***Queer, Latinx, and Bilingual: Narrative Resources in the
Negotiation of Identities***

Holly Cashman (2018)

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Reviewed by Douglas Sanque

Queer, Latinx, and Bilingual: Narrative Resources in the Negotiation of Identities is a vivid, multilayered sociolinguistic ethnography of a Latinx¹ LGBTQ community in Phoenix, Arizona. Traditional explanatory models of bilingualism, language maintenance and shift are based on the transmission of a language from parents to children. Against this backdrop, Holly Cashman identifies a contrastive insight (Rampton 2006:32) between this family-based, cisheteronormative model and the linguistic practices of queer Latinxs in the USA, who navigate daily life with two languages and eschew nuclear family socialisation models.

The theoretical and methodological frame of sociocultural linguistics is informed by two main approaches. First, the author points out the need for *thicker intersectionalities*—that is, the need to look beyond traditional analysis centred on race, class, gender and sexuality to consider the actual lived experiences of individuals in multiple articulations of social arrangements, structural forces and personal agency. For example, one participant, Mario, is a young Latinx gay man who, despite suffering verbal and physical abuse from his father, could not leave home after coming out due to his status as an undocumented immigrant. Thus, Cashman develops with intellectual depth and dexterity an analysis that pays close attention to the various aspects of social life beyond labels such as ‘Latinx’ or ‘gay’.

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The second approach to sociocultural linguistics is represented by *jotería studies*, which is a critical stance on the investigation of nonheteronormative gender and sexuality specifically related to Latinx identities and subjectivities. Arguing against queer theory's anti-identitarian approach, Cashman states that queer theorists do not seem to be concerned with the identity basis of race, which means that their anti-identitarian view of gender and sexuality is white-centred. However, Cashman defines *jotería studies* as a 'critical *queer* approach' (13, my emphasis); it is therefore not completely clear in the text how distant this *jotería* approach is from queer theory, especially if one considers the antiracist focus of some research within queer theory such as Muñoz (1999).

By investigating intersectionalities across the lines of language, sexuality and ethnicity, the book makes important contributions to ongoing debates in language studies, such as language ideologies around bilingualism. Especially relevant is how participants represent their proficiency in English in relation to their coming out processes, since fully living their queer identities means being distant from family members and, therefore, speaking less Spanish. Bilingualism is thereby shown to be tied in complex ways to social issues, such as work conditions, family, social activism, personal sense of identity and nationality. It is possible to argue that research on raciolinguistics could also benefit from considering thicker intersectionalities, since it often does not consider issues related to gender and sexuality.

Another key issue discussed in the book is that of the coming-out imperative, which dictates queer people come out of the closet in order to live a healthy life. Cashman points out that all participants in her research told some kind of coming-out narrative, even when not solicited, which indicates the centrality of coming out for LGBTQ-identified individuals (cf. 66). Despite its importance, the author problematises this imperative as white-centred, showing how it often does not apply to queer people of Latinx/Mexican origins, who may fear losing their family and community ties due to Latinx/Mexican cultural norms. There are also economic and age-related issues for these individuals to come out which may be overlooked by white-centred research, such as difficulties with getting a job.

Chapter 4 stands out as a chapter about stories of *not* coming out. Particularly noteworthy are the 'going in' narratives, wherein people confronted with questions regarding their sexuality simply deny their LGBTQ identity. Such denial is not seen as evidence of shame or self-loathing. Rather, it is a strategy undertaken at the intersection of complex articulations of social identities, such as a need to show respect and concern for their families. Participant Josephina's narrative (cf. 125) is a case in point:

the author argues Josephina chose to deny her queerness so as not to hurt her mother.

Such argument sheds light on a central topic discussed throughout the book, which is that of agency. Cashman focuses on the actions and choices her participants make to live their sexuality, maintain family ties and, essentially, stay alive. An example is provided by Susana, who is described as the agent of her own escape when she flees from her home in Mexico to the USA. However, these participants act within a hostile environment of intolerance, prejudice and even physical abuse that create the need for strategies such as going back in the closet or fleeing from home. By emphasising agency, the author shows with picturesque ethnographic details that queer people act upon their lives, rather than simply being passive victims of white cisheteronormative regulatory frames, but we should not lose sight of the overarching conditions that constrain sexual freedom.

To sum up, the book's greatest strength is to show how intersectionality works; that is, how being gay influences a Latinx man to not speak Spanish or how a woman's trans identity is directly influenced by where she used to live. The call for *thicker intersectionalities* could illuminate more ethnographic research, especially in superdiverse (see Vertovec 2007) contexts where the articulation of identities grows ever more complex. The growing numbers of people requesting asylum in Europe, most fleeing from war and poverty, raise obvious issues of bilingualism and language acquisition. Such research could show, for example, how these people act upon their destinies, usually in conditions of great vulnerability, and the extent to which race and sexuality influence their new lives.

Note

- 1 Cashman uses the "x" to avoid the gender binary *o/a* morphological endings specifying grammatical gender, common in Romance languages.

References

- Muñoz, José Esteban (1999) *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
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- Vertovec, Steven (2007) Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6): 1024–1054. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599465>