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Abstract

Language, gender, and sexuality emerged as a field of study in the 1970s and, since then, has grown exponentially to become a popular and politically relevant area of study and research within applied linguistics. In its broadest terms, the field highlights the role of language in understanding issues, identities, relationships, and debates relating to genders and sexualities. This chapter introduces readers to key topics, themes, perspectives, and methods in the field. It starts with the observation that, within the field of language, gender, and sexuality, there has been a historical shift away from notions of 'gender difference' to more fluid ideas about gender and sexualities as multiple, dynamic, performative, and contingent. Recently, the field has become increasingly concerned with challenging binary and static constructions of gender, sex, and sexuality and the chapter considers how this shift has resulted in a greater focus on linguistic representations of gender and sexuality rather than a focus on the linguistic behaviour of groups and individuals. Furthermore, I consider how these theoretical shifts have initiated a re-evaluation of the categories themselves with questions asked about how language functions to actively produce socially contingent 'categories' of sex, gender, and sexuality. After outlining key theoretical developments, the chapter goes on to introduce some of the most commonly used methods and analytical frameworks in contemporary language, gender, and sexuality research. Finally, I consider some areas of application, including education, law, media, and employment.

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Gender and sexuality

Helen Sauntson

Introduction

Language, gender, and sexuality emerged as a field of study within applied linguistics in the 1970s and, since then, has grown to become a popular and politically relevant area of study and research. In its broadest terms, the field highlights the role of language in understanding issues, identities, relationships, and debates relating to genders and sexualities. Whilst early work in the field tended to focus on identifying and describing differential linguistic behaviour by women and men, contemporary research now focuses more on the ideologies which underlie notions of gender and sexual difference, where they come from, and why they still persist. They also question the very existence of any of the ‘differences’ identified in earlier research or whether the research itself was designed in such a way that it was instrumental in creating ideologies of language and gender difference.

Whilst scholars such as [Sunderland \(2014\)](#) and [Freed \(2014\)](#) acknowledge that there are, undoubtedly, still many structural inequalities around gender and sexuality in most societies, they importantly link inequality and difference to linguistic *representation* rather than linguistic *behaviour*. For this reason, they argue that it is still valuable and important to research difference but only in terms of *represented* difference, and it is this principle which has become a characteristic of the field at the time of writing (and explained further in the sections which follow). For example, it is now considered less useful to ask about how men and women talk

(characterized by early work in the field), but more useful to investigate how men and women (and other genders) get represented across texts and contexts (characteristic of contemporary research). The main questions in current language, gender, and sexuality research, then, tend to focus on examining why and how ideologies about gender and sexuality get embedded in language in different text types and contexts.

Historical perspectives

In language-focused research on gender, it is well-documented that early work in the field was historically characterized by the theoretical approaches of ‘deficit’, ‘dominance’, and ‘difference’ more or less consecutively. As stated in the introduction, these early theoretical approaches to language and gender (sexuality did not appear until later) tended to focus on identifying ‘gender differences’ in language – for example, how women and men talk differently. Regardless of some differing interpretations of language data, most early gender and language research (up to the 1970s and 1980s) tended to view language as merely reflecting ‘gender differences’, which were presumed to already exist. A common criticism is that this work therefore failed to ask what gender actually is, it often inadvertently tended to end up reinforcing gender stereotypes rather than challenging them.

More recent approaches to gender and language differ in that they question this assumption and actually take an interrogation of that assumption as their central point of inquiry. Rather than language simply reflecting gender differences, current research views gender (and now sexuality as well) as being *discursively constructed through language*. This means that gender and sexuality are not necessarily seen as existing outside or prior to language. Rather, language itself is one means through which gender and sexuality are brought into existence. These approaches to gender and language (which emerged mainly from the 1990s onwards) are often referred to as *discourse* or *discourse-based* approaches (see, for example, Baker 2008; Ehrlich et al. 2014; Sunderland 2004). These types of approach are important because they draw

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attention to the fact that gender is a construct or a 'fiction' which is usually upheld through the widespread circulation of populist assumptions about gender which are often not true. Gender is also frequently constructed *binary*, with the differences between women and men, feminine and masculine, and so on being emphasized and exaggerated, whilst the many similarities and non-binary aspects of gender are often ignored and downplayed. Thus, when researchers *do* ask questions about difference in relation to language, gender, and sexuality, Sunderland (2014) argues that questions need to focus on the ways in which women and men, and boys and girls, are represented through language. In other words, it is important to examine *representations* of gender difference in order to expose them with a view to problematizing and challenging them.

