

# 10<sup>th</sup> BAAL Language, Gender and Sexuality SIG Meeting

## *Language, Discrimination and Conflict*

Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Highfield House, University Park  
University of Nottingham

### Event schedule

9.30-10.00	Registration and refreshments	
10.00-10.15	Welcome	
10.15-11.15	Celia Kitzinger: Gender and Sexuality in Talk-in-Interaction <i>Room A01</i>	
11.15-11.30	Tea and coffee	
11.30-12.00	Session 1 <i>Room A01</i>	Session 2 <i>Room A09</i>
	Louise Mullany and Dimitra Vladimirov: The language of Misogyny as a Hate Crime: Media Representations and Online Responses	Robert Lawson and Mark McGlashan: Discourses of Neoliberal Masculinity: A Corpus-Based Discourse Study of an Online 'Pick Up Artist' Community
12.00-12.30	Sophie Payne: Feminist Discourse as Dislocation: Using Discourse Theory to Explore Political Struggles in Language	Laura Coffey-Glover (on behalf of the Blurred Lines project team): Reading Between Blurred Lines: Negotiating Discourses of Sexism in Response to <i>Blurred Lines</i>
12.30-1.45	Lunch and AGM	
1.45- 2.15	Session 3 <i>Room A01</i>	Session 4 <i>Room A09</i>
	Eva Nossem: Discrimination and (Hetero)sexism in Dictionaries	Melanie Burns: Constructions of Discrimination and Oppression in Australian Same-Sex Marriage Discourse
2.15-2.45	Arpita Kanjilal: Asserting Hijra Identity by Challenging Dominant Language Ideologies	Lisa Armstrong: Constructing Sexual Harassment in the Hospitality Industry: A Critical Analysis of Policy
2.45-3.00	Tea and coffee	
3.00-4.00	Erez Levon: Negotiating subjective conflict: Language and the Dialogical Self <i>Room A01</i>	
4.00-5.00	Roundtable discussion (conversation to be continued in the Orchard Hotel bar) <i>Room A01</i>	

## ABSTRACTS

### Plenary 1

Celia Kitzinger *Gender and Sexuality in Talk-in-Interaction*

This talk will explore the ways in which gender and sexuality are produced, and challenged, in everyday talk-in-interaction. Drawing on naturally occurring data and employing a conversation analytic approach, I will show how linguistically gendered terms (husband', 'man', 'he' etc ) can work both to reproduce normative and discriminatory practices and to undermine them. I will also show that these linguistically gendered terms are not necessarily deployed by reference to their gendered properties or in order to make gender relevant to the actions in which the participants are engaged and I'll argue that it is important analytically to recognise when gender is 'irrelevant' (and what that could possibly mean in a profoundly gendered world).

### Session 1

Louise Mullany and Dimitra Vladimirov *The language of Misogyny as a Hate Crime: Media Representations and Online Responses*

This paper focuses on language, discrimination and conflict by analyzing a contemporary digital media dataset, collected in response to Nottinghamshire Police's decision to include misogyny as a recognisable hate crime from July 2016 onward. The force defined misogynistic hate crime as 'incidents against women that are motivated by an attitude of a man towards a woman and includes behaviour targeted towards a woman by men simply because they are a woman' (Nottinghamshire Police, 2016). The dataset includes a variety of digital sources, including mainstream news media reports, public responses to online articles, Twitter interactions including #nottacompliment, a key hashtag trending during the period, and Facebook contributions. Drawing on feminist linguistics, critical discourse analysis and online ethnography, we explore the formation and reactions of online communities responding to this policy change.

The analysis initially surveys key linguistic terms governing the trajectory of the debate in national news media outlets, focusing, in particular, on headline and by-line analysis. Following these observations, we then analyse a series of emergent discourses within online misogynistic abuse targeted at Nottingham Police's Chief Constable Susannah Fish and her close collaborator, Melanie Jeffs, from Nottingham Women's Centre. In particular, we explore discourses of normativity, expertise and authenticity from these digital interactions, focusing on gender and sexuality (Who is a real woman/man?), crime (What is a real crime?), and how these discourses are co-constructed and imposed by disparate interactants 'from below'. Findings suggest that public digital participation in the debate can contribute to the creation of a collaborative and supportive community against misogyny, but at the same time it functions as a powerful tool of online abuse and delegitimation of the Police's initiative. We end with a reflection on the interplay between online and offline sexist discrimination and misogyny and a summary of implications for social policy.

