Proefstuderen Latijns-Amerikastudies
24 maart 2023

Introductie

Een student Latijns-Amerikastudies vertelt hoe jouw eerste jaar bij deze opleiding er uit zal zien.

Hoorcollege en werkcollege

Titel
What do gender and sexuality have to do with language variation and change? A study on the Brazilian queer dialect Pajubá

Korte omschrijving
Queer Linguistics is a recent study area that no longer has minority status. However, the discipline has been disproportionally introduced and studied in different countries and languages. Although scholars have been researching how queer/LGBTQIA+ communities use language worldwide since the 1970s, and the study of queer lexicon seems to be an overstudied subject within the field, the literature on the intersectionality of language, gender, and sexuality has been published predominantly in and about English. Likewise, these studies have focused primarily on how particular sexual identities use language (i.e., gays and lesbians), excluding participants from other dissident sexualities (asexual, bisexual) and non-hegemonic gender identities (transgender individuals), as well as cisgender straight people. Therefore, in this presentation, I analyze the sociolinguistic factors influencing the use of the Brazilian LGBTQIA+ dialect, aka Pajubá, by speakers who identify as female, cisgender, and straight. The data comes from an online Qualtrics survey taken by 387 cis-het women reporting on their attitudes and use of the dialect. This study confirms that these women use Pajubá and tend to convey messages of tolerance towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

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Q&A

Heb je nog vragen over de opleiding? Dan kan de student die hier allemaal beantwoorden!

Voorbereiding
Please read the attached article by Calder and prepare a few questions for the lecturer based on it.

Language and Sexuality: Language and LGBTQ+ Communities

Jeremy Calder

The International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology

Language and Sexuality: Language and LGBTQ+ Communities

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The field of sociolinguistics has evolved over the decades, initially a field concerned with finding large-scale linguistic differences between demographic groups that signal macro-social differences like age, class, race, gender, and sexual orientation. In recent decades, the field has increasingly implemented ethnographic and context-sensitive analyses, exploring how individuals use language not just to signal the demographic categories they belong to, but also to construct and project their identities on the ground in locally meaningful ways. In other words, macro-social differences like age, class, race, gender, and sexual orientation are not universal monoliths reflected in linguistic practice in the same ways across communities, but social difference may be constructed and performed in different ways based on the norms of the communities under analysis.

As the study of language in its social context has evolved, the study of the language of queer speakers – i.e. those speakers whose gender and/or sexual identities fall outside of the normative heterosexual binary – has also necessarily evolved. While early studies were concerned with discovering broad linguistic differences between queer and straight speakers, searching for those linguistic signals that comprise the "gay voice," more recent research has increasingly explored the diversity of queer voices in various contexts and how these voices contribute to the construction of a heterogeneous range of queer identities.

While in recent decades, "queer" is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a range of LGBTQ+ identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others), early studies of queer language aimed to provide descriptions of the ways gay men and lesbians talk – especially how they speak differently from straight speakers. The first known works on gay language (e.g. Gershon Legman's "The Language of Homosexuality" [1941]) appeared in medical venues, often with explicit warnings that the content was intended strictly for medical professionals. As homosexuality was viewed as a medical condition at this time, the framing of gay language in these early works often had a pathologizing effect, with gay speakers positioned as the exotic, deviant Other in comparison to straight speakers.

Most research in the 1940s and 1950s focused on lexical descriptions used primarily by gay men, providing lists of slang and argot used within gay communities. While theoretical linguistic analysis was often absent in the earliest works, authors in the 1950s and 1960s began to speculate about the social utility of gay slang. Some of these early lexicons argued that gay speakers developed new terms in order to have ways to refer to themselves positively rather than pejoratively. A notable example is the emergence of the word "gay" in the early 1950s as a positive term for men who are sexually attracted

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to men, eventually overtaking the term "homosexual" in popularity, a term which had medical and pathologizing connotations. Furthermore, while the earliest authors speculated that in-group terms served to create an isolated and secret subculture separate from the greater society, authors in later decades instead argued that gay slang promoted in-group solidarity, used as a survival strategy in response to the greater society's hostility toward gay and lesbian individuals. Work in the late 1970s through the 1980s advanced the perspective that a shared lexical code was employed as a form of social protest, with gay and lesbian speakers often reappropriating pejorative terms that were once used against them and imbuing them with positive meaning – e.g. the word "queen" to refer to an effeminate man.

Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, the scope of research on gay language began to broaden beyond descriptions of the gay lexicon. Much of the work in this period emerged from the communication and rhetoric disciplines, focusing on interactional and discursive patterns used by gay speakers, e.g. turn-taking and turn frequencies (e.g. Leap 1996, see also Leap 1995), and the construction of topics and narratives in coming-out stories (e.g. Bacon 1998; Rust 1993). Up to this point, the bulk of research on queer speakers was conducted in fields outside of linguistics; therefore, this early work focused on broad rhetorical and discursive strategies, and analyses incorporating knowledge of formal linguistic methods and theory (i.e. focusing on the role of structural linguistic phenomena like syntax and sound patterns) remained relatively scant. It wasn't until the 1990s that research on queer speakers began to flourish within the linguistics and anthropology disciplines.

Many shifts in analytical scope began in the 1990s, following the greater discursive turn in critical theory and the social sciences. Prior to the discursive turn, sociolinguistic studies focused on describing the patterns of broad demographic groups, and how these patterns reflected macro-social differences. Given the marginal position of queer individuals, such descriptions of the linguistic practices of gay speakers at this time served to center and elucidate the practices of marginal demographic groups previously unrepresented – or completely absent – in the academic literature. However, after the discursive turn, studies began to move away from singular conceptions of demographic identity, increasingly exploring how macro-social differences can be instantiated in practice in specific ways in particular contexts. These shifts mirrored shifts in feminism and queer theory, moving away from difference-based feminisms (aiming to explain differences between the genders) and toward poststructural feminisms (aiming to explain how gender and sexual identities are socially constructed). Rather than viewing demographic gender and sexual identities as essential, natural, and monolithic, scholars began to explore how these identities are ideologically constructed on the ground in various ways, and how these constructions relate to broader structures of power in society. An influential figure that represented this shift in perspective – especially in studies of gender and sexuality – was Judith Butler. In her 1990 work *Gender Trouble*, she introduced the idea of gender performativity. In this perspective, gender – and sexuality – aren't biological givens, but rather performed and produced through social action. Rather than people *being* male, female, gay, or straight, people *do* male, female, gay, and straight through performing certain actions in a way that references greater social gender norms. *Doing* male, female, gay, and straight in a

particular way serves to reinforce the normative ways of doing gender and sexuality that are considered ideologically appropriate. In other words, language doesn't merely reflect social differences; it serves to also construct them. This perspective illuminates the ideological intertwining of gender and sexual orientation, such that ideologies of stereotypical gay identities result from individuals doing gender in ways that don't conform to normative expectations of what's socially appropriate for maleness and femaleness. And crucially, performativity argues that even heterosexual gender identities are also constructed and maintained through performances of masculinity and femininity that are socially ratified and conform to normative standards, in service of power relations that privilege normative manifestations of gender and sexuality over those that don't conform. In other words, performativity moves away from the perspective that normative heterosexuality is natural and queer identities are unnatural – instead, all identities are performed, and these performances serve to both construct and challenge social norms dictating which gender and sexual identities are appropriate and legitimate.

With this discursive turn, *queer linguistics* emerged as a field of study in the mid-1990s. Works like William Leap's *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon* (1995) and Anna Livia and Kira Hall's volume *Queerly Phrased* (1997) responded to and expanded beyond the bulk of earlier work on the language of queer individuals. The emergence of queer linguistics as an area of study came with numerous analytical shifts. For one, studies increasingly moved away from essentialism and began to incorporate social constructionism and performativity into analyses of queer language. And as research began to proliferate within the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, studies moved beyond the lexicon and began to incorporate other elements of language like sound, sentence structure, and conversational analysis. Queer linguistics also increased the representation of research on the language of queer speakers beyond gay men, increasingly incorporating the perspectives of queer women and gender non-normative individuals. Furthermore, analyses of queer speakers of languages other than English in contexts outside of the United States emerged, e.g. the linguistic practices of hijras and kotis in India (Hall 2005), leitis in Tonga (Besnier 2003), and 'yan daudu in Nigeria (Gaudio 2009). This work represented a larger new wave of sociolinguistic research, with an increased incorporation of ethnographic methods to explore how individuals' linguistic performance of queerness is influenced by, and should be interpreted within, particular sociohistorical and geographic contexts. The consideration of situational particularity allowed queer linguistic research to expand beyond singular and monolithic Western stereotypes of gayness. Finally, rather than merely describing linguistic and social practices, studies in queer linguistics and related inquiries aimed to relate queer language to greater hegemonic gender norms, exploring both how queer speakers challenge, and are constrained by, these norms. In sum, rather than documenting the ways gay individuals speak differently from straight speakers, studies in queer linguistics and anthropology increasingly concerned the role of language in queer communities in constructing a range of queer identities.

