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Trajectories of knowledge and desire: Multilingual women scholars researching and writing in academia

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the significance of gender in research and academic writing for publication. It reports on a gender-focused, interview-based study with 10 multilingual women scholars, set within a longitudinal research project in which they have participated for between 11 and 14 years. The scholars work in two disciplinary fields, education and psychology, and come from four national contexts: Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal. The paper argues that gender remains an 'occluded' (after Swales, 1996) category in research on academic writing for publication but is implicated in practices around academic knowledge making in important ways. Key themes emerging from the data are discussed: the passions driving intellectual work; academic inscription practices; networks of collaboration; being a carer; academic service work; the body in academia. The value of exploring women scholars' perspectives and practices through the lens of *trajectory* is underscored, offering as it does glimpses of how they enact agency at specific moments of their academic lives, in an increasingly rigidly governed and evaluated social space.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to critically explore the significance of gender in relation to the experiences of multilingual women scholars, centring in particular on their research and academic writing for publication. The main question we explore is:

To what extent, and in what ways, is researching and writing for academic publication a gendered practice?

In this paper we use 'gendered practice' to signal: 1) that gender is (re)-enacted through relations of everyday of living and working, including through specific instances of language use, in line with approaches in sociolinguistics and literacy studies (e.g. Cameron, 1998, 2009; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Hamilton & Pitt, 2009; Ivanič, 1998; Ochs, 1992); 2) that, whilst contested, gender as an aspect of language practice continues to be *primarily* configured, in everyday and academic discourse, in binary terms, that is as male/female¹; 3) that gender, as a dimension to being, is material as well as discursive in nature (for overviews and discussions, see Hultgren, 2017; Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002; Mills, 2012; Threadgold, 1997). This last point is important for, whilst signalling gender as constant (re)enactment, worked at and performed discursively, such (re)

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E-mail addresses: Theresa.Lillis@open.ac.uk (T. Lillis), mjcurry@warner.rochester.edu (M.J. Curry).¹ Whilst debates continue about the significance of treating gender/sex as a biological, discursive and/or material phenomenon, a binary orientation to gender/sex prevails across applied and sociolinguistics. But for critical discussions see Cameron, 2009; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003.

enactments take place in, and against the backdrop of, historically situated practices where there is a bodily, material and ideological reality to being (and being ascribed) a woman or a man (Beauvoir, 1997 [1949]; Clegg, 2006; Moi, 2008, pp. 23–34). The paper seeks to explore the significance of gender in academic research and writing for publication, an under-researched area, with a focus on the lived realities of multilingual women scholars.

The paper draws on an interview-based study with 10 women scholars set within a longitudinal study exploring their perspectives and practices of writing for publication over a period of between 11 and 14 years. It begins by reviewing research on writing for publication, focusing particularly on *categories of being* that have been foregrounded in such work and signals gender as an ‘occluded’ (after Swales, 1996) category. The next section outlines the specific study on which this paper is based, followed by the main part of the paper which is an analysis of key themes emerging from the data. The paper concludes by arguing that gender as a lived experience is a powerful dimension to women scholars’ intellectual lives and foregrounds the importance of the notion of *trajectory* in exploring and understanding their desires and agency.

