

# Language and Gender: A Reader

Second Edition

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# Boys' Talk: Hindi, Moustaches and Masculinity in New Delhi

Kira Hall

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, scholars working within the area of language and gender have increasingly considered the ways in which masculinity informs and structures everyday language practice. While the paradigms that frame scholarship on language and masculinity differ, with early studies focusing on differences between men's talk and women's talk (e.g., Johnstone 1990; Tannen 1990) and later studies seeking to explain how men's talk is produced performatively through appeal to ideologies of gendered language (e.g., Cameron 1997), the research has left us with a trove of data regarding linguistic possibilities for the enactment of masculinity. Whether explicating the homophobic story-telling strategies of male friends in Britain (Coates 2007), the use of sentence-final particles by white-collar Japanese men (SturtzSreetharan 2006), or employments of the address term *dude* among American college-aged men (Kiesling 2004), linguistic research on masculinity has decisively demonstrated that 'maleness' is as much gained as it is given, with speakers reproducing, and often exploiting, ideological links between form and meaning in the production of a gendered subjectivity. The burgeoning body of literature on women's appropriation of purportedly masculine forms of discourse has offered a kind of proof for this theoretical position, establishing the floating and hence endlessly flexible nature of the linguistic sign (e.g., Queen 2005; Matsumoto 2002; Tetreault 2002; McElhinny 1995).

Linguistic research on social class, in contrast, has been less forthcoming in considering the category's ideological dimensions. Because socioeconomic realities such as educational access so clearly constrain the potential for certain kinds of linguistic appropriation, researchers have tended to focus on class as given instead of gained, viewing it as a stable and even quantifiable designation that precedes interaction. Certainly, speakers from divergent class backgrounds do not always share common ground when it comes to discursive meaning-making, including the sociolinguistic making of femininity and masculinity. It is therefore imperative that discourse analysts continue to recognise the possibility of class-based semiotic dissonance. But social class is also vulnerable to discursive appropriation, particularly when different class positions come to be associated with specific ways of talking. In short, the linguistic indices of class, like those of masculinity, are also in some sense

flexible. Most critically for the current discussion, the linguistic forms that index social class can be used as a resource for establishing one's positionality with respect to other social categories, such as gender and sexuality.

This is precisely the case for female participants within the Hindi- and English-speaking New Delhi non-government organisation that is the subject of this study. Founded in 1994 and initially funded by the North American-based Ford Foundation, this NGO, hereafter called the Center, seeks to educate the public on HIV/AIDS and sexual diversity through the sponsorship of a number of outreach programmes. The programme under discussion, a support group designed for 'women who are attracted to women', brings together diverse middle-class participants who orient to distinct class-based sexualities: namely, 'lesbian' and 'boy'. While lesbian-identified women in the support group orient to the same-sex models of sexual attraction associated with the West, male-identified women (or 'boys', as they later came to call themselves) orient to the other-sex models of gender eroticism long associated with rural India, aspiring to a semiotics of masculinity that has sexual reassignment surgery as its endpoint. There are no isolatable demographic factors that clearly distinguish the socioeconomic status of lesbians from that of boys, and yet both of these identity positions are established interactively through appeal to ideologies of social class (see also Pichler, this volume).

The linguistic and ethnographic data I discuss in this chapter suggest that lesbians and boys participating in the support group not only have very different relationships to masculinity, they also exhibit different understandings of how masculinity may be invoked in spoken interaction. For many lesbian-identified speakers, the very use of Hindi for discussions of sexuality is read as indexical of a kind of masculine vulgarity, an interpretation that has serious consequences for those boys who, although bilingual, typically discuss sexuality in Hindi when first joining the group. Veteran members prefer to use English in group discussions, a language they associate with progressive ideas, particularly in the realm of gender and sexuality. But English carries a very different meaning within the predominantly Hindi-speaking classes, where its usage, because of a variety of complex postcolonial and nationalist processes, is often associated with prudishness if not effeminacy (see Gupta 2002). Hindi is thus easily embraced by boy-identified speakers as indexical of a masculinity that is antagonistic to elite ideas about female sexuality, providing a resistant rallying tool for speakers whose understanding of self is dismissed by some Center participants as rudely vernacular. This chapter thus argues for a deeper consideration of the discursive alliance between language, masculinity, and social class (see also Livia 2004), holding along with other authors in this collection that the linguistic performance of gender, like that of other social categories, is always relationally produced and interpreted. My argument is not simply that linguistic constructs of masculinity vary over time, nationstate, and class, although this observation is assumed for the analysis I offer here. Rather, I aim to illustrate how the articulation of masculinity, while importantly influenced by ideological linkages within these larger parameters, is likewise a product of everyday interaction, emergent within localised negotiations of the relationship between form and meaning.

