The Queer Stopover: How Queer Travels in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

Over the last decade or so, developments in queer theory and queer perspectives have resulted in changes to the way that identities are viewed. However, the implications for foreign language classrooms are yet to be fully explored. This paper focuses on the challenges involved in introducing queer theory to the foreign language classroom. Specifically, it seeks to respond to the question "How does queer travel to the French, Italian and Japanese classrooms in an Australian university?" In doing so, it considers the challenges which emerge due to the structures of the languages, the socio-cultural context and the teaching materials used in the classroom. It is written by experienced teachers as they considered, and in some cases trialled, how to integrate queer perspectives into their teaching. The challenges addressed here are not exhaustive, but represent those the authors consider as the most salient at the initial steps of the journey.

1 Introduction

Over the last decade or so, the impact of queer theory and queer perspectives has brought important changes to academic practice around the world. However, the implications for foreign language classrooms are yet to be fully explored. This paper examines the journeys that the three authors have undertaken in response to the question, "Does queer travel?" which was posed in a paper on queer theory and social change. The question itself infers that "queer"[1] may not have the same meaning in other languages as it does in English. In this paper, we address the more specific question of "How does queer travel to the French, Italian and Japanese classrooms in an Australian university located in Sydney?" In particular, we consider the challenges involved in introducing queer theory to the university classroom.

The points discussed here are not exhaustive but represent some of the issues that the authors consider as the most salient from the perspective of experienced language teachers of French, Italian and Japanese contemplating how to integrate broader theoretical developments in queer theory

into their teaching. This paper refers to observations and reflections of our experiences in the language classroom over the last few years and is shaped by informal discussions we have had with language teachers and colleagues researching cross-cultural issues.

At the beginning of our journey, we found little research had been undertaken into introducing queer theory into the non-English language classroom. There are scholars looking at the integration of queer theory into the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom (e.g. Nelson, 1999, 2004), those who research identity in education (e.g. Pennycook, 2001), those who study the relationship between gender and language (e.g. Butler, 1999), and social scientists looking at the construction of identities, but we found little research on queer theory in the context of the foreign language classroom.

2   The authors, students and the university context

The authors include both native and non-native speakers of the languages they teach. Each has been teaching language for a number of years at the university level. All have research interests in fields outside education. Presently, we teach in the Language and Culture program offered by the Institute for International Studies (IIS), University of Technology Sydney (UTS). IIS offers classes in eight languages and has over 1000 students studying languages as a compulsory part of their International Studies[2] degree, or as an elective. Students come from a variety of linguistic, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. In the case of Italian and French, the proportion of International Studies students is over 50% whereas in Japanese, only about 25% of students are in the combined degree. In all cases, students come from different disciplinary backgrounds, including Engineering, Design Architecture and Building, Science and Business. Students are overwhelmingly concentrated in the beginner or intermediate levels. Students have different linguistic backgrounds, although all have English as a common language. In the case of Italian, some students have Italian ancestry, while students in the Japanese program are predominantly international students, particularly from a Chinese language background. In contrast, students in the French program are beginners or have studied French in High School. The differences in student profiles leads to differing challenges for those teaching the individual languages and are responsible for the integration of new theoretical practices in the classroom.

3   Language, gender and society in teaching

There have been rapid developments in approaches to the teaching of language over the last few decades. Whereas the traditional view of language teaching involved the teaching of grammar in order to access literature and culture, today there is a stronger emphasis on teaching language for communicative purposes. There is also a greater recognition of the interrelationship between language and society, and wider use is made of authentic materials (e.g. podcasts, newspaper and TV advertisements) and technologies that are updated to reflect linguistic and social changes and wider theoretical developments.

In his analysis of language and society, Fairclough (2001) observes how language and society hold "an internal and dialectical relationship" (p. 19). That is, linguistic phenomena are social phenomena, in that language use is determined by social conventions which are underpinned by the power relations underlying those same conventions. Yet at the same time, language plays a role in constructing, maintaining and changing the conventions. Examples of this theory can be observed in languages such as French, Italian and Spanish, where the grammar reflects traditional gender inequalities in power (Tosi, 2001, p. 79)[3]. That is, adjectives take a masculine or a feminine ending, depending on the gender of the nouns they accompany, and in cases of items of mixed gender, the masculine form prevails irrespective of the number of items of either gender. In the Japanese language, the radical[4] for woman （女） forms part of the words for servant (奴), dislike (嫌がる), and envy （嫉む／妬み), whilst the *kanji* for man（男）is made from the *kanji* for power (力)

underneath a rice field （田）[5]. In both cases, we can see traditional representations of male domination in social power.

Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis draws attention to the relationship between discourse and ideology, with the former referring to the actual language used, and the latter to a link between social power and the way it is manifest in language use. This view has political implications for the way the role of language teachers is understood. Teachers may either contribute to the preservation of normative positions in regard to dominating social practices, or they can challenge them. In the case of the latter, teachers need to promote a class environment which encourages a critical and self-reflective discourse for both students and teachers. This practice needs to be supported by a curriculum and materials that facilitate linguistic and reflective exploration. An awareness of this point is highly relevant for the introduction of any new practices in the language classroom. In terms of queer theory, this means ensuring that a variety of illustrations of different types of couples are used.

