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GENDER AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

Implications for Second Language Acquisition

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This paper reviews current research on language and gender and discusses the implications of such work for gender-based research in second language acquisition. Recent work in sociolinguistics, generally, and language and gender research, more specifically, has rejected categorical and fixed notions of social identities in favor of more constructivist and dynamic ones. Thus, in this paper I elaborate a conception of gender that has not generally informed research in the field of second language acquisition, and point to more recent work in the field that theorizes and investigates gender as a construct shaped by historical, cultural, social, and interactional factors.

Recent work in sociolinguistics, generally, and language and gender research, more specifically, has rejected categorical and fixed notions of social identities in favor of more constructivist and dynamic ones. Cameron (1990a, p. 86), for example, makes the point (paraphrasing Harold Garfinkel) that "social actors are not sociolinguistic 'dopes,'" mindlessly and passively producing linguistic forms that are definitely determined by social class membership, ethnicity, gender, etc. Likewise, Schiffrin (1996) is critical of variationist studies within sociolinguistics, in particular, the practice of coding aspects of social identity as categorical and invariant across contexts.

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Schiffrin argues for a different view, one in which social identities are locally situated and constructed: "We may act more or less middle-class, more or less female, and so on, depending on what we are doing and with whom. This view forces us to attend to speech activities, and to the interactions in which they are situated" (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 199). With respect to gender identity, feminist sociolinguistics has generally rejected the idea that gender is a set of attributes residing permanently within an individual.[1] More recent conceptions of gender characterize it as something individuals *do* as opposed to something individuals *are* or *have* (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Cameron's (1995a) comments are illustrative:

> Whereas sociolinguistics would say that the way I use language reflects or marks my identity as a particular kind of social subject—I talk like a white middle-class woman because I am (already) a white middle-class woman—the critical account suggests language is one of the things that *constitutes* my identity as a particular kind of subject. Sociolinguistics says that how you act depends on who you are; critical theory says that who you are (and are taken to be) depends on how you act. [emphasis in original] (pp. 15–16)

An important corollary to the view that gender is something locally and interactionally constituted and negotiated is the idea that the construction of gender identities, identities that are not fixed and static, can vary across social, situational, and interactional contexts (see also Freeman & McElhinny, 1996). Goodwin (1990) in an ethnographic study of urban African-American children in Philadelphia argues that stereotypes about women's speech collapse when talk in a whole range of activities is examined:

> In order to construct social personae appropriate to the events of the moment, *the same individuals articulate talk and gender differently as they move from one activity to another.* The relevant unit for the analysis of cultural phenomena, including gender, is thus not the group as a whole, or the individual, but rather situated activities. [italics added] (p. 9)

In a similar way, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) recommend that the interaction between language and gender be examined in the everyday social practices of particular local communities (what they term communities of practice), because they claim (a) Gender is not always easily separated from other aspects of social identity and relations, (b) gender will not always have an invariant meaning across communities, and (c) the linguistic constitution of gender will also vary across communities. Indeed, the introduction to a recent anthology in the area of language and gender (Hall & Bucholtz, 1995) emphasizes the importance of investigating this relationship contextually, given the unstable and shifting nature of gender identities and linguistic practices:

> In recent years, several promising new frameworks for the analysis of language and gender have emerged in linguistics and related fields. These new approaches share a concern with the complexity of actually occurring interactions, and therefore favor ethnographic and discourse-based methodologies over the traditional linguistic methods of native-speaker intuitions and carefully controlled experi-

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> mental research. Such awareness of the importance of context in the analysis of social interaction has given rise to new ways of understanding gender as a factor in language use: recent theoretical work in language and gender emphasizes that social categories are negotiated rather than fixed, and that the process of negotiation occurs primarily through linguistic practices whose meanings themselves are shifting and variable. (pp. 8–9)

Whereas much language and gender research in the 1970s and 1980s took "difference" between men and women's linguistic behavior as axiomatic and as the starting point for empirical investigations, more recent scholarly work has questioned such assumptions on both empirical and political grounds. Many of the claims about gender-differentiated language that emerged from studies in the 70s and 80s (the most notable being that women's speech styles are cooperative, while men's are competitive) were overgeneralized to all women and men based on limited populations (white, North American, and middle-class) engaged in cross-sex conversations for which, as Freeman and McElhinny (1996) note, gender is probably maximally contrastive.[2] Indeed, Freed and Greenwood (1996) provide an important corrective to such studies. Their subjects, women and men involved in same-sex dyadic conversations with friends, displayed strikingly similar linguistic behavior—behavior typically associated with the so-called cooperative speech style of women. They conclude that it is the demands of a particular type of talk (i.e., friendly conversation with same-sex individuals), not gender, that is responsible for the emergence of a so-called cooperative speech style. What becomes clear from this study is the importance of considering communicative settings and tasks as possible determinants of linguistic behavior that has more typically, and perhaps too simplistically, been associated with gender. Thus, like other feminist scholars in the humanities and social sciences, language and gender researchers of late are challenging essentialist conceptions of women and men that have incorrectly universalized experiences and behavior of women and men that is more accurately described as contextually, historically, or culturally specific.

Other researchers have questioned the political utility of research questions that presuppose a female–male dichotomy. Henley and Kramarae (1991) argue, for example, that focusing on differences rather than similarities between women and men functions to exaggerate and reinforce gender polarities and abstracts gender away from the specificities of its social context, that is, away from particular activities (Goodwin, 1990) and communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). Bing and Bergvall (1996) argue that a focus on difference only strengthens the salience of a polarity that ultimately does not serve women's interests:

> The problem with gender polarization is not that there are differences, but that these differences define mutually exclusive scripts for being female and male. Gender polarization makes it easier to limit opportunities and exclude girls and women from education, public office, and the military and easier to deny them legal protection and highly paid positions. (p. 16)

Here, Bergvall and Bing elucidate the antifeminist goals that may be unwittingly supported by research that presumes and then reaffirms that women are different from men.[3]

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Highly contextual investigations of the relationship between language and gender in which sex and gender dichotomies are not presupposed generate different kinds of research questions. Freeman and McElhinny (1996, p. 245), in a survey of language and gender research written explicitly for applied linguists and language teachers, favor questions that take Goodwin's notion of activity as the basic unit of analysis and then ask "when, whether and how men's and women's speech are similar and different" within such a unit. Furthermore, constructivist notions of social identities shift the questions "from understanding how sex or gender shapes language use to understanding how and when language use constructs gender difference as a social category."

