

Chapter 13

Gender and interaction in a globalizing world: Negotiating the gendered self in Tonga^{*}

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1. Gender and language in microscopic and macroscopic perspectives

One of the more important developments in our understanding of the relationship between language and gender in the last couple of decades is the recognition that the gendering of language is semiotically complex. Indeed, linguistic forms and practices do not define “women’s language” and “men’s language”, as earlier researchers argued (e.g., Lakoff 1975), but articulate with a host of social categories and processes that surround gender and help construct it. The clearest articulation of this position is Ochs’ (1992) demonstration that gendered linguistic practices are both *indexical* and *indirect*. Indexicality captures the insight that features of language (phonological, syntactic, discursive, etc.) “point to”, or suggest, gendered identities, and do not refer to gender in an unequivocal fashion, as linguistic symbols would. In this respect, the relationship between language and gender is no different from the relationship between language and any other aspect of socio-cultural identity, as we have known since the early days of sociolinguistics (Labov 1966a). However, the indexical linking of language and gender presents another layer of complexity: linguistic resources are semiotically connected to gender through the mediation of other aspects of the socio-cultural world. For example, features of language and interaction invoke social roles (e.g., mother, CEO, construction work), demeanors (e.g., politeness, authority, or the lack thereof), and activities (e.g., forms of work and play), all of which are *in turn* indexically associated with gender (see Figure 1). This conceptualization of the relationship of language and gender falls in line with developments in feminist anthropology since the 1970s, which locate gender at the “crossroads” (di Leonardo 1991) of an entire panoply of social processes and categories. The researcher’s task in

understanding the workings of gender in its social and cultural context consists in contextualizing gender among pertinent socio-cultural processes.

While we have made much progress in understanding language and gender in local and contemporary contexts (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003; Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003), we still have a superficial understanding of the way in which larger-scale dynamics construct the indirect indexical link between language and gender. By “large scale” I am thinking in particular of the often-covert yet important role that the extra-local and the historical play in constituting the mapping of language onto gender. Take, for example, history. A pertinent illustration of the importance of historicizing “gendered language” is Inoue’s (2002, 2006, this volume) analysis of how features of the morphological structure of the Japanese language came to acquire gendered meaning over the course of Japan’s modern history. The morphological features in question consist primarily of honorific sentence-final discourse markers, without which a Japanese sentence is often not complete, but whose meaning is often complex, multifarious, and context-bound. Tracing the changes in the use of these markers since the advent of Japanese modernity, Inoue demonstrates that they have not always marked gender. Indeed, the emergence of gendered features of language is historically tied to gender ideologies that fueled the nationalistic modernity that ensued from the 1868 Meiji Restoration. These ideologies constructed woman as “good wife and wise mother”, and came to manufacture a “women’s language” that supposedly embodied this new target identity.¹

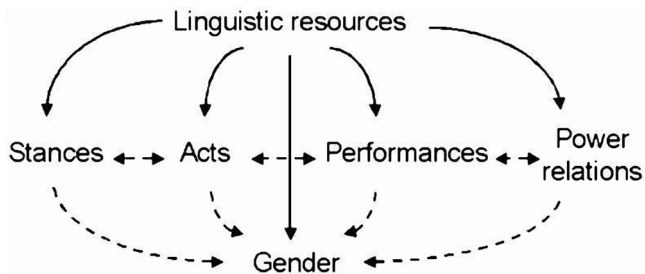


Figure 1. The indirect indexicality of the language-and-gender linkage (adapted from Ochs 1992)

Works like Inoue's that take history seriously encourage us to bring into our focus of analysis larger social forces (in this case the history of nation-building and ideologies of modern identities) that are located far from the textual materials that constitute the focus of traditional sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Attention to these forces demonstrates not only that synchronic semiotic linkages between language and gender are historically contingent, but also that their constitution is the result of important extralinguistic (and non-trivial) aspects of human existence, such as historical embeddedness. My aim here is to introduce into the debate another important aspect of the "macro-context" that informs language and gender, namely globalization.

Globalization of course wins the popularity contest among topics of concern to contemporary socio-cultural anthropology. The consensus that emerges from the discipline (e.g., Edelman and Haugerud, 2004; Jameson and Miyoshi 1998; Mills 2003, to cite only a few) is that globalization offers local lives both new opportunities and constraints, sometimes ambiguously so. For example, global forces may provide new forms of imagined experience, through television soap operas, the Internet, and white-collar work, for example, to persons hitherto excluded from the experiences and horizons associated with them. At the same time, globalization has all-too-well documented nefarious effects, a simple example of which is the economic enslavement of people to menial and unstable work (e.g., migrant domestic work, call-center employment, employment in *maquiladoras* south of the US–Mexico border) that corporate-controlled global development have engendered.

