

Heritage language home and community: Gendered division of labor and language shift

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This presentation builds on scholarship correlating division of labor with language shift from the heritage language (HL) to English, in the American context. In an analysis of West Frisian, German, and Norwegian communities in the Upper Midwest, data suggest that women are more likely than men to be both monolingual and engaged in subsistence rather than wage labor. These data support Bousquette (2020, forthcoming) and Natvig (forthcoming), that specialization of labor correlates with language shift to English. Moreover, the higher rates of domestic, subsistence labor among women accounts for a gender gap regarding HL proficiency.

Working within the Verticalization model of language shift (Brown forthcoming, Salmons 2005a, b), previous research has shown that heritage communities that are more externally-oriented are more likely to shift to English than locally-oriented ones. Specialization of labor is inherently externally-oriented, and decreases the autonomy of the household while simultaneously incorporating worker-speakers into a larger and less dense social network, where HL language practices are less rigidly enforced. We adopt this position here, that increased specialization of labor hastens language shift towards English.

For this study, data on social demographics, employment, and self-reported language proficiency were gathered from US Census records from the early 20th century. Gender was reported on a binary scale, and language proficiency was recorded as either English or the HL (for those who could not speak English). Employment was categorized based on Højrup's (2002) Life Modes (LM) model, as follows:

- LM1 - subsistence/uncompensated/domestic labor, subsistence farming, etc.
- LM2 - wage labor, including both unskilled and skilled laborers, as well as managers, clerks, etc. working for a salary
- LM3 - employers, including mostly farmers who hire laborers to work their land.

Data were then collated based on gender, to identify correlations between labor and language proficiency among groups of men and women.

In a pilot study of Randolph, Wisconsin, the 1910 Census included 79 total monolingual speakers, including mostly West Frisian speakers, but also some Dutch, and German heritage speakers (table 1). These included 43 women and 36 men. Among the men, 19 were employed as wage earners (LM2), 5 were independent farmers (LM1), and 5 were employers (LM3). Among monolingual women, on the other hand, only 4 were wage earners (LM2), and 35 were listed as having no profession, which included 10 wives of monolingual farmers, 17 wives of English-proficient farmers, 7 live-in mothers and mother-in-laws, and one in-home servant (LM1). Though all were certainly productive (in the sense of being active), the focus on subsistence labor was clear in the designation, and was deliberately recorded by census enumerators as such (cf. *Instructions*; Wallerstein 2011: 24-25). Data from Ulen, Minnesota, show similar distributions of reported Norwegian monolingualism and Life Modes by gender (table 2).

These data suggest that women were comparatively less verticalized with respect to the division of labor, and exhibited higher rates of HL monolingualism. Men, however, were more integrated into specialized labor, showing comparatively lower raw numbers of monolingual speakers. More broadly, this study suggests that gender itself does not predict language maintenance/shift, but rather that measurable differences in social factors affecting men and women differently result in different rates of shift.

Table 1 - Division of Labor among Monolingual Heritage Speakers, Randolph, WI 1910

	Women	Men
LM1	35	5
LM2	4	19
LM3	0	5
other (e.g. school age children)	4	7
Total monolingual speakers	43	36

Table 2 - Division of Labor among Monolingual Heritage Speakers, Ulen, MN 1910

	Ulen Village (town center)		Ulen Township (outlying rural area)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
LM1	12	3	9	2
LM2	0	1	0	1
LM3	0	1	0	1
other	0	0	0	0
Total mono. speakers	12	5	9	4

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