Language in Society 26, 47–63. Printed in the United States of America

Sex, speech, and stereotypes: Why women use prestige speech forms more than men

ELIZABETH GORDON

Department of Linguistics
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand
e.gordon@ling.canterbury.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

It is widely reported that women use more prestige speech forms than men, and style-shift more dramatically than men. This article puts forward the view that this behavior of women is not a matter of self-promotion, but of avoidance. Evidence from a survey of New Zealand middle-class speakers shows that their stereotype of a lower-class female speaker includes potential sexual immorality. Because of society's double standard regarding men's and women's sexual behavior, the stereotype affects women more than men, and could be an explanation for middle-class women's use of prestige forms as a way of avoiding association with the lower-class stereotype. (Women's speech, social class, speech varieties, sex and language, stereotypes, New Zealand)*

It has been widely reported that, in societies where social stratification is reflected in speech, women – especially middle-class women – tend to use more of the standard or prestige variants than men. Research in different types of communities, using differing methodologies, has revealed this as a common pattern; it has been shown that, in formal situations, women style-shift more dramatically than men.

There have been a number of attempts to suggest reasons for this difference (Trudgill 1983, Cameron & Coates 1989, Chambers 1992.) Some of these explanations relate this behavior of women to the fact that women have less power and social status than men, and that women seem more conscious of their social status than men. Gal 1978 finds that, in one German-Hungarian community in Austria, a shift toward German (the prestige language) is strongly linked with increasing modernization; women are at the forefront of the move because they are conscious that they stand to gain economically from the change, moreso than the men. Trudgill 1972, 1974 refers to women's greater consciousness of social status to account for the results of his sociolinguistic study of Norwich speakers, and suggests that women are very sensitive to linguistic norms because of their insecure social position.

The traditional forms of female labor, such as housework and bringing up children, lack status and prestige; hence women try to compensate for this in other ways, one of which is the use of more prestigious speech patterns. By contrast, men are able to use non-standard variants with impunity because these possess the covert prestige associated with masculinity, with being "mates," and with the working-class culture in general. Although Trudgill has since modified his position (1983), accepting the possibility of other explanations, his interpretation is still widely discussed.

In this article, I offer a different explanation: I suggest that the linguistic behavior associated with women is not so much a matter of self-promotion as a matter of avoidance. Existing explanations overlook one important point: the way the middle class perceive the lower class, and the high cost to middle-class women of appearing to be lower class. I will argue that women act in certain ways not because they want to appear "better" than they really are, but because they want to avoid the negative stereotype attached to the lower class, and the moral judgments that people make about members of that class on the basis of their speech and other class-related factors. One thing which has been overlooked in discussions so far is the matter of attitudes toward sexual behavior. The belief that certain activities or modes of appearance can also be indicators of possible sexual promiscuity underlies many of the unwritten rules for middle-class female behavior. I am aware of my instructions to my own three daughters to avoid certain types of behavior or dress which might send unintended messages of sexual invitation (instructions that I do not give my son). The question addressed in this article is the extent to which these attitudes could influence the way women speak.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

There is plenty of evidence that moral judgments are made about people on the basis of their speech. Research into attitudes expressed toward early manifestations of the New Zealand accent shows no shortage of comment about lazy speech, degenerate vowel sounds, and disgraceful diphthongs. Lower-class children were described as being badly influenced by the "home and the street"; they were described as lazy, rude, vicious, and unwilling to open their lips or move their tongues properly when they spoke (Gordon 1983, Gordon & Deverson 1989, Gordon & Abell 1990). In the 19th century, there is ample written evidence in novels, articles, tracts, social surveys etc. that the lower classes were seen as basically immoral. Evidence exists for this view in both British and Australian writings, and no doubt in other places as well. In Britain it can be seen clearly in the accounts of the London poor written in 1859 by the journalist Henry Mayhew, who said that street urchins were known for their "licentiousness and unnatural precocity." Costermongers were "free and easy in their relationships"; their children's most remarkable trait was

their "extraordinary licentiousness, an extreme animal fondness for the opposite sex, and a precocity so marked as to suggest that the age of puberty generally assigned to the human species might well have to be revised." (Mayhew 1861:24, 477, 417).

Sexual immorality was the factor which distinguished the respectable from the non-respectable working class (Finch 1993) - what George Bernard Shaw in his play *Pygmalion* (1913) described as the deserving and the undeserving poor. Nineteenth century social surveys used morality as their main criterion for making this distinction: "The alcohol test was not 'did they drink' but in the case of men, 'was their drinking the type which affected their ability to reason?' and in the case of women 'did they drink enough to affect their sexual behavior?' " (Finch 1993:12).

