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## CHAPTER 6

### SITUATIONAL VARIATION IN A BIGENDER FINNISH SPEAKER'S IDIOLECT: A FOLK LINGUISTIC CASE STUDY

Meri Lindeman

Mainstream linguistics often represents sexuality and gender in a simplistic manner: it only recognizes two binary genders, conflates sex with gender, and assumes that language users are heterosexual by default. As in queer and trans linguistics, Lavender Languages Inquiry has questioned and challenged this inbuilt cisheteronormativity of linguistics by bringing non-normative desires, practices, and identities, including trans and nonbinary communities, front and center of inquiry. (For a review of recent trends in the field, see e.g., Jones 2021, Konnelly 2021, and Leap 2021. On the conflation of sex, sexuality, and gender, see Webster 2021). However, the possibilities of gender fluidity have largely remained a blind spot in linguistics, upholding gender staticity as the norm.<sup>1</sup> The term *gender fluidity* refers to a person's gender identity and/or gender expression changing frequently (Katz-Wise 2020), whereas the term *gender staticity* is suggested here as its opposite: a long-lasting gender identity and/or gender expression that does not involve alternating between different gender possibilities.

This chapter investigates the dynamics between gender fluidity and speech in everyday life and deconstructs the normativities that influence gendered language use. Focusing on one person, Elbe (pseudonym, uses *she/her* pronouns), who is a bigender speaker of Finnish, the study asks if variation in an individual's gender might be connected to situational variation in their speech? The question is approached from a folk linguistic viewpoint (introduced in section 2), centering Elbe's own beliefs, intentions, and agency around her speech. Folk linguistics enables focusing on everyday concerns that animate Lavender Linguistic Inquiry, and for

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<sup>1</sup> However, see Benesch 2022 for emerging linguistic work on gender fluidity.

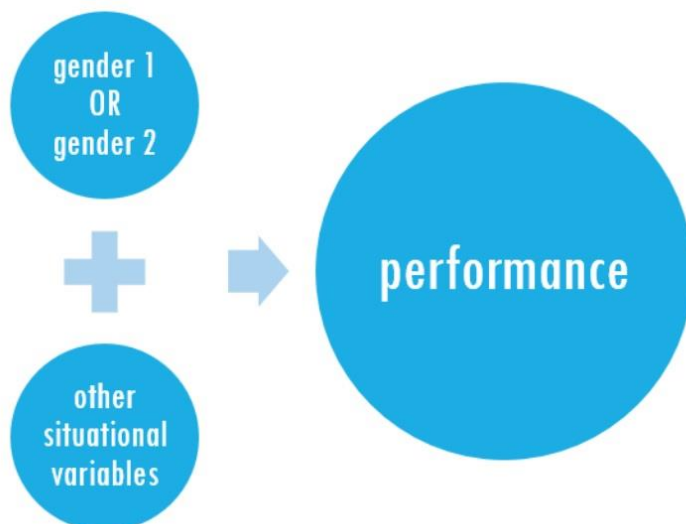
Critical Sexuality Studies scholars, so it can be a convenient passageway to analyzing language use.

The research questions are: How does Elbe describe:

1. her ways of doing gender through speech?
2. her interlocutors' role in doing her gender/s?
3. micro-situations specific to her as a bigender person?

Most importantly, this study develops a theoretical model describing the dynamics between gender fluidity and situational variation in speech. Figure 6.1 presents a pre-analysis model, which holds that for a bigender person, inner experience of gender is not a fixed variable, but one of the *situational* variables that impact their way of speaking. This model is based on the notion that gender is *performed* (Butler 1988) via speech, and it will be further developed through the analysis in this chapter.

**Figure 6.1.** Model before analysis.



### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper draws from an eclectic mix of fields including sociolinguistic variation studies, folk linguistics, queer theory, and sociology. This is a typical strategy in Lavender Linguistics

where it is referred to as scavenger methodology, an expression first used by Halberstam (1998, 13). Disloyalty to any single discipline and its established conventions allows the researcher to use whichever combination of theories, methods, and types of data best suits the study (Leap 2021, 6; see also the introduction to this volume).

This study adopts the following three core beliefs from sociolinguistics (see e.g., Chambers 2009, xviii, Nieminen 1999, and Wardhaugh 2010, 10):

1. The community has an effect on language.
2. Language has an effect on the community.
3. Linguistic variation is not random but connected to extra-linguistic social correlates (such as gender).

In other words, this study subscribes to the idea that social phenomena influence language use, language use influences society, and who people are and how they identify correlates with how they use language.

This study takes special interest in two types of sociolinguistic variation: idiolectal and situational variation. An *idiolect* is an individual person's use of language, and idiolectal variation refers to differences between individual language users, as no two language users' language is entirely alike (Edwards 2013, 4). This chapter takes a close look at a single speaker's conceptions about her idiolect and how it not only reflects her bigender identity but constructs it. More specifically, this study focuses on situational variation in her idiolect. The term *situational variation* refers to the fact that people adapt their speech according to the situation. For example, the same language user might make different linguistic choices depending on the formality of the social situation and their relationship with the interlocutor. (Littlewood 1981, 97). In this case, the focus is on how the situation that Elbe finds herself in affects how and if she does gender via speech.

