Voices of masculinity: Men’s talk in Hungarian university dormitories

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Abstract
Research on language and masculinity has been imbued with a paradoxical juxtaposition of seeing White heterosexual men and their language as a ‘default’ and the paucity of empirical studies on what these men actually do in their everyday linguistic practices. This article examines the multivoicedness of masculinities in a specific local context. We analyze Hungarian male university students’ spontaneous conversations, recently recorded in the Budapest University Dormitory Corpus. Drawing on the Bakhtinian concept of voice, we argue that individual and social voices of masculinity, as well as the contrasts between them, are embedded in gendered and sexualized inequality relations. Even pro-feminist and ‘gay’ voices in the interactions are structured by social inequalities. The voicing of a homosexual figure does not only evoke negatively valued unmasculine behaviors, but also helps in creating homosocial (same-gender and non-sexualized) intimacy. It always happens as a stylized image of ‘another’s language’.

Keywords
Corpus, East-Central Europe, everyday interaction, homophobia, irony, masculinity, multivoicedness, political correctness, sexism, voice

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Introduction

Research on language and masculinity has been imbued with a paradoxical juxtaposition of seeing White heterosexual men and their language as a ‘default standard for being human’ (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 154) and the relative lack of empirical studies on what these men actually do in their everyday linguistic practices. Investigations that do address the latter issue have shown how masculinity is constructed interactionally; men manage their linguistic resources in many different ways, but with a coherent tendency to develop a common understanding of what is called analytically ‘hegemonic masculinity’ of their local contexts (Cameron, 1997; Coates, 2003; Kiesling, 2005; Pujolar, 1997, 2001). This concept was originally coined by Connell (1995), who stated that the practice of legitimizing a widely accepted, ‘unmarked’ and normatively understood ideal form of being a man also involves the subordination of women and the disparagement of gay men (cf. Milani, 2016). When later reformulating the concept as a response to critique toward its neglect of ‘a lived reality for ordinary men’ (Wetherell and Nigel, 1999: 337), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggested a focus shifting away from a unique dominant masculinity toward geographically and historically more dynamic (even controversial) ones. This proposal is widely echoed in research on ‘hybrid masculinities’, which means widespread contemporary transformations in the performances and politics of masculinity, suggesting more inclusive language and the lessening of gender and sexual inequalities (Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2010; O’Neill, 2015). It is however debated ‘how and when real – not just stylistic – change happens in the gender order’ (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014: 256). At the same time, the diversification of masculinity research is hardly mirrored in the sociolinguistic study of men talking in their ordinary lives. Based on a corpus of spontaneous speech among university students, we offer an analysis of masculine voices that can be drawn upon in quotidian interaction, either with success or with failure. Here we provide data from university dormitories in post-socialist Hungary, following earlier work on ‘Western’ masculinity constructions. More specifically, we give evidence that some features found in the literature, such as objectifying women or homosexual innuendos, may act in combination with other aspects, like pro-feminist views and the evocation of a ‘gay’ figure. It produces various ways of voicing masculinities in interaction.

In this article, we propose a departure from the debate on the relationship between ‘hybrid’ masculinities and the hierarchical gender order; instead, we offer the conceptual approach of the Bakhtinian voice to account for contemporary and local constructions of masculinity as observable in our data. By invoking the concept of voice, we propose a shift in perspective which can be traced back to the Bakhtinian equation between ‘form and content’, that is, between how and what is said. As Bakhtiel (1981) states, ‘form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon’ (p. 259). Moreover, his concept of voices as ‘material embodiments of social ideology and experience’ (Feld et al., 2004: 332) highlights that ‘there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 293). Furthermore, language and discourse is endowed with – in Bakhtin’s words – ‘heteroglot’ perspectives of various social groups and their stereotypical representatives, such as ‘men’, ‘fags’, ‘liberals’ or ‘male-chauvinists’, invoked by their differently oriented voices. His views are widely
echoed by contemporary approaches to language ideologies which claim that giving voice to a viewpoint on the world or finding one’s own voice in interaction always has a moral and political loading (Hill, 1995; Keane, 2011; Levon, 2010; Weidman, 2014; Woolard, 2008).

In this article, we argue that the Bakhtinian concept of voice is applicable to the discussion on alleged recent ‘stylistic’ changes in masculinity. In this sense, multiple voices of masculinity do not in themselves imply the transformations of power and gender relations; rather, they give space for negotiating the plurality of ideologies reflected in these voices. In other words, we assert the lived reality of masculine voices by accentuating their ideological becoming. It also means that the study of voicing masculinity is centered on the question how ideologies and reality interact, that is, what speakers actually do when they perform masculinities in their quotidian interactions. It will be shown that spontaneous dormitory interactions of students living in the capital city of Hungary are a site for recontextualizing global cultural and associational changes into everyday life, even if East-Central Europe might be regarded as in a semi-peripheral position vis-à-vis ‘Western’ societies where this issue has been examined.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section we discuss at some length the Bakhtinian concept of voice, and attempt to argue that it can be applied not only to the sociolinguistic study of diverse ethnic identities, as is usually the case (e.g. Blackledge and Creese, 2014), but also when researching gender issues (for an early exception see Pujolar, 2001). After presenting the data and methodology of our empirical research conducted in university dormitories in Budapest, we analyze both the spontaneous interactions of students and interviews with them. The article ends with a discussion of our empirical findings and succinct conclusions.

