

**Teasing, Shaming and Language Socialization:  
A Literature Review**

Thomas Dore, tgd339  
Department of Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin  
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Dr. Laura Horton  
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## **Introduction to Language Socialization**

The study of language socialization is the study of the relationship between communication and culture from the perspective of the acquisition of language and socialization through language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Some of the big questions are: how does language learning happen?, how particular or unique are any of the language processes that we observe across communities?, how do inhibitions of any particular element of language socialization and development alter the process of language development (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984)? Primarily linguists in this field use longitudinal data of many conversations over a long period of time, ideally with the same people in similar circumstances over several years, or longer if possible. Sociolinguists particularly want to live in a society while performing an ethnography and get feedback on their assessments and observations by multiple locals to make sure their understandings are correct (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). One of the guiding theories is that the language instinct is innate in the human mind, though there are some issues with the idea, it is still largely held to (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984).

### **Topic Introduction**

Teasing and shaming are important undercurrents to the modulation of behavior within society. Back to near the start of our study of language socialization we read Schieffelin, 1986 and Miller, 1986, which foundationalize a lot of the frameworks that we see in the more recent papers, eg, teasing as a form of ritualized violence that educates young children how to defend themselves, and how to properly assess a threat from a joke. Teasing and shaming are important

aspects of language socialization because they are foundational aspects of society. Inescapably if you are alive you have to be able to defend yourself. Many of us are lucky enough to live in societies where this means a stern word or phrase and not being reduced to trading blows, but humans are aggressive, frequently unbalanced, and often selfish, so a person needs to be able to defend themselves. Furthermore it's a fascinating topic of study, and it adds a depth that is not seen in many other aspects of language socialization, eg, intense emotional responses, and recruitment of other children into the socialization process. The study of teasing and shaming brings a vivid picture of the social and emotional hardships that a child is being prepared for in any society, and gives us insight into how one would navigate adult society safely, ie, it is language socialization as a means of survival.

### **Article Summaries**

I read five different research papers on the topic of how teasing and shaming relate to language socialization. In this section I will evaluate each of them briefly.

*Teasing in The Linguistic Socialization of Gypsy Children in Hungary* by Zita Réger is based on longitudinal naturalistic data of two girls (Pitjinka 1mo-3yr, Bici 1;0-6;0), belonging to the same Romani community in Hungary, speaking the Mashari subdialect of the Vlach dialect (Réger, 1999). Similar to other studies we see that Romani children are socialized via teasing in ways that their community will expect them to be able to handle as adults (Réger, 1999). The teasing increases in intensity as the children get older, the contextualization cues get subtler, the teasing is gendered, and the sexualized jokes become less intense as the children grow older

(Réger, 1999). This paper contributed to the literature with its focus on teasing of young children in traditional Romani culture (Réger, 1999). This paper was quite good, it handled background information well and had some good analysis as to the types of teases that were employed, and how they changed over time (Réger, 1999). However, although there was numerical analysis in the paper, it was minimal and the graphs were not all that helpful (Réger, 1999).

*The socialisation of Interactional Rituals: A Case Study of Ritual Cursing as a Form of Teasing in Romani* by Dániel Z. Kádár and Andrea Szalai is based on the fieldwork Szalai undertook over about 3 years among the Gabor Roma communities in the Mureș county of Transylvania, they are a trilingual (Romani-Hungarian-Romanian) community and the study focused on the interaction between Kati (18yo caretaker), Zsuzska (4yo), and Teri (40yo neighbor) and Teri's son (Kádár & Szalai, 2019). This paper was the first of its kind to focus on 'ritual cursing' in Romani communities used as a teasing ritual in the socialization of young children (particularly, young girls) (Kádár & Szalai, 2019). This paper has a great deal of useful background information on the ritual of cursing in Romani communities. I disliked the transcripts format, though I appreciated the key they gave for it. The analysis was quite strong and clear, there was an appropriate amount of discourse on the (well-selected) sections of transcript, that was not overly verbose while still providing insight. This was a very good paper. As was seen in the paper in class on the Baltimore working class community (Miller, 1986), quite interestingly, we see that the violent act of cursing is used as a teasing protocol for small children within the community as preparation for encountering violent cursing in their adult lives (Kádár & Szalai, 2019). Also, similar to the paper on the Kaluli people we read in class (Schieffelin, 1986), the teasing that this Romani group engages their young children in both represents a powerful linguistic ability for adults and is used harshly against the children,

frequently bringing them beyond the point of tears (Kádár & Szalai, 2019). Another particularly interesting though under focused aspect of this paper was that cursing as language socialization is a very gendered ritual process and the girls and women of the Romani community are primarily in charge of cursing in their adult world (Kádár & Szalai, 2019).

*Crying and Crying Responses: A Comparative Exploration of Pragmatic Socialization in a Swedish and Japanese Preschool* by Asta Cekaite and Matthew Burdelski is a multimodal conversation analysis based on audio-visual recordings in a Swedish and a Japanese preschool (Cekaite & Burdelski, 2021). This paper focused on the responses of the caregivers to the event of a child crying, and on the implications that their responses have on the overarching society at large (Cekaite & Burdelski, 2021). This paper's contribution to the literature is around its focus on caregivers' responses to crying children in these two cultures. This paper's insight was primarily around the fact that Swedish caregivers mediate by having children *take action* and Japanese caregivers mediate by having children *say something*, which is (probably, the causal chain was poorly presented in the paper) related to the Japanese culture's focus on peaceful social relations and Swedish culture's focus on democratic ideals (Cekaite & Burdelski, 2021). I felt this paper was, on the whole, fairly weak, the explanations of the interactions were overlong and unenlightening, the conclusion seems unsubstantiated (or lazily assembled), and the closest they got to mathematical analysis was to count events. The one thing this paper got right was with its analysis that other children are also part of the teasing socialization process, but in 2021, when the paper was written, this is not new information.