Throughout the literature, the view is expressed that the accepted standards of sexual normality were those of the middle-class family. Although some, like Mayhew, saw a connection between immorality and social environment, many more saw the immoral state of the urban poor as the product of their own animal nature. This is how Barret-Ducrocq (1991:37) describes it: "The return to a beastly, brute state, to animality in the lowest sense, as remote from humanity as it is possible to be ... [this] was what marked the sexuality of the labouring classes, and lay behind the behavior so loudly deplored by the social explorers."

20TH CENTURY EVIDENCE

There is much evidence in New Zealand that moral judgments are still being made about lower-class people on the basis of their speech. Comments about lazy speech and disreputable vowels continue to appear in New Zealand newspapers (Gordon & Deverson 1989). In Bayard's study of attitudes toward speech varieties in New Zealand, a female speaker with a broad New Zealand accent was judged to be lower class, with comments made such as "glue sniffer, unemployed, on the dole." (1991:17).

The question I am asking here is whether, in addition to these attitudes, the 19th century stereotype of the promiscuous and sexually immoral lower class is also with us today, and if this influences speech behavior. The possibility that this might be the case was drawn to my attention when I was talking to a group of seventh-form school students (aged 17–18) about varieties of New Zealand speech. I played recordings of different anonymous speakers, male and female, of different ages and socio-economic class, and asked the students to describe the speakers from vocal cues alone. A recording of a middle-aged working-class woman brought the response, from some of the boys in the class, that she was a *slut* and a *slag*.[1]

Moral judgments were also made of a middle-aged upper-middle-class speaker who was described as proud and snobbish, but no reference was

made to her sexual behavior. This suggested that, for these students, the 19th century stereotype of the promiscuous and immoral lower classes is still alive. If so, then women will be affected by it more than men – simply because of the double standard in our society, whereby male promiscuity is overlooked, but female promiscuity is condemned. The language itself provides evidence of this, with numerous derogatory terms for a sexually active woman, and very few male equivalents for a sexually active man (Stanley 1977). It is a popular exercise to ask students to list words referring to a promiscuous woman, and then do the same for a promiscuous man. The stigma attached to a girl who is "the town bike" or "an easy lay" is not so strongly attached to the lad who "sows his wild oats." My contention is that this can also provide one of the explanations for the language behavior of women.

My hypothesis is that a woman is especially likely to style-shift to more prestigious language in situations where she might be judged by people who do not know her – e.g. in formal situations, when speaking in public or on the telephone, or when speaking in front of a researcher with a tape-recorder.[2] She does this to avoid the damaging lower-class stereotype which still includes potential sexual immorality. Lakoff 1975 says that girls are brought up to talk and behave like "little ladies"; thus they are encouraged to be passive, polite, and refrain from swearing, in order be seen as "respectable." Research by Giles et al. 1980 has shown that male and female stereotypes are complicated by social class factors. Gal notes (1991:181) that "the linguistic evidence links manliness with tough working class culture and femaleness with 'respectability', 'gentility' and 'high culture' as part of a general symbolic structure that ... emerged on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century and continues to be one component of current gender images." Style-shifting to a more prestigious speech variety conveys the information that the female speaker is not lower-class, and is consequently a "respectable" person – because, behind the accepted modes of behavior for middle-class women, there still lies the unspoken implication that these are also indications of morality.

It is well known that dress conveys social messages, as a number of researchers have demonstrated (e.g. Gibbons 1969, Lambert 1972, Bryant 1975, Giles & Chavasse 1975, Giles & Farrar 1979, Lurie 1981). Dress can also produce judgments on sexuality, as shown by this correspondence from a concerned reader with Dr. Miriam Stoppard in the *British TV Times* (29/9/1990):

> Dear Dr Miriam,
> I wonder if you agree with me that many young girls, especially in the nine to 12-year-old age group, wear provocative clothes? I'm no prude but mothers seem to dress them in sexy outfits and frilly briefs that encourage young boys to flirt with them. It's natural for young girls to want to

> look pretty, but I think mothers should be responsible for the way their young daughters dress.

