

***Language and religious identity: Women in discourse.***  
**Edited by Allyson Jule.**

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*Reviewed by Donna L. Lillian*

Allyson Jule's edited collection, *Language and Religious Identity: Women in Discourse*, falls at the intersection of several important disciplines, including gender studies, religious studies, and discourse studies. As such, it makes an important contribution to these fields individually, and to interdisciplinary research in a number of overlapping areas. The book contains an introduction by the editor, followed by ten chapters, all by different researchers. I will first examine each of the ten chapters, and then consider the volume as a whole.

In Chapter 1, Ethan Philip Sharp reports on ethnographic research conducted in a Roman Catholic church in Indianapolis, Indiana, which had become the place of worship for thousands of Mexican immigrants and migrant workers by the late 1990s, and, secondarily, in Tala, Mexico, the area from which many of them had originated. Sharp analyzes the structure of testimonies performed by two prominent laywomen, one in Indianapolis and the other in Tala, in the context of an evangelical retreat and a charismatic prayer meeting, respectively. Sharp demonstrates that these testimonies perform several simultaneous functions, including modelling ways of managing and embracing change, both personal and societal, and providing a forum in which women can exercise authority and can be heard, without directly challenging the male hierarchy of the church.

Chapter 2, by Neryamn Rivera Nieves and Roxana Delbene Rosati, examines language choices (English versus Spanish) used in one Roman Catholic and four Protestant churches in Lancaster, Pennsylvania by people originating

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**Affiliation**

East Carolina University, USA.  
email: [lilliand@ecu.edu](mailto:lilliand@ecu.edu)

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from various parts of the Caribbean, Central and South America. For many of these immigrants, church becomes an important site both of community building and cultural preservation, as symbolized by the use of Spanish, and, simultaneously, of assimilation into American life, as symbolized by the use of English. The authors note that women's voices are most often associated with domestic and transitional tasks, and that women's roles in church tend to mirror their domestic roles in other contexts. However, because women tend to use their dominant language, whether English or Spanish, most often in performing these tasks, this practice collectively reinforces communal bilingualism, rather than only promoting either the preservation of Spanish or the shift to English within the community as a whole.

In Chapter 3, Tamara Warhol demonstrates how interpretation of a biblical text is co-constructed by three participants in a divinity school classroom setting. The passage under discussion, Galatians 1: 11–24, does not concern gender roles, nor does Warhol's analysis of the participants' discourse address gendered speech or gendered communication patterns. Rather, the participants' collaborative exegesis of the biblical passage illustrates that contemporary interpreters of scripture lend local relevance to texts. By extension of this principle, the author suggests that contemporary exegesis of contested biblical passages that do deal with the roles of women in the church may be enhanced by the inclusion of a range of voices in the process of interpretation.

Sage Lambert Graham's next chapter is a promising study, theoretically and methodologically well grounded and based on an interesting set of data from an online Anglican discussion group. The analysis focuses on the contributions of one participant, Sister Goldenrod, who, although not a nun, assumes the identity of one, and on the other participants' responses to her. Graham demonstrates that while Goldenrod attempts to use 'one-down' discursive strategies, in keeping with her identity construction as a 'good Christian', these strategies do not succeed in elevating her to the status of respected spiritual leader, as she apparently thinks that they should. Graham suggests that it is Goldenrod's gender that keeps her from achieving that status within this electronic community of practice, but I would argue, based on the textual evidence, that Goldenrod is a socially dysfunctional individual and it is that, not her gender, which prevents the other community members from affording her the status and respect she desires. The analysis presented in this chapter is strong, but I would challenge the conclusion that the case study of Sister Goldenrod says anything generalizable about the position of women in the church, discursively or otherwise.

In Chapter 5, Veronika Koller explores connections between religious metaphors from seventeenth and eighteenth century German texts, and marketing metaphors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, arguing that not only

does present-day marketing discourse borrow from the metaphorical terrain of religious discourse, but so does contemporary religious discourse borrow from the semantic domain of marketing and business. The vast majority of the religious metaphors gender God as male and human beings as female, utilizing semantic fields of family, romance, and friendship. Marketing discourses likewise use such relationship metaphors to promote brand awareness and brand loyalty, but the brand may be alternately gendered male or female, depending on the target audience for the product. Thus, although there is a great deal of borrowing of metaphors across religious and marketing domains, these two domains employ somewhat different strategies when it comes to gendering the 'audience'.

