
Two Lavender Issues for Linguists

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Some questions about sexual orientation are naturals for professional linguists—for theoretical linguists, phoneticians, sociolinguists, psycholinguists, discourse analysts, and anthropological linguists, for instance. One natural topic (which I look at in the following section) concerns the lexical items that are available for referring to sexual orientations and to people of various orientations. A second topic which I look at in the following section concerns differences in the language and speech of people of different orientations.

As with early studies of language and the sexes, the first approaches to these questions about language and sexuality tended toward the anecdotal and personal. Linguists have been inclined to behave like ordinary speakers, citing usages that happen to have attracted their attention and formulating hypotheses on the basis of unexamined folk theories, rather than using the analytical tools of their trade. This behavior can be observed almost any day on the Internet, for instance in the Usenet newsgroups *sci.lang* (for discussion of issues about language) and *soc.motss* (for discussion of issues about homosexuality) and on the LINGUIST, ADS-L (American Dialect Society), and OUTiL (OUT in Linguistics) mailing lists.

Linguistics does have analytic tools for approaching these questions, but they are only beginning to be used, and it seems tremendously hard to get answers. In this chapter, I survey those tools and suggest reasons why answers have been so hard to come by.

Lexical Issues

What lexical items are available for referring to sexual orientations and to people of various orientations? In modern English, for example, there are an enormous number of lexical choices in the domain of sexual orientation. Virtually every one is publicly contested; not only do speakers differ as to which lexical items are appropriate in which social contexts, but many are aware of these differences and are willing to retail their folk theories about such matters, often with considerable heat. The public forums of lgb life are full of such wrangling.

In fact, early in the history of the OUTiL list, in October 1992 (I started the list in 1991 to bring lgb linguists together both socially and intellectually), a dozen subscribers worked pretty thoroughly over this ground, after one subscriber quoted a problematic passage about the word *queer* in an article by Jeffrey Schmalz, "Gay Politics Goes Mainstream," in the 9 October 1992 issue of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*: "The word is in vogue now, with some lesbians preferring it to 'gay,' which, despite common usage, technically applies only to men."

Here I provide a small sampling of these contested choices, with brief comments on a few of them. (Most of this inventory will be boringly familiar to lgb readers.)

1. *Homosexual* versus *gay*. Some would insist on one, some on the other, and many see a distinction (behavior vs. identity, identity vs. sensibility, whatever) between the two.
2. *Lesbian* versus *dyke*. Here, too, many see a distinction, of behavior versus identity or in a neutral versus an "in your face" stance or in degree of "butchness." *Dyke* is also a reclaimed epithet, a term of derision that has been to some extent rescued as an expression of pride.
3. Reclaimed epithets. *Dyke* has fairly recently been reclaimed; for some speakers in some contexts and for some purposes, it is no longer an epithet. Attempts to reclaim *faggot* have met with mixed responses; while I was in Washington for the 1994 Lavender Languages conference, the *Washington Blade* (16 September, pp. 18, 22) was reporting (largely negative) responses in San Francisco to the gay Seattle newspaper columnist Dan Savage's use of the word in his columns, in which every letter begins with "Hey Faggot." The issue for all such lexical items is: For which speakers, in which contexts, and for which purposes has the word been reclaimed?
4. *Gay*_{ADJ} versus *gay*_N. Many who are comfortable with the former are not with the latter. There are similar, though not necessarily identical, objections to *straight* and *queer* used as nouns; and, in general, to the zero conversion of adjectives to count nouns; and, even more generally, to the choice of predicate adjectives like *Jewish* versus predicate nouns like *Jew*. The usual objection is that the nouns denote an all-embracing, essential property, while the adjectives denote one characteristic among many.¹
5. *Queer*, especially in its adjectival use, as in the Digital Queers slogan "We're here, we're queer, we have e-mail." Another reclaimed epithet, it is

also another item that many judge to refer to sensibility or culture rather than sexual behavior or orientation.² A generational clash is evident here, with many older speakers finding it irredeemable and many younger speakers preferring it to *gay*. In addition, some have seized on *queer* as an umbrella label for the “sexual minorities,” taking in not only homosexuals and bisexuals but also transgender and transsexual people, tranvestites, leatherfolk, the BDSM (bondage and discipline, sadism and masochism) community, fetishists, and so on; others protest that this extension bleaches any useful meaning from the term and in addition devalues gay people and their interests by burying them in a loose collection of sexually transgressive types.

