

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDENTITY: AAE

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1. Introduction

The concept of gender has come a long way from the sixties when it was treated as a salient sociolinguistic variable (sex) to the nineties when it has become a fluid, dynamic and highly complex social category. The evolution of the concept of gender has finally drawn attention to the fact that both female and male language form an overlapping continuum rather than constitute binary categories. With regard to language, gender as a constructed notion calls for moving away from global generalizations and stereotyped conclusions. It has been shown (cf. Cameron 1998; Coates 1997) that actual instances of language use must be considered as part of complex of interlocking cultural, social and political, psychological and linguistic systems. This paper discusses one such actual instance of language use among African American men and women in their church meetings. The data come from my own fieldwork conducted in the African American Episcopal church in Ypsilanti, Mi. The discursive construction of gendered identity of the female chairperson of the meetings is examined through a discourse analysis of her own language choices as well as those of other members. Specifically, the concept of reciprocal expectations (cf. Gumperz 1982) has been employed in order to show how the chairperson and other committee members commonly assume their particular alignment roles in an interaction in terms of their expressions of femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, the concept of crossing (cf. Rampton 1995) helps to examine how Barbara (the chairperson) appropriates the communicative style stereotypically ascribed to the white male culture. The first section of the paper introduces the concepts considered pivotal in the social construction of gender. The next part of the paper discusses how linguistic forms come to be viewed as expressions of femininity or masculinity. The final section analyses the construction of gendered identity through conversational interaction. The paper demonstrates that the qualitative method is unparalleled in showing the richness of the interaction of the language forms and strategies.

2. Gendered identity

2.1. How linguistic forms become gendered

Every speaker has a wide range of linguistic forms available in any setting and at any time. Both men and women make linguistic choices continuously. Although most of these choices are subconscious, or rather they constitute the ultimate effect of a long process of gender role socialization,¹ these choices are never made in a social vacuum. One of the salient features of linguistic choices is the fact that they are always gendered (Coates 1997). What West and Zimmerman (1987) call *doing gender* (or performing gender) is presenting ourselves to others as gendered beings. As a result, there is no single way of being a woman or a single way of being a man at the linguistic level. Both men and women perform differently in various settings such as work, home, etc. The change of a role or a function in a particular setting also entails a linguistic adjustment to a role in order to fulfil the concept of *a whole woman* (Eckert 1990) or may I add the concept of *a whole man*. Different settings enable men and women a wide range of doing femininity, masculinity or alternative femininity and alternative masculinity. By the modifier *alternative* I mean the language choices and discourse strategies that have been stereotypically subscribed to one sex only but which in the framework of the social constructionism of gender² may be employed by both sexes. Different discourses provide us with an access

¹ Gender differences are exceedingly complex, particularly in a society and era where women have been moving self-consciously into the market and calling traditional gender roles into question. Gender roles and ideologies create different ways for men and women to experience life, culture and society. A gender role consists of activities that men and women engage in with different frequencies. The male gender role or a female gender role are like scripts that men and women follow to fulfill their appropriate parts in acting masculine or feminine. Thus a person acts to fulfill a role by behaving in the expected way in the appropriate situation. The process of acquiring gender roles begins at birth. The colors of pink and blue are among the first indicators used by a society to distinguish female from male (Lindsey 1990: 36). As the infants grow, other cultural artifacts will assure that this distinction remains intact, for example girls will be given dolls to diaper and tiny stoves to cook pretend meals; boys, on the other hand, will construct buildings with miniature tools and wage war with guns and tanks. The incredible power of gender role socialization is largely responsible for such a behavior (Lindsey 1990: 36-37).

² Gender within the social constructionist framework is not a trait of individuals at all but a construct that identifies particular transactions that are understood to be appropriate to one sex. Gender so defined is not resident in the person but exists in those interactions that are socially construed as gendered. One of the major premises of social-constructionism is that knowledge is simply what we agree to call truth since it is precisely us who create reality. Along the same lines, gender is not an actual autonomous phenomenon that exists inside individuals but it is rather an agreement that resides in social interchange; it is what we agree to be. In other words, it is the meaning we have agreed to ascribe to a particular class of transactions between individuals and environmental contexts. Social constructionism is often contrasted with essentialism as it moves away from ideas of the naturally given or taken for granted and questions the social and historical roots of phenomena.

to different femininities and /or different masculinities. More mainline discourses position women/men in more conventional ways, while more radical ones offer alternative ways of doing femininity and masculinity (Coates 1997). As Fairclough maintains, discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or constitute them, different discourses constitute key entities in different ways (Fairclough 1992: 3ff.). However, the question remains how particular language features come to be viewed as male or female.

The relation between particular features of language and gender is typically non-exclusive (Ochs 1992), i.e. is variable features of language may be used by both sexes. As a result, linguistic features do not pragmatically presuppose "male" or "female". However, many linguistic forms associated with gender are also associated with the marking of other social information, such as the marking of stance and social action. One or more linguistic features, however, may index social meanings such as stances, social acts, social activities which help to constitute gender meanings. Ochs (1992: 341) noted that many of the linguistic features primarily associated with either men or women have as their core social meaning, a particular affective stance. Such linguistic features in English could be hedges, directly indexing tentativeness. Similarly, particular linguistic features directly index social acts or social activities, such as the imperative mode indexing the act of ordering in English. This act and similar activities in turn may be associated with speaking like a male or like a female and may display different frequencies of use across the two social categories (Ochs 1992: 341). Lavendera (1982) following Ochs' line of reasoning makes a careful distinction between *social meaning*, i.e. a property of the utterance that can be directly related to semantic structure and *social significance*. Social significance derives from the tendency of particular social groups to use relatively high frequencies of particular options. Thus, for example, hedges may carry the social meaning of tentativeness, mitigation and the social significance of "female". As Ochs (1992) noted, certain usages express particular social meanings which become associated with feminine or masculine styles. In western culture, people in powerful positions may exercise the right to speak longer in contexts such as meetings and they may interrupt others, etc.

The positions of power are in general more often held by men. Consequently, the linguistic strategies employed by men tend to be encoded as masculine. When men use these strategies, they contribute to the construction of normative masculinity (Holms 1997: 203). On the other hand, women as a group are more often excluded from power so that social meanings such as *tentative*, *supportive* and *polite* tend to be linked to or cluster with the "feminine" since according to Eckert, femininity is a culturally defined form of mitigation or denial of power, whereas masculinity is the affirmation of power (cf. Eckert 1990: 257). The distinction of social meaning and social significance recognizes the difference be-

tween elements which can be analyzed coherently in semantic terms, as opposed to the purely correlational relationships familiar to quantitative sociolinguistics which are not analyzable in semantic terms (Milroy 1992: 173). The concepts of social meaning and social significance underlie the fact that the relation between language and gender is mediated and constituted through a web of socially organized pragmatic meanings. Ochs (1992) maintains that knowledge of how language relates to gender is not a catalogue of correlations between particular linguistic forms and sex of the speaker, referents, addressees and the like. Rather such knowledge entails tacit understanding of how particular linguistic forms can be used to perform particular pragmatic functions (such as conveying stance and social action) as well as norms, preferences and expectations regarding the distribution of this word, vis-a-vis the particular social identities of speakers, referents and addressees (Ochs 1992: 342). Ochs provides a model depicting two kinds of relation between language and gender.

