

# Creating a Conceptual Framework for Analysing Gender Roles and Language Use Among Minority Language Speakers

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Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1974) are often cited for their claims that women tend to prefer using standard or prestige language forms. These assertions have also been included in Labov's general principles on the role of gender (sex) in language change: men show a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women; women favour the incoming prestige form; and women are the innovators of language change (Labov, 1990). These principles have guided much of the current sociolinguistic research on gendered differences, as Chambers (2009) asserts that "[i]n virtually all sociolinguistic studies that include a sample of males and females, there is evidence for this conclusion about their linguistic behaviour: women use fewer stigmatized and non-standard variants than do men of the same social group in the same circumstances" (2009: 115). What is lacking, however, is a deeper investigation into why this is almost always found to be the case, and how societal roles affect an individual's language use, even more specifically their use of a minority language.

There is a tradition of studies that have shown there to be identifiable marked differences between men and women's language use within multilingual communities (Pauwels & Winter, 2005; Pavlenko, 2001). Be that in the first language (L1) or further acquired languages, these marked differences coincide with broader questions of identity and language attitudes. For bilingual speakers, language plays an important role for the construction and enactment of their own identities and social interactions. The question then arises as to how gender, as a socially constructed identity marker and influenced in large part by the societally pre-determined gender roles within various communities, can be interpreted as a factor in an individual speaker's skills or lack thereof in an endangered or dying language variety. How does this then further affect their attitude towards speaking dialects and languages of lower prestige value within a specific society?

Using the example of a case study from Texas German (Jones, forthcoming), this project intends to begin forming a conceptual framework with which dialectologists can address the question of whether speaker gender and the subsequent gender roles in the community are influential in the processes of language loss and language maintenance. If Labov and Trudgill seem to be constantly proven correct, the next question to answer is why and how we can analyse minority language speakers and language attitudes within these communities from a gender-driven research perspective.

## References

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