

Heritage Language Home and Community: Gendered Division of Labor and Language Shift

Joshua Bousquette and David Natvig

1. Introduction

This article builds on previous scholarship correlating the division of labor with language shift from the heritage language (HL) to English, in the American context. In this analysis of West Frisian, German, and Norwegian communities in the Upper Midwest in the early 20th century, women are more likely than men to be both monolingual and engaged in subsistence rather than wage labor (see Gal 1978; Piller & Pavlenko 2007 for other treatments of gender and language shift). The present data suggest that women were comparatively less verticalized with respect to the division of labor, and exhibited higher rates of HL monolingualism. Men, however, engaged more in specialized labor, showing comparatively lower numbers of monolingual speakers. More broadly, gender, which is recorded on a binary male/female scale, itself likely does not predict language maintenance/shift. Rather, quantifiably disparate social factors affect men and women unequally, and result in different rates of shift from the HL to English. These data support Bousquette (forthcoming) and Natvig (forthcoming), finding that specialization of labor correlates with language shift and suggest that the higher rates of domestic, subsistence labor among women account for a gender gap regarding HL proficiency.

We focus our investigation on two HL-speaking communities in the American Upper Midwest: Ulen, MN, and Randolph, WI. Ulen was a Norwegian settlement, while Randolph (later Friesland) was primarily a West Frisian community. Both were established in the late 19th and early 20th century, both with primarily agrarian economies and emerging (sub)urban village districts (see Wilkerson & Salmons 2012 for an early treatment of urban/rural differences in HL maintenance and shift). This study offers a comparative, longitudinal analysis of two immigrant communities with similar settlement patterns, economies, and social structures and contributes to our understanding of changing social patterns' influences on language maintenance and shift.

2. Verticalization as a Model of Community Structure

We adopt the Verticalization model of language shift, in which the relative autonomy of local institutions determines whether a community maintains an HL or minority language, or shifts to majority language monolingualism (Salmons 2005a, b; Wilkerson & Salmons 2008, 2012; Frey 2013; Brown forthcoming, cf. Warren, 1963). Locally-oriented (horizontal) communities retain local agency, while externally-oriented (vertical) structures forfeit local control over local practice to external entities. Horizontal institutions include locally-controlled, individual parochial schools; or independent churches without hierarchical structures (such as conservative Anabaptist sects). Vertical institutions consist of, e.g., state-wide public-school systems, and regional religious organizations, etc. Data are drawn from

*Joshua Bousquette, University of Georgia; David Natvig, University of Oslo, Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan.

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social institutions at the macro level (Salmons 2005a, b; Brown, forthcoming). Within the Verticalization model, agency refers to decision-making power that affects the local community. It is therefore focused on the orientation and autonomy of institutions and systems, not on the agency of the individual. By focusing on macro-level units, the Verticalization model does not assume that individual agency is inherently absent. Individuals' agency is limited to the ability to make decisions locally – often within a political or social institution – that directly determines their social and cultural practice, education, and economic activity, etc. Accordingly, individual agency is dependent on autonomous, locally-oriented institutions in order to be actionable.

Applied to language use as a cultural practice, Verticalization holds that language use within a given social setting is influenced either locally or externally, depending on degree of verticalization at any given point. In the HL context, horizontal social structures afford local communities the agency and autonomy of decision-making necessary for individuals to use their heritage language in any and all social structures and linguistic domains. Vertical social structures outsource decision-making to community-external institutions that often lack socio-political motivations to maintain HLs. With such local control, HL communities can make political decisions to maintain their HL language in churches, schools, and to support HL social institutions and businesses, even if these decisions go against the real or perceived economic benefit to the community or the individual (cf. Frey 2013: 192-193ff.). Verticalized economic institutions will most often opt for the most efficient system involving use of a single, majority language in all domains, overwhelmingly trending towards adoption of the hegemonic linguistic variety (Bousquette, forthcoming; Lucht et al. 2011).