This chapter also utilizes the term *micro-situation* (*mikrotilanne*) as used by sociolinguist Liisa Mustanoja (2011, 84 and 118–19). Mustanoja defines micro-situations as smaller situations within situations. Some micro-situations Mustanoja found within a larger interview situation were narration, description, and change of topic. Some micro-situations, especially those that are marked by codeswitching between different languages, are easily separable from the surrounding context, while in other cases the lines between the micro-situation and the larger situation are blurrier and more ambiguous. This study seeks to identify micro-situations that are bigender-specific. This does not mean micro-situations unique to bigender people, but rather micro-situations that are caused by Elbe’s bigender identity—things that would not occur if Elbe were not bigender. Some of them could also be relevant to trans or nonbinary speakers, but they will be called bigender-specific here because Elbe does not identify as trans or nonbinary.

The second field that this chapter builds on is folk linguistics. It is a subfield of sociolinguistics that studies the attitudes and conceptions non-linguists hold about language, also known as folk theories of language or more interdisciplinarity, language regard (Preston 2011, 10; for formative works in folk linguistics, see e.g., Preston 1982, 1989, and 1999). The purpose of this study is to analyze Elbe’s (who is a non-linguist) conceptions of her own speech and how it relates to her gender/s. These conceptions manifest in her metalanguage—the language she uses to describe her language (Cameron 1996, 281), or her “language about language” (Preston 2004, 75). It is important to note that this chapter describes Elbe’s beliefs about her speech, not her actual speech, and that non-linguists’ conceptions vary in e.g., accuracy and detail (Preston 2002, 50–51). However, taking a folk linguistic approach allows understanding local language phenomena through local knowledge (Albury 2017, 39) and accessing a vantage point from inside the bigender community in Finland. Folk linguistics also

fits Lavender inquiry in that it centers the analysis around the language user (see the introduction for this volume).

Thirdly, this study has been informed by queer theory. While queer theory famously escapes definition and there is no consensus on its definite limits, as its different definitions contradict each other, one of its defining characteristics seems to be its ability to “dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire” and “locate and exploit the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality” (Jagose 1997, 3 and 97-100). Queer theory has been the dominant approach in Lavender Linguistics since the early 2000s, largely because of this focus on challenging and deconstructing normativities surrounding gender and sexuality (Jones 2021, 16), which runs as a critical undercurrent in Lavender Languages Inquiry, as here, as well.

As already illustrated by the research questions, this study makes use of the queer notion of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) or gender performativity (Butler 1988, 1990, and 1993). As proposed by these theorists, gender is analyzed here as something people do or perform, rather than have or are. Language is central to doing gender, as gender is accomplished through interaction—it is the effect of discourse (Darwin 2017, 2, and Benwell 2017, 243). Doing gender is compulsory, and even individuals who deviate from gender norms are forced to perform their gender in relation to the socially constructed understandings of masculinity and femininity. Several theorists interested in social change have debated the means and meanings of *undoing* or *redoing gender*, as well as *doing transgender*. (Darwin 2017, 2-3.) This study will discuss how Elbe *does gender fluidity*, both *doing* the gender binary and *undoing* it, as she has to perform her gender/s “against a backdrop of gender binarism” (quoting Barbee and Shrock 2019, 573).

Lastly, sociologists Harry Barbee and Douglas Shrock have provided this study with one of its central concepts: audience participation. They point out that some of the language-

related practices that are used for presenting as nonbinary (first names and third-person singular pronouns, in particular) require participation from people other than the nonbinary person themselves (2019, 579-81).<sup>2</sup> Even though Barbee and Shrock analyze audience participation in the context of un/gendering practices used by nonbinary people (and Elbe expressed not identifying as nonbinary), it is easy to argue that it plays a part in any gender performance—after all, people of all genders are referred to and addressed by others. For the purpose of this chapter, audience participation is defined as the ways in which interlocutors take part in doing Elbe’s gender/s. Audience participation will be further discussed in section 6.

### DATA

The data for this case study was collected in collaboration with one primary participant, Elbe. At the time of data collection in 2019, Elbe was 25 years old and lived in the region of Central Finland. She was found using a call for participants that was posted on several social media platforms. Elbe labeled herself as *bigender* in English and *binäärinen monisukupuolinen* (binary multigender), *fluidi* ([gender]fluid) and *kaksisukupuolinen* (lit. twogender; bigender) in Finnish.<sup>3</sup> She also shared that she was assigned female at birth and had not received any gender-affirming treatment.<sup>4</sup> Finnish is her first language, but she also knows English and several other languages.

This study uses three types of data: interviews, self-recordings of everyday interactions, and accompanying recording diaries. First, Elbe was interviewed about her gender/s and

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<sup>2</sup> Names are not discussed in this chapter because they are never mentioned in the data. Pronouns are also not relevant to this study, as the Finnish language does not have gendered pronouns: The third person singular *hän* (or commonly in spoken varieties, *se*) is used regardless of gender.

