

'Ask Each Pupil About Her Methods of Cleaning': Ideologies of Language and Gender in Americanisation Instruction (1900–1924)

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The focus of this paper is on the complex interaction between ideologies of language, gender and identity during the Americanisation era (1900–1924) in the USA. I will argue that the Americanisation movement had a 'hidden curriculum' which singled out immigrant women – and in particular mothers – for specific kinds of English instruction. Americanisers attempted to control women's linguistic repertoires and reduce them to 'pots and pans' English, linked to consumerism and domesticity. Three main responses can be distinguished among the women. Some ignored the classes altogether. Others enrolled and then dropped out, either disappointed by outdated teaching methods or overwhelmed by family and work pressures. And yet others did take the classes but did not adopt the patriarchal femininity constructed for them by the Americanisers. Instead, many immigrant women adopted alternative linguistic repertoires and identities offered to them by the labour movement.

Keywords: language, gender, identity, ideology, immigration, Americanisation

Introduction

In the past decade, we have witnessed a proliferation of scholarly studies that involve gendered aspects of multilingualism and second language teaching and learning (Blackledge, 2000; Burton *et al.*, 1994; Goldstein, 1997; Kouritzin, 2000; Mills, 2004; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko *et al.*, 2001). This work foregrounds the unique position occupied by immigrant women in society. Together with immigrant men they may face poverty, loneliness and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, social status or linguistic performance. As women they also face unique kinds of discrimination, such as sexual harassment, and unique difficulties in access to linguistic resources. Younger unmarried women may be prohibited from going to classes where they are likely to encounter male strangers (Goldstein, 1997), while married women may be prevented from attending classes by multiple family responsibilities (Kouritzin, 2000).

Minority mothers in particular find themselves in a double bind, positioned both as cultural brokers and as guardians of the home language. The majority society pressures them to be the agents of their children's socialisation into the new culture and penalises them as bad mothers if they are resistant or unable to do so. A study by Blackledge (2000, 2001) demonstrates that Bangladeshi

women in the UK are commonly positioned by the school authorities as incompetent mothers and as uneducated and illiterate individuals. In reality, these multilingual women possess multiple linguistic resources and are often literate in Bengali and Arabic. Yet their lack of literacy in English leads their children's teachers to believe that they are illiterate and cannot contribute to the children's literacy education. Their childrearing practices are continuously criticised by teachers who state that Bangladeshi families lack 'white middle-class' parenting skills. In a similar vein, Villenas (2001) depicts a small Southern city in the USA that goes even further in its deficit framing of immigrant mothers. There, Latina women are targets of parenting skills classes, announced in the local newspaper under the headline 'Program Enables Hispanic Women to Become Better Mothers'. Blackledge (2000, 2001), Mills (2004) and Villenas (2001) argue that the public and institutional stigmatisation of cultural and linguistic differences in parenting is nothing but 'benevolent racism' which normalises idealised white/Western middle-class parenting practices and pathologises the practices of ethnic and racial minorities.

More importantly, the majority society is not the only group to put pressure on mothers – minority communities also have expectations for them, requiring them to transmit the minority language and shaming them if they are unwilling or unable to do so. In many ethnic communities, ideologies of language and gender construct ideal femininity as inextricably linked to the knowledge, maintenance and transmission of the minority language (Chinchaladze & Dragadze, 1994; Harvey, 1994; Hill, 1987; Mills, 2004; Spedding, 1994), while women who fail to transmit the minority language are denounced as 'language traitors' or 'language killers' (Constantinidou, 1994; Romaine, 1999). And yet, time and again, minority women manage to negotiate their complex – and often contradictory – responsibilities. In cases where assimilation into the majority community may be socially and economically beneficial, they act as linguistic innovators spearheading language shift (Gal, 1978, 1979; McDonald, 1994). And in cases, where assimilation or bilingualism may threaten their social status they may choose to remain monolingual (Aikio, 1992) or to hide their bilingual competence from the prying eyes of strangers, including those of researchers (Harvey, 1994).

The present paper has two aims. First, it adds a previously missing historical dimension to this body of scholarship by turning attention to the period between 1900 and 1924 (chiefly 1914–1924), commonly known as the Americanisation campaign, or an effort to transform European immigrants into loyal Americans through the study of the English language and American customs. Second, it highlights a unique case where immigrant women were singled out for transformation not only by certain individuals or communities, but by a countrywide educational movement. Based on the data from a variety of primary and secondary sources, I will argue that the Americanisation movement was a gendered enterprise which designed specific kinds of English instruction, i.e. a 'hidden curriculum', for immigrant women as actual and prospective mothers of future American citizens. This instruction aimed to socialise the women into middle-class values and femininities linked to domesticity and consumerism. I will also show that immigrant women were

not passive recipients of these gendered linguistic repertoires. Rather, they positioned themselves as decision-makers and agents of change: some rejected Americanisers' efforts altogether, and others learned English, while rejecting femininities imposed by the Americanisers.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present study blends feminist poststructuralism with sociopolitical historiography. *Feminist poststructuralism*, in the view adopted here, strives to investigate the role of language in the production of gender relations, and the role of gender dynamics in language learning and use (Cameron, 1992, 1997; Weedon, 1987). In agreement with this framework, I will approach gender as 'a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women' (Gal, 1991: 176) and negotiated at the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability and geopolitical location.

Sociopolitical historiography is an approach advocated by Blommaert (1999: 5) which aims to add a historical dimension to contemporary sociolinguistics and add to 'the history of language and languages a dimension of human agency, political intervention, power and authority'. In agreement with this approach, my discussion of language ideologies will be at all times placed within a wider context of social and political issues, such as nation-building and industrialisation, and within more localised contexts of Americanisation classes and materials. I will also highlight opinions and practices of 'the real historical actors' (Blommaert, 1999: 7), namely Americanisers and those they aimed to transform.