Dr. Miriam replied:

> You may have a point. I know it's a frightful indictment on our society, but women of all ages have to beware of the effect they cause when they wear provocative clothes. "Pretty" in the 1990s can mean "provocative." And "provocative" can mean dangerous. Every women has the right to make herself look attractive without endangering her safety, but it's a right she has to be careful about exercising, even if it means her freedom to dress how she likes is curtailed. I would have thought that responsible mothers would carefully guide their daughters through this minefield with sensible advice on dress sense and start this training at an early age.

This letter and its reply underline an anxiety about sexual promiscuity in young girls, and they highlight the mother's clearly defined role in preventing this. Presumably this is a concern which relates only to girls: mothers are not warned about dressing their sons in a provocative and sexy manner.

I am not suggesting that any person of any class is likely to be any more sexually promiscuous than any other – whatever their clothes, speech, or general demeanor. The reported exploits of some members of the British royal family suggest that such behavior is not class-specific. But stereotypes suggest otherwise. The "minefield" to which Dr. Miriam refers, in relation to dress, could also apply to speech. If lower-class speech patterns also carry the suggestion of sexual promiscuity and loose morals, then it will be important for a middle-class woman to demonstrate her respectability by using prestigious speech forms.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

It is difficult to test the hypothesis put forward here. Obviously, the asking of direct questions about speech and sexual promiscuity would be impossible for practical and ethical reasons. So a method had to be devised in which the main purpose of the investigation was somewhat camouflaged, by asking the respondents to perform several different tasks and answer a variety of questions. In this study, carried out in December 1993, individuals were invited to listen to the recorded voices of three girls, each with a New Zealand accent which recognizably reflected a different social class. They were asked to match the three voices to three photographs, showing girls wearing clothes chosen according to social class criteria. They were then invited to answer questions about each person represented by the voice and photograph pairing, including one in which they were asked to rank the three girls in response to the question, "Which girl would be most likely to sleep around?"

Participants

Because the hypothesis involves the speech behavior of middle-class women, this research project was limited to an investigation of the attitudes of middle-class individuals. Those tested were 48 girls from two elite private girls' schools in Christchurch and 24 boys from a private boys' school in Christchurch. All were aged between 16 and 19. Also tested were 35 trainee teachers at the Christchurch College of Education, mostly aged between 20 and 22. This number included 17 trainees in the pilot study. The total number tested was 107, with 28 males and 79 females. Each person was interviewed individually for about 15 minutes, with the researcher filling in the responses to the questionnaire.

Stimulus material: Speech

The speakers in the recordings were three New Zealand women aged between 19 and 21. Initially, 20 young women were recorded from whom these speakers were selected because their accents best represented the three categories generally recognized to reflect social class differences in Australian and New Zealand speech: cultivated, general, and broad New Zealand English (NZE; Mitchell & Delbridge 1965, Gordon & Abell 1990). They spoke at similar rates and with similar fluency.

Each speaker read a short letter which was specifically designed to elicit phonological variables which have clearly recognizable variants in New Zealand speech. The letter contained several examples of the four closing diphthongs /ai/, /ei/, /ou/, and /au/ which have traditionally been strong class markers in New Zealand speech (Gordon 1991). There were words containing the close front vowels /e/ and /æ/, which are raised in broad NZE - as well as /ɪ/, the variant which distinguishes New Zealanders from Australians, being centralized in NZE and strongly centralized in broad NZE. There were two examples of word pairs containing the centering diphthongs /iə/, /eə/, namely *really/rarely*, *clear/Claire*, which have merged for many New Zealand speakers (Gordon & Maclagan 1989, 1990). In these recordings, they were merged by the general and the broad NZE speakers, but kept distinct by the cultivated NZE speaker. There were instances of words ending in /l/, which was vocalized by the broad NZE speaker, and the word *city*, where both the general and the broad NZE speakers use a voiced /t/.

The second verbal stimulus was a sample of casual speech from each of the same three speakers. Here each girl talked about an animal or a family pet. Both the cultivated and general speakers used standard syntax, while the broad speaker had several examples of non-standard syntax. All three speakers were relaxed and fluent, and told amusing incidents about the animals. The speech of the three girls was clearly differentiated phonologically.

