

In the final chapter, Bazerman also mounts a challenge to conventional scholarship in the rhetoric of science and technology—scholarship that draws on venerable concepts from classical and contemporary rhetoric. Arguing from the case study that his book represents, Bazerman asserts that in order to study the multiple forms of discursive activity that permeated the development, patenting, implementing, and marketing of electric light technology, a “rhetoric cannot be a closed and fixed techné offering standard advice about a limited set of practices. Rather, the tools for analyzing and offering advice about communicative actions must be sensitive to the full range of forces, forms, and systems that influence each particular instance, and to the position and influences of each participant. . . . This necessary openness and heterogeneity provides a challenge to rhetorical theory, which historically has tended toward unified, homogeneous accounts and advice based on particular social circumstances and have been taken to be more general than they are.” Bazerman seems to be suggesting that not only is the conventional rhetorical approach to studying technoscience and its surrounding textual dynamics problematic, but it suffers as well from parochialism, my word for the phenomenon he’s describing.

The man may have a point. For example, if we look to other varieties of science and technology studies, we find that, surprisingly, the “semiotic turn” in the human sciences that has influenced the essentially rhetorical work of Latour, Michel Callon, John Law, Susan Leigh Star, and others has been largely *ignored* in the conventional rhetoric of science and technology research that is conducted in the humanities. While such disregard may signify disciplinary snobbery, recent accounts by Steve Fuller and others suggest that classical and contemporary rhetorical approaches to science and technology are too narrow in scope to be of interest to sociologists and anthropologists of science and technology, researchers whose approaches are generally interdisciplinary and eclectic.

Bazerman’s approach is marked by just these qualities, and this is one of the reasons that *The Languages of Edison’s Light* is such a commanding scholarly work. The research in the book forges a long-overdue and badly needed link between the fields of rhetorical studies of science and technology, on the one hand, and social studies of science and technology, on the other. *The Languages of Edison’s Light* sets a high-water mark for serious, interdisciplinary, rhetorical research in the new millennium.

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Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality, Anna Livia and Kira Hall, eds. (New York: Oxford UP, 1997. 460 pages).

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In the fourth grade, my teacher often reprimanded me, exclaiming “Stop talking like a girl.” Her mission as an elementary school educator was not only to strengthen my language and math skills but also to impart to me a gender lesson. As an adult gay male, I now recognize that from this schoolmarm’s perspective I was breaking linguistic rules of gender (intonation, word choice, extralinguistic gestures, rhetorical strategies): she deemed certain of my speech acts to be feminine and thought she should intervene before something more problematic resulted. She was, likewise, the teacher who asked me to explain to my classmates why I liked to play with girls and wasn’t proud of my masculinity. From a young age, I was schooled in how to enunciate and was asked to reflect upon how I should comport myself before the public eye—or, in this case, the public ear.

It’s unfortunate that my fourth-grade teacher did not have access to a book like *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, a collection of essays that serve as a response to established norms in linguistic research that collapse issues of sexuality and gender into an amorphous whole. By contrast, this collection views sexuality and gender as separate yet interrelated entities. Their authors recognize that desirous habits, including speech behaviors, are not naturally linked to our congenital sexual traits. Other linguists have studied men and women’s speech differences, but *Queerly Phrased* revises this discourse by factoring in sexuality, especially queer sexuality. This collection approaches the study of language from “the twin perspectives of gender and sexuality, conceived as separate but intricately linked categories.” Instead of presuming that our gendered sex(uality) denotes (or constates) some true or false answer about our individual beings, these essays demonstrate and confirm that our language allows us to “perform” our gendered and sexual places in the world; the way we use words enables us to reveal/conceal who we are, while positioning us to capitulate to or resist the external forces that attempt to define who and how we should be.

Same-sex desire and alternative gender affiliations bring new contexts and fresh perspectives to language research. Queer language speaks to a particular way of envisioning (and verbalizing) the world, and it forces the heterosexist world to reflect upon its precepts. When a friend

