

Bilingual/bisexual

Linguistic and sexual fluidity in fictional accounts of bilingualism and language learning

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Recent work in language and sexuality has emphasized globalization and multilingualism as important areas of investigation (Bucholtz & Hall 2006, Leap & Boellstorff 2003, Murray 2014). Concomitantly, other scholars have employed the construct of sexual fluidity as a metaphor for linguistic fluidity (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). Few studies, however, have examined how sexual and linguistic fluidity intersect in individual experience. This paper examines metalinguistic discourse in three fictional novels involving bisexual, bilingual characters in order to understand how talk about language informs representations of sexualities. In these texts bilingualism functions in constructing access to queer communities, authenticity, belonging, and emotional control for bisexual characters. Further, sexual and linguistic fluidity are portrayed as lifespan processes embedded in specific time periods. Such understandings point to a need for historical approaches to fluidity that capture longer timescales and multiple dimensions of linguistic and sexual desire, practice, and identity.

Keywords: bilingualism, bisexuality, fluidity, fiction, multilingualism

I no longer wish to be Ann, or Marie, or even Gita. After half a lifetime of subtly Americanizing the pronunciation of my name, in the past year I have begun to say it in the Gujarati way: Minal, mee-nalr. The vowels have a specific, rolling intonation; the final letter is a consonant that does not exist in English, somewhere in the borderland between l and r. Each time I say my name this way, I have the sensation of integrating language itself. I have come to understand that queerness is a migration as momentous as any other, a journey from one world to the next.

(Hajratwala 2009: 321)

1. Introduction

As the study of language and sexuality expands in both depth and breadth, attention has turned to the role of globalization and attendant processes of multilingualism and language learning as they intersect with sexual identity and desire (Bucholtz & Hall 2006, Leap & Boellstorff 2003, Takahashi 2012). Recent work addresses the globalization of queer languages (Leap & Boellstorff 2003), the linguistic aspects of queer migration (Murray 2014), and LGBT issues in language teaching and learning (Liddicoat 2009, Nelson 2006, 2010) among others. There has been less focus, however, on the affective, emotional, and subjective aspects of sexual identity and desire in learning and using more than one language (Nelson 2012). Concomitantly, recent work in linguistic fluidity (metrolingualism) has employed sexual fluidity as a metaphor for emergent and flexible language use (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010, Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). Together these discussions open the field for more focused examination of how subjective accounts of fluidity in language competence and use and sexual desires, practices, and identities intersect and inform one another. The current study brings these avenues of research together by examining connections between representations of bisexuality and bilingualism in works of fiction. Analysis of fictional texts brings to light the potentially complex interplay of linguistic and sexual fluidity in a contextualized, historical format that suggests a need for longitudinal, scalar approaches to studying language and sexuality.

Language, gender, and sexuality are closely intertwined, and language ideologies, alignments and identities influence and are influenced by sexualities. As Cameron and Kulick (2003: 12) note, “The language we have access to in a particular time and place for representing sex and sexuality exerts a significant influence on what we take to be possible, what we take to be ‘normal’ and what we take to be desirable.” The converse is also true, as Indian American journalist and self-identified bisexual Minal Hajratwala (2009) discusses in the epigraph to this article. Hajratwala’s desire to learn her heritage language, Gujarati, emerges only after finding acceptance in an LGBT activist group in India. Hajratwala’s sexual identities and linguistic identities are represented in her memoir as closely intertwined, and she depicts her own migration to queerness as parallel to her family’s migration across national borders. Such discussions and descriptions of interconnected sexual and linguistic migrations, however, are still rare in published research literature on language and sexuality in applied and sociolinguistics, especially for ostensibly “invisible” sexualities such as bisexuality. The current study draws on fictional representations of the intersections of bilingualism and bisexuality as a rich source for exploring the potential interconnectedness of linguistic and sexual fluidity.

2. Fluidity and fixity

Exploring sexual fluidity together with the linguistic fluidity associated with multilingualism and language learning can potentially yield understandings of the nature of both by considering how sexual fluidity, or the “situation-dependent flexibility” (Diamond 2008: 3) of sexuality, and linguistic fluidity, i.e. “creative linguistic conditions across space and border” (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010: 244) intersect. In both views, human action, in the form of sexual and linguistic practices, emerge from the situational context in ways that shape flexible and shifting identities. The novels discussed below present bilingualism and language as a part of the changing scene and context that afford characters different voices (with different addressees or interlocutors) and access to multiple communities, agencies, and belongings. Shifting language competencies and the use of more than one language are intimately tied to the development and representation of bisexuality in the three novels (*In One Person*, *Krakow Melt*, and *Red Audrey and the Roping*) analyzed in the current study.

Recent work in multilingualism has employed sexuality as a metaphor for understanding language practices. Otsuji and Pennycook (2012) and Pennycook (2012) have proposed the term “metrolinguism,” or the “creative linguistic practices across borders of culture, history and politics” (Otsuji & Pennycook 2012: 240), as a correlate to “metrosexuality” and “metroethnicity” (Maher 2010) that embraces contemporary fluidity in language use and language competence associated with mobility and globalization in connection with urban spaces (Pennycook & Otsuji 2014). Metrosexuality provides a good reference point for looking at language and mobility, according to Otsuji and Pennycook (2010: 245), because the “[metrosexual] undoing of gendered orthodoxies [...] resonates with the metrolingual undermining of ortholinguistic practices [...]. Just as the metrosexual challenges hetero/homosexual and masculine/feminine dichotomies, so the metrolingual undermines retrolingual mono/multilingual dichotomies.” The focus of the current study is not so much to examine metrolinguism *per se*, but rather to take the provocative starting point that sexuality and language do not merely serve as metaphors for one another, but are potentially interrelated.

Fluidity is a concept that is used in different ways across the social sciences to describe mobility of human action. In sociology, “social fluidity” refers to mobility across socioeconomic classes (Ritzer 2007), for Diamond (2008) sexual fluidity occurs across the lifespan as women develop relationships with partners of different genders in different contexts, and in linguistics fluidity has come to mean “emergent” language use that is contextualized in space (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). It is possible then that, just as identities and agencies have come to be seen as multiple and complex (Ahearn 2001, Fogle 2012, Norton 2013), there are multi-dimensional

differences in the conceptualization and representation of fluidity that point to the important role of not only ideology, but also history in understanding these processes. Linguistic and sexual fluidity can occur in the moment (i.e. simultaneous mixing of practices) or across time and space (i.e. the waxing and waning of desires, practices, and competencies) over longer time scales. The novels discussed in this article offer three different ways of conceiving of fluidity in human action and point to the need for understanding different conceptualizations of fluidity (and fixity) together.