6. *Gay* as a superordinate term, including both women and men, versus *gay* as either a subordinate term, taking in men only, or an ambiguous term (like *animal*, with a superordinate sense that includes human beings and a subordinate sense in which it is opposed to *human being*); this conflict contrasts the *gay* of Gay Activists Alliance with the *gay* of The National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals.
7. *Gay* as a superordinate term, including both homosexual (in some sense!) and bisexual people in opposition to *straight*, versus *gay* as a subordinate term, in a ternary opposition with *bi(sexual)* and *straight*.
8. *Admitted, avowed, confessed, or self-confessed* (all of which are perceived by many to have negative connotations) versus *open or out* as modifiers with reference to lgb people who have disclosed their orientation (not to mention *in your face* for those whose behavior or costumes make their orientation more or less constantly visible).
9. *Out* itself as covering disclosure by others (*outing*) in addition to various degrees and kinds of self-disclosure (recognition of one’s own orientation, the first same-sex sexual experience, announcing to someone else, announcing publicly). There is often no easy, or single, answer to a question like “Is Sandy out?”
10. Various lexical taxonomies referring to behavior, appearance, or personality: for example, *butch* versus *fem(me)*³ (applied to both women and men), *stud* versus *queen*, *bear* versus *twink* versus *clone*, *dyke* versus *lipstick lesbian*.
11. *Straight-acting, masculine, athletic*, and similar terms used (especially in Men-Seeking-Men personals ads) to pick out Butch types.

Note that the first lexical choices, (1)–(7), make it extremely difficult to refer to lgb folk in any way that most hearers or readers will accept, or even understand as intended. My own use of lgb as a modifier in this article, as in lgb people and lgb folk, makes yet another choice, one that, perhaps predictably, many find either ludicrous or offensive.

What to do? The instinct to try to uncover meanings by simply thinking about what words mean to you or asking other people just to think about what words mean to them is understandable, and from the ethnographic or sociological point of view it can be enormously revealing. Certainly, it is a place for lin-

guists to start. But as a technique for the scientific study of meanings, this approach is hopeless and has long been known to be so. It is especially problematic in domains that speakers are likely to be uneasy about, or where speakers already have explicitly formulated folk theories about the meanings and uses of words, or where the lexical choices are as likely a matter of context and use as of semantics, strictly speaking. All of these problems arise in the domain of sexual orientation.

In any case, we are dealing here with systems of folk (in this case, lgb folk) classification, systems of the sort studied by anthropologists and anthropological linguists. See, for example, the bibliography of early research in this area by Harold Conklin (1972), which covers the domains of kinship, plants, animals, orientation in time and space, anatomy and disease (the domain that is probably most comparable to the domain of sexual orientation), color, and other sensations, or the work of Cecil Brown (Brown 1984, for instance) on the folk classification of plants and animals, or the review by John Lucy (1992: ch. 5) of studies of lexical coding in the domain that has gotten by far the most attention, color.⁴

Admittedly, much of this research has focused on domains that can be seen as intrinsically structured to a considerable degree by human physiology (color) or anatomy (spatial orientation) or by nature itself (plants and animals). But there are domains—kinship and disease are two notable ones—where a significant portion of the structure is surely imposed on the domain or, as we say, “constructed” by particular cultures, and these can serve as models for the analysis of the lexical domain of sexual orientation.

Experimental studies—involving tasks like labeling, sorting, discrimination, similarity judgments, concept learning, and memory—are not usually possible in such domains, because these tasks call attention to the distinctions under study and so are likely to evoke explicit folk theories and produce artifactual behavior. But there are two kinds of research, systematic observation and directed interviewing, that can be pursued.

