■ *Mary Bucholtz*
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Gender

Linguists have traditionally distinguished "grammatical gender" (the classification of nouns based on linguistic morphology) from "natural" or "biological gender" (the division of human beings into binary categories based on anatomical morphology). The latter category has been problematized by a considerable body of work in gender theory that demonstrates that gender in this sense is a social construct rather than a biological given, whose "naturalness" is achieved in large part through discourse. The term *social gender* would therefore be a more accurate label for this phenomenon. Moreover, linguists have long recognized that grammatical gender and "natural" gender do not usually coincide (e.g., *Fräulein* 'young woman' in German is grammatically neuter), and linguistic anthropological research demonstrates that a language's gender categories are social resources rather than fixed grammatical structures. Thus attempts to read linguistic structure directly for information about social gender are often misguided. Information about social gender is best sought not in the abstract linguistic system but in how the system is put to use in practice.

The importance of discursive practice is ubiquitous in the much-discussed notion of "women's language" as a gender-marked linguistic variety. "Women's languages" have been cited in communities as divergent as the Lakhota Sioux, the Japanese, and middle-class European Americans. Accounts of non-European languages in particular tend to emphasize the sharp differentiation of female and male speakers, thereby exoticizing these communities, but in fact such "languages" rarely involve entirely different grammatical systems, instead hinging on relatively minor differences of lexicon, phonology, or morphosyntax. In both Lakhota and Japanese, for example, verbal suffixes frequently described as gender-marked basically indicate the speaker's epistemic or affective stance toward her or his assertion. The link between linguistic form and gendered meaning is indexical: it is forged through repeated associations between gender and stance. Although the gender ideologies associated with these linguistic forms are relatively rigid,

Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 9(1–2):80–83.

actual practice is much more flexible, and speakers may use linguistic forms associated with the other gender to index particular stances (thus women may use "men's" forms to index authority or casualness, and men may use "women's" forms to index affection or diffidence).

Speakers can also exploit the underlying gender ideology of such linguistic forms to forge particular kinds of identities: young Japanese women may use men's language to display their affiliation with modernity, while Japanese male transvestites may use traditional women's language to signal their transgressive gender identities. It is important to recognize that such cases of gender crossing more often serve to critique hegemonic gender arrangements than to mark straightforward identification with the other gender: working-class African American drag queens who use stereotypes of middle-class European American women's language in their performances do so not because they want to be white women but in order to challenge dominant ideologies of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

The complexity of gender identity is evident in other forms of gender transgression as well. Within so-called "third sex" categories in a number of cultures—among them the Lakhota *winkte*, the Indian *hijras*, the Nigerian *'yan daudu*, and the Brazilian *travestis*—biological males engage in cross-gender symbolic practices, including cross-dressing, physical self-alteration and, in the realm of language, manipulation of linguistic gender and stereotypical women's speech. Hence transgendered individuals may refer to themselves and others who share their identity with feminine gender markers.

Although these identities are often celebrated for seeming to transcend the gender dichotomy, it would be erroneous to claim that individuals who violate gender norms have freed themselves from cultural ideologies. Indeed, those who display transgressive identities often experience considerable stigmatization and persecution. And although they challenge binary gender systems, they necessarily draw on these systems as resources in identity construction. For example, a hijra may refer to herself with feminine linguistic morphology while engaging in linguistic practices, such as sexual insult, that are strictly taboo for Indian women. Transgendered identities certainly disrupt gender hegemony, but they do not displace it. For this reason, and because the groups that are often included within the category differ in substantive ways, the label *third sex* is misleading.

If these categories do not eliminate gendered subject positions, however, they at least demonstrate the possibility of shifts between positions. For instance, speakers do not generally rely solely on feminine linguistic forms in referring to themselves or others, but rather use both feminine and masculine gender markers in order to achieve specific discursive effects. Thus a narrator may alternate between feminine and masculine forms to refer to an individual whose gender identity or practice changes during the course of the narrative.

Linguistic studies of gender transgression are part of a larger movement within linguistic anthropology to localize gender-based research, for language and gender studies have tended to favor generalization over contextualization. The call for ethnographically specific research has led to an emphasis on the *practice* and *performance* of gender over the traditional foci of

difference and *dominance*. Earlier research often took a comparative approach, seeking to explain gender differences in language use. In the dominance perspective, patriarchal privilege was held to be the source of such differences, while the difference perspective viewed the female and male genders as separate cultures and explained gender difference as cultural difference. The impasse between these two positions was more apparent than real, and both shared a tendency toward universalizing explanations: thus while women were thought to speak differently from men, these explanations required that they speak similarly to each other as members of the same category, women. Such models overlooked differences among women based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, nationality, and local factors.

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's ethnographically grounded model of the *community of practice* has redirected energy to the in-depth investigation of communities constituted not in sameness but in diversity, made up of individuals who are temporarily unified through shared engagement in activity and thus are able to shift identities from moment to moment. Such an approach deemphasizes gender (and any other single dimension of the self) as a primary explanatory category in favor of fluid, situated, and activity-based identities.

(See also *body, community, functions, indexicality, participation, particle, power, register*)

Bibliography

Bucholtz, Mary, A. C. Liang, and Laurel A. Sutton, eds.
1999 Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse. New York: Oxford University Press.

Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet
1992 Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice. Annual Review of Anthropology 21:461–490.

Goodwin, Marjorie Harness
1990 He-Said-She-Said: Talk as Social Organization among Black Children. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hall, Kira, and Mary Bucholtz, eds.
1995 Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self. New York: Routledge.

Inoue, Miyako
In press Vicarious Language: The Political Economy of Gender and Speech in Japan. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kulick, Don
1997 The Gender of Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes. American Anthropologist 99(3):574–585.

Livia, Anna, and Kira Hall, eds.
1997 Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality. New York: Oxford University Press.

Maltz, Daniel N., and Ruth A. Borker
1982 A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication. *In* Language and Social Identity. John J. Gumperz, ed. Pp. 196–216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ochs, Elinor
1992 Indexing Gender. *In* Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, eds. Pp. 335–358. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Department of English
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-4227
bucholtz@tamu.edu