Stimulus material: Clothes

The three sets of clothes used in the photographs were put together by senior-school home economics pupils, as part of a class project. They were given the instruction to choose sets of clothes which would typify three different social groups – one representing senior pupils from an elite private girls' school (Upper Middle Class), one representing general middle-of-the-road usage (Middle Class), and one representing the clothes worn by girls from a school in a lower socio-economic area (Lower Class). It was decided that the clothes should be appropriate for a visit to the central city during the daytime, accompanied by the girls' mothers, and that the girls would not wear jeans or trousers. The students working on this project spent time observing and taking notes about styles of clothes worn by different people in different parts of Christchurch. They determined appropriate hair styles, make-up, and jewelry for each model – and, in the case of the lower-class representation, tattoos on her fingers. There was no advice to make the clothes respectable or non-respectable. As it happened, the clothes and jewelry chosen to represent lower-class usage were borrowed in their entirety from a school pupil, and included cheap flat shoes. If the instructions had been to make the girl appear "tarty," no doubt very high-heeled shoes would have been chosen. By having the clothes selected independently by people of the same age as those in the photographs, authenticity was better established; this avoided the possibility of the researcher's even unwittingly biasing the stimulus material toward a preconceived result.

Three girls each modeled the three sets of clothes, and were photographed from the quarter front. These three sets of photographs (nine in all) were used in the project. Each set of three photographs showing the same model wearing the different styles of clothing was shown to approximately the same number of participants.

The questionnaire

The first part of the questionnaire contained questions which are fairly standard in subjective reaction tests, being designed to elicit responses relating to both power and solidarity:

Which girl's parents would have the highest income, and which would have the lowest?
Which girl would be the most intelligent? (1 = most, 3 = least)
Which girl would be the most friendly? (1 = most, 3 = least)
Which girl has the best sense of humor? (1 = most, 3 = least)
Do you think the girls went to a state school or a private school?

The question about schools was added because, in Christchurch, there is a strong connection of wealth and privilege with attendance at certain private

schools. Research has shown that the parents of pupils at these schools are in the highest income brackets, and that pupils from these schools enter more prestigious occupations when they leave school (Lauder & Hughes 1990).

The questionnaire also included two questions which sought to elicit views of the girls' behavior:

Which girl would be most likely to smoke?

Which girl would be most likely to sleep around?

The second of these questions was the main focus of this investigation. The question about smoking was added because, in New Zealand, smoking is generally seen as socially inappropriate. In 1990 strong anti-smoking legislation was passed, so that smoking is now banned in all public places, work places, and universities (including halls of residence). Both television and newspapers constantly carry anti-smoking messages. The question about smoking was added so that the question about "sleeping around" was not the only one asked about commonly perceived anti-social behavior. The questions were presented in the following order: (1) Parents' income, (2) Friendliness, (3) Sleeping around, (4) Intelligence, (5) Smoking, (6) Sense of humor, (7) State or private school.

The second part of the questionnaire gave the participants a free choice to suggest a possible future career for each girl. After this, they were asked to assign two possible future careers for each girl from a given list of eight, with the instruction to avoid using the same career twice. The list contained: hair dresser, doctor, secretary, worker in a massage parlor, assistant in a dress boutique, flight attendant, lawyer, and supermarket check-out cashier. These occupations were chosen to represent different levels on the Elley-Irving Socio-Economic Index (1985), which assigns socio-economic scores to occupations in New Zealand. When this "1st choice" had been made, the participants were then asked to assign the remaining two occupations, which I have called their "compulsory second choice."

The third part of the questionnaire was added as a diversion, and was answered most enthusiastically of all. Here the participants were invited to assign tastes in music to each girl, choosing 2 each from a list of 10: Metallica, U2, London Symphony Orchestra, Guns N' Roses, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Cindy Lauper, The Warratahs (a NZ country & western group), Nigel Kennedy's "The Four Seasons," "Phantom of the Opera," and The Exponents.

Method

The participants were asked to listen to the recordings of the three speakers, match them to what they considered to be the appropriate photographs, and then choose a name for each pairing of speaker and photograph. The chosen names were then used in all subsequent answers. This method seemed to

work well; it was easier for the participants to refer, for example, to "Linda" than to "Speaker two" or "Photograph three." In the following discussion, I will also use this method; I refer to the model in the upper-middle-class clothes, matched with the cultivated NZ accent, as "Sarah"; the model in the middle-class clothes, matched with the general NZ accent, as "Helen"; and the model in the lower-class clothes, matched with the broad NZ accent, as "Linda."

