



# Facilitator Notes

## Translating Sexuality

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This module was created by Gillian Fletcher and adapted by the Advancing Sexuality Studies short course team at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

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## Background

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This module extends an understanding of ‘translation’ beyond word-for-word replacement (the traditional understanding) and into consideration of all acts of communicative intent as acts of translation, in which meaning can shift focus or change entirely. How are meanings of ‘sex’ or ‘sexuality’ transmitted, and what meanings may get lost, or be added, in the process of translation? How does the dominance of English as a lingua franca of sexuality studies affect pre-existing understandings of sexual desire, sexual practice or sexual identities?

### **The aims of this module are:**

- To increase participants’ knowledge of issues in inter- and intra-cultural communication (seen through a sexuality lens);
- To enhance participants’ ability to consider the fluid, context- and culture-specific nature of understandings and enactments of sexuality, both within and across geographic borders.

### **Participants will:**

- Broaden their understanding of what is meant by ‘translation’;
- Be able to identify and question the presumption of translatability of sexuality as a limited set of activities, behaviours and stereotypes, specifically from a Western to a non-Western context;
- Be able to recognise that their own understanding of terms, concepts, and practices related to sexuality is both contextual and relational.

## Module approach

While the module does contain some lecture material, the overall aim is that participants should be involved in active learning. Group work will be undertaken in Sessions 1 and 3 (see below), and time is given for review and discussion of issues raised after each of the lecture segments. The short course team advises that any review or amendment of the module maintains a focus on active learning wherever possible.

## Overview

### **Introduction**

This sets the framework for the module's approach to translation, reviews a basic definition of sexuality and provides the key questions raised by the module.

### **Session 1. Sex talk**

This session demonstrates the complexity hidden behind the seemingly straightforward components of the definition of sexuality provided in the introduction. In addition, participants will undertake group work that illustrates the importance of context and point of view in acts of communication.

### **Session 2. Translating translation**

This session uses a mini lecture to introduce participants to three types of translation. A review activity is also included, to check understanding.

### **Session 3. Sexuality, in translation**

Participants will be required to undertake group work examining and reflecting on the ways in which their own communication on sexuality is subject to the three types of translation introduced in Session 2. The session also includes a review of the ways in which the group work mirrored themes from the pre-readings. It concludes with a lecture that expands the topic into further theoretical areas.

## Required pre-reading

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- Alonso, A. M. & Koreck, M. T. (1989) Silences: 'Hispanics,' AIDS, and sexual practices, *Differences*, 1, 101-124.
- Cameron, D. & Kulick, D. (2003) *Language and Sexuality*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 'Making connections' p1-10; 'Talking sex and thinking sex: the linguistic construction of sexuality', 18-29.

## Materials required

Sex Talk handout (in module pack)

Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens

## Module structure, materials and timing

Session & approach		PowerPoint	Other materials (provided or required)	Est. timing
<b>Introduction &amp; schedule</b>				
Introduction & schedule		Slide 1-2		5 mins
Module aims	Facilitator delivery	3-4		5 mins
Sexuality: a working definition	Facilitator delivery	5		5 mins
<b>Session 1. Sex talk</b>				
Session 1. Sex talk		6		45 mins
Problematizing the definition of sexuality	Group work	7-8	Sex Talk handout (in pack)	40 mins
Images of translation	Facilitator delivery	9		5 mins
<b>Session 2. Translating translation</b>				
Session 2. Translating translation		10		15 mins
Mini lecture	Facilitator delivery	11-15	Mini lecture in Facilitator Notes	10 mins
Review	Brainstorm	16	Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens	5 mins

<b>Session 3. Sexuality, in translation</b>		17		<b>165 mins</b>
Interlingual sexuality	Small group work	18-19	Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens	35* mins
Intralingual sexuality	Small group work	20	Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens	35* mins
Non-verbal sexuality	Small group work	22	Flipchart paper or whiteboard; marker pens	35* mins
Review		22	Pre-readings	15 mins
Lecture (inc. short break)	Facilitator delivery	23-31	Lecture in Facilitator Notes	30 mins
Review	Brainstorm	32		15 mins
<b>Conclusion</b>	Facilitator delivery	32		<b>5 mins</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>245 mins</b> (4 hours)
*If time is an issue, the activities on interlingual, intralingual and non-verbal translation could be run concurrently. This would save 70 mins.				

