LANGUAGE, GENDER & SEXUALITY

Day 8: Global perspectives
July 31, 2017
TODAY: MORE ON GLOBALITY

• It’s been so fun!
• Today’s readings
  • Ahearn on Nepali love letters
  • Besnier on globalization in Tonga
  • Article report: Amber & Meg
  • Hall on intertextual sexuality in a Delhi NGO
• Ongoing focus on desire & agency not really intentional, but it says something
• Final papers are due by the end of day on August 3rd
• Class suggestions on LSA sexual harassment policy
WRAPPING UP ON VOICES

• Why was homonationalism relevant in Maegaard & Pharao’s article?
• The take-away from discussion of my research
• Two forms of homonormativity that we’ll see today
  • Per Lisa Duggan, “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constitutency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003:179, cited in M. & P. 101) examples”
  • “In this way Duggan's perspective offers a critique of the normalizing project of the LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) community” actually an example of another type of homonormativity, per Stryker
• What is homonationalism? (per Jasbir Puar)
  • Homonationalism is realized simultaneously from 2 directions: exclusion of “non-Westerners” from non-normative sexualities/genders and imposition of Western models of homosexuality
MIXING METHODS

How can experiments and other traditionally “scientific” methods be combined with poststructuralism, critical theory, or ethnography? If so, how?
AHEARN: Q’S

• What cultural/socioeconomic changes were happening in Nepal in the 1990s?

• How was love being reconceptualized at that time?

• What is “development discourse” and how does it show up in letters?

• How did the linguistic form of these love letters relate to other genres of letters?

• What are the risks of letter writing, and what are its rewards?
AHEARN: NEPALI CONTEXT

• What changes were happening in 1990s Nepal?
  • Presence of NGOs & discourses of development (*bikās*)
    • Emphasis on individual agency & fulfillment of individual desires (why?)
  • New road to Tansen
  • Sending girls and boys to school in roughly equal numbers
  • Evening literacy classes
  • Global flows
  • Shift away from arranged/capture marriage toward “love marriage”
  • Public courtship still taboo

• Linguistic changes that resulted:
  • Higher literacy rates, especially among women
  • An interest in the “discourse of development”
  • Love letters as a place to talk about the meaning of love and what they desire from love
  • A recursive relationship between love letters and conceptions of lov
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AHEARN: LOVE IN 1990S NEPAL

• What our attractions say about us
  • Vajra’s desire for a “laiph phrend” of his choosing; someone who hoped to become a “‘developed’, educated person,” like him

• Overall points:
  • Love is not universal and though certain types of feelings might be, those feelings are nested in culture and history

• Not just about agency, but particular types of agency (e.g. agency to select a spouse, but not agency to choose how one feels)

• Development discourse: Images of success as “a lifestyle based on formal education, knowledge of English, lucrative employment, the consumption of commodities, and a sense of self founded on individualism"
Older model

- Something cultivated
- Embarrassing
- Negative
- Following sex
- The result of practical arrangements, interacting with economics, etc.
- Associated with pre-development
- Love marriages as problematic

Newer model

- Something that “just happens”
- Overwhelming
- Positive (despite the torment)
- Preceding sex
- Seen as pure emotion with no relationship to economics
- Yet also associated with development, success (“the ‘main’ meaning of love is ‘life success’”)
- Love marriages as idyllic
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AHEARN: LOVE LETTERS VS. OTHER LETTERS

• Some characteristics of the love letter are shared with other letter genres:
  • Reference to date/time/place of writing
  • References to kinship relationships
  • References to Hindu gods
  • Certain formulaic openings, such as “There’s really nothing special that must be written; this is only for remembrance’s sake”

• Others are unique:
  • Flowery passages, e.g. about how dear the letter receiver is
  • Use of ellipses to indicate omitted content, especially in women’s letters to men
  • Use of development discourse
  • Use of (or attempts at) English, the language of development, esp. in men’s letters
  • Echoed love letter guidebooks
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• What are the risks of letter writing, and what are its rewards?
• Women who elope may…
  • Lose natal family support if the marriage goes bad
  • Experience the same forms of inequality wherein men but not women can re-marry
  • If letters to a previous love interest are found, loss of current relationship and/or being labeled a rādī ‘widow/slut’ (as in the case of Durga Kumari and Mirgun Dev)
• However…
  • Love marriages can involve different power dynamics
  • Love marriages allow for greater assertions of agency
  • Husbands may side with wives over their natal families
• Questions:
  • What is the relationship between small scale (interactions) and large scale (cultural structures) processes?
  • Does globalization involve the imposition of extra-local norms onto local contexts?
  • How do we know when we see new agencies vs. the perpetuation of existing structures?
  • How is gender being informed and transformed in Tonga by the introduction of “new forms of agency”? 
BESNIER: TONGAN CONTEXT

- Recent diaspora, more Tongans outside of Tonga than on the islands
- Ranked society, much concern about shame (mā)
- Former UK colony; market depends on export, foreign aid, & sibling remittance
- Migration & globalization
  - Movement of people the major source of globalizing cultural practices
  - Migration itself isn’t gendered
- Language
  - Choice between Tongan & English determined most crucially by status
  - Risk of being ridiculed for using English poorly or accused of not being true to their Tongan identity
  - But the “appropriation of global symbols” (e.g. English) is associated with women rather than men – why?
BESNIER: GENDERING GLOBALIZATION AT THE MARKET

• Second hand market & the stigma of selling
• Sellers: women, “local Others”
• How is the marketplace a site of globalization?
(1) Seller: *Sai ia kia koe, Sōnia.*
‘Looks good on you, Sōnia.’