Current trends in language and gender research pose a number of questions for the field of second language acquisition. Do recent theoretical insights emerging from language and gender research have consequences for the field of second language acquisition? To what extent does research that has investigated the relationship between gender and second language acquisition suffer from the kinds of theoretical and empirical problems alluded to above? Are new ways of investigating the relationship between gender and second language acquisition suggested by current trends and theoretical insights from language and gender research? Does the investigation of gender identities and gender relations that are highly attentive to the specificities of cultural, social, and interactional contexts yield any new insights about gender and second language acquisition? Does this body of research contribute to ongoing theorizing about the relationship between second language acquisition and social factors? Although I raise these questions, my goal in this paper is not to provide definitive answers. Rather, my aim is to elaborate a conception of gender that has not generally informed research in the field of second language acquisition and to point to more recent work in the field that theorizes and investigates gender as a construct shaped by historical, cultural, social, and interactional factors.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Myths of Female Superiority

Many early investigations of sex and gender and second language acquisition investigated the possible superiority of female learners. Burstall (1975), for example, reports that girls had significantly higher scores than boys on all tests measuring French achievement in her study of approximately 6,000 children studying French in British primary schools. Ekstrand (1980) reports on two large-scale studies in Sweden, one involving Swedish children learning English and the other involving immigrant children learning Swedish. Ekstrand's conclusions support proficiency differences in favor of girls due, according to Ekstrand, to differences in basic cognitive variables, in attention, in brain function, and in cultural differences. Boyle (1987), in his study of approximately 500 Chinese university students studying English in Hong Kong, found that females were superior in general language proficiency. As Ellis (1994) points out, however, support for female superiority in L2 proficiency is not uncontested; Boyle in the 1987 study found men to outperform

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women on listening vocabulary tests and Bacon (1992) found no differences between the listening comprehension of men and women.

Other studies have indicated that gender plays a role in the way that learners approach the task of second language acquisition, which in turn is hypothesized to relate to female superiority in classroom language learning. In a series of studies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989, 1990; Oxford, Nyikos, & Ehrman, 1988; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; summarized in Oxford, 1993; Oxford, 1994) Oxford and her colleagues investigated possible differences in the use of learning styles and language learning strategies by female and male learners. Oxford (1993) summarizes the results of gender-differentiated L2 learning strategy research:

> When L2 research has considered gender, it has usually . . . demonstrated gender differences in strategy frequency, with women consciously choosing to use particular sets of strategies more often than men. Women especially tended to use general study strategies, social strategies, affective strategies, and certain conversational or functional practice strategies more frequently than men across a number of studies, thus usually showing a greater range of frequently used strategy categories. (pp. 549–550)

Bacon and Finneman (1992) report a similar finding in their self-report study of more than 900 students of Spanish at two large institutions in the United States to the extent that women reported a higher level of strategy use and social interaction with Spanish. Although most of these studies did not determine the relationship between language learning outcomes and strategy use or reported strategy use, Oxford (1994, p. 146) connects the qualitative difference in strategy use by women and men to success in classroom performance: "It may be the qualitative differences in their strategy use that favor women and girls, who often show better classroom performance in a second or foreign language than males." Here, Oxford is drawing on research that has shown that appropriate learning strategy use is frequently related to better learning performance (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1991).

Hypotheses concerning female superiority in second language learning are generally derived from research in L1 acquisition (e.g., Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) that has established girls' superiority over boys. Larsen-Freeman and Long, in their 1991 textbook, report on "the generally accepted fact" in L1 acquisition that females display a rate advantage, at least in the beginning stages of first language acquisition, and they go on to report on two studies that show female superiority in some aspects of second language acquisition (i.e., Eisenstein, 1982; Farhady, 1982). Likewise, many of the studies described above are driven very explicitly by sex differences research. Boyle (1987, p. 274), for example, talks about "the weight of evidence in favor of female superiority over males in verbal ability," evidence that is too powerful to be explained by social factors alone. Ekstrand (1980), although much more cautious about the findings of female superiority in first language acquisition studies, still frames his research question in terms of possible sex differences in second language acquisition. And Bacon and Finnemann (1992, p. 472) begin their literature review with the following comments: "Psychologists, who have long been interested

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in the relationship of sex to behavior and cognition, have found significant sex-related differences in social behavior, cognitive activity, and general verbal ability." Not only do these remarks display some confusion about the usual distinction made between sex and gender (i.e., that sex refers to biological categories and gender to social categories), more importantly, they are emblematic, I would argue, of the biological and dualistic conceptions of gender that underlie much work in second language acquisition. Such characterizations of gender, as argued earlier, exaggerate and overgeneralize differences between women and men in addition to ignoring the social, cultural, and situational forces that shape gender categories and gender relations.

Given the widespread influence of sex differences research (particularly research concerning sex differences in verbal ability) on the kinds of research questions asked by those interested in gender and second language acquisition, I would suggest that this research paradigm warrants some discussion. Crawford (1995), in a general critique of psychological research on sex differences, questions the political neutrality and objectivity of scientific inquiry devoted to the "uncovering" of sex differences, arguing that the epistemological stances driving questions about "difference" are inevitably embedded in a system of unequal power relations between men and women. Her comments about the interpretation of one such difference are instructive:

> Even if we accept the search for sex differences as a valid question, and the differences obtained in research as veridical, the 'truth' about their meaning is elusive, and ideologically influenced. Consider one highly publicized sex difference: mathematics performance on standardized test. Janet Hyde and her colleagues (Hyde et al., 1990) have provided a compelling example of how the meaning of this difference is distorted as a result of treating it as absolute and interpreting it outside its social context. On average, white males do slightly better than white females on standardized mathematics ability tests. However, among African–Americans and Asian–Americans, the sex difference is smaller. Age is an important variable, too: girls outperform boys until adolescence. When odd samples (such as specially selected mathematically precocious adolescents) are removed from the overall calculations, the difference shifts in the other direction—girls slightly outperform boys. Like other sex differences, the similarity is much greater than the difference, and the difference itself may be an artifact of sampling. (pp. 4–5)

With respect to sex differences in verbal ability, it seems to be a generally accepted fact (perhaps like the generally accepted fact described above that males are superior in mathematical ability) in studies of second language acquisition that females enjoy an advantage in L1 acquisition, at least in the early stages. Although Maccoby and Jacklin's *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (1974) is the text most often cited in connection with the claims about female superiority in L1 acquisition, it is interesting to note that other researchers have interpreted this text somewhat differently, that is, as wary of the sex differences literature: "They [Maccoby and Jacklin] . . . warned against uncritical biologizing, noting that there are many possible mechanisms through which female–male differences could come into being. Finally they pointed

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out that beliefs about sex differences far outstripped reality" (Marecek, 1995, p. 105). In addition, other more recent studies of sex differences in verbal ability have contested claims about female superiority. Macaulay (1978, p. 361) finds that the evidence of sex differences in first language development is too "tenuous and self-contradictory to justify any claims that one sex is superior to the other." Furthermore, Hyde and Linn (1988), in a meta-analysis of 165 studies involving 1,418,899 subjects, conclude that there is strong evidence to support *no* difference in verbal ability between males and females. To reiterate Crawford's comments above, even if female superiority in verbal ability is a "true" finding of research, like other sex differences, "the similarity is much greater than the difference, and the difference itself may be an artifact of sampling" (Crawford, 1995, pp. 4–5).