The development of the field has also seen an increasing influence from queer theory in recent years, with the concurrent development of the approach of *queer linguistics* (see, for example, Leap and Motschenbacher 2012; Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013) being a key characteristic of the field from the 1990s onwards. Within queer theory, particular use has been made of Butler's (1990) work on performativity and how this social theory of gender and sexuality was influenced by, and now continues to inform, linguistic studies. According to Butler, gender (and sexuality) is something that we *do*, not what we *are* (in other words, gender is conceptualized as a verb or process rather than a noun or a state) and gender is *performed* through language and other semiotic modes. Butler describes gender as 'an enactment that performatively constitutes the appearance of its own interior fixity' (1990: 70). What this means is that, through performing gender, one simultaneously constructs one's subjectivity and gendered identity and conceals the means by which that identity has been constructed so that it appears as though it has not been constructed at all but simply occurs 'naturally'. In Butler's notion of 'performativity', identities do not pre-exist but rather are brought into being by a series of 'citational' acts – including linguistic acts – which are understood to produce those identities in fluid and variable ways.

Whilst a common misreading of Butler's work assumes that gender and sexuality can be performed at will, this is actually an oversimplification and what Butler in fact argues (especially

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in her later work) is that gender and sexuality are ‘an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints’ (2004: 15) and that both gender and sexuality are mobilized and incited by social constraints and distinguished by them. Butler introduces the idea of ‘hierarchies of constraint’ which come from essentialized ideologies of gender and sexuality. Idealized, or hegemonic, masculinities and femininities stereotypically associated with heterosexuality are ranked higher than more marginalized genders often associated with non-heterosexual identities.

This is one of the reasons that the field of language, gender, and sexuality has experienced a shift away from an almost exclusive focus on gender to a more integrated consideration of the interrelationship between language, gender, and sexuality. Cameron (2005) notes that the study of language and gender started to give greater prominence to sexuality throughout the 2000s which increasingly incorporated considerations of ‘queer’ gender identities and explorations of the relationship between gender and heteronormativity. In linguistics, work by Cameron (1997), Coates (2007), Leap (1996), Morrish and Sauntson (2007), Motschenbacher (2011), and others has shown that the semiotic resources associated with gender categories are deployed as a means of constructing sexual identities in and through discourse. Gender and sexual identity cannot be separated as the construction of both identities tends to rely on the same discursive resources.

In sum, the field has been largely characterized by a historical shift away from focusing on language and gender difference, to questioning the very concept of difference. Queer theory has helped to reconceptualize both gender and sexuality in ways which have significantly moved the field forward in recent years. As part of this, the role that language plays in these gender and sexuality reconceptualization processes has become a critical issue in contemporary research.

A number of existing textbooks and handbooks provide further information about the historical development of the field of language, gender, and sexuality. See, for example, Angouri and Baxter (2021), Baker (2008), Ehrlich et al. (2014), Harrington et al. (2008), Jule (2017), and Talbot (2010).

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Critical issues and topics

An overarching critical issue in language, gender, and sexuality research is its concern with exposing and addressing gender- and sexuality-based inequalities in their various linguistic manifestations. Queer linguistics has become a crucial approach for interrogating and understanding how gender- and sexuality-based inequalities are produced, reinforced, and sometimes challenged through language. The application of queer linguistics to analysis of a range of linguistic data and contexts encompasses many of the critical issues and topics currently being investigated in the field. Underpinning queer linguistics, queer theory is helpful for language, gender, and sexuality research because it takes ‘normality’ itself as its main object of investigation. Rather than presenting gender as an a priori category – as something which is already there waiting to be ‘discovered’ – queer theory interrogates the underlying preconditions of gender identity and how these may be enacted and formulated in discourse. One of its main aims is to challenge all forms of gender- and sexuality-based essentialism (the assumption that identities are innate and static and can be reduced to simple binaries) and to focus, instead, on how gender and sexuality identities and normative ideologies are *constructed* – partly through language. In this way, it is consistent with the discourse-based approaches to language, gender, and sexuality that emerged out of critiques of the older approaches and their problematic preoccupation with gender difference.

