Culture & Communication

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Anthropology 4, Winter 2021

Lecture 14: Language Socialization

Goal

To understand language acquisition from an ethnographic and cross-cultural perspective

Themes & Concepts

1. Language acquisition vs. socialization
2. Notion of “simplified register”
3. Notion of “mediated activity”
4. Notion of “Baby Talk” & its non-universality
5. Notion of “adaptation”

Language Acquisition or Development

The study of how children come to acquire the language spoken by adults and other children in their environment.

It is seen as connected with or part of cognitive development (Linguistics & Psychology, Linguistics as part of Psychology).

It includes the notion of “stages” of acquisition (e.g., “one-word,” “two-word stage”), the acquisition of grammatical categories (nouns, verbs, negation, past tense), sentence types (questions, subordinate clauses), speech acts, politeness, etc.

Until the 1970s done almost exclusively on European languages.

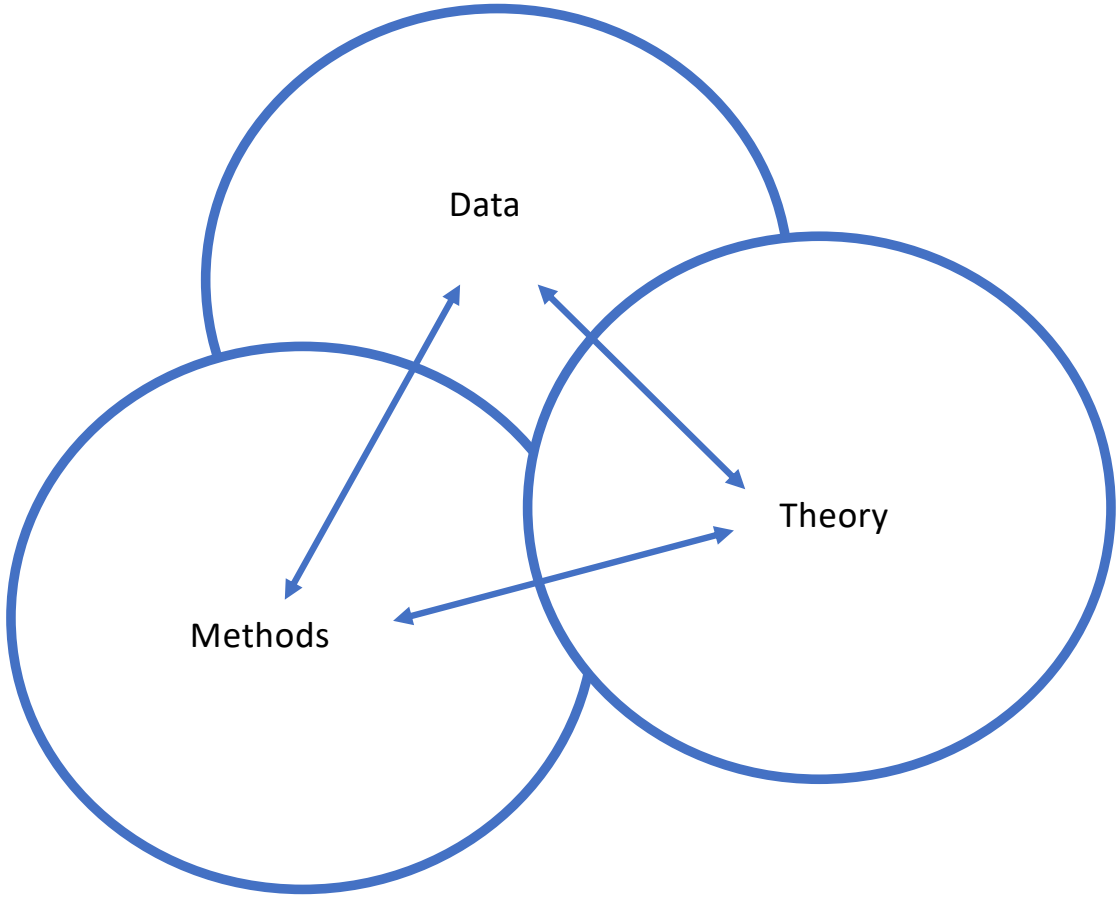
Language Socialization

Based on the notion of “communicative competence” (see *Reader*, §7)

2 Meanings of “language socialization”

1. Socialization **into** language, i.e., to become competent speakers-hearers of a language, to know how and when to use it to do what.