My point here is not to deny the possibility of women's (or men's) greater success in second language acquisition within particular contexts within particular speech communities. Rather, my aim is to challenge claims about sex differences in verbal ability that have provided the impetus for certain kinds of research questions in second language acquisition, that is, overly general questions about women and men, girls and boys that ignore the social, cultural, and situational contexts in which second languages are acquired. Indeed, even when second language researchers have discussed aspects of acquisition that are clearly related to the specificities of certain learning environments or particular social and cultural contexts, dualistic and dichotomous conceptions of gender often emerge. For example, in a recent review of gender differences in second and foreign language learning styles and strategies, Oxford (1994, p. 141) acknowledges a sociocultural basis to the differences she identifies: "These differences may, at least in part, be innate—and thus in fact sex differences—but most are likely to be *socioculturally* developed" [emphasis added]. However, while invoking sociocultural explanations for gender differences, Oxford, at the same time, appears to view gender-differentiated learning styles and strategies as fixed, unchanging, and immutable, for example, in her comments that global learning styles may be characteristic of females and analytic styles characteristic of males. It strikes me that making generalizations about the relationship between gender and learning styles and strategies is particularly problematic in the context of second and foreign language learning, given that learners typically come from a large number of *different* racial, ethnic, and social and cultural groups for which the interaction between learning styles (said by Oxford to be "socioculturally developed") and gender is likely to vary widely.

Ellis (1994), in his attempt to provide social explanations for why females have been shown in a number of studies either to have more positive attitudes toward learning a second language (Burstall, 1975; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Spolsky, 1989) or to outperform males (see the studies cited above), also resorts to generalizations about gender that remove it from particular social, cultural, and situational contexts. Drawing on North American work by Maltz and Borker (1982) that suggests men and women learn different communicative styles (competitive vs. cooperative, respectively) based on the segregated same-sex peer groups they play in as children, Ellis (1994, p. 204) speculates that "the female 'culture' seems to lend itself more readily to dealing with the inherent threat imposed to identity by L2 learning."

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Maltz and Borker's work has been critiqued by Thorne (1990), among others, for overemphasizing the role of same-sex peer groups in the development of gendered identities; Thome argues that the situations in which boys and girls are together may be as socially significant as those in which they are apart. Additionally, Goodwin (1990) has argued, based on her ethnographic study of African–American children, that in certain activities girls adopted hierarchical speech styles similar to those adopted in the all-boy groups. Of particular relevance here is the fact that, in the absence of cultural, social, and situational contextualization, claims about women's cooperative speech styles are overly general and subject to qualification in the same way that claims about women's more positive attitudes to L2 learning and superior ability are. By contrast, Ellis's (1994) final comments about gender link L2 learning to the activities in which women and men are engaged in a specific speech community:

> It will not always be the case . . . that females outperform males. Asian men in Britain generally attain higher levels of proficiency in L2 English than do Asian women for the simple reason that their jobs bring them into contact with the majority English-speaking group, while women are often 'enclosed' in their home. (p. 204)

It seems to me that Ellis points to a more fruitful direction for investigations of gender and L2 learning—one that acknowledges the complexity of gender as a social construct and the variation that gender categories and gender relations can exhibit across speech communities and social contexts.

GENDER AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

According to Ochs (1992), one of the major advances in language and gender research has been the adoption of perspectives that are functional and strategic rather than formal. Such approaches focus first on the types of social activities and practices that enter into the construction and constitution of gender within a particular community and then isolate the linguistic structures that are used in the accomplishment of these activities and practices. Under this account, language *indirectly* indexes gender, that is, this relationship is mediated by the social activities and practices symbolically and practically associated with women and men in a particular community (see also Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992).[4] In her discussion of the experimental setting (i.e., same-sex friends in casual conversation, Freed & Greenwood, 1996) that produced similar linguistic behavior (i.e., a cooperative speech style) in both female and male subjects, Freed (1996) provides a more concrete description of the way in which gender is indirectly linked to language through social practices or activities (see also Cameron, 1996):

> First, participating in the same practice produced in the women and men the same kind of talk; second, outside of the experimental setting, it is possible that women and men would be less likely to find themselves in such similar settings, given the sex- and gender-differentiated society in which we live. . . . Thus language and gender studies conducted in natural settings may often find differences

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> not similarities in women's and men's speech simply because women and men are frequently engaged in different activities (see M. Goodwin 1990) and not because of any differences in women and men themselves. Since it is increasingly clear that speech patterns are products of the activities that people are engaged in and not inherent to the participants, we can conclude that communicative styles . . . are customs related to actions, activities and behaviors differentially encouraged for women and men. (p. 67)

In this light, McElhinny's (1995) study of the interactional styles of male and female police officers in Pittsburgh is particularly relevant. In moving into a traditionally masculine workplace, female police officers did not adopt an empathetic and warm interactional style associated with many traditionally female workplaces nor did they adopt what McElhinny calls a "working-class" masculine style, a style involving displays of anger and the implicit threat of physical force. Rather, in her analysis of police officers responding to domestic violence calls, McElhinny argues that female police officers, like younger male police officers, adopt what she calls a "bureaucratic" interactional style, one associated with "middle-class" masculinity. That is, the younger, college-educated male police officers and the female police officers, engaged in the same workplace practices, adopted similar interactional styles. We see here the way that activities and practices can mediate between gender and language: Both men and women involved in a traditionally masculine workplace produced language associated with a "middle-class" masculinity.[5]

The notion of "gender as social practice" has informed much recent work on language variation and change in terms of the types of explanations offered for women's greater use of standard or nonstandard linguistic features in particular speech communities. Increasingly, explanations have referred to variables that intervene between gender and linguistics practices. In a now classic study of the influence of local labor practices on women's and men's linguistic choices, Nichols (1983) found that different groups of women behaved differently with respect to the shift from a low-prestige linguistic variety (Gullah) to standard English in South Carolina depending on their relation to the local labor market. Older mainland women were the heaviest users of Gullah, whereas younger mainland women were leading in the shift toward standard English. Because older mainland women, like their male contemporaries, were restricted to workplaces where they were generally not exposed to standard English, they maintained their use of the low-prestige Gullah. On the other hand, younger mainland women had access to new employment opportunities in white-collar sectors of the labor market where they were required to use standard English. Their relation to the labor market, then, provided them with the opportunity and incentive to use standard English. Notice that Nichols' explanation invokes the crucial variable of social practice, in this case, workplace practice: It is the contact that speakers have with a particular language variety due to economic conditions and workplace practices that ultimately determines their linguistic practices.[6] (These linguistic practices may, in turn, have some "gendered" meanings attached to them, although this was not the particular focus of Nichols' research.) Because the particular social practices involved in the construction and constitution of "gendered" identities and relations will vary across communities and cultures, it

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is important, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) maintain, to "think practically and look locally" when considering the relationship between language and gender. As the following section demonstrates, research in second language acquisition is beginning to take up this challenge.