## Key to symbols and formatting

Throughout these notes, the following symbols and formatting ‘clues’ have been used:

⇒ This symbol marks an instruction to the facilitator.

- Use of a bullet point indicates steps to be followed in completing an instruction.

|| This symbol, plus a different font which is larger and more widely spaced, indicates text to be read aloud. The end of the text to be read aloud will be indicated with the following symbol. ||

We have also indicated the points where a slide transition occurs on the PowerPoint presentation by inserting:

**SLIDE**

# Module instructions

## SLIDE 1

### Introduction

---

(10 mins)

⇒ Read the following text (or adapt/replace as desired):

|| In this module, we will be extending our understanding of ‘translation’ beyond word-for-word replacement, which is the traditional, basic understanding of translation, and into consideration of receipt of all acts of communicative intent as acts of translation, in which meaning can shift focus or change entirely.

We will be looking at three types of translation: translation between languages (interlingual); within languages (intralingual); and translation of non-verbal communicative acts.

Our key questions throughout will be: How are meanings of ‘sex’ or ‘sexuality’ transmitted within each of these spheres—and what meanings may get lost, or be added, in the process of translation?

How does the dominance of English as a lingua franca of sexuality studies affect pre-existing understandings of sexual desire, sexual practice or sexual identities? ||

## SLIDE 2

## Schedule

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⇒ You will see that, currently, the module schedule does not include tea/coffee or lunch breaks. Insert as required.

### SLIDE 3

## Module aims

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⇒ Read (on slide):

|| This module aims to:

- Increase participants' knowledge of issues in inter- and intra-cultural communication (seen through a sexuality lens)
- Enhance participants' ability to consider the fluid, context- and culture-specific nature of understandings and enactments of sexuality, both within and across geographic borders.

### SLIDE 4

Participants will:

- Broaden their understanding of what is meant by 'translation'
- Be able to identify and question the presumption of translatability of sexuality as a limited set of activities, behaviours and stereotypes, specifically from a Western to a non-Western context
- Be able to recognise that their own understanding of terms, concepts, and practices related to sexuality is both contextual and relational.

What we mean here is that one's own understanding can shift depending on where they are, who they are communicating with and the nature of the communication involved, for instance is it a professional communication, or a personal one? ||

## SLIDE 5

### Sexuality: a working definition (5 mins)

- ⇒ Tell participants that for the purpose of this module, we will be thinking of sexuality in terms of the following, broad definition (on slide):
- Sexuality refers to sexual expression, which is often divided into three components:
- Sexual *desire* or *attraction* - who (or in some cases what) someone is attracted to (physically and emotionally)
  - Sexual *activity* or *behaviour* – what a person does or likes to do (intercourse, masturbation, sexual fetishes)
  - Sexual *identity* – how someone describes themselves (heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian).
- ⇒ Tell participants that while these three components may look neat and tidy when presented in this fashion, we will begin the module by ‘messing them up’.

## SLIDE 6

## Session 1. Sex talk

(45 mins)

- ⇒ Introduce the first session by explaining that is intended to:
- Demonstrate the complexity hidden behind the seemingly straightforward components of sexuality
  - Illustrate the importance of context and point of view in acts of communication.

### SLIDE 7

## Sex talk group work

(40 mins)

- ⇒ Ask participants to remind you of the three broad components of sexuality, as defined on the last slide (desire/attraction, activity/behaviour, identity).
- ⇒ Divide everyone into small groups and provide each group with the Sex Talk **handout** (in pack). Tell half of the groups to focus on a selected set of sentences from the handout, and tell the other half of the groups to focus on a second, selected set of sentences (add to the handout or amend as you see fit).
- ⇒ All groups should discuss (on slide):
- Is this sentence an expression of sexual desire/attraction; sexual activity/behaviour; or sexual identity?
  - Tell participants to choose just one category for each sentence.
  - Then they should choose a second category for each sentence.
  - Ask groups if they can also come up with their own Sex Talk sentences that also blur the boundaries between the three components of sexuality.