The initial design of the study was to present systematically randomized photographs to the participants, so that each saw three different girls wearing the three different sets of clothes. The randomization was designed so that all possible combinations were used equally. However, it was quickly found in the pilot study that some participants individualized the models, especially the one wearing lower-class clothes. This resulted in a great deal of unease, and caused some participants to withdraw from the project. The individualization could be seen from comments about "Linda" such as: "I hate to be so mean to that poor girl, so I'll give her a higher score." After administering the pilot study, I had a general discussion with the students who had taken part, and they expressed their distaste for ranking individual girls. I therefore accepted their recommendation to present three photographs of the same girl; thus it was clear that the participants were being asked to respond to one model, wearing three different sets of clothes, rather than to three individual human beings. After this there were no more problems with adverse reactions. The findings from of the pilot study have been included in the final results.[3]

An analysis of the results for the three different girls did not show any statistically significant difference among them; thus we can assume that there was no variation in responses resulting from one girl being more or less attractive than the others.

RESULTS

The research generated a large amount of data, some of which has yet to be analyzed. The overall results for "Sarah" and "Helen" were less clear-cut than those for "Linda," and they will be the subject of further research. Since this project is concerned with responses to lower-class speech and clothes, only the results for "Linda" are presented here. Data distinguishing the other two speakers are not crucial to this particular study.

The results are all presented in percentages for the following categories:

A = All responses (n = 107)
F = Female responses (n = 79)
PGS = Private School Girls' responses (n = 48)
M = Male responses (n = 28)

Matching of speech and clothes

The figures for the predicted matching of upper-middle-class clothes with cultivated NZE, middle-class clothes with general NZE, and lower-class clothes with broad NZE are:

A: 70.0%
F: 78.0%
PSG: 85.5%
M: 46.5%

The much higher percentages of predicted matching of lower-class clothes with broad NZE ("Linda") were as follows:

A: 91.5%
F: 95.0%
PSG: 98.0%
M: 82.0%

This demonstrates that although some participants differed in their responses to matching clothes and speech for "Sarah" and "Helen," there was widespread agreement about "Linda." Among the females, the predicted matching was very high, especially among the private-school girls.

Questions relating to power

The results for the questions relating income, intelligence, and type of school attended are given below. Responses in which "Linda"'s parents were given the lowest income were:

A: 98.0%
F: 100%
PSG: 100%
M: 91.5%

Responses in which "Linda" was given the lowest intelligence were:

A: 93.0%
F: 92.0%
PSG: 98.0%
M: 95.5%

Responses in which "Linda" was thought to go to a state school were:

A: 97.0%
F: 98.5%
PSG: 98.0%
M: 91.5%

The results of the questions relating to family income, intelligence, and school attendance were predictable and corresponded to those in other similar subjective reaction tests, e.g. those cited in Giles & Powesland 1975, Giles & Coupland 1991, and Gordon & Abell 1990, where the standard or prestige variety was most often associated with high socio-economic status and power within the community.

TABLE 1. *Responses for "Linda" to the question: Which girl would be the most friendly?*[a]

	A	F	PSG	M
1	14.0%	15.0%	8.5%	13.0%
2	50.5%	52.0%	51.0%	43.5%
3	35.5%	33.0%	40.5%	43.5%

[a]1 = most friendly, 3 = least friendly.

TABLE 2. *Responses for "Linda" to the question: Which girl would have the best sense of humor?*[a]

	A	F	PSG	M
1	43.0%	42.5%	30.0%	43.5%
2	40.0%	40.0%	51.0%	39.0%
3	17.0%	17.5%	19.0%	17.5%

[a]1 = best sense of humor, 3 = worst sense of humor.

Questions relating to solidarity

It was expected that, in accordance with the results of other similar subjective reaction tests, "Linda" would fare better on questions about her friendliness and sense of humor. Research has demonstrated (Giles & Powesland 1975) that non-standard varieties are often rated more highly in terms of social attractiveness, and their speakers are seen as more likeable.

The results here were not as conclusive as those for the questions relating to power, and overall sense of humor was ranked greater than friendliness; see Tables 1 and 2.

These results confirm those in an attitude study by Bayard 1991 in Dunedin, New Zealand, where a female speaker of broad NZE was ranked at the bottom for all traits relating to power, but had somewhat improved (though still unexpectedly low) ratings in the solidarity variables – which also included a question about sense of humor. The exception in Bayard's study was the responses of the secondary-school female respondents, who ranked her very low, as they also did in my study.