Over the last decade or so, there has been a move towards integrating the developments in queer theory into the ESL classroom. Nelson for instance, suggests that the queer theory paradigm, rather than a lesbian and gay inclusive framework be used, as it moves the focus "from including minority sexual identities to examining how language and culture work with regard to all sexual identities" (1999, p. 371). Furthermore, Vandrick (2001) suggests that the introduction of issues about sexual identity should form "part of a multicultural/equity approach" (p. 11) or one concerned with the fighting of racism and sexism as well as other forms of discrimination. In a similar vein, Schweers (1997) recommends that discussions on queer identity form part of a thematic based curriculum which allows for the incorporation of other discriminatory themes, such as racism, and therefore does not privilege (and potentially reinforce the marginal nature of) discussions of queer identity. In essence, each suggests that issues of sexual identities should not be introduced in isolation, as that would place undue focus on them. Instead, recognition of sexual identities should be introduced as part of a wider recognition of equity and anti-discriminatory practice. This view has far reaching implications for foreign language teaching, which often emphasises the perspective of the other culture(s) rather than the local.

Queer theory is defined differently by theorists working in the various disciplines, but is recognised as covering sexual identities in all forms as well as behaviours. In the context of this article, we consider queer theory to be primarily about challenging normative and fixed notions of sexuality in whatever form, whether it be heterosexual or gay/lesbian/trans-sexual identities. This means that it incorporates "anyone who feels marginalized by mainstream visions of sexuality" (Morris, 2000, p. 21). Nevertheless, we acknowledge the question that Gunther (2005) raises about "how do we go about fixing the meaning of a term that challenges the fixity of meaning itself?" (p. 23). In the classroom situation, we think of queer theory as an enquiry based approach that is not solely concerned with the inclusion of people of all sexual identities, but is also about critically examining and problematising language materials and information about social structures as they pertain to sexual identities. A risk in not problematising materials and information is that stereotyped or essentialised images of other countries are created and/or reinforced in classroom discussions, as students do not necessarily have their own experience to critique or question the materials and/or information available.

4   Queering the language and culture classes

In many ways, the language classroom is a productive place to explore sexual identities as language learning requires participation in various task-based communicative activities, such as role plays. In these activities students are encouraged to imagine themselves in different situations and roles. As such, the exploration of identities is an integral, albeit not always overtly acknowledged, part of the language classroom.

Most discussions of the integration of queer theory into the ESL curriculum (e.g. Nelson, 1999) appear in the context of classrooms where students have already acquired a conversational profi-

ciency in the target language. However, the potential for exploring issues about sexual identities needs to be recognised from the beginner levels. Discussions centring on everyday concepts like the family and relationships, using simple structures, can still generate meaningful dialogue about sexual identities and can be explored within basic beginner language activities. In instances such as this, some conceptual discussion may take place in the common language – if there is one. The strategy adopted may come down to individual teacher preference, but we believe that the use of a common language should not be discouraged if it aids in students' acquisition and understanding of the language and cultural context.

'Thinking queer' triggered different responses and reflections from each author. A concern we had when writing this article was whether we should find themes that overlap in the three languages and focus on them, or whether we should divide the discussion into individual language sections. We agreed that the three languages each had their own story to tell and therefore decided to look at each one separately. Yet, a number of common challenges were identified. We agreed that the challenges could be defined as personal, cultural, linguistic, and those related to teaching materials. Nevertheless, separating these challenges into distinct categories is not always clear cut as they sometimes overlap with one another.

Personal challenges include teachers' and students' own ideas and views and how these may influence behaviours in the classroom. Some teachers, for instance, may ignore issues such as sexual identities due to a view that other, 'practical' issues are more important. Or, some may believe that their role is to encourage linguistic competence, and issues such as sexual identity and the critique of the hetero-normative position are of little relevance in that role. For instance, Nelson (1999) comments that some colleagues consider "gay-friendly teaching is at best of marginal importance, of interest to a small minority of learners and teachers (gay ones)" (p. 373), and to consider gay and lesbian issues would constitute the insertion of "a discourse of (homo) sex into a field in which that discourse is neither relevant nor appropriate" (Nelson, 1999, p. 373). Similarly, Pennycook (2001, p. 158) writes of an assumption that it is not appropriate to deal with gay and lesbian issues in the classroom as it is too personal for some students. He also writes of "a tendency for straight teachers to assume gay and lesbian issues are not their concern" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 158). Vandrick (2001, p. 6), likewise, acknowledges a concern among heterosexual teachers as to whether it is appropriate for them to teach gay and lesbian issues in their classrooms. Yet discussions about teachers' and students' families for example, inevitably convey information about the sexual preferences of the speaker or their family members. In a beginner level Japanese class for instance, a student asked about the word to describe his brother's same-sex partner, who was in the family photo. With his consent, this led to a very fruitful discussion about the different levels of acceptance of homosexuality in Sydney vis-à-vis Tokyo and Japan in general. Yet, some teachers would not feel comfortable holding this discussion. This could be a personal, or it could because they do not feel they have the knowledge to address them appropriately. Using Japanese as an example once again, some teachers may have only a limited awareness of the situation of non-heterosexual people in Japan or the vocabulary used, and therefore they may not have the confidence to address the issue.