2. Socialization **through** language, i.e., language is used to socialize children to become particular kinds of persons (e.g., attentive, assertive, submissive, dependent, independent, self-centered, other-centered, helpful, free to experiment, entertaining, funny, controlled, etc.)



Methods, Data, and Theory are 3 dimensions of research projects. They are interdependent, i.e., they interact and influence each other.

3 Questions about Baby Talk (BT)

1) What is Baby Talk? (Object of Study, motivating the DATA collection)

2) How to study it? (Methods)

3) Why Baby Talk? (Theory)

Questions, comments?

2 APPROACHES

1. Linguistics: BT is a simplified register & seems universal.

2. Linguistic Anthropology: BT is part of a set of strategies for socialization and is not universal.

Features of Baby Talk (BT)

Greater redundancy (*Where is Mommy?*)

Slower speech

More careful articulation

lengthening of sounds (*goo::d! rea:::lly?*)

repetition

paraphrases of ambiguous phrases

expansion of child's utterances

More Features of Baby Talk

Special rules (*baby hungry, mommy here*)

Special names (*choochoo, horsey, doggie*)

Different word accent

Simplification of consonant clusters (CC-> C)

push: tit/ push tit

/mo Ay⇑këll/

mo:. mo. /a:ykël/

mo

-ycle

((loud)) RIDE IT⇑

one, one,

big -hh O::NE, [wä::n]

wow!

push it?

what? Michael?

wha:t?

motor//cycle?

did you see a motor//cycle?

oh you wanna ride the motorcycle=
=oh we rode the motorcycle at
Chuck E. Chee::⇑ze,

one,

you rode a- big motorcycle?

w:(h)ow!

A “Simplified Register” (Ferguson)

A way (or style) of talking that is designed for interlocutors who are considered not fully competent.

Ex. Baby Talk, Foreigner Talk

A “Simplified Register” (Ferguson)

Simplified registers like Foreigner Talk or Baby Talk can also be seen as examples of Recipient Design.

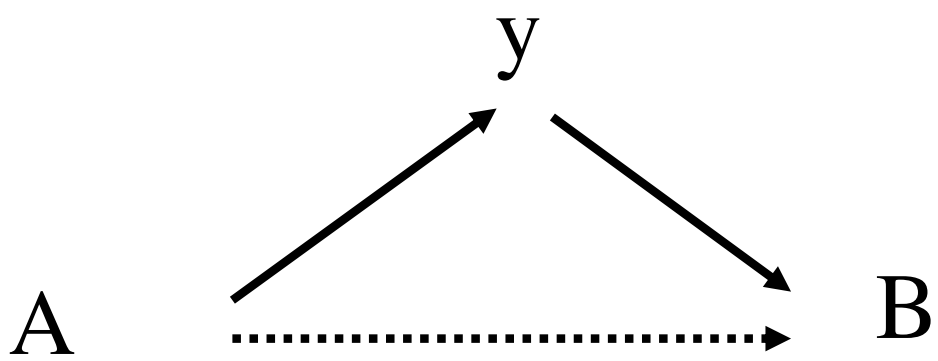
Speakers *adapt* to their idea of what the hearer-recipient can understand.

Speakers’ ideas about language and language use are called their “language ideology”.

