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1 Introduction

Language is central to much gender identity research as well as to much experience of gender. In their influential review of research into the interactions of language and gender, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:468) observed that "sex differences in variation emerge even in communities where the sexes are not systematically separated the way socioeconomic or racial groups are." Nonetheless, a persistent finding across multiple societies is this: females and males, both as children and adults, will segregate or separate themselves or will be segregated or separated to varying degrees. In other words, females and males are formed into or will form same-gender groups. This tendency to prefer same-gender affiliations emerges early, around the age of three or four (La Freniere, Strayer, and Gauthier 1984; Harkness and Super 1985; Maccoby 1988). The segregation peaks in early adolescence or middle childhood and is followed by a subsequent lessening of the segregation in the teenage years (Hartrup 1983, Larson and Richards 1991, Thorne 1993). In their study of children's patterns of interaction and affiliation across six different cultures, Whiting and Edwards (1988:81) concluded that, "…the emergence of same-sex preferences in childhood is a cross-culturally universal and robust phenomenon." Gender segregation continues beyond childhood as a characteristic of the adult workplace (Wright 1997, Maccoby 1998) and appears to persist into late-life friendships though with some variation in advanced old age (Matthews 1986, Jerome and Wenger 1999).

Why and how this same-sex preference emerges is the object of considerable debate with some researchers articulating psychological and biological motives (Maccoby 1988, 1998) whereas others explore activity, situational, institutional, or cultural influences (Harkness and Super 1985, Richer 1990, Thorne 1993). Whatever the reasons, and there are multiple reasons, one factor does emerge repeatedly across the literature. This is age or, more precisely, age segregation. Thorne (1993:51) succinctly stated this finding in these terms: "…where age separation is present, gender separation is more likely to occur."

Such findings have clear implications for quantitative dialect research. First, recall Bloomfield's assertion (1933:46) that "density of communication," meaning differing degrees of spoken interaction, results in the "most important

differences of speech" within a community. If females and males tend to separate or be separated from one another in peer groups, their degree of spoken cross-gender interaction will not be as frequent as their interactions with members of the same sex. If less frequent, in line with Bloomfield, one could predict "important differences." The differences here would result, at least partially, from a relative preponderance of same-gender interactions and from a relative infrequence of cross-gender interactions among peers. This implication does not seem controversial, and is similar to a claim put forth in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 468): "People tend to develop and regulate their linguistic repertoire through contact with language used by those they speak with regularly."

How would variationists respond to this implication? Notice that we speak here of differences in degree of same-gender affiliations not as absolutes but as statistical tendencies which are characteristic of groups. Also, these differences are hypothesized to wax and wane in degree. Therefore, degrees of difference between groups is of interest more than the actual frequency, index, or probability values which groups provide for sociolinguistic variables. The implication may initially be stated as a working hypothesis consisting of four related propositions:

i. The degree of difference in frequency or probability values for sociolinguistic variables between female and male speakers will wax and wane across the life span.

ii. When sex segregation or separation is greatest, the degree of quantitative difference will be the greatest.

iii. When sex segregation or separation is smallest, the degree of quantitative difference will be the smallest.

iv. We should find the greatest degree of difference at stages in life where age segregation or separation is also strongly practiced or enforced because age and gender separation are linked.

Implicit in this formulation of the hypothesis is the assumption that the effects of gender segregation, as seen in degree of quantitative difference, will be contemporaneous with the gender segregation. In other words, there will not be a delay in the effect of gender segregation in speech. This assumption is close to the concept of "convergence" within Accommodation Theory (Beebe and Giles 1984:8). I further assume that the quantitative effects of convergence among same-gender groups entail socially situated probability matching (Labov 1994). This probability matching may result from conscious monitoring. However, it may also result from inter-speaker and intra-speaker priming or perseveration effects as discussed by Chang, Dell, Bock, and Griffin (2000). Chang et al. add that such effects, which occur in the absence of speaker intention or control even as they require awareness and exposure, may result in long-term effects similar

to those of "implicit learning" (Seger 1994). As a consequence, the effects of this convergence, emerging through inter-speaker and intra-speaker priming or perseveration, can extend beyond the face-to-face moments of talk-in-interaction to assume norm-like or gender-lect characteristics because statistical norms are learned implicitly via exposure.