In systematic observation, large amounts of text are collected naturalistically on occasions where people are quite likely to be discussing the domain under study. In directed interviewing, texts are collected under prompting by an interviewer, who introduces topics that are quite likely to provoke discussion of the domain under study. In either case, the analyst needs to record considerable information about the speakers and the settings they are in. Ideally, the extracted data should be subjected to statistical analysis, though the enormous number of potentially relevant variables may preclude that.

In my opinion, linguists should be approaching the lexical domain of sexual orientation by means of systematic observation and directed interviewing, following the lead of, for instance, Geneva Smitherman (1991) and John Baugh (1991) on (in Baugh’s careful phrasing) “terms of self-reference among American slave defendants” and of some of the articles in this volume, such as M. Lynne Murphy on the term *bisexual* and its relatives and Kleinfeld and Warner on signs for lgb people. It is not an easy task, but it is doable.

What makes such investigations difficult is a constellation of problems, which

are shared with other situations where social diversification and change are reflected by, and realized in, lexical change:

1. As with slang, we are dealing with shifting, local usages. Rapid change divides the generations, and locally restricted usages produce intergroup misunderstandings.
2. As with ethnic and racial labels, language names, personality type labels, and names for subgroupings in small social groups (e.g., the *jocks* versus *burnouts* distinction in an American high school studied by Penelope Eckert 1989), by their choice of words, people are actively negotiating conceptualizations, as personal and political acts. Even when I was (as I am no longer) by inclination and behavior bisexual, I spoke of myself as gay in most public contexts, preferring to ally myself with those whose orientation was entirely toward members of their own sex rather than risk being seen as some sort of straight person.
3. There are sometimes large gaps in the coverage of the set of lexical items. When there is a large gap, many individuals in the domain do not fall easily into any of the opposed categories. Gaps within domains are not in any way unusual—they can be found even in very large sets of basic color words, for example—but they are especially prominent in domains where the folk ideology of binary opposition holds sway, as it certainly does in the domains of sex and sexuality. A great many people will be located at some considerable distance from the “ideal types” (butch versus fem(me), for instance).
4. There are often fuzzy boundaries between categories, even within a social group that has relatively stable usage. For many lgb speakers of English, the boundaries between gay and bisexual, on the one hand, and between straight and bisexual, on the other, seem to be not at all clear; certainly, they are the focus of considerable discussion in public lgb forums.
5. There are audience and other context effects. Whether I speak of myself, or refer to some other man, as gay or queer or homosexual or a queer or a homosexual or a faggot might depend very much on the person I am talking to and the nature of our interaction.

All of these facts make investigating the lexicon of sexual orientation a hard task, requiring serious fieldwork within lgb subcultures. Not an impossible one, but very far from an armchair, or coffee table, exercise—though I should remind you that the lexicon is in many ways the easiest part of a language to study; the social meanings of other linguistic variables are even harder to get at.

Phonetics is the aspect of language that has by far the best-developed methods for experimentation and for naturalistic data collection, so it is natural for linguists interested in the second issue I’m focusing on in this chapter—differences between people of different orientations—to look to phonetics for answers. I turn now to this second issue.

Differences between Gay and Straight

It is a widespread folk belief that you can pick out nonstraight people, or at least nonstraight men, by their behavior, in particular by their speech. This belief is probably a corollary of another folk belief, that homosexuality is an (inappropriate) identification with the other sex, that lesbians think and act like men and that gay men think and act like women. Since people are in fact quite good at discriminating the sexes on the basis of speech alone, it follows that dykes and faggots should be detectable by a disparity between their appearance and their speech, or in fact merely by contradictory signals in their speech. In actual practice this belief seems to be restricted to men; for straight people, there appears to be no female equivalent to *The Voice*.

The idea that “you can spot ’em” coexists uneasily with the astonishment many straight people have felt on discovering that some acquaintance, friend, or family member is gay. Such experiences could be taken to mean that only a certain number (perhaps a small number) of homosexual people—the “blatant” ones—are identifiable by their behavior.