A “mediated activity” (L. Vygotsky)

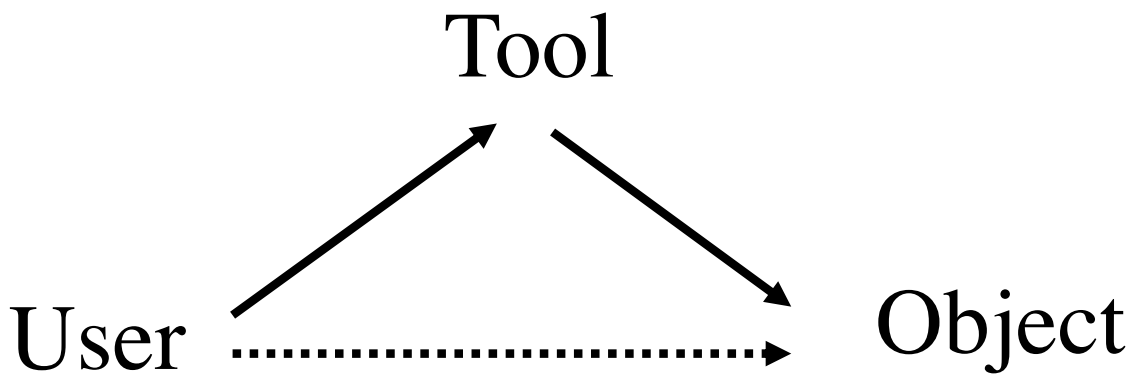
A simplified register, like any type of talk, can also be analyzed as one of the 3 elements of a “mediated activity”