RECENT ADVANCES: SOCIAL PRACTICE, GENDER, AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Bilingual and Multilingual Settings[7]

This section describes the findings of a number of ethnographic studies that have sought to understand gender-differentiated language use and acquisition in bilingual and multilingual settings.[8] Most of the contexts discussed involve the politically dominant language of a former colonial power in relation to a less prestigious indigenous language (e.g., Spanish in relation to Quechua in Peru) or a politically dominant language in relation to a less prestigious language spoken by a minority group within a given country (e.g., English in relation to Spanish in the United States). I have attempted to categorize these studies according to differences in community social practices and values that seem to have consequences for gender-differentiated language use and acquisition.[9] That is, men and women may have differential exposure to, differential attitudes toward, and concomitantly differential motivation and incentives for learning or using the languages spoken in bilingual or multilingual communities, depending on the particular way that gender identities and gender relations are constituted in that community.

Restricted Exposure to Target Language. Hill (1987) investigates gender differences in the use of an indigenous language (Mexicano) and Spanish (a former colonial language) in rural communities located in the central Mexican states of Puebla and Tlaxcala. These communities are characterized by increasing proletarianization, that is, "members are shifting from a base of subsistence agriculture and associated rural pursuits such as woodcutting, supplemented seasonally by migratory labor, to integration into a regional and national system of wage labor" (Hill, 1987, p. 123). Women are much less likely than men to participate in regular wage labor and, on this basis, one might speculate that women would be less proficient in Spanish than men. Indeed, members of the community believe just this: Women are said to "lag" linguistically, that is, they are believed to be more often monolingual in Mexicano, their Mexicano is believed to be less influenced by Spanish, and their Spanish is believed to be more influenced by Mexicano. However, Hill's findings regarding women's speech reveal a somewhat more complex picture. In some ways, women's speech is less Spanish than men's; for example, women's Spanish is "more likely to be conspicuously interlingual than the Spanish of men" and on many variables they exhibit "less hispanization of their Mexicano usage than do men" (Hill, 1987, p. 134). In other ways, by contrast, women seem to exhibit a high sensitivity to Spanish norms, for example, in their use of Spanish stress patterns on

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borrowed Spanish nouns in Mexicano. (Men are more likely to use Mexicano stress patterns on borrowed Spanish nouns.) Hill concludes with the following comments:

> Rather than think of the speech norms of women as marginal to a core of male norms, we might instead think of women's speech as highly constrained within a narrow range of possibilities, at the same time less Mexicano and less Spanish than male's speech, whereas men are able to use the full range of code variation. (p. 158)

That is, women's Spanish is generally poorer than men's because women do not have access to wage labor and the marketplace where Spanish is spoken. At the same time, women's Mexicano is in certain respects more Spanish than men's because women are excluded from certain male social practices, in particular, the discourse of solidarity embraced by the men. According to Hill, men resist their integration into mainstream Spanish culture by emphasizing their Mexicano identities linguistically. This fact explains women's greater use of Spanish stress patterns in Spanish nouns borrowed into Mexicano: The Mexicano stress pattern is a salient marker of an authentic and pure variety of Mexicano and thus a means by which men signal their solidarity with their indigenous culture.[10]

Like Hill (1987), Harvey (1994) investigates the gender-differentiated use of an indigenous language, Quechua (in Ocongate, a small Andean town in Southern Peru), relative to the former colonial language of Peru, Spanish. Whereas the majority of men (76%) are either fully bilingual or fluent in Spanish with heavy influences from Quechua, 46% of women are either monolingual Quechua speakers or have extremely limited Spanish. (This is only true of 10% of the men.) To a large extent, this asymmetry in the acquisition of Spanish can be explained in terms of differential exposure to the prestige language: Historically, women were less likely than men to be educated or to be involved in migrant labor. Harvey notes that in recent years more and more women are learning Spanish in recognition of the connection between bilingualism and positions of authority in the community. Women bilingual speakers, however, are much more reluctant than men to use Spanish. This is because of the quite severe social costs that accompany women's abdication of tradition: Women's use of Spanish is ridiculed and ostracized in the same way that women's abandoning of traditional dress is. Like Hill, Harvey describes the ambivalent relation that the community's men have to bilingualism given the loss of indigenous traditions that may go hand in hand with integration into mainstream Spanish culture. Cameron (1992) makes the following general remarks about bilingual situations analogous to those described by Hill and Harvey:

> Although matters are very complex, it seems men may feel threatened by women's becoming bilingual. Why should that be? One suggestion is that minority men are dealing with their own ambivalence about the loss of indigenous traditions. Assimilation brings certain economic rewards, but it also undermines the continuity of one's way of life and thus one's identity. In a male-dominated society, men can resolve this problem by taking the rewards of cultural change for themselves while requiring the community's women to be living symbols of tradition. (p. 202)

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For our purposes, what is important is the fact that restricted access to a target language may not be the only factor producing gender differentiation in acquisition outcomes. Because women in the Peruvian community of Ocongate become "living symbols of tradition," women's use of Spanish is restricted through social practices that demean and ridicule their abandoning of tradition, in particular, their abandoning of the traditional language, Quechua.[11]

Women as Cultural Brokers. Not all postcolonial or postimperial situations result in women's restricted access to, or use of, the colonial or imperial language. In some communities, women are expected to not only be the "guardians" of the traditional language and culture (Burton, 1994) but also to mediate between the dominant and minority cultures. Medicine (1987) coins the term "cultural broker" to characterize the role that women often assume in Native American communities. In describing the effects of white domination on the Lakota Sioux, Medicine (1987, p. 163) reports that it was typically the women who were "recruited to work in the houses of missionaries and of other agents of change" and as a result they became more proficient in English than men. At the same time, women were also expected to be the major socializers of children and taught them, according to Medicine, "that interaction in two different worlds required entirely different languages."

In her exploration of language and social identities among women in an East Harlem Puerto Rican community, Zentella (1987) comments on the conflicts experienced by Puerto Rican women in New York City who are expected both to preserve a Spanish-speaking tradition and to mediate between the dominant and minority cultures. This "cultural broker" role, not surprisingly, has linguistic consequences: Zentella (1987, p. 177) reports that her data and that of Poplack (1980) "showed that the most prolific intrasentential code-switchers were also the best speakers of English and Spanish, and that these were usually women." In addition, language questionnaire data showed that women displayed greater language loyalty to Spanish than men did.[12] Thus, we see that both Medicine and Zentella portray situations in which women are both the conservators of a traditional language and innovators in English, a role not unlike that assumed by men in the communities described by Hill (1987).