<sup>3</sup> Identifying with several different gender identity labels seems to be typical of people who are not exclusively either men or women, as in Gender Census 2021, the most common number of labels per participant was 4 (Gender Census 2022).

<sup>4</sup> The information on Elbe’s assigned gender at birth and medical history is included here not to discredit her self-identification, but to provide relevant context about her lived experience for following the analysis sections.

speech. This was followed by a month-long research period for which Elbe was given a recording device to record her everyday interactions with different interlocutors (also called “secondary participants” in this chapter). After making each of the seven recordings, she filled in a form (“recording diary”) to provide information about the recording situation, her relationships to the secondary participants (11 individuals), and her gender/s during recording. Finally, she was interviewed again about the experience and new realizations that she made during the research period. In total, Elbe’s data consists of 7 hours and 8 minutes of audio, 473 words in writing, and 5 drawings that she included in the recording diary.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will focus mostly on the interview and recording diary data, as they contain most of the folk linguistic metalanguage, but everyday interaction recording data will be used in section 6 to illustrate misgendering (for more about misgendering, see e.g., Ansara and Hegarty 2014).

There are direct and indirect ways of gathering data in folk linguistics. This study takes the direct approach in which the research participant knows that their conceptions about language are the focus of the study (Coupland and Bishop 2007, 75). In this case, only Elbe’s conceptions are examined, while the secondary participants’ conceptions fall outside of the scope of the study. All participants, however, gave their informed, written consent for being recorded and taking part in the study. All data excerpts in this chapter have been pseudonymized: names and other personally identifiable passages have been replaced with artificial identifiers so that the participants can no longer be recognized.

Neither Elbe nor the secondary participants were offered any compensation for taking part in the data collection. This study relied fully on a Lavender Languages community ethos: “the kindness of strangers” (see the introduction for this volume). I thank all participants for providing the data and therefore acting as my research collaborators.

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<sup>5</sup> The form did not contain any instructions on what or where to draw, but Elbe was told in the initial interview that drawing was allowed.

As with every case study, focusing on one case poses certain limitations to the generalizability of the results. However, focusing on a single case allows for a “thicker” – more thorough and detailed – analysis of that language user. Additionally, as William Labov put it, “each individual shows a personal profile of the comparative use of resources made available by the speech community” (2001, 34). It follows from this that analyzing an individual language user can reveal community-level trends, and even if cannot reach what is *typical*, it is able to describe some things that are *possible*. This study aims to further develop the pre-analysis model (introduced in section 1) with one speaker to later test it with a larger sample.

### ANALYSIS METHOD

The recorded speech, written text, and hand-drawn pictures were all first imported to NVivo, a qualitative research software that allows analyzing multiple types of data in one place and coding the audio recordings directly, without having to transcribe the text first. The transcribed data was examined using qualitative content analysis (see **Appendix 6.1**. Transcription conventions), a research method where a large body of text is reduced to fewer content categories in order to make inferences from it (Weber 1990, 9 and 15). This was done in four steps (constructed loosely following Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009, 108-13, and the analysis method used for drawings in Niemelä 2020, 387–8.):

1. Coding: Finding and marking all thematically relevant passages and visual elements.
2. Reduction: Reducing each coded section to a maximum of five words (such as “elongating words when feminine”).
3. Clustering: Forming groups of coded and reduced sections based on similarity (for instance, “language features described feminine”).
4. Abstraction: Interpretation, drawing theory from the data, and forming new terminology.

## PERFORMANCE: UN/DOING THE GENDER BINARY

This section discusses Elbe's beliefs about whether she performs, or *does*, her gender/s through speech. Does she use speech to do her genders differently from each other, and how? Does she mark moving from one gender to another? What are the linguistic features she utilizes to do this? Are there other ways in which her bigender identity influences her speech? The first interview excerpt contains two significant points relating to the question.

Excerpt 1: Resisting the pre-analysis model, and the two extremes (interview 1).

*ML: ((reading:)) kuuluuko sukupuoli-identiteettisi jollain tapaa puheessasi (.) jos kyllä (.) millä tavoin (...)*

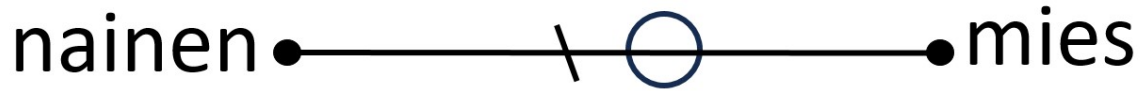
*Elbe: se oj- vain ääripäissä että en mä muuten sanos et se hirveesti ees kuuluu*

*ML: ((reading:)) can your gender identity be heard in your speech somehow (.) if yes (.) in what way (...)*

*Elbe: it i- only in the extremes so I wouldn't say that it even is that audible otherwise*

Firstly, Elbe stresses that most of the time, gender is not very audible in her speech—a notion she repeats several times throughout the interviews. This seems to somewhat contradict the pre-analysis model introduced in section 1; Elbe does not believe she uses speech that much to perform her gender/s and, as she specifies in the second interview, she does not intend to speak differently depending on her current gender. However, Elbe mentions that her gender is audible in *the extremes*. What she means by extremes can best be illustrated with the drawings she included in her recording diaries (Figure 6.2).

