In today’s ever changing academic world, the aim of delivering a multi-disciplinary approach has become much more evident in order to provide a holistic approach towards research. In this new and engaging resource by Routledge, this positive process continues. Billed as the first of its kind, The Language and Sexuality Reader is an innovative collection which brings together historical and contemporary writings from a wide range of academic disciplines including anthropology, communication studies, linguistics, medicine and psychology. With the aim of exploring the connections between sex as a domain of human experience and the language we use to speak and write about it, the reader will find an extensive collection of research to integrate with their learning.

With twenty-three chapters written by international scholars, this resource is divided into two main parts and further organised into thematic sections. In Part One, the Reader first addresses the historic origins and development of language and sexuality research from the 1940s to the 1980s. Entitled ‘Laying the Foundations’, this section contains five pieces on the two themes of ‘anti-languages: of homosexual slang and argot’ and that of ‘Gayspeak: language, identity and community’.

The next section, Part Two, titled ‘Contemporary Debates’ widens the focus previously set by Part One. Moving away from the generic labels ‘homosexual’
and ‘heterosexual’, it explores the diversity of linguistic and sexual practices as documented and debated among scholars from the mid-1990s to the present. This section contains articles within the three main themes of, ‘sexual styles and performances’, ‘Heteronorms’, and ‘the Semiotics of sex and the discourse of desire’. In this part of the book, the focus is on not only the use people make of language to perform sexuality and sexual identity, but also on the question of how language reflects, reinforces and challenges norms defining what is ‘natural’ and desirable in the sexual sphere. The final theme emphasizes the verbal communication of sexual desire.

Part One begins with Gershon Legman’s historic glossary of terms which, in 1941, he considered to be exclusively used by homosexuals. This groundbreaking study is known as being the first comprehensive compilation of the kind. Donald W. Cory continues looking at language usage with his 1951 article titled, ‘Taking My Word For It’. He explores how certain words and meanings, through a geographical context, can then impact the freedom of conversation within the homosexual society. In doing such, he links the resentment against individual words to the conditions and context in which they are spoken.

David Sonenschein is next to contribute with his 1969 essay, ‘The Homosexual’s Language’. Looking at the processes of verbal distinction and the speech of groups within the subject community, he concludes that language of a special nature is one of the primary ways in which a group can give meaning to the experiences of its members. Julia Penelope Stanley continues the discourse with her 1974 article discussing gay slang. She argues that the gay community needs to move away from the destructive definitions that are so evident in heterosexual society and begin constructing more positive self-images. The section is concluded by Louie Crew in support of this general idea. In his 1978 article, and similar to the previous scholars in Part One, he calls for the creation of new ways of being while new self-defined alternatives are being explored.

Following with the historic development of the field, the next section is focused, and adeptly titled, ‘Gayspeak and language, identity, and community’. Beginning with Joseph J. Hayes and his 1981 article, ‘Gayspeak’, in which he coined the phrase, he argues that as homosexuals are ‘America’s largest subculture’, the existence of a discourse style which signifies gay identity is actually a reality. James Darsey responds with his own ‘Gayspeak’: A Response’, also from the same year which stresses the importance of separating general languages with that of the specific way in which groups of people may use language in situated interaction. This intriguing discourse continues with William L. Leap who, in 1999, that while alternative discourse may be authentic, it is ultimately constructed in relation to dominant discourse and therefore does not come from a distance.
It is from this historical background that the book moves forward with Part Two ‘Contemporary Debates’. With the aim to illustrate the influence of recent theoretical ideas on language and sexuality research, the focus is on the mid-1990s and moves onward. With three clear sections, the first area examined is that of sexual styles and performances. Along this theme, Justine Coupland shares her ideas on the structure and content of both written and spoken dating advertisements. She highlights how these adverts show us about the linguistic management of self-promotion and self-display. Scott F. Kiesling shares his fascinating investigation into the US college fraternity system to which he analyses the display of dominance over other men in same-sex groups.

Propelling onward, Kideko Abe shares her research into the link between identity and language, in her 2004 piece, ‘Lesbian Bar Talk in Shinjuku, Toyko’. Her work illustrates that of linguistic behaviour and interactions which is next taken up with Robert J. Podesva, Sarah J. Roberts and Kathryn Campbell-Kibler. From their research, they feel that linguistic forms typically serve more than one function or achieve more than one effect in the production of gay styles. In conclusion, they assert that this analysis allows important cooperative discourse to contribute simultaneously to both heterosexuality in some situations and to the construction of gay identities in others. Therefore one can easily see the impact one makes on the other.

