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Master Thesis

Prestige/Stigmatization in Language - A comparative analysis of women's and men's use of prestige linguistic forms in the English language

Prestiž/Stigmatizacija u jeziku – komparativna analiza upotrebe prestižnih jezičkih oblika kod žena i muškaraca u engleskom jeziku

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ABSTRACT

Language and gender as an interdisciplinary field of research in sociolinguistics is very complex because various different factors affect how people speak. The lack of empirical research and data affects the reliability of one's research and results which was also one of the reasons why Robin Lakoff's (1972) claims were rejected and opposed by other sociolinguists. Therefore, this paper heavily relies on the studies conducted by William Labov and other sociolinguists whose study results suggest that females appeared to favor the prestige forms more than males.

This paper examines the usage of prestige linguistic forms in relation to gender and age in American English. The sociolinguistic goal of this paper is to examine if and to what extent gender and age affect how much male and female speakers use prestige in everyday-life situations – both formal and informal – that refer to scenarios which are set at work, hospital, university, bank and those tied to one's social life. Therefore, the methodology in this paper is based on a questionnaire using the DTC method/measuring instrument that investigates the differences and similarities between male and female speakers usage of prestige linguistic forms, with the significant focus on respondents in three generation groups that are: Generation X, Y and Z. The questionnaire contained twelve hypothetical situations and was distributed to 50 females and 50 males.

From the analysis of the data, it was noted that women regardless of their age do use prestige linguistic forms more than men in American English in formal and informal contexts. The study found that even though there are some similarities and differences between the responses of our male and female respondents still they are not significant.

This study emphasizes the persisting importance of the studies of gender and language in sociolinguistics and suggests that it will be hard for the future researchers to rely on the previous studies of gender and language simply because those respondents who belong to Generation Z more and more perceive genders as spectrums of behavior and do not fit into two fixed genders that are male and female.

Key words: prestige, language, gender, generation X (Gen X), generation Y (Gen Y), generation (Gen Z), English language.

APSTRAKT

Interdisciplinarno istraživačko polje jezika i spola u sociolingvistici je vrlo kompleksno zato što bezbroj različitih faktora utječu na to kako se ljudi služe jezikom. Odsustvo empirijskog istraživanja i podataka utječe na vjerodostojnost jednog istraživanja što je ujedno i jedan od razloga zbog kojeg većina sociolingvista odbija da prihvati istraživanja i rezultate koje je sprovela Robin Lakoff (1972) na temu spola i jezika. Stoga se ovaj rad uveliko oslanja na istraživanja koje je sproveo William Labov kao i drugi sociolingvisti i čiji rezultati pokazuju da žene favoriziraju upotrebu prestižnih jezičkih oblika više nego muškarci.

Rad analizira upotrebu prestižnih jezičkih oblika u skladu sa spolom i starošću u američkom engleskom jeziku. Cilj ovog rada je da ispita da li i do koje mjere spol i godine utječu na to kako muški i ženski govornici američkog engleskog jezika koriste prestiž u svakodnevnim životnim situacijama, a koje mogu biti formalne i neformalne. Te situacije se odnose na scenarije koji se mogu desiti na poslu, u bolnici, na fakultetu, u banci kao i oni koji se odnose na nečiji društveni život i njihove odnose sa bliskim ljudima. Upitnik je jednako distribuiran među ženskim ispitanicima (50) i muškim ispitanicama (50). Jezički korpus na kome je sprovedeno istraživanje je prikupljen putem sociolingvističkog upitnika koji se sastoji od dvanaest hipotetičkih situacija te je prilikom analize podataka poseban fokus bio stavljen na tri generacijske skupine: Generaciju X, Y i Z.

Rezultati su pokazali da žene bez obzira na starosnu dob koriste prestižne jezičke oblike više nego muškarci u američkom engleskom jeziku u formalnim i neformalnim situacijama te da iako postoje određene razlike i sličnosti u odgovorima između muških i ženskih ispitanika, te iste nisu ogromne niti kontrastivne u velikoj mjeri.

Rad ističe trajnu važnost istraživanja koja se bave spolom i jezikom u sociolingvistici te ukazuje na to da će istraživači koji se budu bavili ovom ili sličnom temom imati poteškoća kada je u pitanju referiranje na prethodna istraživanja zbog toga što se ispitanici koji pripadaju generaciji Z sve manje izjašnjavaju striktno kao muškarci ili žene već na spol gledaju kao na široki spektar ponašanja.

Ključne riječi: prestiž, jezik, spol, generacija X (Gen X), generacija Y (Gen Y), generacija Z (Gen Z), engleski jezik.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Anthony Kroch (1978) defines prestige is the level of respect, regard and social values that a certain language, language variation and/or dialect possesses compared to the other languages, its variations and dialects within one speech community (Kroch, 1978).

Furthermore, Milroy (1980) states that the traditional sociolinguistic view that women use the standard form of language more than men is an oversimplified generalization because other factors like social context, social roles, communicative networks, neighborhood, living conditions and level of education determine linguistic production. Additionally, Robin Lakoff, a pioneer in feminist sociolinguistics, contributed to the field of sociolinguistic research from the feminist point of view but was highly criticized for relying heavily on personal observation and lack of empirical research and data.

On the other hand, William Labov, who also has carried out a considerable body of studies on the prestige in English language with the respect to gender differences, proposed the gender-paradox sociolinguistic phenomenon which explains that women do tend to be more conservative in how they use language but that women also lead the linguistic innovation i.e. that they are first to use the new forms of language (Labov, 2001).

Moreover, Labov (1990) states that the overwhelming majority of the variables studied do show that there were no cases reported where men appeared to favor the prestige form more than women. However, Cameron (2008) argues that there is as much similarity and variation within each gender as there is between men and women and that there is a need to think about gender in more complex ways than the prevailing myths and stereotypes allow.

With that in mind, we as researchers of this paper decided to conduct a small-scale survey in order to do a comparative analysis of women's and men's use of prestige linguistic forms in American English. The objective of this study was two-fold: first was to investigate the use of prestige linguistic forms in the Standard American English – lexicon in particular – by male and female speakers in the United States of America, and second was to do a comparative analysis based on data collected between the participants considering their differences in gender and age.

In order to investigate our research questions, we decided to use the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which was conducted via Google Forms amongst fifty male and fifty female participants who are American speakers and belong to three different generation groups: Generation X, Y and Z. The prescriptive rules that we chose to examine were the following ones: negative concord, stranded preposition, who/whom relative pronouns, the case of split infinitives, difference between a nominative case (I) and an objective case (me), and lastly the use of the adverb 'hopefully'.

The ultimate goal of our research will be aimed at answering the following three research questions:

RQ1: Do women compared to men in the USA use more of prestige linguistic forms in everyday speech?

RQ2: What are the differences and/or similarities in the use of prestige in language between female and male participants?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between female and male participants who belong to generation X, generation Y and generation Z?

The structure of our paper is as follows. In the second chapter we introduce some fundamental definitions and explanations of prestige, prestige language and standard language along with the brief overview of overt and covert prestige. Language prestige and gender are discussed in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, we covered a couple of basic rules of prescriptive grammar that served as a core for our DCT. The next chapter deals with the research itself. It describes the research methodology used to investigate the research questions, instrument, corpus and data collection process and data analysis method. The results and discussion are given in the sixth chapter. The conclusion to this paper and questions that stemmed out of our research is concisely presented in the seventh chapter. In the last chapter we presented the limitations of our study and recommendations for the future studies on the similar topic.

2. LANGUAGE PRESTIGE

According to the Webster's Dictionary, the word prestige is defined both as a noun and an adjective. Firstly, it stands for reputation or influence arising from success, achievement, rank or other favorable attributes, but is also explained as a distinction or reputation attaching to a person or thing and dominating the mind of others or of the public. Lastly, prestige as an adjective means having or showing success, rank, wealth etc. (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language).

Aurélie Joubert (2010) states that the word "prestige" is also etymologically revealing and it comes from a Latin word, praestīgi, meaning "*trick, deceit, illusion*". The word entered the English language through the Middle French prestige which denoted "*an illusion or something produced by magic*". It is very important to dive into the word prestige itself because it is a multi-faceted socio-historical construction in need of thorough theorization (Joubert, 2010:55).

Simply put, in sociolinguistics, prestige is the level of respect, regard and social values that a certain language, language variation and/or dialect possesses compared to the other languages, its variations and dialects within one speech community (Kroch, 1978). Therefore, prestige language is not just one form of a language but can be found in any language, language variation or a dialect regardless of its position in one society or community.

Furthermore, in many cases, they – prestige varieties – are the standard form of the language, though there are exceptions, particularly in situations of covert prestige where a non-standard dialect is highly valued (Labov, 1990). In addition to dialects and languages, prestige is also applied to smaller linguistic features, such as the pronunciation or usage of words or grammatical constructs, which may not be pronounced enough to constitute a separate dialect (Kroch, 1978:7).

The assumption that a term like 'non-standard' is rather inferior is commonly made by non-linguists, but it is quite wrong because as used by sociolinguists, the term 'nonstandard' is a technical one, and simply indicates the investigator has found that the linguistic system referred to has limited social prestige (Allen, 2007).

Furthermore, Anthony S. Kroch (1978) describes prestige varieties as language or dialect families which are generally considered by a society to be the most "correct" or otherwise superior. Even though the word superiority was not used in the dictionary description of the word prestige, it seems like one (a non-linguist) can easily associate it with it, especially because of the direct use of the word dominating/domination in the above-mentioned definitions of the word.

Simply put, a dialect refers to the use of words and syntactic structure by one person or a group of speakers. For instance, if someone speaks in a regional dialect of English, such as Scouse in the North West or Black Country in the Midlands in the United Kingdom, then her/his pronunciation will also be particular to that area (Clark, 2007:5).

Chambers and Trudgill (1980:3) also draw attention to those dialects that are commonly viewed as "substandard, low status, often rustic forms of language, generally associated with the peasantry, the working class, or other groups lacking in prestige. DIALECT is also a term which is often applied to other forms of language, particularly those spoken in more isolated parts of the world, which have no written form. And dialects are often regarded as some kind of (often erroneous) deviation from a norm – as aberrations of a correct or standard form of language."

Due to such negative connotations, linguists have come to prefer to use the term variety when describing variation in language. With that being said, the difference between a dialect and a closely related language is mostly a social one, hence people do not always agree. For that reason, a language variety is sometimes used in those cases so one can avoid the issue.

According to Clark (2007:2), the language, languages or varieties of a language that we speak form an integral part of who we are, and attempts at imposing one language or variety of a language on the population of a nation are often bound up with issues of power and ideology. This quote puts an emphasis on two very important points that are one's identity and colonial heritage.

Simply put, the language or language variety that we speak plays a prominent role in the foundation of our identity and places us in the already established rank in a society.

Mesthrie et al. (2009:33) state that the idea was once popular in anthropology that language and thought are more closely intertwined than is commonly believed. It is not just that

language use is an outcome of thinking; but conversely, the way one thinks is influenced by the language one is 'born into'. Mind, according to this hypothesis, is in the grip of language.

Ever since the power and influence of language and speech have become widely accepted and investigated, people have started to be more careful with how they use it. For instance, the term power is associated with the term strength, which additionally can be associated with terms high and low. In brief, the term power usually has connotations of low and high power. With that being said, if language is associated with the term power, and consequently with terms low and high, one can consciously or subconsciously make the same association with the language itself, meaning that there is a 'low' language and 'high' language. Simply put, the higher the language is, the higher one's power is and therefore their position in the society. Those assumptions are supported by the distinction made in the prestige in language, which can be high or positive, and low or negative (Labov, 1982).

Circling back to the second part of Clark's quote, any discussion about power of language cannot be done without mentioning the colonial heritage which is nevertheless indisputable and countries that used to be colonized, such as the United States by the United Kingdom, have probably become aware of the power of language that is imposed on the population of nation, which could consequently be one of the reasons why the study of sociolinguistics originated on the US soil.

In addition to that, William Labov, an American linguist, is often regarded as one of the founders of the study of sociolinguistics, who has done a considerable body of research on the prestige in the English language. Labov is also the first one who introduced the idea of covert prestige which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

For the purpose of better understanding this study, in the following subsections we will briefly explain a few focal points regarding prestige in sociolinguistics i.e. language, that are: the relation between the prestige and standard language, and the descriptions of overt and covert prestige.

2.1. Prestige language and standard language

At times, the notions of "standard language" and "prestige language" are used interchangeably or are "lumped together" (Milroy 2001: 533) due to their similar social implication.

Standardization is a process that a language undergoes in order to become standardized, and it has four steps that include: selection, codification, elaboration of function and acceptance Haugen (1972:252).

Similarly, Wardhaugh (2006) defines language standardization as the process by which a language has been codified in some way. That process usually involves the development of such things as grammars, spelling books, and dictionaries, and possibly a literature. All things considered, a standard language is usually the institutionalized variety of a language. That is, it is used for official purposes (law, politics, education, courts, media and such). Therefore, it gives the impression that what makes one variety the standard language is a strong political, economic, social and/or historical background.

Niedzielski & Preston (2003) state that in countries like the United States, where citizens speak many different languages and come from a variety of national and ethnic groups, there is a "folk linguistic" belief that the most prestigious dialect is the single standard dialect of English that all people should speak. As a consequence, this belief is a reflection of the social order and it equates "nonstandard" or "substandard" language with "nonstandard or substandard human beings" (Fox, 1999).

On the other hand, Wareing & Thomas (2003:135) state that both Britain and the United States have standard varieties of English and these varieties are also dialects, albeit prestigious ones. As prestigious dialects, they are social rather than regional; that is, they are preferred by particular (usually higher) social groups, and in particular (usually more formal) social situations.

Still, Ronald Wardhaugh (2006:335) states that linguists believe that no language, or variety of language, is inherently better, or more correct, than any other language, for every language serves its purpose of allowing its users to communicate. This is to a great extent related to the policy of teaching English as a second language where the teacher's primary goal is to teach students how to communicate their thoughts and their points in a constructive way.