Like queer theory, queer linguistics takes ‘heteronormativity’ as its main object of critical investigation. Heteronormativity is defined by [Cameron \(2005: 489\)](#) as ‘the system which prescribes, enjoins, rewards, and naturalises a particular kind of heterosexuality – monogamous, reproductive, and based on conventionally complementary gender roles – as the norm on which social arrangements should be based’. Queer theory interrogates the underlying preconditions of heteronormativity and presents a unified view of gender and sexuality in that it recognizes that cultural ideologies of gender normativity are bound up with assumptions of heterosexuality.

[Butler \(1990\)](#) develops this notion in her claims that heterosexuality is naturalized by the

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performative repetition of normative gender identities. Thus, the principle of queer theory that claims an integral and definitional relationship between gender and sexuality is of central importance to queer linguistics and its applications.

Queer linguistics draws on the principles of queer theory outlined [above](#) and applies them to the study of language. [Motschenbacher and Stegu \(2013: 522\)](#) helpfully define queer linguistics in concise terms as ‘critical heteronormativity research from a linguistic point of view’. Most definitions and explanations of queer linguistics within the broader field of language, gender, and sexuality are based around the concept of heteronormativity and use it as a theoretical and analytical starting point.

Queer linguistics provides a helpful theoretical framework for examining a range of critical issues and topics in the field, focusing on how normative and non-normative (queer) constructions of sexual identity are enacted through and inscribed in language practices and how these language practices may effect particular discourses of sexuality. And queer linguistics questions how language functions to construct particular binaries relating to gender and sexuality (man and woman, gay and straight, etc.). Previous work by [McElhinny \(2014\)](#) and [Zimman et al. \(2014\)](#) importantly note that, in the past, these binaries have actually been useful in language, gender, and sexuality research in that they have been used as a strategic and political tool for rendering women (and sexual minorities) more visible rather than treating men (and heterosexuals) as representative of all language users. This can still be useful in contemporary language, gender, and sexuality research as long as the binary categories are not treated as a priori or pre-existing language, are not seen as static, and are examined critically.

Within language, gender, and sexuality, queer linguistics is also applied to the critical investigation of *heterosexual* identities and desires, as well as those which are sexually marginalized. [Cameron and Kulick \(2003\)](#) note that research on language and sexual minorities tends to focus on analyzing linguistic manifestations of homophobia and other kinds of sexuality discrimination, whilst queer linguistics more broadly encompasses an analysis of discursive formations of all sexual identities, including heterosexualities. Part of this analysis involves

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exploring the linguistic means by which heterosexuality comes to be seen as the assumed default sexuality, whilst other sexualities become marked as non-normative. Furthermore, it is certain kinds of heterosexualities which are privileged (e.g. monogamous, dyadic, focused on marriage and reproduction), and this is also a concern of queer linguistics (also discussed by [Leap and Motschenbacher 2012](#)). What we can take from queer linguistics is that there also needs to be more critical scrutiny of how privileged forms of heterosexuality are discursively formed in applied contexts with a view to ultimately challenging and changing such practices. With this in mind, intersectionality ([Crenshaw 1989](#)) is a concept which is gaining traction in the field in order to acknowledge and understand how sexuality can involve more than the hetero-homo continuum. For example, identities and relationships may be discursively constructed as normal/not normal in relation to other social dimensions of identity such as ethnicity, age, and social class. Intersectionality in language, gender, and sexuality research is discussed further in the 'Future directions' section.

More recently, scholars have been embedding queer linguistics into the wider approach of critical applied linguistics in order to analyze and problematize discursive constructions of heteronormativity in specific contexts. Critical applied linguistics has been defined as 'the practice of applied linguistics grounded in a concern for addressing and resolving problems of inequality' ([Hall et al. 2017](#): 18). According to Hall et al. and [Pennycook \(2021\)](#), critical applied linguistics is an approach to language study which addresses a specific problem, arguing that the identification of a 'real-world' problem should be informed by the people who experience it. But their definition does not address key theoretical issues which have emerged from queer linguistics and are potentially useful to the field of applied linguistics more broadly. This has led to the integration of critical applied linguistics into queer linguistics by some scholars (e.g. [Sauntson 2018a](#); [Knisley in press](#)). Various referring to queer applied linguistics as QAL or ALx, this new approach is loosely defined as critical applied linguistics which is informed by queer theory/queer linguistics and which is applied to addressing social concerns with inequalities around gender and sexuality.

