that have a significant effect on listener judgments in one context have no such effect in another. Levon (2014) identifies a parallel pattern for perceptions of sexuality and social class in the United Kingdom, which leads him to argue that stereotypes play a central role in the emergence of sociolinguistic meaning.

### The Bigger Picture

Eckert & Podesva (2011) state that the ultimate goal of research on language and sexuality is to understand “the nature of the relationship between linguistic features and the dimensions of the social world they evoke” (9). We argue that their use of the term *dimensions* here is crucial, since the world in which sociolinguistic practice takes place is itself multifaceted and complex. Analyzing that complexity requires the adoption of multiple approaches, including aspects of all three of the paradigms for language and sexuality research that we described previously (i.e., correlational, constructionist, and emergentist). In other words, though we structure it chronologically for expositional reasons, our review of the field is not intended to function as a teleological narrative or to be taken as advocating the wholesale replacement of one approach by another. Rather, we believe that what is needed is a holistic theoretical framework within which components of each of these approaches have their place. We argue that it is by adopting such a holistic approach that we can address the issues of structure, agency, and power introduced earlier. We suggest, moreover, that Bourdieu's theory of social practice (e.g., Bourdieu 1979, 1991) provides the right kind of holistic framework for doing this.

The basic principles of Bourdieu's work, and particularly his conceptualization of symbolic capital and the linguistic marketplace, are fairly well known in sociolinguistics and have been successfully applied in much previous research (e.g., Eckert 2000; see also Ahearn 2001; Hanks 2005 for reviews). For this reason, we only provide a brief overview of the main building blocks of Bourdieu's theory, before describing how it applies to the study of language and sexuality. Bourdieu's central argument is that social practice emerges from the relationship between three factors: what he terms the *field*, *capital*, and

*habitus*. In its most general sense, the field refers to the social space in which interactions take place. This space is itself characterized by a “logic,” or a set of historically contingent rules that govern the configuration of social roles and positionings within the field. The rules also function to assign value to the various “assets” that circulate within the field. These value-laden assets are what Bourdieu terms *capital*. Bourdieu identifies two main forms of capital: economic capital, which essentially refers to money and other monetized assets, and symbolic capital, which refers to a range of activities, relationships (e.g., friendship), and other products that while not normally thought of as “money” are nevertheless associated with value in a given field. The concept of capital is crucial for Bourdieu since he argues it is via the consumption of capital (e.g., eating a particular food or speaking in a particular way) that individuals navigate the field and adopt social roles and positions. It is not the case, however, that individuals consume capital freely or haphazardly. Rather, Bourdieu argues that consumption (i.e., *practice*) is partially structured by *habitus*, or a set of durable dispositions that shape the choices we make. These dispositions represent our internalization of the rules of the field based on our position within the field and our experiences in the other fields in which we have also interacted. In other words, Bourdieu argues that our position in the social world together with the totality of our previous experiences lead us to have certain dispositions to act in a particular way, and this is what he terms the *habitus*.

The concept of *habitus*, or, more precisely, the theorized relationship between *habitus* and the field, is what distinguishes Bourdieu’s framework from other theories of social action (Hanks 2005). In arguing that practice results from the relationship between field, capital, and *habitus*, Bourdieu aims to transcend the dichotomy between social structure and individual agency that he believes characterizes prior research (Maton 2012). His idea is that social practice is not simply a result of either an agentive search for capital or an individual’s social position or past experiences. Instead, it results from the interaction of all three in what Bourdieu (1977) describes as the “dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality” (72). To make this argument more concrete, Bourdieu (1990) offers the metaphor of a game. In any game (i.e., *field*), there are rules that determine the positions of the different players, the “regular” way of playing, and the assignment of value (i.e., *capital*) to certain actions and not to others. The choices that players make while in the game (i.e., their *practices*) are then based on a number of factors. First is the player’s position in the game. Just as a football player cannot necessarily see the entire football field and must instead make choices based on her own perspective and the options available to her from that position, Bourdieu argues that an individual’s possibilities for action are in part structurally determined by the individual’s social position. Next are the rules of the game, which are reflected in the regularities of play. For Bourdieu, these



regularities are internalized and form part of a player's disposition to act in a particular way (i.e., *habitus*). Third are the player's previous experiences playing this particular game as well as other games in other fields. These experiences also form part of a player's dispositions. Finally, there is a player's own subjective agency—her desires, personality, and beliefs. Bourdieu argues that only by taking into consideration the relationship between all four of these components can we adequately model meaningful social practice.<sup>4</sup>

In order to describe how to apply his theory to research on language and sexuality, it is useful to consider Bourdieu's own suggestion for a three-level analytical method (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; see also Grenfell 2014):

- (1) Analyze the position of the field in relation to other fields, particularly the field of power;
- (2) Examine the structural topography of the field, including the positioning of actors, the regularities of practice, and the distribution of capital;
- (3) Analyze the *habitus* of individuals within the field, with a focus on the relationships individuals establish with one another and on the correspondence between individual *habitus* and the structures of the field.