A Mediated Activity



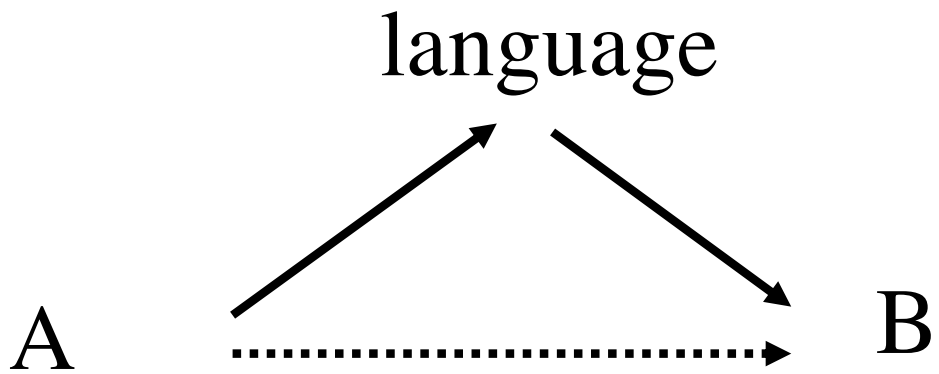
y *mediates* between A and B

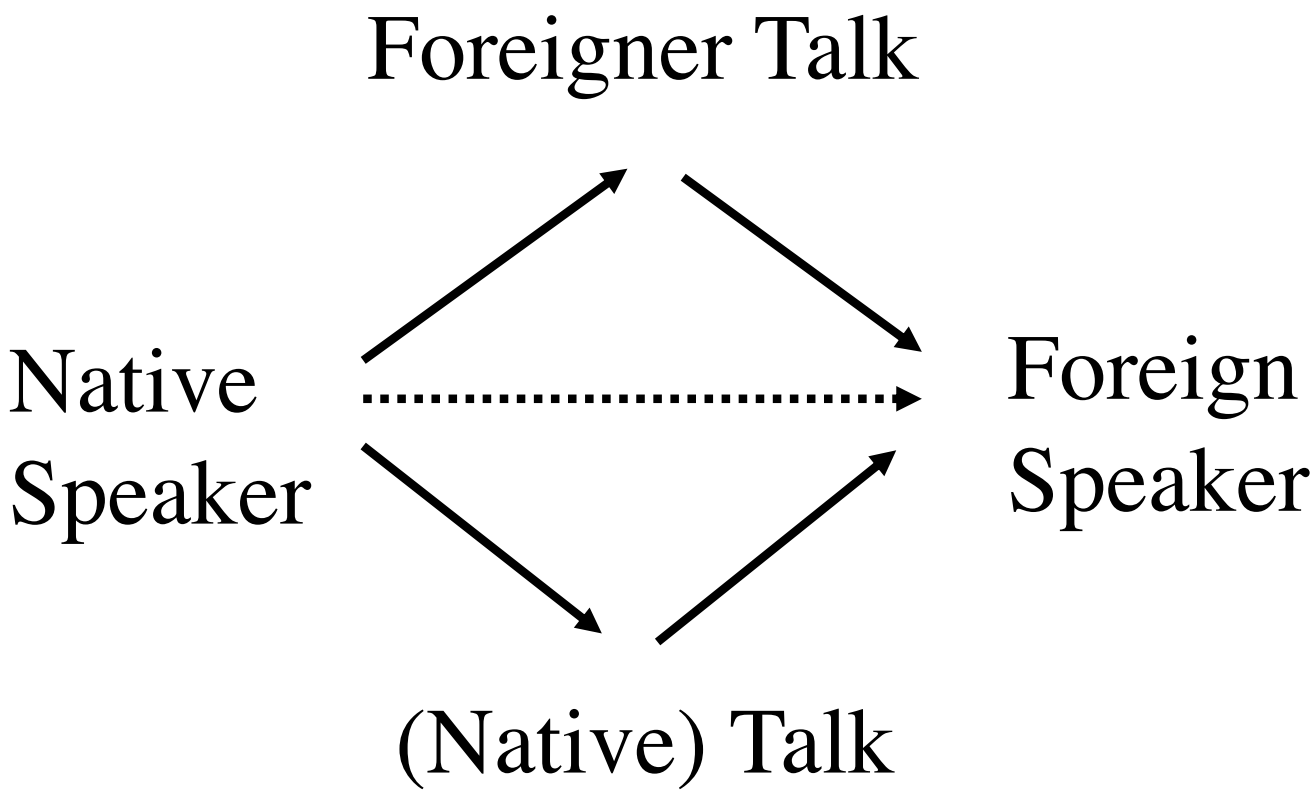
Interaction Mediated by a tool

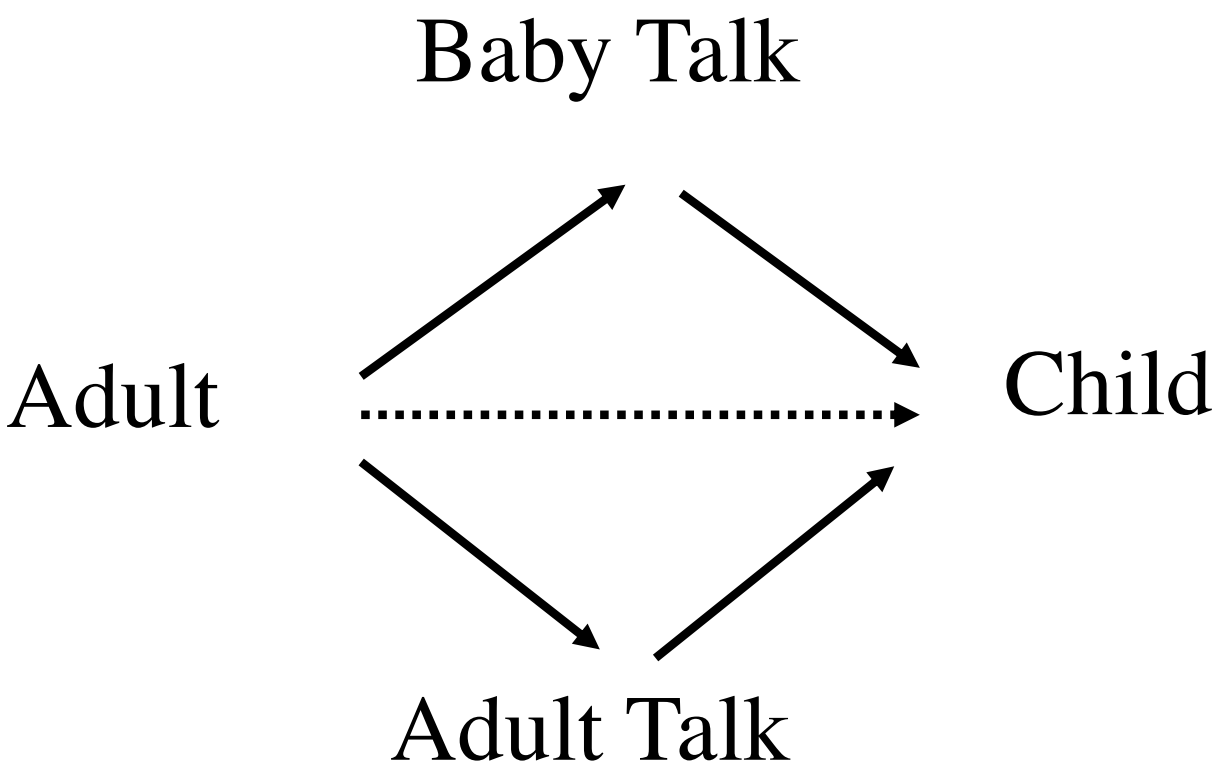


Each tool has some properties that define how it mediates