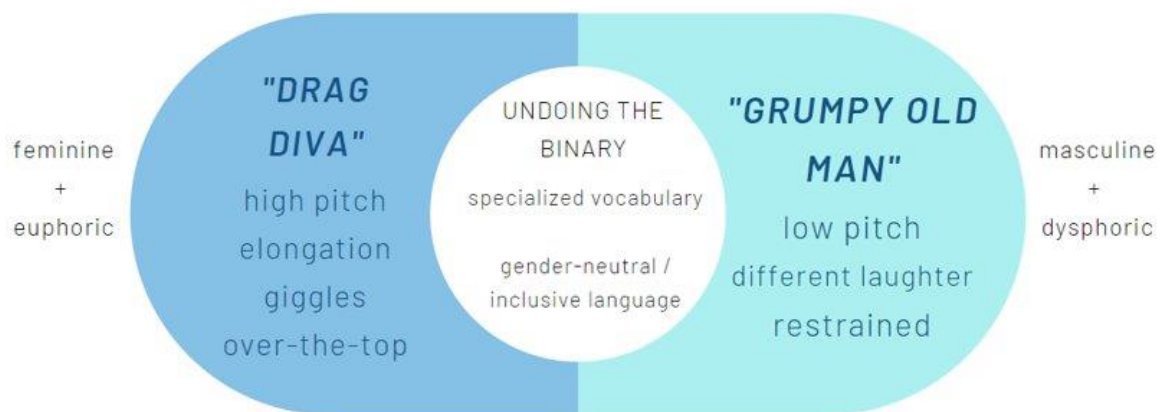
**Figure 6.2.** Elbe’s drawing of her then-current gender (recording diary 2).



All five of Elbe’s drawings show that she visualized her gender/s as a continuum. The left end of the continuum is always marked as *nainen* (woman) and the right end as *mies* (man)—the extremes that she refers to in the data excerpt above. There is a vertical (and in this case, tilted) line marking the midpoint of the continuum, which in the first interview she calls both *fifty-fifty* and *nolla* (zero) and describes as simultaneously being both a man and a woman. The circle on the right side of the midpoint indicates her placement on the gender continuum at the time she recorded herself (slightly closer to a *man* than a *woman*).

In other words, Elbe argues that gender shows more prominently in her speech when she moves closer to one of the two extremes of the continuum, which is unintentional, but that when she moves closer to the midpoint—experiences both these genders simultaneously—gender becomes less audible in her speech. Figure 6.3 follows Elbe’s visual logic of woman on the left and man on the right, to illustrate Elbe’s answers to the questions about her speech as she moves on the gender continuum.

**Figure 6.3.** Elbe doing and undoing the gender binary through speech.



Elbe jokingly described herself as sounding like a *diiva* (diva) and a *drag queen* when she is at the left end of her gender continuum, and an *äreä vanha mies* (grumpy old man) at the right end of the continuum. She described her “diva” speech as high-pitched and generally over-the-top, whereas her “grumpy old man” side had a lower pitch and a restrained style of communication. She also mentioned her laughter changing based on gender: she associated giggling with femininity, while she described her masculine laughter as *räkäinen* (snotty). Furthermore, she mentioned elongating words when feeling most feminine. Elbe did not talk about linguistically marking when she moves from one point on the gender continuum to another.

As mentioned above, Elbe reported not intending to speak differently depending on her gender. Instead, she explained that the differences in speech are related to her emotional state, or more specifically, gender euphoria – “a joyful feeling of rightness in one’s gender/sex” – and gender dysphoria – “a negative feeling of conflict between gender/sexed aspects of one’s self” (Beischel, Gauvin, and van Anders 2022). As a person assigned female at birth who had not medically transitioned, Elbe tended to feel happy, even gender euphoric when she was a woman, but as a man, she often experienced gender dysphoria. For her, this was characterized by feelings of anxiety, sadness, and discomfort with her body and voice. She believed that the difference in mood leads to her speaking differently, which is why she described her speech as

*grumpy* and *restrained* when she is a man. Dysphoria also comes up in her recording diaries, as shown in excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2: Gender dysphoria (recording diary 7).

*Melko voimakas mieskokemus, joka kerrankin tuntui kevyen kehodysforian lisäksi äänidysforiana. Huomasin olevani sukupuolestani tietoinen ja pyrin pitämään ääneni matalampana.*

(Quite a strong experience of being a man, which for once felt like not only body dysphoria but also voice dysphoria. I noticed that I was conscious of my gender and tried to keep my voice deeper).