(30 mins)

### SLIDE 8

- ⇒ Run whole group feedback session.
- Ask one group to present their sentences and their categorisations, then ask the other group(s) who had the same sentences to say whether they came up with the same, or different, categorisations.

- Repeat with the groups who had a different set of sentences.
  - Summarise on flipchart paper or whiteboard.
- ⇒ Run a quick brainstorm to check with everyone:
- When you were doing this, did everyone in your group agree on the classifications? Did differences of opinion arise? Any examples?
  - Did the meaning that people read into each sentence change, once they changed the category for it?
- ⇒ Summary: This was an exercise in acts of translation and interpretation.

**(10 mins)**

## SLIDE 9

### Images of translation

(5 mins)

⇒ **NB:** this slide is animated. Click twice to bring up the images.

⇒ Read:

|| As explained already, in this module we are looking at the multiple ways in which sexuality is translated—not just between languages but within languages and within non-verbal forms of expression. Each of these images is an example of a translation of aspects of sexuality.

We have *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (1994), a book in which the author challenges fundamentalist translations of homosexuality as a ‘sin’, and argues instead that those who perceive Bible passages as condemning homosexuality are ‘misled by faulty translation and poor interpretation’ (Helminiak, 1994).

We also have:

- The cover of an edition of the *Kama Sutra*;
- Sexuality as an equation;
- A lingam and yoni from SE Asia—symbolic representations of the phallus and vagina;
- An equation, using the ‘language’ of mathematics to tell us ‘Sex equals fun’;
- Sign language gestures for expression of sexuality;
- The cover of a DVD of the film ‘Lost in Translation’; and
- A symbol that has been developed by people who have transitioned from their born sex (with its implicit norms regarding sexuality) to a different sex.

For the purpose of this module, these are all to be considered translations i.e. ways of carrying meaning from one place to another. ||

## SLIDE 10

## Session 2. Translating translation

(15 mins)

⇒ This session will consist of a mini lecture examining translation and types of translation.

### SLIDE 11

#### Mini lecture

(10 mins)

⇒ Read:

|| The definition of translation used in this module draws on Gottlieb (2003) who advocates for a ‘multidimensional’ understanding of translation.

His definition is (on slide):

[Translation is] any process, or product hereof, in which a combination of sensory signs carrying communicative intention is replaced by another combination reflecting, or inspired by, the original entity ... Any channel of expression in any act of communication carries [multiple potential] meaning.

‘Processes intending to reflect signs carrying communicative intention’ could be a definition of the process of research. Bear that in mind throughout this module.

Where Gottlieb refers to ‘channels of expression’, he is talking about those channels that use words and language and also those channels that are not obviously word based, such as gestures or images.

What is clear here is that under Gottlieb’s framework, ‘interpretation’ would be considered an act of translation. Others separate translation and interpretation, arguing that translation involves written forms of communication, while interpretation involves spoken forms.

Gottlieb would argue that this focuses on the medium used and ignores the shared intent of taking meaning from one ‘site’ and moving it elsewhere. Also, such a division does not allow for non-language-based transfer of meaning. So, for this module, translation includes what you might consider to be interpretation.

## **SLIDE 12**

In linguistics, there are multiple delineations and sub-categories of types of translation; for the purposes of this module we will focus on three basic delineations.

Two of these delineations refer to translation involving words and language. The first of these is the one you will probably be most familiar with: it is translation between languages, referred to as interlingual translation.

Then, we have intralingual translation—translation within the same language. This can be translation between different historical stages of the same language—some terms acquire different meanings over time, for instance the word ‘gay’ which has changed in English from meaning happy to meaning homosexual.

Then, there are geographical, social and generational variants of the same language; changes in mode—for instance from speech to writing or vice versa.

### SLIDE 13

Before moving on to translation that does not involve words, let’s first consider the role of language in our lives.

In relation to the use of words, Taylor has written that ‘language is the medium through which human beings self-interpret experience – this is a domain to which there is no dispassionate access’. That’s particularly useful to remember when talking about sexuality.