Interaction Mediated by Language




Foreigner Talk
Native Speaker
Foreign Speaker
(Native) Talk


Baby Talk
Adult
Child
Adult Talk

2nd Approach

Language socialization

What is it?

What does it show?

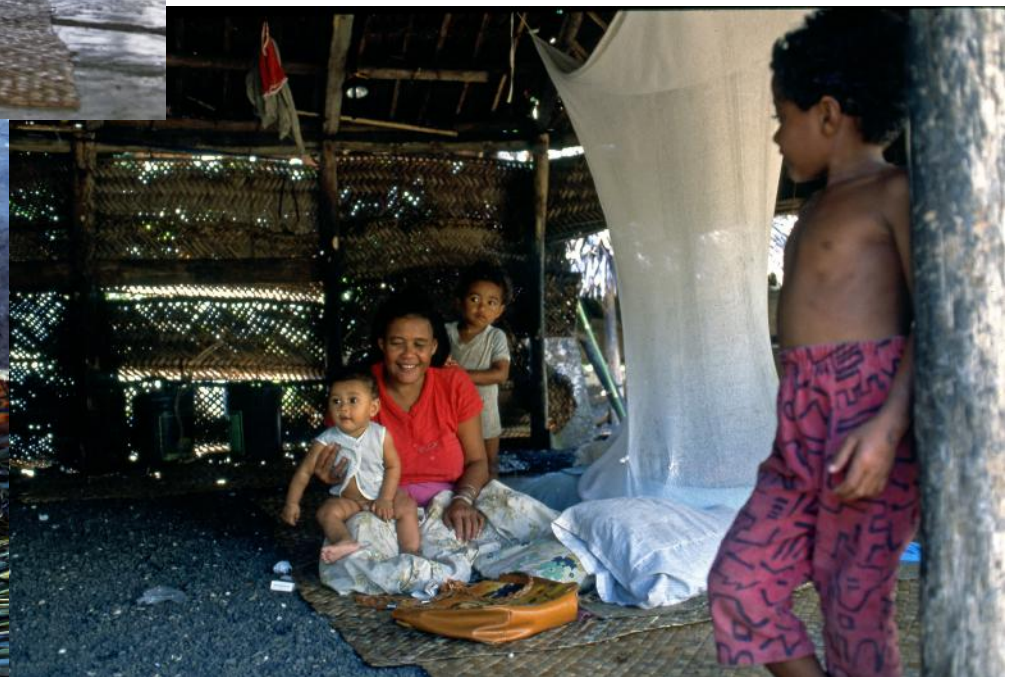
What does it claim?