Personal challenges are often interwoven with cultural challenges, in that everyone brings to the classroom their individual experiences and baggage which reflect their cultural values. As an example, teachers and students may assume there are non-heterosexual students in their classrooms, but that does not necessarily mean that their culturally influenced discourse adequately and appropriately reflects that assumption. Instead, teachers' discourse may linguistically assume the heterosexual position. For instance, a comment "Aren't you lucky!" made by one of the authors to the only male student in a class of 16 students assumes that he is heterosexual! This is just one example of how so-called 'everyday conversations', inside and outside the classroom, assume the hetero-normative position and how a set-phrase sometimes overrides personal awareness.

Cultural challenges include the different ways teachers interpret the culture(s) with which they are familiar. As mentioned above, some teachers are more comfortable than others in referring to sexual identities in the classroom. In doing so, they may send the message to students that the topic is appropriate for discussion in the culture of the target language. Other teachers, however, may

hold the view that as the topic of sexual identities is taboo in their experience of the target culture(s), it is not appropriate for discussion in the language classroom, despite it being acceptable in the local context. These teachers would argue that if they were to discuss it, they would be misrepresenting the culture of the language they are teaching. Yet, to avoid these discussions serves to perpetuate the taboo, and at the same time does not take into account the theoretical developments that may be occurring in other languages and cultures. If discussions are encouraged, even though the ideas expressed do not necessarily represent the mainstream values of the target language, students will gain the opportunity to express authentic ideas and to become individual speakers of the target language. The context of an Australian university is important here – we do not advocate discussions be held in countries where homosexuality is illegal. As Kramsch (1993) argues, "in the foreign language classroom teacher and learners are both participants and observers of a cross-cultural dialogue that takes place in the foreign language across grammatical exercises, communicative activities, and the discussion of texts" (p. 29). That is, through discussions with the teacher and classmates and contact with other resources, students' ideas interact with the values of the culture(s) of the target language and they become speakers in their own right.

Challenges covering teaching materials include ways of dealing with language textbooks published to teach a specific language and culture and the illustrations used. These challenges include identifying whether sexual identities are included or excluded, how they are portrayed, and whether they are reflective of a wide cross-section of cultural contexts. As some languages are spoken primarily in one country (e.g. Italian), whilst others, such as French, are used in a number of countries where the cultural contexts differ, this challenge is manifest differently in each language. As well, teaching materials may only depict families with a mum, a dad and two children and omit representations of single parent families, for instance. This means that pictures of families like those of our students' may not be shown. Whilst we acknowledge that textbook content is an ideological minefield[6] and that the profit margin may drive what is included, this should not prevent teachers from encouraging students to problematise the textbook or ensure that other materials used in class are more inclusive.

Linguistic challenges involve looking at the particular grammatical structures of a language to determine in what way a language reflects the interrelationship between it and social structures. In the case of Romance languages this could include the way masculine gender dominates female gender as in the example discussed above. The challenge is to find ways to promote a classroom discourse which questions the normative positionings that permeate the structure of the language and that are performed and reinforced on a daily basis. If we accept that identities are discursively produced, and that language plays an important role in articulating identities, we need to develop strategies that allow exploration within the constraints of linguistic frameworks.

5   Queering the French, Italian and Japanese language and culture classrooms

In this section we reflect upon some of the challenges faced when addressing questions of sexual identity in the teaching of French, Italian or Japanese. In dividing our discussion by language, we are able to focus on our initial reactions to thinking queer in terms of our own personal experiences as language teachers.

5.1   *French*

In the French language classroom, issues related to sexual identity can be examined from different angles: the choices made by teachers when identifying material for discussion in class; the published teaching material selected to improve and expand the grammatical and linguistic skills of students, and the attitude of the teacher with respect to student linguistic performance.

The first point concerning the selection of material for discussion applies mainly to students in intermediate and advanced level classes, where the focus on grammar and vocabulary building activities shifts to the analysis of contemporary socio-political, media or literary discussions in

French. The aims of such activities are two-fold: to further develop oral, written and reading skills and to invite students to reflect upon issues associated with the French speaking world. Consequently, the selection of materials needs to recognise sexual identities in the plurality of cultural and social contexts that make up the French speaking world.

In the case of France, the developments in queer theory need to be analysed in light of the social and historical context. Queer theory, which is seen as American by French intellectuals, initially met with resistance in France "due in part to the French social model of universalism" (Gunther, 2005, p. 23), which discourages recognition of the existence of minority groups. Thus, France's attitudes towards queer needs to be considered in the context of this universalist model, which desires 'assimilation' and opposes the prospect of a group being "separated from society according to race or sexual orientation" (Gunther, 2005, p. 23). At the same time, however, sexual identities have undergone immense social analysis in France. According to Dumontet (2004), the title of the book 'Liberté, Egalité, Sexualité' by Eric Fassin, Clarisse Fabin and Hugues Jallon (2004) plays on the words of the French motto 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité' in order to highlight the changes that are transforming the French Republic. Issues about sexuality have increasingly entered the public sphere over the last fifteen years. This is partly due to the introduction in 1999 of the 'Pacte Civil de Solidarité' (Civil Solidarity Pact), which offers de facto couples the possibility of a legal status. The enactment of this law generated widespread discussions about the legal rights and obligations of heterosexual and homosexual couples etc. living in France. More recently, debates on whether gay marriages should be allowed in France have divided the country's main political parties and have raised further questions on the rights of the nation's citizens. For example, over the last few years, France's Socialist Party has been divided over the issue of whether gay marriages should be legalised or not. Queer notions in France, therefore, need to be analysed in the context of French republicanism, ideas of integration and assimilation and anti-communitarianism, concepts which are not relevant to countries like French speaking Canada and Switzerland.