2. Where is gender in research on writing for publication?

The field of research writing for academic publication, drawing predominantly on the interrelated fields of applied linguistics and writing/literacy studies, and focusing primarily on the writing of multilingual scholars, has been growing steadily over the past 20 years (see Kuteeva and Mauranen, 2014, SI JEAP; for an overview of research on writing for publication by multilingual scholars, see Lillis & Curry, 2016). Key issues addressed by such research include the experiences of multilingual scholars (e.g. Pérez-Llantada, Plo, & Ferguson, 2011; Tian et al., 2016) and graduate students (e.g. Tardy, 2005); the involvement of ‘literacy brokers’ (Lillis & Curry, 2006b) and differentiated access to material resources (Canagarajah, 2002); textual aspects of genres written for publication (e.g. Moreno & Suárez, 2010); analyses of institutional and governmental policies related to academic publishing (e.g. Englander & Uzuner-Smith, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2013); and pedagogical approaches to supporting text production (see Cargill & Burgess, 2017; Curry and Lillis, 2013; Curry & Lillis, 2017). Unsurprisingly, given the focus in this field on multilingual scholars’ writing in the context of the dominance of English, the categories used to describe and ascribe the significance of particular aspects of writers’ identities have foregrounded language (e.g. first/second, native/non-native, second language, monolingual, bilingual), often aligned with geopolitical descriptors such as a nation state or notions such as ‘culture’. Other key categories relate to disciplinarity and stage of expertise within the academy—novice/student, expert/academic.

Gender has rarely figured in this growing research field on academic writing for publication, with some key exceptions. Belcher (2009) explored gender as a main aspect of the ‘growing diversity of scholars writing in English’ in her study tracking the distribution of authorship and investigating authors’ statements of a research ‘gap’ in 113 articles published in three journals over 12 years. Contrary to her expectations, Belcher found that the increasing diversity among contributors in terms of gender and geolinguistic location was not paralleled by a greater attendant rhetorical diversity in texts, with most writers adopting dominant conventions. Tse and Hyland (2008) and Hyland and Tse (2012) compared male and female academics’ rhetorical practices in two ‘supporting genres’ (Swales and Feak, 2000, p.8), book reviews and biographical statements, and found differences on the basis of gender and disciplinary in the former, and differences aligned with gender and seniority in the latter (Hyland & Tse, 2012). For example, Hyland and Tse (2012) found that in 600 biographical statements by authors of articles in philosophy, applied linguistics, and electrical engineering journals, male scholars mentioned their publications and other achievements more than females, with women scholars giving more information about their educational qualifications and research interests. Tardy and Matsuda (2009), in a survey of 70 members of editorial boards of six journals in the fields of language and literacy that use double-blind peer review, found that 84% of respondents ‘guessed’ about an author’s identity, with 27% speculating about gender.

A different strand of research, focusing on academics writing across their careers, has foregrounded gender to varying extents (e.g. Carnell, MacDonald, McCallum, & Scott, 2008; Casanave & Vandrick, 2003; Olson & Worsham, 2003; Prozesky, 2008). Kirsch (1993) put gender centre stage in her interview-based study of 15 successful faculty female members in five disciplines and four career stages at one U.S. university. She argues that scholars’ experience and rank were the most salient aspects of claiming authority in their writing, and that most women did so by adhering to disciplinary conventions, a finding echoed in Belcher’s study, above. The importance of challenging dominant conventions is emphasised in work foregrounding feminist thinking (e.g. Hamilton & Pitt, 2009; Royster & Kirsch 2012), with work also underlining the significant difficulties of making such challenges (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987).

Research from another tradition, bibliometric studies, has foregrounded gender in relation to publication productivity, showing consistently that women tend to have lower productivity than men (e.g. Freitsch, Haller, Funken-Vrohings, & Grupp, 2009; Kwiek, 2015). The fact of lower publications productivity by women scholars seems incontrovertible (when name is taken as an index for sex) but reasons for this finding and indeed what counts as academic ‘productivity’ are debatable (see Nygaard and Bahgat this issue). Some explanations for ‘lower productivity’ have foregrounded the gendering of academic labour, with women shown to be carrying out a considerable amount of mentoring, service and administrative work as well as having greater teaching loads than men (Aiston & Jung, 2015).

Finally, there is a longstanding strand of work in the tradition of feminist inquiry, which foregrounds gender in relation to women’s academic/intellectual work, discourse and writing. A key writer in this vein is Simone de Beauvoir, one of the first generation of European women to be allowed to participate in academia at the same level as men (Moi, 2008, p. 59) and who across her works engages with the problematic of what it means to be a woman intellectual in a society where academic

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