### Data and Methodology

This chapter additionally asserts the importance of ethnographic methodology for the study of gender and spoken interaction. Specifically, I seek to illuminate what sociolinguists can gain by examining masculinity and femininity ethnographically as emergent within interaction. My discussion of the conversational excerpts selected for analysis below is

thus informed by a much greater body of data that includes several months of fieldwork among boys and lesbians during the autumn of 2000, the spring of 2001, and the spring of 2007. In my research among these two groups inside and outside of the Center, I acted as participant observer in daily gatherings and events, wrote extensive fieldnotes, collected over 50 hours of audio and video recordings of conversational interaction, and conducted 20 ethnographic interviews with administrators, employees and group members, many of which involved the elicitation of individual coming-out narratives. This research was in turn informed by a number of extended fieldwork visits over the preceding decade among groups associated with sexual and gender alterity in various areas of northern India, among them *bijras* in Banaras (see Hall 1997; Hall and O'Donovan 1996) and *kotis* in New Delhi (see Hall 2005). The combined body of ethnographic data has helped me puzzle out the social meaning of certain aspects of the linguistic data that is not transparently accessible through a study of isolated conversational examples. The diachronic and ever-shifting nature of the bilingual data I collected at the Center has compelled me to think through the ways in which the links between language and masculinity emerge over time as a product of localised discursive exchange.

The issue of temporality is critical to the way I approach my analysis of the spoken data. The male-identified women who came to the Center in response to a local advertisement campaign were quickly socialised into new patterns of expression that relied on an ideological understanding of English as the appropriate language for discussions of sexuality, whether these discussions involved sexual practice, sexual desire or sexual identity. Veteran group members, most of whom had come to identify as lesbian within the context of this transnationally funded NGO, viewed Hindi as unsuitable for the expression of a progressive sexuality. For them, the use of Indian languages in sexual discursive domains was backwards, rude and just plain vulgar, an interpretation that appears to be shared by many multilingual speakers of the educated Indian middle class more generally (cf. Puri 1999). In Center meetings, group members would manage their verbal discomfort with Hindi by offering novices a sexualised English lexicon to use in its place. Over time, the boys began to shift their language style toward that of their lesbian peers, using English when voicing sexual concerns and reserving Hindi for domains of talk thought to be more traditional (see Bucholtz and Hall 2008a). In short, English came to hold sociosexual capital for its Center users: Both boys and lesbians learned to employ it as a resource for the expression of a sexually progressive self. I thus observed a rather accelerated process of language shift in this localised environment over the course of my fieldwork, not only in the way novices oriented to Hindi and English at the ideological level, but also in the specifics of their Hindi-English codeswitching practices.

Yet this is not the whole story. The group's dichotomous mapping of English and Hindi onto progressive and traditional domains of talk, respectively, intersected with a number of other ideological polarisations: among them, upper class vs. lower class, femininity vs. masculinity, and lesbian vs. boy. The use of one language as opposed to the other in Center meetings thus accomplished important ideological work, indexing the speaker's position with respect to these polarisations.

The two excerpts I analyse below are taken from a recording of a one-hour Center support group meeting in March of 2001, four months after I began my fieldwork at the Center. With so many boys still hoping for sexual reassignment surgery, Liz,<sup>1</sup> a British expatriate who was instrumental in establishing the support group, had decided to act as facilitator for a discussion on the topic of masculinity. Her plan for the meeting, as she described it to me the night before, was to introduce the group to the idea that

masculinity is a social construct, not a biological fact. If the boys could just understand that masculinity is available to women as well as men, she asserted, they might be able to avoid the more extreme consequences of surgery. Although Liz's activism was motivated by concern for the boys' well-being – for example, she talked with me at length about the financial, physical and psychological burdens associated with a surgical solution that remains dangerous – her position was also uncomfortably allied with dominant Western discourses on sexual alterity, particularly in its assumption that same-sex desire is a viable, or in this case even preferable, substitute for surgically enabled cross-sex desire. Her position was further complicated by the fact that many of the boys had adopted what she and her feminist-identified Indian peers considered to be a sexist understanding of gender relations, desiring servile, stay-at-home wives who managed the women's work associated with traditional India. Yet for the boys, some of whom had even made an ethical decision to delay all sexual contact with their girlfriends until after transition, the same-sex eroticism associated with European and American models of gay and lesbian identity was unthinkable foreign, if not repulsive. Indeed, group members would often enact this repulsion iconically in their everyday pronunciations of the English word 'lesbian', grimacing in disgust while loudly mimicking stereotypically Western pronunciations of the initial /l/ and medial /z/. Simply put, the boys' use of phonetic mockery works as a distancing mechanism, bracketing off the term as alien to what would otherwise be everyday discourse.

I offer these brief ethnographic details as a means of contextualising the discursive polarisations that occur in the data, where the boys use Hindi to reject Liz's constructivist take on gender identity and assert a biological one in its place. My understanding of the term *context* is thus much broader than what is asserted in those forms of discourse analysis that limit inquiry to the immediate spoken text, such as conversation analysis (CA). Susan Speer (2005: 101), for instance, in an important critique of how language and gender researchers have misused the top-down concept of hegemonic masculinity, characterises everything but the immediate materialisation of turns and sequences as 'beyond the talk' and hence analytically irrelevant. Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe (2006: 68) echo this perspective in their critique of what they group together as 'performativity/constructionist accounts' of gender in everyday conversation.<sup>2</sup> But for me, a linguistic anthropologist who makes use of ethnographic methods, the conversations that precede and follow a given stretch of talk – whether distanced by days, months, or even years – are just as crucial for understanding the localised ways in which speakers orient to abstract concepts such as masculinity.