Methodology

The data for the study comes from two sets of sources, primary and secondary. Primary sources include: (1) a corpus of 12 published immigrant memoirs which discuss the period between 1900 and 1924; (2) autobiographic essays and oral histories collected from turn-of-the century immigrants; (3) Americanisation textbooks and guides published between 1900 and 1924; (4) articles on Americanisation published between 1900 and 1924; (5) school board and Americanisation reports which reflect trends in classroom enrolment between 1900 and 1924; (6) demographic censuses and surveys. For all types of texts, 1924 was chosen as a cut-off point as this was the year when the National Origins Act established immigration quotas, significantly reducing the influx of immigrants; soon after the Americanisation campaign had petered out. Secondary sources for the study include sociological and historic studies of the Americanisation campaign and of immigrant women in the USA in the beginning of the 20th century. Almost none of them foregrounded language learning and use, yet all contained useful information that could provide a background for the argument presented here.

Two questions are asked in the analysis of these texts. First, I examine Americanisation texts to see what ideologies of language and gender informed approaches to assimilation of immigrant women, promoted by the federal and

state governments, civic leaders and reformers, and education experts. Second, I examine immigrant memoirs, oral histories, school board and Americanisation reports, demographic surveys, and scholarly literature to determine what, if any, impact did Americanisation have on language learning and use by immigrant women.

The analysis of the texts in question is informed by critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995), an approach centrally concerned with ideological dimensions of discourse. This approach is commonly used to analyse media, educational and institutional texts, which serve to justify particular social arrangements. CDA allows researchers to expose hidden institutional agendas and to pinpoint rhetorical strategies used in naturalisation of certain realities, such as sexism, racism or antisemitism. The central place allocated in CDA to power relations and concerns about social justice makes it an appealing approach for feminist poststructuralist work.

Of particular importance for the present analysis is one strand of CDA, a discourse-historical approach developed by Wodak and associates (Wodak *et al.*, 1999; Wodak, 2001) and successfully used to analyse Americanisation texts by Ricento (2003). The distinctive feature of this approach is a systematic integration of discourse analysis with historical knowledge about sociopolitical contexts in which particular texts are embedded. This concern with the historical dimension of discursive actions makes Wodak's approach a perfect tool for sociopolitical historiography, including the present undertaking. Wodak (2001) identifies five types of strategies often co-opted in discriminating against individuals and groups of individuals:

- referential/nomination strategies used in construction of in- and out-groups (e.g. membership categorisation, depersonalising metaphors and metonymies, synecdoches);
- predication strategies used to define discursively constructed groups (e.g. labelling of social actors and attribution of negative or positive traits to particular groups of people);
- argumentation strategies, where attributions function to justify discrimination, preferential treatment, and political inclusion and exclusion;
- perspectivisation strategies used to express involvement and the speaker's point of view (e.g. reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances);
- intensification strategies used to modify the epistemic status of the proposition (e.g. mitigation of the illocutionary force of the (discriminatory) utterance).

Below I will show how these strategies were used to position immigrant women in particular ways in discourses of Americanisation. I will begin by discussing the historic context of the Americanisation campaign, then look at the gendered aspects of the English curriculum, and subsequently consider the 'uptake' by immigrant women.

The Great Migration and the Americanisation Campaign

In the 44 years between 1880 and 1924, often termed the Great Migration, approximately 24 million immigrants entered the USA (US Bureau of the Census, 1975). The vast majority of these immigrants – be it Southern and Eastern Europeans in the East, or Mexicans in the West – were seen as distinct from the mainstream Anglo population racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically. In big industrialised cities, these impoverished newcomers commonly lived in tenements in ethnic ghettos, with little if any access to the mainstream society. Those who went to the rural areas did not square much better – most often, they also toiled in isolation from their English-speaking neighbours. Many treated their sojourn as temporary and thus focused on wage work, making no major forays into learning the English language and American customs. To remedy the situation, in 1906 the Congress approved the Nationality Act which required aliens seeking citizenship to speak English and made language testing a central component of the naturalisation process. Nevertheless, the census of 1910 revealed that out of 13 million foreign-born persons 10 years of age and older living in the USA, 23% or about 3 million were unable to speak English.

Both contemporaries and later historians agree that were it not for World War I, assimilation efforts would have remained the domain of various philanthropists, rather than the government and the wider public (Hartmann, 1948; Hill, 1919). The conflict in Europe heightened the sense of American nationalism and highlighted the persistence of Old World ties, language among them, among the European-born, many of whom 'manifested no intention of making America a permanent home and no desire of becoming Americans' (Hill, 1919: 611). This population came to be perceived as a threat to the social fabric of society, raising numerous concerns about national unity, about the capacity of the American society to assimilate such a large body of newcomers, and about what exactly was meant by 'We the People of the United States' (Boelhower, 1991).

With patriotism on the rise, immigrants were noticed by the previously indifferent public, and the question of Americanisation and the learning of English began to assume the proportions of a national crusade (Hartmann, 1948). In 1915 the National Americanization Committee was formed to assist the Americanisation efforts of the local agencies. Soon, the Americanisation movement underwent a transformation from a largely liberal one which respected immigrants' contributions to the host culture to the '100% Americanism' which required nothing less than full assimilation and complete abandonment of hyphenated identities, native languages and traditions (Pavlenko, 2002; see also Ricento, 2003). The latter attitude is visible in two types of legislation adopted between the years of 1917 and 1922. More than 30 states passed Americanisation laws which obligated aliens unable to speak or read English to attend public evening schools, and in some cases authorised funding for such schools and imposed fines on noncompliant aliens. Thirty-four states also passed official English-language policies which declared English the only language of instruction and effectively closed most bilingual and native language programmes.

Going After the Women

The efforts to transform immigrants into loyal Americans were carried out by three types of agencies: (a) federal, (b) state and municipal and (c) private and voluntary. The latter category included the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), factories, churches, settlement houses, women's clubs, and other religious, community and charity organisations. At its height, during the immediate post-war years, there existed more than a hundred different agencies and organisations which offered thousands of Americanisation programmes to the foreign-born (McClymer, 1991). These programmes included two obligatory components: English and civics classes, the latter either in English or in the native language of the students.