While the Verticalization model identifies the locus of decision-making in complex social systems, synchronically, sociologists and sociolinguists are also concerned with the dynamic nature of social structures over time. Diachronically, social institutions tend towards a uni-directional process where horizontal social structures and institutions are replaced by vertical, community-external ties, or 'Verticalization'. Institutions are oriented – and verticalize – largely independently of one another; the rate of change between and within communities may differ greatly (Bousquette 2020, Natvig forthcoming, Salmons 2005a, b). Crucial to our understanding of HL language use and shift is the fact that social structures like churches, schools, media, and other organizations are linguistic domains where either the HL or English is acquired and used. A social shift in any institution-domain from the HL to English is a reduction in opportunities for heritage speakers (HSs) to acquire and use their HL.

Within the American context, a broad-spectrum shift towards vertical structures in the first half of the 20th century – 'The Great Change' – comprised an "increasing orientation of community units toward extracommunity systems and corresponding decrease in community cohesion and autonomy" (Warren 1963: 54). Occurring at different rates, but across all American communities, this Great Change drove decision-making from local communities to external structures at a grand scale; communities could no longer determine local policies and practices independently. This change affected all communities, resulting in a radically more hierarchical, bureaucratic, impersonal, and inter-dependent American society. This shift was pervasive, and even concerted efforts to resist Verticalization were typically economically disadvantageous to individuals (Frey 2013, forthcoming), and have required HSs to establish local, cooperative economic enterprise to remain self-sufficient and economically viable (Johnson, forthcoming; Frey, forthcoming). The corresponding effect of Verticalization on HLs was drastic, and we observe language shift during this period across virtually all heritage and minority communities. In effect, this was a far-reaching social shift that initiated language shift in even distant, non-contiguous communities.

In Warren's (1963) framework, Verticalization involves multiple aspects as part of a complex process developing over time. This article focuses on one, division of labor, within HL communities, as the first aspect of verticalization. Since it is an early aspect of community shift, we argue that changes in the division of labor are both an early indicator of language shift-in-progress, and also a factor in hastening transition to HL-English bilingualism, and ultimately, English monolingualism.

In studying the effects on specialization of labor on language shift, it is crucial to note that profession does not directly affect language use in any meaningful way. Rather, the division of labor is applied here as a proxy for social network, a determining factor in cultural practices, including language use (Milroy & Milroy 1992). Smaller, more tightly-knit networks support the maintenance of cultural practices, as

(linguistic) norms are reinforced by multiplex social ties – the interaction with the same individuals in multiple domains. Larger, more open networks are characterized by simplex or categorical social interactions, which are restricted to single domains, and limited contexts, such as customer-client exchanges, or interactions with work colleagues with whom one does not otherwise engage socially. These relationships leave worker-speakers vulnerable to innovation in cultural practice because the lower intensity and larger number of social interactions limit the enforcement of norms, and because the larger number and frequency of simplex/categorical interactions provides opportunity for new practices and linguistic forms to enter into speakers' repertoires.

Following Bousquette (forthcoming), Frey (2013), Højrup (2003), and Natvig (forthcoming), we view social network as a function of the degree of specialization of labor. Empirically, speaker-workers are categorized into one of three Life Modes (LM): subsistence labor (LM1), wage labor (LM2), or employers (LM3). Increased specialization from LM1 through LM3 correlates with a larger and less cohesive social network, and a greater integration of that worker-speaker into an inter-dependent economy. Regarding language shift, a higher degree of specialization at both the individual and community level increases contact with the majority, hegemonic linguistic variety. Over time, a shifting dynamic towards increased specialization leads to a shift first to domain-specific HL-English bilingualism, and then ultimately to English monolingualism (cf. Bousquette 2020: 513-515).

We need to clarify two points on labor categorization. First, specialization of labor is the degree to which a worker is interdependent on other workers to perform their tasks. It is not a measure of other social valuations of labor related to the compensation or 'prestige' of a profession. Second, much of these data from the early 20th century show a clear gender bias. Wallerstein (2011: 23) notes that men and women have regularly done different (but equally valued) work throughout history, and the labeling of the male head of the household as the 'breadwinner' and the female adult as the 'housewife' is a recent devaluation of women's labor. In the dominant Capitalist system, labor that produces a surplus that can be accumulated (and appropriated) is valued. Subsistence labor – child-rearing, domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, and small-scale manufacture (e.g., candles, clothing), and agriculture for personal consumption – produces value for the household, which is not recognized within a Capitalist system. Accordingly, an adult male in a subsistence farming household is listed by profession (farmer), whereas an adult female is listed by social status (housewife). Working with these data and caveats, specialization of labor provides an abstraction of social network, not as a measure of work performed or its monetized value. By considering this bias, we seek to make the best of bad data by listing both the farmer and the housewife in a subsistence agriculture household as LM1, since their social networks – and their day-to-day tasks and economic productivity – would be generally consistent.