Voices and masculinities

The Bakhtinian notion of voice is a widely used concept in sociolinguistics. It assumes that an utterance indexes recognizable social personae; in other words, a voice is ‘[a] figure performed through speech’ (Agha, 2005: 39). As discourse is embedded in a culturally heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex social world, any utterance is inextricably populated with diverse figures who are voiced through different linguistic means; this multivoicedness makes language and discourse to be inherently heteroglot. Bakhtinian voicing anchors the interactional hybridity of the represented figures in larger social structures by highlighting that the indexical relationship between speaking and the social personae is always ideological. As Bakhtin (1981) famously put it, ‘[t]he word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention’ (p. 293–294). At the same time, not only are interactions always intertwined with interactions of others, but genres also bring along with their ‘specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre’ (p. 289) into the discourse. This results in multivoicedness, which opens a new perspective on debates over speaker roles and identities in discourse.
As an analytic concept, voicing makes it possible to draw a distinction between the speaker and the identities represented through his or her contribution to the interaction (Gal, 2016: 119; Eisenlohr, 2018). With respect to gender and sexuality research, it means that the presence of a ‘masculine’ voice in a discourse is not essentially linked to the interactant’s gender. Instead, masculinity is constructed performatively, not as a function of being male, but through voicing stereotypical representatives of social groups. In a recent conceptualization of voice as a social construct, Agha (2005) indicates that ‘voices are not attributes of persons but entextualized figures of personhood’ (p. 43). But what makes a ‘figure’ recognized as masculine? Agha states that a voice is only describable or ‘typifiable’ as a discrete figure once it is contrasted with other voices in its textual-discursive surroundings. Entextualized voicing contrasts are manifold; as Jane Hill (1995) has pointed out, and we will discuss in detail below, there are varied resources for producing a recognizable voice, as contrasted with other voices of the same discourse. Her seminal analysis of a Mexican peasant’s narrative text has shown that Don Gabriel mixed different techniques such as quotation, lexical choice, ‘intonational shadows’, that is, prosodic strategies of desperateness or of a sing-song style, hesitations, self-corrections, and codeswitching between Spanish and Mexican to represent opposed positions of local and nonlocal worldviews, that of peasantry and of the marketplace.

In Agha’s model, voicing contrasts may lead to three types of voices. First, ‘unnamed voices’ are the primary results of metrical or poetical contrasts between different text segments, making the voices of virtual speaking personae identifiable, but not those of biographical persons. Second, the voices of ‘named individuals’ permit ‘biographic identification’ of the speaking person, whether imaginary or real, by using a system of person deixis. The first and second types are individual voices in Bakhtin’s (1981) term, as differentiated from the third type, social voices. These are individualizable but recognized as socially characterized contrasts between, say, men and women. According to Agha (2005), some social voices are only recognized by the interactants in the unique encounter between them; otherwise, if widely known and having ‘a social regularity of typification’, he labels the process of characterization as enregisterment, the metapragmatically driven recognition of an individual’s voice as indexical of a social figure’s voice by a population of speakers (p. 45). These voice types interact in various ways in discourse including the non-congruence of individual and social voicing effects, which results in an emphasis on tropes of speech.

In the analytical section of this article, we use Agha’s concept to study masculine voices of students in contemporary Hungary, but following Bakhtin we also highlight the ideological tensions arising in these students’ (non-congruent) interactional voicing of themselves and others. This analytical, and at the same time, theoretical move is akin to the proposal that any conceptualization of voice has to be an attempt to address the issue of whose voice is heard and whose is silenced (Blommaert, 2008; Dong, 2016; Reynolds, 2010). The findings raised in this article suggest to be cautious in interpreting recent transformations of voicing masculinity as a shift to growing hybridity, because multi-voicedness is an inherent quality of any discourse. Yet, it leads to the question of how different (social and individual) voices bring along ideological conflicts and strains within the interactions.
Data: Hungarian male students’ dormitory conversations

In order to study masculine voices in Hungary, we used the data from a Hungarian linguistic corpus that our previous research project has been collecting since 2015. This corpus consists of recorded, transcribed and annotated spontaneous conversations among university students who are originally from the countryside but study in the capital, Budapest, and live in dormitories (kollégium in Hungarian, belonging to both colleges and universities, Bachelor and Master’s studies). The Budapest University Dormitory Corpus (Budapesti Egyetemi Kollégiumi Korpusz; from now on, BEKK) is unique in offering almost 20 hours of spontaneous speech recorded in the dormitory rooms by the participants themselves.