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The influences of queer theory and the development of queer linguistics, and subsequently queer applied linguistics, described above have meant that the field has become increasingly concerned with conducting empirical research which aims to challenge binary and static constructions of gender, sex, and sexuality. As stated in the introduction, this shift has resulted in a greater focus on linguistic representations of gender and sexuality rather than a focus on the linguistic behaviour of groups and individuals. Furthermore, these theoretical shifts have initiated a re-evaluation of the categories themselves with questions asked about how language functions to actively produce socially contingent categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. The very idea of binary constructs in relation to both gender and sex has been criticized by a number of queer linguistics scholars in recent years (see, for example, the contributions in [Zimman et al. 2014](#)). But an important point is also made by [Barrett \(2014\)](#) who notes that, despite the challenging of binaries in queer theory, they do often have material consequences (i.e. their 'reality' is felt and experienced in physical and observable ways). Phenomena such as gender pay gaps and the numbers of hate crimes committed against gender and sexual minorities, for example, are well-documented examples of structural inequalities between women and men and people of differing genders and sexualities. This means that language analysis can examine gender binaries and 'difference' as long as it is in a way which explores how the physical and material effects of gender ideologies are experienced and constructed through language. Furthermore, [Davis et al. \(2014\)](#) suggest that gender and sexuality binaries should not necessarily be rejected or understood as oppressive. Rather, they urge researchers to be sensitive to how binaries work in particular sociocultural contexts and to pay attention to contextual detail. Drawing on intersectionality theory, they also encourage researchers to consider how binaries relating to gender and sexuality always *intersect* with other social categories and systems.

Current contributions and research

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Current contributions and areas of research within the field are diverse and ever-expanding. Thus, what is covered in this section is necessarily selective and focuses on areas of research which are proliferating and receiving much attention at the time of writing. The best way for readers to keep up-to-date with current contributions and research is to consult the two main academic journals in the field (*Gender and Language* and the *Journal of Language and Sexuality*), as well as the book series referenced in the 'Future directions' section of this chapter. There are also a number of published and regularly updated handbooks which provide overviews of current research in the field.

One key area of research which has remained present in the field since its inception focuses on an exploration of how gender and sexuality identities can be produced through conversational interaction in informal situations and in institutional contexts. In this area of research, attention is paid to how recent work on gender and interaction has incorporated a consideration of sexuality alongside gender (in line with the principles of queer theory and queer linguistics) and has focused on how participants themselves produce and often problematize gender and sexuality categories. Some empirical studies on private contexts draw on interactionist sociolinguistic approaches to analyzing interactional data, whilst others utilize the tools of conversation analysis more explicitly to analyze how gender is produced in conversational interaction. Work examining the linguistic construction of gender and sexuality identities in more institutionalized settings has focused on contexts, such as education, workplaces, medical and healthcare settings, and legal settings.

A further key area of research within the field focuses on linguistic representations of gender and sexuality in the media (see also Tagg, this volume). Media texts are considered to be central sites where discursive constructions of and negotiations over gender and sexuality take place. Therefore, research in this area investigates the multiple ways that language can be used in various media texts (including those which are multimodal) to construct certain kinds of men and/or women. Researchers have conducted empirical studies which have focused on a range of media texts using different analytic methods in order to uncover and problematize gender and

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sexuality ideologies in media texts. The types of media texts examined include newspaper articles, print and online personal advertisements, lifestyle magazines, image banks, websites, posters, and merchandise. This, of course, is by no means an exhaustive list of the types of media texts that can be examined in language, gender, and sexuality research.

In more recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of language in relation to discursive constructions of gender and sexuality in forensic contexts (see Chapter 19, this volume). The field of forensic linguistics more broadly is concerned with applications of linguistic analysis to the law. This includes diverse topics, contexts, and data types, such as courtroom language and interaction; legal documents; police interviews with witnesses, victims, and those who have been arrested; and forensic analyses of voice. Within this specific area of language, gender, and sexuality research, work has been conducted examining some potentially challenging and sensitive topics, such as gendered and sexual violence, harassment, and consent and coercion. An increase in media attention to linguistic issues such as consent is also highlighting the growing importance of this field of research not just within the academic study of language, gender, and sexuality but in the wider social world. Key topics within this area include semantic issues around understandings of consent. This includes some analysis of people's understandings of consent, how consent is represented in texts, and how ideas about consent (and the credibility of victims, witnesses, and defendants) can be manipulated through the use of language in trial interaction. Another focus involves analyzing how ideologies of gender and sexuality are produced in trial and tribunal interaction from rape and sexual assault cases.