Sophie Payne *Feminist Discourse as Dislocation: Using Discourse Theory to Explore Political Struggles in Language*

In the tradition of Discourse Theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), the realm of ‘politics’ is characterised by conflict over meaning and social antagonism. Language is a key site for exploring this conflict; however, detailed linguistic studies in this particular tradition are lacking. Using my own research on contemporary feminist protest, I will discuss how and why linguists might mobilise a discourse theoretical methodology together with analytical methods from CDA – specifically, van Leeuwen’s (2008) social actor analysis and Jeffries’s (2010) work on contextually constructed opposition.

The Everyday Sexism Project, #aufschrei and FEMEN occupy very different parts of the spectrum of feminism today, in both outlook and protest form. In this paper, I will explore the meanings that are articulated around these groups by the groups themselves and by the news media. Where are the points of conflict? For example, FEMEN have been accused of Islamophobia, so how can we see this in their linguistic self-representation? Similarly, *BILD* (right-wing tabloid, Germany) and *taz* (left-wing broadsheet, Germany) both reject FEMEN as legitimate feminist actors, but is it on the same grounds, given the opposing alignment of these papers?

Past feminist struggles have irrevocably changed the current socio-political landscape, and with the current increase in self-identified feminist activity across the world, continued critical study into how feminist protest is constructed and negotiated linguistically is as important as it has ever been.

#### References

- Jeffries, L. (2010). *Opposition in Discourse. The Construction of Oppositional Meaning*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Verso.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eva Nossem *Discrimination and (Hetero)sexism in Dictionaries*

In this paper, I aim to outline correlations between dictionaries and discrimination. By examining various dictionaries and their historical developments, I will draw the attention to how words, especially labels, referring to so-called “minorities”, i.e. social macro-categories as women, LGBTIQ\* persons, etc. have been lexicographed. Also in dictionaries, discriminating discourses can be found, for example, in terms of discriminating style or even in the form of silencing non-dominant voices. Thus it is my aim to show how dictionaries not only reflect, but also (re)produce and reinforce dominant discourses. As both a producer and a product of the dominant discourse, dictionaries mirror and promote social and cultural changes and can contribute significantly the production or elimination of violent and discriminatory discourses in society. Considering this role and weight of the dictionary, the attention shifts to the lexicographer, its producer. Even though some lexicographers rose to fame thanks to their creations, as e.g. Noah Webster or Samuel Johnson, many other remain invisible. But, I argue, the lexicographer is not so much a “harmless drudge” as Johnson himself wanted to make us believe, but the producer of a powerful, authoritative tool. It is the

lexicographer who has the power to (re)produce and strengthen or to modify discourses, and hence to reinforce or dismantle discriminatory and violent discourses. Lexicographers can wield influence on a subtle level by promoting their point of view under the guise of “common sense”, or explicitly take a stance and elucidate their positionality and take a stance against violence and discrimination and for a more inclusive and language (use) and a fair society. I argue for a queering of lexicography in order to bring to light the possibilities and limits of lexicographers and dictionary making.

### Arpita Kanjilal *Asserting Hijra Identity by Challenging Dominant Language Ideologies*

This paper investigates how language ideologies, and language and identity are constructed by the dichotomous view of concepts of sex and gender vis-à-vis how members of Hijra community position themselves in a predominantly heteronormative Indian society. Hijra community is a cultural grouping of transwomen and intersex people, who situate themselves outside of the gender binary, and on that account, are subjected to exclusionary forms of discrimination. This study focuses on Hijras’ narratives of self-identification in relation to how they are portrayed in legal rulings and constitutional provisions, meant for safeguarding the rights of transgender community, and the sociolinguistic construction of Hijra identity in spoken discourse. The procedures used to collect qualitative data were Patton’s (1980) standardized open-ended interview method, LeCompte and Preissle’s (1993) life history interview method and field notes from my PhD research. The data revealed that there are objectionable generalisations in judgements which claim that all Hijras are “third gender” and do not identify as women because of a “lack” of reproductive organs, menstruation and that they are “emasculated men”. Hijras were described as “phantasmagoric beings” who are “neither men nor woman”, thereby feeding into transphobic stereotypes and gender binary. People with intersex variations were referred to as having “genital anatomy problems” and were conflated with transgender people. The words “Hijra” and “Eunuch” were used interchangeably, which is seen as being offensive and related to a history of colonial oppression on transgender community. The findings revealed that Hijras are misgendered, subjected to transphobic slurs and name calling, and that the sociolinguistic construction of Hijra identity at both grammatical and discourse levels are embedded in dominant language ideologies perpetuated by gender binary. This study examined how language plays a significant role in constructing identities, reproducing hierarchies and maintaining social order.