Rigidity or fixity refers to “essentialized identity ascriptions” (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010: 249) that acquires meaning in relation to postmodern, contemporary accounts of fluidity. This interplay of fluidity and fixity, according to Otsuji and Pennycook (2010: 252), “can assign an alternative meaning to essentialism as part of a process of social change.” In their studies fixity is primarily associated with language ideologies of purity and essentialized ethnolinguistic identities. However, fixity and fluidity potentially originate in or are shaped by the historical context and individuals’ life experiences, including socialization processes (Cameron & Kulick 2003, Scollon & Scollon 2004). Looking to works of fiction can draw attention to the sociohistorical context of the interplay of fluidity and fixity as the scene and setting of the novel as well as the characters’ life experiences are presented in ways that ethnographies find difficult to achieve (Blommaert & Huang 2009). Further, the bilingual bisexual characters in these stories, while not approaching the linguistic fluidity described in Pennycook and Otsuji’s collective work on metrolingualism, demonstrate how mixing and switching languages intersect with other forms of fluidity (i.e. sexual fluidity) and how different historical moments afford various possibilities for conceiving of human action.

3. Bisexuality

Bisexuality is often described as an “invisible” sexuality and is notoriously difficult to study (Eliaison & Elia 2011). Baker (2008: 147), for example, argued that despite the fact that bisexuality could be considered a “majority” form of sexuality based on the findings of Kinsey (1948, 1953 as cited in Baker 2008), the concept presented a “problem to mainstream sexual classification scheme” that allowed for only binary homosexual or heterosexual identifications. In an analysis of sexuality terms in the British National Corpus (BNC), Baker found that “bisexuals were mentioned less than once in every one million words” (Baker 2008: 149). In further analysis of the 81 references to “bisexual” in the BNC, he found 19 uses of the word as a “tag” after “gay,” i.e. “gay and bisexual” and further found that mentions of bisexuality usually carried negative connotations. For example, bisexuals were associated with

HIV and having potentially problematic relationships. The term “bisexual” was used as a compromise for “gay,” and bisexuals themselves were stereotyped as promiscuous or scandalous. The biphobia carried in these representations along with the erasure of bisexuality in the media, according to Baker, maintain the illusion of a binary system of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Recent work, however, has begun to uncover how bisexual-identified individuals construct bisexual identities. In her study of a bisexual student group, Thorne (2013: 94) concluded that bisexual identity can be performed and achieved through social associations (relationships), bodily style, or discursive practices that function in interactional discourse to assert membership, police boundaries, and reconcile “the conflict between incongruous desires, behaviors, and identities.” Being in-between in sexual orientation then requires the same sorts of self-conscious navigation of identity conflict as learning a new language or being socialized into a new culture (Duff 2011); although the societal attitudes and sense of belonging associated with these processes are different. These findings help to explain why bisexual-identified individuals in heterosexual relationships may choose to dress or look more “gay” or *vice versa*, how they realize sexual desires and identities through a variety of relationship configurations (including for example polyamorous or non-monogamous relationships), and how they discursively claim membership as “bisexual” (Thorne 2013). As bisexuality is notoriously an “invisible” identity (Baker 2008), published and literary work provides a clear source of representation that can be further expanded in empirical work.

4. Literary representation

The current study draws on fictional characters and fictional accounts of bilingualism and language learning to examine relationships between sexual and linguistic fluidity. As fiction cannot be taken to be reliable “data” or evidence of how languages are actually learned, what is the value of such analysis to our social scientific pursuit? In this paper, I align with Lippi-Green’s (2011: 193) proposal that “the novel is one of the most interesting points of access to current language ideology, in that the way the characters in novels use language and talk about language can be revealing.” Language ideologies, or beliefs about or attitudes toward language that mediate between structure and use (cf. King 2000, Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity 1998) are both represented in literature and function within stories to construct social relations, prompt turns of plot and explain events that occur in the narrative. The current study focuses on explicit metalinguistic discourse in which characters in the novels talk about language and language learning. Examining the ways in which talk about language, and language itself, intertwine with other

aspects of the characters' lives in the context of the literary narrative can offer insight into the kinds of subjectivities and possibilities that are difficult to uncover through other approaches.

Literary texts, and particularly the novel, have historically been rich resources for the production of gay and lesbian identities (Abraham 2008 [1996], 2009). In this paper I draw on Abraham's (2009) notion of "legibility" as a rationale and justification for looking to literature as a means for examining relationships between sexual and linguistic fluidity or bilingualism and bisexuality. In a close examination of the connections between homosexuality and urbanity or how cities have come to be seen as "gay" places and *vice versa* gay people belonging in cities, Abraham suggested that the notion of legibility is at the heart of understanding these processes. She proposed the term "legibility" in contrast to the more commonly used "visibility" as a way to invoke the notion of interpretation that is associated with understanding and knowing what being gay is.

The shift from visibility to legibility is perhaps even more important for bisexual and fluid populations as the emphasis is placed on *interpretation* rather than the *politics* of visibility. As the main character in John Irving's novel notes:

What I should have told her, but I didn't dare, was that I was bisexual. It wasn't my *writing* that kept me from being politically involved; it was that, in 1963, my dual sexuality was all the politics I could handle. Believe me: When you're twenty-one, there's a lot of politics involved in being sexually *mutable*.

(Irving 2012: 129; emphasis original)

Here bisexuality is constructed as "unspeakable" in a particular place and time (the U.S. in the 1960s). Although new movements to organize bisexuals have led to greater visibility in the twenty-first century, the relative invisibility of bisexuals to other groups (i.e. gays and lesbians) has led to a need to investigate processes of legibility and mutability (e.g. Thorne 2013). This paper does not argue that the works analyzed below represent what people actually do with language or their actual sexual/identity practices. Rather, the accounts in these works of fiction point to the ways in which talk about language in the texts is linked to the construction of sexual identities and *vice versa* how bisexuality influences language competences and practices. In addition, fiction offers a site for the construction of metaphors of fluidity and fixity that span boundaries of both language and sexuality so that ways of thinking about fluidity and fixity are contextualized in historical context. These possibilities provide a rich starting point for investigations relying on more traditional social scientific approaches and open new avenues for understanding sexual and linguistic fluidity through close examination of invisibility, passing and belonging as well as the constructs of desire and identity.