This working hypothesis may be supported if and only if the frequency or probability value for an individual speaker's use of a sociolinguistic variable actually changes across the life span beyond the early years of language acquisition. Baugh's (1996) real-time study of four African-American males shows that such change may, in fact, occur. Support for the hypothesis would have at least the following characteristics:

a. We should find the greatest degree of difference between genders in pre-teens.

b. This degree of difference should decrease somewhat during the teenage years in keeping with the general finding that gender segregation lessens somewhat, relative to earlier childhood, during these years. However, gender segregation is still quite pronounced among teenagers. As such, partial support for the hypothesis would emerge if preteens and teens, combined or separately, show a greater degree of difference between genders than do middle age groups.

c. In subsequent portions of the life span, we could expect a further decrease in the degree of difference if it is the case that gender segregation decreases during the adult years relative to childhood. In particular, during the years of active work life, say from 20 to 60 or 65, we would expect less gender segregation because the work place, though also subject to gender segregation, shows less age segregation than occurs during the childhood years where schooling enforces age separation. In effect, the work place is more a multi-age environment for interaction than is school.

d. Beyond the active working years, say 65 and higher, owing to the lack of data on the elderly, it is unclear what we could expect. There is much research on cognitive, emotional, family, health, and support issues among the elderly (Cunningham 1989, Charness and Bosman 1992). Yet, I do not find much research which clearly identifies the daily interaction and friendship patterns of those beyond the age of 65 in ways that researchers have done for children. Some research does show a preference for same-gender friends and affiliations in late life and that friendships, not work relationships, become sites of increased spoken interaction (Matthews 1986, Jerome and Wenger 1999). If there is a return to a predominance of interactions among those of the same age, then we could expect gender separation and the predicted quantitative differences would emerge. If there is not a predominance of same age friends and acquaintances, then the quantitative differences would not emerge.

It is also important here to point out what is not involved in this working hypothesis. The hypothesis does not provide a basis for discussing, at least directly, why females or males choose the variants which they do. What we are asking is if degrees of difference between females and males fluctuate across the life span in a pattern or patterns that we can account for, completely or partially, within the framework of the age/gender segregation hypothesis. In other words, the hypothesis does not directly address such potentially mediating issues as prestige, status, power, expressiveness, conflict within or across gender groupings, vernacular ideologies, sensitivity to symbols, different meanings of variables for the genders, or the time course of change in which sociolinguistic variables may be involved. The hypothesis also does not, as formulated, address the potentially mediating effects of personal development and language acquisition in early and middle childhood as well as linguistic and cognitive change among the elderly. Finally, owing to limitations in the data, both mine and those reported by most other studies, the hypothesis and our review will not consider potential differences in degree of segregation/separation and their effects across class.

2 The Variables and the Speakers

In the research presented here, we will explore the implications of age/gender separation or segregation by identifying patterned degrees of difference between female and male speakers of Puerto Rican Spanish across the life span using an apparent time type of data organization. We will do this by focusing on three different sociolinguistic variables, two phonological and one syntactic. The phonological variables include Intervocalic (d) and Word Final (s), both of which have been investigated extensively in Spanish dialects. The syntactic variable is that of Direct Quotation Strategies. Both Intervocalic (d) and Word Final (s) are stable variables. The variable of Direct Quotation Strategies shows signs of being a change in progress from below, perhaps mid-range, though this is debatable (Cameron 1998, 2000).

Intervocalic (d) (N=2,227 tokens) consists of two variants, [ð] or [0] /V__V, as in *lado* 'side' /laðo ~ la_o/. Word Final (s) (N=9,359 tokens) has three variants, [s], [h], or [0] /V__#, as in *más* 'more' /mas ~ máh ~ má_/. Direct Quotation Strategies (N=1,249 tokens) also has 3 variants abbreviated as [VDR], [Y NP], or [Free]. The variant [VDR] involves a quotation framed by any verb of direct quotation. Variant [Y NP] occurs when a quotation is framed by the conjunction *y* 'and' plus an NP, typically a pronoun, as in <u>*Y ella*</u>, *"¡Ah no, mi'jo!"* '<u>And she</u>, **"Ah no, kiddo!"**' (quotatives are underlined, quoted material is bolded). The Freestanding variant [Free], following Clark and Gerrig

(1990), occurs when a direct quotation has no framer. Consider this illustration from Cameron (1998: 49). Here, Winston, a 14 year old public high school student, speaks of playing hooky from kindergarten. Lines b-e consist of alternating freestanding quotations.

(1) a. *Entonces me metía escapando y que sé yo para la tienda.*
   So I'd cut out escaping or whatever into the store.
   b. *"¿Qué pasó?"*   "What happened?"
   c. *"No tengo clase."*   "I don't have school."
   d. *"¿Qué pasó?"*   "What happened?"
   e. *"No tengo clase."*   "I don't have school."
   f. *Así me pasaba todos los días.* And that's how I'd spend every day.

