

The CALA 2020 Proceedings Paper 8 - 4

Ethnographical Language Work, Paper 4

**Becoming Spiritual: Documenting Osing Rituals
and Ritualistic Languages in Banyuwangi,
Indonesia**

Michael Hadzantonis

Independent Scholar

Eden's East: An ethnography of LG language communities in Seoul, South Korea

Michael Hadzantonis^a

^aIndependent Scholar

Abstract

Motivated by social inclusion, lesbian and gay communities have long attempted to negotiate languages and connected discourses. Social ascriptions act to oppress these communities, thus grounding Cameron's (1985) Feminism and Linguistic theory. This practice of language negotiation significantly intensifies in regions where religious piety (Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam) interacts with rigid social structure (Confucianism, Interdependency), mediating social and cultural positioning. Consequently, members of LG communities build linguistic affordances, thus (re)positioning selves so to negotiate ascribed identities and marginalizations. Paradoxically, these communities model discourses and dynamics of larger sociocultural networks, so as to contest marginalizations, thus repositioning self and other.

Through a comparative framework, the current study employs ethnography, as well as conversation and discourse analyses, of LG communities, to explore ways in which these communities in Seoul (Seoul) develop and employ adroit language practices to struggle within social spaces, and to contest positivist ascriptions.

Keywords: lesbian, gay, discourse, linguistic anthropology, Seoul, South Korea

Introduction

South Korea is quite strongly a Confucian heritage (CHC) (Chang and Kalmansan 2010). Across South Korea, patriarchy and other highly normative values catalyze the maintenance of social harmony, for e.g., maintaining a certain distance from others, a forced politeness as a constructed nationalism, and a strong practice of gendered differentials. These ideologies correlate strongly with others, such as ethno-national identity, xenophobia, a long history of authoritarian politics, militant ideologies, and a Confucianist social obscurity, all of which act in concert (Hadzantonis 2013). To exacerbate this concerted interaction of factors, this region, within which a great percentage of women prefer submissive roles (Pharr 1984; Lee 1998), endorses heteronormativity, yet this endorsement becomes a complex construct, and is at times quite contradictory. At any rate, the heteronormativity, of sorts, has produced an extreme homophobic othering, thus stigmatizing and marginalizing non-heterosexuals as 'deviant' aberrations of society. Abundant oppressive discourses significantly influence the authorization and negotiation of language and sexuality throughout South Korea, as they do the compliance to and subversion of sociopolitical and heteronormative marginalizations (Lee 2007). Oppressive contradictory discourses are subverted and reshaped to develop group requirements through inclusive languages, as individuals attempt to naturalize group and sexual identities, and their aspirations for sexual liberation.

Networks

Contradictions arising from the oppressive discourses of larger South Korean society, re-emerge in LG lifeworlds. Membership in these communities fashions itself on trend-oriented conceptions of sexual 'progressiveness,' and not on critical conceptions of heteronormativity (Pahk-Kim, Lee-Kim and Kwohn-Lee 2006). LG communities reflect on and access homosexual identity as a cultural or political reality, yet with difficulty (Seo 2001; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2003). Here, LG identities offer a novel semiotic with which to restylize a highly rigid social membership. As conceptions of (homo)sexuality have witnessed extensive deferral and limited conscious engagement, though definitions of sexuality are continuously contested through competing and volatile 'larger-network' identities, LG identities remain in turmoil in Seoul. Certain incidents have attempted to obscure or suppress sexual identity, inspiring a need for continuous identity reaffirmation (Hadzantonis 2013), and for the realization of sociocultural challenges to the 'coming out' paradigm. 'Powerful' Confucianist familial bonds (Tu 1985) present a sociocultural semiotic that emerges as a 'reversed Orientalism:' a reappropriation of exoticizing western essentialist notions of Asian societies, to distance South Korean communities from the West (Seo 2001). This reversed Orientalism impedes coming out, increasing the obscurity of LG communities, thus influencing social and linguistic behaviors. Furthermore, exposing LG identities can limit the 'collectivist' requirements of society, to suppress sexual identities. South Korean general consensus has long considered homosexuality as perverted, forbidden, and socially suppressible (Kong *et al.* 2003; Zhang and Min 2013), while not largely differentiating amongst homosexual identities within these respective groups, thus homogenizing the communities (Seo 2001). This process becomes evident by the referent 동성연애자 *dohngsornyongnejah* 'same-sex lover.' This non-differentiation reduces homosexual groups to social non-entities, thus encouraging members to increasingly reaffirm identity (Shin 2006) as a reflexive stance to the suppressing of identity (Hadzantonis 2013). Prejudice toward LG sexuality compounds oppressive discourses, where, the overly sudden widespread awareness of LG identities in Seoul has increased the volatility of these identities, culminating in an attempt by larger social networks to reflexively delegitimize LG groups through coercing members to remain social non-entities, a phenomenon also common in larger social networks throughout South Korea (Shin 2006; Buzo 2007).