5. The study

The three books selected for analysis in the current study were chosen for three primary reasons (a) they included main characters who identified as bisexual, (b) they were written predominately in English, but the bisexual character(s) in the work were also bilingual or proficient in a second language, and (c) they were recognized as outstanding works of LGBT fiction by being nominated for a Lambda Literary award within the past five years. *In One Person* by John Irving (2012) was the bisexual literature winner in 2013, *Krakow Melt* by Daniel Allen Cox (2010) was nominated in the bisexual-fiction category in 2011, and *Red Audrey and the Roping* by Jill Malone (2008) was nominated in the lesbian debut category in 2010. Malone's novel may in fact not be considered a "bisexual book" by some (it is not included in Lambert's [2014] list of bisexual books for university use, for example). However, a second language (Latin) takes a central place in this narrative, and the book offered some of the original inspiration for the study through the use of language as a correlate to sexuality as discussed below. The main character of the book Jane self-identifies as bisexual several times in the narrative and while this identity is ultimately portrayed as transitional, her story provides an interesting counterpoint and study of fixity in relation to the fluidity represented in the other two novels.

Bilingualism (multilingualism in the form of knowing or using more than two languages rarely appears in these texts) is represented in each book in three main ways: (a) through characters who are language learners or language teachers, (b) through metalinguistic discourse in which comments are made about processes of language learning, teaching, or differences in languages and (c) through code mixing itself. The characters in the books are bilingual or proficient in English and one of three different languages: German (*In One Person*), Polish (*Krakow Melt*) and Latin (*Red Audrey and the Roping*). The representation of bilingualism further intersects with literary devices such as shifts in point of view and other aspects of narration that function to construct certain meanings in the texts. Ultimately, I argue here that the representations of sexual fluidity and linguistic fluidity that coincide in these texts can point us in future directions for empirical work that addresses these questions more comprehensively.

For the analysis of the texts, instances of explicit metalinguistic discourse (i.e. excerpts in which language is the topic of talk or thought) were identified (both through close reading and a secondary Google Book search of each novel for language names, e.g. German, Polish and Latin) and copied into an Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. In total, 25 excerpts were identified in *In One Person*, 18 in *Krakow Melt*, and 25 in *Red Audrey*. The talk about language was then analyzed in relation to the discussions of sexuality, narrative devices and actions and the

thoughts and desires of the characters in the text. In addition, code mixing and instances of the use of Polish within the narrative in *Krakow Melt* were further analyzed in addition to the talk about language.

6. Bilingual/bisexual in three novels

While all three novels selected for the current study involve interesting and complex discussions of language and sexuality, they each do so in a different way. In the first novel, *In One Person*, bisexuality is foregrounded through the first person narrative in which the main character Billy comments on, thinks about, and discusses his sexual preferences, desires and relationships over his youth and young adulthood. Two aspects of Billy's language development, overcoming a speech impediment in his pre-teen years and learning and using German as he grows older, play important roles in plot developments that relate to Billy's own understanding of his sexuality throughout his lifetime. The second novel, *Krakow Melt*, presents a more fragmented narrative that tells the story of performance artist and bisexual main character Radek. Radek develops a serious romantic relationship with a woman during the story, but tells about past relationships with men and becomes involved sexually with men through his girlfriend's direction and suggestion. Radek breaks from the first-person narration at times to address the reader with metalinguistic comments or questions (e.g. "I've always wondered what you thought of my English" [Cox 2010: 117]) and also code mixes with Polish for basic phrases and lexical borrowings. Finally, *Red Audrey and the Roping* features a bisexual main character who is also an adjunct Latin teacher at the University of Hawai'i. Jane refers to herself as bisexual at least twice in the novel, but she is criticized by her friends for hiding her affairs and relationships and is not sure, it seems, with whom she wants to be. Her teaching of Latin and use of Latin provide a structural counterpoint to the chaos of her fluid, daredevil life. In sum, the three novels provide perspectives on the ways in which languages provide access to communities and identities as well as the very personal ways languages are used in development, the formation of relationships, and the regulation of emotions.

6.1 *In One Person*: "Trans" fluid

The novel *In One Person* offers a very self-conscious and explicit discussion of bisexuality and sexual fluidity as the main character becomes involved in and spends a good deal of time explaining and commenting on multiple relationships with partners of different sexes and genders. The text offers an examination of how elite bilingualism affords opportunities for sexual fluidity primarily

through international travel as well as how ideologies of language learning provide a metaphor for sexual development and identity. Further, language and language learning take an important role in the development of the plot of this narrative as transforming linguistic competences intersect with new sexual relationships and important events in the characters' lives. In this novel, fluidity manifests itself in varying sexual practices and desires as well as the use of different languages across contexts, while these aspects of the main character Billy's actions and thoughts remain stable within contexts (i.e. in certain places or with certain people).

In One Person is the story of a young man (known as William, Bill, or Billy) growing up in a small town in New Hampshire. In high school he realizes that he has a crush on a transgender¹ librarian (Miss Frost), and the novel travels from the U.S. to Europe and back through several of Billy's relationships into adulthood with transgender women, cisgender women, and gay men. While the picture of Billy's sexuality emerges as fluid, encompassing different desires and practices over the course of his lifetime in the novel, he does not maintain relationships with members of the same sex at the same time or engage in sex with more than one person at the same time. Thus fluidity is represented across different contexts (e.g. Germany and the U.S.) with different people. Billy's interest in transgender women represents a site where the interplay of fluidity and fixity is emphasized as Billy is attracted to both genders "in one person," but maintains a heterosexual identity. These representations of Billy's sexuality rely on language and bilingualism as well as the historical time period of the 1960s–1980s in which fluidity was possible only in certain, socially acceptable ways.

When Billy is introduced in the text, he is attending speech-language therapy for a speech impediment that causes him to have difficulty pronouncing certain words such as "areola" and "penis." As Billy gets older, the narrative shifts to talk about his learning and using German as a second language in high school and through adulthood. These language-related phenomena and topics are tied to Billy's sexual desires and identities in a number of ways at different times in the narrative, and language learning and use play a role in turns in the plot in this novel. The book takes an overt and political, in some ways, stand in favor of bisexuality as many of the issues of discrimination, invisibility and challenges to belonging are brought up by Billy as he explores and explains his sexuality throughout the novel.