LINGUISTIC FORM	DIRECT INDEX	INDIRECT INDEX
ZE	COARSE INTENSITY	MALE "VOICE"
WA	DELICATE INTENSITY	FEMALE "VOICE"

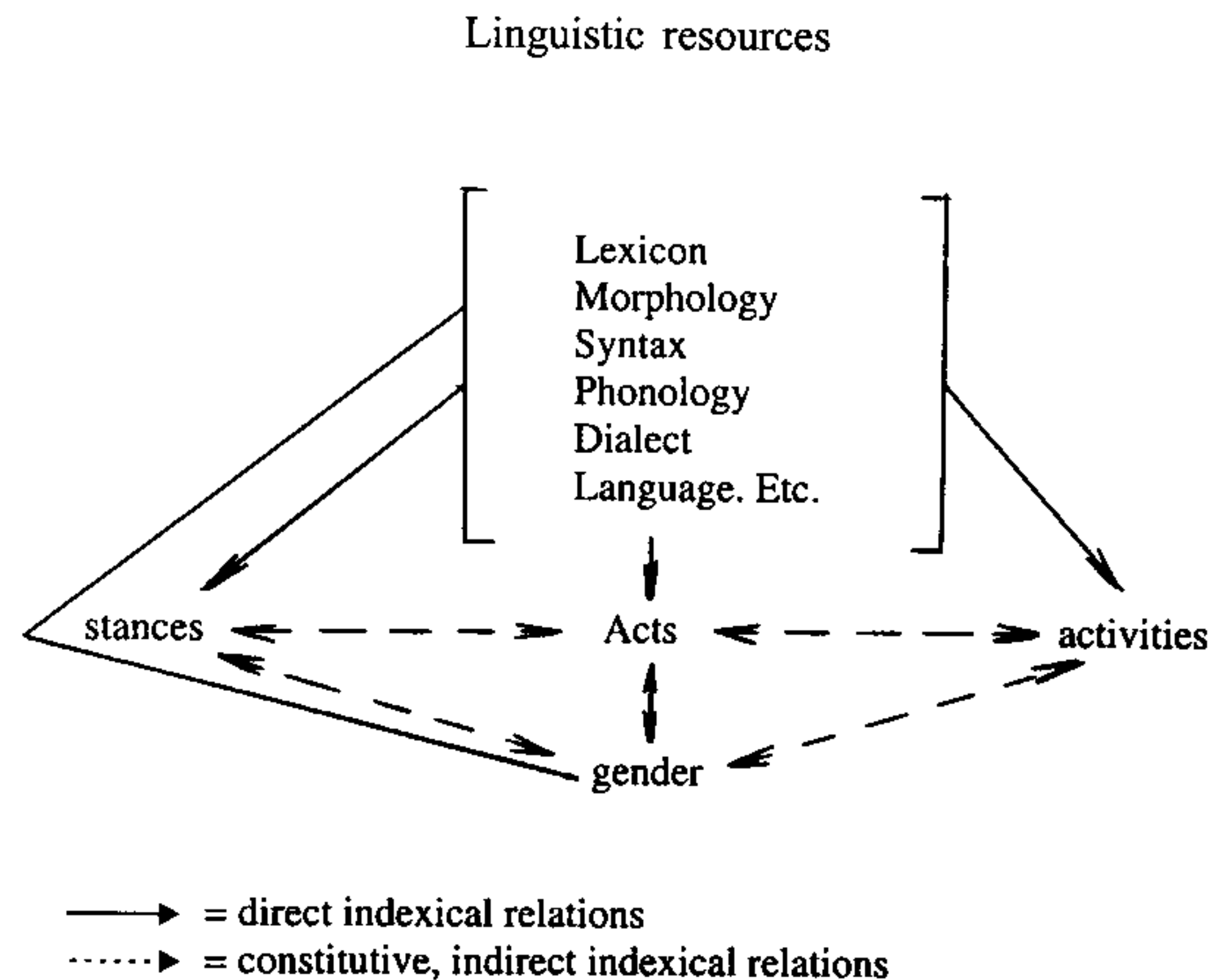


Figure 1. Indexing gender in Japanese (Ochs 1992: 343)

The first relation (direct indexical relation) is of much less importance to my discussion since here a personal pronoun indexes the gender of a speaker or a kin term indexes the gender of a speaker and referent.

The second relates gender to language through some other indexed social meaning. Research on pragmatic devices and interactional discourse strategies has also demonstrated that choices among these can be used to express particular speech functions or social meanings, such as tentativeness or aggression, support or lack of interest, as well as meanings which took on gendered significance as masculine and feminine through habitual association with particular social groups (Holms 1997: 215). They become the locus of "purely symbolic sex role differentiation", in society, of masculine and feminine norms or dimensions (Milroy 1992: 175).

Language is used to symbolize our different social identities and, as a result, in any interaction we draw on the symbolic power to construct a particular identity. The process of creating a gendered identity draws on the participants' familiarity with the social significance of particular choices. The participants draw on established sociolinguistic norms. Thus, the symbolic power in construction of a gendered identity has to be supported by the interlocutors' common assumptions about the event they participate in and the possible alignment roles (all types of social relationships) the participants will index. Here the concept of reciprocal expectations (Gumperz 1982) should be introduced. A gendered identity, whether feminine/masculine or alternatively masculine/feminine, is not the property of an individual but rather the construction of an individual only. The constructions are bound together by sets of reciprocal expectations of the participants in a particular interaction. The participants should approach an interaction with the presupposition about what to do (or rather what is appropriate), how and when to do it. As a result, who we are is sustained by our ongoing interaction with others and the way we position ourselves in relation to those others. In order to illustrate the significance of reciprocal expectations in sustaining roles and identities, Schiffrin provides the following example:

When I am teaching I am expected to act in a certain way: to speak with some authority, raise topics for discussions, and give instructions. But such conduct will work only if others engage in the practices expected of them by taking up the reciprocal status of students for example allowing me an extended floor of talk, building on my topics and following my instructions (Schiffrin 1996: 196-197).

Reciprocal expectations are crucial in constructing gendered identities, as there should be a thread of common assumptions about particular alignment roles in an interaction as to their expressions of femininity or masculinity.

In the following part of this study I shall discuss how a gendered identity is being constructed in the ongoing interaction and how the concept of gender as a

dynamic and socially constructed notion contributes to the choice of particular language forms.

2.2. The construction of gendered identity interaction.

Social Identity Theory relies on an individual's various group identifications as central to a development of self and as the basis for many kinds of behavior, not the least of which is linguistic behavior (Giles – Robinson 1990). There is no set of general sociolinguistic tools through which to analyze how language reveals identity (Schiffrin 1996: 191). In the analysis, however, it is crucial to apply more qualitative approaches since identity is defined as a display of a person's social alignment relationships (Kiesling 1998: 69). As a result, the identities need to be explored in context since people create their identities in various communities of practice.³ Thus, communication appears to play a central role in how participants define a situation and their roles within this situation. Language choice may then be governed by the activity itself, a desire to express and emphasize social identity through language choice or the formality of the setting.

