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Children Socializing Children: Practices for Negotiating the Social Order Among Peers

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This special issue brings together a set of six articles that examine embodied language practices in peer interaction and sibling groups. All six contributions, based on ethnographic video-recorded data collections, demonstrate how children utilize language, gesture, posture, and other semiotic resources to co-construct moral and social order. These articles demonstrate children's ingenuity in building and subverting local social hierarchies, including their ways of co-constructing age and gender hierarchies in pretend play (Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007), their ways of excluding and including other children in the local group (Evaldsson, 2007; Goodwin, 2007), and their use of subversive forms of address and person

The articles in this special issue were originally part of a session entitled Children Socializing Children: Cultural Production, Participation and Authoritative Discourse in Peer Play Interactions at the 2005 International Pragmatics Associations meetings at Riva del Garda, Italy. We thank Karin Aronsson and Jenny Cook-Gumperz for their comments on our articles.

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depictions (de León, 2007; Reynolds, 2007; Evaldsson, 2007; Goodwin, 2007; Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007).

The study of children's peer talk and interaction developed through several phases to look at how children, in their naturally occurring peer groups, become agents of their own socialization (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2004; Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro, 1986; Corsaro, 1985, 1992; Eder, 1995; Ervin-Tripp, Guo, & Lampert, 1990; Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan, 1977; Gaskins, Miller, & Corsaro, 1992; Goodwin, 1980, 1990a; Kyratzis, 2004; Thorne, 1993). (See Cook-Gumperz & Kyratzis, 2001, and Kyratzis, 2004, for reviews.) Through their talk, children construct their own ideas of valued behaviors and identities in their peer or kin groups.

Making use of ethnographically grounded approaches to examine talk-in-interaction, the articles in this issue provide new ways of looking at children's interactional competence by emphasizing their agentive use of language for constructing the moral and social order of their own peer worlds. They manage and monitor local hierarchies as displayed in their accomplishment of subordination and authority in local play-role hierarchies (Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007); their formation of hierarchies in friendship assessments and peer alignments (Evaldsson, 2007; Goodwin, 2007); and last, the subversion of hierarchies as in playful greetings (de León, 2007; Reynolds, 2007).

Our work analyzes how children make use of linguistic resources from the adult culture, for example, control act forms, accounts, person descriptors, assessments, teases, greetings, *palabras* (types of verbal dueling), and forms of parallel language structures to provide their own rendering of these practices, often subverting adult forms. Previous interpretive approaches to the study of children's peer socialization have emphasized that children "actively transform or resist certain value-laden messages" (Gaskins et al., 1992, p. 14) and resources from the adult culture; the articles in this issue carry forward this tradition but add three new perspectives. First, we emphasize children's use of resources for "construct[ing] and reconstruct[ing] their social organization on an ongoing basis" (Goodwin, 1990b, p. 35). Second, we focus on ethnographically grounded studies of moment-to-moment embodied, multimodal sequences of interaction. Third, we expand the range of cultural contexts in which children's peer interaction has been studied previously.

Reynolds (2007) and de León (2005, 2007) have investigated communities in which children spend large parts of their day being cared for and interacting with older children, adolescents, and adult kin in mixed-age

groupings (de León, 2005; Ochs, 1988; Reynolds, 2002; Rogoff, 1981) rather than receiving caregiving by adults, and spending large periods of time interacting with peers in age-graded groupings. The role of children in socializing children is particularly critical for understanding how identities are negotiated in the increasingly multicultural and multilingual post-colonial and transnational societies where children grow up today.

The articles for this issue provide empirically grounded studies of talk-in-interaction to examine how children co-construct activities, meanings, identities, values, and contexts together with their peers and/or siblings. Goodwin (1990a) noted that "in order to coordinate their behavior with that of their coparticipants, human beings must display to each other what they are doing and how they expect others to participate in the activity of the moment" (p. 1). Members of a society collaboratively establish within interactions how relevant events are to be interpreted (Garfinkel, 1967). Examining talk-in-interaction provides ways of analyzing how participants co-construct social situations and social relationships across sequences of interaction.