At each turning point in the plot of *In One Person*, language learning or some aspect of Billy's bilingualism plays a pivotal role. In the first segment of

1. I use "transgender," but the word "transsexual" is used by the narrator in *In One Person* with the following parenthetical commentary, "(I'm sorry but we didn't use to say 'transgender' – not till the eighties)" (Irving 2012: 62).

the narrative, in which Billy is a young student at a private boarding school in the Northeast, Billy recognizes a penchant for developing “crushes on the wrong people” (Irving 2012: 173). He visits the librarian at the town library (introduced to him by his mother’s husband) who eventually gives him James Baldwin’s (1964) *Giovanni’s Room* to read (emphasizing the perhaps self-conscious importance of literary works in understanding sexuality at the time). During this time Billy visits a speech therapist at the school because he had problems pronouncing certain words. Later in the story, we find that the speech therapist (Ms. Hadley) believes that the speech impediment is psychological or emotional and not cognitive:

- (1) *As I was leaving Mrs. Hadley’s office, I suddenly remembered what Fraulein Bauer had told me; I made many grammatical mistakes in German, and the word-order business gave me fits, but my pronunciation was perfect. There was no German word I couldn’t pronounce. Yet when I told Martha Hadley this news, she seemed barely interested – if at all. It’s psychological, Billy. You can say anything, in the sense that you’re able to say it. But you either won’t say a word, because it triggers something, or – ‘I interrupted her. It triggers something sexual, you mean,’ I said. ‘Maybe,’ said Mrs. Hadley; she shrugged. She seemed barely interested in the sexual part of my pronunciation problems, as if sexual speculation (of any kind) was in a category as uninteresting to her as my excellent pronunciation in German. I had an Austrian accent, naturally. ‘I think you’re as angry at your mother as she is at you,’ Martha Hadley told me. ‘At times, Billy, I think you’re too angry to speak.’* (Irving 2012: 108)

Here, in addition to talk about how languages are learned and language variation, Billy links his difficulties in English pronunciation (that are absent in German) to “something sexual.” Ms. Hadley takes a more Freudian approach, suggesting that Billy is angry with his mother, and the topic is dropped for the time being.

Billy’s sexuality and his speech impediment recur together again at a later moment in the story. When Billy is still in boarding school, he has an illicit affair with the librarian Miss Frost. He does not learn that Miss Frost is transgender until after his first sexual encounter with her. In the following excerpt they have had sex for a second time, and this time Billy knows that he is sleeping with a transgender woman. As they are intimate with each other, Miss Frost has encouraged Billy to practice words that are difficult for him to pronounce, such as “shadow.” As he overcomes these difficulties, the topic turns more personal:

- (2) *‘And what’s this that I’ve got in my hand?’ she asked me. ‘My penith,’ I answered. ‘I wouldn’t change that penith for all the world, William,’ Miss Frost said. ‘I believe you should say that word any fucking way you want to.’* (Irving 2012: 79)

Here Irving takes on what Cameron and Kulick (2003) discuss as a psychoanalytic approach to desire. While Freudian and Lacanian views of desire, according to Cameron and Kulick, are essentially innate or private, they argue that other scholars have demonstrated how desires are socialized in interaction. Even if Billy's lisp (and mispronunciation of the word "penis") is attributable to anger toward his mother as Ms. Hadley indicated, Miss Frost's comments represent external socialization that, given the context, allows Billy to speak and act any way he wants to. Here Billy's first sexual experience with a transgender woman is intimately tied with his language development and speech. These two themes come together again in the depictions of language and sexuality in his later life. For Billy, accepting his own bisexual desires, represented in the transgender body of Miss Frost, is important for mitigating his speech impediment. Few linguistic studies are able to capture language in the act of sex, but works of fiction portray the possible connections between sex, sexuality, and language learning.

A second time in the text when language and language learning figure centrally in the plot of *In One Person* is when Billy goes to Austria on a study abroad program and gets a job working at an upscale restaurant. This opportunity is afforded to him because of his excellent German (learned in high school):

- (3) *My German was good enough to get me hired at an excellent restaurant on the Weihburggasse – near the opposite end of the Kärntnerstrasse from the opera. It was called Zufall ("Coincidence"), and I got the job both because I had worked as a waiter in New York and because, shortly after I arrived in Vienna, I learned that the only English-speaking waiter at Zufall had been fired.* (Irving 2012: 111)

During this time Billy meets a woman who is an understudy at the opera. Their relationship is described in terms of their both needing to improve their German:

- (4) *Because I needed to improve my German grammar and word order – not to mention my vocabulary – I instantly foresaw how Esmeralda and I could help each other. My accent was the only aspect of my German that was better than Esmeralda's.* (Irving 2012: 121)

Language learning then becomes the premise both for Billy's entering the community at Zufall and for the heterosexual relationship that Billy forms with Esmeralda. She is the first cisgender woman he has sex with. The authenticity of his relationship with Esmeralda, however, is questioned by both the waitstaff at Zufall as well as the gay, American expatriate crowd that he often serves as they comment on his "legible" homosexuality despite the American girlfriend.

This liminality and controversy in belonging also surface in discussions of Billy's German in the context of the restaurant. While Billy's German had been good enough to obtain the position to serve the English-speaking clientele, the

waitstaff urges him to improve in order to serve the German-speaking crowd in the winter. Thus Billy occupies spaces on the borderlines of identities (gay and straight; English-speaking and German-speaking) that overlap and intertwine as his ability to speak good German is attractive to Esmeralda and gets him a job, but his English-language competence also gains him access to the gay male community that frequented Zufall.

Authenticity and inauthenticity (i.e. passing or invisibility) are depicted as important aspects of Billy's linguistic and sexual identities later in life as well. In one section of the narrative, Billy (now a published novelist on book tour) is traveling in Germany with a transgender partner Donna. Again, Billy's proficiency in German is an asset in his relationship as Donna feels more comfortable in Europe, but does not herself speak a language other than English:

- (5) *Europe was more accepting of transsexuals – Europe was more sexually accepting and sophisticated, generally – but Donna was insecure about learning another language.* (Irving 2012: 62)

In addition, Donna feels that she cannot learn a language because she is not well educated, and this “shortcoming” is tied to the process she goes through in making sense of her sexual identity:

- (6) *She'd dropped out of college, because her college years coincided with what she called her 'sexual-identity crises,' and she had little confidence in herself intellectually.* (Irving 2012: 62)

The language ideology represented here, i.e. that second language learning is reserved for educated elite, serves in an interesting way to construct both Billy and Donna's sexualities. While Billy's elite bilingualism as well as his role as a novelist who travels for book talks allows him access to a number of places and communities that facilitated his sexual fluidity, Donna is portrayed as more rigid, both linguistically and sexually, because of her “identity crisis” in college. At a pivotal moment in their relationship, Billy and Donna go as a heterosexual couple with another heterosexual couple to a drag show in Berlin (at a time when drag shows were not common entertainment for straight couples in the United States). Donna is offended by the campiness of the show and uncomfortable. At the end of the scene, a waitress in drag compliments Donna on her appearance. Billy understands what the waitress says, but Donna does not. She does understand, however, that the waitress takes her for a man in drag, rather than a woman, and is offended and threatened. She complains to Billy that she is not like them (i.e. the drag queens at the bar), and her sense of authenticity is lost. In this world of crossing, then, monolingual and “monosexual” Donna, who sees herself as a woman in a heterosexual relationship, does not belong both sexually and linguistically.