Lgb people themselves differ as to how much “gaydar,” how much ability to spot gay people in public, they believe themselves to have. My partner and I have notably defective gaydars; mine hardly ever goes off, and his goes off far more often than could conceivably be right. Many lgb people believe that their gaydar works only on members of their own sex (where it might be said to have real value). In any case, it is not clear how much of anyone’s gaydar uses cues of speech and language, as opposed to visual cues.

Note that there are two different questions here, the second of which depends on having an answer to the first. First, there is the question of difference: Are gay people—in general, or some distinguishable subgroup of them—different in their speech or language from straight people of their sex? Then, there is the question of discriminability: Assuming that there are at least sometimes significant differences, can people—in general, or some distinguishable subgroup of them—detect these differences and use them to discriminate gay from straight at better than chance?

Difficulties

Even if we restrict ourselves to the question of difference, it is clear that there are serious difficulties in investigating these matters. Here is a brief inventory of five of these.

1. There are difficulties in identifying the groups to be compared and obtaining suitable subjects. Who counts as gay? Who counts as straight? Does using only “out” gay people as subjects bias the results, or are such subjects actually to be preferred? The problems here surround any sort of research of gay/straight differences, of course.
2. There is great variability within both the gay and the straight populations on matters of behavior in general, and speech and language in particular.

Recall that most differences between the sexes involve rather small (though significant) differences between means for two populations that exhibit both enormous overlap and great variability; yet we perceive these differences as large and obvious. Given that people are only rarely surprised to discover someone's sex but are fairly often surprised to discover someone's sexuality, differences between groups of different sexualities (but the same sex) will quite likely be smaller, and variances larger, even than between the sexes.

3. It is tempting to choose as subjects representing a group the most recognizable members of that group; these are either the purest subjects or the most extreme, depending on your point of view. Just as traditional dialectology tended to seek out older rural informants who had lived in one place all their lives, and quantitative studies of social varieties tend to favor young urban informants with a high degree of identification with vernacular (or "street") culture, so we might approach the gay population by selecting the most (stereo) typical informants: diesel dykes and flaming queens. This is relatively easy to do, but it would skew the data enormously, and it cannot give us a picture of variation throughout the speech community.
4. Within these groups we want to investigate, there are different, sometimes overlapping, sometimes vaguely delineated "communities of practice" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992). It would be foolish to suppose that for the purposes of research on behavior there is a single "gay community" from which subjects can be randomly sampled (or, for that matter, a single "straight community"). The norms of behavior can be expected to differ quite considerably from one community of practice to another, and people can be expected to shift quite considerably as they move from one community of practice to another. Many lgb people clearly shift among a number of speech styles and modes of self-presentation. Which of these do we want to tap, and how? (The problem is familiar from research on vernacular speech and creole continua, of course.)
5. There are problems in selecting the characteristics to be examined. I assume here that lexical items, like *gaydar* (glossed earlier) and *twink* (a cute young thing, male), that are almost entirely used by lgb people will be set aside in investigating these questions. The focus of such investigations will be on more subtle aspects of speech or language:
 - on matters of grammar (especially on phonetic variables, especially prosodic characteristics)
 - on pragmatic strategies (e.g., those considered in the work of William Leap, in this volume, on gay male talk: probing, cooperation and competition, offers and invitations)
 - on discourse organization (e.g., what devices are used to make discourses coherent and how information is conveyed, and shared beliefs reinforced, by indirect means rather than by direct assertions)
 - on rhetoric (via content analysis or studies of audience effects)
 - on other global properties of discourse (e.g., authenticity and risk taking/revelation, again as considered by Leap)

The literature on the characteristics of lgb talk is very heavily focused on rhetorical matters rather than on grammatical ones. In fact, the two collections that would appear from their titles to be most relevant to linguists (Chesebro 1981 and Ringer 1994) are almost entirely taken up with rhetorical and lexical questions. The rhetorical issues are often fascinating, but for the most part they are not questions that linguists, or at least linguists engaged in their usual modes of research, are prepared to answer.

