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## **Gender Roles and Language Loss: An Analysis of Language Attitudes and the Potential for Gender-Influenced Language Maintenance and Loss among Texas Germans**

### **Introduction**

Whether in the first language (L1) or beyond (L2, L3, etc.), identifiable differences between men and women's speech and language use often coincide with broader ideas of individual identity and language attitudes. The question then arises as to how gender, as a socially constructed identity marker, can be interpreted as a factor in individual speaker's reported skills in an endangered or dying language variety, as well as in their more general attitude towards speaking dialects and languages of lower prestige within a specific society. The group in question for this paper are Texas Germans living within the United States, specifically around the area referred to as the "German Belt" in Texas.<sup>1</sup>

The Texas German Dialect Project (hereafter TGDP; [www.tgdp.org](http://www.tgdp.org)), founded in 2001 by Hans Boas of the University of Texas at Austin, aims to help preserve the Texas German (hereafter TxG) history, culture, and language by interviewing speakers and collecting historical TxG and German-language documents and letters.<sup>2</sup> The interviews themselves consist of biographical questionnaires, translation tasks using Gilbert's (1977) list of 148 words and phrases, and an open-ended interview section where the speaker and interviewer converse (or attempt to converse) in German about the speaker's life and experiences during the earlier periods of their life when they used Texas German the most. Speakers have varying levels of fluency, and no two speakers have the exact same level of language skill. TxG itself is a moribund

heritage language, spoken by the descendants of 19th century German immigrants to Texas. Boas (2009) estimated that there were around 8,000-10,000 speakers of Texas German remaining at the time of publication, and their numbers have only decreased since then. While the TGDP continues to interview participants, the number of speakers willing to be interviewed, as well as confident enough in their abilities to attempt the translation tasks and converse in German, is low.

The present study investigates the potential for gendered language maintenance and loss among speakers of Texas German following three research questions.

RQ1: To what extent do female speakers of Texas German differ from their male counterparts in regard to self-identity and self-evaluation of language skills as reported in the biographical questionnaires of the TGDP?

RQ1a: If there are gendered differences, can the reasons for them be understood from only the answers and comments from participants found within the biographical questionnaires?

RQ2: To what extent has there been diachronic change over the past 15 years of TGDP interviews between the answers in the biographical questionnaires of both male and female speakers?

In this paper, I refer to biological gender, as gender identity is neither a part of the TGDP biographical questionnaire nor an issue among most of the TxG speakers interviewed. For my analysis I use biographical data collected during TGDP interviews, as well as anecdotal evidence taken both from the questionnaires as well as one open-ended interview section, to conduct an exploratory study of the possible differences between male and female TxG speakers with regards to language maintenance and language loss. I anticipate a difference to appear between speakers of different genders for both their self-identities and rating of their own skills. I conclude the paper by beginning a discussion of the possible reasons behind such differences and suggesting directions for further research.

## **Background Literature**

Labov (1990) has added to the discussion of language and gender within sociolinguistics with his two general principles governing the role of gender in language change: Principle I states that for stable sociolinguistic variables, men show a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women; Principle Ia then adds to this with the assertion that in change from above, women

favor the incoming prestige form; and finally, Principle II views women as the innovators in language change. These principles have guided much of the current sociolinguistic research on gendered differences, e.g., Chambers (2009: 115) asserts that “[i]n virtually all sociolinguistic studies that include a sample of males and females, there is evidence for this conclusion about their linguistic behavior: women use fewer stigmatized and non-standard variants than do men of the same social group in the same circumstances.” The question of how language use and gender interplay is therefore not new, but when gender roles and expectations influence bi- and multilingual situations, it is necessary to define the different environments in which these language contact situations can occur, as there are multiple types of language contact situations. Language contact can occur between languages that may or may not be related, between speakers with similar or dissimilar social structures, and within different patterns of multilingualism among the relevant language communities. TxG is in contact both with English and Spanish, and English is the language used in most official bureaucratic capacities and in schools. Texas German itself is a heritage language, and as Bower (2010: 244) points, one common aspect connecting heritage language groups is that they often view their language variety vis-à-vis the standard, here the standard being “Hochdeutsch” or Standard German (2010: 244). Some TxG speakers view themselves as “Deutschverderbers” (literally: German-ruiners), and often speak about Texas German as a “corrupted” version of the standard. This ties into attitudes about transmission and use, namely that speakers are devaluing their language and this attitude contributes to a lack of motivation to pass it on.