Women as Innovators in Social Change. Although a number of researchers have characterized women's role in bilingual communities as that of "guardians" of the traditional language and, by extension, ethnic identity, Gal (1978) describes a different kind of situation, one in which young women reject Hungarian, the language associated with their traditional culture. Gal focuses on the Hungarian–German bilingual community of Oberwart, Austria, exploring the effects of urbanization and industrialization on women's and men's choice of Hungarian versus German. Young peasant women are leading in the shift from Hungarian to German in this community, because, Gal argues, the peasant lifestyle associated with Hungarian is one they wish to reject. Although for men a peasant life offers self-employment, independence, and autonomy, for women it consists of strenuous and time-consuming manual labor. Thus, Gal explains young women's linguistic choices in

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terms of their desire to distance themselves from a life that is symbolically and practically associated with Hungarian. We see here that the motivation and incentives for learning a second language may differ for women and men, depending on the types of opportunities that a second language creates or makes available to them in particular communities. Notice that the women in Oberwart had access to Hungarian, but rather than assuming a "cultural broker" role, they strategically employed German in order to escape their social position as peasants.[13] As Gal (1978, p. 1) comments, "women's speech choices must be explained within the context of their social position, their strategic life choices and the symbolic values of the available linguistic alternatives."

Second Language Settings

Second language settings can also create gender-differentiated outcomes in second language acquisition either because the native culture or the target culture of learners creates different kinds of opportunities for or imposes different kinds of restrictions on women and men.

Restricted Exposure to Target Language. Goldstein (1995) demonstrates the way in which the linguistic choices of Portuguese immigrant women in Toronto are determined, to a large extent, by their identities as immigrant, working-class women. Within the Portuguese community to which these women belong, men have had greater access to English, either in Portugal as soldiers or in Canada in all-day English classes. Several of Goldstein's women interviewees reported that fathers and husbands prevented them from attending English classes in Toronto because of the presence of so many men in the classroom. Others reported feelings of fear at the prospect of attending classes at night. Not surprisingly, the immigrant women's lack of proficiency in English has had profound consequences for their work opportunities. The factory in which Goldstein conducted her research relied on Portuguese networks and churches in order to hire low-paid immigrant women who spoke little English. This tendency to hire Portuguese family and friends resulted in workplace practices in which Portuguese figured prominently. Indeed, Goldstein reports that the use of English on the assembly line was associated with significant economic and social costs, because Portuguese was used to signal friendship and solidarity on a production line in which cooperation among workers was crucial to productivity. Thus, we see that women's "gendered" roles within the Portuguese community influenced their proficiency in English, thereby restricting their participation in the labor market. In turn, their workplace environments further discouraged the use and acquisition of English.

Cumming and Gill (1991) describe similar types of restrictions on the lives of Indo–Canadian women, in their study of the sociocultural factors facilitating and constraining 13 women's participation in a 6-month ESL literacy program in Vancouver, Canada. According to Cumming and Gill (1991, p. 245), traditional family roles had a significant impact on the women's decision to participate in ESL classes: "All of the women reported that their husbands and husbands' families had greater

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control over their personal lives than they had themselves, a conventional situation in the patriarchal society of the country of origin. Expectations of commitment to child care, extended families, and visiting relatives consumed most of the women's time, making studies for more than two afternoons per week all but impractical. Likewise, their husbands assumed responsibilities for most family financial tasks, major purchases, and institutional interactions, further restricting the extent and quality of interaction that the women had with the majority society." Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising, given the kinds of constraints on immigrant women's lives documented by Goldstein and Cumming and Gill, that census data in Canada have indicated for more than a decade that twice as many women as men speak neither of Canada's official languages (English or French) in spite of similar levels of linguistic proficiency among male and female adult immigrants upon arrival in Canada (reported in Cumming and Gill, 1991).

Sexual Harassment. Polanyi (1995) points to yet another way in which women's participation in the second language acquisition process can be shaped by the "gendered" social practices of a community or culture. From a study of journals kept by American university students in a study-abroad program in Russia, Polanyi uncovers the sexual harassment regularly experienced by American women in their interactions with Russian men. One woman described herself as falling silent when she realized her male companion was not listening to her expressions of resistance: "After a while, I just stopped talking, because I just couldn't make myself be understood, and I was feeling, you know, maybe it was my language, maybe I just didn't know the right words" (Polanyi, 1995, p. 281). Another woman describes her sexual harassment experience as degrading and humiliating. As Polanyi points out, target language interactions in which learners are reduced to silence or made to feel humiliated and degraded may "crucially affect the foreign language input which learners receive and the types of output they must learn to produce" (p. 288). In fact, Polanyi speculates that the sexual harassment experiences documented by these women may be responsible for the gender effect found by Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1995) in their long-term study of the predictors of language gain in the same Russian study-abroad programs. Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1995) found that:

> Women gain less than men in listening and speaking skills. Specifically women score lower than men do on the postprogram ETS Listening test. In addition, men are more likely to cross the crucial divide between intermediate + to advanced level than are women.[14] (pp. 55–56)

The problem, according to Polanyi, is that second language learning theory and pedagogy often assume an abstract, disembodied, nongendered learner. Although the women whose journals Polanyi collected "were learning how to get out of humiliating social encounters, how to interpret the intentions of even polite-seeming educated young men, how to get themselves home in one piece after an evening spent in fending off unwanted advances" (p. 281), the linguistic skills developed in

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response to these sexually harassing situations were not typically the focus of language proficiency tests. That is, a woman will be treated as a "gendered" individual in a language learning situation, but, as Polanyi claims, "proficiency examinations will test her listening and speaking as an ungendered person." Polanyi's work underscores the importance of considering the sexist and androcentric practices that may inform women's interactions in a target culture, which, in turn, may have implications for gender-differentiated second language acquisition outcomes. For example, the degradation and humiliation associated with sexual harassment may restrict women's movements in the target culture, making them less likely to be exposed to target language input, and may create in women negative attitudes toward the target language and culture. At the same time, restricted movement within a target culture may enhance the development of literacy skills within a second language. Kline (1993), in an ethnographic investigation of the social practice of literary students in a French study-abroad program, found that the women in the program read more and read a greater variety of texts than the men. Kline hypothesizes that women took refuge in books and reading because of the sexist and hostile attitudes they encountered in the broader French community: "Of the 19 women in the group, 9 were attacked by French men during the course of the year. Most were grabbed; one was raped" (p. 178). In keeping with Polanyi's study, Kline's work points to the potential gender bias of proficiency measures that focus exclusively on speaking and listening skills (as the Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg measure did). Within the context of the study-abroad programs described by Polanyi and Kline, such proficiency measures may miss important gains made by women in the areas of writing and reading. That is, the way that gendered identities get constructed in particular communities may have very concrete consequences for the kinds of second language proficiency developed by men and women.[15]