LG Identities in Seoul do present a high turnover of shifting and contradictory social membership (King 2008), as individuals spatially and socioculturally shift across these communities, that is, through acts of *hyperthesis*; however, the array of imaginary and possible selves assists these individuals to decentre nationalism, and to better fit into these communities (see Kanno and Norton 2003). Consequently, cosmopolitanism influences gender and sexuality (Jackson 2009), assisting LG communities in Seoul to contest local conceptions of queerness, and to complexify intersectionalities of local agency and membership in transnational arenas (Martin *et al.* 2008; Vertovec 2009). These processes contribute to the transactions of political and sociocultural economies of queering. For example, in heterosexual spheres, the currently metrosexuality movement responds to the need to effeminize and cosmopolitanize the male, and to authorize membership of South Korean heterosexual men within transnational flows. An influx of foreign workers, particularly from Western regions, influences the negotiation of traditional masculinity, and motivates entry into effeminate/metrosexual spaces. Moreover, the insistence of women to explore sexuality and cosmetic enhancements emerges from a contention with transnational sexualities, informing a national/transnational tension on the level of sexuality. National/transnational tensions influence gay men to embody and produce effeminism, but to simultaneously exhibit male chauvinism. Gay communities facilitate membership into communities that legitimize globalized/cosmopolitan identities, through sociolects (see Besnier 2003), aiding subversion of marginalizing sociopolitical and

heteronormative (oppressive) discourses (Swann and Maybin 2008; Greco 2012). This membership significantly increases English-Hangul language contact, reflexively encouraging cosmopolitanism in gay communities (see Besnier 2003) and the development of gay English speech (Provencher 2004), despite the desire to identify with normative standards of 'gayness' (Jones 2013). Lee (2007) notes that society in Seoul has long pathologized lesbianism as an essentialized and destined sexual tendency, instilling conceptions of powerlessness and inferiority through stigmatization of lesbian communities. However, emerging lesbian communities evidence an increasing subversion of these marginalizations, and an encouragement of gender pluralism. Consequently, individuals within lesbian communities negotiate social harmony, through obscuring their lesbian identities, or through limited-period membership in lesbian communities. Women frequently attempt homosexuality and lesbian roles and languages temporarily (Pahk-Kim *et al.* 2006). This reduced affiliation limits the growth of lesbian communities, while also limiting the use of their language registers and characteristics to those of younger generations.

Sociocultural aspirations of younger lesbians, a majority population of lesbian communities, significantly influence lesbian attitudes; imagery, identities, affordances, and languages of lesbian communities thus well embody infantilized styles and fashion commodities. Here I extend on work by both Farris (1988) and Chuang (2005), in that these languages hold strong similarity to other East Asian styles of infantilization, that is, in Taiwan and other East Asian regions. An incessant desire to reaffirm status in this CHC motivates these younger members to enact and legitimize rebellious 'tough' identities with which to contest Confucianist patriarchy, and for which, lesbian communities offer 'identity passports.' Lesbian communities do remodel larger-social-network feminine identities, through attitude, fashion, and language, so to reappropriate social normativities. However, frequently, women attempt to obscure lesbian identities rather than to segregate from society and its normative standards. Here, lesbian communities can 'subvert' oppressive discourses through, for example, reproduction of masculine roles, building semiotic repertoires to reposition selves within a highly (pseudo) patriarchal society (Buzo 2007), but reflexively increase gender differentials within the lesbian communities. These contradictory processes converge from broader social networks to lesbian groups, evident in the rigid formation and maintenance of address labels.

Individuals within LG communities in Seoul construct gender identities through citational linguistic acts (Harvey 1998a, 1998b; Sauntson 2008), that is, discursive reconstructions of aspired identities, frequently in spaces and flows significantly devoid of situated contexts, and acts which facilitate a hyperthesis. These discourses synmediate with and index certain sociocultural factors (Agha 2003; Silverstein 1998; Greco 2012) situated through power, class, and social membership (Halliday, Kirkwood and Martin 1994). This process itself synmediates with the construction of gender identity. I now delineate the discursive strategies pervasive of LG communities in Seoul.

Summary

Unique and inclusive languages facilitate speaker staging and performativity (Coupland 2012), as individuals within LG communities frequently desire to emulate social and sexual identities of larger social networks, local and transnational, despite intentions to subvert oppressive heteronormative discourses. Subsequently, LG communities can expose hidden discourses of larger social networks, through specific linguistic affordances.

Stringent and rigid code-switching practices in lesbian communities in Seoul strongly contrast with the general absence of lesbian discourses in other cities, such as in Kuala Lumpur, or at least in this collected corpus. Despite the patriarchal intentions of Confucianism, cultural models and practices in Seoul exhibit

a pseudo-patriarchy, and more so, substantially a matriarchal society. This matriarchy appears in the language practices of lesbian communities I have presented, in that linguistic practices and related discourses amongst lesbian communities have achieved great distribution, facilitated by women's strong social networks. In addition, languages within these communities develop so to obscure sexualities in this highly heteronormative society. Hence, the languages of lesbian groups increase so to reinforce ethno-national "collectivism". Imagination becomes a necessary construct in lesbian communities in Seoul.

