LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF GENDER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract: This paper examines gender ideologies in English and Romanian societies and argues that these ideologies which assign men and women different social roles become manifest in language at the level of conversational strategies through the process of socialization. The narratives analyzed demonstrate that identity is far from being categorical or fix, but is context-dependent. In some contexts our female informants may choose to conform to the traditional feminine identity imposed by the patriarchal society, whereas in others they may choose to display more liberal identities that deviate from those norms.

1. Gender identity construction in British and Romanian societies

Feminity and masculinity are not biological traits, but are *culturally* constructed through the **process of socialisation**[1] by which a biological being is turned into a member of a certain culture. Within modern societies, the main dimensions of socialisation are *family*, *peer group*, *school* and the *workplace*. In what follows we shall look at how the gendered identities outlined in the previous section are acquired within the *family* and subsequently reinforced within the *public realm*, specifically within *peer group* and the institutionalised setting of *school*.

Men and women are not just born, rather they are the creation of their families and of the society they live in and whose ideologies contribute to their understanding of the world. These ideologies are used and reproduced, both in private and institutionalised settings, in the educational processes that pervade their lives. Sociological studies have shown that at the level of *opinions* and educational *intentions* fewer and fewer parents seem to shape their children's destiny according to the latter's sex. At the level of day-to-day *practices*, however, there are major differences between girls and boys with regard to the personality traits that are encouraged or discouraged and the distribution of tasks.

In both Western European and Romanian societies differential parental expectations with regard to the construction of children's selfhood and gendered identity correlate with the sex of the child. Particularly within working-class families **boys** are expected and encouraged to be active, *independent*, *enterprising*, even *aggressive* at times, while for **girls** parental expectations point to qualities such as *calmness*, *kindness* and *subservience*, that is, to those personality traits that conform to traditional feminine roles of being a good wife and mother. Even within middle-class families, where children generally enjoy a greater degree of autonomy, girls are expected to be *professionally successful*, whereas boys, in addition to being oriented towards educational success, are also encouraged to prove their *physical toughness*, *masculine superiority* and to show their *spirit of enterprise*. Moreover it is important to notice that these differential parental expectations are particularly noticeable at an early age, that is, at the onset of the acquisition of gendered identity (Zinn and Eitzen 1990; Stănciulescu 1997).

Empirical sociological research has shown that in Romanian families, although educational success is an important goal for both boys and girls, the former are socialised into being professionally active, while the latter are taught that marriage and motherhood are their life goals, the essential parts of their feminine identity. The following excerpts taken from

[1] Following Durkheim (1922), we define *socialisation* as the process by which the child acquires a cultural identity and at the same time reacts to this identity.

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sociological interviews conducted by Stănciulescu (1997) provide empirical evidence that supports these gender-related differences in terms of patterns of socialization.

Excerpt 1
(Female; born in 1949; worker)
Cînd a fost să mă căsătoresc – pentru că fetelor li se impune asta la o vîrstă fixă, la 22-23 de ani – mi-am făcut şi eu un prieten cu care am " vorbit " vreun an şi ceva. A trebuit să ne căsătorim, lucru care nu s-a întîmplat din cauza părinţilor. După aceea, pentru ca timpul să nu se scurgă, am făcut cunoştinţă cu altcineva şi în două săptămâni m-am căsătorit . (Stănciulescu 1998:268)
When I was to get married – cause girls have to do that at a set age, 22-23 – I got a boyfriend as well and we hanged out for a year or so. We were supposed to get married, but this didn't happen because of the parents. After that, so that the time won't run out, I met somebody else and in two weeks I got married
Excerpt 2
(Female; born in 1948; clerk)
Şi m-am implicat pentru că aşa am gîndit eu: ei sunt rezultatul …Ce rămîne după mine? Copilul. Ce am facut? Copiii ăştia să facă ceva. Viaţa mea asta-i […] eu întotdeauna am zis că, dacă tu ai un copil, tu pentru tine nu mai exişti, pentru el trăieşti. (Stănciulescu 1998: 291)
And I got involved because I was thinking: they are the result… What's left behind me? The child. What have I done? Let these children do something. My life is like this […] I always said that, if you have a child, you no longer exist for yourself, you're living for him/her.

Since the traditional roles of being a *good wife* and a *good mother* seem to be the main dimensions of *feminine identity*, within the domestic sphere girls are expected to do more housework than boys, irrespective of the parents' level of education and the family's social status, with fathers exerting considerable pressure on both girls and mothers:

Excerpt 3
(Female; doctor; aged 60)
Ea e fată, ea trebuie să pună osul la treabă (Stănciulescu 1998: 292).
She's a girl, she's got a broom in her tail.
Excerpt 4
(Male; born in 1936)
În vacanţă, trec frumos la cratiţă. Dintre toate, Otilia e cea mai gospodină […] Anca: "Nu, că eu am să am bucătăreasă ". Zic: "Ei, da, da' o să vrea bărbatul tău să-i gătească o mîncare cu mîna ta. Că orice ai fi, soţul tău o să vrea să-i gătească o mîncare cu mîna ta. Este o satisfacţie teribilă!" (Stănciulescu 1998: 293).
During the holiday, I'm moving straight to the kitchen. Among all, Otilia is the best housekeeper […] Anca: "No, I'm going to have a cook". I say: "Well, ok, but your man will want you to cook him something by yourself. Cause no matter what you do, your husband will want you to cook him something by yourself. It's a huge satisfaction!"

