



**Angus Leydic**  
University of Arizona

## REVIEW ESSAY:

*Redoing Linguistic Worlds: Unmaking Gender Binaries, Remaking Gender Pluralities*  
Edited by Kris. A. Knisely and Eric Louis Russell  
Multilingual Matters, 2024. 288 pages.

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*Redoing Linguistic Worlds: Unmaking Gender Binaries, Remaking Gender Pluralities* by Kris A. Knisely and Eric Louis Russell explores the undoing and redoing of gender binaries within applied linguistics and language education. The volume contains reflexive research projects on how educators and researchers can widen their perspectives to the multitude of genders and gender modalities that exist and are performed within, through, and by language. In this way, the contributors undo cisnormative understandings of gender in favor of fluidity and plurality, highlighting what these could mean to be somebody who does not fit binary or trinary languaging (e.g. cis/trans; man/woman/nonbinary). Building on Knisely (2022), the chapters in this volume are informed by multidisciplinary, especially trans studies, views on gender as well as the core tenets of gender-just language teaching (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Core tenets of language teaching.

- (1) Unearth and questions all forms of normativity;
- (2) raise awareness of LGBTQ+ [people's] lives;
- (3) actively create and maintain space for marginalized perspectives;
- (4) keenly attend to respecting individual agency and a right to self-definition;
- (5) focus on fostering respectful engagement with disparate worldviews; and
- (6) always leave room for fluidity, flexibility, and complexity” (Knisely, 2022, p. 166).

This life-sustaining collection expands on Butler (2009) who connects sexuality and language through performance and further argues that gender performativity must be considered alongside the idea of precarity, fostering new understandings of gender performativity as “bound up in the differential ways in which subjects become eligible for recognition” (p. iv). The editors of this volume too focus on the social and relational nature of language and gender to argue for changes in language education (in classrooms, institutions, larger power structures), redefining language as “an active process that serves the purpose of conveying the imaginary reality of one person toward another person or group of persons, and one in and through which individual and collective imaginary worlds are constructed and made real” (p. 22). This new definition builds on Knisely’s (2023) work that calls for the inclusion of trans epistemologies in applied linguistics to gain emic, or in-group, insight on how queer, trans and/or gender non-compliant people do language. Gender-just language teaching seeks to engage with this fluidity and detangle cisnormative and colonial logics more broadly from language education in consideration of precarity issues (Knisely, forthcoming). This volume, with its four parts and twelve chapters (plus introduction and conclusion), offers an excellent example of how language scholar-educators have started to do this work.

Part 1 elaborates on the guiding theoretical concepts of language as verb. Working within this definition of language decouples it from something personified and agentive, allowing for more fluidity and complexity within language (teaching) practices. This socioculturally informed view of language aims to expand the boundaries of language teaching and learning to include critical reflection of language and cultural practices. The goal is to show languagers the many ways of doing and being among people.

Part 2 consists of three chapters offering readers examples of gender-just teaching in the language classroom. These contributions underpin the right to self-determination and highlight teaching practices which afford students this right. For example, in chapter 3, Maureen O. Gallagher, Simone Pflieger, Angineh Djavadghazaryans, Brigetta Abel, and Faye Steward outline the creation of a gender-just German textbook, its materials and design, and how to center gender-just pedagogies in language teaching practice. They outline some theoretical concerns: gender and the German language, their approach to teaching linguistic gender and noun class, and finally their approach to pronouns and gendered nouns. Inspired by Claire Kramsch’s (1997) understanding of emergent possibilities in the classroom, their textbook gives languagers a chance to engage with German cultural and language practices that reflect the goals of gender-just pedagogies. This chapter exemplifies modifying course materials towards understanding that cultural and language practices are not prescriptive.

Part 3, consisting of three chapters, calls to light both the affordances and the constraints of doing language and gender in French and Spanish, centering nonbinary voices in particular. For example, in chapter 5, Maxen Jack-Monroe analyzes how nonbinary Montréalers do French under the context of a rigid Franco-French language system. The author interviews 7 nonbinary French-and-English languagers, four of which participated in a cis and transgender comprised group interview. In nuanced dialogue with trans languagers, the chapter explores the possibilities of transitioning in each language at different times, lexical borrowings, systems to bypass gendered languaging among other strategies and theorizings of doing gender and language from a gender non-compliant perspective.

Part 4 contains three chapters and conclusion, all of which promote doing gender and language in ways that flout named languages, standard language, monolingual, binary language ideologies. The chapters focus on Spanish and Italian languaging and the conclusion lays bare the emotional toll of doing gender justice work and of being gender non-compliant and doing language and gender in nonnormative ways. For example, in chapter 10, Eric Louis Russell focuses on Italian enlanguagements, symbolic power and discursive effability. Centering on the death of a nonbinary person, Russell analyzes the relationship that Italian languaging has with doing gender regarding reporting their death. This chapter troubles normative ways of doing language in an Italian context while providing linguistic (im)possibilities. By analyzing Italian in sociocultural and linguistic contexts, Russell gives accounts of the development of Italian nonbinary languaging while questioning oppositional powers that seek to marginalize nonbinary folk. Russell makes clear that languaging against nonbinary enlanguagements is linguistic and symbolic violence, using power to seek conformity.

*Redoing Linguistic Worlds: Unmaking Gender Binaries, Remaking Gender Pluralities* is a vital addition to current research on gender justice—both in educational practices and languaging in the wild—because it creates a precedent in centering research with gender non-compliant languagers through a trans studies lens. This volume focuses on possibilities rather than impossibilities and the contributions seek ways to do language and gender in spite of institutional and structural realities that center cisheteronormative ways of doing language that ultimately reproduce (neo)colonial ideologies (Knisely, forthcoming).

Even ground-breaking contributions have limitations. For example, this volume focuses primarily on commonly taught languages. However, most of the chapter contributions can still offer ideas on how to begin gender-just pedagogical work in languages that do not have a gendered noun-class. Future work can contribute to this conversation by identifying how gender

is performed in less commonly taught languages and address issues with teaching gender-just language in these classrooms.

This book is a must read for all who aspire to do decolonizing work, as oppressive (neo)colonial power marginalizes all non-white, able-bodied, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender, male languagers (Knisely, forthcoming). It cannot be understated: this volume demands that life-sustaining, gender-just practices be acknowledged and centered in applied linguistics. The contributors urge all language scholar-educators to begin doing the reflexive work that is necessary to take those next critical steps forward, asking: are you with us or against us?

## References

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