# Social Identity: Linguistic Construction in relation to Multiple Groups

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## Abstract

Speaker identity is not only constructed in homogenous groups, but through interaction with other social groups. This paper addresses the issue of linguistic construction in relation to social identity. The discussion will highlight the observation that social identity is constructed through interaction with multiple groups. An individual continuously adjusts his linguistic repertoire in accordance with the desired social identity. This paper will discuss interpersonal and intergroup theories with reference to speaker identity.

**Key words:** Speaker identity model; interpersonal and intergroup theories; convergence; divergence; speech maintenance; community of practise (CofP); social identity theory (SIT); speech accommodation theory (SAT); similarity-attraction theory; communication accommodation theory (CAT).

## Basic Principle of Speaker Identity

In this paper I will address the basic principle of speaker identity in relation to social identity; I will focus in particular on the interpersonal and intergroup context.

I will first attempt to identify the 'basic principle' of speaker identity, and then present examples whereby the principle holds true. In addition, I will explore the connection between communication accommodation theory (CAT), and the construction of an individual's linguistic repertoire.

Scott Kiesling (1997; 1998; 2003), observed that American males

construct linguistic identity from male-male interaction as well as from male-female interaction. American fraternity men construct their linguistic repertoire from interaction with single sex male groups and also from interaction with female groups. The basic principle according to Kiesling (ibid.) proposes that speaker identity is not only constructed within homogeneous groups, but also through interaction with other social groups. The Oxford dictionary (1997), defines 'sexuality' as: "the fact of belonging to one of sexes, [and that of] sexual characteristics [or] impulses". The question this paper thus poses: is linguistic repertoire in principal, constructed through interaction with single sex groups? This area is a diverse and exciting inter-disciplinary domain. Extensive inter-disciplinary writing, research and the analysis of language and gender is available across the disciplines: sociolinguistics, psychology, pragmatics and anthropology (Cameron 1985, Lakoff 1975, Smith 1985, Coates 1986). The research highlights areas of language that are clearly marked by male or female characteristics. Independent male and female groups consistently employ linguistic variables representative of their gender group. If we apply this observation to the canon of 'basic principle', it is possible to posit that speaker identity is also constructed through sole interaction with same sex, social groups.

## Interpersonal and Intergroup Theories

I will now discuss interpersonal and intergroup theories (Meyerhoff and Niedziekski, 1994). An individual's speaker identity is constructed from interaction with varying social groups. Each group constitutes a unique culture and social category that is significant to its' members. An individual's membership of a social group will typically influence the individual's linguistic choice. The individual will be a member of a group because he wishes to be part of the group. As a result, he will converge

to the linguistic patterns of the group (Eckert and Ginet, 1992). In other words, the individual will adopt the linguistic patterns of a group because he wants the group to accept him. By employing the strategy of adopting a group's linguistic patterns, the individual is sending linguistic signals to other group members that state 'I like your group and would like to be accepted as a member and part of the group'. When an "outgroup" (Giles and Smith, 1979: 159) member, in other words, an individual from outside the group consciously converges to the group's linguistic style, i.e. speech patterns, he is responding to other group members on an intergroup level. Individuals converge with other speakers from different groups because they wish to enter the group. Speakers can achieve this by reducing linguistic intergroup differences (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski, 1994), hence minimizing the social distance between two intergroup members.

Regarding interpersonal theory, interaction is a personal and idiosyncratic process. Speaker identity is constructed through an individual's personal linguistic choice. Whether the speaker chooses to converge, diverge, or use the strategy of speech maintenance (Bourhis 1979 in Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991b), i.e. remain neutral (discussed later), in an interpersonal interaction, is the individual's personal linguistic choice. If the individual disagrees or wishes to distance himself from the interactant, he may choose to diverge from the speech patterns of his partner. Tajfel and Turner (1979), observed that individuals interact on "two poles" (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski, 1994: 314): the interindividual level and the intergroup level. In other words, it is an individual's idiosyncratic choice how the interactant is perceived. The speaker identifies with an individual positively or negatively on an interpersonal or intergroup level. An individual who believes a social tie exists between two interactants will attempt to communicate on a perceived common ground. However, since the interaction is idiosyncratic for each interactant, social ties may *only* be perceived by one of the interactants. For example, on one hand a speaker

may identify positively with an individual at an interpersonal level, yet on the other, perceive the individual as representative of an unfavourable group. As a consequence the individual will attach negative factors at intergroup level. Giles and Hewstone (1982 in Meyerhoff 1994), argue that speakers identify both consciously and subconsciously, intergroup and / or intergroup factors situational or contextually dependant:

> "Sometimes speakers are highly aware of intergroup factors and only minimally aware of interpersonal factors (and vice versa), while at other times participants are highly sensitive to both intergroup and interpersonal factors" (Meyerhoff, 1994: 314).

## The Speaker Identity Model

Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994), have put forward a speaker identity model. The model addresses the positive, negative and neutral outcome of an individual's interpersonal and intergroup interactions. An individual receives subsequent feedback from interpersonal and intergroup interactions. Feedback is an important aspect of the interaction because individuals can "spin" (ibid.: 321) speaker identity. In other words, interactants construct speaker identity from feedback received in a communicative situation. Within the speaker identity model framework, response to feedback is referred to as "dynamism" (ibid.). Dynamism occurs as the individual constructs his social identity based on the development of speaker interaction. An individual can manipulate the communicative situation by decoding the interactant's purpose, and predict the possible "up-coming moves" (ibid.). The speaker identity model is dynamic because speaker identity is continuously reconstructed and reinterpreted. Nevertheless this continuous reconstruction of speaker identity is dependent on dynamic feedback derived from interpersonal and intergroup interaction. For example, if an interactant addresses the speaker at intergroup level, the speaker will, in-

part, construct his speaker identity based on the response of the interactant, and the intergroup interaction. Hence, the feedback the individual receives will have been aimed at his intergroup identity.

## Speaker Power

At this point it is necessary to address however, the problems associated with the speaker identity model at interpersonal and intergroup level. As an individual constructs his linguistic repertoire, he needs to consider the potential conflict between speaker identity and speaker power. During a communicative event an imbalance of power frequently exists between interactants (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski, 1994). For example, the inherent power difference between civilian and police officer; interviewer and interviewee, and supervisor and employee. As a result, it is important for an individual to construct linguistic repertoire when power and status is in principal, equal. In the case whereby interactants experience a significant imbalance of power and status, individuals will experience communicative difficulties, and in some cases communication breakdown. Imbalance of power can result from a range of social networks and ties amassed by the individual. If individuals communicate originating from different social networks, individuals may experience hostility. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994), state that:

> "A person trying to communicate as if a network tie existed where there is none, will meet resentment or incomprehension from their interlocutor" (ibid.: 320).

Nevertheless, communication can sometimes fail due to interactants' misinterpreted social ties. This will be discussed further in the communication accommodation theory (CAT) discussion.

In order to exemplify the speaker identity model I shall consider the

speech community of a male American fraternity. For this particular male social group it is possible that male speakers have strong affiliations with male peers, in contrast to relationships with female peer groups. Needless to say, the linguistic construction of the male fraternity group's sexuality is dependent on intergroup interaction with both male and female peers. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994) suggest the following:

> "Personal and group identities […of] an individual's persona are not static, but rather can be activated or called on to different degrees depending on the situation" (ibid.: 320).

If we apply this to the male American fraternity social group, it is possible to perceive that speaker identity is constructed at varying points during interaction. The fraternity social group interacts at interpersonal and intergroup level, and individuals "spin" (ibid.) speaker identity according to positive and negative feedback received during interaction. The male fraternity social networks cross both sexes. Individual interaction in male and female peer groups contributes to an individual's linguistic sexuality construction.

As a result, we can comment that speaker-identity is constructed through multiple group interaction, for a male fraternity group. The strength of interpersonal and intergroup interaction is idiosyncratic for each individual, and for some, speaker identity may be more strongly influenced by group identity than interpersonal identity.

## A Community of Practise

Individuals are connected and interact with each other across the social stratum, regardless of sex. Speakers develop linguistic repertoire from individuals whom they interact with on a regular basis. However, individuals are usually tied to at least one community of practise (CofP).