On the other hand, boys are more frequently oriented towards school. For boys *educational success* and *social status* (i.e. professional and/or financial success) are of primary importance:

Excerpt 5
(Male; born in 1981; pupil)
Pentru ei, asta-i cel mai important [învăţătura]. Şi pentru mine, că, dacă n-am să învăţ, n-am să ajung …nimeni…şi…n-am să ajung nimic. Da' nu… dacă nu s-ar ţine altcineva de mine, n-aş învăţa cît trebuie (Stănciulescu 1998: 300).
For them this is the most important thing [education]. For me too, cause, if don't study, I'm going to be nobody and I'll end up doing nothing. But no, if there wasn't someone on at me, I wouldn't study as much as I should.
Excerpt 6
(Female, born in 1968; medical nurse, married to a doctor; her son was born in 1995)
Sînt foarte sigură că pînă acum copilul a crescut bine, este tare isteţ. Sper să am posibilitatea să-l învăţ o limbă străină de cînd este mai mititel, aş vrea să înveţe să danseze şi să cînte la un instrument […] cînd o să mai

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crească un pic o să-i dau ore de franceză şi engleză […] Mi-ar plăcea să înveţe să danseze, să facă sport. Sper să poată face o facultate (Stănciulescu 1998: 314-5).

I'm positive that so far the child has grown up well, he's very smart. I hope I'll have the chance to teach him a foreign language from a young age, I'd want him to learn to dance and play an instrument […] when he grows up a little bit I'll give him French and English classes […]I'd like him to learn to dance, to practice sports. I hope he'll be able to go through college.

Educational success seems to be the only domain in which boys are expected to invest their personal effort:

Excerpt 7

(Male; born in 1937)

" Costel, învaţă! Vreu la [liceul] Negruzzi!" " De ce acolo?" " Ca să nu mai fii cu Jenică " – Jenică e un golănaş de pe aici. " Acolo este fiul doctorului Cutare, fiul profesorului Cutare …Nu ai de cît de învăţat de la ei. Profesorii sunt cei mai buni " (Stănciulescu 1998: 314).

" Costel, start learning! I want you to go to Negruzzi [highschool]" "Why there?" "Not to hang around with Jenică " – Jenică is a punk around here. "There, there's the son of Doctor X, the son of professor X … You have a lot of things to learn from them. The professors are the best"

Excerpt 8

(Male; born in 1972, student; working-class parents)

Încă de mic mi se spunea că… se aducea în discuţie cuvîntul "facultate", că fără facultate nu ai nici o şansă: "Uite la noi cît de greu muncim şi uite la ceilalţi!". Mereu mi se aducea în faţă acest lucru [..]. Şi mi se spunea foarte clar, încă de pe atunci, că mi se oferă toate condiţiile – condiţii pe care ei nu le-au avut – şi că trebuie să dau totul pentru asta. Cam aşa se punea problema (Stănciulescu 1998: 335).

Ever since I was little they told me that … they brought up the subject "college", that without a college education you've got no chance: "Look at us how hard we work and look at the others!". They always pointed this out [..]. And they told me loud and clear, ever since, that they're providing me with all the facilities – which they didn't have – and that I must give all my best for this. That was there stand.

For girls, however, educational achievements and social status are *secondary-rank objectives*, following 'honesty' (innocence with regard to sexuality), being a good housewife, subservience to their husbands and politeness:

Excerpt 9

(Female, born in 1947, clerk)

Fetele le-am crescut foarte serioase …Şi le-am spus: "mamă dragă, o fată trebuie să fie serioasă. Că ai să te căsătoreşti, ai să vorbeşti cu un băiat, îţi dau voie, dar să-l cunosc eu, să ştiu cine este. Dacă e, să vină să te ia de acasă, pleci la ora cutare, vii la ora cutare"

(Stănciulescu 1998: 314)

The girls I raised them very honest… And I told them: "dears, a girl must be honest. If you want to get married, to go out with a boy, I allow you, but I must meet him, know who he is. In any case, he must come and pick you up from home, you leave at a certain time and come back at a certain time"

Excerpt 10

(Male, born in 1936)

Da' voi trebuie să ştiţi că … deocamdată concepţia noastră asta este, că trebuie să fii cinstită, gospodină, corectă, să nu-ţi fie ruşine în societate, să nu te arate nimeni cu degetul, iar cînd ajungi la casa ta să fii cu fruntea sus (Stănciulescu 1998: 339).

But you've got to know that … for now our is that you've got to be honest, a good housekeeper, fair, to hold your head up in society, no one to show you off, and when you've set up a home, to hold you head high.

Excerpt 11

(Male; born in 1937)

Eu, avînd fete, am zis să nu avem prietenie cu o familie în care … " madame " are trei amanţi (Stănciulescu 1998: 311).

Since I had girls, I said we wouldn't make friends a family where " Madame " has three lovers.