*Socialization Practices Regarding Shame in Japanese Caregiver-Child Interactions* by Akira Takada utilizes data collected as part of the longitudinal research project "Cultural Formation of Responsibility in Caregiver-Child Interaction" which focused on 17 middle-class

families from 2007 to 2012 in the Kansai region of Japan (Takada, 2019). This paper was in a psychology journal, and focuses more on the internal states of the children, however it still utilizes linguistic methodologies and tools. Its utilization of these tools is one of its weaknesses, it reads as though it is written for a psychologist and not a linguist, ie, the language is clunky and the analysis on the transcripts was shallower than I would have liked. I found its conclusions provocative but ultimately unsupported, and would like to see a psycho-socio-linguist dive further into some of the psychological statements made (that would be ghastly in a linguistics paper) eg, teasing and shaming of children is a way of showing *love* to the children (Takada, 2019). Its contribution to the field and its primary finding is that some middle-class families in the Kansai region of Japan use the term *hazukashii* to mean shame, guilt, embarrassment, or some mix thereof, and it is employed in teasing rituals between caregivers and children (Takada, 2019). Some mathematical analysis on how frequently the phrase was employed was a nice addition as well.

*The Rite of Reintegrative Shaming in Chinese Public Dispute Mediation* by Yongping Ran, Linsen Zhao, and Dániel Z. Kádár utilizes recordings of the TV program Feichang Bangzhu which was produced by the Nongmin Channel of Hebei Province Television, a documentary program recording a public shaming event of adults by adults (Ran et. al., 2020). This paper was technically outside the scope of the report but was so good it needed to be included. The paper had great background information on interactional ritual behavior which was extremely useful in contemplating the rest of the works, it also had good and clear examples, however, the analysis was verbose and somewhat hard to follow. Also the transcript format was script-style and I found it somewhat hard to follow. The paper's primary contribution to the field was in analysis of mediation of social disputes in rural China, largely taking place between parents, their adult

children, and a trusted member of the community who was selected to mediate (Ran et. al., 2020). The conclusions of the paper were that ritual shaming is a community process in rural China to help society function as they see fit, and that the mediator would utilize violence against the wrongdoer's 'face' to get them to act appropriately (Ran et. al., 2020).

### Article Synthesis

With one exception the studies all are over young children (3 months - ~5 years) over a period of time interacting with caregivers and sometimes other children. All the research was exploring questions about teasing and shaming and how individuals' interactions were instructive as to the goals of the society, ie, the children were being socialized to the society's standards. Largely the general conclusions of the studies are that teasing is a form of socialization, particularly it's a way of ritualizing violence in such a way that it is 'playful', and is adapted to the child's ability to tolerate it. The exceptions are the study on Chinese adults by Ran, 2020, and the study by Cekaite & Burdelski, 2021 on the mediating between crying children, which were focused on closely related but slightly different topics. I stand by the idea that saying *hazukashii* in middle-class Japanese society is a form of harming another person's face and sense of self in the polite Japanese adult society. Beyond that there were also some very interesting architectural themes that came up again and again. Particularly we saw great background on teasing as "a ritual to reproduce social structures", (Kádár & Szalai, 2019), ritual and teasing as an interactional phenomenon, (Kádár & Szalai, 2019), (Lo & Fung, 2011), (Cekaite & Burdelski,

2021), and an outline of interactional ritual behavior as having four distinct characteristics (1. communally oriented, 2. anchored in normative beliefs of a broader social group, 3. manifested in a frame for the rite of aggression, 4. are emotionally invested and transgress participants' status) in Ran et. al., 2020. Largely we see the implications of the papers by Miller, 1986 and Schieffelin, 1986 to be brought to fruition, ie, we can see ritual violence in several different communities and sometimes even in different kinds of ways in the same community (as was seen in the two papers about Romani communities, Kádár & Szalai, 2019, and, Réger, 1999, based on that society's social expectations. Some of the deeper explorations we saw in Lo & Fung 2011, I didn't see come to fruition, eg, the distinction between guilt and shame did not have any impact on my understanding of any of the papers that I read.

### **Conclusion**

This topic can be slotted into any particular community of language learners, as, based on the data we've seen, it seems like every society will have their own form of interactional ritual behavior and learning of violence. Beyond that it's a bit trickier to see where it would fit in, as this is the only modality I can recall that we studied that was focused on ritualized violence as a socialization tool, otherwise we could apply the interactional ritual behavior model more widely. Perhaps things like cursing and peer socialization could be examined more closely to see if, at times, they fit a similar pattern, but I don't think they would. Cursing in a non-Romani sense of the word lacks the sort of punch and emotional weight that would be needed for it to relate, and based on our readings children are not able to fully articulate the ritual behaviors themselves (if they were, they wouldn't be being taught them), so I don't think that direction will bear fruit,



either. If I were to do this project again I would look for more conceptual pieces like Ran et. al., 2020, because the details of teasing in any given society all seemed to transpire approximately as expected, but the abstraction of it all into the modality of interactional ritual behavior was both fascinating and enlightening.

**Final Word Count:** total words - (sum: title page, headings, and this calculation)

$$2241 - 55 = 2186$$