The data comes from fieldwork carried out in San Juan, Puerto Rico, during October, 1989. I interviewed 76 speakers; 62 were selected for analysis (30 males, 32 females). Speakers range in age from 5 to 84. Preteens include children aged 5-11. Teenagers include children aged 14-17. Adults include the age-based groups 20-39, 40-59, and 60+ (actual ages 61-84).

Age	Male	Female	Total
Preteen	7	9	16
Teen	8	5	13
20s/30s	7	8	15
40s/50s	5	4	9
60s+	3	6	9

Table 1. Number of speakers by gender and age

3 Results and Observations

First, I present frequencies and probabilities of Intervocalic (d) at the intersection of the gender groups with the age groups (Table 1). Next, I present the results for Word Final (s) and Direct Quotation Strategies.

The degree of point difference between the Varbrul weights for the expression of the standard variant of Intervocalic (d) ([ð]) may be used as a basis for showing the amount of difference between female and male speakers across the age groups. We plot the difference between the Varbrul weights for males and females in each age group. For this data, a zig-zag pattern emerges (Figure 1). We find similar differences between genders across the life span for the other variables (Figure 1; see Cameron (2000) for the Varbrul weights). Note that the

40-59 and 60+ groups are collapsed in Direct Quotation Strategies because the oldest males did not provide any tokens of one of the variants.

Group		[ð]	[0]	N	Weight	Point Difference
Preteen Female	N	138	62	200	.46	20
	%	69	31			
Preteen Male	N	48	52	100	.26	
	%	48	52			
Teen Female	N	91	9	100	.79	51
	%	91	9			
Teen Male	N	100	100	200	.28	
	%	50	50			
20/30 Female	N	317	60	377	.67	22
	%	84	16			
20/30 Male	N	237	113	350	.45	
	%	68	32			
40/50 Female	N	145	55	200	.50	14
	%	72	28			
40/50 Male	N	149	101	250	.36	
	%	60	40			
60 + Female	N	252	48	300	.67	28
	%	84	16			
60 + Male	N	93	57	150	.39	
	%	62	38			
Total	N	1570	657	2227		
	%	70	30			
		Input Prob. .73			Log Likelihood: -1265.108	

Table 2. Intervocalic (d) by age and gender

The data in Table 2 and Figure 1 allow us to observe several points. First, females uniformly favor the spirantized variant [ð] across all age groups; males favor the null or deleted form. For both Word Final (s) and the Direct Quotation Strategies, males also showed a relative preference for the null variants in a consistent fashion across all age groups.

All three variables show a zig-zag pattern across the life span, with the greatest degree of difference between genders in the Teenage years. This is followed by a sharp decrease in the middle years. For Intervocalic (d), difference between genders is least for the 40-59 group; for the other variables, it is least in the 20-39 group. After this, the degree of difference between genders increases until it is more than or close in value to the degree of difference found in the Preteens (youngest group). This is true for all three variables. For Word Final (s), the degree of difference between female and male speakers in the oldest

group (54) is quite close to the degree of difference among the teenagers (57). Thus, despite slight pattern differences, for all three variables we find a similar waxing and waning pattern across the life span.
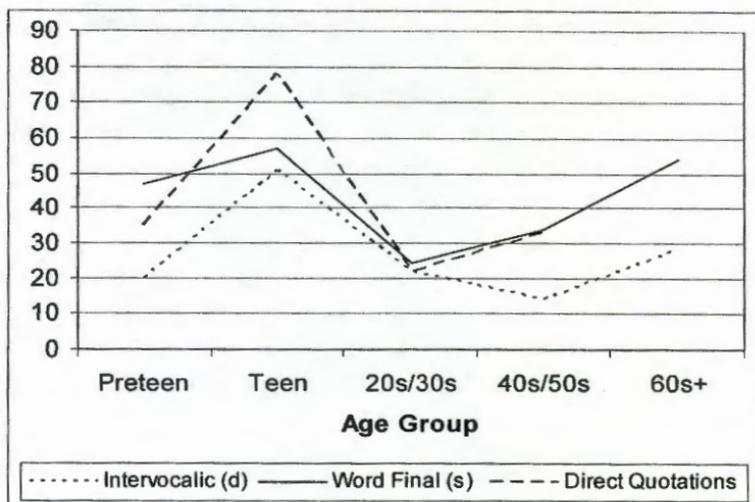

Figure 1. Difference between genders across the life span for Intervocalic (d), Word Final (s), and Direct Quotation Strategies.