What we also need to remember is that, as Becker (1995) has said, ‘All languaging is deficient and says less than we wish it to ... and at the same time all languaging is exuberant and says more than we know’.

There is no ‘perfect’ translation of words or language.

The same is true for communicative acts that do not use words or language.

#### **SLIDE 14**

Returning to Gottlieb, the third delineation of translation is that of acts of communication occurring in non-verbal channels of expression.

These acts of communication originating within non-verbal channels may be translated into verbal communication; for example, in relation to sexuality:

- Arousal of desire or sensual experience is described in words;
- A physical act is observed, then narrated.

Music in a film showing arousal of desire or sensual experience involves a type of translation; the music does not have to describe that which can be seen, but adds an emotional layer to supplement what the viewer sees.

#### **SLIDE 15**

In relation to non-verbal channels of communication, Richters (2008:

1) has written (on slide):

How do people 'read' social spaces and interpret each other's behaviour within them? What are the rules and codes of interaction in a supermarket, a railway station...a bedroom or a sex-on-premises venue?

Think for yourselves for a moment: how many times a day do such scenarios occur? Aren't we constantly taking in communicative acts, and seeking to translate them into something that makes meaning for ourselves? We are constantly 'reading' actions around us and making sense of them. These are all translations within the definition we are using today.

When Clifford Geertz (1973) wrote of interpretation of cultures, one example offered was that of an eyelid closing rapidly. He stated (on slide):

A wink is a wink because of a 'stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures...without which [winks] would not ... in fact, exist, no matter what anyone did or didn't do with [her] eyelids.'

The fact is that this hierarchy of meaningful structures is amorphous; constantly shifting dependent on multiple factors including the ages of those involved, their backgrounds, the context in which the event takes place and so on. There is no simple or permanent equation to interpreting (or translating) cultures: there is no: 'if (a) occurs, plus

(b), then the meaning equals (x)' that defines all occasions, all times and all places, even if it occurs within the same language. ||

## SLIDE 16

### Review

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(5 mins)

⇒ Brainstorm with the whole group:

- Has anything got lost in translation? Who can tell me:
  - For the purposes of this module, are translation and interpretation essentially the same, or different?
  - What are the three types of translation identified so far?
  - Who can give me an example of each type of translation?
- Check to see if there are any questions. **(5 mins)**

## SLIDE 17

## Session 3. Sexuality, in translation

(165 mins)

- ⇒ Divide participants into three groups; they will be doing some sexuality translation work of their own.
- ⇒ **NB:** There are three consecutive activities in this session. If time is an issue, the three activities on interlingual, intralingual and non-verbal translation could be run concurrently.

### **SLIDE 18**

## Group work: interlingual sexuality

(35 mins)

- ⇒ Split participants into groups and ensure that each group selects a rapporteur.
  - Tell the rapporteurs that their role is to identify a couple of *key terms* where translation is particularly problematic or where translation is assumed to be complete but where there are, in fact, differences that get lost in translation.
- ⇒ Explain the activity instructions (on slide):
  - Group participants should brainstorm together to find terms in their first language for:
    - Sex
    - Desire
    - Sex practices
    - Sexual identity
  - Discuss:
    - Are there understandings of aspects of sexuality that exist in participants' first language but have no clear equivalent in English, or vice versa?
    - Are there particular acts not talked about directly in their language that might be talked about in English?

**(20 mins)**

### **SLIDE 19**

- ⇒ Feedback
- ⇒ Ask for a volunteer rapporteur to present one of the terms they identified and to feedback to the group.
  - As they feedback, note the language(s) involved, term or situation and key challenges in relation to mistranslation / translation problems on a piece of flipchart paper or on the whiteboard.
  - Repeat for each group, using a different piece of paper or different section of the board each time to build up a table of languages, terms and situations and key challenges. **(15 mins)**