We begin the issue with articles by Griswold (2007) and Kyratzis (2007) who examine sequences of directives, assessments, the use of membership categorization devices, and other linguistic resources utilized to construct dramatic play. In play, children can construct dialogues in which characters take contrastive positions and stances to one another, permitting the playing out of an event in full dramatic regalia through a multiplicity of voices (Goffman, 1974). Griswold examines a frequently neglected issue in studies of children's interaction: how power is legitimated in children's groups. She articulates how children in middle childhood display subordination to dominant peers through their talk and embodied actions as well as through use of physical space during children's informal play. Rather than focusing on situations of conflict, she examines requests to the dominant girl and displays of helplessness as well as gaze aversion and crouched body positions that girls use to construct themselves as positioned in a subordinate position and cast one of their peers as occupying an authoritative status. Similarly, through the social roles they allocate to one another in pretend play (i.e., giving a peer they usually position as occupying an authoritative status the role of mother), children construct their peer group social positions relative to one another.

Kyratzis (2007) examines the virtuosity that young girls display in the midst of two dramatic play activities: reporting on the news and playing prince-princess dating. Not only do girls display mastery of genre and

social roles in the adult world—animating the hesitating, uncertain demeanor of a stupid person, the authority of a master of ceremonies to bring on and remove acts from the stage while sounding flip and rude, as well as the authoritative demeanor of a king vis-à-vis female characters (e.g., queen); in organizing the activity and in the social roles they allocate to one another in play, children delineate asymmetries in their local social organization.

Two articles (Goodwin, 2007, and Evaldsson, 2007) analyze how group members coconstruct the moral order of the peer group. They investigate the use of linguistic practices (e.g., assessments, forms of membership categorization, and accounts based on culturally specific values), examining how these activities unfold in sequences of interaction to allow group members to constantly define and redefine the social situation and hold one another accountable to it. By negotiating their alignments to moral issues they take up in their talk, they negotiate their alignments to one another.

de León (2007) and Reynolds (2007) both examine children's use, and subversion of, genre. Most child language approaches look at children's acquisition of preformed genres and language structures available in the adult culture (stories, greetings). In the approach taken here, de León (2007) and Reynolds (2007) examine how children pay careful attention to the syntactic and phonetic shape of the talk of the prior speaker and to the turn structure of verbal genres such as games, ridiculing, and humorous exchanges. Children appropriate genres, subvert them, and recombine their features to construct meanings, moralities, and ideological responses of their own. By violating the turn sequence of a greeting ritual or by substituting a new address term, child kin group members can negotiate shifting alliances or challenge age-graded hierarchies within their kin group. Through such practices, children as young as 2 years (de León, 2007) display, among other abilities, metalinguistic awareness of the mechanics of parallel structures in conversation.

This special issue includes studies of Western Russian children; Mayan Tzotzil children of Chiapas, Mexico; highland Mayan Guatemalan children; Kurdish-Finnish, Romani, and Bosnian immigrant children in Sweden; and North American children ranging in age from preschool through to preadolescence of various social classes. We add the following new perspectives. First, we make use of longitudinal, ethnographic techniques, involving videotaping and following children in naturally occurring friendship and sibling groupings over periods lasting several months,

years, or in one case, decades. The analytic foci of these articles include linguistic and embodied negotiation and conflict resolution processes and practices of enacting power, sanctioning, and exclusion used among children in their naturally occurring friendship and peer groups.

Second, the articles take as their unit of analysis the social activity rather than a particular speech act. Third, they focus attention on the orchestration of talk within a situated activity system (Goffman, 1961). We are concerned with how participants constitute their social life in moment-to-moment interaction through publicly available resources and embodied practices and how these moves are ratified or challenged by others in sequences of interaction.

