Diversity of approach in language and gender study: affordances and tensions

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9th BAAL Language, Gender and Sexuality SIG Event
‘Language, Gender and Sexuality Research Methodologies Revisited’

8th April 2016
Revisiting
BAAL/CUP seminar 2005

Theoretical and methodological approaches to gender and language study
Current Research Methodologies in Gender and Language Study: Key Issues; J. Sunderland & L. Litosseliti

PART 1: SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND ETHNOGRAPHY
J. Swann & J. Maybin / A. K. Hultgren / L. Mullany / P. Pichler

PART 2: CORPUS LINGUISTICS

PART 3: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS
C. Kitzinger / E. Stokoe

PART 4: DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY
N. Edley & M. Wetherell / L. D. Kamada

PART 5: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
R. Wodak / V. Koller / K. Kosetzi

PART 6: FEMINIST POST-STRUCTURALIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
J. Baxter / H. Castaneda-Pena

PART 7: QUEER THEORY
H. Sauntson / W. Leap
‘Approach’

‘A broad notion of ‘approach’, but as something chosen in a principled way, which then has implications for, and is manifested methodologically in, the researcher’s choice or research questions, data, data selection/collection/generation, analysis and interpretation’

(Sunderland and Litosseliti, 2008: 1)

Approach not as a tool but as conceptual, with theoretical/epistemological as well as methodological underpinnings.
Research into the many possible relationships, intersections and tensions between gender and language is diverse [and] crosses disciplinary boundaries […]. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, this is an area of study that has evolved in the absence of – indeed, has never been structurally capable of producing – any kind of epistemological or methodological orthodoxy; there is, in other words, no single approach that could be said to ‘hold the field’.

(Attenborough, 2014)
Diversity of approach

YET

little explicit discussion of approach

(what an approach allows for, can reveal and makes possible)
Risk of becoming entrenched in our approaches

Risk of taking our approaches for granted

‘any kind of politically committed approach to social scientific research must build in the kind of reflexivity that can lead to paradigm shifts’

Cameron, 2005: 490
'what is each approach particularly well-equipped to achieve? What are its affordances? [...] and its limitations?'

(Sunderland and Litosseliti, 2008: 12)

And what can be gained from a combination of approaches?
Questions that all approaches have to address

• what counts as gender? how is it to be theorised?
with what ‘warrant’ can the analyst claim that gender
is relevant in a stretch of talk or written text?
Orienting to gender?

“’cos you’re a girl you’re supposed to like working with children, I think that’s a classic one as so you don’t mind if you have to take them out to the park or take them to the toilet or whatever, it is ‘cos that’s a mum thing to do”

“I think it’s just seen as a nice, threat-free profession that one can have, and one can still have when one has babies”

(From Litosseliti & Leadbeater, 2013; interviews with Speech and Language Therapists)
10 years on…

Considerations of warrants

Appreciation that language ‘matters’; political angle

Movement across the micro-macro continuum

Intersectionality

Interdisciplinarity

Sexualities
De Fina (2013) Connecting local identity displays to macro social processes

- New directions in interview narratives analysis
- Paying attention to the embedding of narratives in contexts

De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2011
De Fina & Perrino 2011
De Fina (2013) Connecting local identity displays to macro social processes

- Positioning level 3 (as developed in Bamberg’s 1997 three levels models for the analysis of narratives) as a middle ground between talk-in-interaction approaches (focused on participant orientations at the local level) and macro social processes approaches (focused on identity manifested in discourse)

- Connecting what is said at a local level with processes and Discourses at a global level (economic and social struggles)
De Fina (2013) Connecting local identity displays to macro social processes

• ‘In my view, establishing the relevance of Discourses to local identity displays involves paying attention to recurrent patterns in data from the same community. At the same time, understanding what these Discourses are (their contents, semantics, values attached etc.) involves having access to ethnographic data and knowledge’

(De Fina 2013: 46)
Gendered Discourses in Speech and Language Therapy
Funded by Research Sustainability Fund, City University London
Lia Litosseliti (PI); Claire Leadbeater (RA)

• a discourse analytic perspective on occupational sex segregation in the speech and language therapy profession (where men account for 1-2% of SLTs)
• questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with SLTs, recent SLT graduates, SLT teachers, and career advisors in London
• grounded theory principles; thematic analysis; discourse analysis
Building on recent investigations of the role of gendered discourses in constructing and maintaining sex-segregated professions we analyse small stories told by male and female Speech and Language Therapists. We investigate tensions expressed in the negotiation and performance of professional identities and demonstrate how identity work is achieved via accountability and orientation to: past and present self; interlocutors within the interaction; and ‘master narratives’ about gendered work. Small stories act as a medium of professional identity construction, rapport-building and as a site of contestation, employed to (re)appraise the social order, particularly with respect to ‘women’s’ and ‘men’s’ work.
McEntee-Atalianis & Litosseliti (in progress)

I think partly because most of the male speech therapists I met did work with adults not all of them erm and because I think it’s that thing about it being, seeming to be more medically minded than working with children which is...you think of things like the Derbyshire activities, playing with teddies and dollies which I actually love and er but when I try and describe that to people, especially male friends, they’ll you know they’ll laugh. They’ll find it very amusing and they won’t really see that it’s quite a lot of academic stuff that goes on underneath that but when you work with adults – you’re working on things like adult swallowing or working with stroke patients it just automatically seems to fall into a different area, people just assume it’s much more medical
• Level 1: Positioning of characters in the story world & their relationality. Referential level.
(stance; footing shifts; dilemmas; qualifications etc)

• Level 2: The positioning of the narrator with respect to the interviewer/audience. Interactional level.
(co-construction of events; co-narration etc)

• Level 3: Positioning with respect to broader socio-cultural and ideological frames (‘master narratives’).
(intertextuality; discourses about gendered work, gender ‘differences’ etc)
Rationale

Add to bodies of work across disciplines (Gender and Discourse; Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice; Sociological gender labour studies)

Add to the under-researched area of men in non-traditional occupations (e.g. on discourses of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ and ‘hegemonic masculinity’, drawn by male teachers and social workers to construct a masculine identity; see Francis & Skelton 2001, Cross & Bagilhole 2002, Williams 1992, Simpson 2004)

Contribute to discussions on professional practice, service delivery, recruitment, diversity, education and policy; with professional bodies, clinicians, teachers, career advisors, government.

In sum…

The Speech and Language Therapy profession presents an extreme example of occupational sex segregation, which is continuously shored up by a range of gendered discourses and associated social practices.

These discourses are sometimes taken as given and reinforced by participants in our research, yet other times they are contested.

In structural terms, inequalities persist in such workplaces (e.g. in terms of career progression for women, in terms of the positions available for men, etc.) – and these need to be made visible by (among others) critical / feminist discourse analysts.
Gender and language: the current landscape

• Complex language choices
• Political correctness; Indirect and insidious sexism
• Sexist language used liberally and apolitically
• Irony and humour as strategies to debunk critique
• Postfeminism
Thank you!

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