If we have learned anything from the now substantial ethnographic literature on globalization in the last two decades, it is that it is never the simple imposition of new forms of experience onto local contexts (as commentators like Barber 1996 would have us believe). Rather, globalization informs and transforms people's lives, creating new forms of agency as easily as it perpetrates structures that are continuous with the past. Furthermore, following Appadurai's (1990) consequential insight, we must understand globalization as operating on different levels at once in the lives of those whom it touches most directly. It affects the symbolic, through the valorization of certain symbols at the expense of others. Globalization also works in material fashion, shaping social relations, economic conditions, and social practices. It shapes identities and the lived experience of persons. It is this multiplicity of levels at which globalization operates and its ambiguity that I attempt to illustrate in this chapter, which I design as a programmatic

illustration of how one can approach some of these complexities by focusing on the work of globalization in one setting, and demonstrating how a focus on language can help us make sense of them.

2. Tonga at the convergence of transnational movements

My ethnographic data come from Tonga, a quintessentially transnational society centered on an island nation-state in the South Pacific (see also Philips, this volume). The population of the islands is approximately 100,000, to which we must add approximately 150,000 people of Tongan descent residing in the urban centers of the Pacific Rim: Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Sydney, Melbourne, and Auckland. The diaspora is of recent vintage, as few Tongans migrated from the islands prior to the 1970s. Nuku'alofa, the capital of the island nation, where I conducted my field research, is a town of about 25,000 inhabitants. Tongan society is an elaborately stratified society headed by a king, in which everyone is ostensibly ranked with respect to everyone else. Rank permeates all aspects of social life, and is the subject of considerable anxiety, maintained through the avoidance of shame (*mā*) in both public and private contexts. Tongan society is also highly centralized, at least in the islands.

Unified as a kingdom in the mid-nineteenth century, Tonga experienced colonialism as a British protectorate for over a century. Today, its productive economy is based on the export of agricultural products to such destinations as Japan and New Zealand, but the general economy depends in substantial ways on foreign aid from New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, and on labor migrations to these countries. The king and important members of his family control many of the important resources in the islands, including a significant proportion of the land and modernity-steeped resources like the Internet suffix, the telephone country code, and the airspace above the islands. Other forms of wealth are largely controlled by a nobility that overlaps in part with a cadre of entrepreneurs who have managed to tap into the possibilities for enrichment that diasporic dispersal has made possible. Before the advent of diasporic dispersal, non-traditional resources (e.g., commerce) were largely in the hands of part-Tongan families descended from European traders who settled in the islands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Globalization figures prominently in the lives of all Tongans. Virtually everyone in the islands has at least one close relative in long-term residence

in the diaspora. The economic lives of islanders is intertwined with those of their relatives in the diaspora, and traditional patterns of reciprocity now span thousands of miles across several countries. Nevertheless, globalization in Tonga remains primarily a matter of ethnoscape, i.e., the movement of people, as well as the movement of objects that accompany people. Absent from Tonga are call centers, sweatshops, and other manifestations of the corporate appropriation of globalization found in other parts of the developing world (e.g., Cravey 1998; Freeman 1999). Only a few Tongans in the islands can watch the limited television offerings, and the lives of most are largely unaffected by the Internet.² While classic globalization-related economic policies like privatization and “good governance” have had an impact on the local economy, the country has not been subjected directly to globalize economic forces like IMF-prescribed “structural adjustments”. For the most part, the movements of ideas, economic policies, and media representations piggyback on the movement of people.³

As is the case in other ethnographic contexts, language use acts as a powerful index of identity. The two languages implicated here are Tongan, a Polynesian language that functions as the code of daily interaction in the islands, and English, a code associated with the colonial past, modernity, diasporic dispersal, and its cosmopolitan possibilities. Most Tongans in the Kingdom hold a strong allegiance to Tongan and, despite proverbial complaints voiced by cultural conservatives about the decline of the language (e.g., Taufe’ulungaki 1991), language shift is confined principally to the diaspora, where many second-generation Tongans grow up without learning the language. In the islands, code choice between Tongan and English is determined by a number of factors, the most crucial of which are rank and social class. While non-elite Tongans who use English too prominently in their daily lives risk being ridiculed for not knowing their place in the system or not being true to their Tongan identity, the high-ranking and the wealthy can afford to use English without running this risk or experiencing this anxiety, since they control the local relevance of global resources, both symbolic and material, as well as local ones.