Context: dormitory life in post-socialist Hungary

As for the wider context of Hungarian male students’ dormitory conversations, Hungary provides us a case study of post-socialist East-Central European countries, which are shaped by their position in global geographical hierarchies. Hungary is closely connected to Western-led economic systems like the European Union (EU), while remaining in a constant secondary position similar to post-colonial countries, being an *internal* Other to the ‘West’ on a developmental scale (Böröcz, 2006; Chari and Verdery, 2009; Melegh, 2006). The East–West differentiation is then reproduced in Hungarian domestic discourses, competing with each other. On one hand, the recent right-wing authoritarian turn in Hungarian government increases the dominance of the nationalistic discourse, which rejects all forms of ‘Westernness’ as imperialism (Gagyi, 2012; Gille, 2010). On the other hand, the Hungarian political opposition see their ally in any Western institution, thus often falling into discourses of ‘voluntary self-colonizing’ (Imre, 2009) when referring to East-Central European ‘backwardness’ (p. 163).

In our data, we could observe these two dominant Hungarian positions toward Western ideas in the way male students applied and reflected on what they saw as ‘politically correct’ language. Politically correct, or in colloquial use, ‘PC’ language embraces non-discrimination toward vulnerable groups like women, LGBTQ people, racial and ethnic minorities, or disabled people. In the East-Central European context, the expectation of politically correct language is tied to a Western identification, since it is often EU or other international organizations that promote it. Consequently, many welcome this language use as the index of progressivity. At the same time, those, including the nationalist right-wing, who are against the impact of organizations in the region, also criticize this form of respect for vulnerable groups as Western imposition (Kováts, 2017: 7, 66). In the dialogues that we are analyzing below, we can see both attitudes toward ‘politically correct language’ displayed, and often without a clear distinction between the two.

A dormitory corpus like BEKK is heavily shaped by the context of the Hungarian higher education system. Although it is state-sponsored to a great extent, it still means a huge financial burden on families. College and university students represent social-economic strata above the average in Hungary, and they are part of or entering the middle class. Dormitory life in contemporary Budapest, similarly to most post-socialist cities,
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dates back to the tradition of post-World-War times when an increased number of students, especially from the lower classes, were taken into higher education. Today, students whose parents live in Budapest or other university towns, stay with the family during their studies. More wealthy families from the countryside tend to rent rooms for their student children in shared apartments in the place of their studies, but most students have to rely on the significantly cheaper, state-sponsored but crowded dormitories. They also often work part-time to supplement their limited income. The majority of dormitories belong to universities, meaning that residents go to the same university, but not necessarily to the same programs, let alone classes. Dormitory life is characterized by a strong spatial gender division and limited access to privacy. Although by today dormitories vary a lot in terms of room conditions, infrastructure and populatedness, typically they are located in high buildings with several floors, with several rooms along long corridors on each floor. One room is usually shared by 3–4 students of the same gender, between 18 and 23 years, who have been distributed into rooms randomly by the administration. It means that roommates might not even know each other when the first academic year starts, but they nevertheless spend most weekday nights together in the room, and many of course become friends. Most students regularly leave the dormitory for weekends when they visit their families in the countryside. In all the dormitory rooms where conversations recorded in the BEKK corpus took place, either women or men live in so-called ‘girls’/boys’ rooms’; however, in some recordings, we can hear both men and women talking, as different-sex friends and partners regularly show up in each other’s room.

Methodology

In order to reach a wide range of the student population and access linguistic interactions with the least external monitoring possible, the BEKK project involved students from sociolinguistic classes who contacted various dormitories across Budapest and organized students living there. The peer researchers asked these students to record any conversation taking place in their rooms without anyone involved in the research present, after the written consent of everyone staying in the room. Finally then, even if recorded in more than one piece, we received at least 3-hour-long records of (mostly same-gender) groups of 2–4, from 15 rooms of various dormitories, mostly done by the participants’ own mobile devices. The recordings were transcribed, manually annotated and pseudonymized in a software called Bihalbocs, which synchronizes the transcript with the respective audio excerpt. The annotation was carried out following the primary focus of the BEKK project, namely, the linguistic constructions of the categories of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Furthermore, after the recording period, the peer researchers conducted structured focus group interviews with the dormitory participants. In these interviews running for 1–1.5 hours, students were asked to discuss dormitory life and language use, as well as short texts dealing with recent Hungarian hot cases connected to anti-Roma racism, sexual abuse on campus, and homophobia in connection with the Budapest Pride Marches. The latter, being an international event organized since 1997 in Hungary, also fits into
Western discourses. Organizing discussions also provided us with some ethnographic observations in specific dormitory contexts. In our present analysis, we focus on the spontaneous speech samples of two rooms and we only use a few interview excerpts in order to contextualize the former. As we want to interpret the conversations in light of the group dynamics, we chose those rooms where we have a better knowledge of the internal dynamics as roommates certainly form a circle of friends.