TABLE 3. *Ten most popular choices for a future career for "Linda"*

Female Choices		Male Choices	
1. Supermarket check-out	20.0%	1. Prostitute	17.5%
2. Shop assistant	17.5%	2. Supermarket check-out	13.0%
3. Secretary	10.5%	3. Unemployed	13.0%
4. Unemployed	10.5%	4. Housewife	9.0%
5. Waitress	9.5%	5. Shop assistant	9.0%
6. Prostitute	7.0%	6. Secretary	9.0%
7. Hairdresser	7.0%	7. Actress	4.5%
8. Factory worker	4.0%	8. Cleaner	4.5%
9. Single mother	2.5%	9. Factory worker	4.5%
10. Nurse	2.5%	10. Student	4.5%

Smoking and sleeping around

The two questions relating to the behavior of the girls again showed very strong results for "Linda," with all the girls from the private schools considering her most likely to sleep around. Responses in which she was given as most likely to smoke were:

A: 92.0%
F: 93.5%
PSG: 93.5%
M: 87.0%

Responses in which "Linda" was given as most likely to sleep around were:

A: 97.0%
F: 97.5%
PSG: 100%
M: 95.5%

A future career for "Linda"

Free choice. For the question asking the participants to choose a possible future career for each girl, the free choice meant that a very wide range of answers was given, shown in Table 3.

These lists show an interesting difference between the responses from the male and female participants, with females choosing the more traditional low-paid female service occupations (supermarket check-out worker, shop assistant). For the males, the highest percentage was given to prostitute, while 9% chose housewife, a category that did not appear in the female responses. It seems from these results that a number of the male respondents could be viewing the females in the stimulus material in terms which related to them

TABLE 4. *Careers chosen for "Sarah" and "Helen"*

Sarah (upper middle class)[a]		Helen (middle class)[b]	
Lawyer	25.0%	Secretary	37.0%
Doctor	9.5%	Teacher	11.5%
Teacher	8.0%	Clerk	9.0%
Businesswoman	6.5%	Bank teller	4.5%
Secretary	6.5%	Travel agent	4.5%
Housewife	5.0%	Nurse	4.5%
Librarian	4.0%		
Accountant	4.0%		
Nurse	4.0%		
Other	28.0%	Other	29.0%

[a] 104 respondents.
[b] 105 respondents.

as men, to their sexual and domestic needs. The fact that prostitute was given as a future career for "Linda" by both male and female participants, and was not chosen by anyone as a possible career for "Sarah" or "Helen," strongly confirms the original hypothesis that sounding and appearing lower-class can have sexual connotations. The careers most commonly chosen for "Sarah" and "Helen" are shown in Table 4.

"Other" careers for these two models, each suggested by less than 4% of the respondents, included: public relations, academic, sales assistant, accountant, clerk, nanny, biologist, flight attendant, hairdresser, real estate agent, and journalist.

Choice from given occupations. Where the participants were invited to choose suitable careers from the given list, the results again showed a very strong trend, as shown in Table 5. As described earlier, from a list of eight careers, participants were asked to allocate two to each model, and no career was to be used more than once; the six careers selected here are called "First Choice." The participants were then asked to allocate the two remaining careers, called "Compulsory Second Choice." Hairdresser, supermarket check-out cashier, and worker in a massage parlor were the three occupations allocated to "Linda," with supermarket check-out cashier scoring highest in the first choice by the female respondents, and worker in a massage parlor scoring highest by the male respondents. However, when the first and compulsory second choices are combined, the massage parlor worker was scored highest by both male and female participants. (In New Zealand, it is generally understood that worker in a massage parlor is synonymous with prostitute.)

TABLE 5 *Careers chosen for "Linda" from the given list*[a]

	A	F	PSG	M
Worker in a massage parlor				
1st choice	22 5%	18 5%	23 5%	35 0%
1st choice + 2nd compulsory choice	85 0%	90 0%	92 0%	71 0%
Supermarket check-out cashier				
1st choice	40 5%	43 5%	41 5%	30 5%
1st choice + 2nd compulsory choice	80 0%	89 0%	87 5%	57 0%
Hairdresser				
1st choice	7 0%	29 5%	25 5%	19 5%
1st choice + 2nd compulsory choice	64 0%	72 0%	71 0%	39 0%
Assistant in a dress boutique				
1st choice	5 5%	6 0%	6 5%	4 5%
1st choice + 2nd compulsory choice	13 0%	25 0%	15 0%	11 0%

[a]List included hair dresser, doctor, secretary, worker in a massage parlor, assistant in a dress boutique, flight attendant, lawyer, supermarket check-out cashier

CONCLUSION

The results of this research project show clearly that, when given a choice of three clothing styles and three different New Zealand accents, the clothes and accent most likely to be associated with lower-class women elicit a depressing stereotype. The speaker/model I have called "Linda" was seen by almost all the 107 participants as having the lowest intelligence, the lowest family income, and being the most likely to smoke and be promiscuous. Even her friendliness and sense of humor were in doubt for some of the participants, and all the moreso in the eyes of the private-school girls. Her future occupation included unemployed, single parent, and prostitute; and from a given list of occupations, worker in a massage parlor (i.e. prostitute) was chosen by the highest percentage of the respondents. It seems that respondents had strongly uniform opinions about her - even of her choice of music (Metallica; Guns N' Roses).