As stated earlier, the field of language, gender, and sexuality has become increasingly concerned with challenging binary and static constructions of gender, sex, and sexuality, and work has drawn attention to how ideological concepts such as 'masculinity' and 'femininity' can be 'detached from the bodies to which they are ideologically linked, with language playing a crucial role in this process' (Davis et al. 2014: 3). This is perhaps highlighted the most clearly when examining the practices (including language practices) of those who live as gender-variant

or transgender, and this is another key area of research that has been growing within the wider field of language, gender, and sexuality in recent years. Existing work on language, transgender, and gender variance falls into three broad areas: socio-phonetic studies of voice; discourse analysis studies of how language practices work to construct identities for transgender and gender-variant speakers; and representations of transgender identities in the public-facing texts, such as news media.

A further key area of research contributions to the field focuses on structural inequalities in language and language use and the way that these inequalities function to produce discriminatory effects in terms of gender and sexuality. Whilst early work in the field focused almost exclusively on the types of sexist language targeted at women, more contemporary work explores other forms of gender- and sexuality-based discriminatory language, such as homophobic and transphobic language. In all of the research on discriminatory language, attention has been paid to both forms of direct or overt discriminatory language but has also examined indirect or subtle forms of discriminatory language (including how silence can function to produce discriminatory discourses relating to certain kinds of gender and sexuality identities). Analysis of the language of discrimination potentially has useful synergies with other areas of applied linguistics which address issues relating to minoritized or oppressed social groups, such as race and ethnicity and those with minoritized language backgrounds (see, for example, Delfino and Alim, this volume, and Hornberger and De Korne, this volume).

Main research methods

The field lends itself to highly varied ways in which aspects of language, gender, and sexuality can be investigated. Motschenbacher (2011) and Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013) argue that queer linguistics lends itself well to an eclectic combination of linguistic analytical methods (or methodological pluralism) in order to provide mutually qualifying positions. Leap (2020: 48–49) has also referred to a ‘scavenger methodology’ as being particularly appropriate for queer

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inquiry across a range of disciplines, including applied linguistics. In work which applies queer linguistics, various established methods are therefore drawn on in order to analyze different types of language data. Some of the most commonly used methods and analytical frameworks in contemporary language, gender, and sexuality research include (but are not restricted to) conversation analysis, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis, multimodal critical discourse analysis, linguistic landscapes, variationist and interactional sociolinguistics, sociophonetics, linguistic anthropology, and linguistic ethnography. All of these (and other) frameworks can sit within broader approaches such as queer linguistics. Whilst queer theory and queer linguistics can orient the researcher theoretically (which then helps to identify the priorities and purposes of the research), the analytical frameworks can then offer ways of looking at language in specific datasets in order to realize those theoretical priorities.

Some of the frameworks used in language, gender, and sexuality are covered elsewhere in this *Handbook* (see, for example, the chapters on discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, linguistic landscape, and social semiotics and multimodality). Other volumes include more extensive information about a range of methods used in the field (e.g.

[Angouri and Baxter 2021](#); [Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013](#); [Ehrlich et al. 2014](#); [Harrington et al. 2008](#)).

Recommendations for practice

The field of language, gender, and sexuality has real-life implications for and applications in a wide range of contexts, including education, workplaces and employment domains, law, media, politics, and activism. Education (including language education) is of particular interest to the wider discipline of applied linguistics. Key interventions in language education have focused on challenging heteronormativity in textbooks and other learning materials (e.g. [Pakula 2021](#); [Pakula et al. 2015](#)), interventions focused on classroom practices (e.g. [Motschenbacher 2011](#);

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Sauntson 2018a; Nelson 2006), ‘queering’ curriculum content (e.g. Nelson 2006; Paiz 2020; Pakula 2021; Sauntson 2018a, 2018b, 2020), and incorporating gender and sexuality diversity awareness into teacher training (e.g. Motschenbacher 2011). Researchers such as Paiz (2020) and Nelson (2006) have highlighted a need to routinely conceptualize English language classrooms as ‘multisexual’ and present data to show that doing so can enhance the classroom and learning experience for all learners.

