
The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality

Edited by Jo Angouri and Judith Baxter

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2021 selection and editorial matter, Jo Angouri and Judith Baxter; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Jo Angouri and Judith Baxter to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Angouri, Jo, editor. | Baxter, Judith, 1955- editor.

Title: The Routledge handbook of language, gender, and sexuality / edited by Jo Angouri and Judith Baxter.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021. |

Series: Routledge handbooks in applied linguistics | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020047347 | ISBN 9781138200265 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781315514857 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Language and sex. | Language and languages--Sex differences.

Classification: LCC P120.S48 R68 2021 | DDC 306.44--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020047347>

ISBN: 978-1-138-20026-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-74683-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-3155-1485-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman

by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

Using communities of practice and ethnography to answer sociolinguistic questions

Ila Nagar

Introduction

My research focuses on what informs identity and how identity is formed in interaction. This chapter provides a diachronic view of my interactions with *jananas* and engages with sociolinguistic and ethnographic methods as reliable tools to study marginalised communities. In doing so, I engage with my work with the *janana* community but the primary focus is the theoretical and methodological frameworks that guided my research. I study a community of men who self-identify as *jananas*, also called *kotis*, in Lucknow, India (Cohen 2005; Hall 2005). *Jananas* are assigned male at birth, fall in the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, desire other men, possibly engage in sex work with other men, and simultaneously embrace heteronormative sexuality (with their wives and families) and reject it (as *jananas* with other *jananas* or with their male sexual partners). Thus, they occupy a complex space in the gender and sexuality continuum. I have been working with *jananas* since 2003. An essential guideline for understanding sexualities in South Asian contexts is that sexuality goes beyond mere sexual practice and marginalised people manage it in varied ways that are locally meaningful. Standards with which we view some sexual identities might not apply to others and vice versa.

I use ethnography and communities of practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) as methodological frameworks to study the *janana* community of practice (CofP). Ethnography is defined as theoretical and methodological assumptions that guide a researcher in the field. Ethnography as a theoretical framework for being in the field, writing about research findings, and ways of collecting data has been widely used across disciplines and in language, gender, and sexuality research (see Zimman and Hall 2016 for an overview of this research). CofP is a theoretical framework that, within the study of language, helps researchers understand motivations behind linguistic variation. My goal in this chapter is to highlight the implications of using ethnography and CofPs as methodological frameworks in my work and to underline the collaborations between these two frameworks in sociolinguistic research. It has been more than 25 years since Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) fundamentally changed the way we understood how language variation works and called for understanding local practices to explain more global movements in language change. The CofP framework distinguishes practice from activity, and practice is understood as an aggregate of aspects of practice. These

are practice as meaning, practice as community, practice as learning, practice as boundary, and knowing in practice (Wenger 1998: 54). For the CofP framework the concept of practice implies a deeper engagement with the community which goes beyond simply participating in activities together (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2007: 28) and extends to being incorporated in practices to the extent of being defined by them and also defining them. While early sociolinguistics mapped language use onto gender, class, socio-economic status, occupation, and education, sociolinguistic theory in the last two decades has moved towards investigating local practices that guide specific language usage. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (*ibid.*) brought the communities of practice framework into linguistics from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), which was a step towards understanding how people learn in certain situations and how this learning is a social process, which is a matter of participation in communities of practice. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet demonstrated that identifying communities of practice has an application for sociolinguistics. They proposed looking at language use and social indicators as informing one another. By tracing language variation to the local realities of members of communities, it is possible to understand how local practices govern large-scale language variation. The benchmark of the framework is social practice, and the ways in which regular practices influence language use. The framework suggests that language variation happens within communities of practice which are ‘aggregates of people who come together around a mutual enterprise’ (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464); something that brings members together on a regular basis for a practice that changes their interaction with their world. Engaging in this community of practice/mutual enterprise leads to specific forms of learning. According to this framework, an individual’s identity is constructed in terms of what they experience in their communities of practice and how they (re)present the experience.

This chapter accomplishes the following: (1) it defines the communities of practice framework; (2) it shows how ethnography and understanding meaning-making within communities of practice go hand in hand; and (3) it demonstrates why the communities of practice framework in spite of some of the critiques of the framework (Angouri 2018; Davies 2005; King 2014) was an appropriate tool for me to understand meaning in the *janana* community. In the next section, I outline major works that inform our understanding of communities of practice and ethnography. I then discuss how, as sociolinguistic researchers, we can use CofP to find nuances in the gender and sexuality continua and language use in cultures that we do not know well or in cultures to which we belong. Cultural anthropologists understand culture as historically specific meaning-making. For CofP, culture and meaning are tied to one another. As Wenger (1998: 54) writes, ‘The negotiation of meaning is a productive process, but negotiating meaning is not constructing it from scratch. Meaning is not pre-existing, but neither is it simply made up. Negotiating meaning is at once both historical and dynamic, contextual and unique’. I explain how the nuances in gender and sexuality which are situated in culture allow us to comment on how language use becomes meaningful in communities. I use examples to highlight how the communities of practice framework and ethnography inform my findings. This chapter addresses questions about identifying cultures in communities, finding identity in interaction, and how to make local meaning speak to global ideas about culture, gender, and language use.