This thematic section concludes with Rusty Barrett and his 1995’s ‘Supermodels of the World, Unite!: Political economy and the language of performance among African American drag queens’. He stresses that as lesbian and gay uses of language might not be easily understood within current sociolinguistic models, greater understanding of such language is necessary when looking to develop the relationship between language and society. This assessment of the significance of further research will be necessary to look at in the future.

The next thematic section, ‘Heteronorms’, focuses on the important part played by language and language-use in sustaining heteronormative social arrangements. While one basic norm highlights heterosexuality as having privileges by comparison with other sexual preferences, this section aims to have the reader question certain societal beliefs. With this introduction, we begin with Celia Kitzinger who, through her research, offers intriguing evidence to counter the theory that LGBT activities ‘flaunt’ their sexuality in that heterosexuals constantly display their heterosexuality in everyday occurrences. In the continuation of investigating heterosexual behaviour, Penelope Eckert focuses on how the transition into a heterosexual social order actually brings boy and girls into mutual and conscious engagement in gender differentiation.

This research links into that of Susan Ehrlich and Deborah Cameron, who look at the sexual politics of university students. With the focus on Northern
American University campuses, they illustrate that the ‘male-female miscommunication’ resulted in instituting complaint procedures and codes of conduct. While Susan Ehrlich concludes in her research that in a certain framework it is the woman who is considered to have failed in her ability to exert verbal control, Deborah Cameron finds evidence that the Antioch policy employed by the university in the requirement to verbalize about sex actually increased the students’ enjoyment.

Also focused on the campus setting, Stephanie A. Sanders and June Machover Reinisch examine the definition of sex for university students in which the heteronormative sex act of choice is heterosexual by definition. When asked at which point they would say that they had ‘sex’, the data resulted in such that a common definition among the test subjects was not agreed upon. The search for a common definition is further examined when Sally McConnell-Ginet focuses on marriage in the sense of whether or not the actual term of marriage by definition must refer to a hetero-sexual union.

The next, and final, section of the book is on the semiotics of sex and the discourse of desire.

David Valentine begins with looking at the definition of desire and concludes that in discussing desire, categories of ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ must be used. Laura M. Ahearn and her research into Nepali love letters stresses that through increased literacy, desire and love are expressed.

Momoko Nakamura then focuses on the invention of schoolgirl speech in Japan and how the absence of ‘no’ can show certain situations to be sexual in relation to gender, erotics, and power. Don Kulick concludes the book with the examination of ‘No’ as a word and how it is used when linked with rape, the Homosexual Panic Defence, and sadomasochistic sexual scenes.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and could see this resource benefiting novice and expert alike. The background established in Part One provided us, the readers, with not only the necessary foundation in the field to build upon, but a solid understanding of the key research that has taken place in the past few decades. The flow between the various sections made the book easy to read and the depth of the analysis and interpretation displayed was outstanding. The variety of topics covered was surprisingly vast and as a result, not only kept my attention but aided in stimulating my desire to learn more. The real success came at the end, I feel, when it was clear that the book provided a fundamental and much needed overview on this area of language and sexuality.

Keeping today’s context in mind, I feel that this is an essential resource for an audience coming from a variety of backgrounds. The extensive scope of cases explored has made this a multi-cultural resource which will offer invaluable insight for the reader. I could see this text being cited and read by
many in the future. The theory was applied and discussed in context with other disciplines and showed a nice balance of both data driven and theory driven interpretations. In this way, I feel that the cross-fertilization between the various disciplines has been introduced. The issues were comprehensibly treated and handled while staying logical and quite engaging to read.

I feel that the success of this resource is in direct correlation to not only the editors’ extensive experience and knowledge in the field, but also that of the scholars they chose to include. In bringing together a superb collection of articles and essays, Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick have provided students and researchers alike with a valuable resource. Their goal to provide a brief historical background coupled with more modern research and findings has been reached and as a result, I would strongly recommend *The Language and Sexuality Reader* for your library.