

1 What questions might a linguist ask about language, gender and sexuality?

Much of the time, doing a good research project in any area of linguistics is about asking the right questions, and this principle applies to researching language, gender and sexuality as much as it does to any other area. 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, temporal and performative. Scholars in the field no longer ask, ‘What are the differences (between genders and between sexualities)?’, but instead ask, ‘Why is there so much emphasis on differences?’ Research now focuses more on the ideologies which underlie notions of gender and sexual difference, where they come from and why they still persist, rather than the differences themselves (if indeed there are any).

Sunderland (2014) acknowledges that there are, undoubtedly, still many structural inequalities around gender and sexuality in most societies. But, importantly, she links inequality and difference to linguistic *representation* rather than linguistic *behaviour*. For this reason, Sunderland argues that it is still valuable and important to research difference, but only in terms of *represented* difference. For example, it is less useful to ask about how men and women talk, but more useful to investigate how men and women (and other genders) get represented across texts and contexts.

The main questions in contemporary language, gender and sexuality research, then, tend to focus on examining how ideologies (defined later in this chapter) about gender and sexuality get embedded in language and on asking, ‘What role does language play in perpetuating and challenging gender and sexuality ideologies?’ With these questions in mind, the main purpose of this book is to provide you with the knowledge and research skills required to investigate various aspects of language, gender and sexuality in your own original research project. The book will provide an overview of the field, present illustrative empirical studies in a range of areas and address issues in research design and methodology that are most relevant to language, gender and sexuality.

It has been noted that the field has tended to focus more on ‘minoritised’ genders and sexualities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus (LGBT+) identities. However, as we will see, more ‘hegemonic’ identities, such as heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, can also form a valuable part of research.

2 Questions about language, gender and sexuality

In recent years, a range of scholars have noted the importance of *intersectionality* in the study of language, gender and sexuality (e.g. Lazar, 2017) in which other forms of identity intersect with gender and sexuality (see later section). Although no book can be fully representative of a field, this book attempts to draw from research based on a range of different gender and sexuality identities, both ‘minoritised’ and ‘hegemonic’, and incorporates some intersectional studies.

A characteristic of the field of language, gender and sexuality is that the terms relating to identity are constantly evolving and often remain contested. For this reason, it is worth spending some time considering some of the key terms and concepts routinely used in the field.

Defining key terms and concepts

As with many areas of sociolinguistics, the ‘identities’ under scrutiny in the field of language, gender and sexuality are often unstable, contested and, therefore, difficult to define. Therefore, the following explanations should not be taken as definitive but as working definitions. You may come across alternative definitions (as well as a wider range of terms) in your reading. In fact, it is good practice to think ‘critically’ (i.e. not take at face value) about any definitions you come across in your reading. The terms that follow are not exhaustive and neither are they necessarily unproblematic. They are also likely to continue changing in response to social changes. The terms that follow are just intended to provide a starting point for thinking about particular concepts and the kinds of ‘identities’ that are typically the focal point of studies in the field of language, gender and sexuality.

Sex – Traditionally used to refer to the biological state of being female or male. The terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ are only ever used to refer to biological sex. Biological sex (and the accompanying terms ‘male’ and ‘female’) applies to all animals, not just humans.

Gender – Traditionally used to refer to a social categorisation system consisting of a polarised set of behaviours classed as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. Sex and gender are ideologically linked so that masculine behaviour is expected of biological males and feminine behaviour is expected of biological females. The term ‘gender’ only refers to *human* behaviour.

Woman/man, girl/boy – These terms are usually used to refer to someone’s gender, whereas the terms ‘female’ and ‘male’ are reserved for referring to someone’s biological sex. In contemporary work on gender, individuals can claim their own gender as ‘woman’, ‘man’ or ‘variant’ rather than simply being ascribed a biological sex. Thus, gender is now seen (at least in academic work) as having more agency and as something which is dynamic, active and sometimes a site of struggle.