The conversation I analyse below is thus just one piece of a much larger ethnographic puzzle, positioned alongside, for instance, a conversation I had three months earlier with Nanhi and her good friend Jess, both of whom are veteran participants in the Center support group. The two had taken me to a sweet shop in Delhi's Bengali Market after a group meeting to experience *golgappa*, the delicately deep-fried dough bubble that releases an electrifying green liquid of mint, lime, and chilli. It was on a busy street corner outside of the shop, after popping in the fourth or fifth crisp and experiencing yet another burst of what can only be described as gustatory bliss, that I first became aware of the ideological significance of Hindi and English for the local construction of sexual identity. Jess, perhaps inspired by her own experience with what is popularly known in Delhi as India's sexiest snack, began to relay a series of humorous stories about past lovers who had made the 'mistake' of using an Indian language during a romantic encounter. In her dramatisation of their linguistic blunders – the college roommate who slipped a love letter in her pocket that was written entirely in Panjabi; the ex-girlfriend whose use of Hindi in bedroom sex

talk precipitated a break-up; and finally, the current lover who likes to translate passionate English phrases into Hindi for humorous effect – I got my first inkling of the language ideologies that inform and in many ways structure Hindi-English code choice practices at the Center.

An analytic consideration of ideology is thus not always ‘top-down’ and ‘macro-level’, as Speer (2005: 15) suggests in her critique of the many forms of discourse analysis that utilise the theoretical insights of poststructuralism. Linguistic anthropologists engaged in ethnography seek to uncover the more localised ideologies that inform language practice, viewing conversation as a product of historical and cultural specificity. Some understandings of masculinity may indeed be culturally dominant, achieving a level of hegemony that circulates through and around this specificity. But the social meaning behind the use of particular linguistic forms in everyday conversation can only be determined by attending to the local worlds of discourse that control meaning-making. If we truly want to avoid imposing our own categories of analysis onto the conversations we study, as Speer rightly asserts, we must consider how the participants themselves interpret the relationship between form and meaning. For a linguistic anthropologist like myself, these interpretations are best uncovered through ethnography, a research methodology that views a given instance of talk as just one episode in a much larger interactive history. Masculinity may indeed be produced in the turns and sequences of conversational immediacy, but we cannot possibly recognise it unless we first understand the cultural context that informs its interpretation.

### Boys’ Talk

By the time the meeting under discussion took place, many of the boys had come full circle in their relationship to Center discourses on sexual identity. Although they had initially allied themselves with the understanding of female-to-female attraction espoused by group leaders, grateful to be able to share their sense of sexual marginalisation with open-minded others, they later became much more aware of the differences between themselves and their lesbian friends, and more poignantly, of the social hierarchies that inform and structure these differences. Their code choice patterns parallel this progression. The boys had initially learned to orient to English as the appropriate language for sex talk in weekly support groups, adopting the codeswitching styles of their more veteran peers. But they eventually became much more critical of the prominence and prestige given to English in this interactive style. Likewise, they began to reject the related perception that Hindi-inflected sexuality was necessarily vulgar, an idea that circulated at the Center, for instance, in the condescending use of the derogatory slang term *vernac* for Hindi-speaking participants. The term, which is thought to have originated among Delhi and Mumbai college students in tandem with the North Indian term *HMT* (Hindi Medium Type), literally references a student educated in a regional Indian language as opposed to English. But it carries a much more insidious meaning in elite popular culture, where it is used to characterise speakers as backwards, unsophisticated, provincial, unfashionable and just plain crude (see Devraj 2005).

This is the context that Liz unknowingly walked into as group facilitator on that March day, unaware that her brazenly postmodern solution for boy identity would trigger a network of ideological alliances and contrasts that would make her project impossible. Because masculinity is the domain of boys, not lesbians, group participants immediately saw Liz’s authoritative self-positioning as suspect. ‘What do *you* know about

masculinity?' Jess shouts from her lounging position on the couch after Liz announces the topic for the day.<sup>3</sup> In the fifty-five minutes of conversation that follows, lesbian and boy participants fight for semantic ownership of the concept, with the former defining it as social and the latter as physical. But in contrast to previous meetings where participants unquestioningly oriented to English as the appropriate medium for discussion, the boys in this meeting make use of Hindi, a resource that is better suited to their own understanding of masculinity.

The ideological schism between Hindi and English emerges gradually throughout the course of the discussion, as lesbians and boys register divergent positions on sexuality through the use of two separate languages. As revealed in the opening lines of Extract 1 below (lines 1–24), Liz remains faithful to the plan she voiced to me the night before, proposing a series of repetitive questions that present masculinity as a frame of mind, not a biological reality. But when she later in the same excerpt tries to make her point by characterising Jess as 'a woman' who is 'attracted to other women' (lines 31–4), interpellating her through the terms of lesbian identity instead of boy identity, Jess answers with an alternative understanding of sexuality that relies on Hindi for its emotional force (lines 35–40). [A key to the transcription conventions is located on page x.]

