SPOUSAL TERMS ON SHARED GRAVEMARKERS:
Consistency through time

In the previous three chapters, I have argued that cemeteries serve as a micro-museum of the culture that surrounds them; that the individual gravestones primarily reflect the thoughts of the grieving family (only secondarily the craft of the stone carvers); and that the messages are written in three linguistic styles (formal, casual, and a blend of the two).

In this chapter I return to the first argument—that cemeteries reflect the cultures that produce them. I wish to demonstrate that through time, certain rhetorical aspects of gravestone messages remain constant. Specifically, spousal terms of endearment show no influence of the gradual emergence in American culture of female equality. Husbands and wives have been recognized as emotional equals throughout the 150 years of legible writing available on Texas gravestones.

I begin this argument with a brief explanation of linguistic problem-solving techniques.

Linguists specialize in the analysis of a variety of, usually, vernacular language components. We refer to these components as linguistic "items." These items may be as small as the sound of the Roman alphabet letter p, which is pronounced [p^h] (with a puff of air) in the English word pit, but [$p^{\check{}}$] (without the puff of air) in the word tip. Or the linguistic items may be as large as an entire set of social speech conventions--for example the set we call *English* in England, or *Spanish* in Spain.

In linguistic research, each occurrence of a linguistic item-- a pronunciation feature, a grammatical rule, a vocabulary item, a stylized form of greeting, or an entire language--is either in *complementary distribution* with similar linguistic items or it is in *free variation* (Milroy 21-13).

Linguistic items that can be predicted from known geographic, social, or other linguistic facts are in complementary distribution. If, for example, one wishes to refer to a *running stream* (in the United States), one needs to know that geographical differences occur—at least in the casual register. In the Northeast, people use the word *brook*; in the Eastern Lower North, people use the word *run*; in the upper South, the word *branch*; in the Inland North-and-West, the word *crick*; and in Louisiana, the word *bayou* (Carver 267).

Linguistic items that vary, but cannot be predicted from known geographic or social facts, are in free variation.

The two English language pronunciations of the letter p, explained above, are in complementary distribution. We can predict that the aspirated [p^h] will appear at the beginning of a word; the unaspirated [p] at the end. However the two pronunciations of the letter e at the beginning of English word envelope are in free variation; one cannot predict when any given English speaker will pronounce the word [env^lowp] or [anv^lowp].

The data for this analysis of the English language vocabulary that refers to married couples were obtain from 623

gravemarkers found in eight city-owned cemeteries in San Antonio, Texas. Darcy Esch Phillips helped with the data collection and the analysis, when she was a Trinity University student in 1990. Trinity colleague, Rick Cooper, helped with the statistical analysis (Baird and Esch).

The results of our analysis indicate that spousal terms on shared gravemarkers are in free distribution. Obvious demographic correlates, at any rate, do not exist.

San Antonio City Cemeteries

From a linguistic viewpoint, the variety of English spoken in the southern United States speech is distinct from that spoken in the northern. The northern variety is quite complex, influenced by large numbers of immigrants, mostly from the European continent. Immigration was, conversely, limited in the south. Within the southern variety, two major dialects exist: the highlands (settled almost exclusively by Scots-Irish immigrants) and the coastal (settled almost exclusively by British immigrants and African slaves) (Carver 9-30).

Like many other southern states (North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee), Texas speech today contains both dialects of the southern variety (Atwood; Carver 222-224). Texas differs in a major way, however, from the other southern states because Texas speech was also influenced, like its northern sister states by major immigration movements (Carver 163, 225-226). The most obvious and well-known are the Spanish, and later, Mexican

movements--both of which, in fact, preceded any of the northern European and United States immigration. Less known, perhaps, are the Texas settlements founded by more than twenty-five other immigrant cultures (San Antonio Express news).

The 130-some cemeteries in Bexar County, a county that includes most of the San Antonio metropolitan area, attests to this varied linguistic heritage of Texas--San Antonio, in particular. Languages on gravemarkers in these cemeteries include varieties of British, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and American English; Castilian, Mexican, and Texan Spanish; French; Italian; German; Dutch; Polish; Czech; Hebrew; Chinese; Arabic; Armenian; Ukrainian; Greek; Hungarian; and Norwegian (Baird 1989; 1990; Baird and Duncan; West).

An example of the linguistic variation on the Bexar county gravemarkers can be found in City Cemetery #1. Between 1840 and 1980, forty-eight gravemarkers were written in German; sixty-seven were written in English; and two were bilingual German/English (Davis).

A series of twenty-two cemeteries, clustered on a hill in the middle of a residential area about one mile east of downtown San Antonio, offers linguistic data as old as 1800 and as recent as 1991 (see figure 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1: SAN ANTONIO CITY CEMETERIES
(INSERT SLIDE Esch.Nov90.#1)

Our research was conducted in eight of these cemeteries—City

Cemeteries 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Dignowity, and St. John's Lutheran. These eight cemeteries held 7,381 at least partially legible gravemarkers.

