



Module Outline for Course Participants

## 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.

## Abstract

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This module will begin by extending an understanding of ‘translation’ beyond word-for-word replacement (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.

Three types of translation will be considered; translation between languages (interlingual); within languages (intralingual) and translation of non-verbal communicative acts. 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?

Becker’s view that ‘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’ (Becker 1995: 5) can be extended to cover all forms of communicative acts; therefore leaving all communicative acts vulnerable to becoming lost or transmuted in translation.

## Module aims

- 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.

## Required pre-reading

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.

## Overview of module

### Introduction, schedule & working definition of sexuality

Sets the framework for the module's approach to translation as well as reviewing a basic definition of sexuality. The introduction also provides the key module 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 consists of a mini lecture, examining translation as a concept and introducing participants to three types of translation.

### Session 3. Sexuality, in translation

Group work will be used as a tool to help participants examine and reflect 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. Session 3 concludes with a lecture that expands the topic into further theoretical areas.

### Conclusion

The module will conclude with a brief review of the definition of translation used throughout the module, and the importance of considering issues of language and meaning in all work related to sexuality.

## Further reading

(includes lecture bibliography)

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- Aspin, C. (2005) *The Place of Takatāpui Identity within Māori Society: Reinterpreting Māori Sexuality within a Contemporary Context. Competing Diversities: Traditional Sexualities and Modern Western Sexual Identity Constructions*. Mexico City.
- Becker, A. L. (1995) Introduction. *Beyond Translation: Essays toward a Modern Philology*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.
- Boellstorff, T. (2003) Dubbing culture: Indonesian *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities and ethnography in an already globalized world, *American Ethnologist*, 30, 225-242.
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- Muñoz, V. (2008) *Toward a Decolonizing Transgender Psychology (For Trans People of Color)*. *FGSS Spring Colloquium*. Cornell University.
- Najmabadi, A. (2006) Beyond the Americas: are gender and sexuality useful categories of historical analysis?, *Journal of Women's History*, 18, 11-21.
- Pennycook, A. (1995) English in the world/The world in English. In Tollefson, J. W. (Ed.) *Power and Inequality in Language Education*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Pigg, S. L. (2001) Languages of sex and AIDS in Nepal: Notes on the social production of commensurability, *Cultural Anthropology*, 16, 481-541.
- Sedgwick, E.K. (1990) *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- Temple, B. (2002) Crossed wires: interpreters, translators, and bilingual workers in cross-language research, *Qualitative Health Research*, 12, 844-854.
- Wah-Shan, C. (2001) Homosexuality and the cultural politics of *Tongzhi* in Chinese societies, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40, 27-46.
- WHO/UNAIDS (2000) *Guidelines for Second Generation Surveillance*. Geneva, UNAIDS/WHO Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STI Surveillance.