## SLIDE 20

### Intralingual sexuality (35 mins)

- ⇒ Mix the groups up, preferably into groups with same or similar first languages.
- ⇒ Again, tell each group they need a rapporteur who will do the talking but this time the group must make their own flipchart paper presentation of some key terms. Encourage them to make the presentation visually interesting; can they use images instead of words in some places?
  - Ask everyone to discuss terms in their own language related to sexuality (desire / attraction, sexual activity / behaviour, sexual identity)
    - Are different terms used by different groups of people or in different settings?
    - Consider gender, generation, ethnicity, sexual identity, location (urban, peri-urban or rural; private or public)?
    - Are certain terms considered ‘modern’ and others ‘traditional’?
    - Do the same terms carry different meanings in different groups? **(20 mins)**
- ⇒ Ask for feedback from the group rapporteurs. **(15 mins)**

## SLIDE 21

### Non-verbal sexuality

⇒ Remind everyone about the earlier Geertz quote regarding the meaning of a wink.

⇒ Read:

|| When we are talking about non-verbal acts, it could be something as simple as holding a stranger's gaze for a second longer than usual, nodding to someone who you think may have the same (non-normative) sexual identity as you, or lighting a cigarette for someone and managing to touch their hand at the same time. ||

⇒ Mix the groups again, preferably into groups of people who do not have the same first language. This time there is no one rapporteur. Instead, the group as a whole should act out some of the non-verbal acts they have discussed. What might take place, who would be involved, what might result?

⇒ They should discuss:

- In their cultures, which non-verbal acts could be translated as communicating desire / attraction, sexual activity / behaviour, sexual identity?
- Are there alternate readings of these acts?
- Are the same acts translated differently by different groups of people (consider gender, generation, ethnicity, sexual identity)
- Or in different settings? (e.g. urban, peri-urban or rural; private or public).
- Are certain acts considered 'modern' and others 'traditional'? Has meaning around these acts changed over time? **(20 mins)**

⇒ Feedback **(15 mins)**

## Slide 22

## Review (based on pre-readings)

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- ⇒ Tell participants that the previous activities produced an enormous range of cultural, verbal and non-verbal translations of sexuality.
- ⇒ Ask everyone to brainstorm the following question: can you see any connections between these activities and the core readings? **(15 mins)**
- ⇒ **NB:** Alonso and Koreck (1989) offer an example of interlingual challenge for translation—sexual identity that gets lost in translation—and Cameron and Kulick (2003) is an example of intralingual translation challenge—what does sex mean? You can also refer to Pigg (2001) (non-core reading) as a concrete example of the impact of unquestioned translations of sexuality within HIV prevention.
- ⇒ Wrap-up by either reading the following text or improvising:

|| Hopefully these exercises have illustrated how exuberant and deficient language is, how fraught translation can be—both when we are aware that we are translating and when we are not aware of the translating process taking place—and how fast meaning can shift. Keep these activities in mind as we now go into the lecture part of the module. ||

## SLIDE 23

## Lecture

(30 mins + 10 min break)

- ⇒ Read:

|| This is a still from a documentary called *Friends in High Places* (2001). It shows a Natkadaw, or ‘spirit wife’. Natkadaws are hired to

perform important rituals to bring good luck, to mark important events or to appease spirits who, it is believed, can create bad fortune. Natkadaws are considered very powerful, because of their ability to communicate with the spirits and, according to the film: 'The gay men who serve as primary conduits for the Nat spirits are considered to be neither male nor female'. ||

[From <http://www.der.org/films/friends-in-high-places.html> ]

## SLIDE 24

⇒ Before beginning the lecture, make sure you have some of the outputs from previous group activities to hand as you will have to refer back to them part way through the lecture.

⇒ Read:

|| As we have seen from the module introduction and the group exercises so far, translation is a context-laden process through which meaning is continually negotiated and approximated. Words, gestures, even locations can be read in multiple ways. This is as true when we are working in the same language or when we believe we are communicating from the same culture as when we are working across languages and/or across cultures.

In practice, translation—indeed, all communication—is, as we have heard from Becker, a continual process of deficiencies and exuberance. Intended meanings may be partially or entirely missed, while additional meanings can be grafted on without the initiator of a

communication being aware of this happening. Then, of course, there is the fact that no human being can state with confidence that she knows exactly what she intends to communicate, every minute of every day. We communicate without even having intent to do so.