For instance, the acquisition of adding the letter 's' in the 3rd person rule in the Present Simple Tense is usually a very slow learning process. Thus, teachers do not necessarily correct their students every time they make that mistake because they are more focused on encouraging students to speak and produce meaningful utterances. For that reason, we believe that, to the majority of teachers and sociolinguists, the transmission of meaning is their main concern, after which comes the correctness in accent and grammar.

Bouchard (1979:150) distinguishes the "standard associated with status, high culture and aspiration towards social mobility" from the "non-standard associated with solidarity, comradeship and intimacy with low status group". This quote takes us to sneak a peek at the history of American literature. Walt Whitman was a part of the transition between transcendentalism and realism in which he played a huge, if not the biggest, role. Even though he is considered to be a father of American poetry, he is also inevitably connected to the American English language and its development at the time.

According to Sherry (1998), Whitman took notes on slang sayings and provincialisms, and interviewed workmen, recording his findings in private journals so that he could later incorporate them into his poetry (see "*Slang in America*" by W.W, 1885). Moreover, Whitman as a poet wanted to express the experiences of the common man and woman, borrowing from the language of those in all walks of ordinary life, incorporating slang from the streets and from various professions (Sherry, 1998). However, Sherry concludes that his poetry was not accepted by the uneducated and semi-educated, the audience he wrote for, because he was using terms probably not understood by the general public (obsolete, archaic, and poetic terms; learned words; neologisms; and foreign terms), and hence made it difficult for them to embrace his poetry as he wished.

This gives us a deeper insight into the strong relations between the English language and the influence of one's socio-economic status back in 1885. Apparently, one good example of the prestige in the Standard American English language at the time is that the lower class did not use foreign or archaic words, which was not the case for those who belonged to the upper-class. The lower class at the time consisted of non-educated citizens who apparently used another language variety and thus were not able to completely understand Whitman's poems and works.

So how does one differentiate prestige language from standard language? Despite their very similar and comparable tendencies to be tied up to the highest socio-economic sphere of society, standard language can indeed be differentiated from prestige language.

Joubert (2010:57) argues that the prestige of a language can be promoted through the adoption of linguistic rights for which the existence of a standard form is sometimes recommended but not a prerequisite. In other words, any language variety, whether it is standard or non-standard, can have prestige among its speakers. Something that is very notable in sociolinguistics is a distinction between 'overt prestige' and 'covert prestige made by Labov (1982), which represents the degree of general social acceptance of a speech variety.

2.2. Overt prestige and covert prestige

The issue of prestige is generally very complex and prominent in sociolinguistics. Labov (1966) explained how overt prestige refers to positive or negative assessments of variants (or of a speech variety) in accordance with the dominant norms of the public media, educational institutions and upper middle-class speech. On the other hand, covert prestige refers to this set of opposing values implicit in lower- and working-class lifestyles (Mesthrie et al. 2000:116).

Wareing & Thomas (2003:140) also agree that the higher a person is on the social scale, the more their speech will reflect prestige norms. Their findings suggest that speakers at the top of the social scale (i.e. at the top of the 'cone') speak Standard English with very little regional variation; any variation that is apparent will usually occur between two (or more) equally standard forms (Wareing & Thomas, 2003:141).

In other words, a standard language usually has overt prestige because it is generally socially acknowledged as 'correct' and hence valued highly among all the speakers of the language.

In addition to that, Nordquist (2019) states that the term Standard American English refers to a variety of the English language that is generally used in professional communication (medicine, education, courts, and media). This is also the variety of the American English that non-natives learn in schools, as their second language. Therefore, it is not surprising that such variety would usually have overt prestige due to its general recognition among its speakers.

On the other hand, non-standard varieties are often said to have covert prestige ascribed to them by their speakers (Nordquist, 2019). It usually refers to a specific, small group of speakers that shows positive evaluation of and orientation towards a certain linguistic variety. One example of covert prestige in a nonstandard variety can be seen in youth language. Teenagers have their own world and therefore their own variety of a language that has covert prestige in it. It gives them a strong sense of identity and belonging that they highly thrive for at that age, and it also strengthens their community. However, as they are getting older, choosing their professions and coming to the adult life, their language variety also changes and those changes are usually conditioned by their socio-economic status.

Jane Hodson (2014) also confirms this by stating how the non-standard variety of language may not carry the institutionally endorsed prestige of the standard variety, but for many speakers it carries important social connotations of identity and community. For example, covert prestige of a non-standard variety can be seen in the language of football fans that reinforce and support cursing in their community to the high degree. Similarly, the use of slang among social media users and abbreviations are prestigious on the internet or virtual world but not used outside of it. Such way of expressing themselves, gives them a sense of belonging and understanding among each other. Correctness in language is not considered to be prestigious on numerous social media platforms but on the contrary. As a consequence, it simultaneously alienates them from those who use a different language variety even though it is 'more correct'. Even in the academic world, we can find the level of covert prestige in the use of references that serve as a proof for a speaker's bookworm identity. However, as Mark Twain wrote, every generalization is dangerous.

For instance, Labov's studies from 1982 have shown that positive prestige is more often overt, whilst negative prestige is more often covert (avoidance of the unmentionable). If we connect those findings made by Labov and his findings related to the covert and overt prestige, and if we omit the exceptions in language and generalize, then one could simply make a distinction between those two in the following way:

- a standard language, language variety/dialect = correct = positive = overt = high
- a non-standard language, language variety/dialect = incorrect = negative =covert = low

3. LANGUAGE PRESTIGE AND GENDER

Robin Lakoff, a pioneer in feminist sociolinguistics, published a book *„Language and woman's place"* (1972), which is about how women use language in relation to social power which was quite revolutionary for its time, especially considering the fact that the Women's liberation movement has emerged in the late 1960s.

It is also important to note that the field of linguistics at the time was very much white male dominated. However, despite the important feminist topics, points and conclusions that Lakoff brought up in her book, such as that women use hyper-correct grammar and pronunciation i.e. use prestige grammar, they were mostly opposed because she was relying heavily on personal observation, and was later criticized for her feminist bias and lack of empirical research and data. In the end, her book served as a starting ground for further research and investigation on those topics.

Moreover, William Labov proposed the gender-paradox sociolinguistic phenomenon which explains that women do tend to be more conservative in how they use language – which corresponds to Lakoff's original claim – but he also states that women lead the linguistic innovation i.e. that they are first to use the new forms of language (Labov, 2001). For example, the adoption of the (r)-pronouncing norm in New York City, according to Labov's findings from 1966, is led by women and the reversal of the Parisian chain shift was equally a female-dominated change in the same way (Lennig, 1978, as cited in Labov, 1990).

Holmes & Wilson (2017:179) state that in assigning women to a particular social class, researchers in early social dialect studies often used the woman's husband's occupation as their major criterion. They oppose those studies due to the fact that women may have been miscategorized as not all women marry men from the same social class and therefore the data collected was invalid due to miscategorization. The relation to the wider issue is that generalizations cannot be made and researchers have to be precise with their research.

Additionally, a dot that connects both Lakoff and Labov is the fact that their data on the examined speech differences was only representative of the white upper-middle class women and those women occupy distinct social and linguistic places. That being said, a language that a white woman uses is different from the language that a Latino, Asian or black woman uses. For

example, black women have traditionally suffered a double discrimination: for being women and being black. In addition to that, there are even more differences to each of those types such as socio-economic status, sexuality, religion, education, occupation, and even geographical placement. Considering how variable this category of women really is, it is really misleading to think that gender differences in speech can be examined in general and applied to all women, especially when talking about the United States of America whose population is very much diverse.

In the table below, it is clear that the population of women in the United States is indeed significantly diverse. There are other variables that should have been included in this table, such as labor force, pay gap and leadership but we have not been able to find one reliable and universal source from the same year that we could responsibly take into account. For that reason, we will present the statistical data in terms of race and education (specifically those who have obtained at least the BA degree) in terms of the population of women in the United States.

Race	Percentage of Total Women in US Population (2019)	Education (% of women with BA degree)
White (not Hispanic or Latina)	60.0%	61%
Hispanic or Latina	18.0%	14.9%
Black or African American	12.9%	11.4%
Asian	5.0%	7.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.7%	N/A
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.2%	8.1%

Table 1. *A statistical data of the population of women in the US based on their race and education published in February, 2021*
(Retrieved from: https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-of-color-in-the-united-states/)

Furthermore, even though our research topic strictly divided gender only into two categories – male and female – that at the first glance seem absolute, we are aware that female and male gender are nowadays more and more seen as spectrums of behaviors and expressions. That being said, we as researchers are aware that a binary classification does not apply to everyone anymore and that gender categorization has become more flexible and open in the recent decade.

The above-mentioned gender-paradox phenomenon is also very prominent in the sociolinguistic studies on language and gender because it rejects accounts which explain women's more 'correct' use of language as a consequence of their innately superior verbal abilities.

According to Nisbet's tests (2012:67), there are some findings that show how females performed better on verbal abilities while males performed better on visuospatial abilities. Moreover, Janet Hyde suggests that one female advantage is in verbal fluency where they have been found to perform better in vocabulary, reading comprehension, speech production and essay writing. On the other hand, males have been specifically found to perform better on spatial visualization, spatial perception, and mental rotation (Hyde, 2006).

According to Holmes (1992:1), women use more standard forms as they are more status-conscious than men and are aware that their speech signals their social class background and so they strive to *appear* to have a higher social status than they actually do. As we have already mentioned it in the very beginning of this paper, the Latin language defines prestige as an *illusion and deception*. If we take into consideration this statement made by Holmes, along with Labov's findings from 1982, we can tentatively conclude that women are indeed more likely to adopt overt positive prestige in order to climb the social ladder, overcome discrimination and thus create an *illusion* about them that needs to be created because they are naturally and instantly removed from the standard.

The following statistics relating to gender inequality are from State of the World (2000, as cited in Wareing & Thomas, 2003:77):

- On average, in developed countries, women earn 23 per cent less than men. In developing countries, they earn 27 per cent less.

- Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food and yet earn only 10 per cent of the world's income and own less than 1 per cent of the world's property. Almost a quarter of the global population lives in extreme poverty – on less than the equivalent of $1 per day. Seventy per cent of these people are women.
- Gender violence causes more deaths and disability among women aged fifteen to forty-four than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war.
- In Great Britain, where one woman in ten is severely beaten by an intimate partner every year, the cost to health and social services is estimated at over £1 billion per annum.
- In Switzerland, Japan and Belgium, for every hundred men enrolled in higher education there are respectively just fifty-three, sixty-three and seventy-eight women.
- Women hold only 1 per cent of executive positions in the world's biggest international corporations.
- Women hold only 6.2 per cent of all ministerial positions worldwide.

All things considered, it is not surprising then that women will generally aim for a higher use of overt positive prestige if that will help them 'overcome' the inequality, provide them with economic security and safety, and thus 'earn' their desired status in the society.

On the other hand, cultural isolation between the two genders is an important point of view that should be taken into consideration even when it comes to the discussion of the acquisition of prestige linguistic forms. For instance, if women and men are very much isolated from each other, then their daily activities and environments differ to the great extent which consequently also shapes their use of language and linguistic forms.

Simultaneously, this leads us to Deborah Tannen, who has been investigating the language use, although focusing more on the discourse between women and men. In her book "*You Just Don't Understand*", Tannen (1990) explains that because boys and girls grow up in different worlds of words, talk between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication, which in fact explains that women and men are taught different norms, rules and therefore significantly differ from each other. Such differences inevitably make each conversation between a man and a woman to be viewed completely differently, if not oppositely from each other.

While the majority of studies suggest that women do use more prestigious language, in his study in American English, Fischer (1958) found that males used a higher precentage of non-standard [n] forms than females. The results from this study suggest that women do tend to use overt prestige more than men who tend to use covert prestige. which was also very largely the case in Trudgill's (1972) study of prestige forms. The variable he used initally was (ng) that is the pronunciation of the suffix *-ing* in *walking*, laughing, etc., and is a well-known variable in many types of English. In the case of Norwich English there are two possible pronunciations of this variable: [uj], which also occurs in the prestige accent, RP, and [on-n]. The former is labelled (ng)-i and the latter (ng)-2. The results of this study suggest that in 17 cases out of 20, male scores are greater than or equal to corresponding female scores. Therefore a high (ng) index is typical of male speakers, and this pattern, moreover, is repeated for the vast majority of the other nineteen variables studied in Norwich. Thus, Trudgill (1972:5) has demonstrated that the type of sex differentiation already illustrated in American English also occurs in urban British English (Trudgill, 1972).

However, Cameron (2009:12) refers to the historical sociolinguists Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (2003), who found in a study of early English personal correspondence that men were more advanced than women in the adoption of high-status grammatical variants. As they point out, though, women in Tudor and Stuart England did not have the same opportunities as their present-day counterparts to acquire prestigious forms of language – even those of high social rank had very limited access to education – and none at all to the learned professions. Yet, despite that long-gone occurrence in the West, there are still societies in which superordinate languages and varieties are preferentially associated with men, such as Morocco. Sadiqi's (2003) findings have shown – though through the variable of the majority and minority – that the majority of men use prestige language more than women.

As far as sociolinguistic studies of contemporary English are concerned, Labov (1990:7) states that the overwhelming majority of the variables studied do show that there were no cases reported where men appeared to favor the prestige form more than women. Anyhow, there are three such cases that appeared in a contiguous area. In Amman, for all social classes, men favored the prestige form /q/ more than women (Abd-el-Jawad, 1981 as cited in Labov, 1990). This pattern was replicated in Nablus (Abd-el-Jawad, 1987). Again, in Teheran, women used the local

colloquial forms of the variables (an) and (ass) more than men in all social classes (Modaressi, 1978). If we take into account that those societies are Muslim societies in which women are generally not included in public life, we can conclude that whether men or women use more overt prestige language forms is culturally conditioned.

However, such accounts reject the above-mentioned claims that the reason why women use prestige forms more than men is because of their better verbal abilities, and reaffirm the influence that socio-economic and political status leaves on the language use and power.