Our intent was to analyze kinship terminology--especially spousal terminology--on all English-language gravemarkers that were shared by married couples. That determination was not as easy as we had anticipated. Especially difficult in some cases was the determination between gravemarkers shared by siblings and stones shared by couples. We agreed upon 623 gravemarkers for our data pool. Figure 4.2 displays the number of gravemarkers located in each of the eight cemeteries.

FIGURE 4.2: VALUES FOR CITY CEMETERIES (SHARED GRAVEMARKERS)

City Cemetery #1	166
City Cemetery #2	44
City Cemetery #3	75
City Cemetery #4	146
City Cemetery #5	11
City Cemetery #6	100
Dignowity	44
St. John's Lutheran	37
Total	623

1860-1950: Statistically Relevant Years

Rare is the gravemarker that has the same death date, even the same death year, for both people being memorialized. Often,

in fact, decades will pass between the two death dates. Among the gravemarkers we excluded from our data, in fact, were numerous instances of only one death date being recorded. This occurrence of missing death dates for one spouse was, of course, especially true of gravemarkers placed during the last ten years. The eight cemeteries, however, contain such gravemarkers even in the nineteenth century.

For analysis purposes, we dated all gravemarkers according to earliest death date. Thus if one spouse died in 1910 and the other in 1918, we considered that the gravemarker was created in 1910.

Using this criterion, we concluded that the two oldest gravemarkers were placed in the year 1800; the latest was placed in 1988. The gravemarkers, then, span one hundred and eighty-eight years. The Box-and-Whiskers Graph in figure 4.3,

Figure 4.3: Spousal Terms by Year
(INSERT SLIDE Esch.Mar91.#6)

N = no spousal terms
MF = mother (left) & father (right)
HW = husband & wife (either side)
FW = father (left) & mother (right)
BOTH = mother/father & husband/wife

however, illustrates that the statistically relevant data are found on gravemarkers placed between 1860 and 1950--a ninety year span. In other words, the eight cemeteries were utilized most between 1860 and 1950.

This means, then, that our data reflect usage that may or may not reflect current usage. The data do reflect, however, almost a century of usage, including a forty-year "lead-in" time and a forty-year "phase-out" time.

Spousal Terms Between 18 and 1950: no significant changes

A second look at figure 4.3, will show that kinship on the shared gravemarkers was expressed in four distinct styles: the absence of any separate terms; the use of parental terms only; the use of spousal terms only, and a mixture of both parental and spousal terms. Easily the majority of gravemarkers (54%) contained no terms. These couples shared a common surname and a common gravemarker. That combination alone adequately expresses their relationship.

Among those gravemarkers with separate kinship terminology, the clear majority were parental terms: variations of *Father* and *Mother*—register variants with *mom/dad* and omissions of terms over one name, but present over the other. Of the 282 kinship gravemarkers 209 (74%) contained parental terms.

Perhaps we overgeneralized observations made by other graveyard researchers; nonetheless we expected the *Father* inscriptions to be uniformly on one side or the other of the gravemarkers. Terry Jorden, in his book Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy, for example, claims that "Husbands lie to the South, or right, of their wives"(13). We found that in the majority of cases Jorden's claim proved true--but the terms were

reversed as early as the 1870s and as late as the 1970s.

Six gravemarkers had both parental and spousal terms. The first appeared in the 1870s, the latest in the 1930s.

The spousal terms were variations of *husband* and *wife.* As we found with *father/mother*, these variations show register differences and occasional omissions. The actual focus for our research, these *husband/wife* terms and their variants were found on only 67 of the 623 shared gravemarkers (approximately ten percent.) Although they appeared as early as the 1840s and as late as the 1980s and they did appear in significant numbers during the statistically relevant years (1860-1950), no pattern emerged among the usages and no complementary distribution with available social and demographic data could be verified.

Ethnicity of Surnames: no significant correlation

We hypothesized that time, especially during the suffrage and the feminist movements, would effect kinship terms. When this hypothesis proved non-verifiable, however, we turned to our second hypothesis, still certain that the kinship terms were linked to an obvious social constraint.

Turning to genealogical tables for help in determining the origin of surnames on the gravemarkers, we hypothesized that ethnicity would provide a necessary link for predicting a complementary distribution of kinship terms.

Determining ethnicity, however, presents an enormous set of problems. One clue for ethnicity, as discussed in chapter One,

exists on those gravemarkers where place of birth is given. Being born in Germany, however, does not guarantee that the persons being memorialized are German; they could very well be Swiss or Polish.