Status, social identity, social setting and communicative behavior mutually influence one another. Any individual, at any given point in time, may choose to emphasize or de-emphasize a particular social identity. Gendered identity is one of the dimensions of social identity. Gendered identity is a construct that varies in social significance for an individual depending on the situation. A speaker's gendered identity will take its place as one among a number of social and personal identities, varying its salience, depending on several factors.

The most significant of them will be: the speaker's ties with his/her interlocutors, and the feedback that the speaker gets about the affective nature of the communicative event. As a result, gendered identity is locally situated, i.e. who we are is at least partially a product of where we are and whom we are with. The gender identity is reflected not only in the contents of the utterances (i.e. what was said or not said) but also in how syntactic forms, information status and

³ The concept of a community of practice has been introduced by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992). The community of practice focuses on a community defined by social engagement that language serves "not the place and not the people as a collection of individuals" (1992: 95). It is an aggregate of people who come together around the mutual engagement in some common tasks. A community of practice is different as a social construct from the traditional notion of community in the sense of (Gumperz 1982) because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and the practice in which that membership engages. Individuals participate in multiple communities of practice, and individual identity is based in the multiplicity of this participation. Gender is produced (and often reproduced) in differential membership in the communities of practice. Within communities of practice women and men do not negate their earlier gendered sociolinguistic identities, but rather they transform them, change and expand forms of femininity, masculinity and gender relations.

contextualization cues are used to convey pragmatic meanings central to the interactions (Schiffrin 1996: 193). Following Schiffrin's assumptions, I suggest that identity (gendered identity) is locally situated. This assertion differs from the view assumed by some other sociolinguistic analyses. The sociolinguistic studies of variation, for example, often assume that identities are fixed attributes, very stable characteristics of speakers. This assumption underlies the variationist practice of coding identity as a categorical variable,⁴ remaining constant despite contextual changes. As a result, a speaker like Barbara (the chairperson of the committee whose construction of gendered identity will be analyzed) would be coded as an African American, lower middle-class, and middle-aged woman. She would be assumed to maintain the very same gendered identity, regardless of the activity or interaction in which she is engaged. My view implies that gendered identity is neither categorical nor fixed. Barbara may act more or less like an African American female depending on the broadly defined context. This view forces us to attend to speaking activities and to the interaction in which they are situated, as a frame in which our social roles are realized and our gendered identities displayed.

3. The community

3.1. Approaching the community

My fieldwork was conducted at Ypsilanti, Michigan in the winter, spring and summer of 1999. The participants of the study were members of the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church's Celebration and Dedication Committee. Its task was to plan, prepare and schedule all the major events prior to, during and after the 100 days celebration of the new church. The committee was also supposed to promote and publicize all related events. The committee had three subcommittees, which included the following divisions: Historiography, Public Relations and Promotions, and Worship Services and Event Planning. The committee consisted of 10 members but the number of those attending meetings varied from seven to ten. In my study, the linguistic performance of the regular participants has been analyzed: three men and four women. I chose to study their ongoing interactions at the meetings, on the basis of as many recordings as possible. The methodology I used was ethnographic rather than a laboratory model, based on the spontaneous, natural speech of participants re-

⁴ According to a variationist, a speaker is coded, for example as a white, middle class, middle-aged male from a particular place. In this theory s/he would be assumed to maintain the same identity regardless of the activity or interaction in which he is engaged. Interactional sociolinguistics, on the other hand, provides a different view. This view suggests that identity is locally situated and its different facets may be highlighted or submerged during different periods of time (Schiffrin 1998: 374).

corded by means of long-term participant observation in a "natural environment" (the church). This traditional method of anthropological research is used for the analysis of communicative patterns. By participating in activities endemic to the life of a particular group of people a researcher attempts to replace his/her own way of thinking, believing and acting within a framework in which what is done by the members of another group starts to seem "expected" or "natural" (Schiffrin 1998: 140). Prior to the recordings the participants were provided with detailed information about my project and they granted me permission to record their discussions. Five meetings over a period of six months (the first meeting was not taped) produced about three hours of recording. Each meeting took about an hour but although I was not permitted to tape all parts of the meeting, I believe that the data collected are sufficient for the purposes of the present analysis of the construction of a gendered identity in a specific community of practice. Each meeting was analyzed by means of detailed "write-up" notes, taken after sessions, as well as through the notes taken during the meetings ("thick descriptions" notes). The application of the ethnographic method enabled me to conduct a close inspection of the linguistic behavior of the committee members not only during the meetings themselves but also before the sessions and after them. The research was aimed at this particular group for two reasons. Firstly, it was the only group available to me at that time, whose members met regularly. It was also the only group for which a recording consent was granted. Secondly, to the best of my knowledge, there has not yet been any research conducted on the relationship between the language, gender and social roles of African American church members meeting in church yet discussing secular issues. The community turned out to be a group of people with clearly defined hierarchical positions in their church. However, forming a new community of practice (the Dedication and Celebration committee), their hierarchical, fixed positions had to undergo social redefinitions. The new social roles and positions adopted by the committee members provided them with a new range of identities underlined or resisted by the use of certain linguistic features and communicative strategies. Social psychology has recognized that masculinity and femininity constitute two independent dimensions rather than polar points on a single dimension. The gathered data have lucidly exemplified how in a traditionally conservative black church its members operate on such a continuum and how women can score high linguistically on masculine dimension and men on the feminine one. The observations have also revealed how the committee members redefined their social roles in order to adjust to the new context of interaction with the people they knew previously only as regular church members. This social re-adjustment undoubtedly also entailed some linguistic re-adjustment. Their functions on the committee involved a redefinition of the socially constructed gender and thus a linguistic adjustment. This linguistic re-adjustment of

the committee members to the new roles (superordinate or subordinate) was the focus of my fieldwork.

3.2. The structure of the meetings

The qualitative approach used allowed for a very detailed observation of the structure of the meetings as well as the relations between the participants and their redefined social roles. I considered the group a micro community of practice (Eckert – McConnel-Ginet 1992). The committee members constituted an aggregate of people working towards a common goal. A community of practice as a social construct is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. It is the practices of the community and members' differentiated participation in these that structure the community socially. In other words, their everyday social positions and functions (high-status positions, powerless positions) may not reflect their place in the hierarchies in the church meetings. These redefined positions will be noticeable in their language choices since in congruence with social constructionism, people do gender differently in different settings.

Four meetings were taped. The beginning and the end of every meeting did not go on record because those were fixed routines (prayers, greetings). The number of participants in the meetings varied ranging from seven to ten members per meeting. However, for my analysis I used only the speakers present at every meeting in order to achieve some consistency. The committee members have been marked in the tapescripts with the letters W (a woman) or M (a man), referring to their biological sex. It was not necessary to mark every participant with a different letter, since the study does not examine the effects of biological sex on language use but rather the effects of socially constructed gender on language use. Only the person whose gendered identity is being analyzed (Barbara) has been marked in the tapescripts with a specific letter (B). Her linguistic behavior has been contrasted with the linguistic behavior of other committee members.