Possible research questions

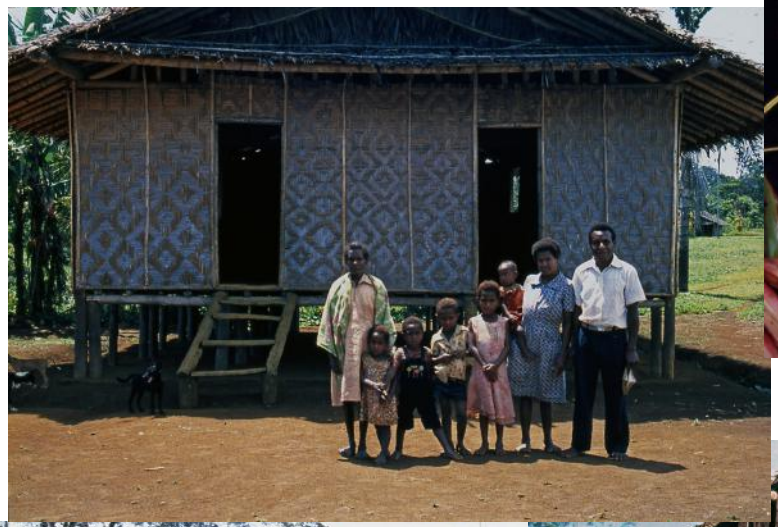
Is “baby talk” universal?

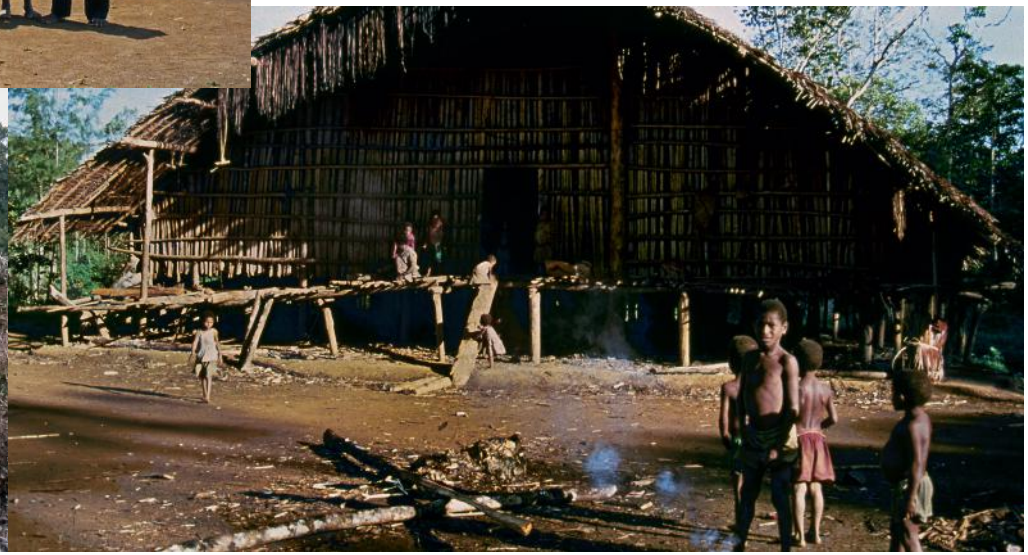
Is “baby talk” necessary to facilitate language acquisition?

(Western) Samoa



Kaluli (or Bosavi) (PNG)





Language Socialization

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Language Socialization claims
2 basic strategies

1. Adapt situation to child
2. Adapt child to situation

★ADAPT SITUATION TO CHILD:

1) Simplified Register (Baby Talk)

2) Cooperative building of utterances between caregiver and child

3)Caregiver follows child's topic

4) Typical participation format: Two-party (dyadic) interactions

★ADAPT CHILD TO ★SITUATION:

1) Modeling of unsimplified utterances (e.g. Calling...)