On the other hand, according to Labov's findings from 1990, in adopting new prestige features more rapidly than men, and in reacting more sharply against the use of stigmatized forms, women are again the chief agents of differentiation. In particular, women in the second highest status group respond more rapidly than men to changes in the social status of linguistic variables, and men usually follow behind with a lesser degree of investment in the social values of linguistic variation (Labov, 1990:35). This is also another example for the gender-paradox phenomenon that he proposed.

Moreover, the Bilaniuk's tests (2003:28) – based on survey and matched-guise language attitude test data – relied on the assumptions that Russian and English language have much more established prestige than Ukrainian language and therefore provide its speakers with clearer and better opportunities for one's advancement and growth in the society. Yet, Russian still retains its connotations of urbanity, education, and social power, and English is associated with the affluent West and political and technological power (Bilaniuk, 2003:28). The results from this study suggest that the majority of Ukrainian women are more likely to pursue the benefits accorded by Russian and English than men because, as Bilaniuk (2003:28) explains, women tend to be more critical of a language of questionable status than men. Furthermore, if men's status is defined less by symbolic capital and more by what they have and do, they risk less in supporting a language of questionable status. This does not mean that symbolic capital is irrelevant for men, but they are in a better position than women to take risks in supporting a less prestigious language (Bilaniuk, 2003:28). Simultaneously, it can be concluded that women cannot afford to take the risk of using low prestige linguistic forms.

Additionally, Cameron (2009:12) puts an emphasis on the access that women do or do not have, depending on social conditions, to the educational and professional institutions in which prestige forms are generally acquired, or generally to the places where one can learn or hear forms of prestige language.

For instance, the Gullah are African Americans who live in the Lowcountry region of the U.S. states of Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina, in both the coastal plain and the Sea Islands. They developed a creole language, also called Gullah, and a culture with some African and Bahamian influence. Nichols (1976) reported that black women on the South Carolina mainland show fewer tendencies to switch from Gullah to English than black women who live on a sea island with tourist development (as cited in Labov, 1990).

Janet Holmes' essay from 1992 under the title *"Explanations of Women's Linguistic Behaviour"* tackles The Social Status Explanation theory that explains how women believe that the way they speak signals their social background or status and therefore use more standard speech forms as they are associated with higher social status. The evidence of this theory is given with the example of the majority of women in New York and Norwich who reported that they used more standard forms than they actually did.

Similarly, the information was found in an Irish working-class community, where the young women who have left the town to find work were found to use more standard speech than the older women who stayed at home working (Holmes, 2017). All things considered, those results indicate that women use prestige forms more if and when exposed to the public life and/or work place where 'correctness' in language is set as a norm while a non-variety or less prestigious language 'belongs' to the more relaxed environments, such as the one when woman talks to her kids at home, as it is natural and free of rules and constraints.

Bilaniuk (2003:4) furthermore states that the language evaluations of both men and women reflect their struggles to shape linguistic value, to claim authority and validity, to resist domination, and otherwise to establish an advantageous position in the symbolic systems of their lives.

Additionally, Holmes (1992) highlights the evidence that the use of standard forms by female teachers in the classroom is rejected 'more vigorously' by boys than it is by girls and

therefore male use of vernacular forms is a reaction to 'overly influential female norms'. Also, if we take into consideration the general viewpoint that the vernacular forms express machismo, as we have previously discussed, we can conclude that standard forms are associated with female values and femininity, which is why women may not want to use vernacular forms which have masculine connotations. An interesting question that could be posed out of this assumption is whether women who use non-standard forms less are seen as more masculine.

This closely correlates to the issues of male sexuality that can be more understood and explained through a study conducted by Smyth, Jacobs & Rogers in 2003, in which listeners rated the perceived gender and sexuality of twenty-five men in three different situations: reading a scientific passage, reading a dramatic passage, and engaged in spontaneous conversation. All in all, Smyth et al., reported a significantly greater proportion of gay -and feminine -sounding judgments for the scientific passage than for either the dramatic passage or the spontaneous conversation. Smyth et al. interpret these findings as evidence of a stereotypical association between gay men and 'formality' or 'prestige', such that men speaking in more formal contexts are more likely to be perceived as feminine/gay than when they are speaking in more informal contexts (Levon, 2014:5).

However, Deborah Cameron (2008) denies that women and men speak differently at all and that the results are biased. Cameron argues that there is as much similarity and variation within each gender as there is between men and women. Cameron concludes there is a need to think about gender in more complex ways than the prevailing myths and stereotypes allow.

Janet Holmes (1992) also highlights the importance of taking into account the context and the influence of the interviewer when referring to the statement that women tend to be more cooperative conversationalists than men. In other words, she suggests that women cooperate more with the educated, middle class style of speech of the interviewer than men. Whilst women converge, men are more likely to diverge with more non-standard forms which may be a factor contributing to the different patterns found between men and women's speech. Holmes (1992) concludes that the nature of the relationship between gender and speech is complex and the way gender interacts with a range of other factors needs careful examination in each speech community.

Lastly, Labov (1990:9) concludes that it is interesting to note that no sociolinguistic argument views women's tendency to use the prestige in language and overt norms more than men as a form of superiority or an advantage to them although this does emerge in the popular view that women speak better or more correctly than men do. Additionally, in disadvantaged communities, sensitivity to exterior standards of correctness in language is associated with upward social mobility. And finally, Labov concludes that covert prestige and norms are inferred rather than demonstrated while it is much easier for researchers to demonstrate the existence of the overt prestige and norms through experiments in the field (Labov, 1990:10).

4. LINGUISTIC PRESCRIPTIVISM

According to Leap et. al (2009:39), a descriptive approach is one which studies and characterizes the language of specific groups of people in a range of situations, without bringing any preconceived notions of correctness to the task, or favoring the language of one social group as somehow 'better' than those of others, whereas a prescriptive approach to language (or prescriptivism) is concerned with what might be termed 'linguistic etiquette'.

In addition to that, McArthur (1992) states that linguistic prescriptivism may aim to establish a standard language, teach what a particular society perceives as a correct or best form, or advise on effective and stylistically felicitous communication. Considering this statement, prescriptivism is then closely related to the use of prestige language because, as we have already established, it correlates to the standard variety, which promotes the correctness in language.

On the other hand, prescriptive rules are a set of social and sometimes more narrowly aesthetic rules about linguistic structure – they are not, contrary to way they are often presented – rules of language (Pullum, 2002).

Simply put, prescriptive grammar is the attempt to establish rules defining preferred or correct usage of language, and these rules may address such linguistic aspects as spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and semantics (Matthews, 2007:316). Moreover, George Pullum claims that prescriptive rules seem hopelessly silly and they warn against doing things which (a) everybody does all the time, and (b) are not harmful or inadvisable anyway (Pullum, 2004:3).

Furthermore, those two sides of linguistic criticism – descriptivism and prescriptivism-pose   questions of left- and right-wing linguistic moralism (Nunberg, 2011). As a result of such implication, it would mean that those who advocate prescriptivism i.e. the preservance of the grammatical rules and use of 'correct' language or language variety, belong to the right-wing linguistic moralism, and thus are conservatives in language. Pullum (2004:9) lists out the buzzwords of political conservatism: order, continuity, tradition, discipline, self-control, authority — and the inherent supremacy of the literate classes.

In contrast to that, descriptivists and linguistic critics are considered to be left-wingers or liberals (in language), and such ideology was to become dominant in the sixties that lay ahead: democracy, spontaneity, self-expression, permissiveness, skepticism, social science, progress, and modernity (Pullum, 2004).

For instance, John Simon, who was an American author and literary, theater, and film critic, promoted prescriptivism and did not support the use of informal language and slangs because he saw it as unhealthy, poor, sad and depressing way to speak and live, simply due to his conviction that our speaking reflects our way of living (see „*Do you speak American?*" documentary). Therefore, failure to follow the prescriptive norms might give the impression that the speaker/writer is unfamiliar with them (which can be linked to intellectual, academic, or social achievement) whereas following them can give the impression that the speaker/writer is pretentious and unduly formal.

If we take into consideration that some linguists define prescriptivism as the concept where a certain language variety is promoted as linguistically superior to others (Mooney & Evans, 2018), then the notions of the standard language could be regarded as an essential part of prescriptivism's' ideology. Prescriptive grammarians put forth a number of justifications for their preferences that are classicism, authoritarianism, aestheticism, coherentism , logicism, commonsensism, functionalism and asceticism (Pullum, 2004:7).

In the following sections, we will briefly present and explain a number of prescriptive rules in Standard English that will also serve as a starting point for our questionnaire and further research on the use of prestige linguistic forms in SE.

4.1. Negative concord – logicism

According to Joseph & Hock (2009:190), the grammarians of the new Standard English who were influenced by the Latin model inveighed against the traditional use of double negation and promoted the Latin rule that double negatives cancel each other out. Hence, they supported their arguments from the classicist view of point. Additionally, they also relied on logic: If negation is equated with -X, and a positive statement with +X, then simple mathematics will tell you that $-(-X) = + X$ (Joseph & Hock, 2009:190).

As reported by Pullum (2004:4), Standard English has a remarkably stable and consistent syntax worldwide and it originated during the last two to three hundred years, evolving out of a dialect used around London. Its syntax lacks the negative concord that was a feature of Middle English: negation is marked just once in a negated clause, either in the tensed auxiliary (verbal negation) or in the morphology of some nonverbal constituent of the clause (nonverbal negation):

a. *My friends didn't love it.* [verbal negation]

b. *Nobody loved it.* [nonverbal negation]

Moreover, Pullum (2004:4) gives another example of prescriptivism in Standard English, such as when indefinite NPs beginning with *some-* (like *someone* or *something*) are replaced by alternate versions beginning with *any-*:

(2) Standard English

a. *People didn't like anything.*

b. *Nobody liked anything.*

Additionally, it is possible in Standard English to use both two distinct negations, but semantically they cancel out to *none*:

(3) Standard English

a. *People didn't like nothing.* ["People did like some things."]

b. *Nobody liked nothing.* ["Everybody liked something."]

The sentences 2a and 2b carry the negative meaning i.e. not a single person liked anything and the negation is achieved with the use of the indefinite pronoun *any* whereas sentence 3a actually carries positive connotations in the sense that someone liked at least something. Lastly, to say 3b is to claim that the set of people who had an empty set of things they liked is itself empty.

As a comparison to (2a) and (2b) examples of prescriptivism in the standard variety or Standard English, the following sentences represent the same meaning written or said differently in various non-standard dialects:

(4) Non-standard English

a. *He didn't like nothing.* [2a]
b. *Nobody didn't like nothing.* [2b]

Joseph & Hock (190:2009) give another example of negative concord in the English language and explain that sentences like (5a) are clearly vernacular and "uneducated" whereas educated, upper-class speech instead uses structures like (5b).

(5) Non-standard and Standard English

a. *I don't want to give nothing to nobody, nohow, no time.*
b. *I don't want to give anything to anybody, under any conditions, ever.*

Lastly, double negation, which was standard in English up to the sixteenth century, is today used as a stylistic rule by people with a control of Standard English to signify emphasis or rebellion (Leap et al., 2009). It is a popular device in English-language pop music, for example in the well-known song of rebellion of the 1960s by the Rolling Stones, 'I Can't Get No Satisfaction', the love song of the same period 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough' (sung by Marvin Gaye, composed by Ashford and Simpson), or a line from a song of the 1990s, 'Ain't no angel gonna greet me' (Bruce Springsteen: 'Streets of Philadelphia')

4.2. Preposition stranding

As we have already established that prescriptivits support their arguments by relying on classicism, preposition stranding is also followed by the Latin model (classicism) because the placing of a preposition at the end of a sentence has no equivalent in Latin syntax. Latin grammar demanded the sequence preposition+object, i.e. pied piping. Additionally, according to the etymology of the term preposition, from Latin prae- 'before' and ponere 'place', the preposition ought to be placed before the word it governs (Yanez-Bouza, 2006).

Furthermore, Yáñez-Bouza (1:2006) states that preposition stranding has always been used more frequently in informal style and spoken language; it is "one of the outstanding features of our language" and "is so natural … that we have extended this usage beyond its original boundaries" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002).

However, as cited by Yáñez-Bouza, sentences like those in (6) were severely criticized in the eighteenth century as being colloquial, inelegant, improper or even harsh (Sundby et al. 1991:426-428).

(6)
a. *Who are you talking to?*

b. *I was shouted at for being late at work.*

Moreover, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade states that those who are aware of the norm and are sensitive to stylistic differences in language would regard stranded prepositions as bad grammar and might carefully and consciously resort to alternative constructions, mainly in formal and/or written styles.

As explained by Yanez-Bouza (2006), the construction illustrated in (7) above is generally known as preposition stranding, which Denison (1998:220) defined as the syntactic phenomenon whereby a preposition is left in a deferred, i.e. stranded, position at or near the end of a clause without any immediately following object.

However, in some cases, preposition stranding may be more acceptable or even almost obligatory. In American English, "*Who did you give it to?*" is standard and "*To whom did you give it?*" is regarded as at least formal if not peculiar, while being quite acceptable in British English.

4.3. Is it *who* or is it *whom*?

Simply put, the pronoun *who*, in English, is an interrogative pronoun and a relative pronoun, used primarily to refer to persons whereas *whom* is its derived form, i.e. an objective form.

According to traditional prescriptive grammar, "*who*" is the subjective (nominative) form only, while "*whom*" is the corresponding objective form (just as "him" is the objective form corresponding to "he"). However, it has long been common, particularly in informal English, for the uninflected form "*who*" to be used in both cases, thus replacing "*whom*" in the contexts where the latter was traditionally used (Pullum, 2004).

Moreover, retention of the 'who'–'whom' distinction often co-occurs with the avoidance of the stranded preposition which is the marker of formal or "prestige" English. This means that "*whom*" can frequently be found following a preposition, in cases where the usual informal equivalent would use „*who*", and place the preposition later in the sentence (Denison, 1998). For example:

(8)

    Formal (Standard English): "*To whom did you give it?*"

    Informal (Non-standard English): "*Who did you give it to?*"

This particular marker of prescriptivism is of huge interest to us as researchers because among all other markers or rules, this one has specifically been referred to in numerous TV shows (*Friends, Young Sheldon, The Big Bang Theory*) in which typically the character who is considered to be the smartest in the group, points out at the incorrect use of the pronoun „who", and suggests the use of the pronoun „whom", after which everybody gets upset because it seems too silly and unimportant.