(1) Extract 1. *She calls me woman!*

(English is in standard font, Hindi in italics)

- 1 LIZ: You- is there no room to be (.) femini-  
 2 to be a female (.) but masculine.  
 3 to be female [but (.) to be masculine.]  
 4 BARBARA: [That's really- ] that's  
 5 just the opposite of the masculine?  
 6 I suppose?  
 7 LIZ: No to be female and to be masculine.  
 8 Is there no [room for it.]  
 9 BARBARA: [That's not ] a way,  
 10 You make that all up (.) opposite things,  
 11 then (you're still a woman),  
 12 LIZ: No I'm not saying whether it becomes  
 13 permanent,  
 14 I'm saying for the individuals in this group.  
 15 today.  
 16 who we are (.) sitting with.  
 17 Is there no room to be a female  
 18 and yet to be: (.) masculine.  
 19 in that role.  
 20 to ↑ be: like that.  
 21 JESS: I th [ink ]-  
 22 LIZ: [Why] doesn't society  
 23 allow for that.  
 24 Why can't we be like tha [t. ]  
 25 JESS: [Well] because  
 26 that's -ss uh one of those things,  
 27 You have to follow a pattern.  
 28 You're a woman so you have to  
 29 ↑[BE::: this this this] this.  
 30 LIZ: [Yeah but ↑WHY::.] Why?  
 31 You're- you're also- you're a woman,



- 32 but you are attracted to other women.  
 33 That's not acceptable to society,  
 34 but you are being like that,  
 →35 JESS: <quietly, rapidly> <gālī detī hai.  
 36 mujhe woman [boltī hai. ]>  
 37 LIZ: <falsetto> <[↑Well just]> [[feh- ]]  
 38 JESS: <loudly, rapidly> <[gālī ] detī hai.  
 39 woman boltī hai mujhe.  
 40 tereko abhī āg lagtī hū maī.>  
 41 SARVESH: [ <laughs> ]  
 42 PRITI: [ <laughs> ]  
 43 BIJAY: [ <laughs> ]  
 44 LIZ: <rapidly> <NO. GUYS.>  
 45 I'm just asking the question, (.) basically.

*Hindi translation* (for lines 35–40)

- JESS: <quietly, rapidly> <She insults me.  
 She calls me woman!>  
 LIZ: <falsetto> <↑Well just> feh-  
 JESS: <loudly, rapidly> <She insults me.  
 Woman she calls me!  
 Now you think I'm fire (to burn you alive)?>

As a regional language that has become ideologically associated with both tradition and anti-elitism through divergent strands of Hindu nationalism, Hindi serves as a likely conduit for a localised expression of identity that challenges the ideas of a globalised English-speaking elite. Jess exploits these associations in her response in lines 35–40, using Hindi to assert her allegiance to a polarised model of sexual alterity that is more in sync with traditional India. Appealing to the boy belief that only men can love women, Jess takes on the positionality of a man and objects to having been wrongly categorised as a 'woman': *gālī detī hai. mujhe woman boltī hai. gālī detī hai. woman boltī hai mujhe. 'She insults me. She calls me woman! She insults me. Woman she calls me!'* Although it may seem surprising that it is Jess who here introduces Hindi into the discussion, given her distaste for ex-girlfriends who discuss sex in Indian languages, her use of Center rhetoric is not always consistent with how she self-identifies. Jess gave up her dream of undergoing sexual reassignment surgery shortly after joining the group, but she continues to maintain an uncomfortable relationship to the same-sex requirement associated with lesbianism, still identifying first and foremost as a boy. This identification materialises here in the particularities of conversational address: Jess directs her response not to Liz but to her fellow boys, referencing Liz in the third person and thus positioning her as conversational outsider. But because this expression of disalignment is articulated in Hindi, the language itself emerges concurrently as indexical of boy identity, setting into motion the ideological associations that control the remainder of the discussion.

Yet Jess's response is not merely about her alignment with a subaltern form of sexual identity; it is also a performance of the masculinity that is required by it. In this excerpt

and throughout the discussion, Jess and her friends find in Hindi a resource for the expression of an authentic masculinity that opposes the fictitious characterisation of masculinity suggested by Liz's appeal to social constructionism. For the boys, maleness is an essential aspect of their understanding of self, not a constructed one, a point underscored by Jess in her decisive rejection of the membership category *woman*. And yet Jess's contribution, in part because of the extremeness of its articulation, is very much recognised as a performance of masculinity by her fellow boys, who respond with uproarious laughter (lines 41–3). In fact, all of the adversarial uses of Hindi I analyse in this excerpt are delivered in good fun. The boys and lesbians discussed in this chapter are all close friends, even if their positions on sexual identity differ. To borrow from Pia Pichler's (2006) recent work on the use of teasing among British Bangladeshi girls, Jess is displaying a kind of playful 'toughness' in this excerpt. This stance is forwarded by the use of paralinguistic features that are stereotyped as masculine in Hindi-based popular media: for instance, Jess's use of rapid speech and increasing volume recalls the menacing voice of a Bollywood villain, countering the measured and steady delivery of her English-speaking interlocutor.

Jess's contribution thus contrasts starkly with the discourses of politeness popularly associated with educated elites, represented here in the voice of Liz. Jess's final line comes across as particularly intense in this regard, when she produces the highly adversarial phrase *tereko abhī āg lagtī hū māī* 'Now you think I'm fire (to burn you alive)?' (line 40). These fighting words, which conjure a threatening image of the Hindu death ritual of cremation, reframe Liz's earlier characterisation not as a passive mistake but as a calculated act of aggression meant to stir Jess's ire. Jess's use of Hindi instead of English for this adversarial response thus calls into play a matrix of language ideologies that predate and inform the immediate text, among them associations of Hindi with lower class impoliteness, with authentic Indianness, and even with the display of stereotypically masculine emotion, such as anger. While these associations may be discoverable as higher level ideologies through a close analysis of popular media texts – for instance, in the Hindi-English code-switching patterns that govern Bollywood film or in the pro-Hindi discourses that surface in Hindu nationalist politics – they are also importantly ideologies that surface in group members' own metalinguistic commentaries regarding language practice, a fact readily determined through ethnographic interviews and participant observation.