## SLIDE 25

We began this module by ‘messing up’ the boundaries between the previously identified three components of sexuality—desire or attraction, activity or behaviour, and sexual identity. Meanings of desire or attraction, activity or behaviour, and sexual identity, are interlinked and heavily context dependent, as well as dependent on whom we are talking to or communicating with.

Then we examined translation, drawing on Gottlieb’s definitions of intralingual and interlingual translation, plus translation of visual sources into words or between visual sources. We further complicated the concept of translatability of terms or understandings related to sexuality through group exercises.

Let’s just review some of the outcomes of those exercises: ||

- ⇒ The facilitator needs to pull out one or two examples of the following points from the activities carried out previously **here**.

|| We found:

- A variety of different terms related to all aspects of sexuality in first languages
- Terms existing in English that have no ‘perfect fit’ translation into first languages
- Terms in first languages that appear to have no ‘perfect fit’ translation into English
- Terms that can have multiple meanings to different audiences
- Multiple alternate readings of non-verbal communication of sexuality
- Some acts that are seen as ‘modern’, although the question here may be: are they really modern, or just more traditionally ‘hidden’?

Referring back to the subject aims, this introduction was intended to help you begin to identify multiple examples of the fluid, context- and culture-specific nature of understandings and enactments of sexuality ... within and across geographic borders, within and between languages, within the non-verbal realm.

Hopefully, you also began to identify and question the assumption that sexuality is a finite set of activities, behaviours and stereotypes that can be clearly delineated and ‘packaged’ through language, and

then can be translated ‘whole’ (either from a Western to a non-Western context or across non-Western contexts).

In this lecture, we shall focus on sexuality as communicated through the written or spoken word rather than on non-verbal communicative acts, simply because it is to language that we always return—both when trying to describe a non-verbal act and when trying to think through the possible meanings of a non-verbal act.

## SLIDE 26

No doubt by now you would agree with Tom Boellstorff, who has stated that ‘translation is haunted by its inevitable failure’ (Boellstorff, 2003). It is a claim that would no doubt be accepted by many academics and researchers who strongly critique the dominance of English-language understandings of sexuality. For example, Clive Aspin (2005) claims that in HIV prevention work in New Zealand, there has been a long-term failure of attempts to translate Anglo-understandings of sexuality into forms relevant to Māori men. The Alonso and Koreck (1989) core reading is also pertinent here.

Even intralinguistically, slippages and misunderstandings occur. We saw that in our group work. Similarly, the Cameron and Kulick pre-reading cites the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s book *The Epistemology*

*of the Closet* (1990). In this book, she outlined some of the multiple different readings—and lived experiences—of sexuality that exist.

For example, as Sedgwick stated, ‘Sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others’ (Sedgwick, cited in Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 9). The importance that a person places on sexual identity as central to who they are can also shift depending on context and on politics. Many people who live without otherwise foregrounding their sexual identity will ‘come out’ when there is a rally against systematic discrimination or when there is the need to protest against homophobic violence; they choose to ‘stand up and be counted’.

People from different cultures may also prioritise other identities over sexual identity. Wah-Shan has written of ‘same-sex eroticism in Chinese societies, where the family-kinship system, rather than an erotic object choice, is taken as the basis of the identity of a person’ (Wah-Shan, 2001: 27). Similarly, across the world there are people who have fallen in love (or lust) with a person and say that the sex or gender of that person is irrelevant. Others, however, would label them as ‘homosexual’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’, ignoring the person’s own self-identification.

## **SLIDE 27**

For Kulick, the question is not one of the value attached to sexual identity but of the importance of language and *sexual identification*. ‘Sexuality is produced and disseminated in language’, he wrote (Kulick, 2003: 148). Kulick went on to examine use of the word ‘no’ in three very differing sexual scenarios. First, he looked at a scenario of sexual harassment and rape. ‘A woman saying “no” is part of what produces a female sexual subject, and not saying “no” produces a male sexual subject’, he argued (Kulick, 2003: 141). Women are supposed to say no, men are supposed to always be ready for sex.