Here Elbe mentions that she experienced voice dysphoria during recording. Although she emphasized that she does not intend to speak differently depending on her current gender, this excerpt includes the notion that she *tried to keep [her] voice deeper*. It seems that dysphoria drives her to intentionally seek to alter her voice even if she does not do so otherwise. (For more on voice dysphoria, see e.g., Nolan et al. 2019, Russell and Abrams 2019, and Şirin, Polat, and Alioğlu 2020.)

In addition to doing both ends of the gender binary, Elbe describes additional strategies that she uses to undo the binary. These strategies involve using specialized vocabulary around the topic of gender, and gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language. Some examples that she gave for specialized gender vocabulary were *miesoletettu*, *naisoletettu*, *cisihminen*, and *nonbinääri* (a person assumed to be male, a person assumed to be female, cis person, and nonbinary, respectively). For gender-neutral words, she listed *tyyppi*, *henkilö*, and *ihminen* (all three of which roughly translate to “person”), as well as saying *illanistujaiset* (social evening, soirée) instead of *tyttöjen ilta* (girls’ night), *lapsi* (child) instead of *tyttö* (girl), *kodinhenki*

(domestic deity) or *kotitonttu* (house-elf) instead of *kodinhengetär* (domestic goddess), and *vanhempi* (parent) instead of *äiti* or *isä* (mother or father). She also mentioned having decided not to ask about a baby's sex first thing after birth. Unlike all the other features listed in this section, which shift depending on her current gender, she uses specialized gender vocabulary and gender-neutral language regardless of her current gender.

### AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION IN DOING GENDER

Section 5 demonstrated how Elbe talks about doing her gender/s through her own speech. However, she makes clear in the interviews that often it is not only about how *she* speaks, but how others speak to and about her—in Barbee and Shrock's (2019) terminology, audience participation. This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

Excerpt 3: Audience participation (interview 1).

*Elbe: sit se on justiinsa se et ehkä enemmän (.) minkälaista kielenkäyttöä mä niinkun siedän silloin kun se (...) mieskokemus on päällä niin silloin yleensä mä tosi huonosti kestän semmosta niin kun (.) hh sanankäyttöä niin kun su- väärinsukupuolittamista ja kaikkee sellasta (...) hirveen sukupuolitettua kielenkäyttöä*

Elbe: and it's precisely that maybe more (.) what kind of language use I can like put up with (...) when the (...) experience of being a man is on then

I usually tolerate very badly the kind of (.) hh word use like ge- misgendering and things like (...)terribly gendered language use

Here Elbe explains that sometimes it is more about what the others say than what she says herself. Elbe talks about *putting up with* other people's *terribly gendered language use*,

more specifically others misgendering her. She mentions that it is especially hard to cope with it when she is a man.

Elbe also explained that since she is a woman some of the time, people are not entirely wrong when gendering her as such. However, it does bother her that people assume that she is *solely* a woman, and sometimes she follows misgendering with an indirect correction:

Excerpt 4: Misgendering, with correction (interview 2).

*Elbe: jos joku niinku ky- on mulle sillee et niinku et @mitten te naiset oikeen tolleen@ (.) @ku en mä oikeen tiedä miten NUO naiset oikeen@*  
(...)

*Elbe: ehkä tolla tavalla niinku epäsuorasti saatan vihjata ettei ehkä kannata vaan olettaa sillee että (...) olen nain- @vain@ pelkästään nainen*

Elbe: if someone as- is to me like @why are you women like that@ (.) @well I don't really know why THOSE women@  
(...)

Elbe: maybe in that manner like indirectly I might give them a hint that maybe they shouldn't assume that (...) I am a wo- @only@ solely a woman

Elbe's self-recording data included one real-life instance of misgendering. In this case, it went without correction but caused a relatively long (7.64 seconds) and possibly awkward silence in the otherwise lively and rapid conversation between the group of friends:

Excerpt 5: Misgendering, no correction (self-recording 4).

Elbe: spread that cheese

Katja: haha @spread that cheese@

Elbe: haha

Katja (to Elbe): c'mon **girl**

Katja: {haha}

Haruka: {haha}

(7.64)

Katja: hmm <sup>6</sup>

Elbe, too, considered being addressed as *girl* misgendering, which is evident in her recording diary where she mentions the incident:

Excerpt 6: Katja does not either remember or notice (recording diary 4).

*Vain Katjalle taidan olla asiasta jotenkin puhunut, mutta hänen käytöksestään päätellen hän ei sitä joko muista tai noteeraa. En yrittänyt salata, mutta en myöskään tuoda esille. Jätin korjaamatta kun minua tytöteltiin, sillä minua ei huvittanut ottaa asiaa edes puheeksi.*

Katja is the only one that I might have talked about the matter with, in some way, but, judging by her behavior, she doesn't either remember or notice it. I was not trying to

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt originally in English.

hide [it] but neither was I trying to bring [it] up. I didn't correct [her] when I was called a girl because I didn't feel like even bringing the thing up.<sup>7</sup>

Even though Elbe largely focused on describing negative experiences with audience participation, in the second interview she also described what would be ideal audience participation for her:

Excerpt 7: Ideal audience participation (interview 2).