Cisgendered – Someone whose chosen gender identity corresponds to their biological sex and as Identifying and embodying the sex assigned at birth. For example, a cisgendered woman is someone who was born female and is

happy with their female body and with adopting a gender identity which is broadly understood as feminine.

Transgendered – Someone whose chosen gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. For example, a transgendered man is someone who was born female in terms of biological sex but who identifies as a man and adopts a gender identity which is broadly understood as masculine. Transgendered individuals may or may not have had different kinds of medical interventions in order to help them to transition into their desired body.

Non-binary, gender variant, gender queer (and related terms) – A range of terms used by individuals whose chosen gender identity lies outside the binary categories of ‘woman/man’ and/or ‘trans/cis’. It is worth noting that ‘woman/man’ and ‘trans/cis’ are not viewed as mutually exclusive binary systems in the field but are seen more as continua.

It has been repeatedly noted that *sex* and *gender* not easy to define and can have multiple meanings. Baker (2008a) observes, for example, that *sex* can refer to sexual acts but can also be used to define the biological distinction between males and females. Sex is generally considered to refer to a male/female binary, whilst *gender* is thought to operate as a masculine/feminine binary. Baker notes, though, that this distinction between *sex* and *gender* is notoriously over-simplified, and we will see examples of why this simplification is problematic throughout this book. Gender is seen as an organising principle for social life in that behavioural expectations around masculinity and femininity are set up through the repetition of social norms. Gender is perceived to be a very fluid concept, as Baker explains,

Throughout their lives, individual people appear to change their gender, becoming more or less masculine or feminine over time. And societies can either gradually, or quite dramatically, alter the consensus about what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviour.

(Baker, 2008a: 5)

A key point to remember is that gender is socially and discursively constructed, rather than naturally occurring. The only link between biological sex and social gender is an ideological one, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet explain,

Gender builds on biological sex, but it exaggerates biological difference, and it carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant

(Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013: 2)

Colour is a good and well-known example. ‘Pink’ is ideologically associated with femininity but has nothing to do with the biological state of being female. It has been argued that ‘pink’ functions to construct social expectations of girls and women in particular ways which are often detrimental.

4 Questions about language, gender and sexuality

Gender is closely related to sexuality, as sexuality involves behaviour in relation to other gendered social actors. As Baker explains,

Sexuality refers to the ways that people conduct themselves as sexual beings. This covers an extremely wide range of phenomena: sexual behaviour (what people do), sexual desire (what they like and don't like to do and who they like to do it with) and sexual identity (how people express and view themselves as sexual beings). One important aspect of sexuality concerns a person's sexual orientation (sometimes referred to as sexual preference): the extent to which someone prefers opposite sex or same sex partners.

(Baker, 2008a: 6)

Sexual orientation is not considered to be binary, although is often constructed linguistically as such as we will see in some of the examples presented throughout this book.

Baker argues that gender and sexuality are related to each other in a number of ways. One way that people are expected to express their gender is through their sexual behaviours and expressed desires. For example, men display dominant forms of masculinity by being the ones who pursue relationships, whereas women display femininity by being more passive. The bodies that are considered to be sexually desirable are also often linked to ideas about traditional, dominant cultural forms of masculinity and femininity.

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, 2010), 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. Such work suggests that there is a clear relationship between gender and sexuality, that the two are not experienced separately and that they cannot be separated for the purpose of analysis.

Contemporary approaches to gender and language question the assumption that language merely reflects gender and sexuality. Rather than language simply reflecting gender differences, current research views gender (and, now, sexuality as well) as being *discursively constructed through language*. We will consider this idea, along with other current theoretical and conceptual approaches in the field, in Chapter 2. For now, the remainder of this introductory chapter will elaborate on the central problem of all earlier approaches – why it is problematic to focus on 'gender difference' in research – as well as introducing some other key concepts in the field.