Discourse and pragmatics

Let me briefly traverse the middle ground between grammar and rhetoric. Staying close to home, I inventory some of the discourse-organizing and pragmatic strategies that have been suggested (in one place or another in the literature or by colleagues) as characteristic of gay male talk and writing:

- subjective stance
- irony, sarcasm (distancing, saying and not saying, “not taking seriously”)
- resistance, subversiveness
- double/triple/etc. vision, metacommentary
- embeddedness, discursiveness
- open aggression
- seductiveness
- reversal, inversion

Some of these are stereotypically “feminine” (subjective stance, resistance and subversiveness, seductiveness), some stereotypically “masculine” (distancing, open aggression). Some—resistance and subversiveness, multiple vision, reversal—are associated with powerlessness and marginality. Some—subjective stance, distancing—hint at hidden or stigmatized identities.⁵ Many are simply the common coin of postmodern discourse—most of the characteristics in the list above are to be found in the writing of Donald Barthelme, for instance, as well as in the writing of Robert Glück—and are scarcely to be directly connected to gender, sexuality, marginality, or stigma.

Again, there is much of interest here, and linguistics can certainly provide indispensable conceptual tools for analysis, but as in poetics (Zwicky 1986) the methods that linguists use in their ordinary practice will not provide an analysis of the phenomena. Subjectivity, reversal, multiple vision, and the rest are realized (in part) in speech and writing, but they are not themselves properties of speech or writing, in the way that having only front vowels and being an instance of the agentless passive construction and containing a cataphoric pronoun and presupposing the truth of some proposition are.

The state of the art

Previous linguistic research on the grammatical characteristics of lgb talk is, in fact, inconclusive. Before the publication of this volume, two studies (both small in

scale and modest as to their claims) considered the questions of difference and discriminability using standard linguistic methods.

In Gaudio's (1994) study on men "sounding gay," judges (not selected on the basis of orientation) were asked to evaluate various characteristics (including "gay" versus "straight") of eight male speakers, four gay and four not, but all reading the same passages; the judges turned out to be good at distinguishing gay men from straight men on the basis of their speech.

Gaudio also investigated the pitch properties of the gay speakers' productions compared to those of the straight speakers. These included several properties that had been investigated in the literature comparing women's and men's speech. It turned out to be not at all clear what phonetic properties allowed the judges to discriminate. There were several suggestive differences, but they did not reach statistical significance.

It does seem clear, even from Gaudio's small study, that gay men's speech is not particularly similar to women's speech, at least with respect to those prosodic characteristics that have often been claimed to differentiate women from men.

Moonwomon's study (1985, reprinted in this volume), which paired two lesbian and two straight female speakers, examined only the difference question and not the discriminability question. Though there were suggestive differences again, with the lesbians tending to have lower-pitched voices and a narrower pitch range, these didn't reach statistical significance. As a result, it is not even clear that lesbians are distinguishable in their speech from straight women: lesbian inaudibility as well as invisibility. Moonwomon suggests that whatever differences do exist might be subtle and might lie more in discourse organization than in prosody.

Why are these questions so hard to answer?

I suggest that the source of the difficulties, and also of the apparent differences between women and men, may lie in the ways gender roles are acquired.⁶ From the literature on the reasons for differences in women's and men's use of more vernacular and more standard variants (Cameron & Coates 1988; Deuchar 1988, for instance), we can extract at least four important psychosocial mechanisms in the acquisition of a gender identity and its associated norms of behavior:

1. *Modeling*: We use the people around us as models for our own behavior (and so will not acquire norms for which we have no or few models).
2. *Identification*: From the available potential models, we choose people we believe ourselves to be, or wish to be, like.
3. *Avoidance*: We avoid behaviors that are associated with people we do not believe ourselves to be, or do not wish to be, like.
4. *Enforcement*: Other people in our social groups maintain norms by rewarding conformity and punishing nonconformity—sometimes openly and explicitly, but more often covertly and tacitly.

The mechanisms of modeling and enforcement are provided externally, by the social context we grow up in, while the mechanisms of identification and avoid-

ance are, in an important sense, internal. It is these two internal mechanisms that I am suggesting might give rise to a significant difference between the sexes in the way a gay identity develops.