Lastly, it seems that the general public often gets confused by the proper use of pronouns *who* and *whom,* which is also supported by a vast number of memes that have been going viral for a while now.

4.4. Hopefully

In response to the injunction 'older is better', linguists assert that languages are continually changing in subtle ways. New rules evolve and interact with older ones in subtle ways little appreciated by the guardians of traditional language. This is in fact shown by the example of new functions associated with the adverb *hopefully* (Pullum, 2004).

Prescriptivists derive their arguments for it from aestheticism because according to White (1991), *hopefully* is "distorted" and "offends the ear" if it is used as a modal clause adjunct.

The issue lies in the fact that the adverb "*hopefully*" once meant "*with hope*" but now has been distorted and is widely used to mean "*I hope*" or "*it is to be hoped*".

Therefore, "*hopefully*" is grammatically related to the verb and describes it. Let's take a look at the following sentence:

(9) "*Hopefully I will get there on time.*"

This sentence either means that I will get there feeling hopeful or that I hope that I will get there on time. If we take into consideration that the majority of people have widely been using the adverb „hopefully" as a way of expressing their frame of mind, then, according to the prescriptive rules of grammar, this sentence is not correct and the point is not expressed clearly.

4.5. The "It is me" or "It is I?" dilemma

Just like in many other languages, another issue in the English language and prescriptivism is the case marking of pronouns. English pronouns distinguish between a nominative case (*I*) and an objective case (*me*); nouns do not, which is the reason why pronouns are somewhat anomalous and therefore vulnerable to developments that might tidy up the situation (Joseph & Hock, 191:2009).

According to Costa-Rivas, one of the constructions prescriptive grammarians usually criticized was *it is me*, with an object case pronoun, as opposed to the traditionally correct *it is I*,

with a subject case pronoun. However, the results of her study suggest that the prescriptivism's negative attitudes and comments towards *"it is me"* are decreasing diachronically, and while grammars definitely did not advocate for the use of the object case pronoun in this construction, people still use it in their speech, but not, however, in their writings, which clearly indicates a division between the uses of these two constructions. *"It is me"* has, nonetheless, succeeded in becoming part of the present-day Standard.

4.6. To Split or Not to Split Infinitives?

As we have already learnt from prescriptivism that one should avoid double negatives, the same rule applies to the case of split infinitives. Prescriptivists radically avoid split infinitives.

According to Connatser, this rule derives from the fact that the infinitive form of Latin verbs is a single word. For example, the infinitive of the Latin word 'go' is ıˆre. Since it is one word, you cannot split it and insert an adverb. Moreover, English grammarians of the 18th and 19th centuries, who were trained in classical Latin, attempted to prescribe the rules and patterns of Latin grammar to English and thus forbad the splitting of two-word English infinitives with an adverb.

Simply put, a split infinitive occurs when one or more items, as an adverb or adverbial phrase, separate the particle and the infinitive. Hence, to split an infinitive is to put a word or words between the infinitive marker—the word *to*—and the root verb that follows it. For instance:

(10)

Non-split infinitive: *She agreed <u>to leave</u> the room quickly and quietly.*

Split infinitive: *She agreed <u>to</u> quickly and quietly <u>leave</u> the room.*

However, Curme's Grammar of the English Language (1978) says that not only is the split infinitive correct, but it *"should be furthered rather than censured, for it makes for clearer expression"*. The Columbia Guide to Standard American English notes that the split infinitive *"eliminates all possibility of ambiguity"*, in contrast to the *"potential for confusion"* in an unsplit

construction (Wilson, 1993). Merriam–Webster's Dictionary of English Usage says: "*the objection to the split infinitive has never had a rational basis*".

All in all, opinions on split infinitives seem to be divided to the same extent both in the linguistic and non-linguistic world. In addition to that, despite the prescriptivists' efforts to promote the correctness in language, it seems like what is considered to be a part of Standard English does not need to be necessarily correct but easier and widely accepted and used instead.

In conclusion, George Pullum states that even Standard English is not being treated rationally. It is hard to imagine anything in the field of linguistics being clearer than the fact that Standard English, the prestige syntactic dialect of the whole global family of English dialects, has preposition stranding, singular antecedent uses of *they*, infinitival constructions with an adjunct between *to* and the verb, and so on — and has had them for literally hundreds of years. According to Pullum's opinion, people pointing that out are treated as if they were proposing that something illegal should be taught in the public schools.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research methodology

According to Litosseliti (2010:30), there are two basic types of methodological frameworks under which all other methods and approaches – in linguistics or any other discipline – can be subsumed: qualitative methods on the one side, and quantitative methods on the other. Moreover, in linguistics or any other questionnaires and surveys (quantitative) and interviews (qualitative) seem to be the most dominant methods used by researchers (Litosseliti, 2010:36).

For the purpose of this study, we decided to use quantitative approach because it is used when something needs to be measured, namely the data collected so that the hypothesis could be tested and/or that the research questions could be answered. (Gass & Mackey, 2005:2).

5.2. Research questions

As we have already discussed in the literature review section, many scholars have done research on the difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between men and women, such

as William Labov, and proved that there are differences in the extent and way men and women use prestige in language.

The goal of our research is aimed at answering the following three research questions:

RQ1: Do women compared to men in the USA use more of prestige linguistic forms in everyday speech?

RQ2: What are the differences and/or similarities in the use of prestige in language between female and male participants?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between female and male participants who belong to generation X, generation Y and generation Z?

We expect the results to show that there are gender-based differences in the use of prestige linguistic forms between female and male American English speakers in everyday speech. Additionally, we expect data to show that there is a difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between participants who belong to generation X, Y and Z.

5.3. Corpus and procedure

This is a small-scale survey that examines the use of prestige linguistic forms by male and female speakers of American English. The objective of this study was two-fold: first was to investigate the use of prestige linguistic forms in the Standard American English – lexicon in particular – by male and female speakers in the United States of America, and second was to do a comparative analysis based on data collected between the participants considering their differences in gender and age.

In order to investigate our research questions, we decided to use the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which was developed by Levenston and Blum (1978) for the purpose of studying L2 lexical acquisition, and is probably the most widely used data collection instrument in cross-cultural pragmatics (Ogiermann, 2018). Our DCT was conducted amongst fifty male and fifty female participants who are American speakers and belong to various generation groups that are:

- *Gen X*: Gen X was born between 1965 and 1979/80 and is currently between 41-56 years old (65.2 million people in the U.S.)

- *Gen Y*: Gen Y, or Millennials, were born between 1981 and 1994/6. They are currently between 25 and 40 years old (72.1 million in the U.S.)

  Gen Y.1 = 25-29 years old (around 31 million people in the U.S.)

  Gen Y.2 = 29-39 (around 42 million people in the U.S.)

- *Gen Z*: Gen Z is the newest generation, born between 1997 and 2012. They are currently between 6 and 24 years old (nearly 68 million in the U.S.)

5.4. Instruments and data analysis method

Since we decided to use quantitative method for this study, we conducted a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The first section of our questionnaire consisted of three single-select questions related to gender, age and race, and the second section contained twelve scenarios from everyday life with two single-select answers that were not inherently wrong or right. That being said, the participants were asked to choose the answer that sounded more natural to them i.e. the sentence that they would primarily use in their everyday speech.

We decided to write shorter scenarios because they have the advantage of being easier to process. Additionally, the variable that we included is whether the scenario i.e. situation is formal or informal. Out of those twelve scenarios, six of them are formal that refer to the situations that could happen in everyday life at work, university, hospital and bank while the another six are more informal and are situations that are tied to one's social life i.e. relations between friends and family. In addition to that, answers offered in Scenarios 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 are declarative sentences written in the singular form of the first-person pronoun while answers offered in Scenarios 3, 4, 5 and 6 are written in the form of questions asked also in the singular form of the first-person pronoun. Lastly, answers that are given in Scenario 11 are written in the plural form of the pronoun I.

The DCT was created on Google Forms and distributed during the month of September, 2021 via online forum Reddit which is completely anonymous. The participants were also presented with the short information about the study, a disclaimer and brief instructions in terms

of filling out the questionnaire. The respondents had no time limit and were able to take as much time as they needed and/or stop or go back to any question at any time. The only criterion for selecting participants was that they are a native speaker of American English.

We constructed the answers relying on the rules of prescriptive grammar as the majority of the former studies suggest that women use prestige linguistic forms more compared to men, and therefore stick to the rules of prescriptive grammar more than men.

While one answer i.e. sentence was written according to the prescriptive rules of English grammar, another answer represented a more informal sentence with the same meaning but with the omission of the prescriptive rules. In addition to that, we decided to offer two questions per each rule. As we have already discussed language prescriptivism, the rules that we chose to examine were the following ones: negative concord, stranded preposition, who/whom relative pronouns, the case of split infinitives, difference between a nominative case (I) and an objective case (me), and lastly the use of the adverb '*hopefully*'.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to do a comparative analysis of women's and men's use of prestige linguistic forms in American English and we as researchers of this study aimed at answering three research questions which will be presented and answered as we analyze and discuss the results of our research. In this section, we will firstly present the results of our three questions in Section 1 of our DCT survey that are related to gender, age and race and then we will analyze and discuss the results from Section 2 that contained twelve questions.

Our DCT survey was filled in by 100 participants who are speakers of American English and who identified themselves with female gender (52%), male gender (43%) while 2% of them preferred not to say with which gender they most identify. In addition to that, 2% of our participants described themselves as non-binary and the last 1% of our participants described themselves as gender fluid, as seen in Diagram 1 below.

1. With which gender do you most identify with?

■ Female ■ Male ■ Non-binary ■ Gender fluid ■ Prefer not to say

2% 1% 2%

43% 52%
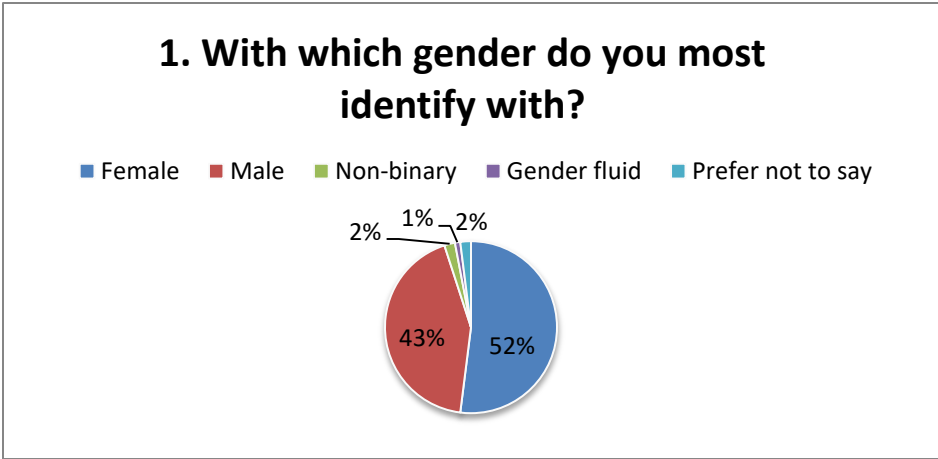
Diagram 1: Gender – results

Moreover, the results from the study suggest that the participants of our study ranged in age from 6 to 60 years old and therefore we were able to include and analyze the use of the prestige linguistic forms by the representatives of all three generations that are Gen X, Y and Z.

2. How old are you?

■ 6-24 years old

■ 25-29 years old

■ 30-39 years old

■ 40-56 years old

■ 60 years old
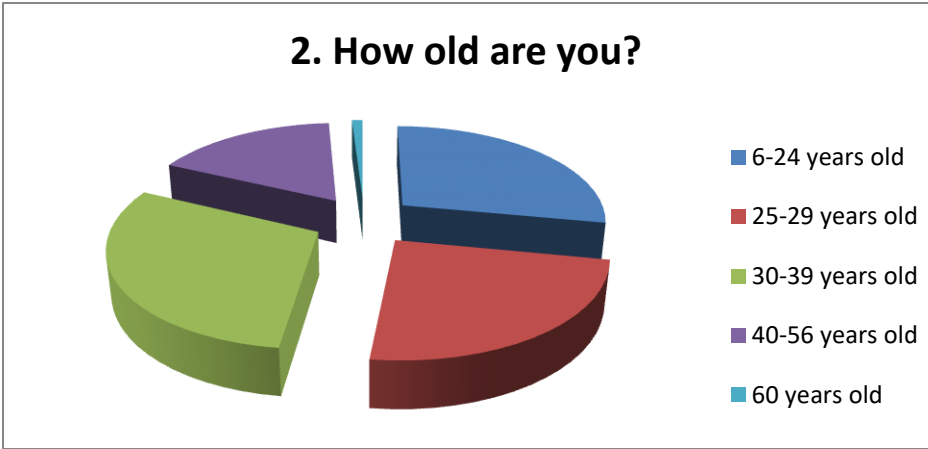
Diagram 2: Age – results

The third question from Section 1 was related to the race and the results suggest that 100 respondents described themselves as: 84% White, 11% Asian, 3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 3% Black or African American, 1% Afro Latino and 1% Hispanic, as presented in the Diagram 3 below.
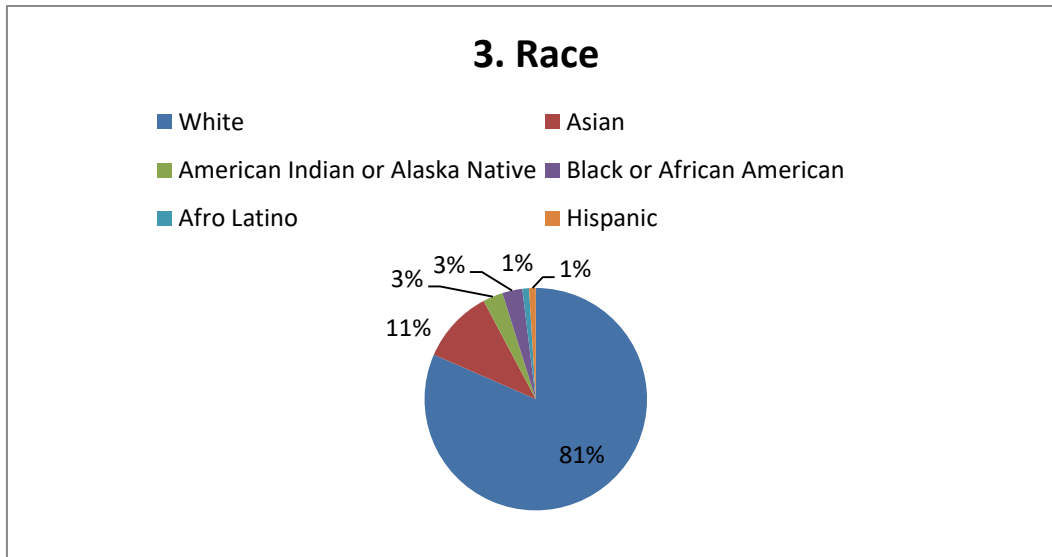
3. Race

Diagram 3: Race – results

All things considered, two variables that we used while analyzing the data were gender and age. Another variable that we included in our DCT questionnaire was whether the scenario i.e. situation was formal or informal. Lastly, the results of our study will be presented chronologically and systematically. Our DCT questionnaire consisted of twelve questions. Those questions were based on the prescriptive rules of grammar with the assumption that such language constructions are seen as prestigious ones simply because they are correct. In addition to that, we decided to write two questions per each rule. The aim of each pair of questions is the same while the context is different i.e. it is either formal or informal.