Problems with 'gender difference'

As stated earlier, early 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. Despite these early approaches receiving so much critical attention, Sunderland (2014) states that looking for alternative work on similarities across women/men and girls/boys is not easy. This, she argues, is because there is still a dominant, probably universal, discourse of ‘gender difference’ which pervades non-academic contexts. This discourse is easily and broadly appealing, and its popularity is evidenced through the high sales of best-selling books, such as John Gray’s *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* (2002);¹ Pease and Pease’s *Why Men Don’t Listen and Women Can’t Read Maps* (2001); and Deborah Tannen’s *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1992).² The commercial success of such books points to the popularity of publications which are concerned with isolating and exaggerating ‘gender difference’. And books such as these also play a role in perpetuating these kinds of gender stereotypes and exaggerated differences.

In a Google Scholar search for ‘gender difference/s’ and ‘gender similarity/ies’, Sunderland (2014) found that there were five times more hits for ‘difference’ than for ‘similarity’. When searching for ‘gender differences language’ and ‘gender similarities language’, the difference was even greater with hits for difference being eight times higher than hits for similarity.

Findings from Sunderland’s (2014) search of Google Scholar:

Gender difference:	2,250,000 hits
Gender differences:	2,240,000 hits
Gender similarity:	428,000 hits
Gender similarities:	501,000 hits (5 times fewer)
Gender differences language:	2,160,000 hits
Gender similarities language:	282,000 hits (8 times fewer)

These results point to a pervasive interest, even amongst scholars, in gender difference. Sunderland argues that a key reason for this is that the idea of gender difference itself has become commodified. Put simply, gender differences can be sold, whereas gender similarities can’t. As Cameron sums up in her extensive critique of these kinds of publications and ideas,

If these points were acknowledged, the science soundbites would be headed ‘Men and women pretty similar, research finds’ and popular psychology books would bear titles like *There’s No Great Mystery about the Opposite Sex* or *We Understand Each Other Well Enough Most of the Time*. Of course, these titles do not have the makings of best-sellers.

(Cameron, 2007: 163–164)

The prioritising of gender differences in academic research has led to what are now deemed to be inappropriate questions being asked in earlier research. Scholars now consider issues such as, ‘Why are questions that strengthen the female-male/woman-man dichotomy so frequently asked, while those that explore other

types of variation evoke much less interest”, and ‘How much of this apparent dichotomy is imposed by the questions themselves?’ This is quite a complex and important theoretical question – do the questions we ask about gender actually play a role in constructing gender itself? As researchers, these are important critical questions to consider when designing a research project.

The gender difference discourse is also routinely embodied in the ubiquitous ‘gender stereotyping’ which, Sunderland (2014) argues, pervades our everyday lives. Sunderland argues that visual and linguistic stereotypes of ‘gender difference’ are everywhere and exemplifies this with images of such products as pink packaged Sellotape, which is described on the packaging as being ‘for girls’. Other images examined by Sunderland include gender-targeted sweets in packages labelled with the phrases ‘Boys Rule’ and ‘Girls Rule’ and the packaging of babies’ teething rattles which contain the words ‘for a sweet baby girl’ and ‘for a busy baby boy’. The rattles themselves take the form of a diamond ring (targeted at girls) and a handsaw (targeted at boys), and these manifestations create different expectations about behaviour and future aspirations for girls and boys. For more discussion of these examples, see Sunderland (2014). Sunderland takes these examples from the Tumblr site *Pointlessly Gendered Products* (<https://pointlesslygenderedproducts.tumblr.com/>), and this site (and others like it) can provide a good source of data for research projects focusing on multimodal analyses (see Chapter 4) of product packaging in relation to gender difference stereotyping.

‘Behaviour’ vs. ‘representation’

Because gender difference stereotyping is so culturally prevalent, as shown in the previous examples, Sunderland (2014) argues that, in the questions we ask about language, gender and sexuality, there is actually a case for seeking out ‘gender differences’ in (or at least being explicitly vigilant about) the way women and men, and boys and girls, are represented (particularly in different text types and in multimodal discourse). In other words, it is important to examine *representations* of gender difference in order to expose them with a view to then problematising and challenging them.