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Within relationships and the family, power plays a crucial role. The father usually takes his control for granted and acts out the patriarchal role of authority, strength and punishment. He expects to be respected by his partner and children not so much for what he is, but for the roles he fulfils (Stănciulescu 1998: 311). More often than not his authority is unquestioned. Although the father's control need not be physical to be effective, physical violence is a common feature in the lives of many of Stănciulescu's Romanian informants:

Excerpt 12
(Male; born in 1936, worker)

Băieții eram cu toții sub îndrumarea directă a tatei. Ochiul lui sever nu ierta nimic, ori făceam un lucru ca lumea, ori nu-l mai făceam deloc […] În schimb tata avea mînă grea, cum se spune, şi ne era frică de el la mînie (Stănciulescu 1998 : 195).

The boys, we were all under father's direct guidance. His stern looks didn't excuse anything, either we did something properly, or we didn't do it at all […] But father had a heavy hand, as they say, and we feared him when he was angry.

Excerpt 13
(Female, born in 1948, clerk)

În familie era foarte greu. Eu am să fiu sinceră şi am să vă spun exact situația. Tata meu, din cauza băuturii, a devenit din ce în ce mai rău […] Cînd era treaz, era dur, dar cînd era beat, era cumplit! Ce e rău, c-o bătea pe mama. Şi noi am suferit foarte tare. Noi copiii (Stănciulescu 1998: 335).

At home it was very hard. I'll be honest and tell you exactly how things were. My father, because of the drinking, had become worse and worse […] When he was sober, he was tough, but when he was drunk, it was horrible! The bad thing is that he was beating my mother. And we suffered a lot. We, the children.

Excerpt 14
(Male, born in 1937)

…mă mai enervam, mai strigam, mai loveam de şapte ori cu cureaua în pat şi numai o dată îl atingeam …Dar ştiau cumva: "Tata ne pedepseşte" (Stănciulescu 1998: 336).

…sometimes I was getting angry, shouting, hitting the belt against the bed seven times and touching him only once … But they knew somehow: "Father is punishing us"

In traditional working-class families in Britain women were supposed to know their places. Since they were thought of as emotional, their husbands assumed that they could not be reasoned with. This legitimated the physical violence: a man had no second thoughts about giving his wife a 'backhander ' to keep her where she belonged. Domestic violence was also a feature of middle-class families, but it was often hidden. Women had to put up with what was going on and they did not seek support outside the family for it would bring shame or disgrace on the family (Seidler 1998). Although physical violence is generally thought of as a breakdown of reasonable behaviour, and therefore a sign of weakness, in this case it can be interpreted as a way of exerting control and asserting a dominant male identity.

Women, on the other hand, are generally relied upon to do the emotional work to keep the relationship going. Moreover they are expected to interpret what is going on for their male partners emotionally. This state of affairs points to a gendered division of labour, the emotional part of which is generally not appreciated by men (Baker-Miller 1986). Consequently we could assume that female childhood socialisation encourages *caring for others* and the *development of empathy for human pain, suffering and distress*. As far as girls are concerned, they learn that one of the acceptable modes of being within the social order of the family is to express their emotional involvement (Gilligan 1982, Ruddick 1990). This assumption is supported by empirical sociological research. One of the many examples Dunn (1988: 28) provides concerns a girl who accidentally knocks over her baby brother. Mother enters room:

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Excerpt 15
Mother: What happened?
Girl: I banged him.
Mother: Well, you'd better kiss him better.

We can see thus how a **dominant masculine identity** and a **subordinate feminine** one are mainly acquired within the family with parents encouraging boys to display their masculine superiority since they are destined to fulfil the role of 'head' of the family. Girls, on the other hand, are urged to conform to the requirements of the feminine roles of being a 'good housewife' and 'good mother' which are traditionally linked with notions of subservience and lack of control. The question that arises is: 'Why do parents consciously or unconsciously continue to transmit differential gender roles that correlate with the sex of the child?' Three types of parental logic seem to account for the transmission of such differential gender roles[2]:

1. **The logic of tradition** – parents define *traditional gender* roles handed down from generation to generation as *normal, rational, and appropriate.*
2. **The functional logic** – differential gender roles are *functional* for the existence of the family.
3. **The logic of conforming to existing gender-related stereotypes** with a view to *avoiding social sanctions* and *achieving symbolic benefits*.

As we shall see in what follows these gender ideologies that assign dominant and subordinate positions to men and women respectively are manifest at the level of *conversational strategies* and in this respect the process of socialisation plays a significant role.

2. Gender ideologies and gender-related conversational styles

In addition to the social practices discussed above, which orient boys towards developing a strong and assertive personality, their self-sufficient dominant identity is also constructed through language. Within the family male children are socialised to dominate conversation with the active support of female members of the family. Usually the mother and daughter(s) act as an attentive *audience* allowing the father and son to make use of their narrative skills, displaying thus their dominant male identity. Research on interruptions and simultaneous speech has shown differences in the parents' use of these conversational strategies which were gender-related; both parents interrupted girls more than boys; father-and-child pairs were more likely to engage in simultaneous speech than mother-and-child pairs and finally both parents were more likely to engage in simultaneous speech with daughters than with sons. In all cases parents were more likely to continue talking than were children. As a result daughters were silenced significantly more often than sons (Coates 1993).