Initially, Americanisation efforts were explicitly geared towards European men for two key reasons. First, men were considered to be the main breadwinners and the key participants in the industrial economy. Second, they were the only ones with full citizenship rights. Most Asian-born immigrants were not eligible for US citizenship, while women could not become naturalised independently until the passage of the Cable Act in 1922. Instead, immigrant women shared the status of their fathers or husbands: if the father or a husband became a citizen, so did the woman. As time went by, some Americanisers started to argue that immigrant women should not be excluded from the intended audience as their loyalties are central to cultural and linguistic transformation of ethnic communities, mainly because of their role as mothers and transmitters of cultural values. A pamphlet of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in Milwaukee (1916–1917) stated that: 'one of the gravest problems that our harassed government has to face at the present moment is the Americanisation of emigrant women, the mothers of the citizens of the future' (as cited in Schlossman, 1983: 177).

The analysis of the texts in the present corpus shows that several constituencies competed for the women's allegiances – progressive Americanisers, assimilationists, ethnic communities and labour unions – and each had specific opinions as to the linguistic repertoires they ought to master. The first such constituency were progressively oriented Americanisers, who, at least prior to World War I, exhibited high levels of respect for 'immigrant gifts' and argued for cultural pluralism and integration of the immigrants and the natives. Among these Americanisers were a prominent sociologist, Dr Peter Roberts, the head of the YMCA Americanisation programme and author of several books and articles about Americanisation, as well as several feminist reformers: Frances Kellor, the vice-chair and effective head of the National Americanization Committee; Jane Addams, the creator of the Hull House; Josephine Roche, the head of the Division of Work with the Foreign Born; and Edith Terry Bremer, the head of the International Institutes programme of the YWCA. These activists played a key role in focusing attention on immigrant women: They challenged the patriarchal view of Americanness by transforming 'the immigrant problem' into the one of homes, where women get to play central roles in shaping attitudes and ultimately the outcomes of the acculturation process.

Another constituency interested in immigrant women were assimilationists who favoured '100% Americanisation' and abandonment of native languages and cultural traditions. These right-wing Americanisers commonly positioned immigrant women as a 'reactionary force' that did not offer the proper kind of mothering and the proper kind of language to the new generation of American citizens. Below, I will use two excerpts to exemplify commonalities and differences in ways in which the two groups constructed immigrant women. Let us look first at an excerpt from an article on immigrant education by a progressive educator, Frances Kellor, who states:

If the immigrant woman is last to be considered, it is not because her needs are least. It is at least as necessary for her to learn English as it is for her husband and her boys and girls. After all, it is she who must Americanise the home, and for playing this part in the assimilation of her family, her previous experience has left her quite unfit. She has been used to a very different climate in the South of Europe ... but if she can be shown that the colds and pneumonia of the winter have been due to the stuffiness of her house and can be persuaded, let us say in the spring, to try ventilating as an experiment, she will appreciate the habit at its true value. Of American foods and cooking, most immigrant women have little conception ... and with the exception of potatoes and cabbage, they do not understand the use of vegetables at all. (Kellor, 1914: 35)

The points made by Kellor are echoed – perhaps in a slightly different tone – by an assimilationist, Frank Lenz:

Most immigrant women know very little about city life. For the most part they are of the peasant type ... It becomes necessary to teach them the use of sinks, the care of toilets, the disposal of garbage, and other sanitary work. The immigrant mother must be taught the value of fresh air ... She must be taught how to ventilate her house and her clothing ... Few immigrant women know food varieties and food values; nor do they know how to properly prepare a wholesome meal. (Lenz, 1916: 473–474)

In all three excerpts above, the referential strategy of using the common label, such as 'emigrant women', 'immigrant women' or a synecdoche, as seen in Kellor's 'the immigrant woman', functions to construct (and misrepresent) the women as a homogeneous group, obliterating vast differences in their ethnic, linguistic, social, cultural and educational backgrounds. In reality, some were peasants, while others came from more urban environments, some were uneducated and illiterate, while others approached their men in the levels of literacy and education. Sixty-two percent of the Jewish women who entered the USA between 1908 and 1912 could read and write (Weinberg, 1988). And among Dutch women, 94% of those above the age of 15 were able to read according to the Public Use Sample of 1910 (Sinke, 1999).

Another feature that permeates these and many other texts is positioning of the women exclusively as wives and mothers (rather than independent citizens or members of the labour force): Kellor discursively links the woman

to 'her husband and her boys and girls', while the pamphlet of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae equates 'emigrant women' and 'the mothers of the citizens of the future'. This positioning obscures the fact that a sizeable minority of immigrant women were young girls who arrived alone and needed to earn a living. In the five years between 1910 and 1915, over half a million unmarried non-English-speaking women, most of them under the age of 21, immigrated to the USA (Seller, 1981). These women were joining the workforce, in particular the garment trade, in unprecedented numbers. By 1920, 34% of foreign-born women worked in manufacturing, 25% in domestic service, and many more were involved in home-based businesses and enterprises (Gabaccia, 1994).