Sunderland goes on to explain that ‘representations’ of any kind are often the privilege of the powerful (especially those with access to media), with their own interests to protect. So in a society which is still, in many ways, patriarchal, we would expect there to be many representations which serve to potentially disempower (some) women and girls. In fact, many media representations of gender have been shown to ferment the ‘gender differences’ discourse (see, for example, studies by Cameron, 2014a; Freed, 2014; Talbot, 2014). Sunderland argues, therefore, that there is a need to be vigilant about all sorts of possibilities/manifestations of *represented gender difference* (including ironic and subtle ones). Throughout this book, we will consider discourses of gender difference as they are represented in a range of texts and contexts. Building on Sunderland’s work, we will also pay equal consideration to the ways in which difference discourses about sexuality often co-occur with those about gender.

In fact, the very idea of binary constructs in relation to both gender and sex has been criticised by a number of queer theory scholars in recent years (see, for example, the contributions in Zimman et al., 2014). In Chapter 2, we examine how work in queer theory and elements of feminist theory have influenced the field of language, gender and sexuality to the point where dichotomies such as ‘male’ and ‘female’ and ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are critiqued and challenged much more than they used to be.

Nevertheless, Barrett (2014) 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 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. In some contexts examined in this book, for example, a binary distinction between ‘men’ and ‘women’ is potentially important when examining gender-based violence and sexual offences committed by men against women (Chapter 7). 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. And they also encourage researchers to consider how binaries relating to gender and sexuality always *intersect* with other social categories and systems.

Gender and ‘intersectionality’

So far, we have discussed ‘gender’ and its related terms (such as ‘women’) as a coherent and unified concept. As stated earlier, however, gender is multi-faceted and often culturally and socially contingent, and, for this reason, it is more useful to refer to *genders* to capture a more pluralistic understanding. Even though ‘women’ as a social category are structurally disadvantaged in the patriarchal gender order, the intersection of gender with other systems of power based on race, social class, sexuality and so on means that gender oppression is neither materially experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way for women everywhere. Starting from the idea that gender discrimination may be compounded by other identity positions, Crenshaw (1989) devised a theory of intersectionality 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. In fact, much gender theory beyond the discipline of linguistics holds this view of gender intersecting with other aspects of a person’s identity. The concept of intersectionality, then, disrupts the notion of a singular and coherent identity in relation to gender and sexuality. It recognises that there is no one way to be a woman, man, gay, straight and so on. Furthermore, intersectionality theory does not simply view other identity categories as ‘add-ons’ to gender. Rather,

intersectionality describes what Piller and Takahashi (2010: 540) term a ‘fusion of subjectivities’. Or, as Levon (2015: 298) puts it, categories not only intersect but also mutually constitute each other. Levon goes on to further explain,

It [intersectionality theory] asserts that intersections are not to be viewed as ‘crossroads’ of two or more discrete and already existing categories but rather that intersections are themselves formative of the categories in question. In other words, mutual constitution maintains that constructs such as class, race, and gender do not exist as entities unto themselves. Instead, they crucially depend for their meaning on their relationship to the other categories with which they intersect.

(Levon, 2015: 298)

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) 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. Wodak (2008) also adopts this position arguing that it is problematic to ‘isolate’ gender as a variable or factor in investigating social phenomena. Wodak (2008: 193) continues,

Clearly, every human being belongs to many groups and has multiple identities, some of which are sometimes backgrounded due to context, others foregrounded. The constellations change due to, *inter alia*, situational and socio-political contexts, functions of the interaction, intentions of the participants.

Levon (2015) points out that another crucial principle of intersectionality theory is that intersecting and mutually constituting identities are dynamic in nature – that is, they emerge in specific social and interactional configurations and therefore are not stable over time or context. Drawing on earlier intersectionality theorists, Levon encourages researchers to ‘ask other questions’ when adopting the approach. For example, we may ask how speakers use African American Vernacular English (which usually has a raced meaning) to enact gender and sexuality identities. Or we may ask how language usually related to ‘place’ or ‘nationality’ may contribute towards constituting gender and sexuality identities.