The CofP has a significant influence on the construction of an individual's linguistic repertoire. As a consequence, the CofP is a relevant aspect to the development of speaker identity.

Firstly, what is a community of practise? A CofP is a group of people who share a common interest, goal, or value (Eckert and Ginet, 1999). The CofP could be a formal establishment, such as a professor's academic committee or a post-graduate committee. Members of the CofP share the same speech patterns and level of group knowledge; hence, members will develop and use common linguistic practises. A group newcomer will experience an introductory phase before he will feel acknowledged, and comfortable as a valued group member. This adjustment and approval period allows the newcomer a length of time in order to accommodate to the group's speech patterns, values, and in-group 'tried & tested' "ways of doing things" (ibid.: 186). A CofP is also an informal establishment, such as a women's group, who participate in a regular aerobics class; or a weekly medical doctor's journal club.

Individuals depend on membership of different CofPs. However, the CofP with the strongest tie to an individual will exert the greatest influence on a person's linguistic repertoire. In the given example, the male American fraternity group may have strong ties with a CofP varsity group, or a student residency CofP. If we apply the stereotypical gender classification to the varsity group and student residency CofPs, it is reasonable to assume that the cited, CofPs are examples of single sex CofPs. Nevertheless, it is not conclusive that all CofP's function as single sex groups. For instance, an individual that is a member of a single sex football varsity CofP, and student residency CofP may have ties with a mixed sex, student magazine CofP. The CofP student magazine group is not gender segregated, in contrast to the gender segregated varsity CofP or college dormitory CofP. Moreover, due to societal pressure all-female train carriages and hotel floors.

Eckert and Ginet (1992), observed that society places emphasis on

gender segregation and the concept of "gendering" (ibid.: 462) individuals. This follows that gendering inevitably encourages the practise of categorizing individual's social identity as *women* or *men* (ibid.). Society puts pressure on individuals to develop and construct social identity based on an individual's biological gender. Linguistic labelling such as "lady, gentleman", "girl, boy", "ladies, boys", "young lady, young man", and the inevitable intrinsic connotations, collectively contribute to gender segregation (ibid.: 462) regardless of the salient influence of CofP on speaker identity.

## Social Identity Theory

Tajifel (1974), defined social identity as: "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups, together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership" (Tajifel, 1974: 31 in Giles et al., 2007). Gender variable is connected to linguistic variation and social identity theory (SIT) (see Tajfel, 1981). The theory states that social and gender identity occur during the process of interaction, and not through language, as the social cognitive perspective suggests (ibid.: 16). In order to signal membership of social groups, individuals use sociolinguistic markers to identify themselves as members of the group. Linguistic identity variables connected to SIT, for example euphemism is identified more with female speech than with male speech. Hence, when an individual employs the use of euphemism[1] in speech patterns, his social identity pertains to a feminine side.

SIT is similar to interpersonal and intergroup social identity categorization and I will now discuss the aspects of the theory that are similar. In Weatherall and Gallois (2003), SIT's supposition states that: "people's sense of who they are comprises aspects deriving both from them as individuals and from their membership of social groups" (ibid: 491). In other words, SIT puts forward the tenant that an individual's self-*identity*

comprises two aspects: the "personal identity" (Giles et. al, 2007: 136), and a "social identity" (ibid.). Personal identity comprises physical attributes, pre-disposed skills and abilities, and "psychological traits" (ibid.). The social identity is based on significant interpersonal and intergroup memberships. Returning to the basic premise of social identity theory (SIT), individuals embody a positive image of their idiosyncratic, personal identity. In order for individuals to maintain and favour a positive self-image, the theory states that individuals should make "social comparisons" (Weatherall and Gallois, 2003: 491), with each other in personal membership groups, as well as from other social networks. Social comparisons help an individual assess the social identity and knowledge, skills and views of intergroup members. SIT recognises that the influence of power and status variable is significant within different social groups. Some individuals endeavour to break away from their social group, and covertly desire membership of higher status groups (ibid.) (further discussed in the next section, CAT).

If we consider 'gender' as a social group, it is not easy for individuals to pass to a higher social status within this social grouping. If an individual wishes to gain a higher social status in their gender group, he must find suitable channels in which enable status shifting within the group. In this instance, linguistic repertoire: accent mobility, pronunciation or speech content, is a potential means of joining a higher status group.