Gay communities in this context also appear to facilitate membership into these imagined communities and thus membership in gay communities indexes globalized identities. The language practices within lesbian communities, however, suggest imagined selves which more strongly index nationalism, evidenced by code mixing practices in Hangul-English word sequencing.

References

- Agha, Asif. 2003. "The Social Life of a Cultural Value." *Language and Communication* 23: 231–273.
- Besnier, Niko. 2003. "Crossing Genders, Mixing Languages: The Linguistic Construction of Transgenderism in Tonga." In *Handbook of Language and Gender*, ed. by Janet Holmes, and Miriam Meyerhoff, 279–301. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Buzo, Adrian. 2007. *The Making of Modern Korea (Asia's Transformations)*. New York: Routledge.
- Chang, Wohnsork, and Leah Kalmansan. 2010. *Confucianism in Context: Classic Philosophy and Contemporary Issues, East Asia and Beyond*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Chuang, Tzui-I. 2005. "The Power of Cuteness: Female Infantilization in Urban Taiwan." *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 5(2): 21–28
- Farris, Catherine. 1988. "Gender and Grammar in Chinese, with Implications for Language Universals." *Modern China* 14(3): 277–308.
- Greco, Luca. 2012. "Production, Circulation and Deconstruction of Gender Norms in LGBTQ Speech Practices." *Discourse Studies* 14(5): 567–585.
- Hadzantonis, Dimitrios Michael. 2013. *English Language Pedagogies for a Northeast Asian Context: Developing and Contextually Framing the Transition Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Halliday, Michael, Alexander Kirkwood, and James R. Martin. 1994. *Writing science: Literacy and discursive power* vol. 8. London; Washington DC: The Falmer Press.
- Harvey, Keith. 1998a. "You're swishing so much you're going to make a hurricane: The pragmatics of the put-down in verbal camp." Paper presented at the *Sixth Conference on Lavender Languages and Linguistics*. American University.
- Harvey, Keith. 1998b. "Translating Camp talk: Gay Identities and Cultural Transfer." *The Translator* 4(2): 295–320.
- Jackson, Peter A. 2009. "Capitalism, Global Queering, and the Production of Sex-Cultural Difference." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15(3): 357–395.
- Jones, Rodney H. 2013. "Verbal hygiene in the Hong Kong gay community." *World Englishes* 32(1): 75–92. doi: 10.1111/weng.12005

- Kanno, Yasuko, and Bonny Norton. 2003. "Imagined Communities and Educational Possibilities: Introduction." *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* 2: 241–250.
- Kong Travis S., Dan Mahoney, and Ken Plummer. 2003. "Queering the Interview." In *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*, ed. by James Holstein, and Jaber F. Gubrium, 91–110. London: Sage.
- Lee, Ji Eun. 2007 "Beyond pain and protection." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 10(3/4): 49–67.
- Lee, Mi Jorng. 1998. *Women in Korea*. Sorwool: Sorwool University Press.
- Martin, Fran, Peter Jackson, Mark McLelland, and Audrey Yue. 2008. *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Gender and Sexuality in the Asia-Pacific*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Pahk-Kim, Soo Jihn, Soo Yohn Lee-Kim, and Eun Jorng Kwohn-Lee. 2006. "The Lesbian Rights Movement and Feminism in South Korea." In *"Lesbians" in East Asia: Diversity, Identities, and Resistance*, ed. by Diana Khor, and Saori Kamano, 161–191. New York: Haworth Press.
- Pharr, Susan I. 1984. "Status Conflict: The Rebellion of the Tea Pourers." In *Conflict in Japan*, ed. by Ellis S. Krauss, Thomas P. Rohlen, and Patricia G. Steinhoff, 214–240. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Provencher, Denis M. 2004. "Vague English Creole: (Gay English) Cooperative Discourse in the French Gay Press." In *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language*, ed. by William L. Leap, and Tom Boellstorff, 23–45. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Saunston, Helen and Jane Sunderland, 271–282. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saunston, Helen. 2008. "The contributions of Queer Theory to gender and language research." In *Gender and Language Research Methodologies*, ed. by Kate Harrington, Lia Litosseliti, Helen Saunston, and Jane Sunderland, 21–28. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Seo, Dohng Jin. 2001. "Mapping the vicissitudes of homosexual identities in South Korea." *Journal of Homosexuality* 40 (3/4): 65–78.
- Shin, Gi-Wook. 2006. *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1998. "Contemporary transformations of local linguistic communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 401–426.
- Swann, Joan, and Janet Maybin. 2008. "Sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches to language and gender." In *Gender and Language Research Methodologies*, ed. by Kate Harrington, Lia Litosseliti, Helen Saunston, and Jane Sunderland, 21–28. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tu, Wei Ming. 1985. *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2009. *Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.