

William Leap and Tom Boellstorff (eds). 2004.
Speaking in queer tongues:
Globalization and gay language.
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 288.

Reviewed by Matthew T. Prior

In *Speaking in queer tongues: Globalization and gay language*, William Leap and Tom Boellstorff have assembled a collection of ten essays examining global and local interchanges of 'same-sex desires, subjectivities, and communities' (p. 4) through the lens of language. Globalization in general, and global queering in particular, are often portrayed as Western-driven phenomena. However, as Leap and Boellstorff discuss, transnational movements of language and identity built upon same-sex desire are not unidirectional, from the so-called Western center to the periphery, but take physical and ideational shape according to the various contexts in which individuals and groups conceive and perform being gay and lesbian.

Recognizing the problematic nature of a discussion on queer globalization, the editors preface this volume by pointing out that terms such as *gay*, *gay English*, and even *globalization*, are often criticized for being over-essentialist and limited in their ability to authentically portray the multiple local and transnational realities of non-heteronormative communities and their unique and overlapping ideologies and practices. In the editors' view, conceptualizing linguistic practices as 'articulation between cultures' (p. 11) is a powerful way to

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consider gay language as locally produced (and contested) linguistic practices as well as dynamic and relational processes.

One challenge in claiming to examine queer or any other globalization is the difficulty or even sheer impossibility of adequately representing multiple realities and experiences from across the globe – not just Western perspectives. In fact, these ten chapters limit their exploration of gay globalization to communities in nine nations: France, Germany, Canada (Francophone Quebec), Israel, South Africa, New Zealand, Indonesia, Thailand, and the U.S. (Cuban American Miami and African America). Addressing this possible criticism, the editors take care to acknowledge that this volume is not meant to be an exhaustive account of global gay linguistic practices, but to show ‘the value that attention to language offers the study of the interface between globalizing processes and sexual subjectivities’ (p. 18).

In the first chapter, Denis M. Provencher investigates the influence of North Atlantic media representations of gay culture, consumerism, and identity on the construction of an imagined French gay and lesbian community of belonging. Examining gay discourse in *Têtu*, France’s national gay magazine, the author describes its use of ‘vague English Creole,’ or a localized hybrid brand of gayspeak which appropriates transnational gay English lexical items and expressions such as *gay*, *gay pride*, *coming out*, and *outing*. Giving further evidence of English influence on gay language in France, Provencher cites the use of co-constructed gay discourse that utilizes gay humor, parody, sexual innuendo, and other associated cultural elements to position speakers and audiences as sharing an authentic gay identity. The author then argues that while gay English certainly influences gay identity in France, a French discourse drawing on shared national and cultural sensibilities also serves to shape a ‘gay way of being’ (p. 41) that is not a clone of gay America, but one that is distinctively French in attitude.

Heidi Minning extends the European view by exploring the function of queer code mixing in gay identity construction, politics, and consumerism in Germany. Drawing upon a communities of practice framework, the author labels this language mixture ‘lavender German’ to both include gay, lesbian and other non-heterosexual communities, and to indicate that while queer Germans may be influenced by ‘lavender English’ terms such as *CSD* (Christopher Street Day), *coming out*, and *queer*, these terms are appropriated to create a queer community that is distinctively German. Through well-chosen examples showing the definitional and pragmatic complexity of lavender code mixing, code switching, and borrowing, the author demonstrates that the strategic use of queer English can serve to construct and reference a shared global gay identity. At the same time, Minning argues that these English-derived terms, by their foreignness, allow for multivocality, as

they directly and indirectly index multiple associations for heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. As a result, the author contends this lavender code, used by those within and also those outside the gay community, is not so much a switch between English and German as it is between a heteronormative German code and a queer one.

Ross Higgins' chapter on gay discursive practices in Montreal provides an insider's view of the dynamic interrelationship between French and English in the construction of a gay Francophone identity. Interweaving a sociohistorical perspective throughout, the author examines language through the practices and lived experiences of members of this gay community. At the same time the discussion attends to the ways in which this gay community is constructed and constructive, the author also deconstructs its foundations, arguing the importance of examining its particular national, social, historical, and linguistic mixtures. Higgins also explains that gay discursive practices in Montreal are used to align speakers with an essentialized Anglo or Franco identity, as well as identify them as members of a larger gay community. Most importantly, the author reminds us that 'gay language is a process not an entity' (p. 100), thus opening a dialogue into gay discursive practices as hybrid sites of power, appropriation, resistance, and identity construction.

Also tying queer globalization into a sociohistorical perspective is Liora Moriel's chapter on gay vernacular and the appropriation of gay English in Israel. The author argues that English, by its assumed gender neutrality, allows Israeli Jews, Arabs, and Christians alike more possibilities for expression and association than does the androcentric grammar of either Hebrew or Arabic. As Moriel contends, while English may not be truly gender neutral, it does allow Israeli people who are lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered a medium through which to imagine themselves as belonging to a global LGBT community. Particularly interesting is the author's discussion of power, politics, and ideology behind local challenges to mainstream Hebrew by the LGBT and gender-bending vernaculars used by a new generation of activists who are 'reinventing the LGBT community in their own image' (p. 129).