3. Genders and globalization in Tonga

As is the case of Western Polynesia in general (Ortner 1981), the relationship between sisters and brothers is foundational to gender relations in the traditional Tongan social order, as many anthropologists have discussed

(e.g., Biersack 1996; Gailey 1987; Herda 1987; James 1992; Philips this volume; Rogers 1977). The sister–brother relationship structures not only kinship but also the entire polity, as other relationships, between chiefs and commoners for example, are metaphorically understood as sister–brother relationships (see also Philips, this volume). In the sister–brother dyad, the sister is socially and culturally superordinate to her brother. However, among commoners, this hierarchy is most relevant to kinship-based contexts (e.g., domestic, local, family-level); only when the status of sisters is enhanced by high rank or wealth does it become publicly consequential. In other configurations of relatedness, women are subordinate to men (e.g., in the wife–husband dyad), and in most public contexts women’s power is muted. Gender is therefore already complex and contingent in its traditional forms. The analysis that follows focuses on additional ways in which Tongan women’s identities as women are complex and contingent.

The other gendered identity that I analyze is that of a small but very visible minority of transgender people, males who sometimes cross-dress, sometimes occupy women’s spheres, sometimes engage in sexual relations with non-transgender men, and always defy generalization. Mainstream Tongans generally call these gendered betwixt-and-between *fakaleitī* (literally ‘like a lady’) or *fakafefine* (‘like a woman’), while they refer to themselves as *leitī* or, in Tongan-accented English, ‘ladies’ (see Besnier 1994, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004a for further discussion). *Leitī* identity is the focus of contestation in daily life: while *leitī* make claims to some form of femininity, usually emphasizing the glamorous and cosmopolitan, mainstream Tongans constantly challenge these claims. Even when the context is viewed as inconsequential, mainstream people invariably try to “expose” *leitī* for “what they really are” in their eyes, i.e., men. However, mainstream Tongans do hold in some regard certain aspects of *leitī* identity, such as the creativity that is associated with them, and particular *leitī* individuals, who are viewed for example as particularly creative or hard-working. Public attitudes toward *leitī* are also changing rapidly, although not uniformly, as I will illustrate presently.

Tongan gender identity formation in the context of modernity, transnationalism and globalization has received considerably less ethnographic attention than in the traditional order (with a few exceptions, such as Besnier 2002; Gailey 1992; Philips 2003). In Tonga, women, men and *leitī* are equally transnational. In contrast to many other parts of the world, migrating is not gendered. Rather, ease of access to transnationalism is a matter of rank and wealth: for example, while elites have relatively little trouble se-

curing visas to travel to or live in New Zealand, Australia, and the U.S., non-elites must post substantial bonds even for short-term visit to relatives or for medical treatment in these countries. Nevertheless, globalization and transnationalism are gendered in subtle ways: women's appropriation of global symbols, such as the use of English for mundane interaction with other Tongans, is less threatening to their identity as women than men's appropriation of the same symbols is to their identity as men. Thus a non-elite man who speaks "too much" English or seeks the company of Westerners too eagerly runs the danger of being identified as a *leitī* without displaying any sign of femininity. As a result, women speak English more readily than men, and with fewer consequences. Nevertheless, unless they are high-ranking or wealthy, they must still exert caution, particularly if their fluency in English leaves something to be desired, as even they can be ridiculed if others perceive them to be "putting on airs" through their use of the language of cosmopolitanism. Mainstream Tongan society controls the appropriation of symbols of globalism, of which language use is an excellent barometer, through the threat of shame (*mā*).

The one group that flaunts these normative expectations with abandon are *leitī*, who regularly present themselves as considerably more cosmopolitan than their wealth or status allows, and who speak English without hesitation even when their competence is minimal (while nevertheless accusing each other of being "hurry mouth, no grammar"). Because they flout so much normativity anyway in multiple respects, *leitī* are considerably more impervious to shame than mainstream Tongans (Besnier 2002). In fact, this imperviousness and the "putting on of airs" that it allows have become part and parcel of their identity, on equal footing with femininity.