My suggestion is that for many lesbians, what is most important is identification with the community of women—becoming a “woman-identified woman” in several ways—while for many gay men, what is most important is distancing themselves from straight men, that is, from the societally masculine norms. This difference in the primary mechanism—identification for lesbians, avoidance for gay men—would be consonant with the larger societal inclination to take masculine pursuits and priorities as the only really significant ones and so to subvert women’s identification with the community of women, which lesbians would then have to work to maintain. In addition, this difference is consonant with the often-observed tendency for masculine roles to be much more rigidly enforced than feminine roles; almost any American man can recall a set of gender shibboleths—men cross their legs this way, carry their books this way, strike a match this way, and so on—that are not only explicitly articulated as part of general boy lore but are also enforced by taunting and jeering. (There is no real parallel in the socialization of girls to their gender roles.) Gay men will consequently be inclined to see their sexuality as a rejection of gender norms.

Insofar as these broad generalizations are valid, it would follow that many lesbians might not in fact be distinguishable in speech from straight women. Admittedly, a sense of difference, distinctness, deviation will play a role in the acquisition of a lesbian identity as it does in the acquisition of a gay male identity; given this sense of difference, we should expect real but subtle differences between lesbians and straight women. It is also true that gay men are reared as men and so can be expected to conform to a great many (though not all) masculine norms; given this shared history, we should expect there to be many similarities between gay and straight men.

We would then have no reason to expect that differences between gay men and straight men would involve the display of specifically feminine behaviors. It would be sufficient for a gay man merely to be different from the masculine norms in any way whatsoever, not necessarily in any way that is associated specifically with women. However, the well-known effect that I like to think of as the “throwing-like-a-girl phenomenon”—anything that does not accord with the specifically, often highly culture-specific, masculine norms is likely to be interpreted as feminine—will lead to the widespread impression that gay men “act like girls.”

In any case, a gay man can mark himself as gay, and can easily be detected to be doing so, by observers gay or straight, by diverging in his behavior, speech and language included, in almost any way from straight men. That would make “the gay voice” very hard indeed to detect by phonetic investigation; if there are just five or ten ways in which gay men could deviate from masculine norms, and if different gay men choose different ways to do so, then the mean deviation from any individual norm for the group as a whole could be quite small, and that difference would be hard to detect except with enormous numbers of subjects (not to mention analytic techniques that recognize the possibility of multiple norms). Seeming lack of difference could then coexist quite happily with very easy discriminability.

There are some parallel lessons from speech studies at the segmental level. For a great many, probably nearly all, categorizations of segments in language—as velar versus labial, or voiced versus voiceless, say—perception of the categories uses many cues other than the obvious and primary one. There are cues provided by other segments in the context, and there are cues provided by properties of the relevant segment other than the primary cue.⁷ Indeed, there is often considerable individual variation as to which properties are the most reliable cues in speech production, and also considerable individual variation as to which properties are the most salient cues in speech perception. These individual differences do not usually interfere with understanding, since it is sufficient for some cue to be produced and perceived most of the time. And it is usually the case that most speakers agree, in both production and perception, as to which cues are the most important. But careful analysis reveals more individual variation than might at first have been expected.

Similarly, studies of how people convey and detect structural ambiguity in expressions like *big cats and dogs* (*big + cats and dogs* versus *big cats + and dogs*) and *The hostess greeted the girl with a smile* (*greeted + the girl with a smile* versus *greeted the girl + with a smile*) indicate that different speakers choose different prosodic properties to mark off constituent boundaries and tend to rely on different properties in deciding where those boundaries are in other people's productions (Lehiste 1973; Lehiste et al. 1976). The end of a constituent can be marked by pausing, by having the pitch fall towards the end, by lengthening the sounds at the end, or by using variants of these final sounds that would be expected at the end of an utterance. Any one of several properties, or a combination of several of them, will do the job. Interestingly, different people have different preferences for boundary signals.