In the end, my argument stands or falls on the question of whether it is the matter of sexuality and the avoidance of implications of sexual promiscuity which underlie women's linguistic behavior, or whether it is the avoidance of all the depressing features that go to make up the lower-class stereotype (low income, low education, more likely to smoke, low-ranked job etc.) Should sexuality be singled out as the prime influence? Intuitively, as a middle-class mother of a son and three daughters, I am aware of my own motivations. Put bluntly, girls get pregnant and boys do not; the social consequences for a girl who becomes pregnant, or who is seen to be sexually available, have always been serious (as countless novels and films have por-

trayed). The question of sexuality is bound with the girl's reputation. Being poor, lacking education, and being engaged in a low-esteemed occupation do not carry the same social consequences or stigma.

I suggest that this research demonstrates the point that, just as in the 19th century, lower-class female speakers are still seen as more likely to be sexually promiscuous than females in higher social classes. It could be argued that the combination of the clothes and speech provides a very strong stimulus, and that speech alone might not elicit such a clear response. Further research needs to be done to test this. However, if clothes do convey a more powerful message than speech, then there is even more reason for a woman in certain situations (such as greeting an addressee on the telephone) to modify her speech in order to indicate her respectability. I think this research points out the risks involved for a middle-class woman if she sounds lower class – risks which many would attempt to avoid at all costs.

The question has been asked about the possibility of a similar study being carried out using males as well as females in the stimulus material. This is certainly an area where further research would be valuable. If it were shown that lower-class men were also seen in the same way as the females in this study, then this would confirm the overall negative stereotype associated with all members of the lower class, and lower-class men as well as lower-class women would be viewed as potentially sexually promiscuous. It might then be asked why men do not change their speech to the prestige forms as women do. The answer to this seems to me to lie clearly with the double standard regarding sexual behavior. If it is true that society overlooks promiscuity in men but condemns it in women, this could be a compelling reason for women to change their speech where men do not. If middle-class views of respectability include sexual probity, this could be a reason why a middle-class woman would wish to avoid anything which might suggest she was not respectable. This could affect two clear social-class markers – her choice of clothes and her speech.

The research described here strongly supports the contention that the stereotype of a lower-class young woman still carries the implication of sexual availability. This is something which has so far been overlooked in the possible explanations for the linguistic behavior of middle-class women; yet it seems to me to be a strong motivating factor, well worth further research.

NOTES

* The argument in this article (without any empirical support) appeared as Gordon 1994. An earlier version of this article was given at the Women and Language Conference, Berkeley, California, 1994, and at the Language and Society Conference, Lincoln University, New Zealand, 1994.

I thank many people who assisted with this research, especially Gaynor Cullinan, Sara Patterson, Leanne Holtham, Maree Middlemiss, Margaret Maclagan, Cherie Connor, Susannah

Gordon, Brenda Zanetti, Fiona Gregory, Wendy Campbell, Sandra Quick, Claire Collier, Jenny Mackinder, Jan Russ, Catriona Mackay, Imogen Dickie, Jeni Curtis, Luke Trainor, Derry Gordon, Gillian Lewis, David Maclagan, the late Peter Lees-Jeffries, Mike Clayton, Margot Mackay, Ronnie Davey, Elody Rathgen, Jill Ritchie, Steve Connor, and the pupils of St. Margaret's College, Rangi Ruru College, St. Bede's College, and the Christchurch College of Education. I also thank the University of Canterbury for financial assistance for this project.

For comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article, I thank Howard Giles, Sally McConnell-Ginet, Janet Holmes, Sik Hung Ng, Peter Trudgill, Jean Hannah, Lyle Campbell, Jenny Cheshire, Susan Gal, and Kathryn Woolard.

[1] In New Zealand, *slag* is an exceedingly derogatory term with sexual connotations for a woman, similar in meaning to *slut*.

[2] An informal survey of classes of university students and groups of teachers showed that they understood very clearly what was meant by "putting on a special telephone voice," and they overwhelmingly associated this with women rather than with men.