Communities of practice and ethnography

A CofP serves as a theoretical tool to determine how people use language to understand their own place within larger structures. The *janana* community is not clearly defined by any boundaries; by which I mean, one cannot locate them by a common space, profession,

cause, or other commonalities that one can use to identify a community. Nonetheless, *jananas* come together around mutually defined practices, and that is what makes them a CofP. These defined practices are what need to be ‘found’, and ethnography seems to offer the other fundamentally important tool in helping ‘find’ these practices.

The CofP framework has been used by scholars to understand language use and to investigate identity in social practice. Moore (2006) uses analysis of narratives to show how girls in Midland High School negotiate meaning and use seemingly simple social practices like dance to symbolise their affinity with a particular social group. Mendoza-Denton (2008), Bulcholtz (1999), and Eckert (2000) have all found similar meaning in social practices unique to the groups that they studied in high schools and communities formed by teenagers around school activities. An entire issue of the journal *Language in Society* was dedicated to identifying and analysing the usefulness and applicability of the framework. In this issue, scholars found that the framework could be useful in explaining language use (Bulcholtz 1999), in seeing categories such as nerd girls and the influence of outside communities of practice on the experience of pregnant women (Freed 1999), and how certain language uses cannot be explained by the community practice framework (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999). While the scope of the framework has been tested in various communities across the world, scholars have also debated limitations of the framework (Davies 2005). Eckert and Wenger (2005) have responded to the critique, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999) have cautioned against using the framework in situations where it might not apply, and others have noted that defining exact practices should be a given for scholars using the framework (King 2014). Scholars have also pointed to macro-concepts ‘such as taken for granted presuppositions about appropriate cultural behaviour’ (Holmes 2018: 34) that can influence interactions between people. An understanding of the full extent to which social factors and cultural norms influence linguistic behaviour cannot be achieved without studying local meaning and deciphering what influences minute speech and behavioural patterns in a community.

A CofP is defined by learning and practices. It is not enough to say that a community of people living together or occupying spaces where they meet and share practices constitutes a CofP. These practices define how a community works in response to the world around it and the parameters of community interaction. These parameters must be articulated by members of the community for themselves and as a negotiation with the broader structures within which they operate to understand the interactions and reactions of a CofP. To say that a community is a CofP without explaining the practices that make it a CofP is not productive to the framework. When it comes to defining motivations behind specific linguistic choices like showing why exactly variation in language use might happen in some contexts and not in others, it is important to highlight practices of a CofP. Ethnographic method is essential in coming to know a community and its motivations. The CofP framework relies on finding local meaning and, by default, propagates ethnographic methods. O’Reilly (2009: 3) writes: ‘Ethnography draws on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions’. Ethnographic methods assume significant time spent with a community, and presenting a written ethnography is an exercise not just in reporting what the researcher learned in the field but is a way to represent social life in its complexity and nuance. How can one find meaning in a community without rigorous study of practice in the community? Therefore, in my view, it is unlikely that one can study meaning and practices in a community without collecting data with ethnographic methodology in mind.

Strathern (1991) points to the complexity of practice and suggests that any practice within a community can be seen from perspectives that make it more and more complicated. Practice is a process, and ethnography engages with it in ways that make the presentation of practices true to whatever level possible. The complexity of practice makes the task of a sociolinguist working with the communities of practice framework critical since no one method of data collection is enough to produce results that can be considered sufficiently transparent. In a way, recognising that only partial connections between practice, communities, and their context can be made is a powerful notion. As we address questions of language use in context within communities, we can look for perspectives that come from ethnographic fieldwork and address their meaning to members of the community. My work with *jananas* included ethnographic methods such as participant observation, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews. Working with the *janana* community using ethnographic methods has shown me varied perspectives on the community which come from the participants who give multidimensional perspectives in what they say about their lives and how I saw their lives in Lucknow. This enhances the richness and diversity of the findings and tells me that *jananas* are a CofP. Questions of meaning within particular practice also need to be explained within the specific context of broader social configurations like patriarchy, casteism, racism, sexuality, or class. Our job as sociolinguists has to be understood as negotiators of these four separate spheres: ethnography, communities of practice, research questions, and the place of a specific community of practice in its own global context (Nagar 2019). A discussion about ethnography and working with a specific community of practice cannot be complete without also establishing the researcher's role, positionality, and the power dynamics their positionality creates within the community that they study. According to Strathern (1991: 27):

I wish to suggest a third way of personifying the ethnographic experience, to draw a figure who seems to me more than one person, indeed more than a person. What happens 'takes place' because it happens somewhere, in the presence of others, because events become interventions, the subjectivity of different persons the issue.