4. Negotiating globality at the secondhand marketplace

The first context of Tongan social life in which I will investigate gender formation in a globalizing context is a secondhand marketplace on the edge of Nuku'alofa, the capital of the country. Immensely popular with every segment of Tongan society, the market is one of the most prominent settings where Tonga engages with the rest of the world. This engagement is material in its most obvious forms, but it is also multi-faceted, as I will show presently. The market began in the 1980s, as informal stalls sprung up on empty lots adjacent to the main produce market in the middle of town. It progressively grew larger and increased in popularity, to the point

that it had to shift to the outskirts of town, where it is now squatting on land that belongs to the Fisheries Division. It is makeshift, indecorous, and marginal even in its physical location away from the town center, as well as subversive, because it seriously challenges elite control of commerce and state control of imported goods. Over-represented among sellers and shoppers are women, as well as “local Others” (Mormons, small-scale entrepreneurs, Charismatic Christians, returned migrants, Chinese traders). The secondhand marketplace is where non-elite women based in the islands engage with globalizing modernity, in contrast to non-elite men, who do so through cash crops and organized entrepreneurial ventures.⁴

The marketplace derives its transnational quality not so much from people but from objects. Most objects for sale are secondhand or remaindered goods received by sellers from diasporic relatives, as supplements to or instead of the monetary remittances that migrants are expected to send to their island-based relatives (Brown 1998; Evans 1999; Faeamani 1995). Marketplace goods are thus part of a large-scale system of delayed reciprocity grounded in traditional kinship-based obligations, particularly the expectation that brothers meet the material needs of their sisters, and that sisters often rely on one another (and thus many objects are sold by women who received them from their siblings). Sending objects rather than money allows migrants to circumvent the poverty debt industry in industrialized countries, such as money-transfer corporations that charge exorbitant service fees. Recipients often “bypass” customs and portage charges by claiming their cargo at customs during a relative’s shift, thus eluding state control and valuation. Since clothing is particularly well adapted to these circumstances, and since being well-dressed is important in Tonga, clothes are the most prominent commodities on offer at the marketplace (cf. Hansen 2000).

At the marketplace, consumption is transformed into pleasure and vice-versa, and consumption and pleasure become intertwined with global modern desires (Besnier 2004b). People come to shop here, browsing and “window licking” in a way that does not take place in the established and elite-owned (and relatively poorly stocked) shops in town, where any evidence of loitering will bring upon browsers the unwelcome attention of security guards. At the marketplace, people also engage in “shopping talk” of a kind generally not heard elsewhere in the country, particularly “fashion talk” since clothing is the most prominent offering. Talk, in fact, is a primary means through which the juxtaposition of desire, consumption, and globality operate.

Seller: That's the in-thing in New Zealand now. Even my kids say, "Mummy, see, it has to show the b-!" Huh! I say, "No:::, no::!" Ahahahuh-hh! Cuz that's the look now!

[Tu'imatamoana, disk 1, 1:47: 55–48: 47]

This interaction illustrates nicely how marketplace participants negotiate the tension between the local and the global. Focusing first on the content of the interaction, we hear the seller present a "sales pitch" of a kind rarely heard at other commercial sites, and then seize the opportunity to display her awareness of what's fashionable in New Zealand, and hence her worldliness. The shopper comments on the problematic implementation of the foreign style she describes, since leaving body parts like belly-buttons exposed is locally indecorous. The seller agrees, albeit in what appears to be a face-saving afterthought, and together they construct a body of worldly knowledge about fashion, but also assert their agentive prerogative to decide on the local appropriateness of these symbols, carefully monitoring each other's moral evaluations. Later, the seller ascribes to herself and her children an interaction that sounds distinctly modern in a Tongan context, one in which children negotiate parents' benign authority over how they should dress in a good-natured tone that emphasizes egalitarian relations. Both seller and customer emerge as modern and cosmopolitan agents, who nevertheless remain grounded in local norms of appropriateness.

A notable formal feature of the interaction is language choice. Besides two instances of code-switching to Tongan, most of the interaction is in English, including the quoted interaction between the mother and her children. As mentioned earlier, English "belongs" primarily to the elites along with other tokens of globality. Non-elite Tongans are often reluctant to speak English, ostensibly because they fear making linguistic mistakes, according to explanations commonly offered. In practice, their reluctance is not so much a matter of defective grammatical competence, but of not having the social self-assurance to assert oneself credibly as a privileged, modern, and cosmopolitan person without fearing shame (*mā*) and exposing oneself to ridicule (Besnier 2003). In the above interaction, however, neither seller nor customer seems particularly concerned with these anxieties, even though the seller's English displays some of the features typical of broadly accented Pacific Island English (e.g., "*it's* might fit you", "one of those *one* that *it* has to show").