Earlier language ideologies have generally viewed language through male-as-standard norms, which ignores women’s roles in language, as well as the social construction of gender. Traditional analyses of women’s language use were conducted based on their similarities or differences to men’s language use, with the men’s language being used as the standard. A more current modern language ideology perspective, feminist poststructuralism, ignores these male-as-standard language norms, and is instead an:

attempt to investigate and theorize the role of language in construction and reproduction of gender relations, and the role of gender dynamics in language use and change. (Pavlenko, 2001: 120)

Pauwels and Winter (2005: 154) write that “language choices, maintenance or shift patterns and bilingual discourse practices” are mediated through each individual speaker’s multiple identities (e.g., parent, child, member of

a certain profession, gender identity, etc.), as well as through “broader socio-cultural prescriptions, values, symbols and ideologies.” Language and culture are tightly interwoven, and for a socio- or ethnolinguistic study, one cannot be discussed without the other. I follow this poststructuralist approach to language analysis, as described by Pavlenko (2001), as it is important to focus on language use in a broader sense, as well as how language maintenance and loss could be affected by the power hierarchies and gender roles within the TxG community. This differs among language communities, although there are general social and linguistic practices affecting language maintenance, e.g., marriage practices, language transmission practices, educational practices, workplace practices, and communal activities (Pavlenko, 2001: 143). Questions about some of these practices are a part of the current TGDP biographical questionnaire, although there is no direct question about the languages spoken by an individual speaker’s spouse, meaning that the issue potentially comes up only during open-ended interviews. In addition, ideologies of language and gender, such as those expressed in early variationist studies, show a tendency to devalue women’s linguistic practices (Pavlenko, 2001: 137).

Since the migration wave of 1880-1924, during which many ancestors of the speakers interviewed came over to Texas from Germany, intolerant attitudes towards other languages have risen in Texas (De Fina and King, 2011: 165). Immigrant language contact with the majority language affects both the development of later heritage languages and language attitudes in both communities. As reported by many scholars of TxG (e.g., Boas 2009, Roesch 2012), both World Wars played a large part in both the creation of English-only policies and attitudes from both outside German communities towards those with German heritage living in the US, as well as from speakers within the communities themselves who were afraid of being seen as “unpatriotic”<sup>3</sup>. As Boas (2009: 56) states, “World War I brought a definite end to German instruction in schools,” with a law passed in 1918 making it illegal to teach in any language other than English. Another factor was a desire based on individual reasons for assimilation, as also mentioned in Seeger (2007) in his analysis of the socio-economic influence on Low German in Kansas. Another aspect of the contact with English and other languages has been the loss of a language domain in which only TxG is used. TxG has also existed in the past within a diglossic language situation, which is defined by Winford (2003: 112) as “situation where ‘one of the varieties, designated the H(igh) language, is employed in more official, public domains such as government, education, literature, etc., while the other, designated L(ow) language, is used in more private and informal domains such as the family, friends, neighborhood, etc.’” (quoted in Boas, 2009: 40). The L language for the speech community

in question, in this case TxG, was acquired and used more frequently within the private domain and specifically the home but was also a part of the public domain of education and business up until the onset of World War I and the interwar period. The decline in German-language news periodicals, church services, and as a language of instruction (i.e., the decline of the H language) all greatly impacted the use of German among TxG speakers. It has been relegated to primarily the private domain, as a language mostly spoken with only friends or family. The relative isolation of the TxG community allowed the more public domains of language use to be preserved for longer than those of German immigrant communities in more urban, concentrated areas, but English-only policies enacted after the onset of World War I eventually reached these regions as well.