This dominant conversational style characteristic of a male identity is initially constructed in the family as an exercise of power and control and is later reinforced in various public settings, particularly in the *playground* and at *school*. Boys' peer groups tend to be more hierarchically organised than girls', and achieving status in the hierarchy is paramount. In boys' groups speech is used as a means of asserting their dominant identity by attracting and maintaining an audience when others have the floor. In his study of dominance patterns

[2] For a detailed discussion, see Bell (1979).

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among boys in a summer camp, Savin-Williams (1976) mentions the following *conversational strategies* as means of displaying power:

- Giving verbal commands and orders
- Name calling and other forms of verbal ridicule
- Verbal threats or boasts of authority
- Refusal to obey orders
- Winning a verbal argument

With regard to politeness, Coates (1993) argues that parents generally *treat* girls and boys *similarly*, but provide *different models*: mothers use far more polite speech than fathers. While both girls and boys are urged to use polite forms, children notice that it is predominantly women who use them. Since children usually identify with the parent of the same sex, we expect girls to use more polite speech than boys even when they are expected to be equally polite.

There are instances, however, when parents' expectations with regard to their children's politeness are gender related. Romaine (1994) argues that the 6-year-olds she worked with in Edinburgh were aware of differences between girls' and boys' speech and differential parental expectations. The children said that girls spoke more politely and boys roughly, and that boys used more slang and swear words. She argues that there is also some explicit coaching by mothers and schoolteachers, and even neighbours at times, and that girls are more likely to be exposed to it. Romaine reports the case where a woman recalls being repeatedly corrected as a child for using a local dialect word, *ken*, meaning '(you) know'. A ten-year-old informant told Romaine in answer to the question of whether the former's mother ever told her to speak politely:

Excerpt (16)

Girl: If there's somebody polite in. Like see, some people come in. There's new people in the stair we've moved up to and they come in and I'm always saying ' doon' [the local way of pronouncing *down*] Shep, cause it's my wee dog, so I say 'doon'. My mum says, 'That's not what you say'. She says, 'It's sit down'. Ken, cause she doesn't like me speaking rough.
SR: Why do you think she doesn't like it?
Girl: Well, *if I speak rough, she doesn't like it when people are in because they think that we're rough tatties* in the stair.
SR: Does your Mum ever speak polite?
Girl: She doesnae really speak polite, but *she corrects all her words*. (my italics)
(Romaine 1994: 119)

This excerpt makes it clear that the girl is aware of the social significance of the options open to her, i.e. using regional forms of speech as opposed to the standard ones, and that she evaluates them in the same way adults do. Non-standard speech forms are 'rough', whereas the standard ones are 'polite'. Moreover, she is aware that the way she speaks is an important part of the impression she conveys to others and that others make judgements about social character on the basis of speech. It also shows how girls learn through the process of socialisation that social status may be achieved through using 'polite' (i.e. standard) speech forms.

Boys' tendency towards employing less polite speech forms seems to be favoured by Romanian parents as well. Stănciulescu (1998) provides empirical evidence that shows that

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parents are more tolerant towards sons' disobedience and their answering back is not only tolerated, but also encouraged, especially by fathers:

Excerpt 17
(Male; born in 1936)

Ne amuzăm de aerele lui de bărbat. Ne amuzăm şi îl incurajez în foarte multe lucruri. Zic " Măi Cornel, ia vino-ncoace, cu mama nu mă înțeleg, cu fetele n-am ce face ..." Asta ca să-i creez un pic de tupeu (Stănciulescu 1998 : 340).

We were laughing at his macho show-off. We were laughing and I encourage him in many respects. I say "Cornel, come here, I can't come to terms with your mother, the girls are useless…" That's to put some courage into him

We can safely argue that boys' *linguistic aggressiveness* and their tendency towards being *less polite* than girls can be seen as a sign of asserting their dominant masculinity which is associated with their 'destiny' as 'head of the family'. Since this social role is associated with status and power, they do not seem to regard standard speech forms as an important way of achieving them.

Men's control of conversation (through disruptive overlapping talk, securing a greater number of turns, silencing their conversational partners, etc), their preference for verbal aggressiveness (including shouting, name-calling, insults, challenges) contribute to and are part of the construction of an assertive self-sufficient, dominant, even aggressive at times male identity. Moreover, their preference for the so-called 'neutral' topics in conversation, such as sports, politics, cars, which relate to the public world, is a means of distancing themselves from their emotions and private issues proving thus that they can rise above their instinctual nature.

Given the fact that they often suppress their emotions and feelings which might question or disturb the way they present themselves to others, it can be difficult for them to be aware of the emotional needs of their female partners. Rather than listen to what their female partners want to share with them, men often assume that it is their task, if not duty, to provide solutions to the emotional problems other have. They seem not to be able to realise that sometimes what their partners want is just a chance to be listened to without being offered solutions. This accounts for the different meanings that men and women sometimes ascribe to questions. Women tend to see questions as a conversational maintenance device while men seem to view them as requests for information.