Strathern complicates the picture of ethnography. Representation, the ethnographer, and writing an ethnography inform how one should look at and represent a community of practice and answer sociolinguistic questions. Local ethnographic findings within a CofP can be indexical of wider social factors, power interests, and conflicts. When a researcher is working to understand language variation s/he cannot make connections between language use and a community of practice without also addressing her own positionality, and issues of practice and power that the community engages in to respond to the world – task that only ethnography can answer.

In the next section, I discuss examples from my own research that highlight the complexity of being a member of a community and how this is manifest in linguistic choices members make.

Background and method: *jananas* and their lived experiences

Jananas live in transitional spaces. They are lower-middle-class to lower-class people with uneven incomes and uneven prospects of income. Many *jananas* marry women and fulfil responsibilities that come with being a man in their cultural context: providing financial support to parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, children, wives, and sometimes siblings'

families. Since income is uneven for members of this community, supporting families financially is a constant struggle. Many *jananas* use the money they earn from sex work to support families. In spite of their admissions of masculine roles, *jananas* say that they are not men, they are not women, and they are not *hijras*.¹ In fact, they place themselves in all of these categories and none of them, depending on their context. Being a *janana* means being fluid with gender roles and subjectivities.

My interactions with *jananas* started in 2003 when I was a graduate student starting a research project on language and gender. I knew nothing about this community. As I was looking for a dissertation topic, a contact at a non-profit organisation in New Delhi suggested that I visit Lucknow and meet with *jananas* since my interest was language. I went to Lucknow from New Delhi without any information about what I was going to do. I established contact with a non-profit organisation that worked in the HIV/AIDS sectors for at-risk men and met *jananas* first through the non-profit organisation and then through *jananas* I had initially met. My participant observation and interviews with *jananas* usually happened in three spaces – the non-profit office, city parks where *jananas* ‘hung out’ and some homeless *jananas* lived, and in spaces where they invited me, usually monuments around the city, a quiet street, or, in some instances, their homes. The *jananas* I interviewed presented a range within the lower socio-economic classes. The examples I present below show how I used my ethnographic data to analyse *jananas* as a community of practice to answer sociolinguistic questions. The examples come from two different points in my fieldwork with *jananas* who were rather different from each other yet inhabited the same marginalised social space. As is often the case with ethnographic research, my research questions changed over the years and with the amount of time I spent with *jananas* in Lucknow. I started working with *jananas* in 2003 when my research question was primarily about the *Farasi*: a secret code *jananas* use in situations that need discretion. By 2015, I was primarily interested in the relationship between legal discourses and how something not necessarily experienced by *jananas* on an everyday basis (specific laws concerning homosexuality) affected *janana* subjectivity and ways in which this was reflected in language use.

While my questions changed over time, my methodology remained consistent. I started noticing dimensions of a CoFP in the *janana* community early in the process of fieldwork. In the community, there was mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a set of negotiable resources that members of the community shared. Mutual engagement entails that participants interact with other participants on a regular basis. According to Wenger (1998: 85), ‘Over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise results in a shared repertoire of joint resources for negotiating meaning’, and joint enterprise is, ‘not just a stated shared goal but a negotiated enterprise, involving the complex relationships of mutual accountability that become part of the practice of the community’ (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 175). For the *janana* community, mutual engagement was establishing a certain kind of relationship with *hijras* who could be perpetual sources of support or physical and verbal violence to the *janana* community, or both. It was also establishing a way to engage with family; to hide their *janana* status while maintaining all responsibilities of being a family man in some cases. It was finding a way to be *janana*, and this translated into finding other *jananas* and being with them to learn to be *janana* or mentoring younger *jananas* to be *janana*. Joint enterprise was sharing in the marginalisation that came their way. Reactions to the marginalisation were also shared. Negotiable resources included using gender marking in Hindi in a specific way, giving each other *janana* names, specific swear words, clapping to signify group belonging or anger, and using the special register, *Farasi*. The question for me was not whether *jananas* were a community of practice but why it was relevant to my research aims to show

that they were and how showing that they were a community of practice strengthened my arguments and conclusions about this community. Showing that *jananas* were part of a CofP that was organised in a certain way with dimensions that corresponded with what scholars had suggested as essential for the functioning of a CofP was important because *jananas* were not organised or recognised in an institutionalised way. They were not in a school, they were not learning a trade, there was much fluidity in who was *janana* when, and there was no single way in which *jananas* defined themselves. Yet, they were a CofP because they shared practices, unique to their community. The mutual enterprises of accountability to family, which for *jananas* can be a burden and a challenge, takes the form of hiding from family, running away from one's family, or negotiating family obligation and the *jananas'* non-heteronormative desire. Accountability to family contradicts initiating and helping young *jananas* to become *janana*. Living as a *janana* becomes a process that is deeply tied to maintaining value systems initiated by the family that are contradicted by *jananas'* own desires. The fact that most *jananas* walk these thin and often dangerous lines makes their community a community of practice. However, elaborating on why *jananas* are a CofP does not necessarily achieve a research goal. The assumption of a community of practice is that it can change and influence practices – it can create meaning that is relevant only to the community and as a response to the world (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2006). The idea that identity is constructed discursively has been explored by many scholars of language, gender, and sexuality (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 2005; Eckert 2000; Mendoza-Denton 2008). In the next section, I explore three ways in which *jananas* express their identity: gender marking in Hindi, defining the boundaries of gender and where *jananas* fit, and the parameters of being a *janana*. My ethnographic work shows that *jananas* are a community of practice who learn to use language and other means to define their interactions with the world.