Pauwels and Winter conducted a 2005 study in Australia with second-generation German and Greek immigrants, gathering data on the participants' language use patterns, proficiencies in English and their parents' language (German or Greek), as well as their views on language maintenance using questionnaires, surveys, interviews much like those conducted by the TGDP, and participant observations. They found that the majority of the second-generation women used German in discourse contexts involving family and with friends, however, less than half of the second-generation men used German within the same discourse contexts (Pauwels and Winter, 2005: 157). The two authors found that the second-generation immigrants differed between men and women in that the German women used German much more often when speaking with friends than the men did, which seems to be the opposite, anecdotally, of what many men who are interviewed by the TGDP claim. For the German speakers from Pauwels and Winter's study, while both groups saw a decrease in the use of German and their overall competency, the men were more likely to avoid using the language when there was a chance of making mistakes, and many said their fathers were the ones encouraging a shift to English (Pauwels and Winter, 2005: 162). This is important in the context of this study, because there is a difference between the second-generation immigrants being interviewed for this Australian 2005 study and the TxG speakers who are commonly 4th–6th generation Texas Germans. The participants also all came from Melbourne, Australia, which is a much more urban area than that of most of the TxG speakers. The difference between urban and rural living could have a difference on the results of this study.

Boas and Fingerhuth (2017) used a methodology similar to that employed here, analyzing the biographical questionnaires and open-ended interviews of 36 TxG speakers (19 men and 17 women) interviewed between 2002 and 2010. Boas and Fingerhuth concluded that while TxG speakers

are consistently proud of their heritage and identity as Texas Germans, this has not translated into a concerted effort to preserve and maintain language fluency and competency. Their study, while very similar to the methodology and analysis of this paper, did not look at gender and gender roles as a factor in this language use and loss. This paper therefore addresses this gap in the research.

## **Methodology**

I have used sections of the TGDP biographical questionnaire and one open-ended interview to do both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of self-reported language attitudes and skills, and to relate those back to gender differences in language loss and maintenance. I also include some anecdotal evidence from a 2021 interview with Speaker 841 (whose biographical questionnaire has not been included here, as that interview took place after data for this paper was compiled) as well as written evidence from the biographical questionnaires analyzed. I examined 60 biographical questionnaires (30 female and 30 male speakers, identified as such by gendered first names).<sup>4</sup> Thirty of the questionnaires (15 women and 15 men) were from TxG speakers interviewed when the TGDP began, but I did not begin with the very first speakers as the questionnaire has been revised several times, and I wanted to have a consistent version in my analysis. The other 30 questionnaires (again with 15 female and 15 male speakers) were the recent interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020. The 60 questionnaires for the analysis were categorized as follows: biologically male or female based on listening to the audio and the speaker's first name; speakers who were interviewed at the onset of the TGDP (Group 1) and speakers who were interviewed in 2019-2021 (Group 2).<sup>5</sup> Of minor interest to the end analysis was the possible changes in attitudes in the short time period during which the TGDP has been conducting interviews, and so I will attempt both a synchronic and diachronic analysis for the purpose examine how speakers' language attitudes have changed between the start of data collection and the present. Due to both the nature of the biographical questionnaire (it is currently 12 pages long, and most speakers do not answer every question, nor do the interviewers always ask every question; I thus chose speakers who answered the majority of the questions about identity and language use/skills) and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the TGDP's ability to conduct in-person interviews, I also note when a speaker did not answer a question. A more in-depth study would also include the open-ended interviews from each of the speakers whose biographical questionnaires were analyzed, but for the sake of space I focus on only one piece of anecdotal evidence from a 2021 interview.

The sections of the biographical questionnaire drawn on for my analysis were as follows: how the speaker identifies themselves when given multiple options; the first language learned at home; who they spoke German with in the 1960s and 1970s; who they spoke German with today (2000s-2020s); a self-evaluation of how well the speaker understands German; and a self-evaluation of how well the speaker speaks German. Each of these questions had multiple answers for the speakers to choose from, with the opportunity to write additional comments if they so chose. I then tabulated the data into charts for a visual comparison of answers based on gender and membership in Group 1 or Group 2. The qualitative part of this study is based both on those answers and anecdotal evidence with respect to current feminist poststructuralist language ideologies around language maintenance and language loss.