From a language learning and teaching perspective, the incorporation of a queer framework into the curriculum also needs to take into consideration whether 'queer' ways of speaking exist in the French language. Again it is important to keep in mind the cultural, historical and linguistic differences that are a feature of the French speaking world. A collection of essays entitled 'Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language' (Leap & Boellstorff, 2004), examines "ways of talking about same-sex desires, practices, and subjectivities" (Leap & Boellstorff, 2004, p. 1) and asks "how culturally specific domains of homosexual subjectivity are created and transformed in relation with domains from other cultures" (Leap & Boellstorff, 2004, p. 11). One chapter looks specifically at the gay language used by the French and notes the impact of universalism. "The French gay and lesbian movement and culture are like other cultural institutions (in France) in that they must operate within the bounds of a larger dominant national framework" (Provencher, 2004, p. 26), so talking about a French gay language becomes difficult when every French citizen is brought up to speak a "mother tongue that emphasizes sameness and inclusion instead of difference" (Provencher, 2004, p. 27). Higgins (2004), on the other hand, examines the evolution of gay language in Montreal Canada and emphasises the community building effect that speaking 'queer' has had in French speaking Canada. He writes "'gay language' developed in ways that united people across the linguistic/cultural divide that has characterized Montreal since 1760" (Higgins, 2004, p. 79). While the French gay language is used to mark sameness in France, language in Montreal is used to create a sense of community and difference. These facts are important when focusing on how language works in a language classroom and whether language is used to highlight or mask differences within a culture. Despite the differences emphasised between France and Canada, Higgins (2004) and Provencher (2004) both come to the same conclusion in regards to the way the gay community uses language within the dominant society. To quote Provencher (2004), the "English language and cultures play a role in French gay text making" (p. 35). However the way this English is used relies "on traditional narratives and way of being that are part and parcel of a national cultural landscape" (Provencher, 2004, p. 35). Higgins (2004) echoes this view when he states that "vocabulary items are adopted from English but then fit into the semantic sets of the adopting language" (p. 99). Nevertheless, he proceeds to stress that "Quebec's selection from the pool of avail-

able terms in English […] is different from that made by the French. Many words used in France are not common in Canada and vice versa" (Higgins, 2004, p. 93). The language class could, therefore, be a productive environment in which to examine linguistic and cultural differences between French speaking countries, and could take the analysis further by determining whether a 'gay language' that incorporates English words is similar or different to the French language of French speakers in general which borrows English words and expressions.

Another point concerns published teaching materials in the French language. French language textbooks are predominantly written and published in France and, therefore, many of the cultural elements refer specifically to France. Incorporating the foundation of queer theory becomes problematic in beginner and intermediate language classes, where the type of material used in class is often dictated by the language textbooks chosen for students. Looking at some of the material published for French beginner levels over the years, it is evident there have been conscious changes made to the way sexual identity is presented. For instance, stereotyped portrayals of heterosexual families such as in Figure 1 are now less frequent[7].

Fig. 1

Today, some French language textbooks, in an attempt to meet the social changes of the modern world, silently acknowledge that maybe people no longer live in families that are necessarily made up of a mother, a father and two or three children, by no longer mentioning traditional families at all[8]. The non-portrayal of families in textbooks is consequently left to the individual teacher to explore in class with students. The way this is done is a reflection of personal choices.

Another way to view how sexual identity is represented in French textbooks is to acknowledge the existence of material that includes heterosexual and homosexual references. For instance, the intermediate level textbook, 'Forum 3' (Le Bougnec, Lopes, Menand & Vidal, 2002), has a chapter on different ways of expressing love. It includes examples of short messages from one partner to another published in the classified section of a newspaper. Some given names clearly indicate that the messages are between heterosexual couples, but one message explicitly identifies the writer and recipient as male (see Fig. 2)[9]. Was this an attempt by the authors to include homosexual couples? Obviously. However, the message, by including a reference to the sender's 'illness' and 'bad blood', also implies that one of the men, Matthieu, has HIV-AIDS. That is, while the authors attempted to include a gay couple in the exercise, they also stereotype homosexuals as diseased. This indicates that simply including representations and information on non-

heterosexuals in materials does not necessarily provide affirmation of diversity, but can serve to reinforce the isolation of a social group by portraying them in a negative light.
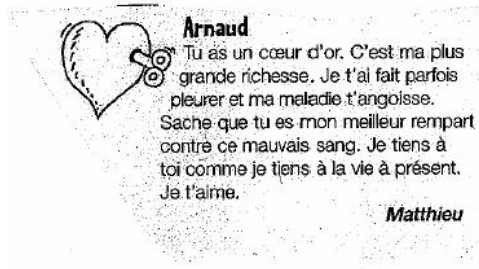