The first level of Bourdieu's suggested method involves understanding how a particular field of interaction (e.g., the "family") is positioned in relation to the dominant structuring principles of society, the so-called field of power. Research on the family at this level, for example, might examine how notions of kinship and familial obligation are structured by constructs such as patriarchy. At the second level, research identifies the value associated with specific practices in a given field, and examines the regular distribution of those practices in order to understand how the different roles in the field are positioned. Continuing with the example of the family, research at this level would identify particular acts and activities associated with various family roles (e.g., "mothering") and consider how those activity-role relationships serve to position actors in relation to one another. Finally, the third level of analysis focuses on the individual actor, exploring both the complex motivations that underlie observed practice and the positionings of self that result from behaving in this way.

We believe that Bourdieu's three-level method provides us with a straightforward way to unify the different strands of language and sexuality research into a single overarching program. At the first level, work on language and sexuality considers how the local organization of gender and sexuality is linked to larger societal forces, including patriarchy (e.g., Kulick 1998; Rudwick & Msibi, Chapter 3, this volume), hetero- and homonormativity (Valentine 2003; Kiesling 2004; Hall 2009), and nationalism (Besnier 2002; Boellstorff 2004; Levon 2010). It is then at the second level that language and sexuality research

uncovers how these larger social forces are inscribed in local fields of practice. Perception research, for example, identifies the capital associated with distinct linguistic features (e.g., which forms sound “masculine” and which do not), while correlational analyses explore the regular distribution of practices across the social space. These two endeavors are related since the value of a linguistic form is in part based on the social positioning of those who normally use it (or at least are imagined to use it; Johnstone & Kiesling 2008). They are also both important since it is only in relation to the regular distribution of capital in the field that we can ultimately understand meaningful social practice. Finally, language and sexuality research at the third level is where the focus is most squarely on individual action. By framing this focus in terms of habitus, however, research at this level does not lose sight of the structuring properties of the field and of the limits imposed by both experience and perspective. Stance-taking and/or persona construction are thus necessarily understood as “constrained by the resources available to do [them], which in turn are shaped by material conditions—those of the past as well as the present” (Cameron 2011: 103). Overall then, Bourdieu’s three-level method provides the framework for an inclusive approach to the study of language and sexuality, one that recognizes the crucial and interrelated importance of structure, agency, and power.

### **This Book: Intersectional Sociolinguistics**

Our ultimate objective in this book is to illustrate the utility of examining how structure, agency, and power together shape sexuality-linked linguistic practice. Bourdieu’s multilevel model provides an invaluable tool for achieving this. Yet, as we note previously, we also argue that a full examination of the topic requires us to recognize that sexuality—whether in terms of individual subjectivity or social structure—never exists in isolation. It is instead always cross-cut, contested, and transfigured by other vectors of social organization, including gender, race, nation, and socioeconomic status. For this reason, we have collected contributions for the volume that place the *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1989; Yuval-Davis 2011b) of sexuality at the center of their analyses.

The term *intersectionality* has become something of a “buzzword” in the humanities and social sciences over the past twenty years (Davis 2008). Originating within black feminist theorizing as a way to conceptualize race, class, and gender as a “trilogy of oppression and discrimination” (Knapp 2005: 255), intersectionality has since been put to use in a wide variety of disciplinary and methodological traditions. In the process, the concept has come to mean a number of different things to different scholars (see, e.g., McCall 2005; Choo & Ferree 2010). In this book, we understand intersectionality to refer to the ways in which dynamic systems of social organization mutually constitute