Three cases: the analysis

In all the years that I interacted with *jananas* in Lucknow, Neerja was never too keen on chatting with me, but I could always see her in the sidelines smiling at me or some other *jananas*. I knew she was a *janana*, and she was friends with many of my informants. In 2006, I had been seeing Neerja in and around the non-profit office where she worked for several years, and I asked her if I could interview her and ask questions about her life. She said 'yes' but did not come at the time of the interview. I asked her why, though she did not give me a direct response. I understood her to be shy of the recorder or not wanting to be interviewed. In 2013 when I returned to Lucknow after a hiatus of five years, Neerja approached me to be interviewed. Neerja had had a rather typical experience for a *janana* in Lucknow. She was from a lower-middle-class family, was literate and had a job at the non-profit office, was admonished and eventually abandoned by her family because of her sexuality, had friendships in the *janana* community (many of which were decades old), had a regular male partner, and often encountered violence. My questions for Neerja centred on her interactions with the law, with other *jananas*, and her experiences as a *janana*. Excerpt 1 below is from an open-ended interview that started with a question about Neerja's boyfriend. She told me stories of heartbreak, cheating, and abandonment and how bad the past year had been. That led me to the question about how she was now. Here Neerja spoke about a deep sense of loneliness she feels in spite of her friendships, access to sex, and making a life for herself. While the excerpt reveals much about Neerja's life and expectations, the last few lines of this interview indicate a subjectivity that Neerja has carved for *jananas* – they are even weaker than women, 'ladies', when it comes to matters of the heart. In the distinction that

Neerja makes, *jananas* are not part of a masculine identity nor a feminine identity. They have their own place on the continuum.

Excerpt 1.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. I: Thoda sa better feel kar rahe hain aap? | I: Are you feeling a bit better now? |
| 2. N: Haan, ab to pehle se thoda | N: Yes, now I am a little |
| 3. better feel kar rahe ⁿ² hai. Matlab apna hai. | better. I mean it is mine, |
| 4. Apni zindagi hai | it is my life. |
| 5. Hum kha rahe ⁿ hain, | I am eating. ⁿ |
| 6. pi rahe ⁿ hain, reh rahe ⁿ hain. | I am drinking ⁿ , I am living. ⁿ |
| 7. Fir bhi yeh hai ki man me | Even so in my heart, |
| 8. ek adhoorapan sa | there is some emptiness |
| 9. hamesha rehta hai ma'am | that is always there. |
| 10. Pata nahi kya? | I don't know what? |
| 11. Aisa lagta hai kisi cheez ki | It feels like I am looking for |
| 12. hume talaash hai | something, |
| 13. jo nahi mili hai | something I can't find. |
| 14. Aur jaane kya shayad wahi dhoondne | And perhaps I am searching |
| 15. ke liye hum sochte hain. | and thinking about it. |
| 16. Kotiyon me baithte ⁿ hain | I hang out with <i>kotis</i> (<i>janana</i>) |
| 17. Giryon se milte ⁿ hain | I meet with <i>giryas</i> [boyfriends or |
| | clients]. |
| 18. Ma'am, hota kya hai ki | Ma'am, what happens is that |
| 19. giriya aate hain. Mil jaate hain | the <i>giryas</i> come. We meet. |
| 20. Khair wo to baat alag hai koi | Although that is a different matter. |
| 21. kabhi sex bhi ma'am ho jata hai. | Sometimes I have sex too, ma'am. |
| 22. Hota hi hai | It happens. |
| 23. Jaise ki ma'am poori kisi ke saath | It is like, ma'am, I am not able to |
| 24. ban ke nahi reh pate hai | get along with anyone. |
| 25. Jane kya koi kisi ke liye | I don't know why, but time |
| 26. waqt khara nahi utarta hai | does not fit with anyone. |
| 27. Aur hum log bahut | And people like me [us] are |
| 28. naazuk hote hain, ma'am. | very delicate, ma'am. |
| 29. Ladies se bhi, ma'am. | We are more delicate than ladies. |
| 30. Phir meri soch hai, ladies | I think that ladies |
| 31. apne aap ko control kar lengi | control themselves, |
| 32. lekin hum log bilkul agar, | but when something happens |
| 33. hum log ko dhakka lage, | when we get hurt |
| 34. to hum to toot ke ekdum | we break apart. |
| 35. bilkul bikhar jaate hain | We completely come apart |
| 36. bilkul kamzor ho jaate hain | we become very weak. |