A dominant male conversational style is also reinforced within institutionalised settings, such as school. Swann's (1989) analysis of classroom talk among 9-11 year olds showed that boys talked far more than girls both in terms of the number of turns and of their length. What is important, however, is that *all* participants collaborate to achieve male dominance: the boys by using the interactional resources available to them to contribute more; the girls by using the same resources to contribute less; and interestingly enough, the teacher by paying more attention to the boys.

Moving on to women's speech, we can safely hypothesise that their consistent use of various strategies which keep the conversation flowing (e.g. backchannel signals, completion of the other's turn, repetition, small talk, etc) is part of the **gendered division of labour** mentioned according to which **women** are responsible for the *emotional work*, for *building a relationship* and *keeping that relationship going*. Similarly, their concern with the private realm and preference for topics, such as child rearing, relationships, husbands' infidelity may be related to the so-called 'emotional' part of their identity since it involves a considerable amount of self-disclosure and shared feelings. Moreover, we are all familiar with the stereotype that women 'gossip' or 'chatter' and that the topics they discuss are *trivial* when

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compared with male topics such as sports, politics, etc. These judgements, however, reflect the differing social values we have of men and women. What men do, that is the roles they fulfil in society, is seen as more important and therefore male conversational topics, which are regarded as 'serious' or 'important', are equated with dominant male identities.

The relationships established within the household and public realm are shaped by and complicit in a system that pushes boys in the direction of *masculine toughness*, *self-assurance* and *privilege* while girls are more likely to be systematically confined to domestic *spheres*. This state of affairs points to a dynamic which is rarely questioned by boys and girls and which is equated with being a 'proper' boy or girl who will later develop into a 'proper' man or woman. Gender-differentiated language-use which is constructed through the process of socialisation within the private domain of the family and subsequently reinforced through *peer talk* and within *public settings* plays an important role in this dynamic, being a constitutive part of the distinctive gendered identities discussed above.

3. An exercise in constructing gender identities through narratives

Research has shown that narrative language is instrumental in the construction and display of self and identity[3]. Stories are resources not just for the *development* and *presentation of self* as a psychological entity, but also as a self that exists within a cultural matrix of meanings, beliefs and normative practices (Bruner 1990); speakers' identities as social beings emerge as they construct their own individual experiences as a way to position themselves in relation to social and cultural expectations (Chafe 1994). The form and content of their stories, their story-telling behaviour are indices of both their personal selves and their social and cultural identities.

Although the study of narratives provides a rich site in which to locate the analysis of various identities, in what follows we will focus on two extracts that illustrate how a conventional gender identity can be constructed through a narrative describing mundane family events such as a birthday party and managing household activities[4]. The excerpts 18 and 19 are taken from an encounter with the beautician. Elsewhere (Hornoiu 2004) they have been analysed as *news-updates*, one of the types of small talk whose aim is to establish and maintain a relationship based on solidarity and co-operation.

Excerpt 18
(Constanța corpus, Hornoiu 2007)

1 Client: şi felicia ce face? a fost ziua ei duminică
and how's Felicia? it was her birthday on Sunday
2 SP[5]: felicia da pe 23 a împlinit şi ea patruzeci şi trei de ani si restu-
felicia yes on the 23rd she was forty-three and the rest
3 lucrează da' ea lunea şi joia îşi ia liber că lucrează mai tîrziu
she goes to work but takes Monday and Thursday off cause she works late
4 cum lucram io pe vremuri şi se chinuie cu ceara
as I used to in the old days and she's got problems with the wax

[3] The role of narratives in the construction and display of who we are has been the focus of scholarly attention in fields ranging from developmental psychology (e.g. Bruner 1986, 1990, Bamberg 1987, Nelson 1989), social psychology (e.g. Harre 1987, Gergen and Gergen 1988), and clinical psychology (Polkinghorne 1988), to literary theory (Bal 1990, Prince 1990), folklore (Bauman 1986), sociology (Riessman 1993), and sociolinguistic (Labov 1972b, Labov and Waletzky 1967, Jefferson 1978).

[4] This section on *identity construction through narratives* is a revised and considerably extended version of Hornoiu (2005).

[5] **SP** stands for 'service provider', i.e. the beautician in this service encounter.