In sum, a social network defined by the specialization of labor should predict HL maintenance vis-a-vis shift. Less specialization would result in maintenance of the HL, or at least a slower rate of shift towards bilingualism and ultimately, to English, while a higher degree of specialization would result in a higher rate of shift towards English. We therefore expect – and indeed see – that HL monolinguals as a group engage less commonly in specialized labor than English-proficient members of the same HL community. We also expect that gendered differences in labor specialization – including those social factors that limited women to subsistence and less specialized professions – align with differences in rates of HL monolingualism.

3. Method

We examine here data from the 1910, 1920, and 1930 US Federal Censuses to determine any correlation between reported gender, reported language use, and estimated LM, in Ulen, MN and Randolph, WI. Language proficiency was determined by identifying HL monolinguals as distinct from those who were able to speak English (HL-English bilinguals and English monolinguals). Language proficiency was recorded differently in each year, due to different language-related Census questions. The 1910 data are clearest for our current purposes, "Whether able to speak English; or, if not, give language spoken", which identifies all self-reported HL monolinguals. In 1920, the enumerators asked two questions: "Mother Tongue", and "Whether able to speak English", which, in combination, allow us to derive monolinguals as those who have a mother tongue other than English and cannot speak

English. The 1930 data are less reliable, asking, “Language spoken in home before coming to the United States”; “Whether able to speak English”. While it identifies non-proficient English speakers, it overlooks HL monolinguals born in the US.

We categorized labor by LM, based on the degree of specialization. LM1 encompasses uncompensated labor, for us primarily subsistence farmers who did not employ additional laborers. Because the occupational records were biased towards labor performed outside the home, especially women and older adults were often listed as ‘housewife’, ‘none’, or simply not recorded. Children who performed domestic chores or worked on the home farm without compensation were similarly not listed as employed. However, these individuals were not necessarily unemployed or idle. Rather, they were uncompensated for the work that they did do. Therefore, women listed as ‘housewives’, the aged and retired (older members of the household not officially recognized by census enumerators as employed), and adults with no listed occupation were recorded as LM1. The manner of their economic production aligns with subsistence/uncompensated labor, and their social networks would be characterized by the same maximally local, multiplex relationships of, e.g., adult male subsistence farmers. LM2 included those listed as selling their labor (wage laborers) and LM3 were employers who hire workers – purchasing the labor of others – and were typically more established farmers with larger operations. Subsistence and employer farmers were distinguished from one another by additional census information listing them as working on their ‘own account’ (LM1, due to their independence from the wage-labor market) or as an employer (LM3). Determinations of farmers as LM3 were often reinforced by the presence of a boarder within the household – sometimes but not always a family relation – listed as a farm laborer (LM2).

In combination, these data points allowed HL monolinguals to be identified, and further categorized by gender and degree of social integration as a function of occupation. We then compare results between the communities of Ulen and Randolph, and between the verticalized village and more horizontal rural areas within each community, over time.

4. Results

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the distributions of HL monolinguals and LM categorization, with rates of HL-monolingualism, from 1910 to 1930 for Ulen and Randolph, respectively. For Ulen, monolingual women outnumber monolingual men in both the Village and Township in all three decades. Furthermore, all but one reported monolingual Norwegian-speaking woman is categorized under LM1. These are listed as having no occupation or as unpaid workers in a subsistence farming family. The one LM2 monolingual woman was a spinner living in the Township in 1920. Although fewer than women in total, the monolingual men also primarily clustered in LM1, with some exceptions: a janitor, farm laborer (LM2), grocery store owner, and farmer-employer (LM3) in 1910 and a laborer at a wood lot (LM2) in 1930. Finally, there was a marked uptick in monolingual women in Ulen Village from 1930, a total of 20 from 5 a decade prior. Ten of these individuals were reported as knowing English in 1920. It is unclear whether the number of monolingual women is overreported in 1930 or underreported in 1920. In either case, the number of monolingual Norwegian-speakers in Ulen Village and Township remained fairly consistent over these three decades. The majority of monolinguals belonged to LM1 (26/30 in 1910, 16/17 in 1920, and 29/30 in 1930 for Ulen Village and Township combined) and most of those individuals were women (21/26 in 1910, 10/16 in 1920, and 26/29 in 1930). The overall trend in Ulen, both for the Village and the Township, is that monolinguals are those who are the least integrated into the verticalized economic domains typified by the selling and purchasing of labor. They are instead primarily engaged in the subsistence labor representative of localized horizontal patterns, and here at least, partial insulation from verticalizing economic forces.