For Irving, language learning and the ability to speak more than one language are integral aspects of pivotal moments in the characters' lives where sexual identities are invented and reinvented. The context of language learning (e.g. in speech language therapy with Ms. Hadley) provides a place for talking about sex and sexuality while the ability to pass as a competent speaker of both English and German opens up multiple worlds where Billy explores his bisexuality and multiple desires, attractions, and relationships. These possibilities, however, are associated with elite lifestyles involving cosmopolitanism and high levels of education that provide Billy the fluidity he enjoyed. Cosmopolitanism has been considered an important construct in language learning (Canagarajah 2013), but discussions have rarely included fluid sexualities, such as bisexuality or metrosexuality, which are central to Billy's elite identity. In this novel, language learning becomes a metaphor for Billy's changing and fluid sexuality as well as, at times, a process that instigates or provides the catalyst for these related changes.

6.2 *Krakow Melt*: Mixing

In contrast to *In One Person* in which characters move across boundaries of languages, genders and sexualities in a "trans" fluid process, *Krakow Melt* presents an overlay of languages and sexualities approaching the metrosexuality and metro-lingualism discussed by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010). The questions of legibility and authenticity play a central role in the events that unfold in the novel as well as the relationship the main character and narrator form with the reader. The character Radek's bilingualism and bisexuality then become dependent not on the internal monologue presented in *In One Person*, but rather on the interpretations made by others (other characters; readers), their intentions, and desires. The main character of the story self-consciously invokes discussions of authenticity through metalinguistic comments and questions that involve the reader in assessing his bilingual language competence. Bilingualism is constructed as a metaphor or correlate to bisexuality as ambiguous, interpretable, and shifting with a focus on fluidity in practice (speaking across languages; having sex with more than one partner) rather than the fluidity across contexts seen in the first novel.

Krakow Melt, involves a parkouring, young, urban performance artist living in Poland who is haunted by a fire in which both of his parents died when he was a child. Much of the main character Radek's performance art involves constructing cities or architectural landmarks and burning them in recreations of famous fires. In addition, the metaphors of "flaming" and homosexuality are continued as Radek and his girlfriend Dorota engage in gay rights activism as they light fires around Krakow with anti-homophobic messages. Radek's primary relationship in

the novel is with the cisgender woman Dorota, but there are a few sex scenes with cisgender men. While the label “bisexual” is not explicitly used in the text, Radek discusses his sexuality and sexual preferences in the narrative, and his girlfriend ultimately finds homosexual encounters for him in which she acts as an observer.

In interviews about *Krakow Melt*, the author Daniel Allen Cox has talked about the book and the fact that it is a book about Poland and Polish culture written for “outsiders.” Further, he notes that the homophobia and homophobic violence depicted in the book could have taken place in many places:

In a certain way, *Krakow Melt* has nothing to do with Poland. I could’ve chosen any number of countries with flagrant human rights violations, including Canada, United States, Russia, Uganda, Latvia and about 200 others.

(Q&A with Daniel Allen Cox 2011)

Thus although *Krakow Melt* was “meticulously researched,” (Q&A 2011) and Cox presents a believable portrait of Poland, the narrative is a text about homophobia in Poland for outsiders (and not Poles) to consider what it is like to be between worlds, languages, and sexualities and to face discrimination, harassment, and assault.

Krakow Melt is written in both English and Polish; although, the mixing of languages is done in a very deliberate way in which the Polish is made understandable to the English-comprehending audience. In this way, the novel might be understood to be written by a “resourceful user” (cf. Pennycook 2012) of Polish who is actively constructing resourceful readers of this mixed language. Mixing Polish in the text is one way to implicitly draw on certain language ideologies as the narrator often couples the language alternation with metalinguistic comments about Polish or English. In this analysis I will focus on the explicit comments made about sexuality and sexual identity as well as the Polish mixes in the text to discuss how bilingualism as represented in the English text relates to the sexual fluidity and sexualities of the characters.

Radek is physically assaulted at several points in the narrative because of his sexuality. He is “read” or made legible as gay in different ways. In the first instance, a neighbor notices that Radek is wearing black fingernail polish. The man believes that it is the same color his wife wears and accuses Radek of sleeping with his wife. Radek gets involved in a fist-fight with the man over the matter, but denies the adultery by saying that he is gay. Radek’s fingernail polish then can be read in two different ways – as evidence of a relationship with a woman who wears the same color or as evidence of his homosexuality. At this point, the narrative addresses the reader through Radek’s thoughts and explains: “‘I am a homosexual,’ I said. This was true, at least according to the broad-brush definition on Polish Wikipedia” (Cox 2010: 9). The implication here is that while Radek does not see himself as “homosexual,” the Polish language (or definition of “homosexual” in

Polish) affords only this label to him, and in the case of the angry neighbor it is more convenient to be read as gay than as straight or fluid. Of course a word for “bisexual” does exist in Polish, and it would be erroneous to assume that fluid sexualities are not recognized by Polish speakers. However, as a representation of “any place” in which sexual discrimination and homophobia occur, the novel presents the notion that sexual binaries, i.e. “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” are used for interpreting the sexual identities of individuals and these are encoded in language. Such representations and interpretations have very real consequences as at the end of the story Radek is read as gay, which results in assault and murder by a group of homophobic youth.

In the same way that Radek’s sexual identities have multiple interpretations, his linguistic identities are also called into question. At times in the narrative Radek shifts to second person to address the reader of the novel, and this occurs most often when he is making metalinguistic comments. Such comments revolve around how to say things in English, when Polish is superior to English, and what the reader thinks about his English. This last set of quotes, represented in the following excerpt, construct the narrator of the story as a Polish-dominant bilingual and the reader of the novel as monolingual English-speaking. In all of these instances, Polish and English are used together to build the character’s authenticity as “Polish” at the same time that these strategies demonstrate an intimate knowledge of English-speaking worlds. This tension is seen in the following passage:

- (7) *After the closing night of my London show at Czlowiek Obcy (we rescheduled the vernissage fire). I came home on the tramwaj and looked forward to a relaxing night of vegging. Is that the expression? ‘Vegging?’ I’ve always wondered what you thought of my English.* (Cox 2010: 117)

Here Polish is used for place names and the place-particular “tramwaj” or street-car in the English text. These are fairly simplistic borrowings of lexical items that occur throughout the narrative and seem more characteristic of a less competent Polish speaker (as compared, for example to Junot Diaz’s (2008) extensive use of Spanish in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* or even the use of Russian by U.S. author Donna Tartt [2013] in *The Goldfinch*). Additionally, the metalinguistic question about the very culturally specific colloquial form “vegging” positions him as both a more competent (for knowing the word) and less competent (for doubting his knowledge) English speaker. So is Radek a native Polish speaker or native English speaker? From a linguistic perspective, he does not succeed in proving himself to be a highly competent code-switcher (cf. Poplack 1980) despite the fact that he constructs himself as an expert in Polish and less competent English speaker through metalinguistic commentary. This conflict between demonstrated competence and self-positioning refers back to long-standing discussions about

the differences between what speakers actually do (or can do) with language and what they say they do. How bilingual Radek is then, depends on his legibility as bilingual to the reader. His authenticity as “Polish speaker” and “Polish” are constructed by the reader in response to these representations and the reader’s own knowledge about bilingualism.