Discussion

If the relationship between language and gender is not a direct one (as argued above), but one mediated by the social activities and practices of particular speech communities, then investigations of gender and second language acquisition are most fruitfully carried out in relation to the "gendered" social practices of those communities. The studies cited have demonstrated the extent to which the following kinds of "gendered" social practices may be relevant to gender differentiation in the process of second language acquisition: differences in access to target languages (e.g., Hill, 1987; Harvey, 1994; Goldstein, 1995; Cumming and Gill, 1991; Medicine, 1987; Zentella, 1987); differences in the nature of interactions in the target language (e.g., Hill, 1987; Harvey, 1994; Polanyi, 1995; Kline, 1993); differences in the symbolic meanings attached to linguistic alternatives (Hill, 1987; Harvey, 1994); differences in expectations about women's and men's roles relative to the maintenance of linguistic traditions (Medicine, 1987; Zentella, 1987); and differences in opportunities created by the acquisition of a target language (Gal, 1978). Predictably, the various ways that gender gets constructed and constituted in terms of a community's social practices result in varying acquisition outcomes.[16] Hill and Harvey describe commu-

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nities in which women are less proficient than men in the dominant, postcolonial language of Spanish (in Hill's communities the women are also described as being more constrained in terms of code variation); Goldstein and Cumming and Gill describe immigrant populations in Canada where men are more proficient in the dominant language, English; Polanyi and Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg describe a Russian study-abroad context in which women were less proficient than men (at least in the skills tested by the proficiency measure); Medicine and Zentella describe communities where the women seem more often than men to be proficient bilinguals; and Gal describes a situation where young women are leading in a community's shift from Hungarian to German. What these studies demonstrate is the difficulty of drawing generalizations about the precise way that gender (more accurately, the social practices involved in the construction of gender in particular communities) will influence second language acquisition; in particular, these studies do not unequivocally support the finding of female superiority. Indeed, if any generalization emerges here, it is the persistence of social and cultural practices across various communities (within the native language or target language culture) that adversely affect women's access to interactions in a target language or the nature of such interactions.

To view women as merely and only victims of these types of social practices, however, would be inconsistent with the constructivist notion of gender put forth in this article. Such an account suggests that individuals construct or produce themselves as women or men by habitually engaging in social practices that are associated with culturally- and community-defined notions of masculinity and femininity. Thus, the possibility of participating in social practices that challenge or change normative constructions of gender is left open. Hill's (1987) final remarks regarding the Mexicano women of her study point to both the possibilities for, and the limitations of, women's resistance to the structural forces that shape and restrict, in this case, access to a dominant, second language:

> Women may find that the symbolic resources emanating from an urban elite are a good alternative to male usage patterns, offering benefits that may be more attractive to women, who are excluded from scarce resources in their own communities, than to men. . . . Since they appear to have less to lose than men by abandoning the norm of conformity to community values, *they may represent a potent source for change.* However, if the uncompensated labor of these women is a pivotal component of the regional system of industrial wage labor, it seems unlikely that the educational opportunities and other support that would enable the women of the Malinche Volcano to fulfill their potential for change will be made available to them. [italics added] (p. 159)

As Hill points out, the structural barriers adversely affecting women's access to, or interactions in, a target language may not always be immune to resistance and change. Recall the young peasant women that Gal (1978) describes, who actively reconstructed themselves as German speakers as a way of rejecting the norms of femininity associated with Hungarian peasant life.[17] A similar kind of resistance has been described by Siegal (1994, 1996) in a second language acquisition context. In an ethnographic study of four white Western women in Japan, Siegal (1994, p. 648)

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found that her learners "created their own language system based on their perceptions of Japanese women's language and demeanor and their awareness of their position in Japanese society." That is, the learners' inadequate use of honorifics and sentence-final pragmatic particles associated with Japanese women's language is explained by Siegal in terms of their resistance to adopting what they perceive as an overly humble, overly silly Japanese feminine identity. Siegal's work portrays female second language learners as active agents who use the second language to resist a social positioning that is "foisted" upon them. In the same way that the Hungarian women of Oberwart made linguistic choices in order to resist their identities as peasant wives, so Siegal's learners used the interactional resources of Japanese to resist Japanese constructions of femininity. As Gal (1991, p. 197) has pointed out, "women's everyday talk . . . can be understood as strategic responses, often of resistance, to dominant, hegemonic, cultural forms." It thus becomes difficult to make a priori predictions about the uniform linguistic effects that structural barriers and sexist social practices of particular communities will have on women's acquisition of second languages.[18]

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Whereas the preceding review has focused on naturalistic aspects of second language acquisition, this section considers their implications for the classroom. Given the difficulty of drawing generalizations about the relationship between linguistic practices and gender within relatively homogeneous communities, let alone across heterogeneous communities, it is equally difficult to generalize about the linguistic behavior of men and women, boys and girls within heterogeneous second language classrooms where factors such as race, ethnicity, and culture are likely to interact in significant ways with gender. Studies of gender and classroom interactions over the last two decades in Britain and North America have consistently found that female students receive less teacher attention than males and that males participate more often than females in classroom discourse (see Sadker & Sadker, 1993; Swann, 1992). As Sunderland (1994a) points out, if the gender asymmetries evident in first language classrooms also appear in second or foreign language classrooms, then females are at a distinct disadvantage to the extent that their participation opportunities in the target language are fewer. The small number of studies focusing on the second or foreign language classroom have investigated NNS–NNS discourse and NS–NNS discourse, but only in pair- and group-work. Gass and Varonis (1986), in a study of interactions between male and female Japanese learners of English, found that men dominated the interactions in a way that allowed them to produce more comprehensible output (a term from Swain, 1985) whereas the women provided more conversational support work that potentially yielded a greater amount of comprehensible input. Holmes (1994) reports on similar behavior among ESL students in Australia and New Zealand:

> Fewer facilitative questions were directed to the women by the men than vice versa, and while the men had the benefit of attentive, responsive and encouraging listeners, the women received relatively little support for their contributions, and were given less encouragement to continue when they did speak. (p. 161)

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By contrast, Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci, and Newman (1991) found that learner gender played a minimal role in predicting features of negotiated interaction in NS–NNS interactions whereas NS gender did (although the NS results were not always statistically significant) to the extent that NS females were more consistent than the NS males in promoting meaning negotiations. In concluding, Pica et al. (1991, p. 368) note the difficulty of determining the extent to which gender, culture, and ethnicity are interrelated variables: "This dilemma points to the need for further research on interaction between NSs and NNSs across a variety of cultures before any generalizations about NNS gender can be made." Even if such generalizations were forthcoming (and this possibility seems somewhat remote given the socially constructed nature of gender), it would be important to assess (following Gass & Varonis, 1986) what aspects of second language development are promoted and diminished by different interactional styles.