Interestingly, the more temporary subject positions that emerge within the interaction coordinate with the ideological contrasts that distinguish lesbian and boy identity. Of particular salience in this regard is the way in which Liz materialises as 'questioner' throughout the discussion, as she frames her ideas in the form of inquiries so as to bring the boys to her own understanding of masculinity. In the confines of this short excerpt, for example, Liz asks nine questions in shotgun style, three times rejecting the answers of her interlocutors outright with a definitive 'no' (lines 7, 12, 44). In fact, her questioning routines often leave little room for any kind of reply, as when she interrupts Jess in two places with a pair of successive questions (line 22; line 30):

**Extract 1 (Lines 17–24)**

- 17 LIZ: Is there no room to be a fg: male  
 18 and yet to be: (.) masculine.  
 19 in that role.

- 20 to ↑bg: like that.  
 21 JESS: I th [ink ]-  
 →22 LIZ: [Why] doesn't society  
 23 allow for that.  
 24 Why can't we bg like tha [t. ]

**Extract 1 (Lines 27–30)**

- 27 JESS: You have to follow a pattern.  
 27 You're a woman so you have to  
 28 ↑[BE::: this this this ] this.  
 →30 LIZ: [Yeah but ↑WHY::. ] Why?

This questioning style often provokes a kind of interactional resistance on the part of the boys, who do not so easily assume the complementary subject positions of either interruptee or respondent. This reaction materialises here in line 28 when Jess, immediately after the onset of Liz's interruption, raises her voice, lengthens her pronunciation of the word *be*, and then uses repetition ('this this this ] this') to sustain her turn through the duration of Liz's interrupting question.

Jess's switch into Hindi in lines 35–40, then, is perhaps precipitated as much by the style of Liz's talk as it is by the content. By articulating an adversarial stance in Hindi, Jess is at the very least able to gain exclusionary control of the conversational floor and thus challenge the interactional role that has been imposed upon her:

**Extract 1 (Lines 35–45)**

- 35 JESS: <quietly, rapidly> <gā l̄ detī bai.  
 36 mujhe woman [ boltī hai. ]>  
 37 LIZ: <falsetto> <[↑well just]> [[feh- ]]  
 38 JESS: <loudly, rapidly> <[[gā l̄] detī bai.  
 39 woman boltī hai mujhe.  
 40 tereko abh̄ āg lagtī hū māi.>  
 41 SARVESH: [ <laughs> ]  
 42 PRITI: [ <laughs> ]  
 43 BIJAY: [ <laughs> ]  
 44 LIZ: <rapidly> <NO. GUYS.>  
 45 I'm just asking the question (.) basically.

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- JESS: <quietly, rapidly> <She insults me.  
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 JESS: <loudly, rapidly> <She insults me.  
 Woman she calls me!  
 Now you think I'm five (to burn you alive)?>

The success of Jess's challenge is facilitated by the fact that Liz is only semi-fluent in Hindi, and she is simply unable to maintain control of the interaction in a language she can only partially understand. Although she recognises that her words have incited

Jess's reaction, objecting with an uncharacteristic use of falsetto (line 37), she does not appear to realise that her own conversational practices may have contributed to its intensity. Indeed, she ultimately comes to embrace the very interactional identity that is the source of the trouble, calling a halt to the boys' laughter and defending her comments as 'just asking': '<rapidly> <NO. GUYS.> I'm just asking the question, (.) basically.' (lines 44–5).

If we were to apply the classic CA question 'why this utterance now?' (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 299) to Jess's use of Hindi, then, we would need to consider at least two analytic possibilities. The first of these, discoverable through ethnographic methodology, argues that the boys' own language ideologies regarding Hindi and English control the codeswitch, in that Hindi has become indexical of a variety of qualities that sync with boy identity. The second, discoverable in large part through an analysis of turns and sequences in a single excerpt, explicates how the use of Hindi establishes an adversarial floor that reverses an unwelcomed conversational asymmetry. I suggest here that neither of these approaches is by itself sufficient for a holistic analysis of the workings of identity in interaction. That is, as Mary Bucholtz and I have discussed in a pair of recent articles (Bucholtz and Hall 2008b, 2005), the identities that emerge at the interactional level – e.g., questioner vs. respondent, interrupter vs. interruptee – often link up in profound ways to the more durable subject positions that move across texts, such as lesbian and boy. As Elinor Ochs (1992) argues in her early discussion of direct vs. indirect indexicality, the association between a linguistic form and a particular social identity is rarely direct; rather, the structural and ideological levels of discourse are mediated by the kinds of stances that speakers take in interaction.