The structure of every meeting could be summarized in the following way:

- 1) **Opening song**
The song was chosen by the chairperson and performed by all members. The opening song tended to allude to the overall theme of the meeting
- 2) **Prayer**
This was led by one of the committee members (very spontaneous effect). A lot of call and response took place, especially expressions such as: *yes, oh yes* and repetition of part of the prayer. Moreover, the prayer was accompanied by some Theme Scripture reading presented by the same person. The prayer was also a good chance to get familiar with the issues to

be discussed or brought up at a particular meeting, since they were present in the sequence of prayers. For the researcher, this stage of a meeting served as a time to minimize the possible effects of the observer's paradox.⁵ It was time for what African Americans call *bonding*, i.e. a time for showing respect, care and brotherly love towards another person. Thus, committee members had time to become familiar with the researcher and get used to the researcher's presence.

3) Minutes review

The minutes from the previous meeting were read out by the secretary and had to be approved by the chairperson, who was also correcting some parts while the notes were read. Copies of the minutes were also distributed at this stage of the meeting.

4) Discussion

The part of the meeting I labeled "discussion" constituted the essential component of the meeting as far as my research was concerned. It was the time when the anticipated discussions between participants took place and they took on new interactional roles. At this time, opinions were exchanged as to what should be done, who is responsible for what, etc. Vivid discussions enabled me to observe how the redefined social positions of the committee members exerted some types of linguistic adjustment. Becoming gendered members of local communities involves participating with other members in the community of practice. The discussion was the time of participation as well as the time when gendered roles were taken on.

5) Announcement of the next meeting

At the end of every meeting the chairperson negotiated the date of the next meeting and after having reached agreement among the members, the date was officially announced.

6) Prayer

Prayer constituted the last component of the gathering. It was interesting to notice that it was the chairperson who usually implied who should conduct the prayer and what they should pray for.

⁵ The very important sociolinguistic concept of *observer's paradox* has been coined by Labov (1972) who claimed that linguists want to observe how people use language when they are not being observed. A lot of methods have been developed since then to avoid the effect of *observer's paradox*, cf. for example, Milroy (1987); Coates (1998).

4. Data hypotheses

I have put forward the following hypotheses for my study:

- 1) The chairperson (a woman) in constructing her gendered identity in this particular setting (chairing the committee) would move her linguistic choices towards the male end of the linguistic continuum. However, this unique social position for an African American female will require an incorporation of some of the discourse strategies characteristic to the dominant white male subculture. She will also draw on the symbolic power of the linguistic expressions used by the person of the rank higher than hers (the pastor). She will index her social alignments in this setting with her language choices as they best express her powerful position in the interaction.
- 2) The chairperson's gendered identity in this particular setting will not be constructed by her language choices only. In congruence with reciprocal expectations theory, other participants with their own language choices, expressed views, and discourse strategies will also significantly contribute to creating a powerful gendered identity of their leader.

4.1. Data analysis

4.1.2. The construction of gendered identity of the chairperson

The committee was chaired by Barbara, a middle-aged woman of lower class status. Her function was the most important for the committee as a whole since she was personally responsible for all the decisions taken, their validity, efficiency, etc. She was directly held accountable before the pastor of the Church who, in secular terminology, could be called Barbara's boss. The committee members, although being friends with Barbara on a regular basis, understood that in the committee setting their social relations had been redefined and a certain asymmetry had appeared. In building her powerful gendered identity she capitalized on the following features stereotypically ascribed to white masculinity: rejection of interruptions while she interrupts freely, direct, blunt corrections, keeping the business-like character of the meetings. She also urges people to action referring to her authority as chairperson, and finally she often takes on an ironic and accusatory tone.

At this point I will demonstrate how Barbara constructs her powerful gendered identity drawing on the symbolic power of features indexing unmarked, normative white masculinity and capitalizing on lexical items employed by the pastor (the person she is directly responsible to). Barbara, an African American woman realizes her dutiful position, thus she frequently remarks on

action or work that needs to be done. Expressing these remarks she draws the members' attention to her authority. In one such utterance, having received a compliment on mailing the cards about the upcoming meeting she responds:

- (1) B: when you see your postcard it's from sister Mary, she does it ... *I asked her to do it and she does it.*

In the highlighted portion, we can see that the committee member (sister Mary) is obliged to fulfil a certain task because paraphrasing Barbara's words *she asked her to do it*. In these words, she also lets other members know that it is how they are supposed to react to Barbara's request, thus building her powerful position. In her further utterances in which she urges people to action a certain pattern unfolds. She tends to use the conjunction *so* and the verb in imperative. Barbara's position of authority allows her to draw conclusions. This is how she responds on a woman's reflections as to what her responsibilities are:

- (2) W: I need to design the form and I need to start working on it right now=
B: = *so* you're the head person over there *so you need* to meet with Brother Martial
And brother Collwill *so write down* those names.

It is also worth noticing here that she latches her pointed comment although the woman fully realizes her assigned work. In another example the same pattern appears; here she comments on the necessity to note down the possible committee themes:

- (3) B: *give* it to her, *so she can copy* it then.

Then during the exchange of suggestions about who should be invited to celebrate with the community Barbara voices the following comment:

- (4) B: sister can you *write these down so we can give* these to pastor Hatter?

Her authority is also expressed in encouraging co-members to voice their opinions and direct questions to her, as she is capable of answering them:

- (5) B: well, everyone take a look at the job descriptions and if you have any questions, you know what your job descriptions are, any questions?

The job descriptions she refers to are on a list of duties and responsibilities of the committee members. The list is very exhaustive and detailed and does not beg for any further explanation. However, Barbara still asks *any questions?* In another excerpt not only does she urge people to prompt actions but at the same

time she asserts her powerful position with irony as to what the members should do but fail to.

- (6) B: ok. so for now we have 2 themes, we should pass them to pastor and maybe somebody else will bring some other and I don't know if anyone has started any work on their assignments. I did see brother Marshall taking pictures on Sunday. Has anyone been up to the site?
M: I think the last time I was there was 2 weeks ago
M: I was up there, I think brother Marshall was there taking pictures=
B: = oh, great that's what he is supposed to do.

Her direct question as to whether co-members fulfil their responsibilities elicits two very tentative (*I think, I think*) answers from two male members of the committee upon which she latches the ironic comment *that's what he is supposed to do*. Here the tentativeness of the answers sharply contrasts with the almost "rapid fire" latch of the chairperson, thus tentativeness (social significance of femininity) is juxtaposed with promptness, and decisiveness (social significance of masculinity). All of the above examples show how Barbara asserts her powerful stance, holding people responsible for their tasks and maintaining her status in this community of practice as the ultimate source of authority. Urging people to action is not the only means of creating her gendered identity. Barbara feels free to interrupt people, she does not obey the turn-taking scheme. Her interruptions, however, are not examples of high involvement style (Tannen 1994). A careful qualitative analysis demonstrates that her interruptions are either *quick rejections* of somebody else's ideas and opinions, or their function is to let co-members know what they should be doing at this particular moment (instructive interruptions). The second function of the chairperson's interruptions is illustrated in the following excerpt:

- (7) W: as you said we would get a huge ziplock or something and tuck it up //
B: // you may wanna put Some of these suggestions in your notes since sister Kerry is not here today.