The students’ everyday interactions within the boys’ rooms belong to a broad but limited set of speech genres; these are collaborative speech activities, such as information-seeking for the installation of a software or during learning together, storytelling, and the most typical genre in the sample, which could be described as playful talk. The typical speech acts performed during the latter include joking, gossiping, tall tale-telling and non-serious insults. According to earlier accounts, men’s talk about ‘serious’ emotions, homosocial or not, is limited to specific situations, for example, where only two men are present (Coates, 2003) or when the whole community as a male institution is addressed (Kiesling, 2005). Indeed, in our boys’ rooms sample, including mostly more than a couple of men, the only instance of ‘earnest’ talk includes a woman and a man who are discussing the failure of the man’s earlier relationship with a girlfriend; the other co-present men do not comment on the topic.

Homosexual innuendo and disparagement of women

In this section, we will show some examples on how typical voices and discursive constructions of hegemonic masculinity appear in the conversations of male dormitory residents. These dialogues are often based on the intersectionality of gender and sexuality (Milani, 2016), which means that there are specific discursive strategies to seize dominance through both misogynist and homophobic utterances. As our data extensively show, from ethnographic observations to interviews and spontaneous conversations, these two main features of expressing otherness are also utilized for self-identification in young Hungarian students’ masculinity constructions. ‘Fag’ (buzzi) is a label that they often use in various contexts, attaching it to anything they would like to joke with or just to devalue, from emotionality to diligence. For example, we recorded a conversation where they describe Christmas celebrations in general as ‘faggish’ (buzis). During ethnographic observations, the fieldworker noted that when one man refused to go out and have drinks with the others arguing that he would need to get up early to get to work, the others objected that with a ‘Don’t be a fag!’ comment.3 ‘Fag’ thus does not necessarily refer to sexuality, but always carries a gendered meaning (Pascoe, 2007: 82). It functions as a means for male students to express their distance from unmasculine behaviors in general and generate a shared understanding of masculinity in the group.

The first excerpt of the conversations recorded in the dormitory rooms fits into this frame of using ‘fag’ as a negative self- and group-identification (the transcription conventions are given in the appendix). The antecedent of the excerpt is that one of the young men, Balázs finds some unexpected content on his computer and realizes that his roommates were using his web browser for accessing dating websites and other activities. During this interaction he is told that porn videos were also watched on his computer.
By referring to watching porn, a social voice of a heteronormative and privileged masculine persona is performed by Andor in the second utterance. He is the one in their room who constantly tries to seize and maintain dominance in their group, and challenges his roommates frequently by evoking alleged sexual behaviors and identities. Later, he also applies a homosexual innuendo (Milani and Jonsson, 2011) against Balázs. Besides teasing Balázs with a supposed activity, his utterance (‘At least you see normal porn besides fag porn’) also shapes a discourse in which ‘normal’ and not-normal sexual practices are discursively constructed and opposed to each other. ‘Fag’ pornography is seen as something bad and unwanted, while consuming ‘normal porn’ is seen as good and acceptable. This innuendo serves as a discourse strategy for competition between men and humbling the other interactant, and it is also utilized for self-positioning in the interaction as a straight and dominant person. Voicing of this approach to sexuality is not being challenged. Indeed, other two interlocutors accept it as Vince is laughing at this type of teasing and Balázs, the victim of the joke, is not reacting to it.
Furthermore, from a privileged masculine position the activities of women are also viewed as inferior. The background of Excerpt (2) is that Andor regularly earns some extra money by doing his acquaintances’ haircut in his dormitory room, which is clearly an illegal activity.

(2)

Balázs: És kit nyírsz?
Andor: Herceget, de csak a szakállát, aztán megyünk csocsózni.
Balázs: Mi, már a szakállát is hozzád jár nyiratni?
Andor: Ja. Ez egy bárber sop (=barber shop) bazmeg, nem egy lófász negyvenöt éves nőnek a fodrászszalonja, hobbi fodrászszalonja bazmeg, ez egy komoly bárber sop (=barber shop).

Balázs: And whose hair are you doing?
Andor: Herceg’s, but only his beard, and then we’re going to play fussball.
Balázs: What? He comes to you to do his beard?
Andor: Yeah, it’s a barber shop, fuck you, not a fucking 45 years old lady’s hairdresser salon, hobby hairdresser salon, fuck you. This is a serious barber shop.

In this excerpt, Andor’s roommate, Balázs, realizes that Andor’s ‘business’ expands to other conducts of male cosmetology. As answer to his question, Andor calls his activity a barber shop using the English-origin term. This expression implies a homosocial practice per se, in which male hairdressers do exclusively other men’s haircut and trim their facial hair. A hegemonic masculine voice appears when the ostracism of women from this activity is explicated. And an opposition between traditional hairdressers and barbers is also created in this short conversation. The latter is something trendy, exceptional and linked only to the capital city in the Hungarian context, as in the post-socialist region ‘barber shop’ is a discursive product of globalization processes. The first American-style barber shops appeared in Budapest only in the past few years.

In the last utterance of this excerpt, a voicing contrast occurs as an example of Andor’s interactional endeavor to achieve a more dominant position. This unnamed voice can be recognized by the increased number of obscene lexemes repetitions, and syntactic parallelism. What also should be mentioned here is that the middle-aged woman’s hairdresser salon is presented as unserious, which is expressed by ‘hobby’ and ‘fucking’ denotators. Furthermore, barbering somebody in the dormitory room is labeled as serious because of its homosocial settings between men despite its conditions such as presumable lack of appropriate equipment and illegality. The intersectionality of gender and age is also at stake in this conversation in the discursive creation of Andor’s superior masculine position and voice.