The asymmetry between questioner and respondent that materialises in this group meeting, for instance, is highly reminiscent of power asymmetries associated with teacher–student interaction in the Indian classroom. The Indian educational system has long received extensive criticism for its reliance on rote learning (cf. N. Kumar 2002; Alexander 2001; Clarke 2001; K. Kumar 1988), a teaching method that often uses rapid-fire question–answer routines to test memorisation. But the teacher–student relationship, in that it is emblematic of a class-based intellectual asymmetry, is itself reminiscent of broader asymmetrical relationships forged through British colonialism and its postcolonial aftermath: for instance, between elites and non-elites, English speakers and Hindi speakers, and even, from the standpoint of local identity categories at this New Delhi NGO, lesbians and boys. There is much ethnographic evidence that the boys themselves associate these higher level identity categories with the interactional identities that habitually emerge in group meetings, beginning with the quite basic finding that they often tease lesbian group facilitators for sounding not only 'teacher *jaise*' (teacher-like) but also formal, uptight and feminine, all qualities they ascribe to the English language as well as to the elites who speak it. In other words, in order to understand how speakers themselves interpret interaction – or in this case, the asymmetrical questioning practices that originate from Liz's role as facilitator – we must isolate the ideological linkages that imbue such practices with social meaning. From the standpoint of linguistic anthropology, this undertaking will require us to go beyond the immediate text and consider the localised sociocultural contexts in which it is embedded.

Hindi operates throughout the discussion as a parallel discursive universe of sorts, in that the boys employ it to develop an alternative conceptualisation of masculinity that is more in line with boy concerns. Specifically, while Liz and her lesbian-identified friends work to convince the boys that masculinity is a matter of attitude, the boys develop in Hindi a counter-discussion that positions masculinity as a matter of physicality. The initiation of this practice within the meeting follows a conversational floor that disallows

their contributions. Throughout the hour of discussion, the boys frequently try to challenge Liz's insistence that masculinity is a social phenomenon by introducing male attributes that are in their perception incontrovertibly biological, among them facial hair, broad shoulders, height, and perhaps most critically in terms of sexual reassignment surgery, the penis. But when Liz repeatedly dismisses their contributions for being about 'men' instead of 'masculinity', they find in Hindi a medium that better addresses the disconnect they are all experiencing between their bodies and their male identification.

In the remaining pages, I analyse one additional example as paradigmatic of this code-switching pattern. The exchange takes place directly after a discussion in which Liz has overtly expressed her opposition to sexual reassignment surgery, claiming – to the boys' profound puzzlement – that 'even a penis can be socially constructed'. Growing increasingly frustrated at the boys' inability to understand her point that masculinity need not be the exclusive property of males, Liz once again asks them to come up with attributes that they perceive to be 'masculine' and not 'male':

**Extract 2. I don't have a bloody moustache!**

(English is in standard font, Hindi in italics)

- 1 LIZ: I'm not talking about male.  
 2 I'm talking about masculine.  
 3 I'm not saying [what about men.]  
 4 BARBARA: [Yeah but but- ]  
 5 within e::h woman. woman. [[woman. ]]  
 6 LIZ: [[Nō:, I'm ] ] just  
 7 saying masculine just (.) ↑in general what  
 8 [masculine is. ]  
 9 BIJAY: [masculine re]lly re[ [fers ] ] to.  
 10 LIZ: [[I'm just saying ]]  
 11 JESS: <laughs> <Masculine?> ]  
 12 LIZ: [Mas ]culine.  
 13 JESS: Masculine.  
 14 LIZ: Masculine.  
 15 Whatever.  
 16 Wh-what comes to mind when you hear  
 17 mascul[ine. ]  
 18 JESS: [A bike?]  
 19 NANHI: A::nd, (1.3) Liz?=  
 20 <Liz is talking to the employee making chai>  
 21 PRITI: =Shave,  
 22 BIJAY: <quietly> <Moustache.>  
 23 (2.9)  
 → 24 SARVESH: *barī kofī kī yā r.*  
 25 I don't have bloody moustache [no. ]  
 26 NANHI: [tū thī k hai].  
 27 SARVESH: ↑ *cup.*  
 28 <laughs> <(xxx) vah boltī hai.>  
 29 <Liz returns to the conversation>  
 30 LIZ: Keep raising them.=  
 31 BIJAY: <singing> =<↑ *Oo::h*>  
 32 (1.7)  
 33 SARVESH: <deeply, loudly> <*hai mere bac ce↑:::*>

*Hindi translation* (for lines 24–33)

- SARVESH: *I really tried, yaar.*  
I don't have bloody moustache [no. ]
- NANHI: [ *You're okay.* ]
- SARVESH: ↑ *Shut up.*  
<laughs> <(xxx) *She says.*>  
<Liz returns to the conversation>
- LIZ: Keep raising them.=
- BIJAY: <singing> =<↑ *Oo :: h*>  
(1.7)
- SARVESH: <deeply, loudly> <*Hey my child, it is I!*>

In contrast to Extract 1, the switch to Hindi in this excerpt is facilitated by Liz's unexpected departure from the conversation (she begins talking to a kitchen employee), an act that frees the floor from the interactive constraints imposed by her role as facilitator. As soon as the boys perceive that her attention is directed elsewhere – namely, when she fails to answer Nanhi's call (line 19) – they begin to introduce attributes that bring the discussion back from bikes to biology, with Priti introducing 'shave' (line 21) and Bijay 'moustache' (line 22). The boys then experience an unusually long pause of 2.9 seconds, particularly given Liz's propensity to interrupt their talk with rapid-fire successive questions. It is at this point that Sarvesh establishes a Hindi-speaking floor through a personal admission of her physical inability to grow a 'bloody moustache': *baṛī kośīś kī yā r*. 'I really tried, yaar' (line 24). As with Jess's initiation of Hindi in Extract 1, Sarvesh's contribution immediately registers a challenge to the formality of Liz's regimented question-answer style. Particularly notable in this respect is Sarvesh's use of the address term *yā r* ('friend', 'buddy', 'pal'), a form used especially among young people in situations of informality and camaraderie.