Perhaps more useful than questions about the potentially unitary linguistic behavior of a heterogeneous group of males or females in a language classroom are questions that consider the differential treatment that males and females might experience from teachers in language classrooms, which, in turn, may shape the nature of their participation opportunities in the target language. As Freed (1996) points out, the binary category of gender can be a powerful "lens" (Bem, 1993) by which we organize our world. Thus, in spite of great heterogeneity among women and among men, such a lens may *impose* gender upon individuals, reinforcing similarities where in fact differences exist. As stated above, the differential treatment of males and females in mixed-sex classrooms (in spite of possible heterogeneity among members of the two groups) has been a robust finding of first language classroom discourse. Limited results from second or foreign language classroom discourse reveal a somewhat different picture, however. Yepez (1994) evaluated the behavior of four ESL teachers, two males and two females, and found that all but one showed remarkable equality in terms of their orientation toward male and female students. Based on two ethnographic studies of second and foreign language classroom discourse in Britain (one involving only students' and teachers' perceptions of potential differential treatment), Sunderland (1995) suggests that differential treatment in language classrooms may favor girls rather than boys:

> It may be that mixed-sex language classrooms do have characteristic patterns of discourse and that girls speak more and receive more and better quality attention than in other classrooms. If so, other potentially gendered and gendering discoursal practices of these classrooms would bear further investigation. (p. 174)

Sunderland ascribes her results to the stereotypical expectations that teachers may have regarding female superiority in the language classroom. It would be a mistake to generalize Sunderland's and Yepez's somewhat different findings beyond their respective studies because of the small number of studies investigating these questions in the language classroom and because teacher's treatment of females versus males may be dramatically altered depending on the racial, ethnic, and cultural background of students in a heterogeneous language classroom. At the same time,

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research that considers the extent to which language classrooms are similar to other classrooms in terms of teachers' orientation to female and male students is well worthwhile, given the fact that schools and classrooms are not politically neutral institutions and often reinforce and construct the subordinate status of women (see also Freeman & McElhinny, 1996).[19]

Any examination of classroom processes must also consider the gendered social conditions of natural learning environments that can be powerful determinants of acquisition outcomes. In a now classic study of social distance (one that is not ostensibly related to gender), Schumann (1976) investigated the effects of instruction on the pidginized speech of Alberto.[20] He concludes "that instruction is evidently not powerful enough to overcome the pidginization engendered by social and psychological distance" (p. 404). One need not look as far afield as Alberto to document the limitations of classroom instruction in the face of powerful social factors. Harvey (1994), in her description of Quechua speakers in the Peruvian Andes, makes the point that young women who studied Spanish in school and consequently had a good passive understanding of the language rarely used it in conversation for fear of ridicule and ostracism from local men (see discussion earlier). Goldstein (1995) reports that the Portuguese immigrant women in her study saw their two hours of ESL instruction a week as an opportunity to socialize with their (primarily Portuguese) coworkers. Indeed, the fact that English was associated with economic and social costs rather than benefits for these women throws into question the utility of their classroom instruction, that is, classroom instruction that focused on developing English skills for the workplace.

In addition to considering the way that gender might shape participation opportunities within the second language classroom, it is also important to ask how classroom instruction might mitigate the powerful social factors that impede acquisition for women in certain communities. Cumming and Gill (1991) address one aspect of this question in their attempt to understand how language education might better serve a group of first-generation Indo–Canadian women who face significant barriers to formal language education. Their report focuses on the sociocultural factors that seemed to facilitate and constrain 13 women's participation in an ESL literacy program. In a similar way, Goldstein (1995) and Polanyi (1995) advocate the implementation of second language curricula that acknowledge the "gendered" nature of women's experiences, in particular, experiences of sexual discrimination and harassment that may restrict women's activities and interactions in the target culture. More generally, Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, p. 336) have critiqued what they call the "reductionist view of the social context of language" that informs most communicative approaches to language teaching. Such a view assumes a generic taxonomy of learners' needs and situations, without regard for the particularities of learners' social locations. As Polanyi (1995) so eloquently argues in the context of female learners' experiences of sexual harassment,

> educators and those charged with shaping foreign language policy and practice . . . must face up to our responsibilities to teach and to nourish not the faceless, disembodied abstract student, but the storyteller, a person always situated by race, social class, and physical disabilities as well as by gender. (p. 291)

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CONCLUSION

Following Cameron (1995a, 1995b, 1996) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) among others, I have argued that individuals construct themselves as "gendered" by habitually engaging in the social practices of a speech community that are symbolically and practically associated with masculinity or femininity or some mixture thereof. It is not gender per se, then, that interacts with linguistic practices, but rather the complex set of "gendered" social practices that individuals participate in. Given that gender is a social construction, I have also argued that investigations of gender-differentiated second language acquisition must consider the way in which gender is locally constructed and constituted in specific speech communities. And, as I have shown, the few studies that have been attentive to the specificities of social and situational context have revealed that generalizations about gender and second language acquisition (including the generalization about female superiority) are difficult to maintain. These studies have been suggestive, however, of (a) the different ways that gender can be constructed through a community's social activities and practices and (b) the different ways that such "gendered" social practices might be related to the process of second language acquisition.

What are the more general implications of such work for theories of second language acquisition? I would suggest, as others have (e.g., Peirce, 1995; Rampton, 1991; Tollefson, 1991), that theories of second language acquisition have often assumed an idealized, abstract learner devoid of social positioning and, thus, removed from the social environment in which learning takes place. The studies reviewed here, however, show that possibilities for comprehensible input, comprehensible output, and positive attitudes toward the target language and culture (factors that some researchers have deemed as necessary conditions for second language learning) are determined almost exclusively by the social context of the learning environment. As Peirce (1995, p. 12) points out, SLA theorists "have not questioned how relations of power in the social world affect social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers." Furthermore, the types of social identities or voices constructed by learners in a target language (and by extension, the types of linguistic and sociolinguistic codes that are adopted) will be the result of learners' own social positionings as well as their perceptions of social identities and social stratification in the target culture (Kramsch & von Hoene, 1995; Lantolf, 1993; Siegal, 1994, 1996).[21] Thus, in the same way that Polanyi argues that classroom practitioners need to view learners as individuals always situated "by race, social class, and physical disabilities as well as by gender," so Rampton (1991) is critical of much theorizing in the field of second language acquisition with its implicit claim that social factors are secondary. According to Rampton (1991), reference to the abstract learner

> bespeaks a deracinated, a cultural non-entity, it invites no cross-reference to the class, race, and gender stratification which might interact to produce the cultural significance of learner status, and it suggests nothing of the way in which language learning might reflect and feed into change in the social order. (p. 241)

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Although generalizations about the uniform effect of gender on the second language acquisition process are difficult to maintain, it is clear that the social practices and activities that often enter into the construction of gender within particular communities can have profound effects on acquisition outcomes. (Consider, for example, the statistic cited by Cumming and Gill [1991] that shows the immigrant male population to be acquiring the two majority languages in Canada with relative ease in sharp contrast to the female immigrant population). Because it is reasonable to assume that other kinds of social identities and positionings will have as equally dramatic effects on learning (and may interact with the construction of gender in speech communities), I would suggest that work in second language acquisition needs to be more attentive to the complex array of social practices involved in the construction of social identities across speech communities. That is, it is not just investigations of gender that require greater ethnographic and social contextualization, but rather investigations of second language acquisition more generally.