Some contemporary gender and sexuality-focused research points to the importance of intersectionality. For example, the 2017 Stonewall Survey of LGBT hate crime and discrimination in Britain (Bradlow et al., 2017) found that young people are at greater risk, with 33 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people (aged 18 to 24) and 56 per cent of trans young people having experienced a hate crime or incident in the 12 months preceding the survey. Therefore, the

intersection between age and sexuality is important for this study. The study also found that black, Asian and ethnic minority LGBT people, LGBT people who belong to non-Christian faiths and disabled LGBT people were all more likely to have experienced gender and/or sexuality-based hate crimes or incidents.

Examples of intersectional *language* studies of gender and sexuality include Eckert's (1989) study of identities in a Detroit high school. In this study, Eckert examines how gender intersects with social class locality to create socially stratified aspirations for the participants and how these aspirations are achieved and expressed through language. Other intersectional studies which take gender and/or sexuality as their primary focus include Barrett's (1997) research on language appropriation among African American drag queens, Pichler's study of the language used by Bangladeshi girls in London and Davis's et al (2014) language-based analysis of gender, sexuality and 'indigenous' ethnic identities among two-spirit Native Americans. Levon (2015) 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.

Transnational approaches and globalisation

Another key issue emerging in contemporary language, gender and sexuality research is globalisation and the importance of what have come to be termed 'transnational approaches'. Whilst these approaches may be beyond the scope of your own research project, it is, nevertheless, useful and important to be aware of these developments in the field. 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). Transnational approaches involve looking at gender- and sexuality-related language practices and issues across national contexts but without making generalisations about those practices. 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 transcends national contexts. In her introduction to a special issue of the *Gender and Language* journal, Lazar (2017) exemplifies a transnational approach by considering gender and sexual stereotyping in a variety of East Asian contexts, including Japan, Korea and Hong Kong. In applying this approach, Lazar notes a commonality that gender and sexuality are closely implicated in the constitution of the stereotypes in all of the contexts included in the issue, even though there may be specific variations at a local level. Transnational approaches, then, can enable researchers to identify shared enactments of gender and sexuality across contexts, as well as how those practices may be

distinctively articulated across different locales. Moreover, gender and sexuality also intersect with other manifest categories in stereotyping, including age, class, culture and nationalism. Thus, transnational approaches also tend to draw heavily on intersectionality.

An example is Piller and Takahashi's (2010) study in which they adopt a transnational and intersectional approach when examining the gendered nature of transnational migration and the role that language plays in the unequal distribution of access to social and economic capital in such contexts. They specifically focus on migrant women and their language experiences in the contexts of sex work and 'reproductive work' (i.e. work in the care and service sectors – child-care, cooking, cleaning etc.). The authors explore how each of these contexts of work feature significant *intersections* of gender, race, class, nationality and language. They examine how the employment opportunities of these particular women are constrained by their intersectional identities, concluding that migration, as a global phenomenon, is inextricably embedded in gender inequalities in their countries of origin *and* in their destination countries. And linguistic factors (e.g. lack of access to particular languages) are integral to constraining these opportunities and leading to exploitation and discrimination.

'Ideology' and 'discourse'

Two final concepts to be introduced in this opening chapter are 'ideology' and 'discourse'. These concepts are so central to language, gender and sexuality research, and have been so heavily theorised and applied from a range of perspectives, that we will also continue to explore them in more detail in subsequent chapters. 'Ideologies' are broadly understood as ways of seeing the world or versions of reality that are produced within systems of power. First used by Karl Marx, the term refers to,

the systems of ideas, beliefs, speech and cultural practices that operate to the advantage of a particular social group.