4 Discussion

We now examine the extent to which the observed patterns support the four-pronged hypothesis presented in 1.

i. The degree of difference in frequency or probability values for sociolinguistic variables between genders will wax and wane across the life span.

✔ This proposition is supported by the zig-zag pattern of differences across the life span for each of the three variables.

ii. When sex segregation or separation is greatest, the degree of quantitative difference will be the greatest.

✔ This proposition is rejected for Preteens but accepted for Teens. Also note that the oldest group shows increased degree of difference relative to middle age groups.

iii. When sex segregation or separation is smallest, the degree of quantitative difference will be the smallest.

✔ This proposition is supported by the relative decrease in degree of difference between the genders in the middle age years.

iv. We should find the greatest degree of difference at stages in life where age segregation or separation is also strongly practiced or enforced because age and gender separation are linked.

✓ This proposition holds for some groups but not others, as in ii.

Thus, we find that the hypothesis is partially supported and partially rejected in the same way for each of the three variables represented.

At this point, we may ask additional interrelated questions which our explorations of the hypothesis and the data make possible. Attempts to answer 1, 2, 4, and 5 will direct future research. For question 3, we have a basis for answering the question now.

1. Why is the degree of difference between Preteen females and males smaller than among Teenage females and males, contrary to expectation?

2. Why is the degree of difference between females and males highest overall among the Teens? Additionally, why does the degree of difference between genders increase among the Teenagers relative to the Preteens?

3. Why does the degree of difference between genders increase in the oldest group relative to the middle age groups?

4. Do these zig-zag patterns show up in other variables of Puerto Rican Spanish and in variables from other languages and communities?

5. Would these zig-zag patterns show up in the same way in variables at different stages of change? For instance, how would the waxing and waning of gender differences pattern in variables that are New and Vigorous versus those which are Nearly Completed?

Returning to question 3, consider the original basis for the hypothesis and the hypothesis itself. During the middle years of the life span, females and males are, on average, actively working in the marketplace. Assuming that the work place causes less age segregation than that which occurs during the childhood years where schooling enforces age separation, we could expect less gender separation. As we saw, the data support this because the degree of difference is smallest between genders for all three variables during the middle adult years of the life span. This follows from proposition iii. During later life, when individuals do not, on average, actively work in the marketplace, they will not find themselves as frequently in the multi-age contexts of the marketplace. As noted at the outset, research indicates that friendships in later life, not work relationships, become sites of increased spoken interaction (Matthews 1986, Jerome and Wenger 1999). If there is a predominance of friendship interactions among those of similar ages, then we could expect gender separation. As such, quantitative differences would increase again relative to the middle adult years. This pattern follows from proposition ii. of the hypothesis. Thus, we may answer question 3 by saying that the degree of gender segregation and age segregation

among the oldest group increases relative to that experienced by the middle age groups. Therefore, female and male speakers in the oldest group of the life span will show an increased quantitative difference in the frequencies or weights which characterize their respective use of the three sociolinguistic variables.

Aside from the implications for variationist sociolinguistics, the hypothesis developed here clearly has implications for the dual culture model of gendered discourse styles (Maltz and Borker 1982, Tannen 1994). Yet, this model is much critiqued. Thorne (1993:89-109), in particular, has provided a nuanced, careful, and compelling critique of the dual culture model. At the end of her discussion of this issue, she advocates "examining gender in context rather than fixing binary abstractions like 'boys emphasize status and girls emphasize intimacy.' Instead, we should ask "which boys or girls, where, when, and under what circumstances." (108) I have attempted to respond to Thorne's arguments by intersecting gender and age with age differences providing a series of contexts across the life span. Thus, one answer to Thorne's question of "which boys or girls" is 'boys or girls at different moments of the life span'. This is not, I will guess, what ethnographers or social constructionists have in mind, but it does provide one basis for operationally defining context for research purposes.

In a similar vein, variationist approaches to gender identity have been criticized in social constructionist terms for disregarding the situated, socially constructed, and fluid nature of gender expression as well as for taking difference between male and female speakers as primary (Ehrlich 1997). However, by focusing on degrees of difference between males and females at different stages of life, we have revealed a striking, systematic zigzagging of degrees of gender differences across time. These zigzagging patterns indicate that gender expression is fluid not only within the situated, co-constructed, and bounded moments of talk-in-interaction but also across different life stages. Thus, our variationist approach takes on a social constructionist spirit. The result is the following claim: gender is not clearly isolable from other social categories but varies in content, manner, relevance, and degree of salience across categories of identity. In this case, those categories of identity are lived through and linked by aging within communities.

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