Here Barbara is again voicing her authoritative position not only by prompting to action but also by using a particular form of a very direct, violent utterance which deprives the speaker of the floor. Along the same lines she ignores a speaker's right to finish a statement:

- (8) W: so I'm gonna //
B: // but he did say we're gonna celebrate every day that first week.

Here Barbara returns with this violent interruption to the previous argument over the days of celebration. The person who was so violently interrupted wanted to expand on a different issue. This fact even aggravates the violent character of the interruption, depicting Barbara as an unscrupulous leader rejecting any rules of interaction. Another example of interruption illustrates Barbara's use of this interactional device in order to reject a co-member's opinion and divert the discussion to a different issue. Here a man is trying to outline his own vision as to what lends itself to a theme for the Dedication and Celebration Committee:

- (9) M: I have a focus in terms of a spiritual book that in terms of our devotional I was thinking about in terms like a scripture like 4 or 5 scriptures and we have
 B: // that will come later=
 M: =yea, I was thinking in terms of, you know, praise. I'm looking at the spiritual booklet, you know
 B: Yea, yea. Pastor do you wanna tell us some of the dates. I don't know if they are still the same.

First of all, Barbara violently rejects the other person's suggestion, interrupting the speaker in the middle of his sentence. The speaker, on the other hand, is trying to retrieve his position and somehow justify his choice in order to win the chairperson's acceptance. His latching upon Barbara's interruption shows his involvement and will to persuade other members to accept this suggestion. It is, however, only commented on by Barbara with the pragmatic particle: *yea, yea* and an abrupt change of the subject is initiated by her.

Barbara not only interrupts other co-members freely, but she also at the same time rejects any attempts to be interrupted by other committee members. This strategy creates a strong asymmetry between the chairperson and other committee members, putting the former in a powerful position and the latter in powerless positions. In the first example, Barbara is explicating people's jobs on the committees, their responsibilities, when, suddenly taking advantage of a pause, a person is trying to "slip in" a question which would require Barbara to go back to her notes:

- (10) W: can you call my name again sister Barbara?
 (IGNORED BY BARBARA)
 B: so you know who you're working with and what's expected of you.

As the example demonstrates, the chairperson completely ignores the request and continues with her explanation without any hesitation.

In another example, the possible interruption is being silenced by the chairperson, then she continues with her utterance:

- (11) B: ... and she and we work together //
 W: // Can I have ... (IGNORED BY BARBARA)
 B: we got together and did the job descriptions

Then in another excerpt a person is attempting to interrupt twice in the same exchange of opinion with the chairperson. Again, Barbara is very successful in rejecting the possible interruption, capitalizing in the first instance on repeating the phrase (*I'm looking*) at which the interruption occurred and then, as in the above examples, continues with her utterance:

- (12) B: you know, you know *I'm looking* //
 W: // this is ...
 (BARBARA STOPS THE INTERRUPTION)
 B: *I'm looking* that we have a week celebration //
 W: // But you know I was just thinking ...
 (BARBARA AGAIN STOPS THE INTERRUPTION)
 B: weekdays, weeknight celebrations

The above presented examples of interruption and rejections of interruptions by the chairperson of which there were many are the most representative for the whole sample.

Barbara is also positioning herself among other participants as an infallible being. It becomes especially evident when some co-members are coming up with the idea of generating a list of phones of all the members of the committee. This list has already been created and these people didn't know about it:

- (13) W: Do we have a list for everyone in this committee in case we need to call each other?
 B: Don't you have it, didn't we give it out, we gave it out, don't you have a directory???

The chairperson does not provide a simple answer *yes we do*, rather she responds to the question with a negative question *don't you have it* and then in the same utterance provides an answer *we gave it out*. The whole construction of the response takes on an accusatory tone, implying that the member should already know what had been done. Similarly, the exchange with another co-member:

- (14) W: now maybe we should have a list of our phone numbers?
 B: but I thought everybody had!
 You don't have this???

Again a very tentative suggestion (*maybe*) brought a highly contrastive response juxtaposition with the question: *you don't have this?* The accusatory tone can also be heard when Barbara latches her sharp remarks onto duties not fulfilled by the co-members:

- (15) W: so it will be 12 o'clock=
 B: =yea, and you didn't have a complete list of everybody who's chairing what
 W: I have it, I have it

Here, the woman is looking for some confirmation from the chairperson about the time of the main service. She gets a *yea*, after which she faces a dredged up negligence from the previous meeting.

The above quoted examples demonstrate how asymmetry is created with the use of ironic and accusatory remarks. Thus Barbara further ensures other co-members to realize her redefined position in this community of practice and this insurance shows at the discourse level.

This asymmetry was also highly noticeable in one meeting when towards the end people suddenly started talking about an issue not entirely connected with the meeting; they were also giggling and feeling very relaxed. This is how Barbara reacted:

- (16) (PEOPLE TALKING, GIGGLING, LOTS OF NOISE)
 B: O.K. Let's get back in the meeting

She did not join in the cheerful discussion but rather, after a couple of minutes, brought the members back to the point of the meeting.

Other white normative masculine discourse features the chairperson draws on in creating her gendered identity are very direct, blunt corrections of the co-members.

In the first example, during the minutes review, the secretary has some doubts about the number of verses that will constitute the theme for the committee:

- (17) W: ok., we need a theme for this committee Dedication and Celebration Committee I have the fourth chapter verse sixth or is it one through six?
 B: one through six.

The doubt is an example of a sort of thinking aloud from the secretary. However, the chairperson interprets it as a possible question and directly provides an

answer to it. It is interesting to notice that Barbara is not even asked for any confirmation but provides it nonetheless. Her corrections often take the form of interruptions. In the example below such a "correcting interruption" resolves the conflict:

- (18) W: I thought we were to come up with weekly themes=
 W: =so did I=
 W: = I thought that themes were supposed to be //
 B: // *It is the theme*

This blunt corrective interruption stops the argument. This interruption turns out to be of the ultimate validity. In another example, a female committee member expresses some sort of a doubt as to what exactly her position on the committee is. The doubt is promptly cleared by Barbara with a latching clarifying response:

- (19) W:= No, I thought Elaine is a corresponding secretary, I'm assistant that's ... did I write something wrong?=
 B: = you're assisting correspondent.
 W: Right assisting correspondent.

On another occasion, a female committee member is trying to suggest more committee get-togethers, providing a very convincing argument. She uses a number of forms which represent the social meaning of tentativeness and the social significance of femininity, such as: *might*, *may* and *possibly*. Her long and exhaustive justification is violently interrupted by the chairperson with the curt *I don't have a date*. Barbara's comment is acknowledged by the female member with the humble O.K.