With the movement away from demographic essentialism, in the new millennium scholars began to question the role of identity in studies of language and sexuality. In his 2000 review "Gay and Lesbian Language," Don Kulick argued that the scope of language and sexuality research should extend beyond the relationship between language

and identity and instead consider the relationship between language and desire. This sparked the "identity vs. desire" debate: advocates of the language and desire approach (e.g. Cameron and Kulick 2003) argue that a strict focus on identity conflates "gay and lesbian language" with gay and lesbian speakers, neglecting to explore how linguistic varieties ideologically constructed as queer can be used by individuals of a range of identities. This approach suggests that a focus on strict, static, and essential identities misses the range and fluidity of linguistic practice in various contexts to express eroticism and desire that goes beyond biographical identity.

In addition, the desire-centered approach argues that identity is an intransitive phenomenon restricted to the subject (i.e. the subject *is* an identity), while desire is a transitive and relational phenomenon that considers the relationship between a subject and object (i.e. the subject *desires* the object), which facilitates the exploration of how linguistic phenomena are co-constructed and co-negotiated by the speaker and interlocutors. Other scholars have advocated for the importance of the role of identity in language and sexuality research, arguing that completely eschewing identity runs the risk of ignoring the social positioning of marginalized individuals, neglecting to relate queer linguistic practices with the political and social structures that marginalize the queer individuals that use them. The *tactics of intersubjectivity* (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) framework was proposed to elucidate the transitivity of identity, arguing that both the practices of the subject/speaker and the uptake of the object/hearer contribute to the co-construction and ratification of particular identities. And given the social dynamics surrounding particular identities, speakers may in fact desire to project particular identities that are important to them. In recent years, scholars (e.g. Queen 2014) have argued for the importance of considering both identity and desire in linguistic research on queer individuals.

The new millennium also came with an increasing availability of advanced instrumental technology, allowing for an increased focus on queer speakers in the fields of sociolinguistic variation and sociophonetics. A greater number of studies began to explore how fine-grained phonetic variation both patterns according to gender and sexual identity and serves to project and perform particular queer personae. These studies spoke to the interest in popular culture in the "gay sounding voice," seeking to pinpoint the specific acoustic and auditory cues that contribute to the perception of a voice as gay. Given popular stereotypes like the "gay lisp" and the high-pitched gay voice, much research focused on features like the fundamental frequency (pitch) and the pronunciation of the /s/ sound (see Calder forthcoming for a review of the sociophonetics of queer speakers). Studies on the fundamental frequency among gay and lesbian speakers had conflicting or inconclusive results, often finding no difference in pitch between queer and straight speakers, despite popular ideologies surrounding the pitch of queer voices. These studies suggest that the stereotype linking pitch and queerness is an ideological rather than empirically provable one. On the other hand, research in both speech production (how speakers produce sounds) and speech perception (how listeners perceive sounds) has robustly illuminated links between /s/ pronunciation and gender and sexual identities. A fronter production of /s/, which results in a higher acoustic frequency, has been found across multiple production studies to be more common among women than men, more common among gay

men than straight men, and less common among queer women than straight women. In addition, fronter /s/ is also perceived by listeners as sounding less masculine and more gay when coming from a male voice. These studies suggest that what is popularly characterized as a "gay lisp" results from phonetic and acoustic properties of /s/, i.e. a fronter articulation with a higher acoustic frequency. While variables like the fundamental frequency weren't shown to pattern consistently across macro-social differences related to gender and sexuality, recent studies have shown how queer men and women use pitch patterns across contexts to perform queer identity in particular ways, e.g. the socially and politically conscious queer woman (Levon 2011) or the flamboyant gay diva (Podesva 2007). With this new wave, sociophonetic studies are increasingly considering the contributions of phonetic features in particular linguistic and semiotic contexts, exploring how multiple phonetic signs come together in constructions of socially salient personae.