Co-editor William L. Leap's chapter investigates same-sex belonging and sexual citizenship at the intersection of language, politics, and ethnicity in post-Apartheid South Africa. Situating his discussion of gay language and sexual citizenship between the tensions of modern nation building with its constitutional acceptance of homosexuality on the one hand, and the entrenched historical and local anti-gay sentiment on the other, the author skillfully paints a portrait of the increasing development of alternative discourses in South Africa around citizenship and non-normative sexuality. Drawing upon examples from bar-naming practices, print media, and life story narratives, Leap argues that

a mixed code or 'creative and flexible language of sexual citizenship' (p. 135) is opening up new ways for speakers to reposition themselves within competing social and political boundaries while connecting with transnational sites of gay belonging.

Continuing the theme of gay language, identity, and postcolonial politics, David A. B. Murray examines same-sex ideology and sexual terminology of non-heterosexual indigenous Maoris in New Zealand for insight into the lives and practices of these double minority members. Connecting indigenous Maori revitalization efforts with the circulation of gay culture and identity, the author centers his chapter on the Maori label *takatapu* (used to index both ethnic and gay identity), revealing a local identity discourse that is made even more complex by the wide range of claimable linguistic, ethnic, sexual, and gendered identities and alignments.

In his chapter centered on Indonesia, co-editor Tom Boellstorff stands out from other authors in this volume by approaching queer language and belonging not as an extension of English or the Western gay experience, but as an authentic, uniquely local discourse. To prevent the reader from equating same-sex desire in Indonesia with Western notions of homosexuality, the author is careful to set off the term 'gay' in scare quotes and italics, reminding his audience that non-Western appropriations of the term do not necessarily imply congruent usage or ideology. Particularly insightful is the author's argument that the Indonesian 'gay' community presents a new way to conceptualize globalization processes that are lateral, stating that '[t]his possibility of a nonthreatening and nonantagonistic relationship to processes of cultural globalization is almost completely absent in the LGBT literature on globalization' (p. 186). While gay language in Indonesia can function as a secret code or an index of identity by those within the queer community, as the author illustrates, it becomes even more complex when this same code is appropriated by popular culture. In sum, this chapter is clear in showing that 'gay subjectivity is not merely an import or a globalized version of Western gay sexuality' (p. 194), thus demonstrating that 'gay' authenticity, place, and belonging can be translocal, not just transnational.

Rejecting even more strongly the idea of a transnational queer identity in a Southeast Asian nation is Peter A. Jackson's chapter on Thailand. Taking a historical perspective to queer sexuality, the author cites Thailand's unique distinction as the only Southeast Asian country to have never been colonized by the West, positioning it as 'one of the few Asian societies to initiate cultural engagement with the West largely on its own terms' (p. 204). This applies no less to engagement with gender and sexuality. The author focuses his examples of the multiple possibilities of Thai sex/gender categories and homosexualities through a discussion of the indigenous concept of *phet*, a Thai word that

encompasses sex, gender, sexuality, sexual desire, and eroticism in all their diversity. As the author argues, while the borrowing of English non-normative sexual terms certainly does occur, this does not imply that Thais had no such pre-Western concepts or categories. Rather, while Western gender/sex terms do have influence in Thailand, they are innovatively localized to fit Thai conceptual categories.

Susana Peña, in her chapter on gay Cuban American men in Miami, Florida, prefers the term ‘transculturation’ (p. 231) to explore the localized practices of this linguistic, cultural, and sexual minority. Framing her discussion against the backdrop of U.S. language, ethnic, and immigration politics, Peña opposes attempts to comprehend the gay Latino experience through Anglo conceptual terms, arguing instead that Latino sexualities must be understood through the unique sociohistorical and geographical contexts through which they have been shaped. Like others in this volume, the author argues that even apparent adoptions of English terms such as *gay* do not signify that their users necessarily interpret or draw upon them in the same ways as other gay communities. Peña also carefully avoids perpetuating the view of gay Cuban American men as an oppressed sexual minority within an ethnic minority. In fact, part of her argument serves to shatter the myth of ‘[l]ily-white ghettos filled with middle- to upper-class men’ (p. 247), suggesting that their empowered position as members of a dominant minority affords them the possibility of transforming U.S. gay culture.

In the final chapter, E. Patrick Johnson further deconstructs the myth of a homogeneous gay experience through his powerful essay on gay vernacular, home, and belonging in black gay America. Drawing upon examples from interviews and films, he reveals the ways in which black gay men in the U.S. employ a hybrid linguistic and performative code to both resist and appropriate oppressive racial and heteronormative discourse, arguing that ‘they have devised intricate discursive as well as material spaces to proclaim subjectivity as family members and sexual citizens’ (p. 274). Lest the reader assume black gay men are merely carving out this space in reaction to an oppressive society, the author reminds us that mainstream popular culture is also being transformed linguistically and culturally by black gay America and ‘marks the beginning of queering hegemonic heterosexuality’ (p. 274).

A theme shared by authors in this volume is the rejection of approaches to sexual desires, practices, and subjectivities that are biased toward Western norms and perspectives, arguing instead the need for examining language, non-heteronormativity, and belonging as multiple, shifting, and locally defined, performed, resisted, and appropriated. Overall, the editors have put together an impressive collection of essays that provide rich insights into globalizations, gender/sexual politics, identity construction, citizenship, consumerism,

transnational interchanges, language mixing, and imagined communities of belonging both global and local. Tempered in its use of technical jargon and drawing upon an interdisciplinary perspective, *Speaking in queer tongues: Globalization and gay language* provides an accessible and informative reference for the layman, student, and linguist alike.