Table 1: Norwegian Monolinguals in Ulen Village and Township (1910–1930)

		1910		1920		1930	
		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Village	LM1	12	3	5	4	20	1
	LM2	0	1	0	0	0	0
	LM3	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Total	12	5	5	4	20	1
HL-Monolingualism		17/438 (3.9%)		9/590 (1.5%)		21/452 (4.6%)	
Township	LM1	9	2	5	2	6	2
	LM2	0	1	1	0	0	1
	LM3	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Total	9	4	6	2	6	3
HL-Monolingualism		13/392 (3.3%)		8/383 (2.1%)		9/362 (2.5%)	

Data are presented in table 2 on the gender and LM categorization of monolinguals in the primarily agrarian Randolph Township¹, and in the West Ward – a separate Census enumeration district² that was part of Randolph, but reflected high labor specialization. Generally, HL monolinguals pattern as expected, and similarly to Ulen. Consistent with the Verticalization model, HL monolinguals are only found in Randolph, not in the comparatively verticalized, almost suburban West Ward. Also consistent with the model is the fact that the majority of HL monolinguals are in LM1 and LM2. There is a clear positive relationship between the comparatively smaller and more dense social networks and the maintenance of HL proficiency and monolingualism. Very few HL monolinguals were identified in LM3, with those limited to farmer-employers; we assume that the medium of communication between employer and employee would have been the HL.

¹Randolph is Census enumeration district 0030 in 1910 and 1930, but 0024 in 1920.

²The West Ward is Census enumeration district 0014 in 1910, but 0031 in 1930. They appear to be the same location. The West Ward is not recorded as a separate part of Randolph in 1920.

Table 2: West Frisian & German Monolinguals in Randolph Township & West Ward (1910–1930)

		1910		1920		1930	
		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Randolph Center	LM1	35	5	14	2	26	4
	LM2	4	19	2	1	1	9
	LM3	0	5	0	1	0	(3)
	Other	4	7	1	1	131	147
	Total	43	36	17	5	158	163
HL-Monolingualism		79/1005 (7.9%)		22/1211 (1.8%)		321/1192 (26.9%)	
West Ward	LM1	0	0	–	–	0	0
	LM2	0	0	–	–	0	0
	LM3	0	0	–	–	0	0
	Total	0	0	–	–	0	0
	HL-Monolingualism		0%		0%		0%

Regarding gender, women are more numerous than men among HL monolinguals, across all three US Census years. They were also most commonly categorized as LM1. Monolingual men, on the other hand, were more often employed in wage labor than subsistence labor, and HL monolingual men were more numerous than HL monolingual women in LM2. These data suggest that men engaged in more verticalized labor practices than women did; the results of this verticalization are apparent over time. For example, in 1910, 19/36 (52.7%) of HL monolingual men were employed as wage laborers. Within 10 years, the number of self-reported HL monolingual men dropped by over 86%, from 36 to 5. Over the same period, however, 35/43 (81.4%) of HL monolingual women were designated as LM1; the number of HL monolingual women dropped by just over 60%. This comparison indicates that HL monolingual men are more specialized in their labor than women, and these men also transition to become English proficient more quickly. Conversely, women maintain a less specialized division of labor than men, and transition to become English proficient at a slower rate.