## Development of Communication Accommodation Theory

The study of language behaviour in relation to the direct context spoken is the basic premise of sociolinguistics. The term accommodation has in recent writing been described as "attuning" (Miller, 2005: 153). In a communicative interaction, speakers adapt and manipulate speech in response to their partner. Speakers consider the psychological factors of the interaction, interpersonal and intergroup factors and partner's linguistic repertoire.

These factors contribute singularly or collectively to the potential outcome of the interaction. That is to say, speakers accommodate or attune speech patterns to their partner's idiosyncratic speech behaviour.

## SAT to CAT

Speech accommodation theory (SAT) evolved as a socio-psycholinguistic development, due to the needs of addressing the principal that individuals cognitively perceive interactions. As a consequence, there was a possibility that behaviour would affect speech output. As Giles et al. (1991b) state, SAT began as a "socio-psychological model of speech-style modifications" (ibid.: 2). The former model thus developed into communication accommodation theory (CAT), in order to acknowledge that not only speech but other "communicative behaviour"(Giles et al., 2007: 134), effects interpersonal or intergroup interaction. Speakers make adjustments to linguistic repertoire, including non-verbal behaviour, discourse patterns and the "discursive dimensions of social interaction" (Giles et al., 1991b: 6). Discursive elements include idiosyncratic unpredictable events and, or actions occurring between individuals during social interaction. Therein, SAT developed from a primary socio-linguistic speech study, to a multidisciplinary area that connects language communication with social psychology (Giles et al, 1991b).

CAT postulates that when individuals "like or value each other" (Fraser & Scherer, 1982: 6), they adopt speech patterns, and other paralinguistic features of the interactant. Conversely, individuals who wish to "distance or dissociate" (ibid.) themselves will diverge using divergent strategies. Giles et al., (2007), suggest that "according to CAT, people modify their speech, non-verbal behaviour, and /or discourse patterns to become more like their interactant in a bid to decrease social distance, seek or signal approval, and thereby accommodate" (ibid.: 142).

In order to proceed and manage a social interaction, individuals principally alternate between three linguistic strategies in accommodation theory: convergence, divergence and speech maintenance (Giles et al., 1991a and b; Thakerar et al., 1982, Fraser and Scherer, 1982; Miller, 2005, Giles et al., 2007). In the early 70's, Giles and his colleagues identified the concept speech convergence during his 'interviewer situation, accent convergence' study (Giles, 1973). The study postulated that interpersonal factors arising from the unequal power/status relationship that are inherent to an interview situation would override any "phonological variants" (Giles et al., 1991b: 5). The results highlighted interviewees' convergence with interviewer (see Giles "accent mobility" model, 1973).

Convergent strategies are the most frequently studied aspect of CAT however, before we discuss convergence in greater detail, we need to restate the four main socio-psychological theories (which support the CAT framework). According to the work and studies of Giles and Smith (1979), the CAT framework consists of: similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1969); social exchange theory (Homans, 1961; Giles & Powesland, 1975); causal attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelly, 1973); and Tajfel's (1974) theory of intergroup distinctiveness.

## Similarity Attraction Theory

Speech convergence is one strategy employed based on similarity-attraction theory. Byrne's (1969), psychological work originally postulated that "the more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to certain others [;] the more likely it is we will be attracted to them" (Byrne, 1969 in Giles & St. Clair, 1979: 47). Speech accommodation theory (SAT) was developed under the influence of similarity-attraction theory. That is to say, individuals use linguistic markers, such as pausing, utterance speed, and speech

content, in order to distance themselves from each other or send 'I like you' signals. The two theories were the foundation for the development of communication accommodation theory (CAT) (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991b).  SAT and similarity attraction theory propose that individuals adjust linguistic repertoire in accordance with the way they wish to interact with an interactant, and how they wish to be perceived. Similarity attraction theory posits, individual A likes individual B, hence A may change speech rate, pause length, speech content or some other linguistic feature such as pronunciation, in order to become more similar to B. It follows that individual A becomes more similar to individual B, whereby the theory postulates B will regard A with increasing warmth and interest.