This interplay between practice (what Radek does) and identity (how he is read) in Radek’s bilingualism parallels his sexuality. As discussed above in the case of the black fingernail polish, Radek’s identity is interpreted and read through a number of signs that construct him as homosexual, just as he can be read as a competent Polish speaker, despite the fact that in practice he has relationships with cisgender women and proves to be a highly competent English speaker. This deception and confusion over authenticity and Radek’s sexual fluidity lead to questioning, ascription and finally Radek’s murder.

In the final scenes of the book, the interpretations of who Radek is – Polish or not, gay or not – are layered with contradictions and multiplicities. As Radek participates in homosexual sex in the presence of his girlfriend (who acts as an “ally” and leads him to places where such acts are possible), the acts in which he is engaging on a public beach constitute a very visible practice that is read by homophobic youth in search of victim. Despite Dorota’s pleading with the assailants, arguing that she had evidence of previously having sex with Radek, he is assaulted and murdered for his “homosexuality.” What is taken, interpreted, or read then is not his fluid sexuality or bisexuality but rather the fact of his homosexuality at that moment, in that situation. Thus the narrative plays with constructs of practice and identity as well as fluidity and fixity. As Radek’s sexuality is interpretable and interpreted by others through his visible homosexual acts, he is also made legible as a native speaker of Polish through his metalinguistic comments. The conclusion here is that legibility and interpretation are the responsibility of the listener, hearer, or observer as the speaker, doer, and lover navigates and presents multiple possibilities and selves. The sexual and linguistic fluidity portrayed in *Krakow Melt* are not dependent on the passing of time in the same way as *In One Person*. Rather simultaneous mixing leads to complex considerations of authenticity and interpretation.

6.3 *Red Audrey and the Roping*: Fixity

Finally, *Red Audrey and the Roping* invokes ideologies of language teaching and of the academic pursuit of learning and using Latin to construct sexual and linguistic fixity in the narrative. If German in *In One Person* was used externally for access to certain communities (i.e. the waitstaff at Zufall) and spaces (the gay bar) and

Polish in *Krakow Melt* was used as a means for carrying on a second-person conversation with the reader that probed issues of belonging and authenticity, Latin in *Red Audrey* figures most saliently in the main character Jane's internal monologue as a means of emotional regulation. This novel presents a little studied area of language and sexuality where a learned language is depicted as a rigid resource for counterbalancing external chaos. The fixity of Latin, both as a "frozen" or "dead" language and as a tool for emotional control as discussed further below, serves as a counterpoint to the portrayal of bisexuality as a transition from confusion to calm or multiple, conflicted relationships across genders and practices to one stable lesbian relationship. In this book fixity plays a central role as fluidity is constructed as a confusing and at times dangerous state of transition.

Red Audrey and the Roping involves a young adjunct professor of Latin at the University of Hawai'i who has suddenly left a committed relationship with a woman in Dublin to return back to Hawai'i where she grew up. The main character, Jane's shifting, unmoored desires, actions, and personality lead her through three relationships during the time of the narrative as she fluctuates between self preservation and self destruction. Jane talks about being bisexual a few times in the text; however, the one relationship she has with a man (Nick) during the book is portrayed as extremely destructive as she takes the role of masochist to his sadist partnership in ways that are subjugating and damaging. In this way the novel tends to foreground the healing and nurturing aspect of lesbian relationships for this character and takes a rather negative stance to the heterosexual, sadomasochistic one.

Jane talks a lot about language, and Latin in particular, in the narrative both in her discussions of her work as well as at times when she is undergoing intense emotions or emotional events. Talk about both the grammar of Latin and the content and structure of Roman literature are interspersed in the narrative at key points. The myth of Philomela and Procne, for example, is invoked as a metaphor for the events in the story and her relationship with Audrey. The reference made to Philomela and Procne, which involves the rape of Philomela by her sister Procne's husband Tereus and the subsequent revenge exacted on Tereus by the two women (Bulfinch 1959), invokes feminist ideals of the dominance of men and relative power of sisterhood that cements the final scenes of the book as Jane accepts her lesbian relationship with Audrey. Thus lesbianism is portrayed as a salvation for Jane at the conclusion of the story and bisexuality or fluidity is more closely depicted as the origin of chaos in which male dominance threatens women's safety and survival. This depiction of bisexuality as a transitional state to lesbianism is augmented by the presence of Latin as a stabilizing and calming force on a chaotic mind and body.

The publisher's blurb on the back cover of *Red Audrey and the Roping* refers to the main character Jane's role as a Latin teacher as an important part of the plot:

- (8) *Fight or flight? Jane Elliott has tried both. Surfing, letting the waves take her. Teaching Latin, clutching at its rules to feel safe.* (Malone 2008: cover)

In many of the places in the text where Latin or talk about teaching Latin appears, it is to counteract the relative chaos, danger, or uncertainty experienced by the main character in her real life as she explains in the beginning of the narrative, "In the fall, I would discipline my energies to focus exclusively on teaching Latin to undergraduates" (Malone 2008: 45). Here becoming a Latin teacher involves "disciplining the energies" or quieting the frenetic life she has created for herself. Throughout the novel Jane's role as "Latin teacher," the structure and consistency of Latin grammar, and the act of reciting or chanting Latin forms counteract the messy and fragmented story that unfolds. Latin then becomes a place to which Jane turns for safety, comfort and transcendence.