(Mesthrie et al., 2009: 320)

Fairclough (2003: 9) provides a similar definition of ideologies as 'representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation'. Fairclough claims that we both shape and are shaped by, ideologies, including ideologies of gender. In other words, an ideology is a particular 'world view' which is partially representative of society in that it only represents the views and values of those groups holding the most power. Althusser (1971) developed the work of Marx by arguing that ideologies are not upheld or perpetuated in society by force, rather they become naturalised so that people consent or 'sign up to' ideologies without really questioning them. Althusser proposed the term 'ideological state apparatuses' to refer to various organisations and institutions within a society that function to naturalise and promote particular ideologies – these include the

family, religious institutions, the legal system and education. Ideological power, according to Fairclough (2001), involves being able to project one's own practices as universal and 'common sense' and is usually exercised in discourse. If we consider the previous examples of gender difference stereotyping in toy product packaging examined by Sunderland (2014), we could say that the ideologies of tools being for boys and jewellery being for girls are presented as 'common-sense' practices which are universally accepted. They are certainly not 'marked' as unusual in any way.

Sunderland (2004) further explains that 'discourse' (realised through language practices) is seen as *carrying* a particular ideology or set of ideologies. If we continue to take the product packaging texts as examples, we could say that the texts use language (and other semiotic resources such as colour and images) to convey a particular ideology (world view) of what it means to be a boy (masculine gender) and a girl (feminine gender). In other words, the texts work to create discourses which carry ideologies about girls and boys having particular interests, abilities, characteristics, expected behaviours and so on. And these ideological messages, because they are imbued with power, come to be seen as 'common sense', and this contributes to sustaining existing power relations. Such ideologies, because they reinforce taken-for-granted assumptions, are difficult to challenge and resist. As we will see in Chapter 4, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an analytical framework commonly used in language, gender and sexuality research, which is specifically concerned with ideologies and power and the ways in which they are achieved, reinforced and contested through language (and other semiotic resources).

'Discourse' itself is actually a contested term, and there are a number of slightly different definitions. And Cameron (2001) points out, 'Discourse analysis' is often used as an umbrella term for many different approaches. But it is generally accepted that there are two broad meanings of the term which, although drawing on different interpretive frames, are, nevertheless, related to one another. The first 'linguistic' meaning of 'discourse' is that it refers to language above the level of the sentence. In other words, it refers to longer stretches of spoken and written text. This definition also tends to have a 'functional' meaning of referring to language in use and language in context, rather than to notions of language as an abstract decontextualised system. The second meaning of 'discourse' is used in more of a social, rather than a purely linguistic, sense. In this sense, 'discourse' has been defined as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1992). These social meanings of discourse often draw on the work of Foucault who defines discourses as socially produced forms of knowledge which organise experience and understandings of the world. According to Foucault, because there can clearly be different ways of organising and understanding reality, these 'social' discourses always embody a power dimension and form sites of potential struggle. Moreover, discourses do not simply reflect particular understandings, but they actively shape and construct them. Foucault (1972: 49) famously describes discourses as being able to 'systematically form the objects of which they speak'. When using the term 'discourse' in this second sense, researchers often refer to the 'discursive construction' of particular aspects of the social world, and this can include gender

and sexuality. These constructions can be varied and multiple; therefore, ‘discourse’ in its social sense can be plural – different discourses can be constructed within any context. And, as Sunderland (2004: 45) points out, discourses do not exist in isolation but in ‘constellations’ or, to use Foucault’s term, ‘orders’ of related discourses. In other words, they exist in relation to other discourses, often in hierarchical ways. We will see this in a number of the empirical studies discussed throughout the book.

Sunderland (2004) similarly makes a distinction between ‘descriptive discourses’, which operate at a linguistic level, and ‘interpretive discourses’, which operate at a broader societal, post-structural level. She explains that these two meanings of ‘discourse’ are interrelated as social (or interpretive) discourses are realised and enacted through linguistic (or descriptive) discourses, as well as through other semiotic modes of expression. Linguistic analysis can reveal ‘traces’ (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999) of particular gender and sexuality discourses as they are enacted through linguistic discourse.