## Further Aspects of Convergence

Since as previously stated, convergence is the most frequently studied aspect of CAT, it follows that various debates surround present convergent strategy theories. The degree of convergence is connected to social identity, which I will discuss further in later sections.

Speaker's converge on speech rate, pauses, pronunciation, utterance length (Fraser and Scherer, 1982), and pitch range (Giles & St. Clair, 1979). It is inevitable that an individual's degree of convergence rests on the perceived image of the interactant.  These perceptions are subjective, and this area of convergence has been termed "subjective [or] psychological accommodation" (Giles et al., 2007: 143). In other words, individuals converge "speech style" (ibid.) where they perceive interactant's speech, contrary to the "actual" (ibid.), verbatim speech. Giles and his colleagues (2007), high-lighted three examples based on their law enforcement CAT research. First, individuals with a higher status, i. e. architect and builder, manager and factory worker, may be perceived as having "more prestigious accents" (ibid.: 143). Second, the "dominant speakers" (ibid.)

in an interaction may be perceived as having louder speech (patterns). And finally, in the situation whereby a police officer (P. O) on first interaction with a civilian, requests to see identification, the P. O's speech patterns may be perceived as "indirect command" [s] (ibid.). Hence, subjective accommodation is a critical aspect of convergence.

In the former law enforcement example, a civilian may diverge from an officer due to his perceived image that a P. O's manner is aggressive or abrupt, which are negative connotations stereotypically associated with indirect commands from law enforcement. The P. O may in fact be attempting to accommodate with the civilian, however, this would be unproductive. The communicative act may be considered non-accommodative due to the "inaccurate stereotypes of partner's speech" (ibid. 143) as coined by Giles and his colleagues (2007). In the civilian and P. O case, individual assessment of the interaction may be perceived as unsatisfactory or unsuccessful. Moreover, from the civilian's perspective the interaction may be viewed as possibly hostile, due to the significance of subjective accommodation.

Status relationships have a great influence on convergence. In most interactions a power / status relationship exists, whether consciously or sub-consciously. It is inherent to an interaction. Factors which effect either upward or downward convergence will be reflected in the degree of social approval an individual seeks, and the likelihood of future interactions (Natale, 1975).Thakerar et al (1982) state:

> "…. in the eyes of the recipient, convergence may be best considered as a reflection of an individual's desire for social approval" (ibid.: 208)

In other words, the greater the need an individual has for social approval (or inter-attraction), the greater occurrence of upward convergence. Thakerar

et al. (1982), observed that the occurrence of upward convergence is greater between Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York City (NYC), than between African Americans and Puerto Ricans. In contemporary life, examples of power / status relationships are frequently dramatized on television. The 2005 American dramatization *Prison Break* (20th Century FOX Broadcasting Company), depicts an interethnic group of escaped convicts. The interethnic all-male group comprises a Caucasian redneck[2], an 18-year old Caucasian yahoo[3], a Puerto Rican, an African American, an Italian mobster boss, and two, middle-class Caucasian Americans. Interpersonal and intergroup status relations are often depicted in the drama series, in particular between the stereotypical white trash[4] 'redneck', and the African American and Puerto Rican. Inevitably due to the nature of a television dramatization, speech patterns and interactions are written by script-writers; however, the contexts clearly mirror power / status CAT relations (see www. twiztv.com for scripts).

Divergent acts are simply means to dissociate or distance from an individual. Speech *differences* and nonverbal *differences* are emphasized in order to differentiate interactants, either in interpersonal or intergroup situations. The levels and degree of divergence are similar to those of convergence. Giles and Powesland (1975), postulate that convergence and divergence are influenced by an individual's desire to gain social recognition or identification, and the inert human condition driving individuals to fit in with others, in other words conform. In spite of this, Giles and Powesland (1975), go on to state that social processes employed during convergent and divergent acts are different:

> "Convergence is a strategy of identification with the communication patterns of an individual internal to the interaction, whereas divergence is a strategy of identification with…. some reference group external to the immediate situation" (ibid.: 27 in Miller, 2005: 155).

