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The Janana community of practice: Identity and linguistic practice in Lucknow, India

The communities of practice (CofP) framework (Wenger 1998, Eckert and McConnell Ginet 1998) has been applied to investigation of the practices of a variety of social groups from classrooms to midwives (King 2014, Lave and Wenger, 1991). I show that the CofP framework is a productive and appropriate tool with which to study the relationship between linguistic practices and identity and shifts in identity in a community of men who self-identify as janana. Jananas are men who have sex with men, sometimes for money, and maintain culturally accepted normative roles of heterosexual masculinity outside of their lives as jananas (also called kotis, Hall 2005, Cohen 2005). My research is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Lucknow, India during 2003-2015. My work with jananas shows that they define their identity in opposition to attributable identity practices of other groups and as men with 'armaan' or desires of a woman. Jananas define themselves as being not hijra (Hall 1995, Reddy 2005) by living with family, not cross dressing, and mostly not participating in *tohi badhayi* 'ritualistic singing and dancing at ceremonies for money'. Masculinity eludes jananas because they have sex with men and say that they have the *armaan* or desires of a woman. Femininity and performative aspects of femininity are part of being janana but only in specific contexts. Jananas, then, define themselves in opposition to male, female, and hijra identities even as they borrow from these categories according to need.

I demonstrate that jananas create sociolinguistic meaning in their CofP by showing that the core CofP components of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire relate to and define membership in the janana community. For the janana CofP living with marginalization forms joint enterprise, shared knowledge of levels of participation, active versus passive sex roles, and extent of relationship with hijras is part of mutual engagement, and shared repertoire is naming each other, clapping, swear words, switching gender marking, using the secret register *Farasi*, accountability to family, and initiating new members into the community. I explain each of these aspects in the paper. Linguistic variation in switching gender marking is part of shared repertoire. Jananas shift grammatical gender marking in Hindi as an indication of switching identities. I show that the social implications of this variation pertain to jananas performativity of gender and sexuality, linguistically and otherwise. Practices that jananas partake in demonstrate that they are in fact a community of practice where membership is grounded in practices that are outward looking (Eckert and McConnell Ginet, 2007). My findings also suggest that meaning in communities like janana is best understood as created within hierarchies and participation in their CofP.