Therefore, it is the uncovering of ideological representations and enactments of gender and sexuality which lie at the heart of discourse analysis. Ideology, then, is a crucial component of much current language, gender and sexuality research, and we will see examples of how different researchers have exposed gender- and sexuality-based ideologies in language as we go through the book.

How to use this book

This book is structured so that the theory, research methods and analytical frameworks commonly used in the field of language, gender and sexuality are introduced in Chapters 2–4. Chapters 5–9 then focus more on presenting illustrative empirical studies which explore particular areas of research within language, gender and sexuality. After the content has been presented in each chapter, you will find a list of study questions and activities. These are designed to help you to engage with the content of the chapter in more detail and to consolidate and develop your learning with an emphasis on how you might use and apply ideas in your own research. There is variety in the questions and activities – some ask you to think about theoretical points and issues whilst others ask you to reflect on aspects of your own experience. Other activities aim to give you practice in analysing linguistic data.

You do not have to read the book in the order in which it is presented, nor does it need to be read in its entirety. There is enough flexibility for you to use the book in ways that are the most useful to your particular research project. The book can also be used simply to gain an understanding of the field, even if you are not engaged in actively researching language, gender and sexuality.

A note on the presentation of data extracts

Throughout this book, various data extracts will be presented. When conversational data is transcribed by researchers, it often contains symbols and particular

types of formatting to show conversational features (such as pauses, hesitations and overlapping speech) if they are relevant to the analysis. The conversational data extracts included in this book are presented in Courier New font in order to retain the original formatting as much as possible. If a particular transcription method has been used to indicate conversational features as well as speech content, a transcription key is provided in the appendix. Some extracts have no transcription key because they have been transcribed for content only where the conversational features are not relevant to the analysis.

Non-conversational data extracts (e.g. interview data, online texts, written media data) are presented in a normal font style with no specialised formatting or annotations.

Study questions and activities

- 1 Read, discuss and evaluate the ways that the authors in the list that follows have defined 'sex', 'gender' and 'sexuality' in their introductory books on language, gender and sexuality (page numbers are provided to help you to locate where the definitions appear):
 - Baker, P. (2008). *Sexed Texts: Language, Gender and Sexuality*. London: Equinox. 3–7 ('Sex', 'gender' and 'sexuality').
 - Cameron, D. and Kulick, D. (eds.) (2006). *The Language and Sexuality Reader*. London: Routledge. 2–6 ('Sexuality').
 - Jule, A. (2017). *A Beginner's Guide to Language and Gender* (2nd edition). Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 7–11 ('Sex' and 'gender') and 11–13 ('LGBTQ' terminology).
 - Litosseliti, L. (2006). *Gender and Language: Theory and Practice*. London: Hodder Arnold. 10–12 ('Sex' and 'gender').
 - Sunderland, J. (2004). *Gendered Discourses*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 14 ('Gender').
 - Talbot, M. (2010). *Language and Gender: An Introduction* (2nd edition). Cambridge: Polity Press. 7–14.
- 2 Compare the definitions in the previous readings with Davis et al.'s problematising of binary concepts in language, gender and sexuality in this chapter:
 - Davis, J., Zimman, L. and Raclaw, J. (2014). Opposites attract: Retheorizing binaries in language, gender, and sexuality. In L. Zimman, J. Davis and J. Raclaw (eds.) *Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1–17.
- 3 Discuss and evaluate your own experiences of everyday 'gender differences'. In a similar way to Sunderland (2014), find and analyse texts which visually and/or linguistically perpetuate a 'gender difference' discourse.
- 4 Consider the ways in which your own gender identity may be seen or experienced as *intersectional*. What other aspects of identity intersect with, and therefore help to constitute, your own gender identity?

Notes

- 1 According to HarperCollins, the book has sold more than 50 million copies. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men_Are_from_Mars,_Women_Are_from_Venus
- 2 This book was at number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list for nearly four years. www.debrahtannen.com/you-just-dont-understand/