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5 că ba le-o dă o firma mai bună alta mai puțin bună
'cause they are either supplied with high quality wax or one of a poor quality
6 clientele care mai întîrzie care
the clients some come late some
7 (3)
8 vin la timp [...]
are on time
9 SP: cosmin a terminat toate zece examenele şi a luat numai nouă şi zece
cosmin has passed all ten exams and got only nine and ten
10 ce n-a facut în anu' unu şi doi
something he didn't do the first and the second year
11 Client: da
yes
12 SP: şi şi-a facut mărţişoare să le dea cadou colo colo şi el
and he made first of march decorations to give them around like that
13 să nu mai dea bani pe ele
lest he should spend money on them
14 Client: şi George?
and George?
15 SP: george nu se simte bine cu sănătatea a facut tratament şi fizioterapică
george's got some health problems he's been under treatment and has received physiotherapy
16 a făcut şi reflexo
and reflexotherapy as well
17 în Londra a făcut crize şi a trebuit să-şi facă [injecţie cu voltaren
he had seizures in London and he had to get a shot with voltaren
18 Client: [m::::
mmmm
19 SP: şi acum mai are nişte cîteva şedinţe de fizioterapie (cu) pauză de zece zile
and now he receives physiotherapy with ten-day breaks
20 şi să continue mai continuă cîteva
and he's got to go on he's going on with some more
21 (2)
22 pe douăş'patru martie tre' să plece
he's got to leave on the twenty-fourth of march
23 Client: e acasă el
he's at home
24 SP: e acasă de o lună şi ceva
he's been at home for over a month
25 Client: nu se plictiseşte acasă
he doesn't get bored at home?
26 SP: e nu:: mai face şi el
eh, no, he's been doing some things
27 Client: da: v-ajută
yes, he's helping you
28 SP: pe Felicia ei acolo-n casă fac menaju' că pînă vine felicia seara
felicia they do the work there around the house 'cause felicia comes in the evening
29 ce s-o mai aştepţi pe felicia să pregătească masa să:
so why wait for felicia to cook dinner to
30 mai uşurează pe căn- cătălina că ea se pricepe la gătit
they take some burden off cătălina 'cause she's good at cooking
31 şi cosmin face piaţa
and cosmin does the shopping
32 Client: cătălina găteşte da?
cătălina can cook right?
33 SP: cătălina găte::şte
cătălina can cook
34 (2)

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35 ce nu ştie mai face felicia mai complicat joia şi lunea
when she doesn't know, felicia's cooking sometimes the more complicated things on Thursdays and Mondays
36 în rest cartofi la cuptor cartofi prăjiți ouă ochiuri grătar
for the rest, baked potatoes, fries and fried eggs roast
37 Client: e şi astea dacă vii şi le găseşti gata făcute contează
eh, these if you come and find them already cooked, they count too
38 SP: e:: da' ea nu poate la opt şi jumătate să aştepte toți nemîncații
eh but she can't at eight thirty let them be hungry and wait
39 să vină felicia să pregătească
for felicia to come and cook

Excerpt 19
(Constanța corpus, Hornoiu 2007)

1 SP: era mîndră că de ziua ei i-a luat cosmin o pereche de cercei de argint mari aşa
she was proud because cosmin bought her a pair of large silver earrings for her birthday
2 Client: a::::h
a :::
3 SP: cînd i-am văzut la (.) ureche zic 'io nu port aşa' şi era numai cu argint
when I saw them on her ears I said 'I don't wear this' and she was covered in silver
4 da' verigheta lor este combinație de aur cu aur alb
but their wedding ring is a combination of gold with white gold
5 Client: mhm ce frumoasă
mhm, how beautiful
6 SP: şi merge şi la argint şi la aur da şi avea o groază de brățări pe mînă
and it goes with both silver and gold yes, and she had a lot of bracelets on her wrist
7 ' cerceii ăia mari mi-a luat cosmin de ziua mea'
'cosmin got me those large earrings for my birthday'
8 că pe nouă februarie a fost ziua lu' cătălina pe cinşpe a lu' cosmin
'cause on the ninth of February it was Catalina's birthday, and on the fifteenth it was cosmin's
9 şi acum pe douăştrei a lu' felicia da şi:::
and now on the twenty-third it's Felicia's, yeah and
10 (4)
11 îi luase a venit c-o seară înainte naşa de cununie a lor şi i-a adus o bluză
she had brought her… their matron of honour came a night before and brought her a blouse
12 foarte frumoasă cu fir prin ea aşa
very beautiful, purled like that
13 (4) au făcut la clubu' unde lucrează cosmin au serbat amindoi pe:::: sîmbătă
the party was at the club where cosmin works they celebrated both their birthdays on Saturday
14 pe paişpe
on the fourteenth
15 Client: de valentine
on valentine's day
16 SP: da au făcut platouri reci
yes, they served a cold buffet,
17 le-am făcut io un tort de fructe le-am dat
I baked them a fruit cake, I gave them

The beautician engages in extended stories about her husband's health, or her son and daughter-in-law's happy marriage, about her grandson's academic success or her granddaughter's cooking talent. Through these stories she constructs a particular gendered identity for both herself and the other protagonists. The gender identity constructed here is to a certain extent a *conservative* one: an identity conforming to the beliefs of a patriarchal

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society[6], beliefs about the way women and men should behave. This type of gendered identity constructed through narratives supports Andrei's view (1978: 219) that there is overwhelming societal pressure to accept particular gender roles[7]:

> 'Noi nu ne creştem copiii cum vrem, ci aşa cum ne impune obiceiul, tradiţia, opinia publică, societatea cu structura ei dintr-un moment dat.'