Chapter 6, by Abolaji Mustapha, analyses responses to compliments in 193 observed examples of compliment/response adjacency pairs among evangelical Nigerians. A strength of this paper is that it is well grounded in the published research on politeness and compliment behaviour. Nevertheless, the analysis of data and its interpretation are problematic. For example, there are errors in Table 6.3, both in the sums of the columns and in the percentage figures for two of the three rows. Furthermore, the discussion and interpretation of the results appears biased and unscientific. For example, Mustapha writes that 'women's shift-praise response type (36 percent of their responses) compares favourably with that of men (36 percent)' (p. 141). However, according to the data reported in tables 6.2 and 6.3 (with the calculations corrected), women shift credit to God 24% of the time, while men do so 39% of the time. Even if the figures were correct and women and men engaged in this response strategy at an equal rate, it would still be biased to describe this in terms of women 'comparing favourably' with men, since such a description presupposes that men's behaviour is the norm against which women's behaviour should be judged. With insufficient evidence or argumentation, Mustapha draws conclusions about the sorts of motivations that speakers may have for their behaviour in responding to compliments, making this a disappointing chapter, in spite of the value of the research questions and the data used in this study.

Chapter 7, by Laura Álvarez López and Chatarina Edfeldt, is one of only two chapters in this book that deal with non-Christian religions. Candomblé was recreated in the Americas by African slaves and their descendants. It is practiced primarily in Brazil by poor, Black women within the context of a society that discriminates against those who are poor, Black, and/or female. Yet within Candomblé itself, women are afforded respect as leaders and practitioners of the faith. Within the context of this faith community, gender of initiates is determined by the gender of the deity to which one is consecrated upon joining the faith, and the language used in addressing and referring to a member of the community will be gendered according to their initiatic gender, not the

gender category to which they may be assigned in the outside community. Since women may be gendered male by this practice and men female, the construction of gender within this faith challenges the gender hierarchy imposed by the dominant Brazilian society.

Chapter 8, by Defen Yu, is the second of two chapters that deal with non-Christian religions. Lisu is a recognized ethnic group in China, whose language is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family, and whose traditional religion consists of 'animism, ancestral worship, and spirit worship' (p. 172), passed down orally from generation to generation by male shamans and elders. Within Lisu faith and Lisu society, women are subordinate to men, and female spirits are lower in status than male spirits. This chapter is rich with examples from traditional Lisu religious discourse, and it demonstrates the inseparability of religious discourse from the discourses of everyday life of the Lisu, particularly as these pertain to acceptable gender roles for Lisu women in this society.

Chapter 9, by Huamei Han, returns to the book's emphasis on Christian contexts, with an ethnographic study tracing the gendering of a young couple from their homeland in China, through the complex immigration and settlement process in Canada. After settling in Toronto, the young couple voluntarily converted to Christianity and joined a church, a practice not uncommon among new immigrants. Timothy and Grace (pseudonyms) were further gendered, as evidenced by the speaking roles they performed in tape-recorded small-group Bible studies analyzed by the researcher. Han contextualizes the gendering experiences of this young couple within a larger framework of globalization and post-modernism.

The book concludes with a short chapter by Bozena Tieszen, who demonstrates, through an examination of gendered linguistic occupational tokens and depictions of women in popular magazines, that even though women and men are ostensibly equal in modern-day Poland, women are still expected to practice the self-sacrificing, maternal roles of *Matka Polka* (Mother Poland), even as they are simultaneously expected to excel at their careers and to uphold Western standards of beauty and femininity. Linguistically, the women prefer occupational titles that avoid feminization, but elsewhere, they under great pressure to reproduce those traditional gender roles approved of by the Catholic Church.

I had very high hopes for this book and I read it so that I might use in my Discourse and Religion course. I came away with somewhat mixed feelings, however. On the one hand, it is a book of generally high quality, for the most part well edited, with the exception of Chapter 6, noted above. A strength of the book is that the papers are all grounded in empirical research, so it is very useful as a source of data on a range of different religious communities. Unfortunately, there is very little theorizing of women or of gender in any of the

individual chapters or in the editor's introduction, so I found myself getting to the end of each chapter and thinking that something was missing. Furthermore, the subtitle, 'Women in Discourse', seems almost misleading, since several of the chapters seemed to focus on religious discourse, with women, or issues of gender or gender roles, seeming almost to have been added in to make the study fit into the theme of the book. Women were not always as prominent in the analysis as one might expect from a book with that subtitle. Finally, I was disappointed in the variety of articles. Eight of the ten chapters dealt with one or another variety of Christianity and only two dealt with other religions. To be sure, the eight articles about Christian communities did represent a good variety of nationalities, ethnicities, and denominations, but I was expecting a wider variety of religions, given the title of the book. I think that it might have been better to have replaced the two articles that didn't deal with Christian communities and to have titled the volume something to the effect of *Language and Christian Identity*.

I do not want to leave the impression that this is not a good book. It is, and I would hope that libraries, in particular, would buy it for their collections, because it does contain valuable field research that others might draw on. It makes an important contribution to the study of gender in religious discourse and I will certainly recommend it as a resource to my students.