In education beyond ESOL and language learning, research has recommended ways in which language can be used in classrooms and curriculum documents to create greater visibility and positive discourse around gender and sexuality diversity (e.g. Sauntson 2018a). Furthermore, recommendations have been made for paying closer attention to language in the context of gender- and sexuality-based bullying in schools, with researchers such as Motschenbacher (2011) and Sauntson (2018a) calling for all educational inclusion and anti-bullying policies to include a clear focus on language. This includes not only language which tackles overt forms of homophobia but also language which fill the ‘absences’ and ‘silences’ around difference and gender and sexuality diversity which currently pervade schools in many areas of the world (e.g. Sauntson and Borba in press).

In the domain of employment and workplaces, recommendations have been made for professional communication, particular in relation to issues of gender and leadership (e.g. Angouri et al. 2021; Baxter 2010, 2017; Mullany 2007). In legal contexts, work by scholars such as Ehrlich et al. (2016) has been influential in drawing attention to the coercive discourse often used in North American rape and sexual assault trials and how this needs to be challenged as part of the pursuit of justice in sexual offence cases. And work focusing on language, gender, and sexuality in media texts continues to increase awareness of the ways language can be used to reinforce damaging and restrictive ideologies, again with a view to challenging those ideologies.

Leading language, gender, and sexuality scholars such as Freed (2014) and Cameron (2014, 2021) have, for some time, been questioning why language, gender, and sexuality scholarship is relatively infrequently taken up by practitioners outside academia when compared

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with other areas of applied linguistics research. Both observe that, despite scholarship continually challenging static and binary notions of gender and sexuality, popular accounts of ‘male and female language’ often remain pervasive and unchanged in the public domain. Freed notes that a considerable amount of print media continues to characterize women’s and men’s language as different with no reference at all to academic scholarship that has been conducted in language, gender, and sexuality for the past three decades. This, in itself, is a problematic area that is currently receiving attention by scholars in the field. Cameron observes that popular public ideologies about gender and language continue to differ greatly from social and linguistic realities as analyzed by scholars. One probable reason relates to public resistance to relinquishing the idea of binary gender and accommodating to greater variability within and across gender identities and behaviours. Freed (2014: 640) refers to a ‘fear of gender instability’ amongst the public, probably rooted in a gradual collective realization that gender ideologies which have been held for a long time are increasingly under threat. Both Freed and Cameron call for language, gender, and sexuality researchers to concentrate their efforts more on making inroads into challenging public discourses on gender, sexuality, and language and argue that one of the main future directions of the field needs to focus on increasing its public engagement and take-up by practitioners, policy-makers, and activists.

Future directions

There continues to be an increasing scholarly interest in the field as evidenced through the introduction of two journals dedicated to the topic in recent years (*Gender and Language*; *Journal of Language and Sexuality*) and the increased expansion of the field’s main professional network – the International Gender and Language Association (IGALA). During this time, the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) has set up a dedicated special interest group in the area of language, gender, and sexuality. Even more recently, two new book series dedicated to publishing research in the field have emerged – *Palgrave Studies in Language*,

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Gender and Sexuality and *Cambridge Elements in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. These are in addition to the already-established *Oxford Studies in Language, Gender and Sexuality* series. A review of recent themes and priorities within these series, journals, and organizations suggests a number of continuing and emerging future directions for the field.

There continues to be a growing body of research which examines diverse masculinities and femininities across different international and cultural contexts, some of which includes currently under-researched contexts, such as Africa, Italy, Japan, Russia, and South Asia. There also continues to be a growing interest in researching language in relation to 'queer' gender and sexuality identities, again in a range of transnational contexts (e.g. [Baker and Balirano 2018](#); [Barrett 2017](#)). This includes investigations not only into language and minoritized sexualities and genders (e.g. bisexuality, asexuality, polysexuality, transgender) but also language and its relationship to marginalized forms of heterosexuality and non-binary gender identities. Related to this is research which focuses on gender- and sexuality-based discrimination in language and, importantly, how these forms of discriminatory language intersect with other forms of oppression and marginalization (such as those associated with race, ethnicity, nationality, and social class). Indeed, as stated earlier, there is a significant interest in examining the intersectional dimensions of language, gender, and sexuality at the time of writing. Starting from the idea that gender discrimination may be compounded by other identity positions and that there needs to be recognition of heterogeneity amongst women and men, [Crenshaw's \(1989\)](#) theory of intersectionality provides a helpful framework for exploring the diverse ways in which language, gender, sexuality, race, age, class, nationality, and a range of other facets of 'identity' intersect to produce particular identifications and linguistic practices. The concept of intersectionality disrupts the notion of a singular and coherent identity in relation to gender and sexuality and recognizes that there is no one way to be a woman, man, gay, straight, and so on. [Lazar \(2017\)](#) highlights that this concept of intersectionality is particularly important in contemporary language, gender, and sexuality research because it encourages researchers to view identities as plural, intersecting, and mutually constitutive rather than as isolated categories. [Levon \(2015\)](#)