The excerpt from Neerja that I present above is an example of an average *janana* interaction with themselves and with the world around them. Neerja's feeling of being different from men and women that she talks about in Lines 25–36 are part of her being a *janana*. The idea that Neerja (or any other *janana*) is not a man or a woman and is emotionally weaker than

women,³ a belief that many *jananas* hold is part of the practice of being a member of the *janana* CofP. I learned from repeated interactions and time in cruising areas that *jananas* across the age spectrum hold the view of emotional weakness of *jananas* or even women. While it did not become a theme for my work, I learned that specific perceptions about being *janana* were learned and circulated among *jananas*. Ethnographic methods support finding these imperative details about any community of practice.

The second example I present is from an interview with Rajnidevi from 2004. I met Rajnidevi in 2003 and continued contact with her until her passing in 2012. Rajnidevi was a *pacci*⁴ *janana* who was about 50 when I first met her and was a lower-class *janana* who spent considerable time in *hijra* households. Poverty was constant in Rajnidevi's life and defined much of her interactions. Rajnidevi did not have a regular job and her income depended on what she was able to do for *hijras* or sex work. Rajnidevi engaged in sex work and worked as an agent or pimp for other younger *jananas* who could not find clients on their own. She was also often a senior member in *janana* spaces and was given respect due to her senior status.

Excerpt 2 below is from an open-ended interview where I asked Rajnidevi questions about her interactions with younger *jananas*. Rajnidevi's response was centred on telling *jananas* not to be *janana*. She says that the first advice she gives to *jananas* was to not come into the profession, which was sex work. However, her advice was not just about sex work, it was also about being *janana* in general and bettering themselves, specifically by *not* being *janana*. Since being *janana* is not a choice for any *janana*, the response to this type of discourse from seniors is usually nothing. Young *jananas* keep coming to the areas where *jananas* congregate and keep up their interactions with other *jananas* and clients and boyfriends. *Jananas* like Rajnidevi also know this and assume that anyone who wants to be a *janana* will be one; they just give advice on the off-chance that things might change for a *janana*. For Rajnidevi, after it is established that a young *janana* wants to stay a *janana*, the learning and practice of being *janana* begins. This practice includes ways to navigate public spaces, find clients, interact with *hijras*, and other modes of good *janana* behaviour. While there are excerpts of interviews in this section that support my findings, no one interview or cruising area visit or observation led me to arrive at my conclusions about the *janana* community. An aggregate of interactions using ethnographic methods can facilitate arriving at conclusions about why a community of practice is a community of practice.

Rajnidevi also adds information that defines *janana* relationships with the *janana* community. She suggests that she does not interact too much with *kade taal jananas*. *Kade taal jananas* are *jananas* who keep their *janana* status hidden from the world as much as they can. They come to cruising areas but do not necessarily participate in hanging out with other *jananas* or any other forms of social interactions with *jananas* or *hijras*. *Kade taal jananas* do not have the same level of interactions with *jananas* like Rajnidevi. Within *janana* circles, *jananas* who are able to be *kade taal* successfully, that is, be *janana* and be a man and do both contextually and without one persona overlapping with the other, are considered to be living in the best of both worlds. While many *jananas* try to achieve this goal, it does not come easy and many fail. Rajnidevi suggests a certain level of distaste about being *janana*, shares information about what kind of knowledge she imparts to new *jananas*, and finally suggests that if someone wants to be hidden as a *kade taal janana* and does not want to proclaim a *janana* identity, she lets them be. The self-deprecation that Rajnidevi shares in this excerpt about being *janana* surfaces in many other *jananas*' stories.

Excerpt 2.