- (20) W: But you know, sister Barbara, not even take over from anything that you and sister Thurman have already discussed, it might even be kind of crucial now because we're already in May and I'm thinking for myself per se that summer coming up and many people may be vacationing, it might even be important if we meet once more this and possibly trying to meet once or twice in June //
 B: // *I don't have a date*
 W: O.K., O.K.
 B: *we did discuss that*=
 W: *O.K. O.K. and the reason I'm saying*
 B: and we know we need but we don't have a date.

Barbara not only violently interrupts the speaker, she also pinpoints to the fact that the idea had already been discussed. This comment is also approved by the woman with the *O.K. O.K.*, at this point, however, she wanted to provide additional justification with the words: *and the reason I'm saying*. The justification

was not presented, though, since Barbara again interrupts the co-member in the middle of the sentence with the terse *we know we need it but I don't have a date*. Barbara's use of the pronouns in her second interruption marks a clear asymmetry between her high status and the lower status of other committee members. She uses *we*, expressing the common agreement on the necessity of having more meetings. The use of *we* here is inclusive in the sense that it embraces all the regular members and Barbara (the chairperson). She uses *I* to indicate that the only reason for rejecting the idea of more meetings is the fact that *she has no a date*. As a result, the committee members are not able to meet more often because their leader is not available.

In constructing her gendered identity Barbara does not only capitalize on the features and strategies characterized as white and male. She chairs the community of practice for which the pastor of the church constitutes the ultimate source of authority. She is personally responsible before this person for all the work of the committee. As a result, she may accommodate some of the pastor's discourse features. Labov (1972) commented on the relative ease with which outsiders can acquire superficial phonological and lexical features of another dialect as opposed to the grammar. Barbara's linguistic repertoire supports Labov's findings.

The pastor appeared at the meetings only once. It was sufficient, though, to notice some characteristics of his discourse. These are some of his statements concerning the choosing of the already mentioned theme for the meeting, as well as his views on how the celebration should proceed:

- (21) P: Around that theme we gonna be celebrating and dedicating... it ought to be something Joyful, something lifting, thankful, *whatever* your theme is...but it got to have, you know, That flavor.
 P: ...you know, I'm just saying *whatever* your final theme is, it needs to be ... keep in mind Also, all things in mind our theme for the whole church, praising and thanking God for The victory in Jesus Christ
 P: you know, we can take some of that, some of this, and put it all together and come up With *whatever*, it's got to be an assignment for the next meeting
 P: we'll have to target... we may have special musical *whatever*, we wanna mix it up, plays You know, *whatever*, and we may just have some groups to come and share with us...

The examples above with *whatever* clearly indicate that this lexical feature is typical of the pastor's discourse. It is used by him when outlining some suggestions:

Whatever your theme is
Whatever your final theme is
To come up with whatever

We may have some special musical, whatever we wanna mix it up, plays, you know, whatever

While building her powerful gendered identity Barbara took advantage of this particular lexical feature since, according to Labov, lexical and phonological features are the first to be accommodated. The chairperson did employ this lexical feature in the following contexts:

- (22) B: so you can go and work with whatever group you want to, but these are the first notes ...
 B: we need to get...and by the way brother Marshall thank you, you're on your job, that's a beautiful start, thank you so much but we need names of people that we wanna suggest to help us celebrate, speakers, dance group, *whatever*. We need some suggestions to be passed to pastor Hatter
 B: ... going there you could write them down and that's just in case if in a year from now when you have a first year celebration, *whatever*, you know, somebody can look up and say, oh my mom wrote this

She frequently uses *whatever* expanding on the same topic as the pastor. Her use of *whatever* also indicates an invitation to propose some ideas and concepts in a way similar to the pastor's remarks. Another important observation is that the pastor's *whatever* is usually accompanied by the pragmatic particle *you know* which further highlights the function of the discussed lexical feature of making space for members' own ideas. Barbara also employs *you know* next to *whatever*.

In the above examples I have demonstrated how in the framework of social constructionism, where identities are flexible and never fixed, Barbara, the chairperson of the Dedication and Celebration Committee, constructs her gendered identity, availing herself of the features traditionally associated with normative, white masculinity and of the lexical feature typical to the person she is directly responsible to (the pastor). A question arises at this point why Barbara, an African American, middle-class woman in constructing her powerful gendered identity draws on the features traditionally linked to unmarked white masculinity? Although contemporary African American middle class women often reside and socialize in Black social contexts; they often work in predominantly white social contexts. Thus their concept of a chairperson with all the discourse characteristics is defined on the basis of a workplace experience (cf. Stanback 1985). Language is a means of gaining prestige (its symbolic value), respect and influence. Another question to ask is why Barbara as an African American woman did not employ the language features and communicative styles stereotypically labeled as black masculinity? Her position in this community of practice called for prestige, whereas black masculinity carries the connotations of being physically powerful and locally dominant thus not of the

highest value in the church context interaction (Bucholtz 1999: 443). Additionally as a consequence of racism, black masculinity in the United States has long been ideologically associated with physical violence (Davis 1983) and "blackness", according to Morgan (1999), has often been ideologically linked to men more than women. By adopting the normative white discourse style Barbara sends the message of acting as a representative rather than an individual. Barbara's discourse could also be labeled the so-called "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin 1981), which recognizes the presence of multiple layers of self and other.

In her double-voice discourse Barbara combines the features traditionally associated with white masculinity discourse and the lexical features of the person of higher hierarchy in her community of practice.

4.1.3. Other participants' contribution to the construction of gendered identity of the chairperson

The powerful gendered identity of the chairperson is not merely created with her own language choices. Other committee members with their own strategies equally contribute to building the powerful gendered identity of their leader. This contribution is congruent with the already discussed principle of reciprocal expectations. The co-members fully realize the unique position of Barbara in their community of practice. Their linguistic behavior further supports the construction of the powerful identity of their chairperson. Both the male (three persons) and female (four persons) members of the committee contribute with their discourse strategies to building a powerful gendered identity of their leader, thus creating asymmetry between their own positions in the community of practice and the position of the chairperson. In what follows I will discuss the following strategies: compliments paid to the chairperson, asking for permission before voicing a question, directing and addressing all doubts and questions to the chairperson, and the strategy I call *linking*, i.e. building a discussion or an exchange of opinions based on one another's utterance. The first example of the contribution of the co-members to building up a powerful gendered identity of their chairperson I want to discuss are the compliments. Compliments may play a variety of functions (for a review, see Holmes 1995). In my sample, co-members compliment the chairperson on fulfilling her role perfectly. The chairperson in the community of practice I am discussing here can be viewed as a superordinate and the co-members as subordinate. Tannen (1990) maintains that: "giving praise ... is ... asymmetrical. It ... frames the speaker as one-up, in a position to judge someone else's performance" (1990: 69). This statement, however, does not seem to hold for the participants of this discourse. Let's first have a look at the following examples of the compliments expressed by the committee members to Barbara. In the first example a female committee member voices the following compliment in the middle of the meeting:

- (23) W: you know, I just 'd like to say while we're doing this, ah, Sister Barbara, I just wanna thank you and commend you because I think you, that you have really done an awesome job at calling everybody and notifying the members of the committee and reminding them not that I have been avoiding the meetings, I just had schedule conflicts.