Malone captures the transcendent qualities of Latin practice as well as its association with religious practice at other moments in the text. As much as it is a safety net or "an admirable, purposeful language diluted to derivatives" (Malone 2008: 45), Latin is also an ethereal source of inspiration for Jane and her students. She describes class time in the beginning of the book in the following way:

- (9) *In our greenhouse, with the light filtering onto my students' heads like vague halos, I felt holy, as if the lot of us formed a chanting chorus of heaven. The rounded, dead words in their mouths rattled the windows, moved the tables and chairs, until even the overhead projector vibrated with the crescendo. It was glorious, thrilling, and triumphant! I expected trumpets to usher princes on elephants through campus to the very throne of my golden black-haired angels. I would have dressed them in purple capes and shiny knee-length booths; a mantra to transcend all time.* (Malone 2008: 52)

Here the glory and triumph of recitation creates a space for holiness, purity and innocence represented in the "black-haired angels."

At other times, however, reciting Latin forms takes on the characteristic of survival as in the climactic excerpt below where Jane is involved with her lover Nick. Over time Jane and Nick began to engage in sadomasochistic practices that lead to visible bruises and injury to Jane's body that her other friends (Emily) note and comment on. In one scene where Emily sees Jane's infected scars, Jane replies, "I can't feel anything. I can't feel at all. I can't remember the last time I slept" (Malone 2008: 241). In scenes where Nick isn't present during this period, Jane is depicted as disconnected from the world and damaged both physically and emotionally. The sex practices are not entirely consensual as Jane is ambivalent about engaging

in them, and through this relationship Malone constructs an abusive, dominant male character in Nick that is reinforced by reference to the Procne and Philomela myth in which Tereus rapes Philomela and (in some versions) cuts out her tongue (Bulfinch 1959). In the following episode, chanting Latin verb forms provides a different kind of transcendence from the passage above as in this case Latin allows Jane to control her thoughts during sex (with a harness to restrain her for the first time). The repetition of the forms of “teneo,” to hold or possess, regulate the untold sex act that she is experiencing:

- (10) *He'd bought a harness and that night in his bedroom, Latin freighted through my brain – teneo, -ere, [...]. To hold, to possess. Tenuero, teneris, tenerit, tenerimus, teneritis, tenerint. I will have possessed. You will have possessed. He will have possessed – as PJ Harvey's 'Rid of Me' blared in the background, her quirky rage an anthem in the dark. The boy was slick and he'd wiggled me out.*

(Malone 2008: 287)

Instead of sex or inflicted pain, the reader sees and hears the conjugation of the verb “teneo” on the page. The rigidity and structure of the verb conjugation provide an anchor or mantra to hold onto as Jane goes through the experience. In the narrative, the Latin forms take the place of descriptions of the sex act, and the language practice and sex essentially become the same thing to the reader.

Much of the work on emotion or affect in second language learning has focused on the role of anxiety in learning a (spoken) language or the role of private speech in internalizing new forms (e.g. Garrett & Young 2009, Lantolf 2006). Malone's depiction of Jane chanting Latin during an intense sexual act, however, gives the practice of conjugating verbs new meaning. In contrast to causing anxiety, silently practicing the language provides a calming force and perhaps even contributes to the ecstasy or intensity of the experience. Instead of private speech as a form of practice, or from a Vygotskian point of view, internalization of new grammar, this speech serves to regulate Jane's emotions and provide a safe space to get through the experience. Just as in *In One Person* where Billy practices pronouncing difficult words during sex with Miss Frost, here *Red Audrey* provides some indication of the possible connections between language and sex itself. Thus fiction provides a window onto situations that are rarely found in the research literature on language and sexuality. Further, the role of grammar practice in regulating emotions or calming is rarely considered in theories of second language learning.

In the final chapter of the book, Jane is in the hospital after a bad accident. She reflects on her relationship with a lesbian character Audrey that had begun during her affair with Nick and here compares Latin to the possibility of a long-term relationship with that woman:

- (11) *Suppose our relationship becomes, essentially, like Latin: an admirable, purposeful language diluted to derivatives. Then the utility of the language no longer matters – a tool of scientists and scholars; a root for linguists; an incantation during traditional Catholic services – since ultimately the fact of Latin’s extinction belies its legitimacy and merit.* (Malone 2008: 304)

Here the language unable to change, relegated to written form becomes a metaphor for choosing, for taking one side or the other, for the rigidity of the “mono” or “homosexual” relationship. The choosing of one lover, one relationship for the bisexual subject then is similar to the loss of fluidity and resourcefulness a language faces as it loses speakers. However, legitimacy and merit still exist – in comfort, structure and reliability – as Latin has provided for Jane through the course of the narrative. Fixity then provides “legitimacy and merit” as a tool for calming emotions and regulating chaos. Here the construction of fixed relations and “mono” norms provide comfort as a counterpoint to conflicted postmodern fluidities, and the private use of a frozen or dead language mediates these processes.

7. Discussion

In a discussion of the translingual novel, Kellman (2000: viii) writes, “Like sex, language seems to be a bizarre stratagem by which human beings both connect and conflict.” These parallels emerge in the representations of bilingualism and bisexuality in the three texts examined for the current study. Bisexuality and bilingualism are constructed similarly across three dimensions of “bi” desire, practice, and identity: fluidity *across* contexts, fluidity represented *within* contexts, and fixity as an antidote to fluid chaos. These dimensions are linked to the time periods that contextualize the events and actions that lead to specific constructions (i.e. a mid to late-twentieth century focus on moving across cultures, communities, and languages to a twenty-first century understanding of simultaneity in practice; Blommaert 2010). These findings point to three main affordances of looking to works of fiction for new ways of thinking about and studying linguistic and sexual fluidity by offering (a) a lifespan approach to understanding fluidity, (b) contextualization of the dimensions of fluidity and fixity within the historical moment, and (c) examples of how fiction can socialize views on sexuality. I will discuss each of these points below and conclude with how these affordances might be captured in specific ethnographic approaches to the study of language and sexuality.

7.1 Lifespan orientations

The stories in these books point to the fact that lifespan studies or perspectives are important in conceptualizing fluidity. Other work in the social sciences and linguistics also take this approach to fluidity. Diamond (2008), for example, has argued that women's sexual fluidity occurs across the lifespan as women choose different sexual partners of different genders in contextually-informed ways. Similarly, bilingual competencies wax and wane across the lifespan (Hyltenstam & Obler 1989) and can be context-dependent as speakers are taken as more or less bilingual depending on the views of others and opportunities to claim bilingual identities (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouk 2005, Caldas & Caron-Caldas 2002, Hult 2014). In these three novels, developing bilingual competencies, identities, and practices coincide with shifts and changes in sexual desire, identities, and acts over long time periods in the characters' lives.