2) Child directed to notice others

3) Topics arise from context controlled by caregiver

4) Typical participation format: Multiparty interactions

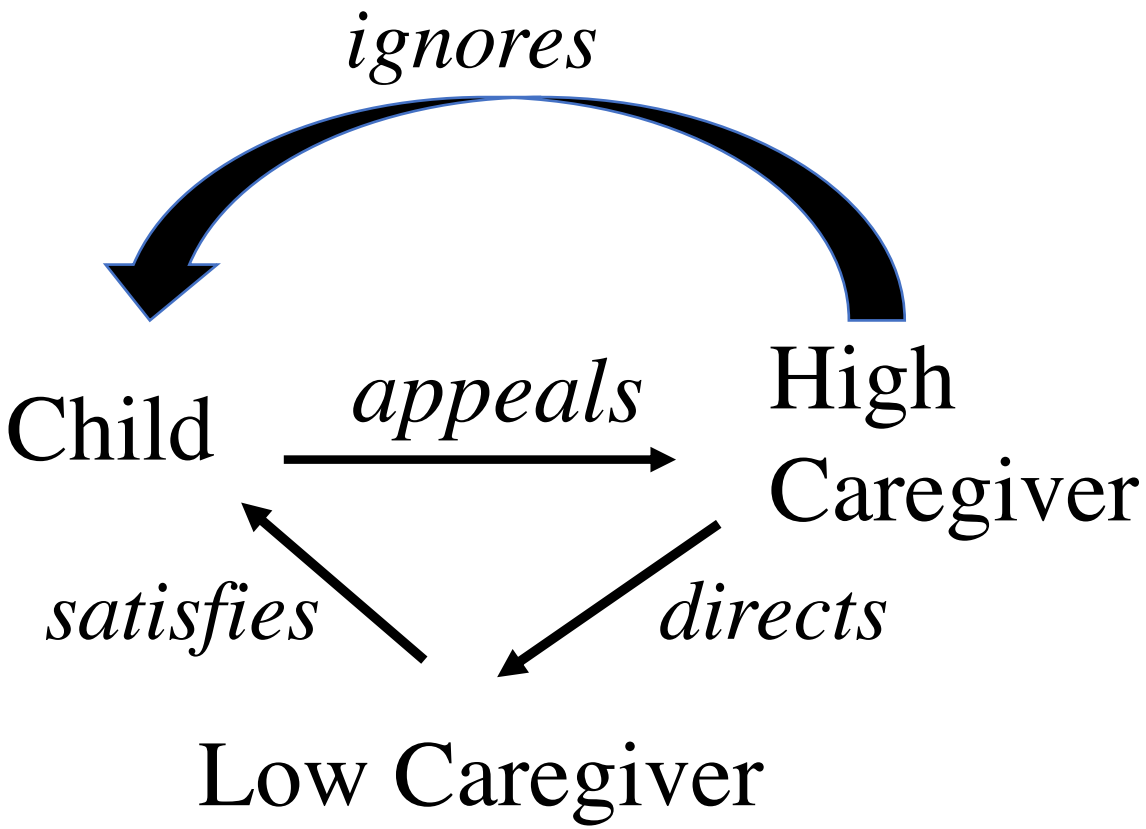
“Trick-r-Treat”

✓ Based on data collected in 1989 by Wendy Fonarow for her Master Thesis in Anthropology at UCLA.

OCT 31 1989

Mother-Child Interaction in a Samoan Village

Based on research by Elinor Ochs


ignores
Child
appeals
High Caregiver
satisfies
directs
Low Caregiver

Examples of non-adaptation

Film and video segments from Samoa (A. Duranti & E. Ochs).

Watch edited film on Samoan caregiving (at 11m:03s)

Language acquisition is embedded in cultural practices, that is, routine interactions in the lived space informed by beliefs and expectations (what does it mean to be an X?).

Main Points

Child Discourse has been studied with different methods (e.g., talk by children & talk to children)

Each method uncovers different aspects of a child's world and different properties of language.

Language socialization sees talk as part of larger set of strategies