Here, while trying to come up with the theme for the committee, the woman makes a very spontaneous comment, praising the chairperson for the "awesome job". The female co-member does not seem to appear in the "up position", rather, being aware of the change of the social position for the chairperson, she only acknowledges how perfectly Barbara adjusted to the new role. This compliment taken out of the entire context of the committee may appear as putting the addressee in the down position. In the context of the meeting, however, where the social roles have been redefined, the compliment only acknowledges asymmetry by putting the addressee in the up position. The above compliment also illustrates that the function of a chairperson is new to Barbara.

In another excerpt (also quoted earlier in the paper) the members brought up a topic not entirely related to the discussion of the meeting. At that moment there was a lot of giggling and a lot of noise. After a while the chairperson brought everybody back to the meeting. It did not go unnoticed, rather the following comments were expressed:

- (24) B: O.K. let's go back in the meeting
 W: O.K. good idea
 W: I like that
 W: Isn't she great

All the three comments are expressed by three different female committee members.

Again with these compliments the co-members are acknowledging a change of status of Barbara and commenting on her fulfilling the requirements of the new function perfectly. At the same time they signal a different status of Barbara and the other co-members.

In the last example dealing with compliments, the co-members' comments build up the image of a dutiful chairperson who is fully aware of the responsibilities. The compliments refer to Barbara calling people a day before the meeting and reminding them about an upcoming session:

- (25) W: I appreciate it and reminding me because of my schedule, too
 I do like that
 W: Mhm, it was very helpful
 It is.
 W: very helpful

The above presented examples of comments expressed towards Barbara, the chairperson, acknowledge that her social position has been redefined for the need of this committee of practice. They also draw attention to the differences in status between the chairperson (superordinate) and other members (subordinate). Moreover, they draw a clear boundary between the power relations in the ongoing interactions between the committee members. As a result, the compliments significantly contribute to creating a powerful gendered identity of chairperson.

Another contribution of the other participants to the construction of the gendered identity of the chairperson to be discussed here is that of asking for permission before asking a question. The requests are voiced by the co-members and they are actual instances of requests of taking over the floor. These requests place the person asking the question and the question addressee in asymmetrical situations where the former takes on a subordinate position, and the latter a superordinate one. Let's look at the following examples. Every request for permission is uttered by a different female participant and the requests are directed to the chairperson:

- (26) W: Can I ask one more question?
 B: yeah
 W: Can I ask a question?
 B: Mhm.
 W: Can I just ask a question?
 B: Mhm.

The above examples clearly illustrate the power asymmetry in the ongoing interaction. Not every member of this community of practice has the floor available at all times. An intention of taking over the floor has to be proceeded with an appropriate request. These requests filed by committee members contribute to creating the powerful gendered identity of the chairperson as they indicate whose position is powerful in the discussed context. It is also interesting to notice that having heard the request the first time Barbara did not object to it or ask the co-members to feel free about voicing their opinions at all times. Rather, every time she hears the requests she gives minimal responses such as: yea, mhm.

The co-members could not proceed to bringing up a new topic without a request to do so. However, as stated above, in accordance with the principle of reciprocal expectations, they fully comprehended their new roles and redefined social positions in their community of practice.

Another contribution of the committee members to building up the powerful gendered identity of the chairperson, closely related with the strategy just discussed, is that of directing or addressing any doubts or questions to the chairperson only. These expressed doubts or questions do not have a direct addressee. Nevertheless, it is the chairperson only who provides answers to all of them. In

the first example a female participant intends to read a passage from the Scripture in order to get an opinion whether it lends itself to a committee theme. She is voicing a general request that is addressed to all committee members, nonetheless, it is replied to by Barbara. The chairperson, then, clearly perceives it as a request for permission that can only be provided by her:

- (27) W: Do you mind if I read this out loud?
 B: No.

None of the other present participants replied to this request. As a result, this adjacency pair positioned Barbara in the superordinate position in relation to other co-members.

A similar communicative situation took place when, while reading the minutes review, the secretary was not sure whether she read certain information correctly or not. She was looking for some feedback from the co-members, instead, the chairperson dispelled her doubt:

- (28) W: did I make a mistake there or=
 B: =no you didn't

It is also interesting to observe how the chairperson does not let finish the co-member her utterance, rather she latches her quick answer no you didn't. With that quick reaction she does not give any other participant a chance to respond to the doubt. Again, the quick response and the fact that Barbara did not let others answer the question contribute to creating her powerful gendered identity. The last example dealing with the directing doubts/questions to chairperson is the following:

- (29) B: If you notice on this schedule instead of 8 o'clock service, it is 7.30 in the morning.
 W: 7.30 instead of 8.
 B: Mhm

Here the chairperson announces a change of time. It is commented on by one of the female participants with 7.30 instead of 8 which are a mirror of Barbara's words. The co-member does not look for any confirmation as she merely notes down the change and repeats it while making the actual correction in her planner. However, the chairperson interprets it again as a request for confirmation. The confirmation takes the form of a minimal response mhm.

The last example of the contribution of the committee members to the construction of the powerful gendered identity of their leader which I shall discuss is linking, i.e. building on one another's utterances. This feature has been recognized by many researchers as a typical feature of female discourse (Kalcik 1975;

West – Zimmermann 1987). West and Zimmerman maintain that women tend to give an explicit acknowledgment of what has been said and make a connection to it (1987: 92). Similarly Kalcik (1975) states that women explicitly acknowledge and respond to what has been said by others. Women attempt to link their utterances to the one preceding it and build on the previous utterance or talking about something parallel or related to it. Kalcik mentions the strategies of tying together, filling in, and serializing as signs of women's desire to create continuity in conversation.

The tendencies that West and Zimmerman and Kalcik talk about are not the features of female discourse but rather the characteristic of an subordinate position of interlocutors in an asymmetrical interaction. In my research group both the female and male members of the committee positioned themselves asymmetrically to Barbara, the committee's chairperson. As a result, the linking discourse feature should characterize the regular committee members but not the chairperson.

At the same time, the linking strategy contributes significantly to creating the powerful gendered identity of the chairperson. Some of the examples will be analyzed below.

- (30) W: this is gonna be an excellent time for us because there is gonna be year 2000 and the election=
 W:= and there gonna be people knocking at our door=
 W:= some political figures
 W: yea, that's right
 M: I mean there gonna be people coming //
 W: // so we're looking for people every week
 B: yes, that's right

The above example is a fragment of a discussion on which political and religious figures should be invited to celebrate with the community. The first women's utterance is an introduction in which she claims the year 2000 to be the best time for celebration as it is election time and many VIPs will be willing to participate in celebrations of different kinds. Another female member spontaneously links to this utterance stating that there will be no problem to get even the biggest names as they gonna be knocking at our door. The application of the conversational device of latching by the committee members enhances the effect of a linking strategy. Actually, those three somewhat chopped phrases uttered by three different women could be perfectly combined forming a complete utterance. There is also a linking contribution made by a male committee member although it is obstructed by a question. Finally, the linking utterances are closed

with Barbara's yes, that's right. This statement draws a clear boundary in the roles the committee members took on in their community of practice.

