

Socialization

Language socialization research examines how language practices organize the life span process of becoming an active, competent participant in one or more communities. Communities comprise households, neighborhoods, peer groups, schools, workplaces, professions, religious organizations, recreational gatherings, and other institutions. Unlike language acquisition research, the analytic focus rests neither on less experienced persons as acquirers nor on more experienced persons as input but rather on socially and culturally organized interactions that conjoin less and more experienced persons in the structuring of knowledge, emotion, and social action. This is an important point, for it implicates a methodology in which the gaze and camera lens of the data collecting researcher is primarily directed at the activities undertaken rather than zooming in and tracking the actions of any one participant. Activities (e.g., telling a story, playing a game, preparing and consuming food, attempting to solve a problem, having an argument) are examined for their social and linguistic organization, including the spatial positioning of more or less experienced participants, the expressed stances, ideas, and actions that participants routinely provide or elicit and, importantly, the responses that such expressions receive. With an eye on interaction, we examine the language structures that attempt to socialize (e.g., the use of strong evidentials to claim facts or the use of affect morphology to instantiate moral values) and the interactional effects of such attempts (e.g., Are stances, ideas, or actions acknowledged? Do others display alignment? Non-alignment? Minimally? Elaborately?). From this perspective socialization is a collaborative enterprise, and language socialization researchers are in the business of articulating the architecture of that collaboration.

We tend to think of socializing interactions as repeated and enduring encounters dedicated to the mastery of some community-defined domain. Yet socializing interactions may be fleeting as well—as when one interlocutor momentarily asks another for directions or points out some hitherto

unnoticed phenomenon. This property means that ordinary conversation is an informal resource for transforming self and society and that an understanding of how conversation unfolds in specific situations and communities and the roles of author, animator, hearer, overhearer, and principal or protagonist that less and more experienced participants assume is central to understanding socialization as a continuous way of life.

While committed to the close examination of ordinary communicative exchanges, language socialization research differs from a conversation analytic or developmental pragmatic approach in its insistence on understanding interactions between neophyte and veteran interlocutors as cultural arrangements. This perspective also has methodological ramifications, for it means that the gaze and wide-angle camera lens of the observer is pulled back to situate what is happening ethnographically in a web of local theories of mind and emotion, local concepts of paths to knowledge, local modes of legal and political decision-making, language ideologies, and the like. Thus a Euro-American parent's praising of a child is tied to local notions of individual accomplishment. A parent's attempt to formulate the meaning of a child's partially intelligible utterance is tied to the idea that it is possible and appropriate to publicly guess at what another person may be thinking and feeling. Simplifying one speech to an infant is tied to the notion that infants can be conversational partners. And all of the above practices can be tied to a child-centered versus task- or situation-centered orientation of participants in an activity.

Language socialization research is aware that generalizations of this sort have several undesirable effects: for one thing, cultures are essentialized, and variation in communicative practices within communities is underemphasized. We say, for example, that Samoan caregivers communicate one way, Euro-American caregivers another way, Kaluli yet another, and so on. Our accounts also seem like fixed cameos, members and communities enslaved by convention and frozen in time rather than fluid and changing over the course of a generation, a life, and even a single social encounter. Further, in our rush to point out to developmental psychologists that there are diverse cultural paths to communicative competence and not to mistake diversity for deviance, we have tended to overemphasize the unique communicative configurations of particular communities and underspecify overarching, possibly universal, communicative and socializing practices that may facilitate socialization into multiple communities and transnational life worlds.

I end here with a brief account of how Bambi Schieffelin and I have considered such matters in individual and co-authored work. We look at a community's linguistic repertoire as a set of resources for representing ideas, displaying stances, performing acts, engaging in activities, and building social personae. Many of the linguistic resources and the ways they are socially deployed appear to be widespread and are candidate pragmatic universals. For example, there are common ways of marking the stances of certainty and uncertainty and expressing emotional intensity, and common ways of performing the socializing acts of prompting, giving directions, guessing, questioning, and clarifying. Although universal, the communicative stances

and acts themselves are locally organized in terms of who attempts to communicate them, to whom, when, how often, and how elaborately. Thus prompting has been reported widely, but its situational scope varies. In middle-income Euro-American families, for example, prompting is infrequent, endures a few turns, and typically involves only an adult-child dyad. Alternatively, prompting in Kaluli households is pervasive, endures across long stretches of interaction, and involves triadic as well as dyadic participation. Similarly, while clarifying may be universal, it is a highly dispreferred response to children's unintelligible utterances among the Kaluli and Samoan Islanders, while commonplace in Euro-American adult-child encounters.

Depending upon situational rights, access, expectations, and/or personal style, children and other novices come to understand the linguistic repertoire as a palette of subtle, expressive variations and possibilities. They become aware that members draw upon linguistic forms in the palette in different ways. For example, members use language not to portray themselves and others as generic personae such as mother, father, child, teacher, or expert, but rather to paint themselves and others as distinct kinds or blends of mother, father, child, teacher, expert, and so on. Further, rather than sticking to a single portrayal, members transform or rather attempt to transform their own and others' identities continuously over interactional and autobiographical time. While language socialization research concentrates on the role of language in the cultivation of social convention, it also considers invention and attempts to distill conditions that promote or inhibit it, including communicative settings, activities, recognized level of expertise, stage of life, and assigned state of mental and physical health of interlocutors. Socialization is ultimately a two-way street, in that more and less experienced members learn from each other by creatively deploying linguistic resources to navigate and construct the human condition.

(See also *acquisition, community, expert, healing, identity, ideology, turn*)

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