Arnaud
"Tu as un cœur d'or. C'est ma plus grande richesse. Je t'ai fait parfois pleurer et ma maladie t'angoisse. Sache que tu es mon meilleur rempart contre ce mauvais sang. Je tiens à toi comme je tiens à la vie à présent. Je t'aime.
Matthieu

Fig. 2

Another issue is the use of gender in French grammatical structures[10]. In the Australian university context, language teachers are working in an environment that is more and more open to the sexual identity of students. However, this is not always reflected in the language or activities done in class. One problem that arises concerns whole-class discussions in which students are required to describe their partner or their ideal partner. In French, as in other romance languages, the endings of nouns and adjectives reflect the sex of the partner. A common mistake made by students, particularly English speaking students who are learning French, is to use a female ending when a male ending is required, and vice versa. For example a male student talking about his girlfriend could say *ma petite amie est japonaise* (my girlfriend is Japanese), but should say *mon petit ami est japonais* (My boyfriend is Japanese) if referring to a male partner. The spelling and the pronunciation are different. What would happen if a student was to say the latter in class? There is a strong chance that he would be corrected by the teacher, who would assume that the agreements should be in the feminine, that is, as in the first statement. What if the male student was aware of the agreements he was making and was referring to a male partner? In this situation, teachers are faced with the dilemma of correcting a student if they think the wrong grammatical agreement is used, or not correcting the student because they think it might be what the student intended to say. What should a teacher promote in class, hetero-normative 'correct' grammar, or an environment where the exploration of sexual identity is possible? The way that language lessons and activities are structured should allow choices in the types of roles students take on. For example, an activity on a desirable partner could begin with a discussion of the different types of partners and the applicable vocabulary. Students then choose the sex of the person they will talk about and if a teacher needs to intervene to make corrections, the emphasis is on the language itself, rather than on the teacher's assumption of the sexual preferences of the student. This would also lessen the angst that students' may have about whether to 'out' themselves to the class or not. A colleague learning another Romance language mentioned that he had been in two minds about whether to out himself in a similar 'Perfect Partner' exercise. He said that as he pondered what to do, another student outed himself by deliberately using the male agreements, and so he decided he could too. This highlights the hetero-normative assumptions in the language, as well as suggesting some class activities.

These observations demonstrate that queer issues in the French language classroom can be approached in various ways and from different cultural angles. Some of the choices teachers can make regarding queer issues depend on the material used in class, the language level of the students and the French speaking countries in question.

5.2   Italian

In seeking to queer the Italian classroom, three main areas of reflection stood out: the values conveyed by the teaching materials, the biases embedded in the language structure itself, and the cultural baggage that a teacher brings to the language classroom.

The textbook 'Rete!' (Mezzadri & Balboni, 2000) was chosen in 2004 for use in beginner and advanced beginner level Italian at IIS because it seemed to highlight aspects of contemporary Italian culture and society. In 'Rete 1 Unit 1', Maria, a girl from Argentina, meets an Italian male, Sandro. They start chatting and exchange personal information. They keep in touch and a few units later, Maria meets Sandro's family: his mother, father and a sister. In terms of the grammatical structures, this unit introduces possessive adjectives. Students are exposed to the following pattern: unless modified or accompanied by an adjective, possessive adjectives are used without the article when referring to family members in the singular[11]. To give an example using the two masculine nouns *libro* and *marito*: *questo è il mio libro* (this is my book) requires the article *il*, but *questo è mio marito* (this is my husband) does not require the article. However, this rule is not as straightforward as it seems, as it raises the question of who is considered a family member. For instance, one says *questo è il mio compagno* (this is my partner) with the article when speaking about one's own de facto partner! A grammatical rule therefore fences off the Italian family and openly declares who is in and who is out.

It is interesting to observe that this grammatical structure reflects the contemporary social reality in regards to the status of de facto relationships in Italy. Unmarried couples in Italy do not have the same legal rights or access to benefits as married couples. This absence of equal rights has an impact on issues ranging from welfare to rights of inheritance. That is, there is no legal recognition in 'the Vatican's courtyard', as Italy was provocatively called during a debate on these issues in the 2005 election campaign. Romano Prodi, leader of the centre-left Union coalition and now Prime Minister, proposed the legalisation of unions between unmarried couples, including gay ones, as part of his electoral platform[12]. To his opponents, recognition of these unions would undermine the concept of family founded on marriage, as outlined in Article 29 of the Italian constitution[13]. To his supporters, however, the amendments meant an acknowledgement of the reality of contemporary life for a growing number of Italians.