of mine answers telemarketers by stating that the “mister” of the house isn’t home but that he will speak as the “lady” of the house, he plays upon their assumption that they have contacted a heterosexual household. My friend recounts that the most clueless telemarketers become so frustrated by his queer word-games that they often hang up or announce that they’ll call back when it’s more convenient. (My question is, “More convenient for whom?”) My friend’s telephone repartee disrupts the heterosexism (and the capitalism) that invades his queer privacy with straight presumptions. The linguistic researchers in *Queerly Phrased* raise our awareness about the phonetic sounds, the phrasal constructions, the pronominal usage, the rhetorical strategies, and the semantic allusions that queer folk use to pronounce/announce themselves, as well as the tactical silence, the martial language defenses, and the parodic play that they use to survive in a heterosexist and/or homophobic world. Rudolf Gaudio, in his study of Nigerian ‘Yan daudu (“Hausa-speaking men who talk and act like women”), discusses how this marginalized (read stigmatized) community uses language as a way to signify their place in their society. He explains, “‘Yan daudu thus appear to exploit linguistic ambiguity as a way of establishing and enhancing their seemingly paradoxical power to attract and criticize others in a society that demeans them. The indirect speech forms used by ‘yan daudu do not just convey multiple meanings in the referential sense; they also serve to position ‘yan daudu in various ways in relation to each other and the society at large.” Gaudio, like other authors in this collection, allows readers to imagine how “queens” of nations as diverse as Nigeria, England, Japan, and India can revamp language into a useful tool for survival. By what these researchers have to report, *homo lingua* (and *homo luden*) take on whole new meanings in a queer world.

The editors of this collection proclaim that this volume serves a variety of purposes: it highlights a range of gay-focused linguistic scholarship; it points out how the disciplines of linguistics and queer theory can inform each other; it reapplies Austin’s doctrines of performativity to revitalize linguistic research; and it showcases researchers who use a range of historical, methodological, and rhetorical analyses to explore fresh potential for linguistic study. Livia and Hall state that the essays they have chosen take both a microscopic and a macroscopic view of language in relation to sexuality, investigating the particularities of lexical items as well as larger discourse characteristics of queer speakers. “With the publication of *Queerly Phrased*,” they conclude, “we hope not only to establish a place in linguistics for queer theory but also to

encourage queer theorists to look again at the linguistic roots of many of the tenets of queer theory.” They offer sage advice when they suggest that theory and pragmatic research should maintain a dialogic relationship. More often than not, writers get so wrapped up in theory that they forget what would ground their abstract ideas in real life, or they get so inundated with field notes that they forget how theory could help arrange the information into digestibly framed configurations. In fact, some of the articles in this volume have this very problem: they are either theory-heavy or data-laden and, because these factors are not dialogically balanced, obscure the researcher’s ultimate point.

The best articles in this collection challenge accepted notions of linguistic convention—queering what could be considered the status quo of sociolinguistics. By pushing the limits of how linguistic studies are approached, and what kinds of materials and situations are explored, these studies of queer language reinvent linguistic ideals and methodologies. Arnold Zwicky begins the volume with “Two Lavender Issues for Linguists,” in which he designates the questions and difficulties faced by queer linguists, and suggests how the tools of their discipline can assist their explorations. The other writers in the volume far exceed his expectations. For example, some researchers study the queer deaf community’s use of sign, a primarily visual language (Kleinfeld and Warner), while others record the linguistic rituals of radical queer groups (Lucas), while still others comb historical texts to uncover linguistic traces of homoeroticism (Conner and Watt). The inquiries of deaf and radical groups underscore the docu-ethnography and the subsequent cultural critique that can occur in linguistic exploration, while the historical research demonstrates how linguistic research/discourse analysis can uncover centuries-old homoerotic language. By looking at lexical items both ethnographically and etymologically, these authors uncover how homoeroticism was both practiced and defined. This textual linguistics sheds light on past definitions of queerness, offering new ways of discussing a heritage of homoerotic desire that isn’t necessarily gay in contemporary terms. The sociolinguists studying both queer contemporary language and homoerotic historical texts attempt to discover a lineage of queer linguistic heritage: we were there, we were queer, get used to it.

Authors investigating contemporary “queerspeak” often conduct their inquiries in unusual language venues. For example, Robin Queen uses lesbian comic books as her data source, while Kathleen Wood analyzes lesbian coming-out stories on e-mail. These researchers recognize that the predominantly verbal discipline of linguistics should explore

the secondary orality of new technological venues. Although these comics and e-mails aren't spoken, they convey a homotextuality that is reminiscent of the spoken word. Wood writes, "In addition to the differences among spoken, written, and electronic stories, there is much to be learned about the task of managing several linguistic frames, multiple identities, and the incomplete, processual-nature of coming out." Queen concurs: "While lesbian comic-book characters' speech is not an example of the naturally occurring speech of lesbians, it is a representation of the ways in which lesbians are assumed to speak. The characters are all created by lesbians for a predominantly lesbian audience, and thus the characters' believability relies on social knowledge that is assumed to be shared." Another example of an unusual language venue can be seen in William Leap's contribution. Leap looks to what is written on the wall—the bathroom wall—to apply his linguistic knowledge. The first scholar to write a full-length book on queer linguistics, Leap comments, "Reading gay graffiti, like hearing gay silence or interpreting the freedom chains and t-shirt messages, allows the reader to become a coparticipant in the construction of gay space, whatever his gender or sexual interest." These researchers who are scouting out new sources of linguistic investigation are consequently breaking new methodological ground.