And yet, immigrant women's growing presence in the American workplace and the conflicts between their private responsibilities and public roles were largely ignored by the Americanisers. Making attributions common to the whole group (predication strategy), they portrayed immigrant women as illiterate, ignorant peasants, unable to speak English, unaccustomed to winters (an assumption which, at least in the case of Eastern Europeans, speaks more to the ignorance of the Americanisers than to reality) and 'unfit' to prepare 'a wholesome meal' which would include vegetables other than potatoes and cabbage. In fact, references to the offensive cabbage abound in the literature on immigrant women (cf. McClymer, 1982, 1991). The General Federation of Women's Clubs made eliminating cabbage a major objective of its Americanisation work and decided to launch a campaign to

carry the English language and American ways of caring for babies, ventilating the house, preparing American vegetables, instead of the inevitable cabbage, right into the new home. (as cited in McClymer, 1991: 12)

It would be unfair to say that paternalistic attitudes of the Americanisers had no real basis. For many women, the transition from a familiar way of life to one that involved unfamiliar standards, objects and procedures was a stressful one. Based on her study of life in immigrant communities, a sociologist, Sophonisba Breckinridge (1921), described numerous challenges facing women in transition. Not only did they have to deal with new furniture, bedding, washing procedures or cooking supplies, but they also had to adjust to the fact that tasks previously treated as communal (e.g. washing) now became individual responsibilities. At the same time, social workers' reports suggest that many women managed to maintain clean and pleasant homes in the face of great adversity and that the majority of the problems listed by Americanisers were caused by socioeconomic, rather than cultural factors – tenement overcrowding, lack of running water and simply poverty (Breckinridge, 1921; Weatherford, 1986).

More importantly, many Americanisers did not stop at pointing to the women's lack of knowledge in homemaking – they also emphasised their lack of parenting skills, representing Eastern and Southern European women as unfit mothers in the long-standing tradition of 'benevolent racism', unmasked by Blackledge (2000, 2001) and Villenas (2001). Breckinridge (1921), for instance, states that

the foreign-born mother, from a rural district in Europe, where children were put to work helping the parents as soon as they could be in any way useful, frequently does not recognise this need [for wholesome play], and hence does not even do those things within her power to secure it. (cited in Seller, 1981: 105)

Based on such reports, assimilationists linked the 'established' deficiencies of immigrant women (peasant background, lack of English, literacy, education, homemaking and childrearing skills) to a wide range of social problems, from a perceived decline in family life, to slums, disease and the rise in juvenile delinquency. The Federal Bureau of Education stated that 'from babyhood to adolescence the child suffers through the mother's ignorance of language' and that 'later on, when the child reaches the age limit of compulsory school attendance, the non-English speaking mother, failing to realise the advantages of a longer period of schooling, frequently allows the boy or girl to leave school and go to work, although an economic necessity may not exist' (McClymer, 1991: 10–11). The Bureau of Naturalization concurred that 'the schooling of the mother is the only effective way to enable her to take her full responsibility in the home and in the community' (McClymer, 1991: 10).

In reality, however, while the women may have been unfamiliar with some foods, clothes or housekeeping routines, they were not unfamiliar with the practice of mothering. Some explicitly questioned the American way, juxtaposing it to the Old World where children were supervised by various family members and friends rather than by condescending nursery workers (Weatherford, 1986). Many immigrant mothers were also determined to ensure better educational opportunities for their children than the ones they had themselves. Jewish women interviewed by Weinberg (1988) recall that their immigrant mothers were 'pushers for education'. If and when they did pull the children out of school and put them to work, it was because the family needed their wages and not because the parents did not understand the value of education.

And yet Americanisers continued to emphasise the civilising mission of English. Some texts, including the ones cited above, equated the lack of English and 'ignorance of language', whereby inability to speak English rendered a woman dumb in all senses of the word (for a discussion of similar assumptions in the contemporary UK society, see Blackledge, 2000, 2001). Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, such assumptions are also echoed in immigrants' own portrayals of Americanisation and English learning (at least those produced for public consumption), such as the one below, found in a newsletter article about the Americanization Center for Jewish women in Newark, New Jersey:

It was hitherto thought impossible to get the older foreign woman to give any time or thought to learning English. The forty women here disprove such a supposition. Every week, – each class meets twice a week, – sees a few new ones who come in timidly at first ... The first step is of course to make these mothers literate in English, so that they can use their environment to the best advantage to themselves, their children and their community ... the organizer of the classes, who did a

lot of house-to-house visiting, did not need to come bolstered up with arguments on the necessity for learning the language of the country; the women gave the best arguments. They feel as dumb and blind creatures unless they have the language. (*Making Americans*, 1919)

We can see that this text not only recycles common assumptions – such as presumed unwillingness of older women to learn English or the necessity to learn English and literacy to become better mothers and citizens – but also attributes the key argument, ‘feeling dumb and blind’, to the women themselves. A further analysis of the corpus suggests that the main differences between portrayals of immigrant women by liberals and assimilationists, exemplified here in excerpts from Kellor (1914) and Lenz (1916), are in the agency attributed to the women and in intensification strategies. Kellor (1914) positions the women as future agents who will be Americanising their own homes after proper instruction. In discussing their shortcomings, she uses numerous modifiers to mitigate the illocutionary force of her statements, saying that the immigrant woman ‘can be shown’ the value of fresh air and ‘can be persuaded, let us say in the spring, to try ventilating as an experiment’, after which ‘she will appreciate the habit at its true value’. In contrast, assimilationists paternalistically position immigrant women as recipients of the Americanisers’ wisdom rather than as independent agents and see no need for gentle negotiation and persuasion. In Lenz’s (1916) view, the immigrant woman ‘must be taught’, in the view of the General Federation of Women’s Club, the ‘new ways’ must be carried ‘right into the new home’, and in the words of another Americaniser, Dr. Grace Hebard, ‘some of the principles of Americanization must be ground into her’ (Van Nuys, 2002: 123).

Overall, we can see that despite different views on the women’s agency, liberal Americanisers and assimilationists agreed on the need to transform immigrant women into better wives and mothers, or, in Jane Addams’ words, on the imperative to rebuild ‘the wrecked foundations of domesticity’ in immigrant communities (Gabaccia, 1994: 116). Americanisation discourses on immigrant women, in particular assimilationist ones, predominant in the later part of the Americanisation era, commonly reduced immigrant women to the child-like status of helpless, illiterate, uneducated and malfunctioning home-makers, in dire need of assistance from the middle-class white society. This assistance would allow the foundations of domesticity to be rebuilt and transformed through ‘domestic education’ classes where the women ‘could be taught English, and, largely by practical demonstration, the principles of hygiene, food, cooking and sanitation’ (Kellor, 1914: 35; see also Lenz, 1916). What they needed in reality was instruction that would help them to become more marketable and employable. Instead they were offered classes that taught them that there was the American way to raise their children, to cook, to shop for groceries, to air the room, and even to brush their teeth (cf. Beglinger, 1922). And while to a contemporary reader such an approach may sound inane, McClymer (1982: 109) points out that ‘the linking of patriotism and the toothbrush effectively conveyed the Americanisers’ basic message: 100 percent Americanism was just that, a total way of life.’