[3] Some of the students in the pilot study admitted that their responses were affected by uneasy feelings about making judgments concerning individual young women. Later two male student respondents also admitted that they had been deliberately obstructive in their responses. In spite of this, it was decided to include the data from the pilot study in the final results. Without them, the results would have been even stronger.

REFERENCES

Barret-Ducrocq, Françoise (1991). *Love in the time of Victoria*. London: Verso.

Bayard, Donn (1991). A taste of Kiwi: Perceived attitudes to accent, speaker gender, and perceived ethnicity across the Tasman. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 11:1–38.

Bell, Allan, & Holmes, Janet (1990), eds. *New Zealand ways of speaking English*. Clevedon, Avon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Bryant, N. J. (1975). Petitioning: Dress congruence versus belief congruence. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 5:144–49.

Cameron, Deborah, & Coates, Jennifer (1989). Some problems in the sociolinguistic explanation of sex differences. In J. Coates & D. Cameron (eds.), *Women in their speech communities*, 13–26. London: Longman.

Chambers, J. K. (1992). Linguistic correlates of gender and sex. *English World-Wide* 13:173–218.

Elley, Warwick B., & Irving, J. C. (1985). The Elley–Irving socio-economic index: 1981 Census Revision. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 20:115–28.

Finch, Lynette (1993). *The classing gaze: Sexuality, class and surveillance*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Gal, Susan (1978). Peasant men can't get wives: Language change and sex roles in a bilingual community. *Language in Society* 7:1–16.

_____ (1991). Between speech and silence: The problematics of research on language and gender. In Micaela di Leonardo (ed.), *Gender at the crossroads of knowledge*, 175–203. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gibbons, Keith (1969). Communication aspects of women's clothes and their relation to fashionability. *British Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology* 8:301–12.

Giles, Howard, & Chavasse, William (1975). Communication and length as a function of dress style and social status. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 40:961–62.

Giles, Howard, & Coupland, Nicholas (1991). *Language: Contexts and consequences*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Giles, Howard, & Farrar, Kathryn (1979). Some behavioral consequences of speech and dress styles. *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 18:209–10.

Giles, Howard, & Powesland, Peter F. (1975). *Speech style and social evaluation*. London: Academic Press.

Giles, Howard, et al. (1980). Speech style and the fluctuating salience of sex. *Language Sciences* 2:260–82.

Gordon, Elizabeth (1983). "The flood of impure vocalisation": A study of attitudes towards New Zealand speech. *New Zealand Speech-Language Therapists' Journal* 38:16–29.

_____ (1991). The development of spoken English in New Zealand. In Graham McGregor & Mark Williams (eds.), *Dirty silence*, 19–28. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
_____ (1994). Sex differences in language: Another explanation? *American Speech* 69:215–20.
_____, & Abell, Marcia (1990). "This objectionable colonial dialect": Historical and contemporary attitudes to New Zealand speech. In Bell & Holmes (eds.), 21–48.
_____, & Deverson, Tony (1989). *Finding a New Zealand voice: Attitudes towards English used in New Zealand*. Auckland: New House.
_____, & Maclagan, Margaret (1989). *Beer* and *bear*, *cheer* and *chair*: A longitudinal study of the *ear/air* contrast in New Zealand English. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 9:203–20.
_____; _____ (1990). A longitudinal study of the *ear/air* contrast in New Zealand speech. In Bell & Holmes (eds.), 129–48.
Lakoff, Robin (1975). *Language and woman's place*. New York: Harper & Row.
Lambert, S. (1972). Reactions to a stranger as a function of style of dress. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 35:711–12.
Lauder, Hugh, & Hughes, David (1990). Social inequalities and differences in school outcome. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 25:37–60.
Lurie, Alison (1981). *The language of clothes*. New York: Random House.
Mayhew, Henry (1861). *London labour and the London poor*. London: Griffin, Bohn. (Facsimile edition, ed. by J. D. Rosenberg. New York: Dover, 1968.)
Mitchell, Alexander G., & Delbridge, Arthur (1965). *The speech of Australian adolescents*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
Shaw, George Bernard (1913). *Pygmalion*. London: Constable.
Stanley, Julia (1977). Paradigmatic woman: The prostitute. In D. L. Shore & C. P. Hines (eds.), *Papers in language variation*, 303–12. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
Trudgill, Peter (1972). Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich. *Language in Society* 1:179–95.
_____ (1974). *The social differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
_____ (1983). *On dialect*. Oxford: Blackwell.