## Speech Maintenance and Noble Selves

Speech maintenance also known as non-accommodativeness occurs when an individual neither converges nor diverges to an interactant's speech patterns. That is to say, an individual makes no change to his speech style in order to smooth communication or reduce the social distance between interactants. Non-accommodativeness may occur during interaction between a native speaker (NS) and a non-native speaker (NNS) whereby NNS' lack "conversation sensitivity" (Giles et al. 2007: 145), or the appropriate "communication repertoire and skills" (Argyle, 1973 in Giles et al. 2007: 144), which are necessary skills, in order to attempt accommodation. However, as theorists have argued, to what degree are speakers conscious of accommodation or non-accommodation in an interaction? Some accommodation theorists assume certain speech accommodation systems are cognitively conscious for the speaker, for example "language simplification" (ibid.). Let's now take the example of an interaction between doctor and patient. A doctor will sometimes consciously use non-specialist terms, such as decongestant or cough medicine in place of the medical term bronchi dilator. It is argued that the use of "work-place jargon" (ibid.) is a conscious speech accommodation act. In contrast, some theorists believe speech accommodation occurs unconsciously for both interactants.

The notion of noble selves (Hart, Carlson and Eadie, 1980 in Giles, Coupland and Coupland, 1991b), is relevant to speech maintenance, in particular during interpersonal interactions. Speech maintenance could be particularly useful during interethnic situations. If we consider the *Prison Break* dramatization situation, it is rational to comprehend that each interethnic individual protects his individuality and safety through non-accommodative speech patterns. It is logical that in such a diverse interethnic group, the recognition of power status is considered hypothetically important to members. The act of consciously emphasizing

intergroup differences via speech maintenance is a way for interethnic individuals to gain respect and value from within the group (Bourhis, 1979). With regards to noble selves, those individuals who are perhaps sensitive to accommodative processes, yet employ and maintain idiosyncratic speech patterns and non-verbal features throughout interaction, regardless of power / status relations, or socialization approval. Speech accommodative processes would go against noble selves true to themselves principles (Hart, Carlson & Eadie, 1980).

Noble selves are conscious of their non-accommodativeness, due to the belief that any adjustment to or modification of speech patterns is a debasement of their "real" (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991b: 11) selves, and hence unacceptable. In contrast, those individuals who employ speech maintenance strategies are neither conscious nor unconscious of the application during interaction.

## Social Exchange Theory

We have touched on social exchange theory indirectly during the discussion of speech convergence strategies. Social exchange theory (SET), supposes that an individual considers the potential outcome of a social exchange prior to interaction. The theory states that individuals try to predict the "rewards and costs" (Giles and Smith, 1979: 48), formulae of an interaction. An ambitious journalist will assess the rewards and costs associated with the act of sneaking into a politician's office, in order to snatch the debut interview from his peers. He will choose the path that will hopefully be rewarded with a "positive outcome" (ibid.), for example, a ground breaking interview. In this context, minimum costs may be verbal abuse or a black eye. With reference to CAT, social exchange theory highlights the rewards and costs of convergence or divergence of a pre-mediated path, maximizing the rewards and minimizing costs. An interviewee's upward accent convergence

with an interviewer could result with the interviewer viewing the social interaction more favourably. Whereby the potential rewards for interactants could be great, such as the interviewee being the successful applicant, and the interviewer being satisfied with his decision.

## Casual Attribution

It is inevitable that individuals are not conscious of developments prior to an accommodative or non-accommodative act. The motivational forces may be intergroup or interpersonal dependent. Individuals are not cognizant of an interactant's conscious act to decrease differences or dissimilarities between interactants (Thakerar et al. 1982), or the degree of outside influences responsible for the speech accommodation. As a consequence, it can be subsumed that individuals take into account three precipitating factors, in order to identify reasons for a speaker's act. These factors are: speaker ability, effort and external pressures which impel the individual to act in a chosen, idiosyncratic manner (Giles et al., 1991b; Thakerar et al., 1982). Thanks to Giles and his colleagues' (2007), extensive CAT work within law enforcement, in order to highlight the third factor I will now refer to one of their examples.