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NOTES

1. The distinction between sex and gender was originally an attempt by feminist researchers in the 1970s and 1980s to separate biological categories (sex) from social ones (gender). In more recent years, some feminist theorists (e.g., Bem, 1993, 1996; Butler, 1990) have argued that both sex and gender are socially constructed. Bem (1996) cites the work of developmental geneticist, Anne Fausto-Sterling, who argues that sex is a continuum that ought to be divided not into just two sexes, but into at least five. The fact that intersexed individuals are regularly assigned to the categories of male or female provides some evidence for the claim that sex, like gender, is socially constructed. See Bing and Bergvall (1996) for discussion.

2. There are at least two types of explanations offered for the linguistic differences between women and men documented in research of the 1970s and 1980s. The first type of explanation, characterized as the *dominance* approach (Cameron, 1990b), sees male dominance as operative in the everyday verbal interactions of women and men, thus giving rise to linguistic reflexes of subordination and dominance (see, for example, Fishman, 1983; West & Zimmerman, 1983). An earlier version of this approach can be found in Lakoff's (1975) *Language and Women's Place* in which Lakoff documents aspects of women's speech (although her examples were based on introspection) that she claims are manifestations of women's subordinate status. The second type of explanation, characterized as the *difference* approach (Cameron, 1990b), suggests that women and men learn different communicative styles based on the segregated same-sex peer groups they play in as children (see Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1990).

3. Cameron (1992, p. 40) comments on the paradox implicit in feminists' contribution to the discourse on gender differences, "which is that every word we say on the subject of difference just underlines the salience and the importance of a difference we are ultimately striving to end." She continues: "merely paying attention to sex difference—affirming that women exist and are different from men—is not in and of itself a feminist gesture. It can just as easily fall back into anti-feminism."

4. Ochs (1992) claims that a more direct indexical relationship between language and gender is exemplified by personal pronouns that index the gender of a speaker.

5. Linguistic practices are, of course, also involved in the construction of gender. To say that linguistic practices and gender are mediated by the crucial variable of social practice is to emphasize the social, dynamic, and performative nature of gender categories.

6. Eckert (1989) offers a somewhat different explanation for gender-differentiation found in variationist studies. In her discussion of Nichols' marketplace explanation, Eckert makes the following comments: "So whereas economic explanations focus on the marketplace, they attribute gender differences in language to social forces that could presumably continue to operate on the individual speaker regardless of his or her personal relation to the economy. Since actual power relations between men and women can be expected to lag behind (indeed perhaps be orthogonal to) changes in relative position in the marketplace, one can expect such a dynamic in language to outlive any number of economic changes" (Eckert, 1989, p. 255). Eckert

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argues that women are much more likely than men to use linguistic resources for symbolic purposes; for Eckert, however, this does not necessarily translate into women's greater use of prestige forms.

7. Here I am making a slightly different distinction from the one Ellis (1994) makes in his classification of the settings in which natural second language learning occurs. Ellis distinguishes between second language learning in majority language contexts and in official language contexts. Majority language contexts refer to situations in which the target language serves as the native language of the country; official language contexts refer to situations of decolonization where the target language is the postcolonial language and functions as the official or dominant language of the country. I have distinguished between second language acquisition in bilingual or multilingual settings and in second language settings. My first category includes postcolonial contexts but also includes situations in which stable and long-standing bilingual communities exist, even though the target language may be the native language of the country (e.g., bilingual communities among native American and native Canadian populations and the Spanish–English bilingual community in New York City). My second category includes situations for which the target language is the native language of the country and the learners do not live in stable, long-standing bilingual communities.

8. Schiffrin (1994, p. 137) defines the ethnography of communication as an approach that analyzes "patterns of communication as part of cultural knowledge and behavior: this entails a recognition of both the diversity of communicative possibilities and practices (i.e., cultural relativity) and the fact that such practices are an integrated part of what we know and do as members of a particular culture (i.e., a holistic view of human beliefs and actions)."

9. In my attempt to categorize these studies according to social practices that might be relevant to gender differentiation in second language acquisition, I may have glossed over significant differences among the speech communities.

10. See Chinchaladze and Dragadze (1994) for a description of two villages in rural Soviet Georgia before the breakup of the old Soviet system. Women have tended to be far less competent than men in Russian, the dominant language, because of men's wider travel and army service and women's role as the "guardians" of the minority language. However, unlike the situation Hill describes, Chinchaladze and Dragadze argue that within the context of Georgian nationalism women's relative lack of proficiency in Russian has not been regarded negatively because of the positive value placed on Georgian as the national language.

11. See Humphrey (1994), MacDonald (1994), and Spedding (1994) for further examples of symbolism associated with language choice in bilingual or multilingual settings.

12. See Gonzales Velasquez's (1995) similar description of the role of women in a Spanish–English bilingual community in New Mexico.

13. See Aikio (1992) for a similar description of the indigenous Sami people of northern Finland. Before World War II, Sami women, more than Sami men, resisted the shift to Finnish because, as Aikio argues, they saw their economic and social position as superior to that of Finnish women. Sami women's diminished economic and social power after World War II was accompanied by a greater acceptance of Finnish. See James (1996) for discussion.

14. Brecht et al. (1995, p. 56), in explaining their gender-effect, assert that "there are not real differences between men and women in language learning ability" and for this reason propose the following possible interpretations of their results: "gender bias in the testing instruments; a skew in the sample of men and women; and a difference in learning opportunities in-country." In order to investigate the third possibility, the researchers refer to a Ford Foundation–sponsored study of the ethnography of language learning in the study-abroad context.

15. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* for helping me to clarify this point and for alerting me to Kline (1993).

16. Admittedly, the acquisition outcomes of some of these studies are not completely clear; however, all of these studies are suggestive of the social practices involved in the construction of gender that might be relevant to the second language acquisition process.

17. James (1996, p. 104) proposes that working-class or peasant women will be motivated to move away from local linguistic norms (in the way that Gal's women have) "when a significant amount of social change is in progress, and when women believe there is a realistic chance that they will be able to better their lot in life by moving out of their own immediate community."

18. Although all of these studies consider particularities of women's and men's social practices and activities within their respective speech communities, most do not consider how women's and men's linguistic behavior might be similar or different according to situational or discourse context.

19. See articles in Sunderland's (1994b) collection that consider the question of sexist language and sexist materials in relation to second or foreign language learning.

20. I say that Schumann's notion of social distance is not *ostensibly* related to gender because one of my arguments in this paper is that gender *is* social practice. Thus, discussions of social distance are surely related to social practices that may constitute gender in certain speech communities.

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21. Siegal (1994), for example, suggests that a third (linguistic) gender is created by her white female learners of Japanese because of their feelings of otherness in Japan and their distaste for Japanese constructions of femininity as manifested in Japanese women's speech styles. Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, p. 330) advocate the development of a third space within the foreign language classroom "from which to live critically between cultures."

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