   While the majority of studies on queer language in Western contexts up to this point had focused on cisgender queer speakers, recent years have seen an increased focus on transgender speakers, exploring topics like transgender coming out narratives, the use of pronouns, and phonetic features in the construction of transgender identity. Lal Zimman's ethnographic and longitudinal study of trans men in San Francisco (e.g. Zimman 2012) explores the role of phonetic variables in the articulation of trans-masculine identity, as well as the effect of testosterone on the voices of trans men over time. Such studies of trans linguistics increasingly serve to ideologically detach femininity and masculinity from certain types of bodies, illuminating the socially constructed nature of the connections between particular linguistic performances and particular bodies. The disentanglement of practices from bodies allowed researchers to question the analytical usefulness of many binaries taken for granted in language and sexuality research, with work in the 2010s taking a more critical perspective toward assumed binaries like male versus female, gay versus straight, and cisgender versus transgender, e.g. Zimman, Davis, and Raclaw's 2014 volume *Queer Excursions*. Recent years have also seen a greater attention to the practices of gender non-binary speakers, i.e. speakers who identify as neither male nor female, calling into question that conceptions of binaries like "male and female" and "masculine and feminine" are mutually exclusive poles at the ends of a singular continuum. In fact, non-binary speakers may identify as both masculine and feminine or neither masculine nor feminine, suggesting that masculinity and femininity represent independent continua for many non-binary speakers (Calder and Steele 2019). There remains great potential for exploring how linguistic patterns reflect such complex and multidimensional orientations to the gender binary.

   Another recent shift is the increased attention to intersectional identities, i.e. identities with multiple intersecting macro-social dimensions, like race, gender, sexuality, class, and place. Rusty Barrett began to probe the role of language in complex articulations of race, gender, and sexuality in his work on African American drag queens in the 1990s, exploring how African American men in drag employed white women's language on stage to make social commentary on ideologies surrounding race and gender. More recently, Barrett's 2017 book *From Drag Queens to Leathermen* explores the articulation of identity in a range of gay male subcultures. Recent years have seen an increased representation of work on the linguistic practices of queer speakers of color

in specific geographic locales, reflecting a greater move in queer and feminist theory toward the consideration of intersecting oppressions in structural systems of power.

While the earliest studies of queer language explored how language was conditioned by structural societal difference, and work starting in the 1990s began to take a post-structuralist perspective toward the articulation of queer identity, work in the 2010s is increasingly considering both poststructuralist and materialist perspectives in the analysis of queer language. Although work on gender and sexuality has increasingly explored the role of performativity in the linguistic articulation of queer identity over the past couple of decades, perspectives in transgender and queer studies have increasingly argued for the materiality of the gendered body and the socially real effects particular bodies carry with them. In other words, identities may be performed in a range of ways, but the range of performativity may be constrained by the material body and ideologies surrounding which types of bodies are considered appropriate for which types of performances. Considering both poststructuralism (e.g. the role of linguistic performativity) and materialism (e.g. the role of the physical body) illuminates the effect of the gendered body on both the production and uptake of gendered linguistic performances. Recent work has shown that the visual gendered presentation of the body can influence both how interlocutors socially interpret gendered linguistic variables emerging from that body, as well as how speakers modify their linguistic performances based on their own visual presentation (see, e.g. Calder 2019a, 2019b). Such work represents a greater trend in sociolinguistics considering the role of the body and embodiment in the articulation of identity, exploring how both linguistic and embodied resources are employed to project particular identities or accomplish particular interactional goals (see Bucholtz and Hall 2016 for a comprehensive review). Given the ideologies surrounding particular gendered bodies and how these bodies relate to sexual orientation, a greater exploration of the performative collaboration between queer language and the queer body remains an exciting avenue for future work in LGBTQ+ linguistic anthropology and linguistics.

SEE ALSO: Body, Embodiment; Feminism and Language; Gender (Social), Language and; Identity, Language and; Language, Sexuality, and Desire; Queer Theory and Language

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