## **Session 2**

### Robert Lawson and Mark McGlashan *Discourses of Neoliberal Masculinity: A Corpus-Based Discourse Study of an Online ‘Pick Up Artist’ Community*

In 2014, self-proclaimed ‘pick-up artist’ (PUA hereafter) Julien Blanc was denied entry to the UK following a campaign against his promotion of sexual violence and assault against women (Travis 2014). This intervention was one of the first occasions where the strategies of the PUA community shifted away from the confines of private online settings and into the media limelight.

Although PUA communities generally position themselves as ‘self-help’ fora for men to discuss methods of attracting sexual partners, the linguistic strategies used in these communities, including how women are represented, discussed and positioned, remain relatively underexplored in language, gender and sexualities research (although see Jones and Merrison 2012; Dayter and Rüdiger 2016).

In this paper, we present preliminary results of a corpus-based study of the online PUA community ‘The Red Pill’, a Reddit board (‘subreddit’) with ~200,000 subscribers. Our corpus was constructed by extracting comments and submission text from the 100 top submissions, totaling ~2m words. We focus primarily on dominant (i.e. frequent) forms of social actor representation and practices that are part of the construction of online masculine identities. This work contributes to current debates concerning contemporary constructions of masculinities in online spaces (cf. Hardaker and McGlashan 2015), and highlights potential research directions in terms of ‘alt-right’ masculine identities.

## References

- Dayter, D. and Rüdiger, S., 2016. “Reporting from the field: The narrative reconstruction of experience in pick-up artist online communities.” *Open Linguistics*, 2 (1).
- Hambling-Jones, O. and Merrison, A.J., 2012. “Inequity in the pursuit of intimacy: An analysis of British pick-up artist interactions.” *Journal of pragmatics*, 44 (9): 1115-1127.
- Hardaker, C. and McGlashan, M. 2015. ““Real men don’t hate women”: Twitter rape threats and group identity.” *Journal of Pragmatics*, 91 (1): 80-93.
- Travis, A. 2014. “Julien Blanc barred from entry to UK.” *The Guardian*. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/19/julien-blanc-barred-entering-uk-pick-up-artist>. Last accessed 9/02/17.

Laura Coffey-Glover (on behalf of the Blurred Lines project team) *Reading Between Blurred Lines: Negotiating Discourses of Sexism in Response to Blurred Lines*

This paper reports on research undertaken by the Blurred Lines project team (Sheffield Hallam University, Nottingham Trent University, The Open University), investigating responses to the song and video to the now infamous pop song *Blurred Lines* by Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams. The song was controversial when it was first released as many listeners suggested that it seemed to be asserting that even if women said they did not want sex, in fact, they did. Such issues of sexual consent are a key issue for feminist linguistic analysis, particularly within current debates about ‘rape culture’.

We distributed an online questionnaire to over 1000 respondents, and conducted follow-up interviews with 9 participants. The survey results suggested that although there was a division between those who interpreted the song as relating to sexual consent and those who found the lyrics unproblematic, there were a significant number of listeners who felt conflicted about the song and video, enjoying the song musically but finding the lyrics particularly problematic. Follow-up interviews revealed how in making sense of the song interviewees both orient towards and deflect feminist discourses, and construct their responses around personal memories and experiences of the song. These ‘small stories’ (Georgakapoulou, 2008) serve as mechanisms for encapsulating opinions, demonstrating conflicting feelings or illustrating links between wider cultural issues such as victim-blaming, rape culture and gender inequality in popular music. Following research in queer linguistics (King 2014; Leap 2014; Motchenbacher 2010) and feminist linguistics (Cameron 1992; Mills 2008), the analysis shows how the various feminism-related subject positions that participants negotiate in their storytelling draw on and challenge normative understandings of gender, sexuality and sexism.

Melanie Burns *Constructions of Discrimination and Oppression in Australian Same-Sex Marriage Discourse*

With many countries around the world having changed their laws to permit couples of the same sex to legally marry, the past few years have seen increased efforts to effect this change in Australia also. The topic became a key issue in the 2016 federal election, with the opposing Labor party promising that a parliamentary bill would be passed to change the marriage act as a matter of priority. The incumbent Liberal-National coalition refused to commit to changing the law, instead promising to hold a non-binding public vote. Seeing the election as a de facto vote on same-sex marriage, lobby groups ramped up their efforts to sway the public.