Of additional interest is the fact (not visible in the transcript) that the seller not only speaks English, but also pronounces certain words with an exaggerated New Zealand accent. For example, she renders the first vowel of “Zealand” as a central vowel [ə] (schwa, i.e., the phonetic value of short unstressed vowels in standard English, such as the second vowel sound of “Zealand”). The phonetic centralization of certain vowels is specific to New Zealand English (Bauer 1994), but it is principally the short lax vowel [ɪ] (as in “kid”) that can be rendered as such; the first long high tense vowel [i:] is only sometimes centralized in a word like “Zealand” in the speech of very “local” New Zealand speakers. The seller’s linguistic behavior is an example of what sociolinguists customarily call “hypercorrection”, long documented in industrial societies as an index of a variety of inter-related socio-cultural attributes, including weak solidarity with members of one’s own social group and the yearning to be perceived as aligned with a social group that the speaker considers to be socially desirable (Labov 1966b). Through her exaggerated pronunciation, the seller communicates to others that she is familiar with the subtleties of New Zealand English and, by the same token, with all that the dialect stands for in Tonga, including a certain transnational sophistication and familiarity with urban modernity. She also distances herself from Tongan-accented English (with some difficulty at the level of syntax) and all that it represents in the New Zealand context, including the stigma of being an underclass “Islander”, whose vowels are never centralized. Indirectly, she is also attempting to present herself not just as part of the context that stigmatizes accented English, but also as part of those who are not stigmatized.

Topics of conversation, moral stances, code switching, syntax, and phonology all conspire to place this interaction, which is typical of the marketplace, at the center of a complex intersubjective negotiation between the expanded horizons that globality offers and the local symbolic and social order. The very act of selling is also constantly under scrutiny at the marketplace, in equally ambiguous ways. Tongans traditionally considered commerce shameful because they saw it as evidence that one was not holding one’s own in the gift economy. In more modernity-oriented contexts, selling is less stigmatized but not completely free of negative morality (see Besnier 2004b for further discussion). Neither globality nor locality, neither the seller nor the customer, comes out the “winner” of the negotiations. Rather, the conversation presents different possibilities and constraints, which the protagonists accept, reject, and revise intersubjectively. They do so by utilizing the microscopic resources of language, through which they

negotiate the macroscopic value of large-scale dynamics like modernity, globalization, and transnationalism. And they do so while mulling over a blouse brought in from a larger world, whose appropriateness to the local context remains undecided at the end of the conversation. The customer did not buy the blouse.

5. Negotiating globality at the transgender beauty pageant

The second context of Tongan social life through which I investigate the relationship among language, gender, and global processes is the national contest that *leitī* organize every year, the Miss Galaxy beauty pageant. Remember that *leitī* have a particular affinity to globalization, and that their appropriation of the symbols of cosmopolitanism have become just as central to their identity as their claims to femininity.

Nowhere are these dynamics more evident than at the pageant. Over the years, the pageant has transformed itself from an underground event held in the early 1990s in dingy dance clubs before drunken male audiences into a national affair endorsed by the patronage of prominent female members of the royal family and eagerly attended by the cream of Tongan and “Expatriate” society. Today it is held in the Queen Sālote Memorial Hall, the most prominent public venue in the country, and it showcases transgender contestants who vie for substantial prizes of a transnational nature, not surprisingly: in 2005, the winner received a round-trip to Los Angeles donated by Tonga’s national airline, upgraded from a trip to Auckland in prior years. These historical transformations both mirror and contribute to the gradual changes in mainstream attitudes toward *leitī*, changes that are neither uniform nor devoid of second thoughts. For example, while the government-controlled newspaper timidly began publishing post-hoc reports of the pageant in its back pages in the late nineties (Besnier 2002: 560), today the Parliament of Tonga’s official website sports the following (still somewhat distanced) announcement: “As an entertainment event more than anything else, there is also a Miss Galaxy competition, where ‘*fakaleiti*’ or drag queens have their own beauty pageant. This event is popular for its outrageous behaviour and comedy” (Parliament of Tonga 2005).

It is at the pageant that *leitī* can assert most publicly their claims to cosmopolitan glamour, with relatively little challenge from mainstream society. The contestants, poor and low ranking in everyday life, as well as mar-

ginalized because of their gendering, don for the pageant extravagant costumes and parade before a large and distinguished audience, displaying themselves in as much feminine glamour as their physiology affords them, and laying claims to an identity over which local moral codes have no stronghold, at least for a couple of nights a year.