These portrayals suggest that studying the lives of bisexual-identified bilinguals over longer time periods could potentially yield rich data for understanding identity flows and the ways in which linguistic and sexual identities are constructed together, i.e. how languages shape sexualities and *vice versa* how sexualities shape language learning and use. Drawing on the depictions in these texts, such investigations would include greater discussion of historical and political events that potentially influence research participants' day-to-day lives, the private speech and emotional worlds of bilinguals, and even considerations of language use during sex. One limitation of fictional texts, however, is the constraint to the depiction of bilingual language use that arises from the genre of the novel. As a genre, novels are typically monolingual, and multilingual writing is constrained by textual conventions; although, this also may be changing in the twenty-first century (Kellman 2000). Further linguistic research in the intersections of linguistic and sexual fluidity would capture instances of real language use which are certainly more spontaneous and mixed than portrayed in these books (except, perhaps, in the use of Latin in *Red Audrey*).

7.2 Historical contextualization

A second important methodological consideration presented by the analysis of these texts is the fact that views toward and representations of sex and language are embedded in and contextualized by the historical moment in which they occur. Novels construct historical events that contextualize characters' lives in ways that research reports in the social sciences rarely do. As recent approaches to linguistic research have emphasized a need for approaches that capture the complexity

and scaled nature of human action (Lemke 2000, Scollon & Scollon 2004, Uryu, Steffensen & Kramsch 2014, Wortham 2012), looking to the fictional construction of lives can point ethnographers and other social scientists to the types of information that might be important for making sense out of fluctuation, change, and mobility. The mid-twentieth-century connections of sexuality, language, and place (i.e. gay bars, European countries, libraries, etc.) in *In One Person*, where public and private spaces played an important role in being “out” or expressing desire, contrasted with the more public and fluid practices of *Krakow Melt*. These contrasts are indicative of the types of changes in these time periods noted by scholars interested in language and mobility (Blommaert 2010, Pennycook 2012). *Red Audrey and the Roping*, which doesn’t deal with politics or history explicitly, but through reference to cars, music, and cultural icons is potentially set in the late 1990s, presents a possibility for bisexual/lesbian-identified women that is situated in the monosexual norms of the time.

The novel then is able to present a historical representation of activities and practice that avoids the “atemporality and anecdotism” (Blommaert & Huang 2009:267) of most ethnography. The problem of course is that fiction is not real, and the question of how to portray layered simultaneity and the contextualization of life experiences such as those portrayed in novels in scientific research reports remains an open one (Scollon & Scollon 2004).

7.3 Methodological frameworks

There are two related frameworks for ethnographic linguistic research that could capture lifespan and multidimensional investigations of linguistic and sexual fluidity. First, language socialization research brings together the study of language and culture to understand how novices are socialized both to use language and through language (Ochs & Schieffelin 1982). This approach employs a longitudinal design with close analysis of interaction over time to chart development (Garrett 2004). Discussions of cultural norms and language ideologies are integrated into the analysis. Cameron and Kulick (2003) have argued that language socialization can offer a means of investigating the socialization of desire by examining how talk about taste and desire shape individuals’ sense of cultural appropriateness and subsequent actions. However, contexts of mobility, multilingualism, and “trans”cultures have presented a problem for language socialization as the notions of community and cultural reproduction in general are complicated by conflict and transformation (Duff 2011, Fogle 2012, Garrett & Baquedano-Lopéz 2002). Such challenges seem even greater in relation to bisexual individuals where, in some cases no community exists (as seen in these novels). A language socialization

approach can thus provide the longitudinal, interactional perspective on fluidity found in the novels, but falls short of the historical contextualization that fictional narration can provide.

Further, while language socialization is important for language and sexuality research, the framework might not adequately capture the socialization processes of bisexuality. Bisexual communities are hard to identify, and many bisexuals do not have access to bisexual communities into which they can be socialized. One source of bisexual voice and representation, then, are the novels discussed here. Fiction can afford new possibilities for identity and play a role in socialization processes (Berg 2012). Thus while desires, identities, and practices are often studied as socialized in interaction, books and media also play a role in what is taken as possible and desirable and can make the “invisible” visible (Abraham 2008 [1996]). The three novels discussed here demonstrate the ways that bisexual characters work to socialize others (or not) in the text. The characters in these three novels are “lone” bisexuals. They do not participate in bisexual support groups or even develop relationships with others who outwardly identify as bisexual. As members of “bisexual” communities that do not exist, the interplay of conformity and resistance to straight and gay worlds is represented in each character’s relationships. Socialization into gay and straight worlds for these bisexual characters centers on establishing individual trust and alliances and successfully navigating between these available communities. These processes are fraught with violence and rejection in all three novels, constructing the bisexual position as dangerous and, in some cases, impossible as Radek is murdered and Jane severely injured. Bisexuality offers a particular challenge to language socialization as interactions that contribute to fixity and fluidity occur across times, places, and interactants and cannot be examined in one context (the family, the classroom) alone.

More complex research frameworks may help to integrate these different, shifting notions of community and socialization. A second ethnographic framework, nexus analysis, proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2004) integrates historical perspectives and timescales in a tripartite investigation of discourses in place, interaction order, and participants’ historical bodies. This framework integrates the examination of public discourse (discourses in place) with moment-to-moment interaction (interaction order), and participants’ prior socialized or lived experiences (historical bodies). The research picture that emerges is multi-dimensional and historical both in relation to participants’ lives and broader, societal events and ideologies that inform the interactional moment. In language and sexuality research, nexus analysis approaches have been employed to bring together societal discourses identified in gay communities and momentary displays of power and positioning in interaction (Jones 2005, 2013). Nexus analysis and ethnographic

approaches incorporating principled way of integrating multiple scales are better able to capture fluidity and flow across time and space. As the findings from the texts discussed in these articles have demonstrated the importance of historical approaches to fluidity, nexus analysis provides an ideal starting point for integrating examinations across dimensions and timescales.

8. Conclusion

Rather than eschewing binaries as rooted in essentialized notions of polar opposites, this article has examined the construction of “bi” identities, practices, and desires in works of fiction to better understand possible dimensions of linguistic and sexual fluidity. Following Halperin (2009), I have argued that bisexuality is best seen as a subversive position that challenges notions of authenticity, belonging, and community, and that individual bilingualism coincides with and augments these processes. The study found two main contributions of looking to works of fiction for representations of language and sexuality. First, fictional accounts allow for greater exploration of private contexts (e.g. sex acts and private speech) that open doors for future research in language and sexuality as well as bilingualism and language learning. Second, fiction and narrative contextualize individual actions and events in ways that foreground history and time. Given the dynamic and changing nature of fluidity (and the dependence of fixity on fluidity for meaning), multi-sited, longitudinal, scalar research designs are necessary for adequately studying linguistic and sexual fluidity.

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