Are there any references to these issues in the chapter in 'Rete' entitled 'The Family'? Unfortunately no (not even in the teacher's notes), and it is the same with other Italian language textbooks, apart from 'Ciao Amici' (Riviello & Calabrese, 2003), which I looked at for this article. In the case of 'Ciao Amici', students are introduced to the vocabulary for step-families, which seems quite progressive, since other textbooks portray the modern typical Italian family as being made up of a mother, a father and a couple of children. I suspect that it is because 'Ciao Amici' is published in Australia, where there are many blended families, that the vocabulary for step-families is included. Nevertheless, whilst the authors of 'Ciao Amici' should be praised for including examples of step-families, some terms used to refer to members of the step-family point toward a conservative family paradigm deeply influenced by the Catholic Church. In fact, the words for step- brother and sister *(fratellastro* and *sorellastra)* evoke memories of Cinderella's story, as *sorellastre* is used to refer to the ugly sisters and has the connotation of a non-caring 'acquired' family. This is due to the fact that the suffix "-*astro*" is usually pejorative and therefore suggests images of conflict in relationships. As reported by the National Observatory on Families (n.d.), this negative connotation results in pessimism in relation to the roles. To use Livia and Hall's (1997) words, drawing on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, "the language one speaks determines one's perception of reality" (p. 8). Hence, new linguistic terms of reference need to be developed to facilitate the integration of this emerging family's typology in the social fabric.

In recent years, moderate steps have been taken to develop alternative ways of expressing these relationships. For example, *il marito di mia madre* (my mother's husband) or *il mio fratello acquisito* (my acquired brother) are sometimes used. Interestingly, Italian policies in relation to the introduction of neologisms and foreign words (English in particular) are very liberal when it comes

to promoting the international profile of the country and meeting demands for politically correctness. Nevertheless, as Massimo Arcangeli (2004a) claims, moves to introduce politically correct language for issues such as race, sex, disabilities and some job descriptions, do not necessarily point toward more positive positionings but, on the contrary, can be deceptive, since the changes involve a simple 'verbal uplift', rather than a reflection of a changed reality. For instance, Arcangeli argues that censoring and replacing offensive expressions used to address lesbians and gays does not automatically eradicate discriminatory attitudes amongst some of the extreme conservative fringes. At the '2004 Gay Pride in Rome', people exhibiting banners reading "*Il Colosseo ai gay? Coi leoni dentro"* (Shall we give the Colosseum to the gays? Only with lions inside!) were able to show their hostility without using the offensive term *frocio* (poofter) (Arcangeli, 2004b). This suggests that shifting terms can be seen as purely the re-labelling of old realities, as opposed to an indication of new ways of thinking. However, this unidirectional view ought to be discussed in the light of other theoretical postulates. As Annamarie Jagose (1996) points out in her analysis of the theories underlying post-structuralist discourse, the function of language is not "simply to describe what is already there. Rather, language constitutes and makes significant that which it seems only to describe" (p. 79).

As Cameron (1997) explains, the postmodernist approach shifts away from the assumption of sociolinguistics that "people talk the way they do because of who they (already) are" (p. 49), to suggest that "people are who they are because of (among other things) the way they talk" (Cameron, 1997, p. 49). Postmodernism has major implications for the concept of identity, in that subjects are not seen as pre-given entities, but are thought of as discursively produced. As Pennycook (2001) puts it, identity is "something we perform through language rather than something reflected in language" (p. 162). The issue is to examine the types of classroom discourse which facilitate the articulation of more inclusive identities.

Personally speaking, I have started reflecting on these issues quite recently. Although in my teaching practice I have always tried to promote a critical and reflective pedagogy, in that I have encouraged students to challenge the values and attitudes the materials convey, I have begun to wonder what values my behaviour actually conveys. In light of the ideas put forward by Wright (1987), I could be bringing with me "social and psychological 'baggage', which impacts the group activity" (p. 11). That is, while on the one hand I consciously prompt enquiry, on the other hand, my actions and words could be seen to be promoting the opposite position. As an example, when preparing for a class test that had feminine and masculine grammatical versions, I instinctively selected a blue folder for the masculine version and a pink folder for the feminine one! I later realised that I had unconsciously played a role in perpetuating a ritualised discourse. However, I can re-evaluate experiences such as these in the light of Nelson's suggestion to bring dilemmas into the classrooms and make "complexities the object of enquiry" (O'Móchain, Mitchell & Nelson, 2003, p. 136)[14]. I have begun to see the classroom as a privileged space to unpack my own behaviour and make it an object of critical discourse. For instance, I now encourage students to critique my behaviours in regards to sexual identities.

An open attitude together with a queer aware approach to materials and classroom activities provides an excellent framework for exploration of sexual identities. I realize now how often in the past I have set hetero-normative activities, such as role-plays, where a guy tries to pick up a girl, without providing the students with the option of setting their own roles. Recently, I gave students the freedom to determine their own relationships in a role-play and two female students chose to be lesbians. I suspect the discussion we had had earlier in the class about an Italian movie which addressed gay issues had contributed to creating a supportive environment for expressing or exploring sexual identities. This gave me a glimpse of how much can be achieved with an open curriculum and materials that encourage exploration of larger questions of identity.

5.3   *Japanese*

The Japanese language classroom provides an interesting context for discussions of when to introduce queer issues into the classroom, the cultural context of the target language versus the local, and how sexual identities may be addressed in written text in a non-romanised language.