Figure 2. One of the contestants in the Miss Galaxy 2000 pageant readjusts her bra which had fallen off during her outrageous dance performance, causing general hilarity

Not surprisingly, the pageant is conducted almost entirely in English. The problem is that most contestants' command of the language of cosmopolitanism leaves much to be desired. While their level of competence does not hinder them much in everyday contexts, it is more problematic before the pageant audience, who lie in wait for the first opportunity to see the contestant slip, be it a slip of clothing, slip of the foot, or slip of the tongue. Nothing generates more uproarious peals of audience laughter than a "wardrobe malfunction" like a bra sliding off a contestant's flat male chest or a wig falling off, which some audience members, after a few drinks, try to provoke (Figure 2).⁶

It is during the interview event that *leitī*'s competence in the language of cosmopolitanism is most open to scrutiny. In this part of the pageant, the *compère* asks each contestant in turn a (usually rather inane) question, first

in English and then in Tongan to ensure that the contestant has understood it. Theoretically, contestants have the choice of answering in either English or Tongan. Most cautiously choose Tongan, but this choice “proves” to the audience that they are unable to substantiate their nonverbal claims to cosmopolitanism through language competence. When a contestant does answer in English, which sometimes happens, the audience bursts out laughing at the slightest slip. At the 1997 pageant, which I have analyzed in detail elsewhere (Besnier 2002), the audience initially reacted with a loud murmur of temporary admiration for the courage that contestant Masha Entura (stage name of hairstylist Mo’ale), not known for being particularly worldly, displayed as she began speaking in seemingly effortless American-accented English. However, Masha soon stumbled, as she searched for an English word while waving her hand campily, while the audience, satisfied with the expected proof of the fraudulence of her claim to cosmopolitanism, began hooting and ridiculing, forcing her to abort her brave attempt (Figure 3):

- (2) Emcee: What would you say about being a hairstylist, or- being- a working- what- what does it mean, like, to be working at Joy’s Hair Styles? ((sotto voce, summarizes the question in Tongan)) *Ko e hā e me’a ‘oku ke fai ‘i he hair salon?*
- Masha: ((takes cordless mike)) Well thank you very much. ((audience laughs, then shouts with admiration and encouragement)) If you want your hair to be curled, ((beckons with her hand)) come over. ((audience explodes in laughter and whooping, Masha laughs and then becomes serious and requests silence with the hand)) Uh, I like it very much, and uh- I enjoy working there, with uhmm- ((pauses, word-searches, waves her hand, audience explodes in laughter, drowning the remainder of the answer)) blowers, ((unable to finish, mouths)) (thank you). ((hands mike back and returns to her position))
- [1997:Sony:4 0:02:45–0:03:55]

Linguistically and otherwise, pageant contestants are caught between a rock and a hard place: if they answer in English and make mistakes, the audience ridicules them, and if they answer in Tongan, they demonstrate that they are unable to carry through the artifice of cosmopolitanism to its logical end. The ridicule that greets the choice of Tongan is congruent with

many other aspects of mainstream Tongans' attitudes towards *leitī*, both at the pageant and in day-to-day interactions. Mainstream Tongans indeed consider *leitī* identity as essentially bogus: here are these men pretending to be women, and not just any women but cosmopolitan sophisticates, and yet they cannot even maintain their end of a simple conversation in English. In day-to-day interactions between *leitī* and mainstream Tongans, the latter often express mock annoyance at the "fraudulence" of *leitī* self-presentation and identity, while *leitī* argue back with "proofs" that they are "real women".



Figure 3. Masha word-searches the word "blowers" during her interview answer

However, like all ideological linkages that generate inequality, these dynamics are not immune to contestation on the part of those whom they marginalize. This was powerfully illustrated by a minor humorous incident at the 1997 pageant, when one of the contestants, the quick-witted 'Āmini or Lady Amyland, sponsored by Joey's Unisex Hair Salon, turned the tables on the audience during the interview event (and, perhaps, on society at large, even if only for a fleeting moment). Before she has a chance to answer the *compère*'s question, Lady Amyland is heckled by a drunken *leitī* in the audience, who urges her to answer in English (*faka-Pālangi*). The heckling draws some laughter, since everyone knows that Lady Amyland's English is poor and that she would make a fool of herself if she tried. But 'Āmini's repartee wins the prize (Figure 4):



Figure 4. Lady Amyland savors the general hilarity that her quick-witted answer has provoked