*Elbe: ois ihan sika mahtavaa jos olis porukka jotka kaikki tietää niinku meikäläise  
(...) sit ois semmonen et joo @otetaaks miehet vastaan naiset@ ja sit joku kysyy et  
@Elbe (.) kumpaa sä oot tänää@*

*ML: nii haha*

*Elbe: haha voi vit- se ois ihan mahtavaa*

Elbe: it would be super awesome if there was a group where everyone would like know me (...) then there would be a thing like @should we do men against women@ and then then someone asks @Elbe (.) which one are you today@

ML: yeah haha

Elbe: haha oh damn it would be so great

In this excerpt, Elbe imagines a situation where she would be with a group of friends where everyone knows about her bigender identity. She imagines someone asking her *which*

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<sup>7</sup> See Barbee and Shrock 2019 for analysis on why and in what conditions nonbinary people choose to present as binary-gendered or to allow others to gender them as such. Similar reasons might explain Elbe's behavior, as she faces similar challenges as nonbinary people.

*one* [a man or a woman] *are you today*, letting her pick her team for a game based on her current gender. The building blocks of her fantasy are simple: being out to her friends and the friends not only believing and respecting her self-identification but also taking it into consideration in shared activities.

As this section has shown, being misgendered is a micro-situation that Elbe faces often. Some of the misgendering situations include a correction sequence from Elbe while some do not. Section 7 will discuss the other bigender-specific micro-situations that Elbe described in her interviews and recording diaries.

### BIGENDER-SPECIFIC MICRO-SITUATIONS

The content analysis yielded a cluster of four reduced categories of bigender-specific micro-situations: misgendering, coming out, gender compromising, and gender mirroring. Misgendering was discussed in the section above. Coming out is a related phenomenon, as misgendering is sometimes followed by a correction from Elbe, where she indirectly hints that she does not identify with solely the gender that she usually gets gendered as. However, Elbe also describes coming out in situations that are not prompted by misgendering and where she takes the topic of her gender up directly and uses more specific terms. In the following excerpt, Elbe answers an interview question about how she brings up her bigender identity to someone for the first time:

Excerpt 8: Coming out (interview 1).

*Elbe: mää niinkun kysyn että et ooksä kuullu muuten \_monisukupuolisuuden termistä ja sitte on sillee ei ja sit mä selitän sen ja jos ne on kuullu ni sit mä (...) että minä koen tämän termin omaksi*

Elbe: I like ask that that by the way have you heard about the term \_multigenderedness and then [the person] is like no and then I explain and if they have heard about it then I (...) that I feel that this term describes me

In this excerpt, Elbe relates that she usually begins the micro-situation of coming out by asking her interlocutor if they know what *monisukupuolisuus* (lit. manygenderedness; multigenderedness, polygenderedness, or plurigenderedness) means. Only after that, she reveals that she uses the label for herself. She also mentions avoiding using the word *bigender* when she comes out in Finnish because she finds that Finnish-speakers often confuse *bigender* with *bisexual*. However, even when avoiding the word *bigender*, coming out often entails Elbe having to explain what *monisukupuolisuus* means. She finds that this happens more with cis interlocutors than trans interlocutors and relates that she can often go into more detail about her gender/s with trans interlocutors who are more familiar with different gender identities (and related terminology) than most of her cis interlocutors. In other words, what the micro-situation looks like depends on how informed Elbe believes her interlocutor to be.

Both *misgendering* and *coming out* are well-established terms among queer communities, but the following two micro-situation types, *gender compromising* and *gender mirroring*, are less known. Here, the term *gender compromising* refers to micro-situations where a bigender person's (inner) gender identity and (outer) gender expression conflict. This is similar to how women have been shown to compromise their gender identity to fit in male-dominated workplaces by intentionally modifying their behavior (Wijayawardena et al. 2017). In the data, Elbe describes situations where a certain gender expression is socially expected from her or more beneficial to her in a particular context, to the extent that she will do femininity even if her inner experience of her gender is masculine at that moment. This is

particularly true in the contexts of sexuality and work, as illustrated by the following two excerpts.

Excerpt 9: Gender compromising in a romantic or sexual context (recording diary 3).

*Niilon kanssa kyllä huomaa hieman aina taipuvani feminiinisempään käytökseen, mikä usein tapahtuu cishet-oletettujen mieshenkilöiden seurassa, joihin tunnen romanttista ja/tai seksuaalista kiinnostusta.*

With Niilo, I do notice that I always bend toward more feminine behavior, which often happens with men who are assumed to be cishet and that I am romantically and/or sexually interested in.

Here Elbe notes that her behavior tends to be feminine when she is around her boyfriend Niilo or other (assumedly) cisgender, heterosexual men that she is interested in. In the interviews, she clarifies that her partners have usually been straight men and that she believes that feminine speech is more attractive to them than masculine speech, so she alters her expression to please them and flirt with them, even when she experiences herself as a man on the inside. She also adds that this only applies to the men to whom she is drawn romantically or sexually.

Excerpt 10: Gender compromising in a work context (interview 2).