Second, Kulick looked at the use of ‘no’ in murder cases where the defence was that there had been unwanted homosexual advances. This defence has become commonly known as the Homosexual Panic Defence. Kulick noted: ‘This defence relies on and promotes a view that there is no difference between a sexual advance and a sexual attack. In fact, the Homosexual Panic Defence argues that a sexual advance from a homosexual male is by definition a sexual attack, and that the accused is justified in responding violently to such an act of aggression’ (Kulick, 2003: 144). In such cases, Kulick argued, having to say ‘no’ to what is believed to be a sexual proposition from another man means that the *possibility* that he could also have said ‘yes’ is also raised.

He explained: 'It is a "no" that says "I refuse to acknowledge that I am being called into being as a sexual subject". But a refusal to acknowledge something is already a form of acknowledgment' (Kulick, 2003: 145).

Third, Kulick looked at the use of the word 'no' in sadomasochism. There, the whole premise is of sexual power-play in which the fantasy of lack of power needs to be maintained. Those who engage in sadomasochism will begin by negotiating a 'safe' word, the utterance of which will stop whatever is occurring. For the fantasy of powerlessness (or total power) to be made as real as possible, 'no' is not used as a safe word.

'Manuals explain that safe words should be anything other than words like "no", "stop", or "don't"—that is to say, any words other than negations or expressions of pain. Most manuals recommend either contextually jarring words like "pickle!" or "radish!", or words that invoke associations to traffic lights: "yellow", meaning "lighter or slower", and "red" meaning "stop". In any case, my point is that S/M sex self-consciously exploits the performative potential of "no" to facilitate and extend sexual scenes' (Kulick, 2003: 147).

Just a two-letter word, but in three different scenarios it has accomplished translations of complex and socially constructed assumptions of both gender and sexuality.

That's a lot to think about, so we will just take a 10-minute break here before completing the lecture. ||

⇒ 10-minute break.

⇒ Review: Any questions?

⇒ Check understandings:

- What do we mean by 'translation' in this module?
- What connections can participants see between the earlier exercises and this lecture?

## SLIDE 28

|| So what do we do? How can we speak or write of sexualities in ways that at least reduce the scope of what Boellstorff termed its 'inevitable failure'?

For some, the failure of translation requires a move away from interlingual translation of sexuality and giving preference instead to presentation of non-English verbal or written explanations or taxonomies of desire or attraction, behaviour or practice and sexual identity.

Aspin has argued that 'attachment to one's cultural identity [often represented through use of the Māori language, rather than English]

can provide protection against a range of infections, including HIV' (Aspin, 2005). Part of New Zealand's response to perceived failure of translation of sexuality has been the Māori Sexuality Project, 'created to support the consciousness, advance the practice of, and promote the availability of Māori understandings and definitions of Māori sexuality' (International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education, 2008). Aspin is a lead researcher on the project.

Similarly Muñoz, who is of Puerto Rican background, has written of 'the importance of locating oneself through [one's own] language'. She added:

The critical importance of vocabulary, its connection to culture and its role in sexual and gender identities cannot be emphasised enough generally and specifically with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of color. (Muñoz, 2008: 9 & 12)

'People of color' could be considered to extend to those from countries with a colonial history. For Muñoz, Aspin and others, reliance on understandings and explanations of sexuality that were first developed in English equates to a (re)colonisation in which non-Western sexualities are erased. This is an argument also put forward by Temple, who has described the increasing spread of English language usage across the globe as 'a Western takeover bid' that overrides local understandings (Temple, 2002: 851). Similarly,

Pennycook (1995) has written of the dominance of the English language across the world as a form of neo-colonialism.

The widespread use of English as the language of discussion of sexuality (and development of sexuality theory) can also provide a 'get-out' clause for those who wish to enforce normative sexualities, Jolly has argued. She sees a risk that adoption of terms such as 'gay' or 'lesbian'—so clearly linked to the 'outside' world and so easily attacked as being 'non-traditional or not culturally appropriate'—could inadvertently feed into what she has described as a desire within some countries to stereotype homosexuality as 'a Western phenomenon' (Jolly, 2000: 82).