The question that arises is what do such stories aim to accomplish? At one level, they are intended to bring the interlocutor up-to-date on what the narrator and significant others have been doing. This function help the interlocutors establish and maintain a relationship based on solidarity. At another level they are components in a complex answer to the client's enquiry. At yet another level during these stories, the service provider constructs **conservative** or **normative gender identities** for herself, her daughter-in-law and her granddaughter. According to *Barometrul de gen* (the Gender Barometer) 2000, in contemporary Romanian society the proportion of women who have internalized and accepted patriarchy is roughly similar to that of men[8]**.**

The narrator represents her daughter-in-law as a 'good' mother and 'loving' wife who is concerned for her family's comfort and well-being and therefore works long hours to supplement her family income[9], but at the same time she manages to take two days off to look after her family's needs. Consider the most obvious relevant sections of the narratives:

Excerpt 20
(Constanţa corpus, Hornoiu 2007)

● (Felicia) lucrează da' ea lunea şi joia îşi ia liber că lucrează mai tîrziu cum lucram io pe vremuri şi se chinuie cu ceara că ba le-o dă o firma mai bună alta mai puţin bună

(Felicia) goes to work but takes Monday and Thursday off cause she works late as I used to in the old days and she's got problems with the wax 'cause they are either supplied with high quality wax or one of a poor quality

● (O ajută) pe Felicia acolo-n casă fac menaju' că pînă vine Felicia seara ce s-o mai aştepţi pe Felicia să pregătească masa

(They help) Felicia they do the work there around the house 'cause Felicia comes in the evening so why wait for Felicia to cook dinner to

● (Ce e mai complicat) face Felicia joia şi lunea

---

[6] Recent research on gender has shown that post-communist Romanian society, although characterised by gender-related egalitarianism at the level of official ideology, is marked by traditional patriarchal attitudes and practices in the private sphere and by patriarchal authority in terms of the state-citizen relationships (Pasti 2003). Moreover, recent public opinion polls and increasing tendencies towards left-wing conservatism show that a paternalist state is still favoured in contemporary Romanian society (Miroiu 2004).

[7] This view is also echoed by Weedon (1987:3) who argues that "As children we learn what girls and boys should be and, later, women and men. These subject positions – ways of being an individual – and the values inherent in them may not all be compatible and we will learn that we can choose between them. As women we have a range of possibilities. In theory almost every walk of life is open to us, but all the possibilities which we share with men involve accepting, negotiating or rejecting what is constantly being offered to us as our primary role – that of wife and mother".

[8] Romanian mass-media do not portray a less patriarchal society. Television shows with and about women are confined to aspects of the private sphere whereas shows with and about people (i.e. men) focus on aspects of the public sphere and issues of general interest. Commercials endlessly perpetuate the image of the woman who brings up her children and does all the cleaning and cooking to keep her man around the house or the woman who beautifies herself to win over the man for whom she will wash, clean and cook to keep him around the house. The Romanian woman as promoted by mass-media is the victim of poverty and violence or the super-woman top model (Rovenţa-Frumuşani 2005), the so-called 'Barbie doll'.

[9] More often than not, female professionals depend on their husbands' incomes since their own incomes are inadequate (Pasti 2003).

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Felicia cooks the more complicated things on Thursdays and Mondays
● E:: da' ea nu poate la opt şi jumătate să aştepte toţi nemîncaţii să vina Felicia să pregătească
Eh but she can't at eight thirty let them be hungry and wait for Felicia to come and cook
● Era mîndră că de ziua ei i-a luat Cosmin o pereche de cercei de argint mari aşa
She (i.e. Felicia) was proud because Cosmin bought her a pair of large silver earrings for her birthday

While the message can easily be inferred from the first four utterances, it is not quite so obvious from the last. In fact, this utterance indicates that Cosmin's love for his mother is a reflection of the latter's good qualities. The beautician also constructs her own gender identity as a good understanding mother(-in-law) and grandmother:

Excerpt 21
(Constanţa corpus, Hornoiu 2007)
● Pînă vine Felicia seara ce s-o mai aştepţi pe Felicia să pregătească masa
Felicia comes in the evening so why wait for Felicia to cook dinner to
● le-am făcut io un tort de fructe le-am dat
I baked them a fruit cake, I gave them

Similarly, the gender identity the service provider constructs for her granddaughter conforms to the rather conservative norms of Romanian society. The granddaughter is portrayed as being perfectly able to look after her father and brother and run the household showing that in the traditional Romanian family, which is characterised by a spirit of partnership only to limited extent[10], the performance of the housewife role in adulthood is prefaced by a long period of apprenticeship. This state of affairs is best illustrated by the following three utterances:

Excerpt 22
(Constanţa corpus, Hornoiu 2007)
● Cătălina se pricepe la gătit
Cătălina is good at cooking
● Cătălina găteşte (….) cartofi la cuptor cartofi prăjiţi ouă ochiuri grătar
Cătălina can cook baked potatoes, fries and fried eggs roast
● Ea nu poate la opt şi jumătate să aştepte toţi nemîncaţii să vină Felicia să pregătească
She can't at eight thirty let them be hungry and wait for Felicia to come and cook

These extracts describe a state of affairs frequently encountered in Romanian society: girls are socialized into appropriate 'feminine' behaviour which presupposes, among other things, taking care of the male members of their families[11]. In the socialization of boys, freedom of choice and independence are valued twice as much as in the case of girls who are orientated towards obedience and hard work[12].