*Elbe: asiakaspalvelutilanteessa totta kai vähän sitä aina muuttaa sitä o- olemustaan sen (.) PIKKUSEN aina sen mukaan että minkälainen asiakas siinä on edessä että hh*

*ML: mm*

Elbe: (...) hh (.) tämmösille vanhoille setäihmisille myy parhaiten ku (.) on vähän semmonen (.) kikatteleva (.) tyttömainen

Elbe: in customer service situations of course you always change a bit the d-demeanor (.) A LITTLE BIT always depending on what kind of a customer you have there in front of you like hh

ML: mm

Elbe: (...) hh (.)you sell best to these old geezers when (.) you are a little like (.) giggly (.) girly

Elbe works in retail, and in this excerpt, she explains that she alters her gender expression based on the customer she is serving. She finds that with older male customers, she makes the best sales if she acts *girly*. Similarly to the sexual and romantic context, she prioritizes fulfilling her socially expected role (a desirable woman and a successful saleswoman in the eyes of the cisheteropatriarchy) over authentic gender expression.

Fourth, Elbe describes doing gender based on one's interlocutor's gender expression. This could be called *gender mirroring* (not to be confused with reversed-gender mirroring [Overmann 2009 and Kambasković-Sawers 2007] or gendered mirroring [Bettcher 2014]). In this data, Elbe describes two types of gender mirroring: she notes that she can either join someone else's gender expression by doing gender similarly to them or counter the other person's gender expression by doing gender differently from them. Gender mirroring can be seen as a subtype of *speech accommodation* where speakers adjust their speech either toward or away from their addressees' way of speaking (Edwards 2013, 79, Niedzielski and Preston 2003, 167, and Schilling-Estes 2002, 383).

Excerpt 11: Gender mirroring (interview 1).

Elbe: [keskustelukumppanin sukupuoli] ei juuri vaikuta [puheeseeni] (...) ellei HEIDÄN (...) ulosantinsa oo \_hyvin maskuliinista tai \_hyvin niinkun feminiinistä (...) ehkä niitten maskuliinisten kanssa (...) mä VÄHÄSEN niinku otan enemmän semmost ffeminiinisyyttä siihen mukaan koska (.) tai no riippuu \_tyypistä koska jos se on semmonen hirveen maskuliininen tyyppi jok- joka niinku vähä- vähättelee feminiinisyyttä niin sillon totta kai mä NOSTAN omaa maskuliinisuuttani esiin että se ei niinkun (.) mee siihen et se vähättelee (.) tai sitte et jos on hirveen maskuliininen tyyppi joka niinkun (.) on semmonen hirvee alffauros rr et niinkun muut urokset häipykää helvettiin niin (.) sillon totta kai on helpompi olla silleen et no niin @joo joo kato täs on@ hehe FEMIINIINISTÄ ENEERGIAA (...)

Elbe: jos on tosi voimakas feminiininen [olo] niin en mä sillon pysty niinkun tuomaan semmost omaa niinkun \_maskuliinisuutta (...) ellei se tuu iha ittestään (...) feminiinisesti itseään ulosantavilla niinkun tuntuu olevan et he ehkä (...) jos on ite hirveen niinku semmonen (.) oma \_diiva päällä niin sillon (...) molemmat ollaan oikein niinkun @niin femmei ku ollaan@ ja tällei mutta sitte (.) jos (...) se on sillee että mä en oo niin ääripäissä kummassakaan et mä oon siinä vähän siinä niinku keskialueella niin sillon saattaa joskus vähän (.) tilanteesta riippuen ihmisestä riippuen ihmisen omasta ulosannista riippua että (...) kumpaan suuntaan kannattaa lähtee niinku vähän nojaamaa (.) siinä ulosannossa

Elbe: [interlocutor's gender] does not really impact [my speech] (...) unless THEIR (...) delivery is \_very masculine or like \_very feminine (...) maybe with the masculine ones (...) I take A LITTLE BIT of ffemininity with because (.) or well it depends on the \_person because if it is someone very masculine th- that like be- belittles

femininity then of course I EMPHASIZE my own masculinity so that [the person] won't belittle [me] (.) or if there's an awfully masculine person that like (.) is a terrible alpha male rr like other males go to hell then (.) of course it's easier to be like well @yes yes see here is some@ haha FEMININE ENERGY (...)