The first scenario is formal and written in order to test the use of negative concord. The respondents were put in a hypothetical situation where they are sitting in a class and chit-chatting with their friend next to them while their professor is talking. Suddenly, the professor looks at both of them and asks whoever is talking to stop with it. The respondents are given two options i.e. sentences as possible answers which were not wrong or right so they only had to decide what sounded more natural to them.

According to Figure 1 below, the first option is the sentence that is written according to the rules of prescriptive grammar, negative concord in particular, and is therefore seen as a prestigious one. Out of 100 respondents, that sentence was chosen by 96% respondents out of

which 57.29% were females and 42.71% were males. The second, less prestigious sentence was chosen by 4% of our respondents. From the results of this question, it is clear that there is a slight difference in the responses between the male and female respondents in regards to the first, prestigious sentence.
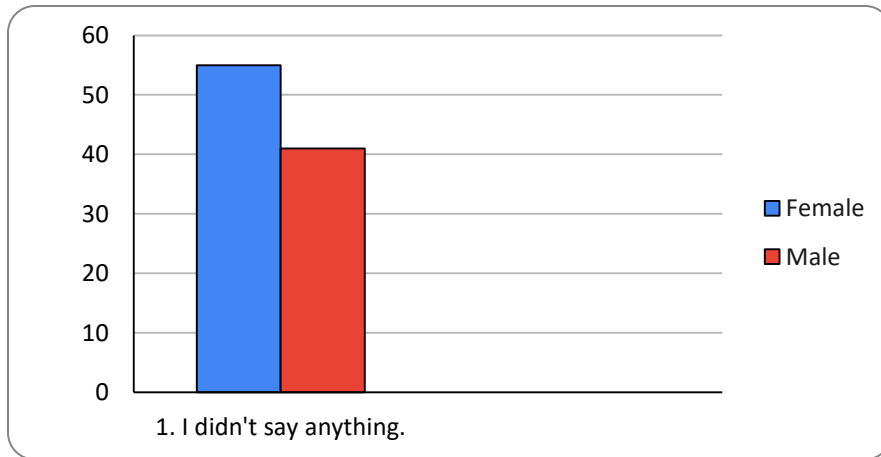
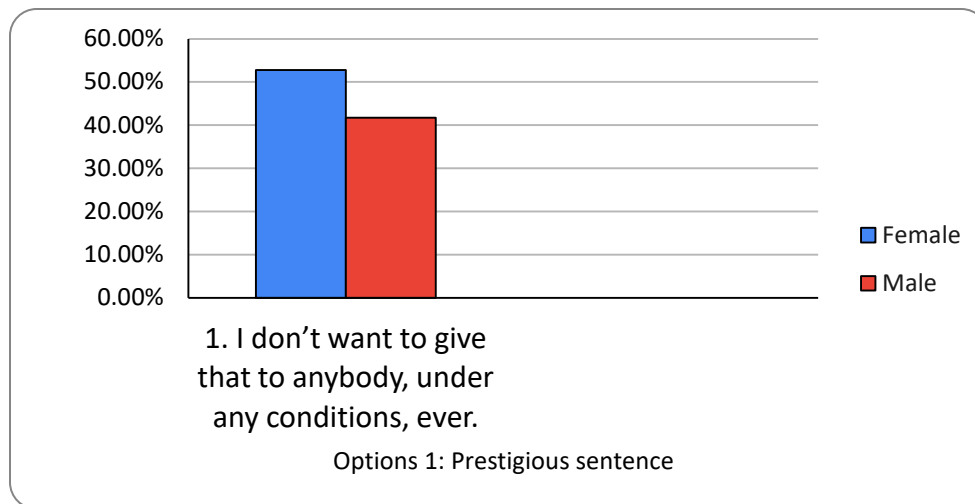**Figure 1.** Scenario 1, Gender – results

In Figure 2 below, 28 participants who are 6-24 years old and therefore belong to Generation Z chose the prestigious linguistic form. Additionally, 50 respondents who belong to Generation Y and 17 respondents who belong to Generation X responded by choosing the first option as well.
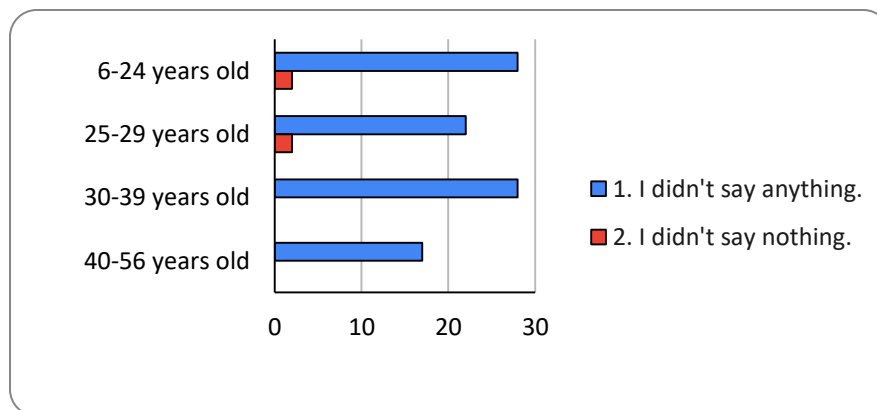
Figure 2. Scenario 1, Age – results

In the second scenario, we decided to test the use of negative concord again, but compared to the first scenario this one was set in the informal context. The respondents were talking to their sister who asked them about the toy which was actually their favorite one from their childhood. She [the sister] wanted to give it to their nephew so he can play with it now.

According to our data, 91.92% of our participants chose the first, prestigious sentence out of which 58.24% of them were female respondents and 41.76% were males. Additionally, the second, less prestigious sentence was chosen by 8.8% respondents.

Figure 3. Scenario 2. Gender – results

Moreover, the results of our study suggest that 26 Gen Z participants, 48 Gen Y participants and 16 Gen X participants chose the first option which followed the rules of prescriptive grammar and thus are seen as prestigious linguistic forms.
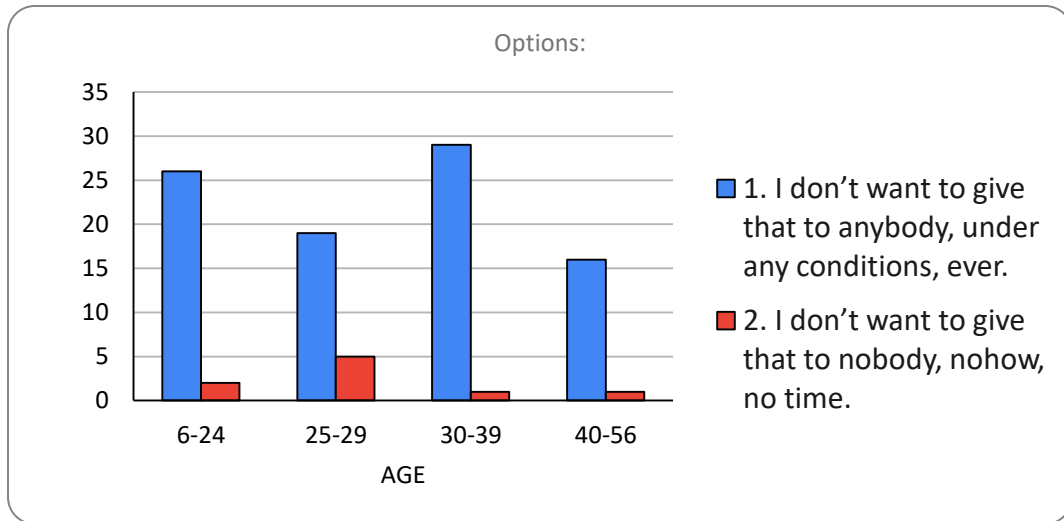
Figure 4. Scenario 2, Age – results

The results that we gathered from Scenarios 1 and 2 suggest that there is a difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between male and female respondents. The majority of female respondents used the prestigious linguistic forms in both contexts more compared to the majority of the male respondents whose percentage was higher in the use of the less prestigious linguistic forms. The findings are directly in line with previous studies carried out by Trudgill's (1972) who demonstrated that females do in fact use prestige linguistic forms more than males.

In the third scenario the setting is formal and answers were written in regards to the stranded preposition rule in prescriptivism. The respondents are in the work environment where they told their secretary to give the report to their boss's assistant. However, they're not sure whether their secretary gave it to the assistant or to their boss directly so they want to check with her. As given in Figure 5 below, the first, prestigious sentence was chosen by only ten participants (10%) while 90% of our respondents chose the second less prestigious sentence. In addition to that, the first, prestigious sentence chose 60% females and 40% male respondents.
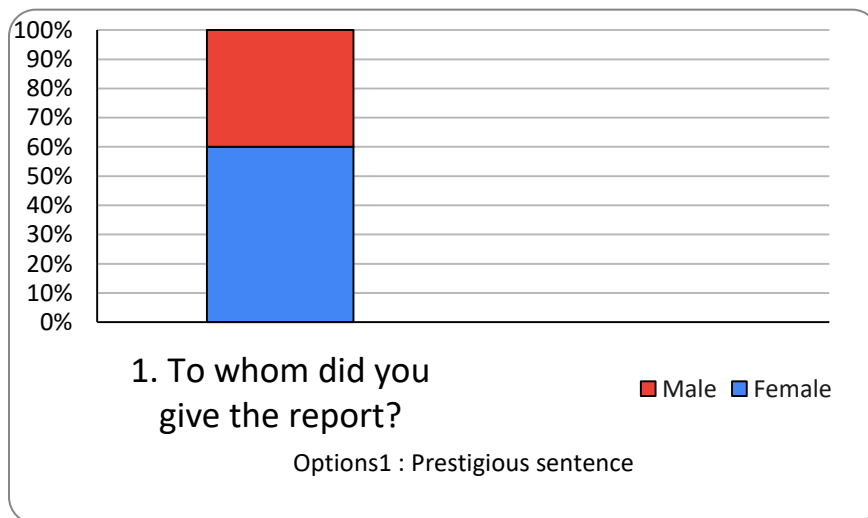
Figure 5. Scenario 3, Gender – results

Yet again, the results suggest that the prestigious linguistic form was used more by our female than male respondents. The results from this question differ from others primarily because the majority of our respondents, whether they were females or males, chose the second, less prestigious sentence. However, the explanation for this lies in the notions of hypercorrect grammar or superstandard language. As cited in Wardhaugh (2002:54), if listener's reaction to the form (not the content) of the utterance is neutral and he can devote full attention to the meaning, then the form is standard for him. If his attention is diverted from the meaning of the utterance because it sounds 'snooty,' then the utterance is super-substandard. If his attention is diverted from the message because the utterance sounds like poor English, then the form is substandard (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974). For instance, even though we put the pronoun *who* in the example of the less prestigious sentence still the pronoun *who* is considered to be a standard form while the pronoun *whom* is an example of hypercorrect speech. With this in mind, it is now clear why 90% of our respondents chose the second, less prestigious sentence.

When it comes to the differences in the use of prestige linguistic forms in regards to our participants' age, the data suggests that 27 Gen Z participants, 48 Gen Y participants and 14 Gen X participants decided to use the second, less prestigious option.