In these three excerpts, we showed some examples of traditional and uncriticized voicing of hegemonic masculinity which has some common and well-known discourse strategies such as homosexual innuendos or misogynist utterances. However, in the next section we will provide data on how these traditionally described voices can be challenged.
Beyond overt sexism

Even if, as we showed in the previous section, sexist and homophobic remarks unani-
mously accepted by the speakers’ community often characterize Budapest dormitory
men’s talk, we noticed that it is far from being the only significant pattern. Indeed, we
have encountered much more often an ambivalent thematization of both women and
gays: the way young men talked about these groups was often contested by their peers.
Not only do they have arguments with each other, often even the same person’s utter-
ances go against each other. Balázs, for instance, tends to voice a liberal persona; how-
ever, he never interrupts a homosexual innuendo. What is more, most of this
multivoicedness is imbued with irony to the extent that claims about authenticity or
seriousness would be impossible, even if someone aimed at it (cf. Cameron and Kulick,
2003: 124). What results is a mix of employed discourses on gender relations.

As the first example, let us see how the ‘boys’ talk’ moves on about the ‘barber shop’
one of them claims to manage. Their talk is taking place while they are playing a football
video game, hence some of their remarks concern what is happening in the game, dis-
playing ‘sport talk’, a typical genre through which masculinity gets reconstructed
(Cameron, 1997: 50).

(3)

Andor: Bárber sop (=barber shop) minőség. Na, hogyha ez bement volna, hát lesz-
opom magam komolyan. Hát jó, többször el kell mondani, érted. Ez egy
nagyon jó reklámfelület. (nevét)
Balázs: De azt is mondod el, hogy nőket nem vágsz!
Andor: Nőket nem, ja. Nőket csak/
Balázs: /Mert himsoviniszta barom vagy.
Andor: Szerintem nem vagyok az bazmeg, hát őket csak megbaszom. (nevét)
Balázs: Aj istenem!

Andor: Barber shop quality. Nah, if this was a goal I would have given myself a
blow job, seriously. Well OK, one has to tell it several times, you see. This
is a very good advertising surface. (laughing)
Balázs: But also tell that you don’t do women’s hair!
Andor: I don’t, right. I just/
Balázs: /Cos you’re a male chauvinist jerk.
Andor: I don’t think I would be, fuck; I just fuck women. (laughing)
Balázs: O:h god!
Andor: I was actually just quoting someone. It was a joke.

Balázs’s remark (‘but also tell’) initiates the discourse concerning women in relation to
the idea of a barber shop, and he immediately puts Andor’s attitude in a framework of
sexist exclusion or discrimination. Using this voice, Balázs puts himself in the position
of a human rights defender who calls Andor to account for his misogyny. Still, this voice
represents a masculine ideal which would include respect for women and liberal attitudes in general. Such a competition of gender-related discourses is characteristic to our data. For example, members of the same room made the tension explicit in their focus group interview, conducted with them after the recording of their spontaneous speech. When the facilitator introduced the topic of gay Pride Marches, Andor noted, ‘We will be supposed to talk politically correct here’, with Pali replying with laughs, ‘About dirty faggots? (A mocskos buzéránsokról?)’. They voiced their reservations about gay-friendly attitudes which they label with ‘PC-ness’, referring to critiques of Western pedagogy aimed at East-Central European intolerance, embedded in local nationalist discourses (see Woodcock, 2011). Andor’s ironic and critical note of the enregistered ‘PC’ shows that this is a social voice that they are aware of as expected in certain contexts, including the interview which is more formal than the recording of their spontaneous talk. Pali played along with making the contrast of social voices, juxtaposing the slur with the euphemistic, convoluted, English-origin phrase Andor deployed.

In Excerpt (3) then Andor rejects the charge of misogyny with the ironic statement that his fucking women would qualify him as non-discriminatory. At the same time, the same statement with the double use of the word ‘fuck’ (baszni) makes obvious the derogatory content of these sexual relations. In both encounters then, by contrasting the woman-friendly, human rights defender social voice with vulgar masculine position, they challenge both entextualized figures. The fact that two, mutually exclusive enregistered social voices are placed next to each other in the same discourse is a source of humor. The young men are thus voicing figures alternatingly, who they do not entirely identify with. For the term buzéráns is less used among young, educated men than buzí – the former term evokes the voice of underclass men who go to protest the annual Budapest Pride March. Finally, Andor makes another step back, labeling his last comment (‘I just fuck women’) as a quote and a joke, biographically disidentifying himself from the sexist individual voice of someone else.

Similarly to the multiple and undecided, uncommitted use of both sexist and anti-sexist discourses, in most cases homophobic remarks get also wrapped in an ironic voicing of the liberal, tolerant pro-gay figure. In the same ‘boys’ room’, Vince is often the target of homophobic jokes. In Excerpt (4), where Balázs supports him with laughs, Andor is teasing Vince through references to his dance course, which itself counts as unmasculine (see Pascoe, 2007).