Elbe: if [I feel] a strong femininity then I can't like bring my own sort of \_masculinity (...) unless it comes naturally (...) those that express themselves in a feminine way like seem to have something that they maybe (...) if I like totally have (.) my own diva on then (...) we both are like @as femme as we are@ and stuff but if (...) it's like I'm not so much in either extreme like if I'm a little like in the middle area then it might depending on the situation a little bit (.) depending on the person it depends on the person's own delivery (...) which direction it makes sense to start like leaning toward (.) in [my] delivery

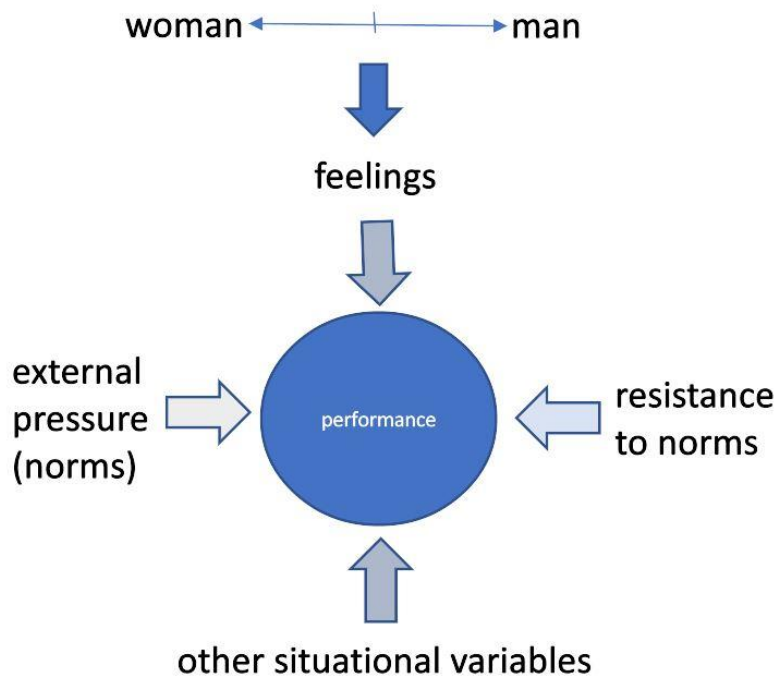
In excerpt 11, Elbe explains that her choice to either diverge from or converge with her interlocutor's linguistic gender expression depends on her current gender, the interlocutor's attitudes (such as belittling femininity), or other situational conditions. She relates that she has more room for choice in deciding to *lean toward* masculine or feminine speech when she is *in the middle area* of her gender continuum than when she is at either end of it.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has addressed gender staticity as an implicit norm in linguistics. The study began with the expectation that a bigender person's current gender would be a situational variable that directly impacts how the person speaks in a given moment. Analysis revealed that Elbe did not fully conform to the initial expectation: she argued that her current gender only influences her speech when she is feeling extremely feminine or masculine; she does not intend

to speak differently depending on her current positioning on her personal gender continuum. Instead, she believed that feelings related to gender euphoria and gender dysphoria impact her speech, creating an indirect connection between gender and speech (as shown in Figure 6.4).

**Figure 6.4.** Improved model describing the dynamics between Elbe’s gender/s and speech.



Elbe associated high pitch with her femininity and low pitch with her masculinity. She also described elongating words when at her most feminine. In other words, her metalanguage included very few strictly linguistic features that depend on her current gender. She did not mention any ways of linguistically marking switches between genders. However, she expressed that, regardless of her current gender, she prefers using gender-neutral language and specialized gender vocabulary, which can be interpreted as strategies for resisting cisnormativity and binarism.

Elbe also pointed out that she does not do her gender/s alone, but together with her interlocutors. She described problematic audience participation where her interlocutors misgender her as solely a woman, which she sometimes follows with an implicit correction. On the other hand, Elbe also dreamed about ideal audience participation where her interlocutors

would avoid making assumptions and instead would respect her self-identification and ask her about her current gender.

In addition to misgendering, three other types of bigender-specific micro-situations were identified: coming out (disclosing her bigender identity), gender compromising (doing femininity out of external social pressure even when she is internally feeling masculine), and gender mirroring (reflecting other people's gender expression through either similar or different speech). Bigender-specific micro-situations were defined at the beginning of this study as "situations that are caused by Elbe's bigender identity—things that would not occur if Elbe were cisgender and not bigender". The analysis made it clear, however, that these micro-situations do not occur just because Elbe is bigender. In fact, most of them occur because Elbe lives in a cisheteronormative society. In a gender-fair world free of cisheteronormativity, her interlocutors would not automatically assume her to be a straight cis woman: she would not be misgendered; she would not have to correct others; she would not have to painstakingly explain the words she uses to describe her identity; and most importantly, she would not have to compromise authentic gender expression to be accepted.

This chapter has demonstrated that there is a meaningful overlap between Critical Sexuality Studies and Lavender Language Inquiry: had this study overlooked extralinguistic concepts such as normativity, it would have lost much of its emancipatory potential. Lavender Language Inquiry's openness to scavenger methodology enables the researcher to look for tools and answers outside of linguistics. Similarly, Critical Sexuality Studies can benefit from Lavender Folk Linguistics in approaching the interplay between language, gender, and sexuality by centering locality, daily practice, and language users' own articulations of their lived experiences.

## **Appendix 6.1.** Transcription conventions

ML interviewer's initials

(( )) added descriptions of speech

(.) pause; if measured, includes length in seconds

(...) ellipsis

- interrupted word

hh sigh

@ @ voice quality differs from the surrounding context

NOSTAN louder than the surrounding context

\_ emphasized beginning of word

haha laughter

{ } lines spoken simultaneously

[ ] added clarification

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