Many historians (cf. McClymer, 1991) have also remarked upon the irony of the fact that among some of the most prominent Americanisers, social activists and progressive educators were early feminists and suffragists who did not deem it appropriate to encourage independence in their immigrant sisters – rather, they aimed to transmit a very patriarchal model of femininity.

Teaching the New American Womanhood

Once Americanisers agreed upon the needs of the new target population, several agencies began offering classes for immigrant women: public schools, factories, YWCA, and women's clubs and organisations, such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Council of Jewish Women. In some cases, special efforts were made to hire 'home teachers' for immigrant mothers who were unable – or unwilling – to attend public school classes. There also appeared materials created exclusively for use with immigrant women; in the majority of the cases however, the texts used in women's classes were ones created for both men and women. In this section I will analyse seven English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks which target both men and women (Banks, 1914; Beglinger, 1922; Faustine & Wagner, 1909; Field & Coveney, 1911; Markowitz & Starr, 1914; Mintz, 1913; Vitali, 1905) and one geared exclusively towards women (Austin, 1913), to see whether these materials reflect Americanisers' discourses on immigrant women.

The analysis of the seven books created for mixed audiences shows that all of them implicitly privilege male learners and portray a male-dominated public sphere. This male domination and reproduction of traditional gender roles are accomplished in the textbooks through three discursive strategies: nomination, predication and perspectivation. The main protagonists of the short stories in the texts are invariably male characters (nomination): Mr. John Dowe, Sam and Thomas (Faustine & Wagner, 1909), Peter and Antonio (Banks, 1914), or Walter and Mr. Peterson (Beglinger, 1922). The world these learners live in is described from the perspective of a male European immigrant (perspectivation): the characters arrive in the USA from Europe with their invisible families, and then work, eat, save money, study English, discuss American traditions, get citizenship and vote in the company of other men. Overall, we can see that men are closely linked to the public domain while women live in the private one (predication): they cook, clean and iron, and their main foray into the public world is a shopping expedition (cf. Markowitz & Starr, 1914).

The working place appears to be populated almost exclusively by men. In Vitali's (1905) text, for instance, the lesson on professions and trades focuses on typically masculine professions (e.g., banker, lawyer, jeweller) and asks the students the following questions: 'What is your trade? Is your father a barber? ... Is your brother a merchant? ... Was your grandfather a mason? ... Was your grandfather a banker? What is your uncle's trade?' (p. 85). No questions are asked with regard to mothers, aunts, or sisters, who presumably do not have professions or trades. Twenty years later, Beglinger (1922) still portrays the world of work (pp. 96–97) and the world of banking

and savings (pp. 98–108) as exclusively male domains. Another exclusively male domain in these texts is citizenship, as illustrated in the following short text, entitled ‘A citizen’:

Most men are citizens. They can vote. They can be elected to office. We respect a good citizen. All citizens have equal rights. All citizens can speak English. A man born in Italy, Russia, Greece, or any country can be a citizen of the United States. He must first be naturalized. Each man who lives in the United States wishes to be a good American citizen. (Field & Coveney, 1911: 200)

One can say that these representations reflect the historical circumstances in which the books were created: men really were the ones who were obligated to find employment and to study for the naturalisation tests. However, a closer historic analysis which pays attention to the realities of the labour market shows that such an argument is patently false – the world presented in the texts is a constructed one. In the real world, growing numbers of immigrant women were joining the labour force either part- or full-time, as factory workers, domestic workers, or owners of private businesses or boarding houses. Women were also becoming American citizens, if only as wives and daughters of naturalised male citizens (until 1922). Yet their wage work and citizenship are not reflected in the texts. Furthermore, a male perspective is often taken on activities in which all humans engage equally. For instance, Beglinger’s (1922: 78–79) text offers advice on how a man should groom himself, on how many meals a working man should eat a day and what these meals should consist of. In sum, an analysis of ESL textbooks written for a general immigrant audience shows that strategies of nomination, predication and perspectivization served to link men to the public domains of citizenship, land and home ownership, and work, and women to the private domains of home and family.

Texts and programmes which were aimed exclusively at immigrant women were not much different. They typically centred on topics such as the home, furniture, ventilation, cleaning methods, laundering, personal hygiene, child welfare, American money, shopping, cooking, and visiting schools and doctor’s offices (Austin, 1913; *Suggestions for Americanization work among foreign-born women*, 1921; Lenz, 1916; see also Barrett, 1992; McClymer, 1991; Van Nuys, 2002). Austin’s (1913) text, however, does recognise that some women come to class after a day in the factory and includes relevant units, such as ‘A day’s work in a cigar factory’. Unlike the texts discussed earlier, Austin (1913) actually offers women specific linguistic repertoires for performing their family duties and talking to doctors (Lesson 41. What the doctor told Mrs. Mason), school teachers (Lesson 7. A visit to the school) and even probation officers (Lesson 42. The probation officer). ‘Lesson 37, Getting working papers’ informs immigrant mothers that employment is prohibited for children under the age of 14 and restricted for children under 16 (this lesson also includes a summary of relevant labour laws). At the same time, women are still defined primarily through their household responsibilities. In her preface, for instance, the author instructs English teachers to take women’s

own interests and experiences into consideration and allow them to 'express themselves' – through discussion of cleaning methods:

The teacher must take into consideration the national characteristics as well as the home life and daily work of the members, then seek to relate the lesson to their experiences. For instance, in the lesson on 'A Day's Cleaning,' asking questions of each pupil as to *her* methods of cleaning and of doing housework will help to make the lesson a means of self-expression. (Austin, 1913: 5–6)

And while the text includes multiple discussions of housework (e.g. Lesson 15. A week's work at home) and 'shopping' units (a day's shopping; fruits and vegetables; the meat market; the dairy store; the grocery store; the hardware store; the flower store), it lacks lessons on the form and structure of the local, state and national government, on the judicial system, and on voting, central in the texts targeting immigrant men. Thus, it appears that the female model of citizenship promoted in this and other texts, such as *Suggestions for Americanization work among foreign-born women* (1921), is one steeped in home economics, rather than in civics (for a similar argument, see van Nuys, 2002). Here it is necessary to point out that while predominant, this model was not exclusive: there also existed some programmes, both in the East and in the West, that espoused a different conception of immigrant women and attempted to teach them about their rights as citizens, employees and tenants (Bach, 1923: 34–36, 54–55, 57; Van Nuys, 2002). Mostly, however, Americanisers attempted to control women's linguistic repertoires, reducing them to 'pots and pans' English.

The analysis of the texts in the corpus exposes the 'hidden curriculum' behind an attempt to help immigrant women learn English. This analysis suggests that during the Americanisation era English instruction was co-opted for purposes of social engineering, which aimed to impose on the women a particular model of middle-class domesticity. This 'hidden curriculum' placed the women squarely in the home and emphasised American values, such as thrift and cleanliness, and Americans standards of hygiene, childcare, marketing and clothing. A close consideration of the sociopolitical and historical contexts in which these texts were produced suggests that the emphasis on domesticity – and thus, cooking, cleaning and childrearing – in the Americanisation texts and textbooks was not accidental. To begin with, this was the dominant model in the educational curriculum for women as a whole; one that Anglo women were only beginning to contest (and, as indicated earlier, contested for themselves but not for their foreign-born sisters). In fact, some Americanisers argued that sharing the 'pots and pans' language would help immigrant mothers and daughters to communicate better. Thus, Robert Woods (1903: 303–304), an authority in settlement work, argued that 'the girls can discuss sewing and cooking with their mothers when they have no language to discuss trade winds and syntax'.

Secondly, the emphasis on domesticity aimed to either obscure or perhaps even counteract the fact that many immigrant women were forced to seek employment outside the house, in cigar and tobacco manufacturing, textile manufacturing, dressmaking, and other areas to eke out a living. In doing so,

'the woman of foreign birth [was] willing to accept employment at a lesser wage than the man' (*Immigration and unemployment*, 1914: 31). This in turn raised concerns that the growing numbers of women in the industrial labour market, on the one hand competed for some of the same jobs as the men and lowered men's wages, and on the other, were gaining a taste for independence and an aversion to housework, marriage and motherhood (Seller, 1981).

The emphasis on consumerism – shopping, marketing, selecting clothes, and furniture – was also intentional. Most newcomers came from preindustrialised economies where homemaking included both production and consumption of goods and where women were often involved in income-producing activities. In turn, in the highly industrialised USA the problem was not scarcity but overproduction and the ideal homemaker was defined as a consumer rather than a producer. Moreover, as consumers, immigrant women tended to patronise local ethnic shops, in which they had more trust and where they could find familiar products and buy them on credit (Breckinridge, 1921). This was an undesirable situation for the mainstream economy – it had to be adjusted by getting the women to do things 'the American way'.¹

Immigrant Women as Agents of Change

The analysis above points to historic, social and economic forces that shaped a particular approach to English curricula for immigrant women. Let us see now how these curricula – and attempts to position the women – were perceived by the women themselves. How did the immigrant women respond to the Americanisers' efforts? This in itself may be a misguided question, as there never existed one cohesive group of 'immigrant women'. Rather, there were multiple heterogeneous constellations of women who had very little in common with each other, except for the societal portrayal of them as 'backward' and 'incompetent'. Their responses were mediated by age, generation, race, class, cultural and ethnic background, level of education, level of engagement in economic structures, and gender roles and expectations in the ethnic community. For reasons of space, the present paper focuses exclusively on European women, leaving out the racialised dimension of immigrant treatment (see however Van Nuys, 2002).

The analysis of European immigrant women's autobiographies and oral histories shows that there was only one thing these diverse women had in common – they were not passive recipients of Americanisers' messages. Rather, they exhibited three types of responses to Americanisation programmes. To begin with, most women simply ignored the courses – some were too busy to be involved, and others exhibited nothing but mistrust for social reformers' efforts (Weatherford, 1986). For instance,

once Cleveland head worker ruefully confessed that the settlement's 'house-to-house canvass' to recruit students for an 'English class for foreign women' was a 'failure.' The women regarded 'the sudden invitation to learn English...' with suspicion as part of a plan of the American government to 'make soldiers of their husbands'. (McClymer, 1991: 7)

This failure is not surprising as in many cases social workers exhibited little respect for the time-honoured local traditions, as seen in one description of the encounter of Italian women with overzealous Americanisers:

Social workers burst into their homes and upset the usual routine of their lives, opening windows, undressing children, giving orders not to eat this and that, not to wrap babies in swaddling clothes ... The mother of five or six children may, with some reason, be inclined to think that she knows a little more about how to bring up children than the young-looking damsel who insists upon trying to teach her how to do it. (Sartorio, 1918: 58)

The second visible trend is a high attrition among both men and women who did attend Americanisation classes. On the basis of school reports and surveys, McClymer (1982) estimates that about 1,000,000 immigrants were at some point or other enrolled in formal public school Americanisation classes, but significantly fewer completed them. Comments made in school board reports, immigrant memoirs and oral histories, suggest that the reasons for this attrition included family and work-related responsibilities, safety concerns, lack of coordination among agencies, and outdated methods of instruction, which did not take into consideration the students' needs and goals and thus often led to 'undertakings of little value' (Hill, 1919: 642):