Customer: Yeah- if it fits =

Seller: ((ignoring customer’s contingency)) = Ni:ce. (10.0)
What size is it?

(2.0)
Customer: Eight.

(3.0)
Seller: Ohh. (4.0) Too small. (2.0) ‘E hao ia 'ia Mālia. (2.0)
‘Ia me’a.

‘It’ll fit Mālia. I mean,
what's-her-name.’

(2.0)
It’s might fit you, cuz it looks big!

Customer: ‘Jo?
‘Yes?’

Seller: Yeah! (2.0) The waist, look!

Customer: I know-

Seller: I think it’s one of those one that it has to show the
bellybutton.

Customer: No way!

Seller: Aaaha-ha-haa!

Customer: Haa-ha-hah!

Seller: That’s the in-thing in New Zealand now. Even my kids
say, “Mummy, see, it has to show the b-!” Huh! I say,
“No:::; no:::!” Ahahahuh-hh! Cuz that’s the look now!
BESNIER: GENDERING GLOBALIZATION AT THE MARKET

• Second hand market & the stigma of selling
• Sellers: women, “local Others”
• How is the marketplace a site of globalization?
  • Objects are usually secondhand/remaindered goods received as remittances, esp. clothing
  • The pleasure of consumption
  • Talk about global fashion trends
    • But not wholesale adoption: the customer and seller negotiate what is and is not appropriate for Tongans
  • The use of English (and specifically NZ English in this case)
  • Displays of extra-local kinship dynamics in this case
• Fakaleiti, fakafefine (not to be confused with Samoan fa’afafafine)
• Certain cultural appreciations of leitīs, but simultaneous desire to discredit them as men/inauthentic in their femininity
• Cosmopolitanism as just as important as femininity
• How do the leitīs interact with mā (shame)?
• Leitīs as “transgender,” “male,” “drag queens”…
  • How do we talk about global gender diversity?
  • Leitīs respond to claims that they are bogus by asserting that they are “real women”
• The Miss Galaxy pageant
  • Temporary suspension of moral order
  • Conducted mostly in English, questions asked in both English & Tongan
  • Leitīs have to decide whether to answer in English or Tongan: what is the dilemma?
What happened in this example?

(3) Emcee: Miss Joey’s Unisex Hair Salon! What do you have to say to promote Joey’s Unisex Hair Salon? ((lowers voice, translating into Tongan)) Ko e hā e me’a ‘oku ke fai ke promote ai ‘a e- ((rolls eyes, searches for Tongan word)) fakalakalaka ai ‘a Joey’s Unisex Hair Salon.

‘Ahi: ((heckling from audience)) Faka-Pālangi, ‘Āmini!

audience: ((laughter))

‘Āmini: Sorry excuse me, I’m a Tongan (  )

((rest of answer drowned by deafening laughter, vigorous applause, cat-calls))

[1997:Sony:4 0:05:42–0:06:26]
First, what is intertextuality?

How many genders are recognized in India?
- Hijras as “accepted” by Indian society

Hijras vs. kotis
- Why such strong disputes despite their commonalities (stigmatized for femininity, desirous of giriyā, both using [non-Persian] Farsi, movement of members from one group to the other)
- Difference as anatomical, desire-based, determined by familial structures, innate (or not)
- Claims to historical continuity and originality

What is “hijraspeak”?
- Phonetic features: high pitch, nasality, loudness, IP-final lengthening, rising intonation
- Pragmatic features: use of intimate 2nd person verbal/pronominal forms, intimate terms for address for both women and men
- Sexual crudity, loud flat-palmed claps, exclamations associated with hijras, Farsi, lexical items indexing rural “uneducated” lower-classness
What does the parody of hijras focus on?
- The perceived ridiculousness of hijras as positioning themselves within a kinship system as an alternative to normative kinship
- Sexualizing their ritual role (e.g. via the prop penis)
- Hijra demands for money in exchange for blessings

How does class map with non-normative genders & sexualities?
- Lower class, vulgar hijras (and how this contradicts hijras’ discourses about themselves)
- Upper class, prudish women/men, including gays and lesbians

This breakdown and the leakage of kotiness denaturalizes hijra identity by maximizing intertextual gaps

Globalization via NGOs that serve marginalized sexual/gender minorities
- And the breakdown of those normativities in this performance as women at the Center cheer on the licentiousness of the koti performance
CONCLUSIONS & FOOD FOR THOUGHT

• What have we discovered as a class?
• How can we apply these lessons to language reform and activism? Will these tools help us address linguistic oppression? How?
• How can we incorporate social theoretic perspectives and critical theories of power with more traditional (socio)linguistic tools?