(4)

Andor: De mi, most meg akarod kúrni azt a nőt, vagy mi- miért mentél táncolni?
Balázs: (nevet)
Vince: (nevet) Milyen nőt?
Andor: Mért, nem növel táncolsz?
Vince: De növel [táncolok, basszus, de mondom, hogy ní]ncs itt a párom.
Andor: [Meleg vagy, Vince? Vince meleg.]
Balázs: (nevet)
Vince: Istenem.
Andor: Persze én nem vagyok homofób, nehogy azt higgye valaki. De semmi baj nincs azzal, hogy meleg vagy, Vince, nekünk elmondhatod nyugodtan.

Vince: Oké.

Andor: Egy köcsögtöcskölő buzí. (nevete) Milyen jó szó ez, köcsögtöcskölő.

Andor: But what, do you want to screw that woman, or why- why did you go to dance?

Balázs: (laughs)

Vince: (laughs) What woman?

Andor: Why, don’t you dance with a woman?

Vince: Yes, I dance [with a woman, shit, but I’m telling you that my partner isn’t] here.

Andor: [Are you gay, Vince? Vince is gay.]

Balázs: (laughs)

Vince: Oh my god.

Andor: Of course, I’m not homophobic, no one should believe so. But it’s totally fine to be gay, Vince, feel free to tell us.

Vince: OK.

Andor: A ball licker fag. (laughing) What a great word it is, ball licker (köcsögtöcskölő).

Although Vince’s female dance partner is mentioned, Andor attempts to guide the conversation into a point when the homosexual innuendo can be made. When Vince does not get in the game with negation, Andor performs the gay-friendly liberal voice we delineated above. Underlining its irony, Andor goes on to employ a linguistic contrast. After using the widespread and ‘PC’ term ‘gay’ (meleg), he juxtaposes with it a slur of two sexually derogatory terms (köcsögtöcskölő, lit. ‘catcher-shagger’), in a composition not commonly used at all. Similarly to our previous examples then, Andor here brings in oppositional registers vis-à-vis gender relations, but this time with a unique phrase. His metalinguistic remark (‘What a great word it is’) makes it explicit that his contentment originates as much in the linguistic, tongue-twister pun as in its homophobic content. Multivoicedness, therefore, serves as the source of both humor as well as of (related) masculine performances of dominance.

In contrast to individual voices and to social voices that are not enregistered, the next excerpt starts with the most prominent social voicing effect, stylization. It is ‘an artistic image of another’s language’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 362), where the language, recognized as the voice of the powerful or stigmatized other, is appropriated for interactional purposes (Coupland, 2007). In Excerpt (5), Feri poses a series of questions designed to shed light on his roommate, Ottó’s, new relationship with a woman. When negotiating this novelty, which can be seen as an ‘assault’ on homosociality between the participants, Feri mimics an affectionate and caring voice in his questions. His performance maximizes the transparency of voicing contrast between the enregistered social voice of the caregiver and the individual voice of his interactants. The non-congruence of voicing effects provokes a harsh reaction from the others. The excerpt shows that this leads to a controversy on betting whether Feri trespasses the culturally defined boundaries of
physical contact between men. Importantly, such taboos are already being reinterpreted, as during the conversation, Misi is massaging Ottó.

(5)

Feri: És akko jártok? (..) Hm?
Ottó: Nagyon úgy néz ki.
Feri: (HOP IPR Igen?)
Ottó: Igen.
Feri: (HOP IPR Csókolóztatok?)
Ottó: Persze, cső-, de ezt mondta is neked, persze.
Feri: Végül is (.) fiatalok.