One of the common themes across the articles is how conjointly children use various cultural resources—adjacency pairs (directive–response, insult–return–insult sequences, etc.), format tying, bodily positions, membership categorizations—to construct participation frameworks. All of the articles deal with participation frameworks within face-to-face encounters, examining the crafting of social identities (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996). Directive–response sequences provide a means through which children can enact positions of dominance and subordination. Kyratzis (2007) illustrates how in pretend play, child preschool pretenders can enact a subordinate role by voicing their own character to sound inept or not in control of the situation through making requests for information or permission. Evaldsson (2007) looks at how in the midst of talking about relational troubles, 11-year-old girls can mobilize coalitions of three against one against a “bad friend” through negative person descriptions. The Griswold (2007) and Goodwin (2007) articles examine how children (literally) position themselves to carry out their incumbent roles in the activity. Griswold is concerned with how girls display their subordination to a powerful girl not only through talk (making requests) but also through bodily displays. Goodwin (2007) analyzes how girls in a friendship relationship closely align their bodies, at points embracing one another, whereas a girl who is more marginal positions her body at a distance from the focal participants. De León (2007) examines how young children sustain a dual participation framework in a verbal duel based on a greeting. She also looks at how the same siblings achieve participant alignment in intergenerational interaction. Also concerned with verbal dueling, Reynolds (2007) examines how an improvised insult is entextualized and keyed in different ways within and across participation frameworks involving peers and kin (ages 2–14 years), becoming an institutionalized family and peer network practice.

Ethnography provides a way of discovering the important members' categories of a social group. Sacks (1972) argued that membership categorizations consist of particular actions or category-bound activities that are constitutive of a specific category (see also Butler & Weatherall, 2006, for an analysis of membership categorization in children's pretend play). We explore children's competencies in making use of locally relevant and culturally specific categories through examining negative depictions of actions addressed to those positioned as transgressors. Negative category-bound activities in Evaldsson's (2007) data—including fighting, blaming, exploiting others, lying, and talking behind people's backs—were associated with the category "bad friend." Goodwin (2007) found the term *tagalong* being used to refer to a girl who attempted to play with girls in a popular clique but never completely belonged. Reynolds (2007) notes that *Ma'quito* (a pejorative nickname indexing a local bread maker/deliveryman), *Chiricuta* (nickname of an inebriated middle aged woman), *Gema India* (denoting an indigenous woman figure), and *Tía Guatemala* (old maid of Guatemala) are all used in conflict talk among children as address terms. Terms such as *pig*, *lizard*, and *old rooster* are used by Tzotzil children studied by de León (2007) as address terms in their greeting games. Griswold (2007) finds that the term *fatsó* is used when portraying someone as dependent and inept among children in middle childhood. Kyratzis (2007) illustrates how, in pretend play, a young pretender, acting as head news reporter/announcer, orients to her peer subannouncer's character as inept, calling her *silly*. The news reporter category is itself divided into a hierarchy of value levels (head news reporter, subannouncer), enabling the children's construction of local social order. The assessment adjectives, pejorative person descriptors, and negative categorizations of activities and actors all point to implicit cultural values that the children invoke and orient to as they accomplish their alignments to one another in the interaction.

Format tying is another theme shared across the articles. We find that participants make creative pragmatic use of the local environment of talk, that is, the immediately prior discourse, for the formulation of their next utterances. Keenan's (1983) early work "Making it Last: Repetition in Children's Discourse" critiqued the notion that simple imitation was taking place with children's repetition.¹ Rather, Keenan (1983) argued that important pragmatic functions were being accomplished through repetition: querying, self-informing, commenting attitudinally, agreeing, as well as imitation (pp. 31–32) and reversing the direction of an information question, requesting clarification, providing a reciprocal move such as a greeting,

and so forth (p. 33). Work by Sacks (1995) on tying techniques showed that much of the connectedness between separate turns is achieved through systematic syntactic operations, procedures that achieve what Jakobson (1966, 1968) has called parallelism in language. Practices similar to those of tying techniques have been discussed as format tying (Goodwin, 1990a), dialogic syntax (Dubois, 2007), as well as "dialogic repetition" (Brown, 1998), entailing close formal semantic and syntactic parallel structures across conversational turns.