We read Shakespeare and I used to fall asleep. I needed 'cat' and 'rat', but we got Shakespeare. So I had trouble with English. (Gussie M., in Weinberg, 1988: 170)

The instructor seemed more interested in getting one-hundred-percent attendance than in giving one-hundred-percent instruction. He would joke and tell silly stories ... (Schneiderman & Goldthwaite, 1967: 39)

We tried to go to school and then overtime would interfere. Evening classes, when they were available, were useless because it was a question of attending school or keeping a job. (Pauline Newman, in Glenn, 1990: 155)

The out-of-date method of reciting in concert is still used in a number of evening schools. In many cases the investigators criticised the vocabulary and phrases used in the English instruction. Very seldom were they selected with a view to the every day working needs of the immigrant group. (Perkins *et al.*, 1909: 37)

... the causes of these unsatisfactory conditions [low attendance and high drop out rates in Americanisation classes in Cleveland] are to be found in the character of instruction given in these classes. The trouble is that the teaching does not follow any well matured plan and is not skillfully done. (Miller, 1916: 90)

The low attendance of Americanisation classes did not signify however that immigrant women – or men for that matter – were not learning English or getting Americanised, at least to a degree. Rather, some women were moving towards this goal at their own speed and in a variety of ways, through family,

friendships, workplace, neighbourhood, women's organisations, and union or church activities, all of which offered them more relevant linguistic repertoires and feminine identities (for a case study of such assimilation, see Krause, 1978). A former garment industry worker, Dora Bayrack, recalls that she was taught English by her coworkers at the shirtwaist factory in Boston (Glenn, 1990). Mary Antin's mother went to work in a store immediately upon arrival in the USA and made quick progress due to the interaction with the store customers:

as she could perform the acts of weighing, measuring, and mental computation of fractions mechanically, she was able to give her whole attention to the dark mysteries of the language, as intercourse with her customers gave her opportunity. In this she made such rapid progress that she soon lost all sense of disadvantage. (Antin, 1912: 196)

On the other hand – and this is the third trend visible in the data – there was also a population of women, in particular young Jewish women from Eastern Europe, that flocked to English classes, be it ones organised by official Americanisers or ones offered by factories or various charity and philanthropic organisations. In 1908, Jewish immigrant women constituted 40% of the total enrolment in Americanisation classes in New York City (Weinberg, 1988). Garment industry workers, most of them Russian Jews, made up the largest proportion of working girls attending public evening schools in New York City (Glenn, 1990). A particularly successful factory school for women was organised by the Sicher Company, a large manufacturer of muslin underwear. This school offered its workers instruction in spoken and written English, business letter writing, the fundamentals of arithmetic, hygiene and sanitation, civics, and the industrial evolution of the product they handle, from the cotton fields to the factory floor. The pamphlet entitled *Where Garments and Americans are Made* describes this school as one where 'in thirty-five weeks the illiterate girl, foreign born and trained, can be transformed into a literate American woman with a good mental equipment and social knowledge essential for the battle of life' (McCarthy, 1917: 3).

Jewish charities and organisations were particularly active in educating incoming girls and women. Representatives of the Department of Immigrant Aid of the Council of Jewish Women often met Jewish women at the ports of entry and maintained contact with them for extended periods of time. They organised English, literacy and Americanisation classes, where such classes were not otherwise available (*Making Americans*, 1919; Winkler, 1918). Jewish organisations also maintained vocational schools for girls, such as the Training School for Girls, instituted by Baroness de Hirsch and the Hebrew Technical School for Girls (Bernheimer, 1905; Joseph, 1935). Even some mature Jewish women exhibited a zest toward learning the language and attended day and evening classes, organised by the Council of the Jewish Women and Baron de Hirsch Fund, among others (Joseph, 1935; *Making Americans*, 1919; Weinberg, 1988). All of these efforts resulted in increasing numbers of Eastern European Jewish women in mainstream educational establishments. In 1914, a growing number of Jewish girls from East Side homes was going to high school, and a smaller but equally growing number of Eastern European women began

attending Hunter College and Barnard. In 1916, Eastern European women constituted 24% of Hunter College graduates, and 82% of all the Jewish graduates (Howe, 1976). And by 1920, Jewish girls attended high school and college in numbers significantly higher than those of other ethnic groups (Weinberg, 1988).

This group enjoyed an unprecedented success in learning English. According to Manning's (1930) report, 90% of Jewish immigrant women older than 14 learned English as opposed to 34.7% of women in other ethnic groups. Several factors contribute to this outcome. To begin with, while other newcomers often saw themselves as temporary sojourners with families still in the old country, Jews, escaping persecution in tsarist Russia, came with an intention to stay, and thus with significant investment into assimilation. The return rate for Hungarians, Slovaks and Italians has been estimated as high as 50%, while the rate of return for European Jews was a mere 2–3%. Their language learning was further facilitated by the fact that they had brought with them a history of multilingualism, and high levels of education and literacy (oftentimes in a score of languages, including Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian). And while Jewish women as a group were not as educated as the men, many received secular education, and had literacy at least in Hebrew, used in religious ceremonies, and often also in Yiddish, Russian, Polish and German (Weinberg, 1988). Here is how Sarah Lederman, a participant in an oral history study conducted by Brumberg (1986: 48), recalls her elementary school curriculum in Galicia circa 1905:

I studied geography, history – history was my best subject. And I studied – you go by grades like here – in the first grade only Polish, reading and writing ... Then when it comes already to the second grade you already start learning German ... So the third year we went already into Russian.

At the same time, women were still considered to be second-class citizens in traditional Jewish culture. Consequently, many single Jewish women journeyed to the New World in search of a better future and more gender equality. A trade-union organiser, Rose Pesotta, recalls that she left Russia at the age of 17 because she could see 'no future for myself except to marry some young man returned from his four years of military service and be a housewife. That is not enough' (Pesotta, 1944: 9).