### **Data and Analysis**

The data compares answers to the chosen questions both synchronically (men and women), as well as diachronically (Group 1 and Group 2). Figures 1 and 2 below show the answers given by participants when asked which identity they would choose as the first choice for themselves. This question also asked the speakers to list each option that they believe best fit them in the numerical order; here only the number one for each speaker is considered, as numerical rankings were not consistent. There was another choice, “a resident of this city or country”, but this was the rarest choice for any spot amongst the rankings and therefore excluded here. These results were also only analyzed synchronically, men versus women as two groups of 30 speakers each. This was done mostly to avoid cluttering the visual representation of the data, but differences between Groups 1 and 2 below regarding the timeframe during which the interviews were conducted are still discussed.

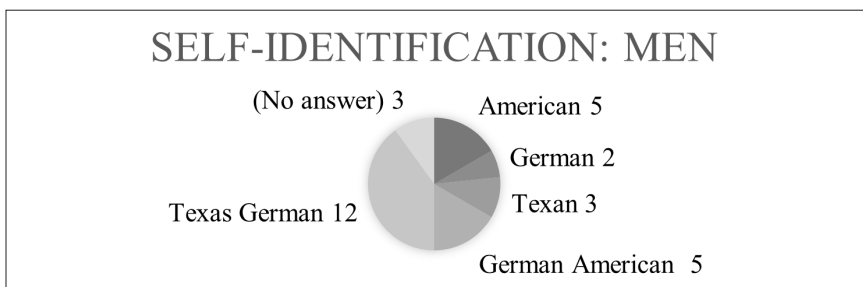


Fig.1. How the 30 male speakers identify themselves first. (Speakers were asked to give each identity a ranking, however, most just chose one.)

As shown in Fig. 1, 40% of the 30 male speakers identified as “Texas German,” with a further 17% identifying as “German American.” Five speakers chose “American” (also 17%), and 3 chose “Texan” (10%). Interestingly, 2 speakers identified as “German,” which is not reflected in any of the data from the 30 female speakers. The speakers who identified first as German were in the first group of interviewees, which means the chart could be interpreted as a diachronic shift in self-identification among the 30 male speakers. One aspect that could contribute to the choice of identity may also be generational, e.g., whether they are a 3rd-generation immigrant or a 6th-generation immigrant (for example). However, further study is necessary to confirm this.

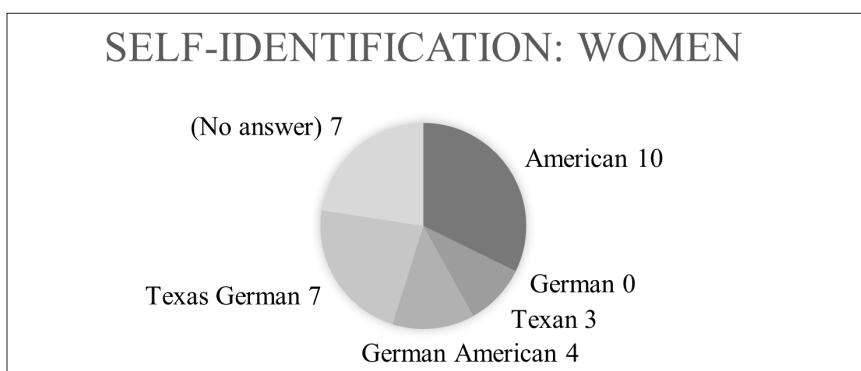


Fig. 2. How the 30 female speakers identify themselves first. (Given the same task as the speakers in Fig. 1.)

Fig. 2, containing the results from the women’s questionnaires, looks rather different from Fig. 1. As stated above, none of the 30 female speakers chose “German” as their first choice of identity, and 7 speakers gave no answer at all (23%). 7 female speakers chose “Texas German” (23%), which is 17 percentage points below male speakers. 4 women identified as “German-American” (13%), and the same number of women as men chose “Texan.” While 5 of the male speakers selected “American” as their first choice of identity, almost twice as many women chose this category, with 10 speakers (32%). Another interesting comparison is that only 7 women (23%) chose “Texas German,” four fewer than the men. There were women from both Group 1 and 2 who chose “American” as their first choice of identity, so there is no evidence of a diachronic shift there.