This presentation argues that during the pre-election period (and still today) the discussion about whether same-sex marriage should be legally allowed in Australia became obscured by debate on how the issue should be decided (a non-binding public vote or parliamentary process), resulting in competing constructions of discrimination and oppression. The public discourse around same sex marriage in the lead up to the 2016 election is examined via a critical discourse analysis approach, with a focus on the media releases, advertisements, and promotional material from lobby groups on both sides of the debate.

‘Discrimination’ is a key construct enacted by those both for and against, and this presentation unpacks how this is linguistically constructed and drawn upon to persuade voters. It is shown how those who support a change to marriage law locate discrimination within the linguistic and social constructions of ‘marriage’ itself as it is currently defined within Australian law, and represent the potential public vote as an act of oppression. It is also shown how those opposed to such a change disrupt this message by positioning a lack of public vote as a discriminatory practice, oppressing free speech.

Lisa Armstrong *Constructing Sexual Harassment in the Hospitality Industry: A Critical Analysis of Policy*

Increasing attention is being paid to the problem of sexual violence in Canada, including sexual harassment, which is especially pervasive in hospitality, and affects “hosts, bartenders and servers, most of whom are female” (Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], n.d.). Despite the prevalence of sexual harassment in hospitality, however, it is rarely discussed in academic research, and few studies have investigated the issue from a discourse analytic (DA) perspective. Engaging in discourse is one of the ways in which institutions and individuals reach consensus about—or resistance to—an understanding of sexual harassment, and research that focuses on discourse and discourse practices contributes to that understanding. To that end, this mixed method study investigates the discourse of sexual harassment at the level of the institution, i.e., the bar/restaurant. Specifically, this project consists of a discourse analysis of five sexual harassment policies from a selection of bars/restaurants using primarily analytical tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Studies, followed by an online questionnaire distributed to Canadian bar owners/managers that aims to understand the alignment or misalignment of these administrators’ understanding of sexual harassment in their workplace with the values, goals, and definitions realized in the policies. Preliminary findings suggest that there is a striking lack of concern with the safety of employees and a marked concern with protecting the interest of the businesses themselves. While this is perhaps unsurprising, it is imperative that protections afforded (some) other workers in Canada be extended to hospitality workers. One

way to understand this problem is to look at the assumptions implicit in the discourse of sexual harassment in and around the hospitality workplace in order to understand and correct these assumptions, and that is the primary aim of this research.

## Plenary 2

Erez Levon *Negotiating subjective conflict: Language and the Dialogical Self*

The majority of research to date on conflicts between sexuality and other intersecting affiliations has been grounded in a theory of identity synthesis, or a belief in the necessity for individuals to integrate their multiple constitutive aspects of self into an internally consistent whole. For example, Yip (1999, 2002) describes how non-heterosexual Catholics overcome an “intractable opposition” between their sexuality and normative articulations of their faith by reinterpreting religious doctrinal strictures, thus enabling them to “harmoniously incorporate” their sexual and religious identifications into a unified conception of self (see also, e.g., Yearhouse 2001; Keenan 2012; Toft 2012). In this talk, I suggest that identity synthesis need not be the only solution. Rather, I contend that individuals can opt to maintain multiple conflicting identifications in tension. Building on recent developments in social psychological theories of the self (Hermans et al. 1992; Hermans 2001), I argue for a more holistic and multi-faceted treatment of sexual subjectivity – one that recognises the variability in positioning and alignment that individuals adopt in the course of their daily lives. In doing so, I aim to go beyond a zero-sum approach to sexuality-linked conflict so as to better document the variety of strategies individuals draw upon to negotiate everyday dynamics of oppression.

My arguments are based on two case studies of subjective conflict as it relates to sexuality in Israel/Palestine. One is the story of Igal, a man from Jerusalem who lives his life according to Orthodox Jewish proscriptions but who also seeks out and has sex with other men. The second is the story of Louie, a Palestinian gay man who lives as an undocumented migrant in Tel Aviv. In both cases, I describe how the men use a variety of linguistic and other social semiotic strategies to mediate the relationship between their sense of cultural/communal belonging and their sexualities. I demonstrate how the men do not work to resolve the perceived incompatibility between these identifications, but instead use language to help them inhabit a space of identificational conflict. In the talk, I describe why the men’s behaviour is important for our understanding of the complexity of sexuality as lived experience, and that it has broad ramifications for our models of how intersectional subjectivities are instantiated in interaction.