At least one rather different feminine identity gets voiced throughout these news-updates: the identity of several mutual female acquaintances who identify themselves more readily with the role of a *modern woman with a full-time job*, a woman who is very careful about her physical appearance and who regularly undergoes beautifying treatments[13].

[10] In contemporary Romanian society 80% of household chores and the raising of children are left up to the wife whereas only in 5% of Romanian families household chores are jointly completed by both partners (Barometrul de gen, 2000).
[11] See also Stănciulescu (1998).
[12] See *Barometrul de gen* (2000).
[13] This type of woman, promoted mainly by mass-media, is referred to in gender studies as 'the Barbie doll' (Miroiu 2004): an independent career woman with sex appeal and access to beautifying techniques.

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Excerpt 23
(Constanta corpus)
1 Client: da' camelia ce bine arată nu ?
but camelia, she's looking good, isn't she?
2 SP: da camelia arată foarte bine
yeah, Camelia's looking very good
3 'să ştiţi că chiar nu m-am dus decît de vreo două ori'
you know I really went there a couple of times only
4 la o colegă a ei care a făcut cosmetică
to a colleague of hers who's a beautician
5 da' nevoită că mă duceam acolo la coafor şi dacă nu mai puteam să vin
but because I had to cause I was going to the hairdresser's there and if I couldn't come anymore
6 de cînd lucrez la bancă termin tot la şapte opt seară
since I started working at the bank I get off at seven or eight in the evening just like before
7 ştiam că sîmbăta dumneavoastră nu lucraţi
I knew you didn't work on Saturday
8 şi cînd mi-am adus aminte
and when I remembered
9 cînd a mai vrut ea să mai vină din nou auzise că sînt bolnavă şi nu mai lucrez
when she wanted to come again she heard that I was ill and I didn't work anymore
10 Client: şi auraş?
and auraş?
11 SP: auraş acuma nu mai vrea să piardă
auraş doesn't wanna miss any beautician treatement
12 că toate fetele au lăudat-o ca arată foarte bine
cause all the girls praised her cause she looked so good

Through her narratives the beautician also constructs her son's and grandson's gender identities. In some contexts she portrays them as assuming a predominantly conservative and normative male identity when she presents her grandson as knowledgeable, competent and successful:

Excerpt 24
(Constanța corpus, Hornoiu 2007)
● Cosmin a terminat toate zece examenele şi a luat numai nouă şi zece ce n-a făcut în anu' unu şi doi
Cosmin has passed all ten exams and got only nine and ten something he didn't do the first and the second year

In other contexts, however, men are portrayed as behaving in ways usually framed as 'feminine' (helping with the housework or doing the shopping) deviating thus from a traditional masculine identity[14].

Excerpt 25
(Constanța corpus, Hornoiu 2007)
● Ei acolo-n casă fac menaju' mai uşurează pe Cătălina
They do the work there around the house 'cause Felicia comes in the evening and they take some burden off Cătălina
● Cosmin face piața
Cosmin does the shopping

[14] Ordinarily, in terms of housework duties, men's work is related private property and its external tokens: the house and the car become symbols of social status. Since property ownership confers power, this close association between men and symbols of property represent the materialization of relationships based on power (Miroiu 2004).

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These extracts show how gender identity is constantly being constructing and people may reinforce existing societal norms at one point, but challenge and contest them at others. In extracts 18 and 19, on this particular occasion the service provider constructs a predominantly conservative identity not only for herself but also for her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Although we may safely assume that in other respects their gendered identities may not conform to the rather conservative norms of Romanian society, on this occasion she takes the traditional roles of 'good mother', 'good daughter' and 'good wife' very seriously, and likes others to recognise and appreciate the extent to which she and other female members of her family meet society's prescriptions in these two areas.

4. Conclusions

This paper examined *gender ideologies* in modern European societies with special reference to English-speaking and Romanian societies demonstrating that, according to these ideologies, men are assigned social roles that are associated with power and status, while women are assigned subordinate roles. These gender ideologies are manifest in language at the level of conversational strategies through the process of *socialisation*. Children are socialised first within the family and then within institutionalised settings so as to conform to the differential gender roles that society assigns to them. Conforming to these gender roles also entails using gender-appropriate conversational styles.

The analysis of narratives has shown that social identity is locally situated: who we are is, at least in part, dependent on who we are with and where we are, both in interactional and discourse worlds. This view of identity differs to a certain extent from the view of identity assumed by some variation sociolinguistic analyses. *Sociolinguistic studies of variation* often assume that identities remain *constant* despite contextual changes, that they are somehow fixed attributes that are permanent properties of speakers. Thus a speaker will be coded, for instance, *white*, *middle-class*, *middle-aged*, *English woman* and she will maintain this constellation of features irrespective of the activity or interaction in which she is engaged.

As our analysis has hopefully demonstrated, identity is far from being categorical or fixed. Transforming experiences into stories and narrating them become a way of showing the addressee the salience of particular aspects of the speaker's identities. Speakers may act more or less middle-class, more or less female depending on what they are doing and with whom. Sometimes they may choose to conform to the traditional female identity imposed by a patriarchal society, whereas at other times they may choose to display more liberal identities that deviate from those norms.

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