These two figures above show us that while being “Texas German” and having that identity was important for the 30 speakers described in Boas and Fingerhuth (2017), it becomes much more important for male speakers than female speakers when comparing results across genders. The large percentage



of women who chose “American” might be due to exogamous marriage, but this cannot be fully confirmed at this time. Exogamous marriage is also not solely a phenomenon among female Texas Germans, meaning that if this is in fact a factor in choice of identity, it would indicate a trend of the female TxG partner shifting their identity to fit more closely to that of their husband, and not the reverse.

Another point in this analysis is that the answer to the question “which language was learned first at home” was overwhelmingly “German”. There were 2 instances of “German and English” from the speakers from Group 1 (2 males) and 3 from Group 2 (3 males). In addition, 2 speakers from Group 1 (1 male and 1 female) reported learning only “English” first at home, and 5 speakers (2 male and 3 female) reported the same from Group 2. Of the 60 speakers, only 12 speakers (less than 20%) did not put “German” as the language they learned first. In Group 1, this seems to correlate directly to a tendency to identify first as American or Texan. That cannot be said to be the case with speakers from Group 2. The speakers who only learned English at home most often identified as American or Texan, but there were also two speakers who still identified as Texas German despite stating that they did not learn German first at home. This underscores the claim of Boas and Fingerhuth (2017) that while Texas German is an important aspect of many community member’s identities, that same cannot be said for its impact on community efforts to maintain the language.

I did a synchronic and diachronic comparison of the data for TxG speakers’ self-reported listening and speaking competencies, as shown in Figs. 3 and 4. It is important to note that many speakers chose more than one option for these specific questions, showing that speakers themselves do not always have a definite answer about with whom that did or do speak German with.

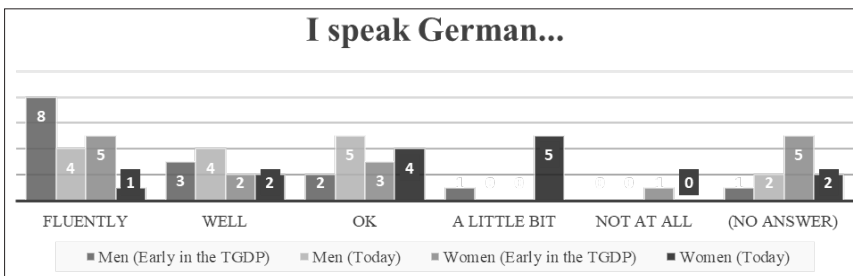


Fig. 3. Speakers’ self-evaluations of their German speaking abilities.

The two groups of men showed a tendency to rate their speaking skills higher than the female speakers, and Group 1 female speakers also tended to rate them higher than those from Group 2. The Group 1 men were the most likely to rate their speaking skills as “fluent,” but more Group 1 women rated their speaking as “fluent” than Group 2 men. The speakers who were interviewed when the TGDP first started tended to be more confident in their speaking skills than later participants. Women today were the most likely to rate their speaking skills as “I speak German . . . a little bit”, while no men today rated their speaking skills as lower than “OK”. There were several speakers who did not answer this question, which could be due to various factors, e.g., the speaker did not understand the question, or the question was not asked by the interviewer, although the exact causes are not clear.

In general, while it was more even across Group 1, and those speakers tended to rate their skills higher regardless of gender, female speakers who have been interviewed over the past three years tend to place their speaking skills on a lower level. The male speakers from Group 2 have also shown a decrease when compared with the earlier male speakers from Group 1, but not to the same extent as the female speakers. This same trend, however, is not as extreme when looking at the TxG speaker’s self-reported receptive skills.

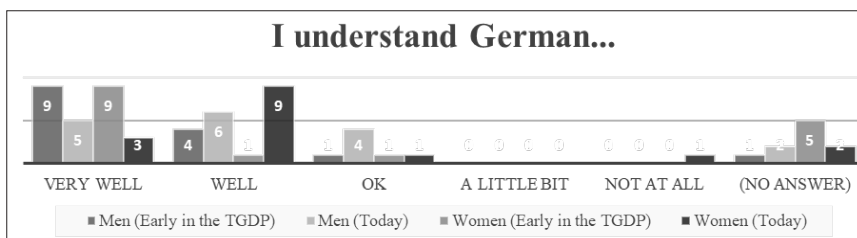


Fig. 4. Speakers’ self-evaluation of their receptive listening skills for German.