A second clue for determining ethnicity lies within the actual language on the gravemarker. A gravemarker written in German, however does not tell us if the person named is German or Russian. A gravemarker written in Spanish does not tell us if the person named is Mexican, Spanish, or perhaps Puerto Rican.

Family names provide a third clue of ethnic background. Again obvious caveats exist. In our paternalistic society, for example, the custom of women legally relinquishing their family names upon marriage wrecks havoc with attempts to correlate ethnicity with gravemarker data. Insufficient scholarship on family names produces another barrier. For the past fifteen years my East Texas State University colleague Fred Tarpley has sponsored a Family Name Heritage booth at the four-day Folklife Festival in San Antonio. Our experience at that festival has led us to believe that as high as twenty-five percent of Texas surnames cannot be ascertained through standard genealogical references such as Hanks and Hodges' A Dictionary of Surnames.

Working within all of these drawbacks, however, we could determine the ethnicity for all but 75 of the 623 surnames used in our data pool—about eighty percent. Surnames included English, German, Czech, Dutch, Polish, Flemish, Scottish, Irish,

Welsh, French, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, and Swiss. For analysis purposes, we grouped the German, Norwegian, Flemish, and Dutch into a category we called *Germanic* and the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh into a category we called *Celtic*. As shown in figure 4.4, then, the major ethnic groups were English (277 names or forty-five percent); Germanic (137 names or twenty-two percent); undetermined (75) ; Celtic (73); Spanish (28); and French (18). The remaining thirteen gravemarkers were so diverse (Czech, Polish, Italian, Swiss) and contained so few occurrences, that we grouped them into a miscellaneous category. Figure 4.4 illustrates that in all ethnic groups, virtually the same pattern of spousal terms was used: most common was the absence of any terms, second preference was for parental terms, third preference was some sort of spousal term. This analysis did isolate the six gravemarkers that included both parental and spousal terms: five of them were English, one was German.

Figure 4.4: Surnames by Ethnicity
(INSERT SLIDE Esch.Mar91.#14)

[blank]	=	Unknown Ethnicity
Celt	=	Scottish, Irish, Welsh
E	=	English
F	=	French
G	=	German, Norwegian, Flemish, Dutch
SP	=	Spanish
U	=	Czech, Polish, Italian, Swiss

Ethnicity of Maiden Names

We were determined by this time to recognize those women who defied the linguistic aspects of marriage customs that bound them to their husband's surnames. One hundred and twenty-six of the

women memorialized on the six hundred and twenty-three gravemarkers showed a modicum of independence by the inclusion of their maiden names (see figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Ethnicity by Maiden Name
(INSERT SLIDE Esch.Mar91.#11)

Fortunately or unfortunately, whichever the case may be, these women were memorialized independently, without any obvious support from their ethnic groups. An analysis of their use of maiden names through time showed the same absence of correlation as did an analysis of their maiden names by ethnicity.

Conclusions

All analyses of spousal terms on the San Antonio City Cemetery data have led to the conclusion that the use of spousal terms is not in complementary distribution with any social correlates. The use of spousal terms is in free variation. To non-linguists, perhaps, this finding provides no major insight. But to linguists the claim is major. To quote the British linguist, Lesley Milroy, ". . . speaker variables are of considerable *theoretical* importance" (Milroy 97,emphasis hers).

In essence, one group of linguists, the most notable being the late Frenchman Ferdinand Saussure, claims that in actual language use, speakers have a tremendous amount of independence.[1] The other group of linguists, the most notable being the quite active American linguist William Labov, claims that the occurrence of free variation at all--even the elusive [env^lowp]

vs [anv^lowp]--does not exist. Only our incompetence as linguists prevents us from finding the social or linguistic constraints that place the language in understandable complementary distribution.

Our claim, then, that all kinship terms--be they spousal terms or parental terms--on shared gravemarkers in San Antonio City Cemeteries are in free variation is a major claim. The easiest way to deal with the claim is to disassociate gravemarker inscriptions from other, more meaningful, language usage. The alternative, however, is the take the claim seriously and pursue its consequences. Our intent, of course, is to pursue.

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[1]For any of several introductory discussions, see Hudson, chapters two and three or Milroy, chapter nine. For major discusions see William Labov (1972) *Language in the Inner City* . Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press; Peter Trudgill (1974) *The social differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; William Labov (1975) *What is a linguistic fact?* Lisse: Peter de Riddler Press; William Labov (1982) Objectivity and commitment in linguistic science: the case of the Black English trial in Ann Arbor. *Language in Society* 11, 165-201; W. Downes (1984) *Language and society* . London: Fontana; J. Milroy and Lesley Milroy (1985) Linguistic change, social network and speaker innovation. *Journal of Linguistics*, 21, 339-84; or B. Horvath (1985) *Variation in Australian English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.