In many ways, the Japanese language classroom is no different to any language classroom, but due to the need to incorporate the teaching of different writing systems, it has a different dimension to language classrooms where the Roman alphabet is used. In the context of sexual identities, the use of different writing systems poses various challenges as well as opportunities for teachers to encourage enquiry. A prime example of a challenge is in the way that *kanji* can be used to indicate different meanings. That is, the pronunciation of one word can be written alongside the *kanji* of another word to suggest a different meaning to the usual meaning of the *kanji*. For instance, the *kanji* compound for she (彼女 *kanojo*) could be written with the pronunciation for he (*kare*) next to it, to indicate that the female being discussed is masculine or butch. Understanding the meaning requires the recognition of each word as well as the imagery involved. In most cases, these examples are 'one-offs' rather than standard usage, and so are not usually taught, but can appear in literature or other texts used in the classroom. In the context of the classroom, examples such as these can serve as an excellent way to explore sexual identities and social structures behind what is written.

The curriculum used in many Japanese language programs in Australia, including that at IIS, follows the communicative approach. The communicative approach is an excellent mechanism to teach and learn the full meaning of what is said. However, as the focus is primarily on what is culturally appropriate in Japan, the local cultural and academic context is sometimes downplayed. That is, topics which may be considered important locally (e.g. the expression of sexual identities) or form part of students' educational and social development (e.g. equity issues), may not be included in the curriculum because they are not seen as relevant in Japan. This gives rise to a number of challenges. The first is to find a balance between these positions. Another is how to incorporate topics such as sexual identities into the curriculum without giving students the false impression of the appropriateness of the topic for direct and open discussion in Japan. Issues of sexual identity are rarely *directly* addressed in Japanese, but this does not mean that they are ignored completely. Rather, as Japanese has a strong tendency to use inference to indicate meaning rather than addressing a topic directly, topics such as sexual identities are discussed indirectly. In this context, what is not said is often just as important, or even more important, than what is actually verbalised. Accordingly many seemingly taboo topics, such as sexual identities, are addressed more than they appear. Under these conditions, the listener understands the message by interpreting the sub-text, or the cues and nuances indicated or gestured.

A further challenge is in how to teach and learn to recognise and interpret these non-verbal communication cues. The right hand held at an angle against the left cheek for example, indicates that a male is effeminate or perhaps gay. Introducing pictures of this gesture at the same time as those for 'me', 'come here' and 'girlfriend' can avoid a deliberate focus on homosexuality. Differences in the use of non-verbal communication between the sexes can be introduced at the same time. The above example for instance, is only used to refer to men and is not used about women. As not recognising, or unintentionally misusing these cues can inadvertently indicate a different meaning or cause confusion, it is important for students to be aware of the differences. Yet, in the context of the classroom, inadvertent or intentional use of these signals can serve as an excellent avenue for the exploration of sexual identities. At the same time, it is important to encourage students to express their individuality in Japanese whilst simultaneously encouraging them to be culturally sensitive. This does not mean that students have to conform to native speaker or Japanese 'cultural norms', but that they be aware of how they maybe reinforcing social norms, so that they can make choices as to what they want to say. As Kristen puts it, "I wanted to find a way of speaking in Japanese that was more reflective of myself" (Nagata & Sullivan, 2005, p. 24).

Although Japanese does not have gendered grammar like in Romance languages, it has quite a strong codification of masculine/feminine language use in vocabulary (e.g. in the choice of words for 'me' and 'you'), intonation and the use of sentence final particles. At the intermediate level, students are taught that the use of *wa* (a sentence final particle) by females serves to soften the tone of an utterance, and female students may be encouraged to use it. At the beginner level, however, students are taught that *watashi* means I/me and is used by both males and females, but *boku* is used only by males and only when speaking with colleagues or people below the speaker in the social hierarchy. Students may also be taught other pronouns and that the overuse of *watashi* by males indicates femininity[15]. In the process, teachers may tell students that when listening to a conversation, listeners can, among other things, understand the relative position of the participants in the social hierarchy as well as some personality traits. For example, using the intonation of the other sex can signify sexual preference. A male using female intonation or *wa* at the end of sentence, for instance, can infer he is effeminate or gay. Yet, unless students hear both intonations and learn the implications, they may not be aware of the message they are sending, or pick up these distinctions in the speech of others. At the same time, teachers often unconsciously use the intonation patterns of their own sex and therefore students may not have the opportunity to hear and learn the various differences[16]. Overcoming this situation requires access to different speakers and/or materials which clearly show the differences in usage. Yet, as Yukiko admits, audiotape materials can be problematic, as they tend to replicate essentialised gendered language (Nagata & Sullivan, 2005, p. 19). To deal with this situation, Yukiko suggests that "it is important for students to receive additional explanations from the teacher regarding neutralization of gender differences in Japanese today" (Nagata & Sullivan, 2005, p. 18). I suggest that the hetero-normative aspects of language use also require some explanation from the teacher.

The above points are just a few of those which teachers of Japanese may confront when faced with integrating discussions of sexual identity into the classroom. In some cases, the issues are not specific to considerations of queer theory in the classroom, but are extensions of discussions on *otoko kotoba* (male language) or *onna kotoba* (female language). Thinking queer in the classroom in these terms may encourage more teachers in the future to consider the hetero-normativity of Japanese and include it is in their teaching.

