

Negotiating Europeanness: Language and identity construction in the Eurovision Song Contest

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This research-in-progress paper outlines the theoretical basis, methodological approach and data of the project *The Discursive Interface of National, European and Sexual Identities: Linguistic Evidence from the Eurovision Song Contest*. The project aims at a higher visibility of queer theoretical approaches within linguistics – a procedure that has so far only received minor attention in linguistics outside the U.S. as a research context. More specifically, an attempt will be made at using the poststructuralist-oriented approach of Queer Theory as an explanatory framework for processes of a new pan-European identity formation.

The interrelationship between non-heteronormative sexual identity construction and the use of English as a foreign language has repeatedly been asserted. One reason for this is the increasing role of English as a modern, global lingua franca, which enables speakers to distance themselves from more traditional (national) ways of identity construction. Furthermore, the structural qualities of English also seem to play a role. As a language without grammatical gender distinctions, English easily allows for the construction of gender-neutrality and/or ambiguity and is therefore a means to avoid normative binarisms in sexual identity construction. Illustrative data are taken from a context of Europe-wide media attention, the Eurovision Song Contest, which represents an excellent context for studying both sexual and European/national identity construction. Material from the 2007 edition of the contest will be used to demonstrate linguistic means of national, European and sexual identity construction, with a special focus on their interrelationship. It will be shown that the higher usage of English as a non-native European lingua franca goes hand in hand with an increase in the linguistic construction of sexually open or subversive identities. Dealing with both the production and the reception side of the contest, the study adopts a pluralist methodology that involves a combination of quantitative (corpus linguistics) and qualitative approaches (discourse analysis, ethnography).