35
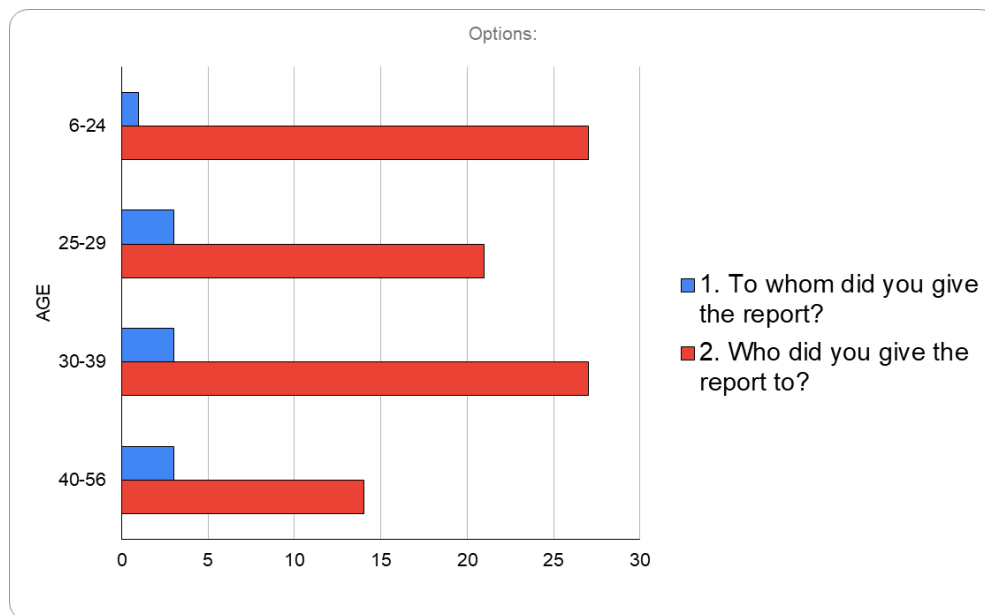
Figure 5. Scenario 3, Age – results

Similarly to the results from Scenarios 1 and 2, the data shows that male respondents used less prestigious linguistic forms more than our female respondents. A similar conclusion was reached by Fischer (1958) who found that males used a higher percentage of non-standard [n] forms than females. Besides, the results from Figure 6 show that far fewer Gen Z respondents [only one] used the prestigious linguistic form compared to the respondents who belong to the other two generation groups, and whose answers are somewhat similar.

In the fourth scenario, the context is formal and the prescriptive rule that we used was stranded preposition. The respondents were put in the situation where they are at work and their colleagues are having a discussion. However, since they have been swamped up with work for a while they decide to take a break and join their colleagues and their discussion but they firstly want to hear what exactly the topic is. This context can also be viewed as a semi-formal one because despite the work environment, the respondents could perceive some of their colleagues as friends, which simultaneously changes the way people interact.

Our data suggests that only one female respondent chose the first, prestigious linguistic form while the second option was chosen by 100% male respondents. The results from this scenario are directly in line with the results from Scenario 3 because this form of sentence is also

an example of hypercorrect grammar or superstandard form where our respondents were most probably diverted from the meaning simply because *"About what are you talking?"* sounded too snooty even though the context was formal.
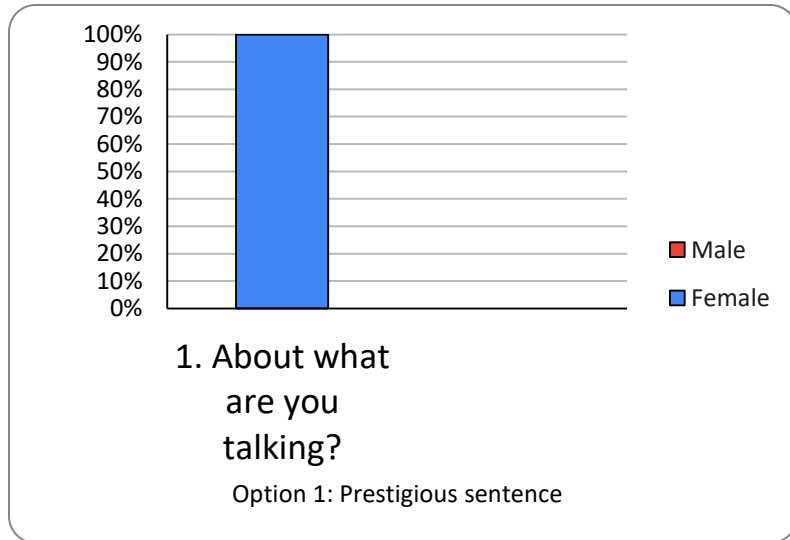

Figure 6. Scenario 4, Gender – results

Moreover, in Figure 8 below, the answers are more or less equivalent to each other despite the differences in age. As seen in Figure 7 above, only one female respondent decided to use the first, prestigious sentence and according to our data that female respondent belongs to Generation Y.2 and is 29 to 39 years old.
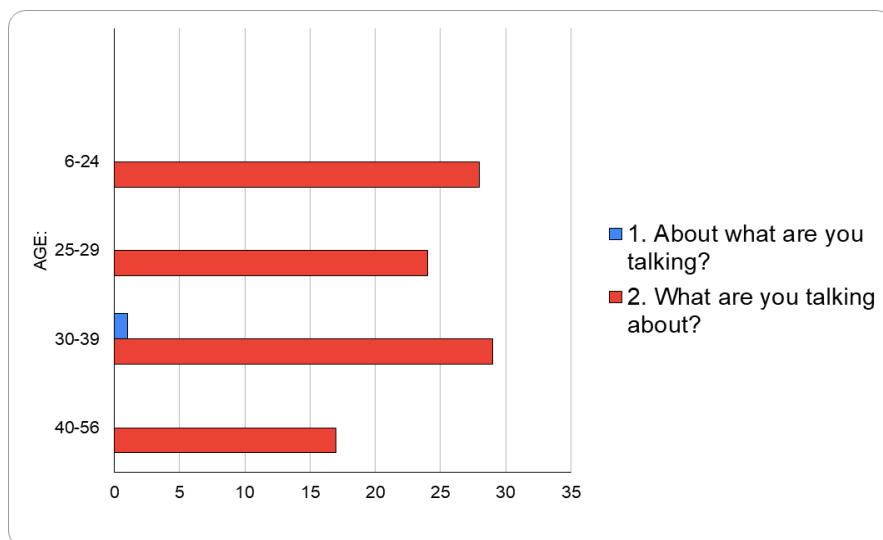
Figure 7. Scenario 4, Age – results

The results from the fifth scenario, which was set in the formal setting and was used to test the use of *who/whom* relative pronouns, suggest that 65% of our respondents chose the second, prestigious sentence out of which 53.85% were females and 46.15% were males. Based on the results, it is clear that once again our female respondents chose the prestigious linguistic form more than the male respondents while the second, less prestigious option was chosen more by males than females.
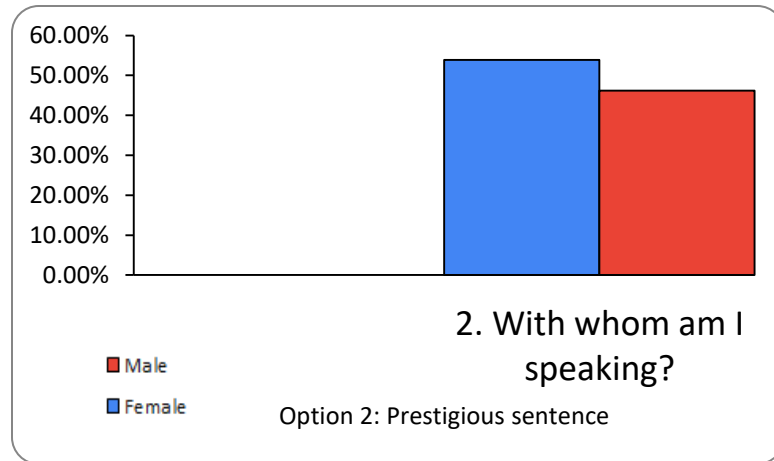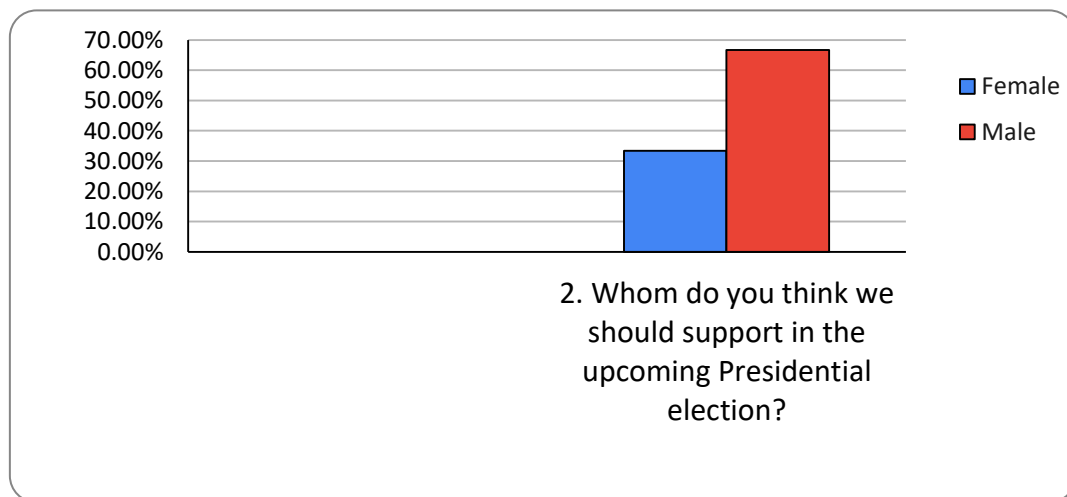
Figure 8. Scenario 5, Gender – results

In addition to that, in Figure 10 below, all 17 respondents who belong to Generation X chose the second option whereas 21 Gen Y and 14 Gen Z respondents chose the first, less prestigious sentence.
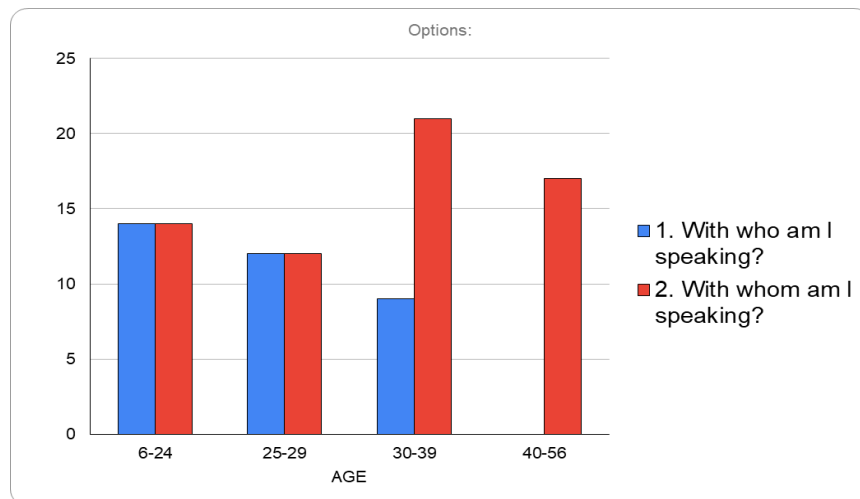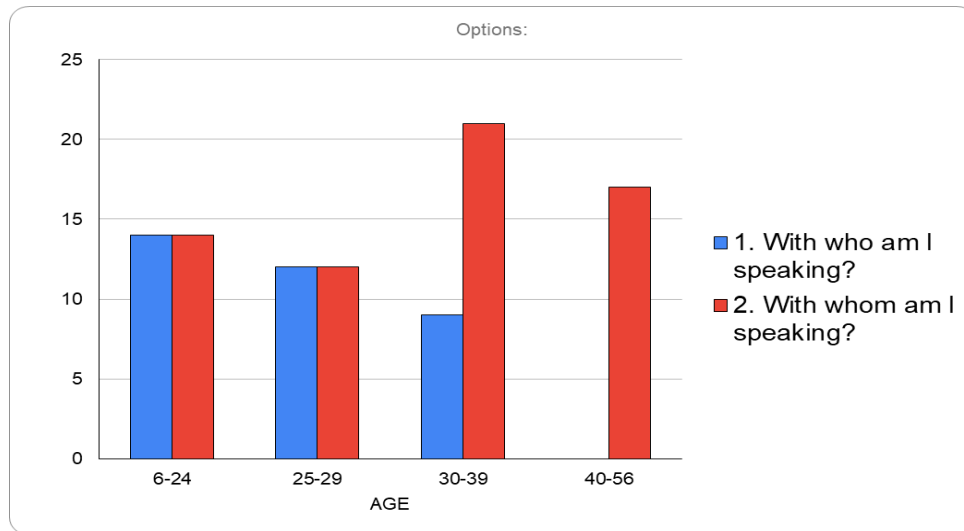
Figure 9. Scenario 5, Age – results

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In the sixth scenario, the setting is informal and the respondents are put in the situation where they are curious about their friends' opinion on the presidential election that is approaching. The respondents were given two variations of the same question that they would use in order to start a discussion. The data from Figure 11 shows that only 6% of our respondents chose the second, prestigious sentence while 33.33% of them were females and 66.67% were males. On the other hand, the less prestigious sentence was chosen by 94% respondents. Considering the results from the third scenario in which only 10% of our respondents chose the sentence in which pronoun *whom* was used, it becomes clear that pronoun *who* in the given contexts is a standard form that is widely used and that hypercorrect grammar does indeed divert listeners and/or speakers from meaning.
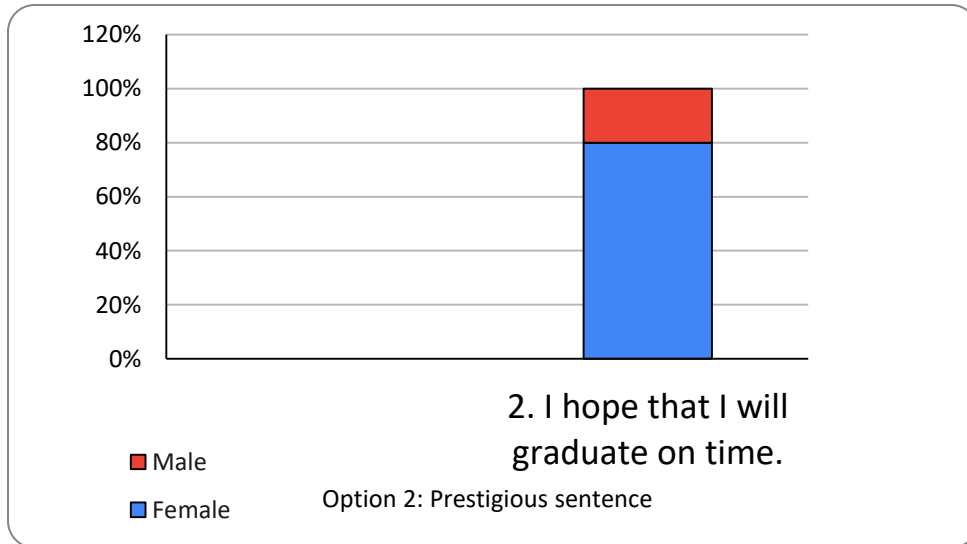