In these phonetic studies we see a multiplicity of concomitants and of possible cues, just as in the displaying and detection of a gay identity. In fact, in the case of gay identity there are surely many more possible cues than there are in the phonetic examples, and there is no reason to expect general (tacit) agreement as to which cues are most salient. When I poll linguists about the phonetic characteristics of The Voice for gay men, I get a very wide range of suggestions: the prosodic characteristics considered by Gaudio (wide pitch range and frequent fluctuation in pitch), frequent use of a specific pitch pattern (high rising-falling), concentration of pitches toward the high end of a speaker's range, large fast falls in pitch at the ends of phrases, breathiness (often associated with "sexiness"), lengthening of fricatives (especially *s* and *z*), affrication of *t* and *d*, even dentalization of alveolar *t/d/s/z/n* (which, thanks to its association with the white working class in some northeastern U.S. cities, is often taken to be a marker of masculinity). It is entirely possible that everyone is right—but for different speakers, in different places, on different occasions.

In any case, the more cues there are, and the less agreement there is as to which cue is the most important, the more difficult it will be for linguists to discover the cues at all. Much larger sample sizes are required than the ones that have so far been used in what are essentially pilot studies, and analysts must be prepared to subclassify their subject populations, in the expectation that some of them are doing very different things from others. When these conditions are satisfied, I ex-

pect that gay-straight differences in phonetics will emerge, probably more easily for men than for women, but eventually for both.

Conclusion

Linguists have the tools to investigate the lexicon of the lgb world and to discover phonetic differences between the speech of gay and straight people. Neither task is easy, for reasons I have detailed here, but they are doable, and excellent beginnings have been made on both of these lavender issues.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS An earlier version of this article was presented at the Second American University Conference on Lavender Languages and Linguistics, 17 September 1994. I am indebted to the audience there—in particular, Kira Hall, William Leap, Birch Moonwomon, Ruth Morgan, and Keith Walters—for many helpful and thought-provoking comments and to Hall and Moonwomon for detailed comments on a postconference draft of this article.

NOTES

1. See Wierzbicka (1986) for a nuanced discussion of this difference.

2. Writers who try to clarify their intent in using *queer* often find themselves merely entangled. Doty (1993), for instance, has a diffuse introductory chapter explaining that, as he uses the word, *queer* isn't about sex, but then it isn't entirely not about sex, either. Then, still not fully satisfied, he explores the question some more at the beginning of his first chapter.

3. As applied to women, the two spellings have a history and cultural setting that would not be obvious from inspecting dictionaries of slang, sexual slang in particular, which all seem to treat *fem* and *femme* as mere variants. Yet Kennedy and Davis (1992: 77) observe in their first footnote about lesbian life in the 1940s and 1950s: "We are using the spelling *fem* rather than *femme* on the advice of our narrators. They feel that *fem* is a more American spelling, and that *femme* has an academic connotation with which they are uncomfortable." *Femme*, however, has become the spelling of choice; this is the spelling Nestle uses in the subtitle of her 1992 book and throughout her own contributions to the volume.

4. Color, of course, with its (relatively) easily measurable dimensions, is not a very good model for other sorts of folk classifications.

5. Here is a typical observation, by Morris Dickstein, writing in a *New York Times Book Review* (23 July 1995, p. 6) review of Edmund White's *Skinned Alive*: "Before the 1970's, when direct professions of homosexuality were taboo, writers from Oscar Wilde to Cocteau to Genet made their mark with works that were often theatrical, oblique, florid and artificial. The strategies of concealment many gay people used in their lives were turned into richly layered artistic strategies by gifted writers, choreographers, directors and set designers. For the writers, wit and paradox became more important than sincerity, since sincerity meant self-acceptance (which could be difficult) and self-exposure (which could be dangerous); style, baroque fantasy and sensuous detail were disguises that suited them far better than verisimilitude or realism."

6. Like the studies I have cited, these remarks concern modern European and North American cultures. I make no claims here about sexuality and gender cross-culturally.

7. This particular topic seems to fall uncomfortably in the area between phonetics and psycholinguistics, which means that introductory textbooks tend not to discuss it. Among the psycholinguistics texts, at least two—Clark & Clark (1977: ch. 5) and Garman (1990: sec. 4.2), with a chart of speech cues (192–193) based on Borden & Harris (1980: 184–186)—do, however.

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