one another. In other words, we do not subscribe to the view of intersections as simple crossings or “street corners” (Crenshaw 1991) where static categories like “gay” and “working class” meet on a Cartesian plane. Instead, we adopt a process-centered approach (Weldon 2008) that views the production of sexuality at both the individual and the structural levels as inextricably linked to the production of other relevant social systems. A useful heuristic for engaging in this type of intersectional investigation is what Matsuda (1991) describes as “asking the other question”—that is, constantly and continually exploring how a practice related to sexuality may also be related to gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and so on, and critically interrogating why it is that these categories are linked in this way. We argue that it is only by exploring the dynamic relations between systems that we can adequately model the lived experience of sexuality, and hence the ways in which language participates in its materialization (Cameron & Kulick 2003). For us, the inclusion of an intersectional perspective does not supplant the importance of Bourdieu’s multilevel approach. Rather, we see the two frameworks as complementary and mutually reinforcing (Yuval-Davis 2011a). Methodologically, intersectionality prompts us to “ask the other question” at each level of Bourdieu’s model. In other words, whether we are looking at the position of the field in relation to the field of power (level 1), the structural topography of the field and the distribution of capital within it (level 2), or the relationship between habitus and individual practice (level 3), an intersectional perspective encourages us to expand our analytical gaze beyond the specific confines of sexuality and to explore the *relationships* between categories at all levels of social organization.

The following ten chapters thus all focus on sexuality as one component of a broader sociolinguistic space. In an effort to highlight the links between sexuality and the other dimensions of lived experience, we have chosen to focus primarily on studies of language and sexuality outside English-speaking contexts (with the sole exception of Podesva & von Hofwegen, Chapter 9, this volume). We do so not because we feel that intersectionality as a concept is not relevant to research in the English-speaking world. This is obviously not the case. Yet, we believe that concentrating on issues of language and sexuality in languages other than English and in cultures other than the United Kingdom and North America serves to foreground the socially and historically contingent nature of sexuality, and hence underscores the importance of an intersectional perspective. We nevertheless recognize that by juxtaposing a call for an intersectional perspective with studies mostly from outside North America and Northern Europe, we risk re-inscribing a North Atlantic norm (Boellstorff & Leap 2004) and implicitly positioning other cultures as somehow intersectionally “deviant.” This is emphatically not our intention, and we strongly encourage research on sexuality as an intersectional phenomenon in a wide variety of cultural and linguistic contexts, including those that have received the most attention in the literature to date, like the United States.

While each of the chapters in the volume offers a self-contained analysis of sexuality as an intersectional phenomenon in a given cultural and linguistic context, the organization of the book overall is designed to emulate Bourdieu's multilevel analytical method. The contributions to the volume are thus organized according to level. The first three chapters (2, 3, and 4) are situated at the first level, and all examine how sexuality is positioned in relation to the local fields of power in Hong Kong (Wong), Zulu-speaking South Africa (Rudwick & Msibi), and Japan (Maree), respectively. The next four chapters (5, 6, 7, and 8) all involve the second level of analysis. As such, they each consider the topography of the social fields in question by examining the perception of sexuality-linked features in Denmark (Maegaard & Pharaon), Brazil (Mendes), Puerto Rico (Mack), and Hungary (Rácz & Papp). Finally, the remaining three chapters (9, 10, and 11) are situated at the third level of analysis, and all explore how individuals in rural California (Podesva & von Hofwegen), Thailand (Saisuwan), and Israel (Levon) use language to negotiate conflicting pressures and identifications as they relate to gender, sexuality, and same-sex desire. In structuring the volume in this way, we aim to illustrate how these three different levels of analysis inform one another, as well as how an intersectional perspective can be productively applied at each level. Ultimately, it is our hope that the structure and organization of this book as a whole serve as a demonstration of the theoretical proposals we make in this introductory chapter—proposals that we believe will allow the field to develop a more complete understanding of the relationship between sexuality and language.

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## Notes

1. The majority of Chesebro's questions are not "linguistic" questions, as such, given the volume's grounding in communication and rhetoric studies (Livia & Hall 1997; Queen 2014). Chesebro's question 2 is the only one to speak to issues directly relevant to distributional sociolinguistics.

2. Though beyond the scope of this brief review, it is important to note that the constructionist model has also long had a foothold in linguistic anthropological work on sexuality. See, e.g., Hall & O'Donovan (1996); Hall (1997, 2005); Kulick (1998); Gaudio (1997, 2009); Besnier (2002, 2004); Boellstorff (2004, 2005); Leap & Boellstorff (2004).

3. Eckert uses the concept of *personae* as a more locally relevant alternative to "identity," which she argues tends to refer to a "reified locus of iterability" (Eckert 2002: 102). In