1. I: Aap choti kotiyon ko kya salah dete hain
 2. R: humare paas kotiyon aati^f hain
 3. to pehle to hum kotiyon se yahi kehteⁿ hain
 4. ki beta is kooche main na aao,
 5. is kooche main kuch rakha hai nahi,
 6. ye narak ki zindigi hai.
 7. Agar humare samjhane se maan jaye
 8. to zyada better hai,
 9. agar samjhane se nahi manti^f ho
 10. to vo tumhare upar hai.
 11. Agar ana chahti^f ho to aao
 12. agar nahi ana chahti^f,
 13. sambhalna chahti^f ho to sambhal jao.
 14. Jo nahi sambhalti^f hai
 15. ana chahtif hain to phir
 16. unko sari baatein batani padti hain.
 17. Inko ye kehte hain,
 18. inko ye kehte hain.
 19. Inse hoshiyar rehna,
 20. police walon se hoshiyar rehna.
 21. Har baatein unko samjhaya jata hai
 22. Bahut si kotiyon hain jo apna
 23. kade tal main rehti^f hain,
 24. jananiyan mili, unse baat kiya,
 25. uske bad kehti^f hain ki, ‘kade ho jao’
 26. apna...phir hum
 27. un kotiyon se milna bhi
 28. nahi ichchuk karateⁿ
 29. hain ki bhai tum apne ko
 30. band roop main rehna chah rahi^f ho
 31. to band roop main raho na khulo
 32. to zyada achcha hain
 33. tumhara jaise dhanda chale
 34. waise achcha hai.
- I: What advice do you give to younger *kotis*?
R: The *kotis* that come to me, first I say to the *kotis*, ‘Child, don’t come in this place. There is nothing here. This is the life of hell. If they understand what I say then it is better. If you don’t understand, then it is up to you. If you want to come, if you don’t want to come, if you can better yourself, better yourself.’
The ones who don’t better themselves who want to come in this, then we have to explain everything to them:
‘This is called this. This is called that. Be careful of this, be careful of the police.’
We have to explain everything to them.
There are many *kotis* who live in *kade*.
They meet *jananis*, talk to them then they say, ‘Be *kade*.’
My...then I don’t even like to meet those *kotis*.
The thing is, if you want to be hidden form, then stay hidden form.
That is better.
However you can make your work, that is good.

The third example is from a conversation with Imrana from 2004. I met Imrana very early on in fieldwork and continue to interact with her to this day. The last time I met and interviewed her was in 2015. Imrana is a *kade taal janana* who lived with her family which comprised of two brothers and their families, five nieces and nephews, a mother, and one sister. Imrana took on the responsibilities of a son in the household: providing financial help wherever possible and being available to take care of the needs of the family. Imrana was in her late twenties when I

met her and she had a story fit for a novel. She ran away from her home when she was still a teenager and joined a *hijra* group. She danced with *hijras*, went around North India Hindu and Islamic religious sites, worked in the Middle East, and now lives a simple life as a *kade taal janana* who does not engage in sex work and mentors young entrants into the community. The conversation below was between Imrana and me in the presence of another *janana* in the non-profit office. The *janana* who was present during the conversation was Imrana's friend, and I knew her well. In many interviews I had heard *jananas* talk about '*bigadna*', a Hindi verb which means 'to go bad'/'to rot'/'to be spoiled'. It is used in reference to food that has gone rotten or people who have chosen paths that do not coincide with 'proper' behaviour. *Jananas* use '*bigadna*' to tease each other about sexual misconduct, comparing each other's degree of '*bigadna*'; they use it to describe their coming into sex work (like Imrana does below), and as a way to establish camaraderie. I was curious about why *jananas* used this word for each other because of the negative meaning associated with the word. My question for Imrana was about the choice of this particular word for specific *janana* choices. She did not answer this part of my question but did explain her own process of '*bigadna*'. She has a *janana* heart, she says, meaning desire for men and for women's work, such as cooking, cleaning, other household work, for professions like sewing, and for feminine products, such as makeup and clothing. With a *janana* heart, Imrana found a *janana* friend and explored Lucknow by roaming around and finding other *jananas* and men interested in *jananas*.

Excerpt 3.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ila: aap log jaise kehte hain na, 2. hum tab bigde, to 3. bigadna kyon kehte hain? 4. Imrana: bigadna ka matlab ye hua 5. jaise hum apko bataien, 6. jaise hum chauda saal ki umar ke theⁿ, 7. hamara dil <i>janana</i> tha. 8. humne samaj main ye nahi 9. dekha tha ki dhandha kahan hota hai, 10. janane kahan baithte hain, 11. matakne chatakne wale 12. kahan baithte hain. 13. Ab ye hamare mohalla ki taraf
 14. se guzre, <i>janana</i> matakta chatakta hua, 15. Humne inhe dekha, 16. inse salam dua kari. 17. Humari inki dosti aa gayi, 18. hamari bhi adat ban gayi 19. inke saath ghoomne ki. 20. Phir ghomte ghoomte hum bhi 21. parko main jakar baitheⁿ lageⁿ, 22. hum inke saath ane lage jaaneⁿ lageⁿ
 23. baitheⁿ uthneⁿ lageⁿ. 24. Humne dekha samaj. | <p>Ila: Like you guys say,
'That is when I got spoiled.'
Why do you say 'spoiled'?</p> <p>Imrana: Being spoiled means...
Now let me tell you,
like I wasⁿ 14 years old
my heart was <i>janana</i>.
I had not seen
where sex work is done,
where <i>jananas</i> hang out.
People who sway and move hips –
where these people hang out.
Now this one came to my
neighbourhood,
a <i>janana</i> swaying and moving hips.
I saw him,
I greeted him.
We became friends.
I also got into the habit of
going out and roaming about.
After roaming about for a while.
I startedⁿ sittingⁿ in parks.
I startedⁿ comingⁿ and goingⁿ with
this one.
I startedⁿ hangingⁿ out with him.
I saw the world around me.</p> |
|---|---|