Almost all speakers who gave an answer for this question rated their receptive skills as no lower than “OK,” except one female speaker from Group 2 who did not understand German at all. There is still a trend for Group 1 men to show more confidence in their speaking skills than Group 1 women, but this could relate to the fact that 5 women had no answer here. None of the speakers from either group or either gender put down that they only understood German a little bit, relating back to the question of the language learned first. Many speakers interviewed for the TGDP report that even if they did not speak German at home with siblings and/or parents, their grandparents almost always spoke German and they heard family members speaking German as children. Early input from other TxG speakers would, in theory, lead to understanding the language while not being able to produce it to the same extent.

In Group 2, there is again a decline in the degree to which speakers claim to understand German, however more men report understanding German “Very well” and “Well” than women. The number of TxG speakers has declined consistently since 2001, when the TGDP was founded leading to a decrease in opportunities to use the language. The question is then why female speakers are showing a marked decrease in reported skill?

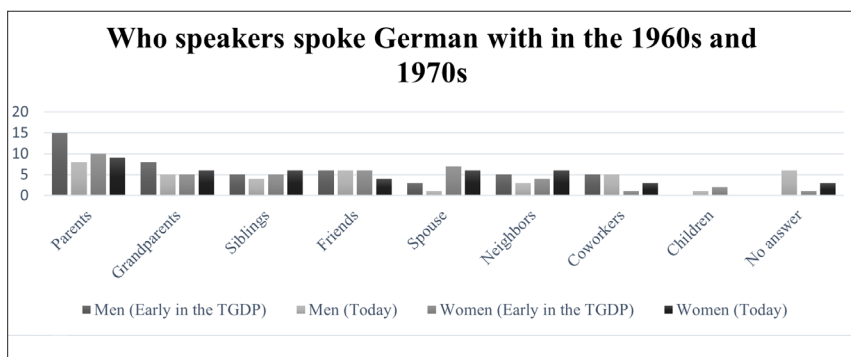


Fig. 5. Who each speaker reported using German with during the 1960s and 1970s.

Figs. 5 and 6 show the different discourse contexts and language domains within which speakers reported using German both during the 1960s-1970s, as well as today.<sup>6</sup> The data is again analyzed synchronically and diachronically. Speakers were also asked how often they used German and English (always, often, regularly, sometimes, never), however, I chose to focus only on with whom they spoke German with “always,” “often” and “regularly.”

Heritage speakers like those who speak TxG use the language mostly in the private domain. It becomes a language of the home and neighborhood as the majority language becomes more established in the public domain. Most speakers from both genders and both Group 1 and Group 2 reported using German the most in the 1960s and 1970s with their parents and grandparents. The Group 1 men reported the most use of German with parents and grandparents. It is slightly lower here for all groups when it comes to German use with their siblings, which reflects the answers of some speakers when asked which language they learned first at home. Many reported using German with parents but also learning and using English with siblings who were already in school.

The largest groups of speakers who reported using German frequently with spouses at that time were women from Group 1 and Group 2. This contradicts my earlier assumption that because women were less likely to identify as “Texas German” due to exogamous marriage, it impacted language use and subsequent loss. This phenomenon could therefore be due to more

younger women than men present in the TxG community after the World Wars, which would have affected marriage rates and pools of potential partners.

In addition, 6 men from Group 1 had no answer to this group of questions on the questionnaire. Knowing that information might change the results. In general, however, Group 1 speakers reported similar numbers of more use of German in different discourse contexts during the '60s and '70s than Group 2 speakers. During these two decades, many public organizations were available for men, such as *Sängervereine* (singing clubs) and *Turnvereine* (sport clubs), which gave adults from the TxG community opportunities to speak German outside of the home but were primarily for men.

