Language, Gender, and Sexuality: An Introduction
Scott F. Kiesling (2019)
New York: Routledge, 188 pp.

Reviewed by Vincent Pak

Designed as an introductory guide to language, gender and sexuality, Scott F. Kiesling's textbook takes a comprehensive look at established and contemporary literature seminal to this field in sociolinguistics. Kiesling is a prominent scholar in the study of language and gender, particularly in research surrounding masculinities (see Kiesling 2004, 2005, 2008), and his textbook offers a structured introduction to the theories and empirical findings of linguistics and feminist and queer studies.

While textbooks have a reputation for being dry, *Language, Gender, and Sexuality: An Introduction* defies this expectation. Kiesling, as he admits in this volume, intentionally styles the prose in a conversational manner that allows readers to follow the text with ease. This is particularly helpful for new students of linguistics and gender studies, who may not easily grasp the complex theories that inform much of the field. Chapter One contextualises the flow of the textbook, including the style and nomenclature, and even includes a self-reflexive section on Kiesling's role in a field usually populated by scholars identifying with one or more marginalised gender and/or sexual identities. Right from the beginning, Kiesling demonstrates the reflexivity and criticality that characterise the work in this field.

Chapters Two, Three and Four briefly introduce the basics of linguistic research and gender and sexuality studies, guiding the reader to understand

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why researchers in these fields do the work they do. Fundamental theoretical concepts in linguistics and gender studies are covered in an accessible manner, such that readers are not inundated by complex terminology. These terms include, for instance, the semiotic processes of iconisation, fractal recursivity and erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000), as well as Butler's (1990) influential theory of gender performativity. I particularly appreciate the acknowledgement that a critical approach is crucial to the study of language, gender and sexuality, since criticality is inextricable for any research that delves into such social categories. In Chapter Five, Kiesling explores and problematises the practice of categorisation in language, gender and sexuality. He rightfully notes the violence that categories can inflict on marginalised people through language. Chapter Six takes a poststructuralist turn to discuss identity construction through interaction and Butlerian performativity, while Chapter Seven discusses variationist studies in language, gender and sexuality. The book ends with Chapter Eight, a consolidation of the topics explored previously and the possible trajectories that this field might take.

Language, Gender, and Sexuality: *An Introduction* does exactly what it says. The approachable tone of the textbook is beginner-friendly and offers a welcoming look at an interdisciplinary field that may not always be accessible to students new to linguistic, feminist or queer theory. Rather than having students study the three constituents of language, gender and sexuality separately, Kiesling deftly ties them together by explaining their intersections and highlighting the seminal works that have defined the field. Readers are offered a holistic overview of the field, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of language, gender and sexuality. The textbook not only focuses on academic research, but also features anecdotal experiences of how gender and sexuality may play out linguistically in real life, which adds to the approachability of the textbook. More importantly, at almost every endeavour, Kiesling demonstrates a commitment to show how the relationship of language, gender and sexuality is imbricated with power asymmetries in society. This is particularly salient in his sections in Chapter Five on rape and sexual violence; the literature underscores the significance of conducting research on language and cultural understandings of gender and translating the results to impact laws and policies.

Insofar as the textbook provides a broad coverage of contemporary research on language, gender and sexuality, Kiesling appropriately acknowledges that one has to discern what to include and that this inadvertently leaves out other research. For instance, the volume does not cover language and intersex individuals, a minority group within the already marginalised queer community. Intersexuality can be thought of as disrupting

normative gender and sex categories, especially in how intersex individuals discursively construct their bodies and genitals (Valentine and Wilchins 1997). King (2016) also critically analyses government documents in New Zealand to demonstrate the tension between normative sex categories and intersex bodies, where the latter are often rendered unintelligible due to a deficiency in the lexicon adopted by the government. Research on language and intersexuality could be considered for future editions of the textbook.

It is also understandable that Kiesling draws mainly from the Global West for this textbook, given that American and European scholarship is the key contributor to the field. Gender and sexuality issues are, however, geopolitically contingent, and perspectives from the Global South have been crucial in understanding gender and sexuality in diverse sociocultural contexts. In a recent review of the field, Hall, Borba and Hiramoto (2021) underscore the need for research in language, gender and sexuality to move southward 'through a transnational theoretical consideration of Southern epistemologies'; these efforts must also be included in textbooks that introduce students to the field. This textbook is nonetheless a worthy introductory reader to the often complex field of language, gender and sexuality and ought to be considered for undergraduate syllabi as a foundational guide.

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