In another excerpt it is the pastor who starts the linking strategy:

- (31) P: O.K. all right, the first day will start with the morning service
 W: so it takes place after the service=
 W: =so we have an 8 o'clock service and Sunday school here in this building
 But 11 o'clock will march.
 W: and pastor, you want a theme for each week.

Here a simple statement announcing the day schedule triggers three linking utterances on the part of the committee members. Similarly to the previous example, these three separate utterances could be combined in one sentence. Each of them relates to the information provided by the pastor. Also, like in the previous example, the pastor's position in this interaction is asymmetrical to the roles of regular committee members. His one utterance evokes three statements. A comparison can be made to the chairperson's yes, that's right. Both the chairperson and the pastor appeared in the above examples in superordinate positions. Neither of them participated in the linking responses, rather they either initiated the chain responses (the pastor), or concluded them (Barbara).

In the next example the regular committee members engaged themselves in the linking strategy:

- (32) W: I got an announcement, the first add for the souvenir booklet is coming from this committee
 And we're gonna do the first add and we all gonna chip in, O.K. The first add from this Committee.
 W: sounds like an excellent idea
 W: I might look at some different ads that we've gotten and we might even do, we should
 Do...=
 W: = oh, absolutely
 M: we're not limited, each committee should have an add and we're not limited either, we can do our individual add.

The linking strategy here is initiated by a female committee member who comes up with the idea of creating their own committee add that will appear in the souvenir booklet. The idea is easily picked up by other members who continue with building on the first statement.

The second line in this exchange expresses an approval of the idea, functioning as an invitation for more approving comments. The third line is an example

of a direct linking to the first statement, although it is not complete. The following latch prevented the completion of the statement. The latching comment is another example of approval followed by another linking extension of the original concept.

The linking strategy, although recognized by researchers as a feature of a female discourse, is applied in my sample by both male and female committee members. It is not, however, used by Barbara, the chairperson and the pastor. Thus, my data suggest that the use of this strategy is not so much determined by biological sex, but rather by the constructed gender that is the position/function a person plays in a certain community of practice. In the above examples the fact of applying the linking strategy by the regular committee members significantly contributes to creating asymmetry between the participants. The asymmetry then put Barbara in the superordinate position. As a result, the linking strategy constitutes an important factor in constructing a powerful gendered identity of the chairperson.

5. Conclusions

In this study I have demonstrated how a gendered identity is being constructed among African American women. The seven community members I worked with constituted a unique community of practice in which their roles and relationships between one another had been redefined. The linguistic consequence of such a redefinition was an asymmetry that appeared in the choice of discourse strategies of the committee members. One aspect of the asymmetry that has been analyzed was the gendered identity of the chairperson, Barbara. The gendered identity has been presented as a social construct that is as a locally situated construction. Thus, I assumed that Barbara's linguistic choices in the community of practice had been partially a product of her new position in the group (chairperson). Drawing on the notion of *gender as a performance*, I discussed how Barbara with her choice of particular discourse strategies performed her gendered identity defined by her position and status in the community of practice. The process of creating gendered identity, however, draws on the participants' familiarity with the significance of particular language choices. As a result, there must be a common understanding as to the social significance of a certain discourse strategy, linguistic choice. Consequently, the notion of *reciprocal expectation* has been introduced in order to demonstrate how the linguistic strategies of regular committee members constructed the gendered identity of the chairperson. The comparison of the linguistic strategies employed by the female chairperson and other committee members (three men and three women) indicated a gross discrepancy in the social significance of the discourse strategies employed by them. On the one hand the chairperson's linguistic strategies indexed her identity as powerful, and approaching the male, normative end of

the linguistic continuum. On the other hand, the linguistic choices of the regular committee members positioned them as subordinate thus moving toward the feminine end of the linguistic continuum. As a result, it can be concluded that the committee members' language choices were not motivated by their biological sex but rather by their socially constructed gender that reflected their positions in their community of practice. Additionally, it has been shown that who we are is sustained by the ongoing interactions with others and the way we position ourselves with relation to those others. The interaction between the committee members and the chairperson was a frame in which the social roles, including gendered identity, were displayed. In the light of social constructionism an interaction with the same participants but in a different community of practice, that is with the redefined roles of the committee members, may bring quite different assumptions as to their gendered identities (gender is a performance). The analysis has also presented how social categories are constructed via linguistic practices. Gender is one of such social categories. The discussed notion of context (kind of an interaction, participants, topic, etc.) exerts the use of language forms with the social significance of femininity or masculinity. Barbara's (the chairperson) gendered identity has been constructed via her linguistic practices. Consequently, a co-dependence between socially constructed gender and language choice can be observed since language choice indexes gender categories but also the category of gender entails the use of specific, marked (feminine, masculine) language forms. In constructing her gendered identity the chairperson draws on the discourse features traditionally marked as normative white masculine but also she employs the lexical feature consistently used by the African American pastor- the person she was held responsible to. In Barbara's linguistic behavior we can observe the sociolinguistic phenomenon of crossing⁶ (Rampton 1995). Barbara is crossing the cultural and gender boundaries. Consequently, she diverges from the traditional feminine discourse. However, her constructed gendered identity cannot be labeled as masculine. It is rather an alternative dimension of femininity, the dimension that demonstrates one of the activities a woman may be engaged in. The social position of the chairperson carries the social meaning of assertiveness, decisiveness, strict control, thus features traditionally indexing masculinity. The analysis of the data emphasizes that

⁶ The term *crossing* has been applied to cross-dialectal (or cross-linguistic) shifts. Rampton (1995) states that Anglo-American teenagers may shift into AAVE in order to indicate that they are familiar with (and would like to be a part of) African American youth culture. However, recent research (Bucholtz 1999; Cutler 1999) suggests that crossing may be quite widespread. In this analysis Barbara is crossing into the white male communicative style. Her alignment with white normative male communicative style drew on a stereotyped conception.

a person's gender is socially constructed from roles/norms and reciprocal expectations of the community in which the members participate.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS (based on those devised by Sacks – Schegloff – Jefferson 1974)

//	double slashes indicate point of interruption
(())	used for descriptions not utterances
?,.	punctuation for intonation
noooo	repeated vowel for elongation
[]	simultaneous speech
x	something was spoken but unintelligible
=	“latched” speech, one speaker follows the previous one without break, no interval between the end of a prior turn and the start of a next piece of talk. There is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first, without overlapping it, the utterances are linked together with equal signs (Schiffrin 1998: 425)
(pause)	pause
mhm	a marker of approval
hm	a marker of disapproval
B	Barbara, the committee chairperson
W	a female committee member
M	a male committee member

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