

- Rayner, Keith & Alexander Pollatsek. 1987. Eye movements in reading: A tutorial review. In Max Coltheart (ed.), *Attention and performance XII: The psychology of reading* (Psychology Library Editions: Cognitive Science), 327–362. London: Erlbaum.
- Sag, Ivan A. 1997. English relative clause constructions. *Journal of Linguistics* 33, 431–484.
- Willis, David W. E. 2011. The limits of resumption in Welsh *wh*-dependencies. In Alain Rouveret (ed.), *Resumptive pronouns at the interfaces*, 189–222. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Author's address: School of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, Bangor University,
Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DG, UK
rborsley@essex.ac.uk

(Received 31 October 2019)

J. Linguistics 56 (2020). doi:10.1017/S0022226719000380
© Cambridge University Press 2020

Helen Sauntson, *Language, sexuality and education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 204.

Reviewed by AIMEE BAILEY, University of Nottingham

Language, Sexuality and Education examines how sexuality discourses are constructed and experienced in contemporary secondary schools. The book explores six years' worth of research in UK and US cities in which Helen Sauntson interviewed educators and young people, captured classroom interaction and reviewed curriculum documents. It adroitly illustrates, above all else, the illocutionary silencing of sexual diversity in schools and its real-world implications for both pupils and educators. While this silence is perhaps nothing new, it is significant in an increasingly complex era for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) identities. For example, young people are more likely than ever to see LGBT+ people in the media, yet children's picture books about gay penguins still lead to protests outside schools over 'indoctrination'.

The introductory chapter jumps straight into the political context, with Sauntson noting the resurgence of discriminatory discourses following the Trump election in the United States and the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, which contributes to the sense of insecurity around sexual equality issues. Such a sense of insecurity is reflected in the gap between policy and attitudes, a point which is underscored by a wealth of recent statistics and the words of participants from the research. Importantly here, Sauntson argues that linguistic research needs to go beyond simply focusing on explicitly homophobic language, to encompass the 'often more subtle but just as damaging' ways sexuality is constructed in schools (7). For this reason, a critical focus on heteronormativity is most useful. Heteronormativity refers to the discursive construction of certain forms of heterosexuality – monogamous, reproductive and involving conventional gender roles – as natural, normal or preferable to other expressions of sexual identity. The book sets out to denaturalise and challenge the dominance of such constructions. For readers who are less familiar with queer linguistic research in this area, the

opening chapter also provides a highly accessible overview of the key terms used in the book.

In Chapter 1, 'Confronting the context', Sauntson traces how sex education has been approached in the UK and the US from the 1950s to the present day. The focus here is on key policies: this includes the notorious Section 28 legislation which banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools in the UK, and the 'abstinence-only' model of sex education in the US. Despite the repeal of Section 28 and the move away from abstinence-only models, the impact of such policies continues to be felt in the narrow focus on heterosexual reproduction and health. Chapter 2, 'Researching language and sexuality in educational settings', discusses the development of language and sexuality research, with a specific focus on education.

Following this, Sauntson crucially sets out her Queer Applied Linguistics (QAL) approach, marking the intersection between queer linguistics and critical applied linguistics. Queer linguistics is a dominant strand of language and sexuality research underpinned by queer theoretical principles, such as problematizing what we take to be 'normal' in terms of gender and sexuality. Critical applied linguistics is an approach to language study which addresses particular social issues. Like previous queer approaches, Sauntson's QAL framework takes normativity as its central focus, yet offers something new in paying specific attention to the ways in which normativity shifts across time and space. In other words, the approach highlights the idea that heteronormativity is not a stable cohesive concept but rather temporally and spatially construed. While the temporal and spatial dimensions have begun to be explored in queer linguistic research (e.g. Leap, [in press](#)), their foregrounding in the QAL approach is undoubtedly useful for scholars interested in normativity, with the exciting potential to drive forward the way in which we conceptualise this area of inquiry.

Chapters 3–6 are data-focused. Chapters 3 and 4 explore interview data using a combination of Bucholtz & Hall's (2004) tactics of intersubjectivity (ToI) framework and Martin's (2000) APPRAISAL framework. ToI is a sociolinguistic framework based on the principle that identity is constructed RELATIONALLY through language. In other words, identities acquire meaning through the discursive positioning of the self and others, specifically in terms of similarity, authenticity and legitimacy. APPRAISAL is a framework for analysing evaluative language, based on a multi-levelled system for categorising the expression of emotions, attitudes and values. Chapter 3 focuses on the school experiences of LGBT+ youth. The choice to start with the voices of young people is fitting, highlighting what is really at stake when we talk about sexuality in education. The chapter explores interviews conducted with LGBT+ people who are currently in or have recently finished school in the UK only – a limitation which is understandable given the practical and ethical difficulties of reaching this group internationally.

A particular strength of the interview analysis is that the data is systematically coded according to the dimensions of the intersubjectivity and APPRAISAL frameworks and compared quantitatively. This approach clearly allows us to see

that young LGBT+ people predominantly experience school in negative terms: as a site where they feel invalid, marginalised, unhappy and insecure. One of the most poignant findings here is the young people's frequent use of *irrealis* tactics (i.e. expressing imagined or hypothetical realities), revealing their need to have their identities explicitly recognised and represented in the school environment. Silence and inaction on the part of authority figures are found to be highly significant problems, with the behaviour of individual educators having the power to 'make or break' a young LGBT+ person's school experience.

