Gender and Language
Chair: **Katy Chaffee**, University of Alberta

Gender and language has recently become a headline issue in Canada due to the government's decision to change the national anthem to use gender-fair language. Research shows how language and gender may interact in a variety of complex ways; gendered language may shape our perceptions of the world, as suggested by proponents of Canada's anthem change, and people of different genders may take different approaches to language use or language learning. This symposium brings together researchers examining different facets of these intersections. Focusing on how gender can influence individuals' approaches towards language, Katy Chaffee will present research into how stereotypes of foreign language study as a feminine domain deter men from learning new languages and lead to gender imbalances in foreign language classrooms. Gendered stereotypes about communication styles may also influence individual people's self-presentation; Adrienne Hancock will describe the influence of cultural gender stereotypes on voice and communication training for transgender speakers. Kate Blackburn will discuss how certain words appeal to women who read romance novels and how these word preferences reveal information about women's mate values. Finally, Magdalena Formanowicz will discuss her research into what factors affect the implementation and effectiveness of reforms promoting gender-fair language, such as Canada's recent change to its anthem. This symposium brings together research about how gender stereotypes affect language behavior with research about gendered linguistic interventions that might promote social change, highlighting new understandings of problems and solutions in language and gender.

Understanding men's underrepresentation in foreign language classes

Kathryn E. Chaffee, **Nigel Mantou Lou**, and **Kimberly A. Noels**, University of Alberta

Speaking a foreign language is a useful skill that opens up career and communicative opportunities. However, there are marked gender differences in who chooses to pursue foreign language learning, with men underrepresented in elective foreign language study across many countries. This talk summarizes a program research investigating possible reasons for this disparity. Our results suggest that gender stereotypes are an important factor explaining men's underrepresentation in foreign languages. Although threats to men's linguistic competence relative to women had little effect, threats to their masculinity led certain men to disavow interest in language learning. Both stereotypes of language as feminine and ideologies of traditional masculinity appear to play a role in deterring men from foreign language study.

Transgender People Navigate Communication Choices

Adrienne B. Hancock, George Washington Unversity

Can strategies for feminizing/masculinizing communication capitalize on stereotypes of gender-linked language? Assertiveness is typically associated with masculinity, which presents a conundrum for transgender females. Can she be both assertive and feminine? "L.A.", a 15 year-old transgender female, was experiencing bullying and was terrified to speak, saying she wanted to sound strong, smart, and more feminine. Audio samples and data collected across the year of speech-language pathology services demonstrate the progression of her speech to sound feminine and confident. This case demonstrates how person-centered assessment and collaborative goal planning considers the speaker's many roles and overall communicative function. Unique challenges for transgender people are discussed in context of the general process model explaining the gender-linked language effect (Mulac et al, 2013).

The Language of Romance: An Open Vocabulary Analysis of the Highest Rated Words used in Romance Novels

Kate Blackburn, University of Texas at Austin

What are the common linguistic features of top rated romance novels? The open vocabulary method was performed on 703 romance novels to determine what words were commonly used in the highest rated romance novels. Results revealed that the highest rated novels contained words related to arousal, sexual/primal prowess, and sexual communication. Our research team recognized the ability for words to capture psychological underpinnings related to readers. We will discuss which words may have a particular, unintended effect on women who read romance novels. She will explain not only why women may enjoy these words, but how these word preferences may reveal more information about women's mate values. We discuss the implications of these results and directions for future research.

The benefits and pitfalls of language change – the case of gender-fair language use

Magdalena Formanowicz, University of Bern

Gender-fair language (GFL) is a symmetric linguistic treatment of women and men. To create GFL two principle strategies can be deployed. Neutralization means that gender-unmarked forms (police officer) are used to substitute the male-biased (policeman). Feminization, implies that feminine forms of nouns are used systematically to make female referents visible. This presentation summarizes the results of a comprehensive European research program that

systematically examined what affects the usage of GFL. In general, studies indicate positive effects of GFL. However, negative effects of reformed usage were also reported specifically when GFL is novel. Overall, I aim to shed light on how to introduce a social change via linguistic means taking into account the potential setbacks preventing linguistic reforms to be effective.