In turn, Fannie Shapiro admitted that, like many others, she craved education: 'my whole hope was coming to this country to get an education. I heard so much about America a free country for the Jews and you ... didn't have to pay for schooling, so I came' (Glenn, 1990: 47).

These women were not the frightened, passive, illiterate and uneducated peasants portrayed by the Americanisers. On the contrary, in addition to basic levels of literacy and facility in several languages, Eastern European Jewish women brought with them a centuries old tradition of female labour and, in many cases, needle skills and experiences as dressmakers, seamstresses and tailors (Bernheimer, 1905; Glenn, 1990; Weinberg, 1988; Yans-McLaughlin, 1990). And as their previous experiences were congruent with the work-force demands in the USA, many required no transitional period and found jobs

immediately in the garment industry and other trades. More often than not these jobs were at the lowest paying levels, as emphasised by the 1905 survey of the life of Russian Jews in the USA. The author of the survey, Charles Bernheimer (1905: 38), states that 'there are scores of educated Russian girls in the sweat shops and their life is one of direst misery'. These girls needed to learn English in order to move up on the employment ladder, and 'pots and pans' vocabulary was not helpful in their endeavours.

A much more attractive linguistic repertoire was offered to them by the labour movement. Labour activists, in particular representatives of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and Women's Trade Union League, used English as 'a point of entry into these women's lives through which lessons of unionism could be taught' (Hyman, in Barrett, 1992: 1013; see also Burns, 1920). In doing so, they practised what we now see as critical pedagogy, one where learning the language is combined with the critical view of the economic, social and political power relations in the target society. The New York League even produced a labour-oriented English primer, *New World Lessons for Old World People* (Pike, 1912), that described everyday lives of women in immigrant neighbourhoods and emphasised the accomplishments of female activists (Barrett, 1992). The critique of capitalism, absent in the mainstream teaching materials, was particularly appealing to Eastern European Jewish women, who were well primed for it by political movements popular in the Jewish community: socialism, social democratic unionism and Zionism. This readiness was demonstrated in the study of oral history interviews about the work in the garment industry between 1900 and 1930 collected from more than a hundred Italian and Jewish immigrants (Yans-McLaughlin, 1990). While Italian women emphasised their family lives, Jewish women constructed themselves both as private and public personae, and as active autonomous agents who understood and challenged power relations in their workplaces.

It is not surprising then that many Eastern European Jewish women – Mary Antin, Emma Goldman, Belle Moscovitz, Rose Pastor Stokes, Rose Schneiderman, Rose Pesotta and Anzia Yezierska among them – became eloquent English speakers and writers and came to play a highly visible role in the early 20th century radical activism, socialism and labour movement in the USA (cf. Glenn, 1990). At the time when middle-class American feminists aimed to politicise their roles as moral guardians and to differentiate their civic contributions from those of men, female Jewish activists politicised their roles as breadwinners, 'striving to join with men in the common struggles of the working-class immigrant community' (Glenn, 1990: 215). In forging their new gender identities, these women did not uncritically adopt the roles fashioned for them by the Americanisers. Taking strength in the Old World tradition of women's work, they rejected the domestic role imposed on them by the middle-class American culture. At the same time, they drew on the American culture when rejecting the Jewish notions of female inferiority and aspiring to the rights and opportunities – including education – they saw as a birthright of American women (cf. Antin, 1912; Yezierska, 1925).

Conclusion

To sum up, I have argued that during the Americanisation era immigrant women were predominantly constructed as a homogeneous group of 'uneducated peasants' and incompetent mothers and homemakers. The analysis of turn-of-the-century ESL textbooks and related materials has exposed the 'hidden curriculum' of the era that offered the women 'pots and pans' English and attempted to place them squarely within the boundaries of the home.

This analysis, grounded in historic, social and economic factors, and marketplace realities affecting immigrant education, pointed to the discontinuity between Americanisers' goals and immigrant women's needs. This discontinuity is evident in three common responses to Americanisers' efforts among European women. Some women ignored English classes altogether. Others enrolled and then dropped them, either disappointed by the outdated teaching methods or overwhelmed by family and workplace pressures. And yet others did take Americanisation classes, but did not necessarily adopt patriarchal femininities constructed for them by the Americanisers. Instead, these women constructed their own versions of what their contemporaries called the New Womanhood, incorporating their mothers' traditions and habits – such as the Jewish tradition of female labour – into the newly appropriated 'American ways'.²

In fact, it is rather ironic that the Americanisation era is chiefly known for the efforts of well intended social reformers to transform the Old World ways of 'backward' immigrant women and to eradicate the 'inevitable cabbage'. In reality, this was the time when American cuisine became enriched by Chinese, Italian, Jewish, Mexican and Greek cooking traditions. This was also the time when immigrant women rejected or simply ignored the attempts of Americanisers – including early American feminists – to fit them into the patriarchal mould. Instead, garment industry strikers and political activists, many of them Eastern and Southern European immigrant women, became role models for American-born middle- and upper-middle-class feminists, activists and suffragists (Glenn, 1990). Finally, this was also the time of an unprecedented failure of the 'hidden curriculum' in ESL instruction. Instead of limiting themselves to 'pots and pans' English, women of different ages, ethnicities, education levels, socioeconomic backgrounds and religious persuasions converged in choosing their own linguistic repertoires, ones most appropriate to their own circumstances and settings.

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Notes

1. Van Nuys (2002) insightfully points out that not all immigrant women were invited to join the middle-class society – Mexican immigrant women, for instance, were asked to adopt the middle-class values, while remaining at the outskirts as housewives, domestic workers and members of the working class.
2. I do not intend to claim that such a trajectory was common for all Eastern European Jewish women or that it was unique to these women. Scholarship on immigrant women has convincingly established that female 'mavericks' who wanted to escape patriarchal gender roles and enter the larger public arena came to the USA from a variety of countries (Seller, 1981; Sinke, 2002).

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