[...]
Feri: Mondtad neki, hogy ‘szeretlek’?
Ottó: Igen, mondtam neki, de hát ezt má- (. ) borfeszten is mondtam neki, ezt neked is mondtam, hogy mondtam neki.
Feri: (HOP IPR jól va:n, de hallani akarta::m . ) (nevét) ( . ) (HOP IPR és ő mondtat, hogy ő is szeret?) ( . ) (HOP Mondta, hogy szeret?)
Ottó: Buzi.
Feri: (HOP Mondta, hogy szeret, Ot[tó?] )
Ottó: [Igen. ]
Feri: (HOP IPR Igen? És mikor mondtat? )/
Ottó: /Mindig. Ááá.
Feri: (HOP IPR Mindig mondtja, hogy szeret?)
Ottó: Igen.
Feri: (HOP IPR Jaj de aranyos! ) (. ) (HOP És ki mondtat előbb, hogy ‘szeretlek’?)
Ottó: Én.
Feri: (HOP IPR Te mondtad előbb, és ő utána mondtat, hogy szeret?)
Ottó: Igen.
Feri: (HOP Mind a kétszer?)
Misi: Ezek- má- már engem kezd idegesíteni!
[nevétés]
Ottó: (Ferinek:) Megnyalom a szádat! [MEGNYALOM!] MEGNYALOM!
Feri: [De- de- de- ]
Jenő: Várj, inditom a kamerát!
Misi: Fizetek egy ezrest, (nevete: ha megnyalod.)
Ottó: Még egyszer!
Misi: Fizetek egy ez[rest. ]
[nevétés]
Ottó: [Ez] most komoly?
Misi: Aha, nyald meg a száját!
[hosszas nevétés]
Ottó: Bármikor áll az ezres?
Misi: Nem, csak most.
Ottó: Csak most?
Misi: Ja, hogy ja, most nyald meg!
Ottó: (nevetve: Na gyere, basz meg!)
Misi: Tényleg odaadtam volna.
Ottó: Jól van. Még várjál, [mé- jön még-]
Feri: [Mer én] nem fogom hagyni.
    [...]
Feri: Ilyen megvásárolható kurva vagy? Ha? Egy ezresér-he? (nevetve: Lesmárolsz
akár[kit, bazmeg?])
Ottó: [Ne:m], meg kell nyalni a szádat. Ezt nem mondtam. Ilyet nem mondtam.
Feri: És mennyiér nyalnád meg a faszomat?
Ottó: Azért te fizetsz? (..) Semmiért.
Feri: Ö, ingyen?
Misi: (nevet) JOGOS! JOGOS!
Jenő: Figyelj, Ottó, kapsz egy ötezrest, ha megnyalod a faszát.
Feri: So you two are dating? (.) hm?
Ottó: It very much looks like.
Feri: (HOP IPR Really?)
Ottó: Really.
Feri: (HOP IPR Did you kiss?)
Ottó: Of course, we d-, but I’ve told you this, of course.
Feri: After all (.)(They’re) young.
    [...]
Feri: Did you tell her, ‘I love you’?
Ottó: Yes, I did, but already- (.)(in the wine fest) I told her, I told you that I had told
her.
Feri: (HOP IPR All right, but I wanted to hear it.) (laughs). (..)(HOP IPR And did
she say she loved you too?) (.) (HOP Did she say she loved you?)
Ottó: Faggot.
Feri: (HOP Did she say she loved you, Ottó?)
Otó: [Yes.]
Fer: (HOP IPR Really? And when did she say that?) /
Ottó: /All the time. Aaargh.
Feri: (HOP IPR Does she tell you all the time that she loves you?)
Ottó: Igen.
Feri: (HOP IPR It’s so sweet!) (.) (HOP And who said first ‘I love you’?)
Ottó: Me.
Feri: (HOP IPR Did you say first, and then she said she loved you?)
Ottó: Yes.
Feri: (HOP Both times?)
Misi: These- this is is starting to annoy me (they laugh).
Ottó: (to Feri:) I’ll lick your mouth! [I’LL LICK IT!] I’LL LICK IT!
At the beginning of the excerpt, Feri’s use of stylization dominates the interaction over a 20-turn-long episode. He is stylizing the effeminate figure of an older caregiver through posing intimate questions about Ottó’s new girlfriend and describing them as ‘young’, but crucially, also through the use of what Hill (1995) called intonational shadows. In this case, these are prosodic strategies for evoking the female caregiver’s enregistered voice: higher overall pitch and pitch range provide the condition under which masculine non-intimacy is transgressed. That the strategy is working is clear from the reactions; Ottó tries to make Feri silent by different means. First, he attempts to reframe the interaction as a simple information-seeking dialogue, which is not acceptable because of common knowledge (‘but I’ve told you this’). Second, he seeks to offend Feri by labeling him as ‘faggot’ (buzi), meaning that his behavior is far from normal masculinity. This interpretation is not only supported by the distinction usually performed by the use of ‘fag’, but is also consistent with Béla’s reaction (‘this is starting to annoy me’). Third, after Feri’s disregard of the insult, Ottó quickly answers or even interrupts him in order to cut off Feri’s turn. And finally, after repeated and failed efforts to end the caregiver’s stylized performance, Ottó, backed by Béla’s feedback, initiates a new conversational
direction by uttering a humorous verbal insult (‘I’ll lick your mouth!’). They all seem to strive to re-create a homosocial intimacy against the threat that a girlfriend might mean, and this intimacy between the interactants can be effectively achieved by their joint transgression of boundaries (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 115).

Feri’s strategic use of styling, which means here the non-congruence of the individual and social voicing effects, gives way to an emphasis on tropes of speech. Ottó’s false threat to control Feri’s behavior is rather unusually phrased; however, it subverts the stylization effect of distancing Feri’s position from that of the other participants by resonating the enregistered voice of the caregiver who speaks with moral authority, characterized by shaming routines and false threats (cf. Reynolds, 2010). Consequently, this voicing draws attention to itself as a performance of a social figure more clearly than Feri’s voicing of the earlier episode: as one of the participants says, this performance is worth documenting (‘Wait, I’m starting the camera!’). The social figure is recognized by the participants as a sexually authoritative man with homosexual allusions. Playing along, Feri brings it further with accentuating Ottó’s homosexuality (‘For how much would you lick my dick?’). Following a script that Pascoe (2007: 60) describes as hot potato, Ottó’s reaction is engagement in homosexual innuendo (‘Are you paying for that?’), receiving the same intimation from Feri (‘Oh, for free?’). At this point, Feri turns back to his earlier performance of the caregiver’s social voice, but now mirroring his interactant’s play of representing a homosexual figure (‘I love you Ottó’). Thus, in this performance both of them are playing the gay man and trying to discredit each other’s (heterosexual) masculinity (see e.g. ‘Are you such a bitch easy to buy?’).