## SLIDE 29

For Boellstorff, who as we heard earlier doomed translation to inevitable failure, the answer lies in what he has termed 'dubbing'. Boellstorff reported from Indonesia on the use of terms '*gay*' and '*lesbi*' which, he said, were first presented in the mass media as descriptors of 'outside' ways of being but which have become adopted as subject positions by Indonesians who otherwise had no publicly shared identity categories to inhabit. Indonesia is home to more than 600 languages. Boellstorff argued:

Disjuncture is at the heart of the dub; there is no prior state of pure synchrony, and no simple conversion to another way of

being. Where traditional translation is haunted by its inevitable failure, dubbing rejoices in the good-enough and the forever incomplete (Boellstorff, 2005: 82).

Ultimately, what is being discussed here is what Najmabadi has termed the ‘taxonomical drive’: an ‘impulse to categorise identifications and desires’ (Najmabadi, 2006: 16) that means we are forever having to re-organise, re-categorise, shift language and meaning around, as we discover new ways in which it does not ‘fit’.

Could it be that there is something to be said for moving away from the desire to categorise, name and rename of aspects of sexuality—and towards a recognition that translation is *always* deficient, and therefore we are all constantly involved in ongoing acts of making and re-making meaning related to sexuality?

### SLIDE 30

Before we move on, let’s review what all of this might mean for our own work, and our own understandings of sexuality. Given that language is both deficient and exuberant, we will always be participating in some form of translation whenever we talk—or think—about sexuality.

Within fields such as HIV prevention, we do need some kind of shared language to interpret epidemiology and to develop interventions. But when we use 'MSM' as a shorthand term, two things happen: first, the complexities and fluidities of relationships between those who all carry XY chromosomes is buried underneath the apparent simplicity of the label of MSM; second, when the label is then taken up and used, for example in HIV/AIDS research, without a 'spelling out' of exactly what it is intended to apply to, and to whom it is intended to apply, it becomes impossible to dig up the original complexities and fluidities in play at that point, in that place.

This can only limit our capacity to develop considered and informed responses to the issues we seek to address with these populations of men.

So is the answer simply to adopt local terms, such as 'msenge' in Kenyan or 'waria' in Indonesian? No. Why would we choose these terms over others? What do these terms mean to those who become identified by them? Are they terms that these people might choose for themselves? Do those who identify by these terms even have the same understandings of the terms' meaning among themselves? Understandings of the cultural, generational, locational specificities of those terms are easily lost, and often these terms are simply substituted for the translated term and thereby subsumed.

## SLIDE 31

As sexuality researchers, we are all facing the reality that the lingua franca of sexuality theory and research is English. We are involved in constant acts of translation: translation of understanding of research participants' lives; translation of our own understandings of research findings and of sexuality theory; translation of our thoughts into research papers, journal articles, and in our communications with each other. We need to be mindful. There is no one answer to these conundrums, of course—not in any language. ||

## SLIDE 32

### Conclusion

(20 mins)

⇒ Ask for a volunteer willing to try and summarise the key points that they have taken from the lecture.

- Any other comments? Questions?

⇒ Read:

|| Just to wrap up, I'm taking you back to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of translation. Translation is initially defined by the OED as: *'Transference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another'* (Oxford University Press, 1989). In removing something from one place to another, as we have seen from the group work exercises, some things can get dropped and others can be carried over that were not intended to be carried over. ||

- ⇒ Review some of the key outputs from group work carried out during the module.
- Review the three different types of translation (interlingual, intralingual, non-verbal), and the examples that participants came up with of these types of translation
- ⇒ Conclude by reminding participants:

|| Exuberance and deficiency in translation **will** happen; our responsibility is to make sure that we are aware of this happening and to be mindful of it. ||

### SLIDE 33

Short course acknowledgements.

## Optional assessment exercise

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⇒ Ask participants to spend 10 minutes writing a short reflection piece. They should:

- Think about one incident from their life or work where they have been involved in translation of sexuality. Remind them what was said at the beginning of the module—that research is itself a process of translation, so participants may want to reflect on a piece of sexuality research that they have been involved in. Alternatively they may want to look at other events from their work or private life.
- Tell participants to look for the possible other translations that could have applied in this example, and what differences might have arisen if an alternate translation had been used.

## Further reading

(includes lecture bibliography)

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