- (3) Emcee: Miss Joey's Unisex Hair Salon! What do you have to say to promote Joey's Unisex Hair Salon? ((lowers voice, translating into Tongan)) *Ko e hā e me'a 'oku ke fai ke promote ai 'a e-* ((rolls eyes, searches for Tongan word)) *fakalakalaka ai 'a Joey's Unisex Hair Salon.*
- 'Ahi: ((heckling from audience)) *Faka-Pālangi, 'Āmini!*
- audience: ((laughter))
- 'Āmini: Sorry excuse me, I'm a Tongan ()
- ((rest of answer drowned by deafening laughter, vigorous applause, cat-calls))
- [1997:Sony:4 0:05:42–0:06:26]

Lady Amyland answers the heckler by reaffirming her Tongan identity and therefore her duty and privilege to answer the question in Tongan, an unexpected move which the audience (and any Tongan viewer of the video recording) found extremely humorous, because the claim is embedded in a context in which everything is done to foreground non-locality.⁷ What Lady Amyland is doing here is part of a wider tacit project on the part of at least some contestants to take greater charge of the pageant and its effect on the audience. This project consists in stripping the audience (and society at large) of its privilege to ridicule contestants, to take control of the boundary between humor and seriousness, and to redeem an identity that mainstream

society marginalizes by relegating it to the jocular. (All this while being roaring drunk.)

But the project goes further. Note that Lady Amyland asserts her claim to Tongan identity not in Tongan, but in English; the covert message being that one can assert one's Tonganness while controlling the tools with which one does so, and while using tools that are not part of the sanctioned repertoire. In addition, the preface of her repartee ("Sorry excuse me") is an inside joke which non-*leitī* audience members are unlikely to make sense of (a reference to another *leitī*'s awkward attempt, a few years earlier, to speak English to set up a prospective date with a tourist). The overall effect of Lady Amyland's repartee contests the power of dominant forces to dictate what counts as markers of locality and what does not, asserts that the claim to be part of the "galaxy" does not necessarily deny one's local identity; and proclaims that being a *leitī* does not mean giving up one's place in Tongan society.

6. Gender and language at the intersection of the global and local

The relationship between language and gender that I have discussed in this ethnographic context is clearly complex. There is no clear mapping between the two codes in use in Tonga and gender categories. Nor is there a clear mapping between English or Tongan and a particular prestige value. Tongan is the language of locality, associated with both high-prestige and low-prestige contexts and actions. English is the language of globality, modernity, and cosmopolitanism, but its local prestige value is not unmitigated (see Besnier 2003: 283–284 for further discussion).

For the two groups and contexts I have analyzed, sellers and customers at the paradoxically cosmopolitan second-hand marketplace, and transgender participants in the annual beauty pageant, language use and other markers of relative locality and globality offer different possibilities, which are tied to (enabled or restrained by) local dynamics of power and prestige. Market women can display some degree of global sophistication and cosmopolitanism within the safe confines of the second-hand marketplace, but do so with some caution, testing carefully the effect that these displays have on their interlocutors. They can appropriate global symbols with some degree of risk, and must negotiate intersubjectively the extent to which their appropriation allows them to remain grounded in local standards of moral-

ity and decency. Miss Galaxy contestants, in contrast, throw in the towel, having little to lose in the local context. Safely shielded at the pageant from too brutal forms of harassment by the height of the runway, they can make claims to belonging to a “galaxy” that goes way beyond the confines of the local moral strictures and standards of decency. The risk *they* run is being laughed off the stage, and again they must negotiate the balance between extravagance and credibility, which they know from everyday contexts is particularly delicate for them given mainstream society’s constant efforts to rob them of legitimacy.

In the Tongan context, and I propose in many other comparable ethnographic contexts, appropriations of tokens of globality are negotiated inter-subjectively, and thus are open to challenges. Here, anxiety surrounding rank, dignity, and shame figure prominently in these negotiations, as they do in all social relations in Tongan society. These concerns are all firmly grounded in the local context. In addition, the symbolic and material tools that Tongans also employ in these negotiations are part-and-parcel of a much larger structural context, including among other things diasporic dispersal, post-coloniality, and elite control of global resources, be they material or symbolic. Gender identities are thus formed at the unstable intersection of the local and the global, the microscopic and the macroscopic. If we are to understand the role of language in these dynamics, language and gender are indeed linked through structures of indirect indexicality, as is now well-understood, but the categories and processes that mediate the indexicality are themselves constructed at the intersection of the local and the global (and, as I discussed in the introduction, the historical). This claim is diagrammatically represented in Figure 5, a revision of Figure 1.