Hindi is activated here as a resource for discussing the physical aspects of masculinity that stand between boy and man. The boys feel that they already possess the attributes of social masculinity that are of interest to Liz, conceptualising themselves for the most part in male terms. Indeed, many of them voice this self-conceptualisation overtly in this discussion through the use of grammatically masculine self-reference. But what Jess, Sarvesh, Priti and Bijay do not possess are the attributes of physical masculinity ideologically associated with Indian manhood, such as moustaches. Liz's decision to structure the conversation around social constructionism thus makes little sense to the boys, who instead want to discuss what they can do to acquire the essential technologies of male virility. The emergence of a Hindi-speaking floor gives them the opportunity to do just that, providing an alternative verbal space to debate, for instance, their successes and failures at growing facial hair.

Yet the boys' interactive practices also bring about new indexical links between Hindi and indigenous forms of maleness, precisely by exploiting already existent ideologies of both masculinity and language. As a case in point, consider the exchange that develops around the attribute 'moustache'. Without any understanding of the larger context in which Bijay's and Sarvesh's comments are embedded, we could easily hypothesise that Bijay's registering of the moustache as a male attribute (line 22), along with Sarvesh's

subsequent admission of her failed attempt at growing one (line 24), quite simply reflects their desire to pass more convincingly as men. But if we were to know how the moustache operates socioculturally in contemporary India, as well as how the boys themselves orient to it as a marker of masculinity, we would want to analyse their comments in a much more complex way. The moustache looms large in the Indian imagination as a marker of ideal masculinity, so much so that the women I interviewed in Delhi claim that at least 90 per cent of Indian men wear one. Moustaches, when groomed appropriately, are seen as indexical of both prestige and courage. Indeed, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, the Indian police force, after determining that 'moustachioed constables' receive more respect from civilians (BBC News 2004), recently began a programme that pays policemen thirty rupees per month just for growing one. Venerated in the popular Hindi proverb *much nahī kuch nahī* 'no moustache, no nothing', the moustache stands as one of India's most important markers of sexual virility. This fact might explain, for example, why a recent report on violence against women in northern India points to the high rate of moustache-wearers in Uttar Pradesh as evidence for the fact that the state is a 'stronghold of patriarchy' (MASVAW 2007: 2).

Yet critically, the Indian moustache is also ideologically associated with a class position that is definitively *not* elite. Although once a status marker comfortably situated in upper as well as lower tiers of class and caste hierarchy, particularly before the advent of British colonialism, the moustache appears to have been losing its appeal among globalised urban elites in Delhi and Bombay. Most of the middle class men and women I knew at the Center were no exception, viewing the moustache as a preoccupation of the uncultured urban classes. For many of them, a moustache was the opposite of modern, an anti-fashion, of sorts, better situated on the face of a pagari-wearing Rajput from the countryside of Rajasthan. A number of scholars and social commentators have attributed the anti-moustache shift to the influential Bollywood film industry, given that almost all of the most popular stars under the age of 40 do not wear them (e.g. Kala 2007; Dwyer 2000). Moreover, while the heroes of Bollywood narratives are typically clean-shaven, their enemies often display bold moustaches of varying shapes and sizes.

Whatever the cause for the moustache's decline among urban elites, the class division over this issue connects up in significant ways with globalisation. Shortly before the advent of my fieldwork, the media had even popularised this connection in its handling of the now infamous Indian Airlines' grounding of a 33-year veteran employee for refusing to shave off his large handlebar moustache. When a spokesperson for this Delhi-based air carrier backed up the decision by asserting that 'some passengers could be unnerved by such a striking facial feature' (BBC News 2002), the company registered its commitment to a sense of fashion that was not Indian, but decisively global. The rise of the clean shave as a new marker of Bourdieuan distinction (Bourdieu 1984) might also be behind why many of the boys confess a 'secret' love for the film stars of the less globalised Tamil-language Kollywood industry, who unlike their Bollywood counterparts, almost always sport hefty upper-lip facial hair.

Without a consideration of these sorts of ethnographic specificities, we would be unable to see a relationship between Bijay's quietly spoken suggestion of the attribute 'moustache' and Sarvesh's subsequent introduction of a Hindi-speaking floor. Like the activity of 'winking' in Clifford Geertz's (1973) oft-quoted discussion of ethnographic methodology, we can determine the social meaning of linguistic practices such as these only if we engage in the kind of 'thick description' that enables us to distinguish a wink from a twitch. I assert here that both of these conversational 'winks' are ideologically related. In short, both practices index an orientation to indigenous models of sexuality

that oppose the sensibilities of globalised elites. The boys are acutely aware that many English speakers at the Center denigrate moustache wearers and Hindi speakers as similarly 'vernac', and they here embrace both practices in order to establish an oppositional class position that better aligns with the masculinity they wish to project. Moustaches and Hindi thus emerge as jointly indexical of the more traditional understanding of masculinity that is core to boy identity.