According to Pascoe (2007), strategies of homosexual innuendo and gay imitation are the constitutive elements of ‘fag discourse’ that serve the students’ disciplining each other to avoid weakness or femininity. In this case, however, there is also an overarching interpersonal function for re-establishing social bonds within the group. Paradoxically, homosociality is achieved by invoking the voice of the homosexual who risks, in turn, hegemonic masculinity because hegemonic masculinity includes the desire to build and maintain same-gender social rapport with other men (cf. Kiesling, 2005). One could argue that we are witnessing ‘inclusive’ masculinity, which incorporates homosexual traits and challenges sexual inequality. However, this reasoning ignores the reaction of the addressee, namely, Ottó, who tries to make Feri’s voice silent by threatening him with an analogous breaking of taboos about sexual contact between men. We can plausibly construe Ottó’s false threat as an interactional answer to the imitation of the gay figure, which is associated with the fag discourse. Feri’s styled performance is a disciplinary mechanism to warn the other of a possible failure in performing masculinity; if Ottó spends too much time with his girlfriend, his male bonds will be weakened. In addition, it has to be kept in mind that this playful interaction is based on the non-congruence of voicing contrasts between individual and social voices. This means that the style labeled by Kiesling (in press) as ‘gay voice’, that is, the enregistered social voice of the gay characterological figure, can only be heard as a stylized, that is, distanced performance of ‘another’s language’. Having said that, it is also important to recognize that by being performed, the gay voice is involved in an interactional reality where it contributes to a shared experience of closeness between the interactants.


Conclusions

In our study, we have presented an analysis of dormitory room interactions of Hungarian male students, which were recorded in the Budapest University Dormitory Corpus recently. Our data show that strong masculine voices previously described by the literature of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis still persist, which seize dominance through humiliating groups of women and homosexuals. Furthermore, we pointed out that these young men voice a myriad of different social figures, sometimes in the very same discussion. The ambivalent thematization of both women and gays resulted in a multivoiced framing of sexism and homophobia, where their support appears side by side their critique, and further, a typically ironic reaction.

Consequently, our findings contribute to the recent debate in masculinity studies about the form and content of changes in ‘hegemonic masculinity’ showing the multiplicity of gender discourses among young men in Hungarian college dormitories. In our corpus, in addition to earlier accounts of young men’s talk, gay voices can be heard not only as disciplining each other’s unmasculine behaviors, but also as a means of achieving homosocial intimacy. We argued that this function of the gay characterological figure, accompanied by pro-feminist voices, does not point to a trend of attitudes in favor of gender equality, as reflected in the concept of inclusive masculinity. Thus, although gay voices appear among the multiple voices employed by Hungarian male students, they are always featured as the Other’s quoted social voice. It is important to take into account the pervasive irony of the students’ utterances, characterized by an ambiguity that makes it difficult for researchers to claim what the participants in fact think about gender equality. This lived reality of the interactions is imbued with the ideologies that the evoked individual and social voices reflect, even if the speakers do not prefer to commit to a single, ‘monoglot’ perspective of masculinity.

In this article we considered voices as performed in a dynamically changing, complex social world. We argued that contemporary masculinity discourses cannot be understood without taking into account the mutual co-determination between individual voices and their socially characterized pairs, the social voices, reflecting structural social relations. While the study of Bakhtinian voice accentuates the power relations manifested in the literature on stylization and enregisterment, we suggested that individual voices and their conflictual contradictions also have an integral part in the performative construction of social meaning. For one of the greatest challenges of contemporary sociolinguistic scholarship is to find balance between individual and social aspects and to describe their correspondences and interplay as extensively as possible.

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Notes

1. There are only a few exceptions, mostly in small-scale dormitories offering some special college programs, where students can opt whom they prefer to live with, creating mixed-gender rooms for couples or for a group of friends.

2. The transcript of the corpus thus created is being uploaded online for open access on http://bekk.elte.hu, and the audio material will be available for research purposes, according to each participant’s consent.

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References


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**Appendix I**

*Transcription conventions*

- (.) a pause shorter than 0.5 seconds
- (..) a pause longer than 0.5 seconds
- [ ] overlapping speech
- / no discernible silence between the speakers’ turns
- : stretching of the preceding vowel
- - a cut-off or self-interruption
- **WORD** loud speech
- *(word)* the transcriber’s description of events, e.g. *(laughing)*
- *(=)* the transcriber’s interpretation of the preceding segment(s)
- *(HOP)* intonational characteristics of the segment in brackets, e.g. *(HOP IPR Really?)*, whereas HOP and IPR stand for higher overall pitch and increased pitch range, respectively
- [*…*] omitted ‘side-talk’