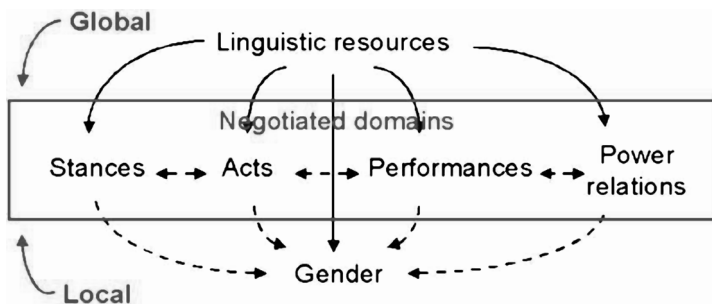


Figure 5. The local-global production of the language-and-gender linkage

I have developed an analysis of the role of globally informed linguistic resources in the construction of two different gendered identities, one the cosmopolitan modern woman, who defies the shame of selling, redefines her relationship to family, and displays her command of the world of fashion; the other of the cosmopolitan transgender, who walks the pageant catwalk with aplomb in front of royalty, has the self-possession to transgress the mainstream equation of gender, sex, and sexuality, and asserts her command of global tokens while not being entitled to them. The linguistic and social practices of members of these two groups illustrate the way in which social agents enlist the opportunities and constraints that the global context offers to fight local battles, to enforce or critique local inequalities, and contest local claims of privilege and authority. With Inoue (2002, 2006, this volume) and others, I propose that greater attention be paid in works on language and gender to large-scale structural conditions that link particular forms of language to particular forms of experience, and in turn to particular forms of identity. What I am adding here is an understanding of these structural conditions as they are offered by a globalized context, but also as people give them power and meaning (or lack thereof) in local contexts.

Notes

- * This chapter is based on fieldwork materials gathered in Tonga between 1994 and 2001, with permission from the Government of Tonga and funding from the Marsden Fund of the Royal Society of New Zealand and the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. I originally prepared this paper as a keynote for the International Gender and Language Conference hosted by Sally McConnell-Ginet at Cornell University in June 2004. Thanks to Sally for her enduring kindness. I also presented versions of this paper at UCLA, Sarah Lawrence College, State University of California Long Beach, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, University of Heidelberg, and University of Amsterdam. I thank all my respondents in Tonga for their patience, audience members for their comments, and Bonnie McElhinny for inviting me to contribute to this volume. Segments of this paper have already appeared in Besnier (2003 and 2004b).
- 1. The sociolinguistic and discourse analytic literature on Japanese markers of politeness and gender is vast, and includes works by, among many others, Cook 2005; Shibamoto-Smith 1987; Okamoto 1995; and Sturtz Sreetharan 2004. The historical trajectory of their meanings has also preoccupied a sizeable number of scholars writing primarily in Japanese, such as Nakamura 2001.

2. The situation is quite different in the diaspora, where many people of Tongan descent partake in Internet-based discussion boards (Franklin 2003; Morton 1998).
3. These characterizations, however, may soon need to be revised, as the WTO accepted Tonga as a new member in early 2006, under relatively unfavorable conditions (Wallis 2006). Co-incidentally, the country is currently in serious fiscal and political crisis, exacerbated by the death of King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV (1918–2006) and the accession of King Siaosi Tupou V, a firm believer in neoliberal reform. In November 2006, disaffected young Tongan men ransacked the capital's Central Business District, leaving it in ruins. Complex and ill-understood reasons motivated their actions, including the lack of employment opportunities, the slowness of political reforms, and the ruthlessness of immigration and deportation policies in countries to which Tongans seek to migrate. At the time of writing, Tonga's economic and political situation remains volatile.
4. I analyze the secondhand marketplace in greater detail in Besnier (2004b). The discussion that follows is drawn in part from that publication.
5. In this transcript I utilize standard conventions used in linguistic anthropology, originally developed by conversation analysts (see Atkinson and Heritage 1984). In standard Tongan orthography, superscript macrons indicate vowel gemination, apostrophes indicate glottal stops, and *ng* stands for a velar nasal stop.
6. When the pageant was held in smaller venues, inebriated audience members would routinely harass contestants. The runway at Queen Sālote Hall is too high to allow this harassment, and the move to this venue in 1997 has bestowed greater agency onto the contestants, although etiquette forces them to physically stoop down to high-ranking audience members, who sometimes take advantage of the situation. Ironically, the move to the larger venue was triggered by the Christian-inspired trans-phobia of certain government officials, who kicked the pageant out of the government-owned Dateline Hotel, the only international hotel in Nuku'alofa.
7. The humor already began with the heckle itself, which is uttered in Tongan, despite the fact it urges the contestant to speak English, and which refers to the contestant by his everyday name, rather than her transgender name.

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