Group 2 women did report more usage with family members than men from that group, coinciding with the idea that women are the homemakers, and therefore passing on the language (or not). Group 2 women also reported speaking more German with neighbors. Group 2 men reported using more German in the '60s and '70s with friends and coworkers. Noticeably more Group 1 and Group 2 men than women used German with coworkers. In many towns along the German Belt like New Braunfels or Fredericksburg, it was good to be able to speak TxG with coworkers or customers. This phenomenon persisted until fairly recently, as Salmons (1983) reports its continued presence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Stereotypical women's professions, like teachers, required English proficiency, the language of instruction in the 1920s and 1930s.

For Fig. 6, the categories have changed slightly, due in part to the assumption that speakers are now mostly retired and older relatives would have passed away. There is also a noticeable change in domains and discourse contexts during which all 60 speakers report using German “always”, “often”, and “regularly.”



Fig. 6. Who each speaker reported using German with today (i.e., at the time of the interview, be it in the early 2000s or 2019-2021).

While Group 1 men and women reported using German with parents, Group 2 men did not, and only two Group 2 women reported using German with parents. The 15 years between interview groups affects these results. Here, Group 1 men reported the most usage among the most groups with whom they spoke German (siblings, spouse, friends, etc.). Group 2 men also reported just as much use of German with their friends as Group 1 women, while Group 2 women reported much less. One Group 1 man, Speaker 28, wrote on his questionnaire next to this question that he spoke more German with men than with women. This anecdotal evidence reflects the trends seen in this study, namely that Group 2 men are continuing to use TxG with a slight decrease while Group 2 women use less German in comparison with Group 1 women connecting back to these men-only community organizations.

The only category where Group 1 women reported more usage than the other groups was with spouses. One explanation is the passage of time and by the possibility that Group 2 speakers may be widowed or remarried to a non-TxG community member. Speaker 835, part of Group 2, identified as “Texas German” although she does not claim to speak TxG. She is married to a Texas German, but her husband never learned German at home because his parents were afraid of being seen as spies during WWII.<sup>7</sup> As a result, she never spoke TxG with her husband and did not pass it on to her children. Speaker 46, part of Group 1, reported that his wife understood German when he spoke it, but was unable or unwilling to speak it herself. So even though female speakers from both groups are reporting frequent usage of German with spouses, this could be due to specific speakers being married within the TxG community as well as language attitudes acquired from their relatives, as opposed to male speakers with exogamous marriages.

Another piece of anecdotal evidence comes from a soon-to-be segmented open-ended interview with a male speaker conducted on April 3, 2021, with TxG Speaker 841 (whose biographical questionnaire is not part of this study’s analysis). In talking about his siblings, he mentions how his older sister and two brothers can speak German, but his two younger sisters cannot, because, in his words, “Die wollten kein Deutsch sprechen” (They [his sisters] didn’t want to speak German).<sup>8</sup> This is a typical pattern in many open-ended interviews where TxG speakers talk about how older siblings tended to be able to speak German, but younger siblings and especially girls could not. It is also a typical pattern among immigrant families in the USA.

Group 2 speakers who still identify as “Texas German” in the present day have pride in their heritage, which translates to a desire to speak as much TxG as possible. The data above points to a tendency for female TxG speakers to integrate more fully into the majority community and subsequently the

majority language of English, as opposed to men who often stay in rural communities for work and participate in men-only organizations that gave them, pre-Covid, more opportunities to use TxG.

## **Conclusion**

The data from the 60 biographical questionnaires show multiple trends. RQ1 was concerned with how members of each gender self-identified and self-rated their own language skills. There appears to be strong difference between both men and women, as well as when the interview took place. Men, regardless of when they were interviewed, were more likely to identify as “Texas Germans” (40%) or “German American” (17%). Female speakers, on the other hand, tended towards self-identifying as “American” (32%) while 17% of the men did. Some speakers reported learning only “English” at home but still identified as “Texas German”. There is not a true correlation with language learned first at home, however it does show that the Texas German identity, as also shown in Boas and Fingerhuth (2017), is more important for men in TxG communities than for women. Furthermore, the language and the cultural heritage of the TxG community are not as closely intertwined as one might initially assume: identifying as Texas German does not directly correlate with high TxG language competency (or any). When speakers were asked to rate productive speaking skills and ability to understand German, there was again a diachronic difference between Group 1 and Group 2. While it was relatively similar across both skill sets between Group 1 men and women, Group 2 women showed much less confidence in their speaking skills than Group 1 men, which falls in line with the claim made by Pavlenko (2001) about the devaluing by both men and women of women’s own linguistic practices.