In the final section of the book, "Linguistic Gender-Bending," linguists question how the issues of gender affect queer linguistic study. These researchers investigate multi-national contexts to ascertain how certain groups unsettle their countries' accepted male-female roles. In describing this section, Anna Livia writes, "The very fact of referring to another man in the feminine [pronoun], indicates participation in this countercultural, antiheterosexual discourse mode." The studies in this section show how the most visibly and audibly queer—and, subsequently, the most marginalized—people position themselves within the dominant society. In the public eye or within public earshot, the queerest members create their own physical and linguistic locales. Using the Indian hijras' public verbal displays as an example of how they claim public space, Kira Hall comments, "In order to make any sense of the hijra's seemingly innocuous and nonsensical utterance, the passer-by must enter into what he believes to be the hijra's frame of reference, a linguistic space involving sexual innuendo, crudity, and gender fluidity. Yet by doing so, the hearer must also admit to himself that he in many ways inhabits that same space." Hall understands that the hijras, like other self-effeminized speakers, enfranchise themselves by creatively upturning gendered pre-conceptions. Hall elaborates: "Through this verbal play, then, the hijras,

who have a precarious status in the Indian social matrix, are able to compensate for their own lack of social prestige by assuming linguistic control of the immediate interaction, creating alternative sociosexual spaces in a dichotomously gendered geography." For them, public life is a queer stage, and their performance is significant when "normal" people begin to reconsider the societal roles they take for granted.

In his chapter, Rusty Barret asserts that "Standard" forms of language—those established and accepted as the norm—enforce a society's power structures, and he challenges those scholars within the discipline of linguistics who "have equated the 'grammar' of society at large with an abstract conception of language that is a means by which the ruling class maintains power." In this linguistic empire, "Standard" forms could be speech-acts that refuse to acknowledge same-sex desire or gender difference (that is, straight talk) or, alternatively, acadamese, a specialized and privileged school dialect that standardizes and that, sometimes, prevents students from expressing themselves. In some instances, institutional policies use this "Standard" to in effect prevent students from enrolling in school, from joining in the discourse of school. For those of us working at publicly-funded institutions, we are fully aware of the external pressures placed on students to become English proficient quickly; otherwise, they are considered not to belong in higher education. In fact, according to some educators, the lack of fluency in standard English doesn't just make you an outsider; it makes you ineducable. There is thus a parallel between queer and educational politics: queers have been asked time and again to leave straight society for some queer island somewhere; now "remedial" students are being asked to withdraw from society at large.

The problem of linguistic discrimination brings me to why I think compositionists should attend to queer linguistic issues. I am sure that some readers are wondering why this three-year-old volume is being reviewed in a composition journal, whether it is "relevant" to rhetoric and composition. I would like to suggest that these studies have important implications for teachers of language, be they compositionists, linguists, or even literature professors. Rusty Barrett reminds us that in linguistic study (and, I would add, language study overall) "little consideration is given to the amount of socialization that has gone into the construction of the linguistic competence of a given speaker." The process of acquiring language can be an important part of acclimating oneself to a new community. For men and women who shift from the traditional hetero-familial space where being socialized to gay culture doesn't normally

happen, queer language skills become a significant part of their acculturation. While participating in queer enclaves, they acquire their new culture through linguistic and behavioral performances that support their new sense of self. This process is similar to that of first-year students who enter our composition classrooms and who thus face a new form of self-expression. Before they can be truly welcomed into the academic forum, they must be taught the conventions and the special language forms expected by the academy; the most gifted writers (or the most well taught) find common ground between their own voices and scholastic conventions. As educators, we can teach these non-normative students how to join the academy's conversations by offering them the educational space and resources to experiment with and develop their expressive skills.

Queerly Phrased addresses significant issues for linguists, queer theorists, and teachers of language. If we are to comprehend, discuss, and (for those of us who are teachers) evaluate the linguistic value of people's spoken and written words, we need to apprehend their unique positions by considering the times, places, and situations in which they articulate themselves. With this knowledge, we can make them more aware of how their linguistic and cultural positions inform their language-learning processes. Queer linguistics can inform us about how to better see and hear the "funny" ways that people express themselves. Perhaps, if my fourth-grade teacher had been informed by a book such as *Queerly Phrased*, she would have better understood how to react to her strange girlish-speaking boy student. Perhaps, she could have helped him find a voice and a position to justify why he liked to play with girls and to resolve his "issues" with masculinity. Language teachers often face linguistic conflicts with their developing students, but if researchers of language can chronicle the queer sense of historical documents, or re-create the manner in which they collect data, or affirmatively reevaluate the language use of "strange" people in "strange" lands, composition teachers can surely undertake the formidable task of deciphering the divergent interpretations and "queer" meaning-making patterns of our writing and conversing students.