Yet this emergence is ultimately dependent upon the structural particularities of the interaction itself. This observation is again exemplified by the final line of the above example, where Sarvesh enacts an extremely adversarial stance in response to Liz's attempts to regain a more regimented English-speaking floor: *hai mere bac↓ ce↑*:: 'Hey my child, it is I!' (line 33). (The pragmatic effect of this expression, which is not altogether clear from the translation, is something like: 'Who do you think you are? It will take you several generations to reach my level!') This classically hierarchical putdown is precipitated by Liz's return to the conversation: Instead of acknowledging the boys' concerns, her actions work to disrupt, or otherwise ignore, the more solidarity-oriented Hindi-speaking floor. Most notably, she places the boys back into the interactional role of respondent, ordering them to come up with more masculine attributes ('keep raising them', line 30). Sarvesh's response thus works to reverse this unwanted conversational asymmetry, if only momentarily, by putting herself into the role of adult and Liz into that of child. Yet in terms of the larger discussion, the response also works to establish Hindi as the preferred medium for the enactment of combative oneupmanship. The hierarchical use of Hindi in this excerpt, far from isolated, is just one of many instances where the boys employ the language for adversarial stance-taking. And because this kind of stance-taking is itself ideologically associated with male speakers – a connection made here by Sarvesh's uncharacteristic use of a low-pitched voice – Hindi emerges by association as indexical of masculinity more generally.

### Conclusions

My primary argument in this chapter has been concerned with the way in which masculinity emerges in interaction through a confluence of structural and ideological factors. I have suggested that group members, bilingual in Hindi and English, are continually in the process of negotiating new indexical links between language, masculinity and sexuality. While these negotiations materialise through and against dominant metalinguistic understandings of English and Hindi, the specifics of this materialisation emerge within daily interaction at the Center and related environs, where Hindi and English increasingly come to occupy antagonistic ideological endpoints with respect to the articulation of sexuality. The interactional subject positions that emerge from the turns and sequences of conversational immediacy are thus situated within locally bound ideologies regarding the relationship between language and identity.

This brings us back to that bugbear of a concept that in many ways motivated the writing of this chapter: social class. Language and gender researchers, particularly those influenced by the paradigm of performativity, have long challenged static conceptualisations of gender, race and sexuality by treating these categories as ideological instead of fixed. Scholarship written within this tradition does not deny the existence of social hierarchy, but rather gives discourse a central role in its production. Yet the same body of scholarship has been much more reluctant to view social class as having discursive fluidity, often working from the assumption that class is a stable designation that precedes,



and in many ways predicts, how speakers speak. This is not without good reason, given that the material reality of social class in many ways determines the possibilities of talk, particularly given the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational access. In northern India, to name but one relevant example, competency in English is importantly reliant on whether speakers have attended Hindi-medium or English-medium schools. Indeed, the 'medium' divide, forged through economic liberalisation, has produced a new category of identity within the Indian middle classes (LaDousa 2006), a development no doubt intensified by the hefty price tag associated with English-medium education.

But the lesbians and boys associated with the group, in that they share the ability to converse fluently in both Hindi and English, do not generally distinguish themselves along the lines of medium, viewing themselves, for the most part, as socioeconomic equals. Their divergent uses of the two languages in the above data are thus motivated primarily by ideological orientation, not material constraint. Specifically, Center boys orient to a semiotics of lower classness in order to oppose what they perceive to be an elite and un-Indian conceptualisation of sexual identity. In contrast, Center lesbians, although not well represented in the data discussed here, appropriate the linguistic resources of upper classness as a means of positioning their identity as globally progressive. It is not only masculinity that is emergent in group interactions, then, but also social class. Indeed, these two orientations materialise in the data as ideological bedfellows, mutually indexed by the same set of linguistic resources. That is, the adversarial stance-taking that indexes boy masculinity – here developed through, for example, the use of verbal oneupmanship, Bollywood villain intonation, exclusionary uses of the solidarity address term *yār*, and most critically, Hindi – also works to index a non-elite class position, particularly through its defiance of upper class norms of politeness.

The Center thus provides the globalised local context in which tensions around sexual identity, social class, language and postcolonialism take form. A British woman acts as an intermediary between the Ford Foundation's mission to address the AIDS epidemic and the identity concerns of the middle classes. But in the course of this mediation, she brings to the conversational table Western understandings of masculinity and sexuality. Some participants, particularly those whose understanding of self cannot be reconciled with Western ideologies of social constructionism, are inspired to rebellion; others come to embrace the identities put before them. NGOs like the Center, by providing access to global identities of masculinity and sexuality, offer their members a powerful kind of sociosexual mobility. But because this mobility is dependent upon ideological transformation, such spaces are also changing the very process through which masculinity is recognised and reproduced.

### Notes

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- 1 Because the decision to participate in this organisation carries significant personal risk for the individuals involved, I have chosen to use pseudonyms for the group title as well as for the boys and lesbians discussed in this article. I have tried to select pseudonyms that in some way convey the spirit of the actual names, with particular attention to connotations of gender, formality, and/or linguistic origin.
- 2 In their review of language and gender research, Benwell and Stokoe conflate a number of theoretical perspectives that are usually viewed as intellectually distinct by social theorists, most notably social constructionism and gender performativity.
- 3 I have chosen to refer to individuals with the pronoun that they themselves prefer. For instance, while Jess, Sarvesh and Priti usually use the feminine first person when speaking Hindi, Bijay always uses the masculine.

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