Due to the nature of law enforcement, police officers (P. O) are frequently exposed to power / status relations in speech interaction, both consciously and unconsciously. A P. O will attempt to engage a civilian in a friendly manner. Needless to say, the civilian will attribute the P. O's accommodative behaviour as situational predicative. Moreover, the civilian may perceive the convergent act as a false means for eliciting information. In other words, the civilian perceives an accommodative act as superficial and irrelevant; due to external pressures which underlie status / power relations between P. O's and civilians. Giles et al. (1991b), neatly summarize the significance of miscommunication due to social roles and the associated

perceptions in the following: "…. the relationship  between perceptions of accommodation and attending social consequences is one in which misattribution is rife, as sometimes partners' perceptions of each others' behaviours are decidedly at odds" (ibid., 1991b: 24).

Causal attribution touches on Tajfel's (1974), theory of intergroup distinctiveness. These socio-psychological theories are interdisciplinary connected, and I will now continue with a short discussion of Tajifel's theory of intergroup distinctiveness.

## Tajifel's Theory of Intergroup Distinctiveness

Divergent acts are strongly connected to interpersonal and intergroup factors, and social identity theory. Heider's (1958) causal attribution theory states that individuals evaluate speaker behaviour in light of the motives or reasons, and external pressures they suppose are the driving force behind speaker behaviour. Consequently, individuals' perceptions are linked to individual interpersonal attributes. The influence of intergroup identity can be minimalized or maximized during divergent speech acts. Factors such as intergroup status, prominence of the group, degree of group accessibility or openness, and the "existence of multiple group memberships" (Miller, 2005: 156), all minimalize or maximize the effects of divergence. Individuals may wish to utilize linguistic repertoire or paralinguistic features due to intergroup distinctiveness aspects, in order to diverge from other intergroup members. This can be achieved if an individual employs or exaggerates differences in speech patterns, i.e. accent or the use of jargon. For example, individuals may use workplace jargon; teenagers may use slang or 'in' words to emphasize intergroup distinctiveness. As discussed earlier, the maintenance of individual group identity is important and according to Bourhis (1979), a potentially conscious act in interethnic contexts.

Let us now consider a potentially conflicting intergroup context:

respectively jocks[5] and bookworm[6] intergroups. Each intergroup uses divergent strategies to highlight their intergroup differences, and emphasize the non-permeable aspect of each respective group. From an athletic jocks' perspective, a bookworms' appearance, habits and or attitudes are undesirable. On the contrary, the bookworms' consider the jocks' intelligence, habits and or attitudes as inferior. Each intergroup uses divergent strategies to protect, differentiate and maintain social identity; meanwhile maintaining respective, positive ingroup distinctiveness. Giles et al (1991), continue to argue the benefits for intergroup distinctiveness with regards to the inherent value it has on an individual's social identity:

> ".. intergroup comparisons will lead individuals to search for, or even create, dimensions on which they may be seen to be positively distinct from a relevant outgroup. The perception of such a positive distinctiveness contributes to individuals' feelings of an adequate social identity, which enhances their feelings of self-worth" (Giles et al. 1991: 27, in Miller, 2005: 156).

Giles and Smith's (1979), optimal levels of convergence, based on empirical research are noteworthy to the discussion. Giles and Smith evaluated British teachers' conclusions of a sample of recorded Canadian speakers, converging on varying degrees during the early 80's. The teachers listened to pre-recorded tapes of the speakers converging on aspects of speech rate; content and/or pronunciation (see Giles and Smith, 1979 for detailed procedure). In-line with causal attribution factors, full convergence on all aspects is viewed critically by listeners. In this case the British teachers viewed Canadian speakers' full convergence least favourably. Interethnic convergence can be perceived as condescending and in some cases threatening; in particular due to intergroup individual social identity distinctiveness, and the accompanying self-worth factors. Full convergence may also be considered a threat to cultural identity. Giles and Smith (1979), propose that over-convergence between interethnic groups is viewed

negatively due to the caricature, stereotypes that full speech convergence implies. A North American speaker, who converges with a British speaker on pronunciation and content, may be perceived as an indirect old-fashioned cultural stereotype. As a consequence, accommodation is received negatively; and any further attempts at accommodation will be redundant. Due to socio-psychological reasons interethnic intergroup attempts to reduce social distance (between speakers) requires delicate manoeuvre, and careful consideration prior to interaction. The strategy of speech maintenance is best employed in these contexts, or noble selves would be more favourably received. However, convergence between interethnic groups is possible if para-linguistic features, such as speech rate and pausing are employed; these convergent strategies would be favourably received in interethnic groups.