RQ2 was answered above both in the analyses covering identity and self-evaluation and in the discussion of language domains for the speakers included in the analysis. Overall, Group 1 used more German in daily life than Group 2, both in the 1960s and 1970s as well as at the time interviewed. The numbers of TxG speakers declined between those two periods, and English use grew in both the public and private language domains. Group 2 men still used more German today than women, especially with friends. One explanation for this, as noted above, is that English-only policies and both World Wars led to many parents not transmitting German to their children or using only English, so those potential speakers were only exposed to German through listening to parents and older relatives speaking amongst themselves.

This exploratory study begins a discussion on how gender might play a role in differences between language maintenance and loss for male and

female speakers of Texas German. Without a more in-depth analysis of the open-ended interviews, I can only make assumptions as to why female speakers show a higher degree of loss than the male speakers, and therefore do not have a concrete answer for RQ1a. Due to the patriarchal hierarchies found in many rural American communities, here including those belonging to wider TxG society, and despite ideological claims that mothers and women encourage language transmission in the home as described in Pavlenko (2001), it appears that men retain the linguistic confidence shown by the Group 1 speakers and continue to find opportunities to speak the language with friends, while women are less likely to be confident in their productive skills and showing a sharper decline in maintenance of TxG.

Without inclusion of the open-ended interviews for these speakers, it would be difficult to say after this study's initial analysis that a strong gender hierarchy exists within TxG society, however, this framework would be beneficial to further studies on gender roles and dialect maintenance. Looking at the biographical questionnaires in conjunction with the other sections of the TGDP interviews would give us a better look at the true language situation within this speech community. Even so, anecdotal evidence points towards a male-dominated dialect as the years progress, due in part to how gender roles are defined within TxG society. More broadly, generalizations could be made concerning how any gender affects any minority speech community experiencing language death and language loss. Investigations into gendered differences in maintenance and loss, as well as attitudes towards minority language use in general, using a feminist post-structuralist framework could introduce more opportunities for contrastive dialect studies. This subsequently raises more questions about the universalities and generalizations that could be made about gender and language use around the world, highlighting a number of issues which remain to be addressed in future research.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of the paper was presented at the 46th Annual Symposium of the Society for German-American Studies in April 2022. I thank the referees, William Keel, and Marc Pierce for help with the essay.

<sup>2</sup> TxG itself is a moribund heritage language, spoken by the descendants of 19th-century German immigrants to Texas.

<sup>3</sup> The exact role of World War I in the history of Texas German remains disputed, e.g., Kamphoefner (2019) argues in that language and loyalty were unrelated, specifically concerning soldiers of German heritage who served in the war. Here I following the argument laid out in Boas (2009), which cites the introduction of English-only laws created because of the

United States' entry into World War I as one factor influencing rapid loss of language domains in which German was used, as Boas argues convincingly that World War I had a considerable impact on TxG.

<sup>4</sup> Boas and Fingerhuth (2017) analyzed 26 biographical questionnaires from TxG speakers in Gillespie County but did not control for an equal number of male and female participants. The intention here is to control for an equal number of participant questionnaires regardless of physical location, and to investigate if responses from similarly aged participants would differ based both on the time period during which they were interviewed, as well as each speaker's gender.

<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by two reviewers, claiming a diachronic difference between the groups analyzed based solely on the date interviewed may not show enough change. While analysis on the specific generation of each speaker would be one way to improve upon this analysis and take it further into broader discussions around gender and language use, I would argue that the rapid decline of language domains within which TxG can be/is used lends validity to analyzing the questionnaires as has been done here.

<sup>6</sup> "Today" on the questionnaire is date on which the interview took place.

<sup>7</sup> This was discussed during her open-ended interview.

<sup>8</sup> 153-841-1-0-a: 00:10:55 – 00:11:26. (153 refers the interviewer number, 841 is the speaker number, and 1 denotes that this conversation was part of the open-ended interview segment, as per the audio labelling conventions used by the TGDP).

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