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>25. Jab yahan se dekha dhanda hota hai
 26. to humne bhi shuroo kar diya.
 27. Isko kehthe hain hum
 28. yahan se ab bigad gaye.</p> | <p>I saw where sex work was done,
 so I also started.
 This is called,
 ‘we got spoilt from here.’</p> |
|---|--|

While on the face of it the three examples I present in this section are parts of larger conversations I had with Neerja, Rajnidevi, and Imrana, and do not give us a full picture into their lives, they give us relevant pieces of information about how *jananas* see the world around them. All three *jananas* in this section were *jananas* telling me about the consequences of their sexual desires. Neerja and Imrana were *kade taal jananas* while Rajnidevi was a *pacci janana*. Yet, there were other differences too. Neerja and Imrana, while they were both *kade taal*, had very different family pressures. Neerja lived alone, had lived with a boyfriend at one point and had no financial responsibility for her family. Imrana lived with her family, had contributed significantly to the well-being of her family both financially and in terms of family prestige, and had a very different outlook on what it meant to be *janana*. While Imrana, Neerja, and Rajnidevi had uneven incomes and no regular sources of money, Imrana felt financial pressures that were different from Neerja’s, and Rajnidevi was often reliant on others to provide for her food. For Imrana being a *janana* was an indulgence, for Neerja, it was a life, and for Rajnidevi it was a life choice. Neerja’s example primarily points to categories of gender that Neerja has created and where she finds *jananas*. For Neerja, *jananas* do not fit the male or the female category. They are something else, even more fragile than women are. Rajnidevi’s example informs us about some relevant parameters in the *janana* community of practice. We see that senior members engage new and younger members and can actively engage in teaching them about being *janana*. Imrana’s example also gives us a glimpse of how exactly members of this community come to understand membership and become members. It is a matter of knowing someone who has or understands a *janana* heart and is willing to show a younger *janana* the ropes of being a *janana*.

While the primary pieces of information from these examples are easy to extract, the ethnographic task is identifying the key insights in these brief excerpts as members of the *janana* CoFP. The specifics that these examples present are not easy to parse if one does not have a complete picture of the community. It is the task of the ethnographer through participant observation, interviews, and interactions to decipher these categories. The CoFP framework, while based in practice and learning, cannot be utilised fully if issues of power, hierarchy, and social structure within communities of practice are not uncovered. This is why it is pertinent that an ethnographic approach be written into finding and commenting on structures of language change or variation in communities of practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have established what the communities of practice framework is meant to do, I have shown why ethnographic methods are central to finding meaning within communities of practice, and I have shown why the communities of practice framework is a highly appropriate tool for me to understand meaning in the *janana* community. Yet, one question that remains to be answered is, how does suggesting that meaning is created and maintained within a community of practice help us to understand why community members create the meaning that they do? Why is Neerja’s response to abuse a creation of a category of gender that in her world is weaker than women in its response to abuse? Why is it that *jananas* see themselves as people who engage in ‘*bigadna*’, a quality that is not celebrated

outside the *janana* circles but can have some positive connotations for *jananas*? Why is it that Rajnidevi needs a certain amount of openness from a *janana* before she lets them into her life? Each of these boundaries that these *jananas* have created are responses to their ways of dealing with the world. These can only be understood in the context of this CofP and how it is placed in the broader context of Lucknow and in the sexuality continuum. This CofP comes into focus only by engaging with it through ethnographic methods.

Future directions

Introducing an emphasis on local realities within an understanding of community-based practices can help us flag blind spots in our interpretations of how language, gender, and sexuality can be connected. Local practices can be hard to identify. A collaboration between CofP and ethnographic methods along with an understanding of some of the challenges and their remedies that methods can pose (see Angouri 2015, 2018; Holmes 2018; King 2014 for a comment on CofPs and; Banerjea 2014; Long et.al. 2009; Nagar 2014 for a comment on ethnography) can enhance a researcher's understanding of their own data. Future directions in work on CofPs and how they influence language change should see language variation as a result of localised realities. Local realities can be situated in marginalisation and can help us understand structures within communities or structures of which communities are a part. Ethnographies conducted over periods of time are fundamental to these pursuits.

Notes

- 1 *Hijras* are a transgender presence in India who also have ritualistic and religious roles, for instance the blessing of newborn children. For more on *hijras* see Reddy 2005, Hall and O'Donovan 1996.
- 2 Hindi has grammatical gender. The verb in Hindi agrees with the nominative argument. The gender, person, and number is indicated on the verb morphologically in past and present perfect tenses, future tense, past habitual, and past, present and future continuous. In case of compound verbs, gender and number is indicated on the all delexicalised verbs in all tenses. Gender is also marked on some adjectives, pronouns, and some postpositions. *Jananas* vary gender marking as their context changes. In the examples, I use superscript m (for masculine), f (for feminine), and n (for neutral) to signify which gender marking a *janana* is using. Neutral is a dialect feature of the dialect of Hindi spoken in Lucknow where the second person plural conjugations, which are not marked for gender, are used in first person.
- 3 This sentiment is alien to us as a Western audience and speaks to the obvious sexism of the system of which *jananas* are a part.
- 4 A *pacci janana* (as opposed to a *kade taal janana*) is more open about their status as a *janana* and about their sexuality. While *pacci jananas* can live with family and support families, many of them live alone or with boyfriends and other *jananas*. *Pacci jananas* engage in sex work more openly than *kade taal jananas*.