Chapter 4 examines educators' perspectives. Comparatively, this chapter differs to Chapter 3 in the sense that the majority of educators' perspectives come from the US context via online survey, though a high degree of similarity is noted between US and UK educators. A key finding of this chapter is that there is what Sauntson terms 'attitudinal rupture' among educators. This is reflected, for example, in differing levels of confidence and security surrounding acknowledging sexual diversity, with some educators reporting positively recognising LGBT+ identities in their schools, yet with other participants, expressing confusion over the legal status of Section 28. Silence and inaction are again found to be bigger problems than overt homophobic bullying, with educators, at times, fiercely condemning the use of homophobic slurs in the classroom, yet feeling constrained by the requirements of the curriculum and the perceived discomfort of other staff and parents.

The methodology shifts in Chapters 5 and 6 to utilise the well-established combination of critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. Chapter 5 interrogates the ideologies present in curriculum documents, focusing on the subjects of English and Health Education/Sexual and Relationships Education (SRE), having been established by the participants as the most likely areas to facilitate discussions around sexual diversity. The key finding of this chapter is that the documents are worded in ways that do not encourage teachers to incorporate sexual diversity into their teaching. In terms of English curricula, Sauntson convincingly demonstrates through collocational analysis how seemingly neutral terms like 'culture' and 'identity' are narrowly defined to emphasise nationality, ethnicity and (binary) gender. While sexuality is a marked absence in English documents, it is clearly addressed in Heath Ed/SRE documents. However, sexuality is taken for granted to mean heterosexual sex, which is negatively associated with risk and disease. This is, of course, when it occurs outside of marriage, which the documents positively construct as important. The analysis also uncovers implicit homophobia in the documents: alarmingly, one section of the SRE documents prohibits the 'direct promotion of sexual orientation' (161), whereby 'sexual orientation' acts as a smokescreen for homosexuality. It is therefore easy to see why some educators may be confused about the status of Section 28.

Chapter 6 examines how sexual identities are constructed in classroom interactions, using three recordings of SRE lessons from two UK schools. Sauntson also recorded English lessons, though these lessons were not found to contain any 'gender and sexuality trigger points' (166), an absence which is

revealing in itself. True to the guidance documents of Chapter 5, the SRE lessons are found to perpetuate heteronormative understandings of sex and centre on risk and disease. In addition to this, sexuality is constructed in stereotypically gendered and sexist terms, whereby boys are constructed as active and predatory and girls are constructed as passive and responsible for warding off danger. Though there is some challenge to heteronormativity and sexist stereotypes from students, time and curriculum pressures mean this is rarely taken up. Sauntson argues that there is a fundamental mismatch between what is taught in these lessons and what students want to know. While physical safety is important, the de-eroticisation of sex of can lead students to disengage from sex education.

The concluding chapter succinctly sums up the main contribution of the book: that silence and inaction, rather than overt homophobia, are the biggest problems concerning the construction of sexuality in UK and US schools. This reveals the vacuum left by legislation such Section 28: it is no longer acceptable to openly express discriminatory ideas in schools, yet it is also not acceptable to ‘openly discuss gender and sexuality in a positive and inclusive way’ (186). There is a desire for change among students and educators alike, but the realisation of this desire is stunted by a culture of fear and confusion. In light of these findings, the chapter includes a list of practical recommendations for schools. Sauntson importantly makes the point that it is the discourses themselves, rather than simply access to them, which must change; the recent introduction of compulsory SRE in UK schools will solve the problem because the language of the guidance still contain harmful discourses.

I wholeheartedly agree with Sauntson’s assertion that QAL ‘offers useful avenues for exploring the themes of sexual diversity and inequalities in schools’ (192). The book is certainly a seminal text in this regard. At the same time, she acknowledges that QAL is not yet a ‘finished product’ with more rigorous theorisation needed. This is perhaps why, though normativity is a constant critical focus throughout Chapters 3–7, temporality and spatiality are only infrequently alluded to. While this does not detract in any way from the important and politically-relevant contributions of the book, it does highlight gaps for future queer linguistic work. In this sense, I look forward to seeing the development of the QAL approach in future applications.

Overall, *Language, Sexuality and Education* provides an impressive examination of a timely issue on the political agenda. The breadth of data, approaches and political context covered in just seven short chapters is commendable. The analysis is rigorous and insightful and used to inform sensible recommendations for change. From scholars and students interested in queer linguistics, to policy-makers and educators, I have no doubt that this will be a highly valuable resource.

REFERENCES

- Bucholtz, Mary & Kira Hall. 2004. Theorising identity in language and sexuality research. *Language in Society* 33.4, 469–515.
- Leap, William. In press. *Language and sexuality before Stonewall*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Martin, James. 2000. Beyond exchange: APPRAISAL systems in English. In Susan Huntson & Geoff Thompson (eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (Oxford Linguistics), 142–175. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Author's address: School of English, University of Nottingham,
University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK
aimee.bailey@nottingham.ac.uk*

(Received 31 October 2019)