The category ‘other’ includes children under the age of 10 whose language proficiency was recorded on occasion in 1910 and 1920 in Randolph, but not in Ulen, contra the specified enumerator instructions. In 1920 this included an 11-year-old girl, a middle child in the family, and a similar German boy who was 8. In 1930, language proficiency was recorded for *all* children. These data from 1930 shed light on the actual patterns of language acquisition and use in the community, which would not have been possible, had the enumerator not inquired about the linguistic proficiency of children. In 1930, nearly 27% of the town is monolingual, but this is a dynamic situation. Most of them (278/321) are children under the age of 10, and the largest number of adult women monolinguals are retired, or farmer’s wives. The largest number of monolingual men are working-age farm hands. Monolingualism still appears to be a gendered pattern, restricted to LM1 and LM2, but based on the 1930 data, it seems that HL monolingualism occurs up until around age 9 or 10, with sequential HL-English bilingualism beginning with formal instruction in school, which yields high rates of bilingualism over the generations.

5. Discussion

This study finds evidence of a correlation between labor specialization and HL monolingualism in both Ulen, MN, and Randolph, WI. Following a higher degree of specialized labor, networks expand, leading to a greater opportunity and necessity to acquire and use English. We find this in: lower rates of HL monolingualism among more verticalized communities, like the Village of Ulen and the West Ward of Randolph; lower rates of HL monolingualism among more verticalized Life Modes, LM2 and LM3 as compared to LM1; and lower rates of HL monolingualism among men than among women. This suggests that gender is a factor in exposure to and acquisition of English. Of course, gender itself is not directly causative; perhaps the contemporary traditional gender roles in the period 1910-1930 limited women in their access to education and specialized job training, resulting in women having different social networks, compared to more outward-facing orientations for men, contributing to a slower transition to English proficiency. That is, men integrating into wage-labor economies are a driving factor of language shift. Future work will compare social HL-monolinguals' and English-speakers' networks within the community.

In addition to data on the division of labor, reported language proficiency among children in 1930 Randolph provides information about domain-specific use of the HL in the home. Records consistently report in 1930 – and sporadically in 1910 and 1920 – numerous households with English-proficient parents, but HL monolingual children. This indicates that the home was overwhelmingly a domain of HL acquisition and use, as English-proficient parents opted to speak their HL with each other, and with their children as late as 1930. Extrapolating the 1930 data, we deduce two additional points. First, HL proficiency is severely under-represented in the census from 1910 to 1930 and HL-English bilingualism rates must have also been high. If there are over 300 monolingual children in Randolph, WI, in 1930, then they certainly have HL proficient adults to learn the language from, and HL-English bilingualism must have been the norm. Second, we might assume that HL monolingualism was also under-reported in 1910 and 1920, since those adults raising HL monolingual children in 1930 were themselves likely HL monolingual children in 1910 and 1920, becoming sequential bilinguals by adulthood. Similar over-reporting of English proficiency in Ulen, in 1920 (or under-reporting of English proficiency in 1930), also suggest that HL proficiency was likely much higher than self-reported data directly indicate (cf. Wilkerson & Salmons 2008, 2012; Bousquette & Ehresmann 2010; Olsen 2016 for deriving HL proficiency within a household).

These data from Randolph, WI, suggest that the HL was a domain-specific language, acquired and used in the home. This was also the most stable domain in Ulen, where records of institutional language use are unclear (Natvig, forthcoming). This point is supported by the high rates of HL monolingualism among children in Randolph (especially in 1930), and also among subsistence laborers in both communities (from 1910 through 1930), that is, the subsistence farmers, housewives, and retired and aged members of the household whose locus of production and socialization were both the home.

When considering the broader implications of this study, these data show a positive correlation between the division of labor as a social factor, and HL proficiency. The use of Life Modes as a proxy for social network builds on previous work such as Bousquette (forthcoming), Frey (2013) and Natvig (forthcoming), in identifying and testing social factors that affect which language a HS uses, and with whom. Going beyond those works, we also identify gender as a factor in language shift, as gender-based differences in professions and professional opportunities result in higher rates of subsistence/uncompensated labor among women, yielding consistently smaller, denser social networks for women than for men. Within the literature on the Verticalization model of language shift, this work furthers our understanding of the early stages of language shift, and of Warren's (1963) Great Change (cf. Salmons 2005a, b; Brown forthcoming); it also contributes more broadly to a growing body of literature developing the Verticalization model, through the identification of social factors that drive language shift.

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