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notes additionally that intersectionality reminds language, gender, and sexuality researchers that no one category (e.g. ‘woman’ or ‘lesbian’) is sufficient to account for individual experience. Levon does point out that intersectional approaches do not necessarily need to be applied to all research investigating language and identity because, at times, identities such as gender and sexuality are clearly foregrounded. However, in certain research projects, an intersectional analysis may be more appropriate and effective to make sense of how people use language to mutually constitute multiple identities which include gender and sexuality. This is an issue which is likely to continue to receive much attention in language, gender, and sexuality in years to come.

In recent years, the field has partly been characterized by a recognition that the majority of research has taken place and been published in the Global North, leading to a relative invisibility of issues that are relevant in other global settings. Alongside redressing this balance by focusing more on exploring issues relating to the Global South, another direction being taken by the field at the time of writing is to focus more on issues of migration, transnationalism, and globalism. There is also recognition within the field that much research has focused on English; therefore, another area ripe for development examines languages beyond English and multilingualism in relation to gender and sexuality. Lazar defines a *transnational perspective* as examining ‘contextualised concrete local instances of stereotypes in conjunction with a wider lens on other local and specific instances, so that transnational connections and patterns across locales can be brought into relief without making sweeping generalisations’ (2017: 576). In an increasingly globalized and mobile world, Lazar posits that transnational perspectives are useful for the study of language, gender, and sexuality because they can account for widespread phenomena, such as gender and sexual stereotyping, which often transcend national contexts.

Another significant growing area is that which examines language, gender, and sexuality in digital and virtual settings (e.g. Myketrak 2020). A continued global increase in the use of digital communication is likely to mean that this aspect of research in the field continues to grow. Digital platforms such as social media provide spaces where language users can explicitly

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respond to rapidly changing geopolitical situations and events in ways that never used to be possible. These platforms, therefore, provide rich sources of data for examining how language is used in politically and socially charged situations in relation to gender and sexuality. Current research, for example, examines language, gender, and sexuality in online contexts in relation to issues, such as terrorism, COVID-19, rape culture, activist movements (such as MeToo, Everyday Sexism, Everyone's Invited, and Black Lives Matter), and issues relating to ecological and environmental justice.

In terms of methodological and analytic frameworks, the field is following broader developments in applied linguistics in its increased use of forms of multimodal discourse analysis and creative inquiry (see Toohey, this volume). It is generally acknowledged that the field lends itself well to interdisciplinary research and to using combinations of different methods and techniques of linguistic analysis. The methodological pluralism of queer linguistics (and queer applied linguistics) is often innovative and is likely to continue making significant contributions to the development of inquiry in applied linguistics more broadly.

Related topics

discourse analysis; critical discourse analysis; institutional discourse; identity; language, race, and ethnicity

Further reading

Angouri, J. and Baxter, J. (eds.) (2021) *The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender and Sexuality*, London: Routledge. (*The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality* provides an authoritative overview of the field and is a useful and up-to-date companion to the *Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*. The *Handbook* contains detailed information about methodologies, theoretical frameworks, empirical studies,

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real-world applications, and suggestions for further reading which cover an extensive range of topics within the field.)

- Motschenbacher, H. (2010) *Language, Gender and Sexuality: Poststructuralist Perspectives*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins. (Motschenbacher's volume is one of the few monographs dedicated to providing a detailed explanation of queer linguistics and its contributions to the field of language, gender, and sexual identity. The author situates queer linguistics within broader post-structuralist approaches and provides illustrative empirical analyses of language data to exemplify the approach. The book deals with repercussions of the discursive materialization of heteronormativity and gender binarism in various kinds of linguistic data.)
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pays careful attention to engagement with speakers' own orientations to dichotomous systems in a range of contexts.)

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