Figure 10. Scenario 6, Gender – results

Moreover, Figure 12 shows no significant difference in answers regarding the respondents' age. The data suggests that 26 Gen Z, 52 Gen Y and 15 Gen X participants of our study chose the first, less prestigious sentence.
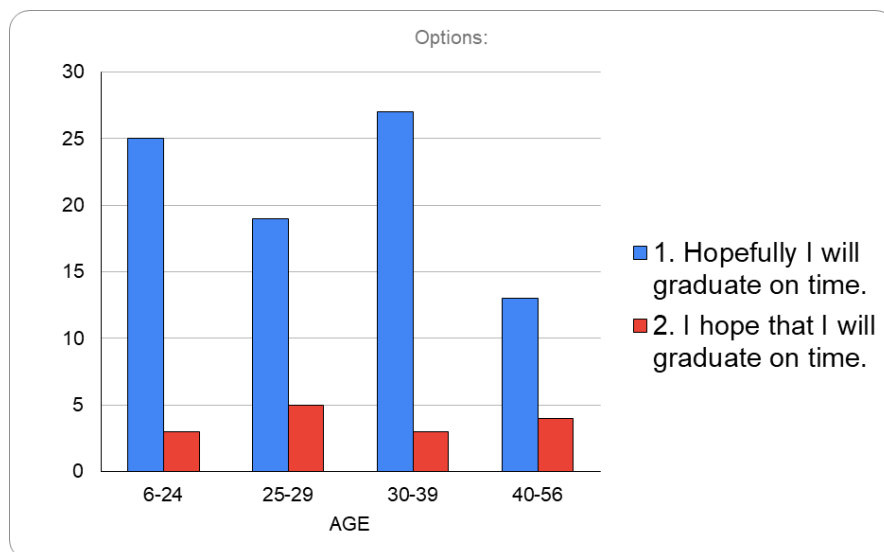
Figure 11. Scenario 7, Age – results

These results are in accordance with the findings reported by Abd-el-Jawad (1981) because this is the first instance in which our male respondents (66.67%) favored the prestige linguistic form more than females (33.33%). According to his studies, men of all social classes favored the prestige form /q/ more than women (Abd-el-Jawad, 1981 as cited in Labov, 1990). This pattern was replicated in Nablus (Abd-el-Jawad, 1987).

The seventh scenario was again informal and answers were written in regards to the use of the adverb 'hopefully'. This was a situation in which respondents run into a cousin in the street who asks them about the expected graduation. As given in the Figure 13 below, the results from our study suggest that only 15% of our respondents chose the second, prestigious sentence while the other 85% chose the first, less prestigious one. Moreover, the data suggests that 80% females and 20% males chose the prestigious linguistic form.

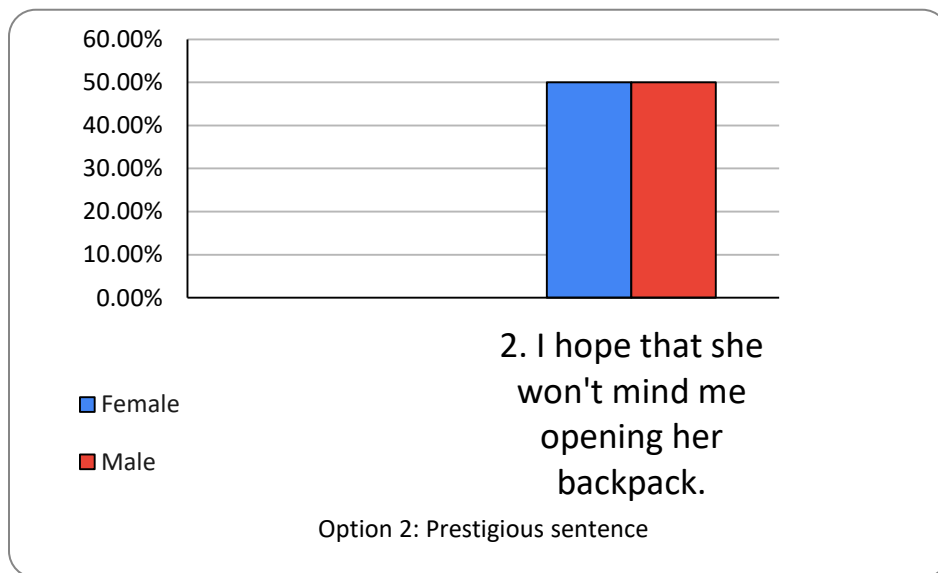**Figure 12.** Scenario 7, Gender – results

Similarly, the data from Figure 14 shows that the majority of the respondents who belong to all three generation groups chose the first, less prestigious sentence. Out of 100 respondents, 18 Gen Z respondents, 36 Gen Y respondents and 9 Gen X respondents decided to choose the sentence that does not follow the rules of prescriptive grammar.
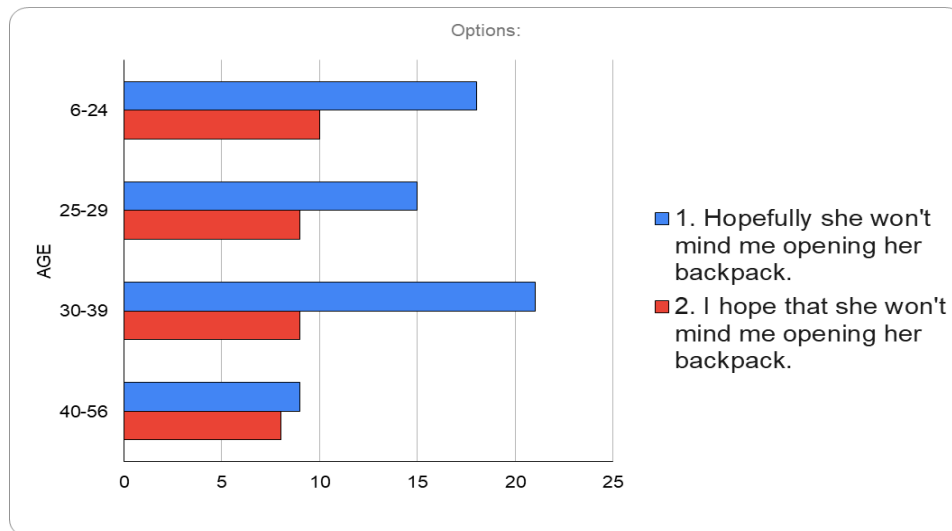

Figure 13. Scenario 7, Age – results

The eighth scenario is set in the informal setting where respondents are travelling by bus with their two friends. While one of their friends went outside for a cigarette break, the other one stayed inside with them. The problem arises when the respondents can't find their headphones and they [respondents] remember that they left them in the backpack that belongs to the friend who went out. They decide to look for them without telling their friend about it prior to that but they do not want to seem rude in front of the other friend.

The results suggest that out of 100 respondents, 40% of them chose the second, prestigious sentence whereas there is no difference between the female and male responses as 50% females and 50% males chose the second, prestigious sentence. The results from this scenario differ from others because this is the first instance in which responses between the males and females do not differ since the same percentage of our male and female respondents chose the same option, a prestigious one in particular.

Figure 14. Scenario 8, Gender – results

Furthermore, the results from 16 support the data found in Figure 15 and show that there is no significant difference in responses when it comes to the different age groups. That being said, only 10 Gen Z participants, 18 Gen Y and 8 Gen X participants chose the second, prestigious sentence.

Figure 15. Scenario 8, Age – results

The ninth scenario was informal and written with the purpose of testing the difference between a nominative case (I) and an objective case (me)**.** All these scenarios revolve around different aspects of one's life such as work, school, social life etc. The ninth one tackles one's romantic relationship in which our respondents had an argument with their partner and they want to make up with them. Anyhow, it was not their partner who made a mistake but the other way around and due to that they feel bad about it.

The results from Scenario 9 suggest that 47% of our respondents chose the first, prestigious sentence out of which 57.45% were females and 42.55% were males. On the other hand, 53% of our respondents chose the second, less prestigious sentence.
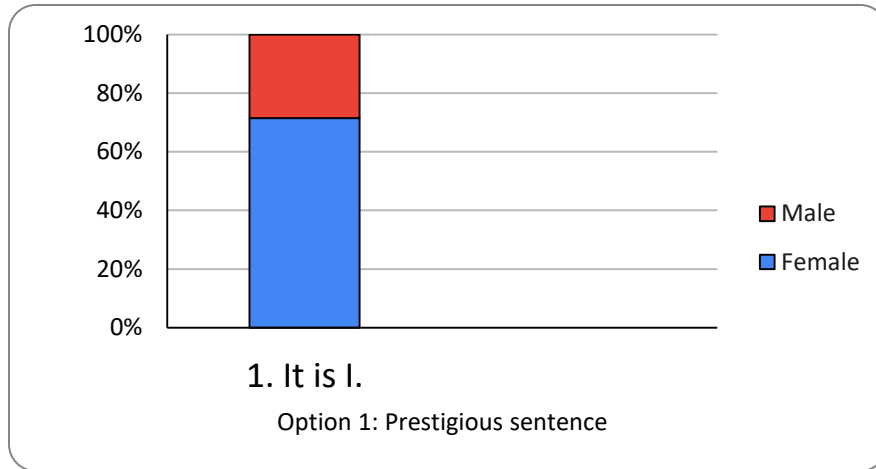
Figure 16. Scenario 9, Gender – results

In Figure 18 below, the results show that 12 Gen Z, 24 Gen Y and 11 Gen X respondents chose the first, prestigious linguistic form while 16 Gen Z, 30 Gen Y and 6 Gen X decided to use the second option.
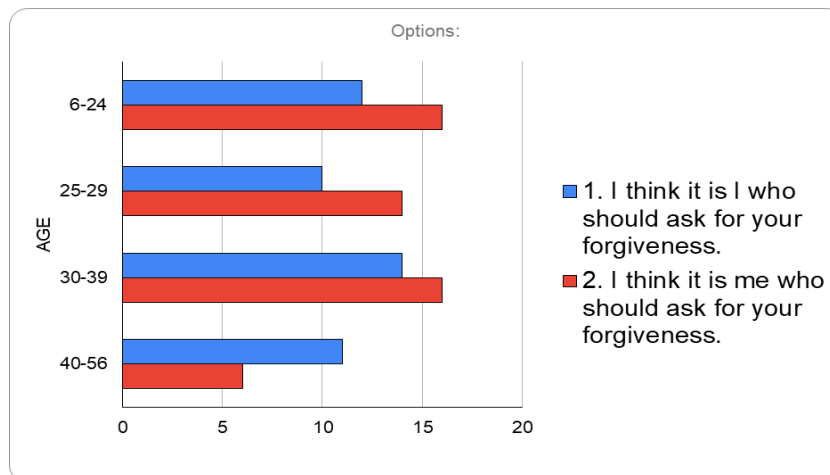
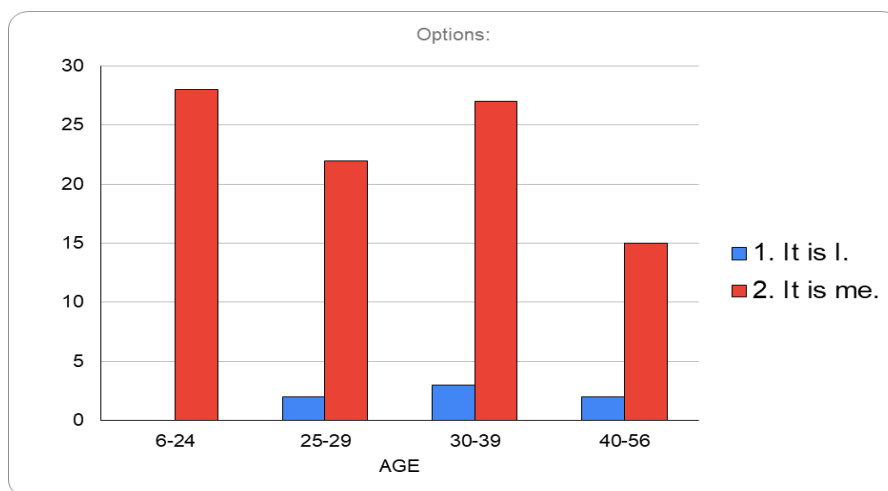**Figure 17.** Scenario 9, Age – results

As compared to the ninth scenario, the tenth one was set in the formal context i.e. the respondents are in the doctor's office who told them to come back in an hour to pick up the medical exam results. The answers were offered as their eventual answers to the doctor asking who it is. With that in mind, the results suggest that only 7% of our respondents chose the prestigious sentence out of which 71.45% were females and 28.57% were males.
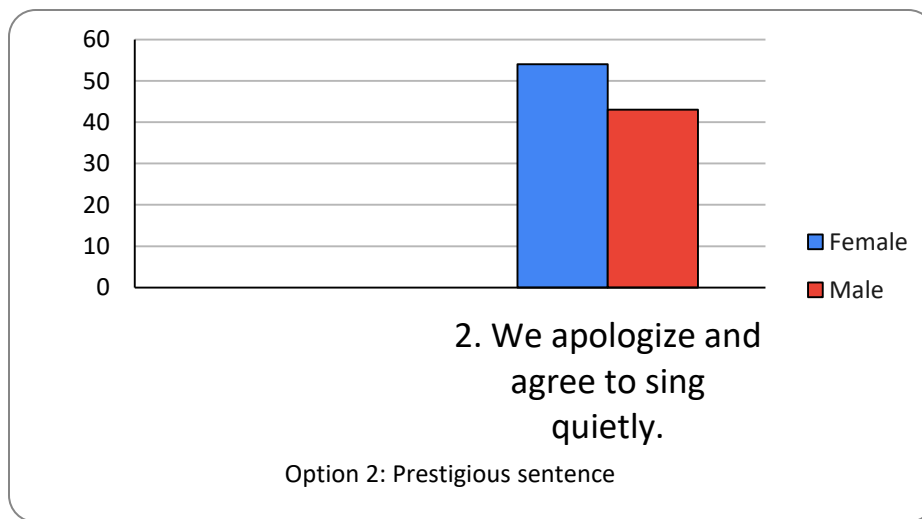
Figure 18. Scenario 10, Gender – results

This is in line with the ideas of Bilaniuk (2003) who concluded that the reason why the male respondents used less prestigious linguistic forms more than the females is because men's status is defined less by symbolic capital and more by what they have and do, they risk less in supporting a language of questionable status.