## Socio-Psychology Perspective

I will now touch on the socio-psychology perspective to conclude this discussion. Psychologists have differentiated two approaches which categorize gender and language: the social cognitive perspective and discursive psychology. Discursive psychology considers the language of the social interaction as representative of social identity. The theory behind discursive psychology states that social and gender identity occurs during the process of interaction, and not, as the social cognitive perspective suggests, through language (Giles et al. 1991b). Social and gender identity is not expressed or developed through language but as the social cognitive perspective suggests, during the process of interaction with others (ibid 1991b and Weatherall and Gallois, 2003). The social cognitive perspective is reflected in social identity theory and speech accommodation theory. By this we imply that gender in relation to social identity, is cognitively assigned prior to interaction. Weatherall and Gallois (2003), describe the social cognitive perspective in regard to language and gender as follows: "Gender

identity is considered to be the internalisation of social norms about gender that predisposes individuals to act, talk and think largely in accordance with them" (ibid., 2003: 487).

The problems, which have been associated with SIT and SAT theories, resulted in the development of CAT. But how do we account for variation, and assess the degree of social group and intergroup convergence? The individual will place greater value on individuals from similar social groups, and consider the linguistic repertoire of an approved individual similar to his own. Bilous and Krauss (1988), noted that in sociable, friendly interaction, motivation to converge is expected, because we would expect the motivation to converge is strong in an amicable interaction (ibid, 1988 in Weatherall and Gallois, 2003). However, the research highlights that during friendly interaction men and women only converge part of the time, and instances of divergence were also noted.

## Concluding Remarks

This paper addressed the issue of an individual's linguistic construction in relation to social and speaker identity, with reference to interpersonal and intergroup factors. The discussion of interpersonal and intergroup theories highlighted that social identity is constructed from an individual's interaction with *multiple* groups. The outcome and feedback individuals receive in social interaction constitutes a dynamic process. Individuals are continuously adjusting their linguistic repertoire in accordance with a desired identity they wish to portray, that is interpersonal and intergroup dependent. Individuals are linked to social and network groups, the stronger the tie between a group and an individual, the greater influence the group will have on an individual. The natural consequence of social and network groups is the imbalance of power and status. An imbalance of power and status may be strongly felt when individuals interact on an intergroup level. Communication often

fails due to misinterpreted network ties. The community of practise is an important aspect in relation to an individual's linguistic construction. Individuals are members of one or more CofP's, these are single sex groups, as we saw examples of the male college varsity group or the female aerobics class. The CofP can also be mixed gender groups, such as a book club. Society continues to place great emphasis on gender segregation and the categorisation of individuals, who use linguistic variables characteristic of their gender group. Social identity theory, early speech accommodation theory, and the later development of communication accommodation theory are based on the psychological social cognitive perspective, arguing gender and social identity are biologically pre-ordained. The perspective states that prior to social-interaction gender and social identity is already fixed. The contrasting psychoanalytic argument is the discursive psychology perspective, proposing gender and social identity are created during, in other words *in* interaction, regardless of gender, power or status.

Linguistic construction is a dynamic process. Convergence and divergence strategies are employed consciously and unconsciously, context dependant. I thus propose that both psychoanalytic perspectives hold true depending on the relevant social groups and level of interpersonal or intergroup influences and instances of interethnic interaction.

## Notes

1    An offensive or alarming word is replaced with a milder version e. g. working girl in place of prostitute; working girl in place of hooker (Matthews, 1997).
2    1. An uneducated white farm labourer, especially from the South, USA. 2. a bigot or reactionary, especially from the rural working class (APA).
3    1. An uncultivated or boorish person; lout; philistine; yokel  2. a coarse or brutish person.
4    A member of the class of poor whites, especially in the southern USA. 2. poor whites collectively (APA).

5   1.Athletic supporter, or someone who is characterized by excessive concern for machismo.

6   1. A person devoted to reading or studying.

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