A range of conversational actions can be accomplished through format tying. In assessment sequences, Southern California girls (Goodwin, 2007) display their common alignment toward a target through producing format-tied utterances—utterances that make use of a prior utterance in framing a new assessment with slight semantic changes. By repeating what someone else has said, girls extend participation in talk that aligns with another speaker against a target across several utterances. Maintaining the structure of the prior utterance while making minimal semantic shifts, young Tzotzil speakers (see de León, 2007) perform transformations in framing (Goffman, 1974). One way in which young Tzotzil children play with issues of framing (and authorship) is by omitting the evidential particle *la* (it is said), required when reporting a message (such as "It is time to eat"). Thus, a message authored by a more senior kinsperson inviting people to come to have lunch is reframed by a 4-year-old as his own utterance, with his younger 2-year-old brother joining him in a playful game of repetition with Grandpa. Tzotzil children create games such as the greeting game in which a prior utterance is repeated with the substitution of a noun in the address term slot. Tzotzil children can subvert the play frame in greetings—for example, by employing an address term that uses adult ritual kinship terms of reference (*compadre*) in a greeting from a young child to his older brother. As discussed by Reynolds (2007), Mayan children in San Antonio Aguas Calientes use the greeting *Buenos Dias* in ways that subvert traditional meanings (using it in inappropriate contexts, between kin after midday, and with a military salute). Goffman (1974) showed how in creating a cited figure (by quoting a prior speaker), a speaker (as "animator") takes up a stance toward the words being quoted. Children's commentaries on their interlocutors' moves may provide mocking responses, for example, in Antonero culture by repeating *Buenos Dias* with a feminized falsetto voice, recasting the identity of prior speaker and turning speaker's own words against him. Violating expectations about sequencing can also be consequential for the interaction. In pretend play (Kyratzis, 2007), when a

child initiates a turn sequence (e.g., bringing their peer's character on stage) and fails to follow up on the projected sequence by taking them off the stage too soon, this can convey a disrespect to their peer's character. The findings here illustrate how both moves of alignment and misalignment can be accomplished through how prior moves are tied to, transformed, followed up on, or not followed up on in the talk.

The analyses demonstrate that children command a range of cultural and linguistic resources including speech acts associated with different roles and social category designations. As in the "productive-reproductive" model of peer socialization put forth by Corsaro (1992), children are viewed here as able to "select from and creatively use cultural resources" (Gaskins et al., 1992, p. 7) and also as able to subvert them and to apply them toward their own peer group goals. These articles show that central goals of group members are to negotiate their social positions and accomplish the social organization of their local peer group within their own "arenas of action" (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). They teach one another linguistic and embodied practices for standing up for themselves, holding one another accountable for moral action, and subverting age-graded hierarchy. Through language practices such as accounts, person descriptors, assessments, and humorous interchanges involving laughing at and subverting established social order, they index appropriate and inappropriate behavior for the peer group (Evaldsson, 2002). In so doing, they make use of practices that can marginalize certain members and build asymmetrical relationships among group members (Evaldsson, 2002; Goodwin, 2002).

Children rely on a range of embodied practices to socialize one another and hold one another accountable to their local understandings of social norms. Goodwin (2007) explores how children excluded from a softball game collaborate in the negative assessment of offending parties first, through contrasting ways of being in the world (being concerned with how one looks as opposed to how one acts), and second, through elaborated hand-clap celebrations affirming their mutual orientations. As Evaldsson (2007) argues, participants in interaction use membership categorization to describe coparticipants as *good* versus *bad* friends such that normative gender behaviors are implicitly inferred. In addition to countering gender stereotypes (views of girls' "cooperative" language and ethic of care), these articles point to new methodologies for understanding affect and embodiment. They provide new conceptions of social and communicative competence by considering how children evaluate the speech of their interlocutors

in terms of culturally appropriate understandings and accomplish social alignments during sequences of interaction.

In providing ethnographically based studies of naturally occurring interaction in the life world of particular groups, the studies presented here document how observed moment-to-moment processes of interactions are informed by a diversity of culturally specific notions of appropriate social action and provide a range of types of social organization that are possible for those groups. These include face-threatening acts and forms of "character contests"—"moments of action [during which] the individual has the risk and opportunity of displaying to himself and sometimes to others his style of conduct" (Goffman, 1967, p. 267)—as well as actions that demonstrate orientation toward a social solidarity principle (Heritage, 1984, p. 268; Lerner, 1996). Children move fluidly from play to resistance, from humor to confrontation. With negative assessments, participants can form alliances against someone, demonstrating collaborative action in the production of competitive moves. The close observation of children interacting, negotiating, and teaching one another provide new ways of envisioning the processes through which human sociality is developed during childhood.

NOTES

- 1 On the notion of repetition, see also Tannen (1987).

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