In Figure 20, the data shows that all respondents (28) who belong to Generation Z chose the second sentence whereas 49 respondents who belong to Generation Y and 15 respondents who belong to Generation X also chose the same option. This is so far the only Scenario in which all respondents from Generation Z had the same answer to a given question.
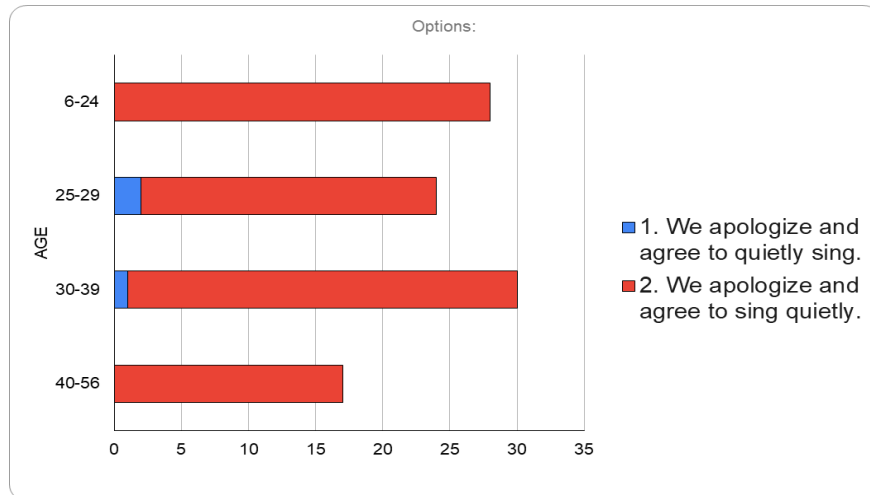

Figure 19. Scenario 10, Age – results

The last two scenarios were used in order to test the case of split infinitives. The eleventh scenario was set in the informal context. The respondents were put in the situation where they have to apologize to their neighbor because of the noise and loud music. The data suggests that 97% of our respondents chose the second, prestigious sentence out of which 55.65% were females and 44.35% were males.

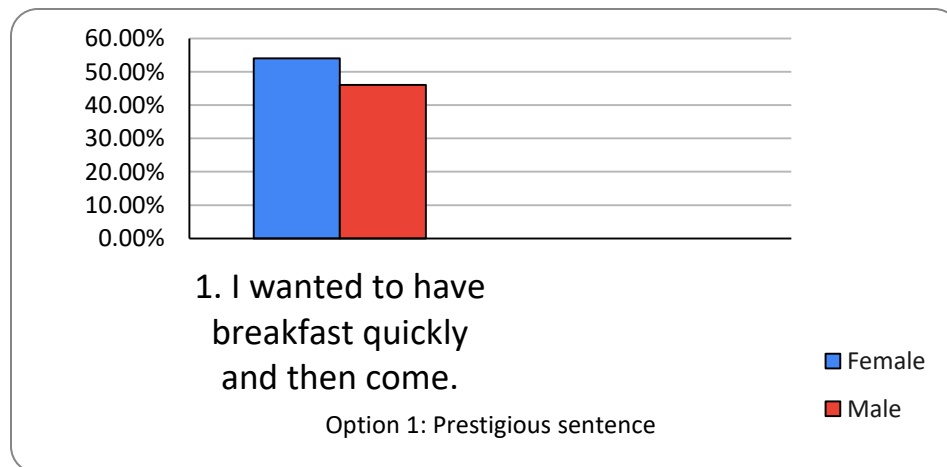**Figure 20.** Scenario 11, Gender – results

In the Figure 22 below, the data shows that those 3 female respondents belong to Generation Y out of which two female respondents belong to Gen Y.1 and another female respondent belongs to Gen Y.2 which also corresponds to the findings from the Scenario 4 in which the abovementioned female respondent belonged to Generation Y.2 and is 29 to 39 years old.

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Figure 21. Scenario 11, Age – results

Lastly, in the twelfth scenario, the setting is formal and the respondents are put in the situation where they are late for a meeting at work so they are joining in late and should explain themselves to their boss. The results suggest that 50% of our respondents chose the first, prestigious sentence out of which 54% of them were females and 46% were males.

Figure 22. Scenario 12, Gender – results

Lastly, in the Figure 24 below, the results show that 14 Gen Z participants, 25 Gen Y participants and 10 Gen X participants chose the second, less prestigious option and as such do not indicate any significant difference in the respondents' answers.
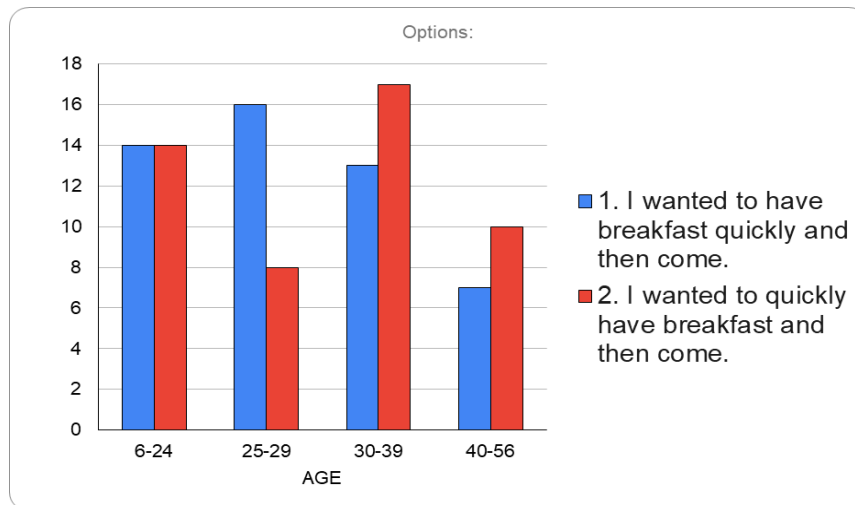
Figure 23. Scenario 12, Age – results

On the basis of the results gathered from our DCT survey, it is safe to conclude that women do use more of prestige linguistic forms in everyday speech than men which answers our first research question. Out of twelve scenarios, there was only one – Scenario 6 namely – in which more male respondents chose the prestigious linguistic form than our female respondents. On the other hand, the data suggests that in all other eleven scenarios (six formal and five informal ones), women did indeed use prestige linguistic forms more than men.

The second research question of our study discussed the differences and/or similarities in the use of prestige in language between female and male respondents. The key finding that we have found is that both male and female responses were affected by the hypercorrect grammar or superstandard form that was analyzed in Scenarios 3, 4, 6 and 7. A difference between the male's and female's responses in our findings is that our female respondents chose the less prestigious linguistic form in only one scenario (6) that was informal. In addition to that, there was only one scenario in which the same percentage of our male and female respondents (50:50) chose the prestigious linguistic form.

The third research question that we have posed is whether there is a significant difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between female and male participants who belong to Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. However, what took us by surprise is the fact that investigating data from that point of view would require a more detailed and complex analysis that does not fit into the framework of one's master thesis. Despite that obstacle, we have

analyzed the data only using the variable of different age groups that in the end did not show any prominent differences in the use of prestige linguistic forms between the respondents who belong to Generation X, Y and Z. Simply put, there was no scenario in which we have seen any significant difference between these three generations except for the Scenario 5 that is related to the use of the relative pronouns who/whom and was set in the formal setting. While examining the results that we have gathered, we have come to the conclusion that this was the only situation in which the respondents who belong to the Generation X, and therefore are 40 to 56 years old, unanimously chose the prestige linguistic form. This could partially be due to the fact that the respondents of that age are exposed to the formal situations more often than respondents from any other age group, and are probably more educated than the respondents who belong to Generations Y and Z.

7. CONCLUSION

We have argued throughout this research paper that women use prestige linguistic forms more than men in American English because the majority of studies carried out in the field of sociolinguistics support that claim, although with few exceptions. On the basis of our results, we have demonstrated that women in the United States of America do indeed use prestige linguistic forms more than men, both in formal and informal contexts. However, even though there are some similarities and differences between the responses of our male and female respondents still they are not significant.

Since we were not able to answer the third research question of our study it remains a question of future research to investigate whether there is a significant difference in the use of prestige linguistic forms between female and male participants who belong to Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. Including different age groups in our research sample has shown us that including only female and male gender as fixed categories nowadays may be misleading, as some of our respondents who belong to Generation Z perceive genders as spectrums of behavior and therefore identified themselves as non-binary, gender-fluid etc. With that in mind, we think that it will be hard for future research to continue the investigation of the use of prestige linguistic forms strictly through the prism of two genders, as this is slowly changing and seems like it is subtly asking academia to take a different approach.

8. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It will be important that future research investigate this topic by including the respondents' levels of education as a variable, as we only analyzed the data using the age and gender variables. This would give a deeper insight into the reasons for some of the respondents' answers.

Luckily, we gave our respondents an option to leave a comment after taking our DCT survey. After looking through those comments, we realized that putting neither or other as options would be better for our data. That being said, we recommend any future researchers to include those two options in their survey as well.

We highly recommend future researchers to pay attention to the context of scenarios and situations while creating a DCT survey because it seems to be a key factor in the respondents' answers. Additionally, since we invited our respondents to anonymously leave any comments that they might have, another respondent, who is getting a doctorate in English, said the following: „*Some of the phrases we use in speech are ungrammatical. Most of us know that, but they just sound better so that's what we say. I'm getting a doctorate in English, but I still end sentences with a preposition in spoken conversation, for example. The grammatically correct sentence would sound pompous. But in a formal, written communication, I'd use the correct, stuffy-sounding version. It's all about context.*"

Discourse Completion Task: Prestige linguistic forms in American English

You are invited to participate in a web-based online questionnaire on the use of prestige linguistic forms in American English. This is a part of the Master thesis being conducted by Emina Basara, a student at University of Sarajevo. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

This questionnaire does not collect any personal information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact my thesis supervisor, Professor Merima Osmankadić via email at merima.osmankadic@ff.unsa.ba, or me at ebasara96@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time!

Section 1

1. With which gender do you most identify?

a) Female

b) Male

c) Prefer not to say

d) Other: _____

2. How old are you?

a) 6 to 24

b) 25 to 29

c) 30 to 39

d) 40 to 56

e) Other: _____

3. How would you describe yourself?

a) American Indian or Alaska Native

b) Asian

c) Black or African American

d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

e) White

f) Other: _____

Section 2

Choose the sentence that sounds more natural to you.

(*There is no wrong or right answer, only what sounds more natural to you.*)

Scenario 1: *You're sitting in a class and chit-chatting with your friend next to you while your professor is talking. The professor looks at both of you and asks to stop whoever is talking, so you decide to say:*

a) I didn't say nothing.

b) I didn't say anything.

Scenario 2: *Your sister is asking you about the toy which is actually your favorite one from your childhood. She wants to give it to your nephew so he can play with it now. You decide to say:*

a) I don't want to give that to anybody, under any conditions, ever.

b) I don't want to give that to nobody, nohow, no time.

Scenario 3: *You told your secretary to give the report to your boss's assistant but you're not sure whether she gave it to the assistant or your boss directly so you want to check with her. You decide to say:*

a) Who did you give the report to?

b) To whom did you give the report?

Scenario 4: *Your colleagues at work are having a discussion but you've been swamped up with work for a while. However, you decide to take a break and join them and their discussion but you firstly want to hear what exactly the topic is, so you decide to say:*

a) What are you talking about?

b) About what are you talking?

Scenario 5: *Your credit card is about to expire and you have to call your bank in order to talk to your personal banker and discuss the details. Someone picks up the phone but you're not sure whether it's the person you want to talk to, so you decide to say:*

a) With whom am I speaking?

b) With who am I speaking?

Scenario 6: *The presidential election is approaching and you're curious about your friends' opinion on that matter and you want to start a discussion, so you decide to say:*

a) Whom do you think we should support in the upcoming Presidential election?

b) Who do you think we should support in the upcoming Presidential election?

Scenario 7: *You've been in the process of writing your thesis for the past three months. One day you run into your cousin who asks you about your graduation, so you decide to say:*

a) Hopefully I will graduate on time.

b) I hope that I will graduate on time.

Scenario 8: *You're travelling by bus with your friends and one of them just went outside for a cigarette break while you and your other friend stayed inside. You can't find your headphones and you remember that you left them in his backpack that's right next you. You decide to look for them without telling your friend about it but you don't want to seem rude in front of the other friend, so you decide to say:*

a) Hopefully she won't mind me opening her backpack.

b) I hope that she won't mind me opening her backpack.

Scenario 9: *You had an argument with your partner yesterday and they want to make up with you today. Anyhow, you were the one who said some bad stuff to them and you feel bad about it, so you decide to say:*

a) I think it is I who should ask for your forgiveness.

b) I think it is me who should ask for your forgiveness.

Scenario 10: *You were in the doctor's office and he told you to come back in an hour to pick up the medical exam results. You're knocking at the door and you hear the doctor asking who is it, so you decide to say:*

a) It is I.

b) It is me.

Scenario 11: *You hosted a house party in your garden and you decided to sing karaoke with your friends but one of your neighbors has been complaining about the noise for a while. They are at the door to warn you about it too, so you decide to say:*

a) We apologize and agree to sing quietly.

b) We apologize and agree to quietly sing.

Scenario 12: *You're late for a meeting at work because you decided to eat before so you're joining in late. Your boss asks for a reason why you're late, so you decide to say:*

a) I wanted to have breakfast quickly and then come.

b) I wanted to quickly have breakfast and then come.

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