6   Conclusion

This article explored the journey undertaken by experienced language teachers when considering how to integrate queer theory into the non-English language classroom in the context of an Australian university.

The implementation of queer theory has been considered through the analysis of the challenges involved. Each author has identified challenges posed by the specific context of the language (i.e. French, Italian and Japanese) and culture taught. However, a number of common challenges linked to the teaching materials, personal, cultural and linguistic, emerged from the discussion.

It was found that recognising the interrelationship between language and society is crucial. As linguistic structures reflect and construct social realities, the language itself represents a tool to either perform and reinforce socio-cultural values, or question them. Some challenges are considered to be personal and/or cultural. One example is the description by the Italian teacher of her reflections on how her 'baggage' impacted on classroom practices. Personal and cultural values of both teachers and students were also found to interplay to create a dynamic, yet complex, space for enquiry into sexual identities. This is particularly the case in the context where students' profiles differ quite considerably.

In exploring cultural challenges the authors also dealt with different perspectives based, on the one hand, on cultural values and attitudes of the target language as interpreted by the teacher and, on the other hand, on theoretical developments in cultures represented in the classroom and local context. The Japanese teacher, for instance, suggests that the focus on the culture of the target language can serve to downplay developments in other languages and the local context. Yet, the in-

termingling of cultures can be seen as a productive environment for facilitating cross-cultural dialogue.

In terms of teaching materials, the paper also highlights how both exclusion and inclusion can be problematic. As suggested in the French section, inclusion serves to reinforce the marginalisation of non-heterosexual identities, while exclusion fails to acknowledge the existence and relevance of all sexual identities. At all times, it is essential for teachers to take a critical approach to materials and activities in order to provide a framework for exploration.

In conclusion, we reiterate the view put forward by Nelson (1999) that more research in this area needs to be carried out. Some areas for future discussion include how to further develop an enquiry based approach in the curriculum using material and activities that allow students the freedom and the choice to explore topics related to identity while at the same time developing their linguistic skills. For example, a more empirical approach, whereby specific activities incorporating heterosexual and queer roles and/or issues are used in class and are analysed in terms of the way that students interact and reflect on their choices. Some observation style research similar to that undertaken by Nelson (1999) in the ESL context is also required but adapted for the foreign language classroom. Furthermore, student/teacher dialogues, such as that employed by Nagata and Sullivan (2005), would give voice to students and their journeys. Moreover, as technology is used in language classroom more than ever before, it would be worthwhile investigating how online materials incorporate issues related to sexual identities.

Notes

[1] As with the use of the word 'queer' in English, each language has had its own debates over terminology. We do not address this issue in this paper.

[2] Students in the combined degree program study a language for 2 years before going overseas on In Country Study for one year.

[3] Tosi's reference is in regards to the Italian Language but also applies to the French and Spanish languages.

[4] A radical is a *kanji* character which forms the basis of another *kanji*.

[5] Not all words incorporating the radical for woman have negative connotations. Kittredge Cherry (1987) provides a number of examples of words incorporating the *kanji* for woman.

[6] For a discussion on the content of textbooks see Apple & Christian-Smith (1991).

[7] Author's translation of selected sentences that accompany this picture:

The family is the most highly valued element of French life. Family life is at the heart of social life. The majority of celebrations take place around the family. (...) the French family is changing, the mother works, the father participates in the upbringing of the children, the grandparents are less likely to live in the family home. (...)In a world full of uncertainty, the family is a place of protection and stability. The family cocoon is a very private universe. An invitation into a French family is a real privilege. (Jansma & Kassen, 1997, p. 60).

[8] Recent publications of textbooks used in beginner and intermediate levels such as *Campus* (CLE International, 2004), *Forum* (Hachette, 2002), *Connexions* (Didier, 2004), *Studio 60, Studio100* (Didier, 2004), and *Taxi* (Hachette, 2004) were some of the material considered in making this observation.

[9] Author's translation of text: *Arnaud (male first name), You have a heart of gold. It's my greatest source of wealth. I have sometimes made you cry and my illness worries you. I want you to know that you are my best defence against this bad blood. I care about you in the same way that I care about life at the moment. I love you. Matthieu (male first name).* (Le Bougnec, Lopes, Menand & Vidal, 2002, p. 28).

[10] This issue is not restricted to French but covers all languages, such as Italian and Spanish, which have a gender.

[11] With the exception of '*loro*' (their) in the singular.

[12] This initiative echoes the French PACS model (civil pacts of solidarity) mentioned in the French section.

[13] The Italian constitution is available online at www.quirinale.it/costituzione/costituzione.htm

[14] Nelson makes this suggestion in the context of deciding what is culturally appropriate with regard to gay and lesbian themes in the classroom.

[15] See Abe (2004) for a discussion on the use of pronouns and sentence-final particles by lesbians in Tokyo.

[16] Women who play male roles in Takarazuka (revue theatre) or males who play female roles in *kabuki* spend years learning the appropriate gestures and way of speaking of the other sex.

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