Further reading

- Eckert, P. (2012) 'Three waves of variation study: the emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, pp. 87–100.
Provides a history of sociolinguistic methods and explains why the third wave is important for understanding linguistic variation.
- King, B. (2014) 'Tracing the emergence of a community of practice: beyond presupposition in sociolinguistic research', *Language in Society*, 43(1), pp. 61–81.
Provides an analysis of the pitfalls of using the communities of practice framework.

Related topics

Anthropological discourse analysis and the social ordering of gender ideology; gender, language and elite ethnographies in UK political institutions; interactional sociolinguistics: foundations, developments and applications to language, gender and sexuality; identity construction in gendered workplaces; gender, stance and category-work in girls' peer language practices.

References

- Angouri, J. (2015) 'Online communities and communities of practice', in Georgakopoulou, A. and Spilioti, T. (eds) *The Routledge handbook of language and digital communication*. London: Routledge, pp. 323–338.
- Angouri, J. (2018) *Culture, discourse, and the workplace*. London: Routledge Press.
- Banerjea, N. (2014) 'Critical urban collaborative ethnographies: articulating community with Sappho for equality in Kolkata, India', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 22, pp. 1058–1072.
- Bucholtz, M. (1999) "'Why be normal?'" Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls', *Language in Society*, 28(2), pp. 203–223.
- Bucholtz, M. and Hall, K. (2004) 'Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research', *Language in Society*, 33(4), pp. 501–547.
- Bucholtz, M. and Hall, K. (2005) 'Identity and interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach', *Discourse Studies*, 7(4–5), pp. 585–614.
- Cohen, L. (2005) 'The Kothi wars: AIDS cosmopolitanism and the morality of classification', in Adams, V. and Pigg, S. L. (eds) *Sex in development: science, sexuality, and morality in global perspective*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 269–303.
- Davies, B. (2005) 'Communities of practice: legitimacy not choice', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(4), pp. 557–581.
- Eckert, P. (2000) *Linguistic variation as social practice: the linguistic construction of identity in Belten High*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. (1992) 'Think practically and look locally: language and gender as community-based practice', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21, pp. 461–490.
- Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. (1999) 'New generalizations and explanations in language and gender research', *Language in Society*, 28(2), pp. 185–201.
- Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. (2007) 'Putting communities of practice in their place', *Gender and Language*, 1(1), pp. 27–37.
- Eckert, P. and Wenger, E. (2005) 'What is the role of power in sociolinguistic variation?', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(4), pp. 582–589.
- Freed, A. (1999) 'Communities of Practice and Pregnant Women: Is There a Connection?', *Language in Society*, 28(2), pp. 257–271.
- Hall, K. (2005) 'Intertextual sexuality: parodies of class, identity, and desire in liminal Delhi', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 15(1), pp. 125–144.
- Hall, K. and O'Donovan, V. (1996) 'Shifting gender positions among Hindi speaking Hijras', in Bergvall, V., Bing, J., and Freed, A. (eds) *Rethinking language and gender research: theory practice*. London: Longman, pp. 228–266.
- Holmes, J. (2018) 'Negotiating the culture order in New Zealand workplaces', *Language in Society*, 47(1), pp. 33–56.
- Holmes, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (1999) 'The communities of practice: theories and methodologies in language and gender research', *Language in Society*, 28(2), pp. 173–183.
- King, B. (2014) 'Tracing the emergence of a community of practice: beyond presupposition in sociolinguistic research', *Language in Society*, 43(1), pp. 61–81.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Long, N., Burner, E., and Mookherjee, N. (2009) 'Discussion point: when informants lie', *Cambridge Anthropology*, 29, pp. 85–94.
- Mendoza-Denton, N. (2008) *Homegirls: language and cultural practice among Latina gang girls*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Moore, E. (2006) "'You tell all the stories'": Using narrative to explore hierarchy within a Community of Practice', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 10, pp. 611–640.
- Nagar, I. (2019) *Being Janana: language and sexuality in contemporary India*. New York: Routledge.
- Nagar, R. (2014) *Muddying the waters: coauthoring feminisms across scholarship and activism*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- O'Reilly, K. (2009) *Key concepts in ethnography*. London: SAGE.
- Reddy, G. (2005) *With respect to sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Strathern, M. (1991) *Partial connections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zimman, L. and Hall, K. (2016) 'Language, gender, and sexuality', in Aronoff, M. (ed) *Oxford bibliographies in linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press.