suffixed, for example, than prefixes (e.g., Hungarian, French), some have no affixation at all (Mandarin Chinese). And while most languages have a few irregular forms that must be learned one by one (e.g., the irregular past tense forms of English verbs like bring, see, break, or hit), others have a certain number of regular systems (e.g., Plurals of nouns in Arabic), and still others have highly regular word forms with virtually no exceptions (as in Turkish).

Language typology plays an important role. In many languages, word order serves a grammatical function, indicating what is given versus new information in the speaker’s utterance. Grammatical relations are signaled by case endings on nouns, such as an affix that indicates that the noun is the subject. In other languages, word order serves a grammatical function, marking subject versus object, so the ordering of the parts in a phrase (subject versus object) matter (as in Greek and Arabic). And regularity in a language, depending on typology, is another domain where patterns of acquisition depend on the type of language being acquired.

Finally, research has shown that comprehension is ahead of production. (In adults, this translates as more extensive than production.) This allows children to store target forms and constructions in memory and use those representations as guides for their own productions. Since comprehension is ahead, they can always use it to help correct and shape their own productions, gradually aligning their own spoken forms with what they hear and understand from others.

SEE ALSO: Bilingualism; Cognitive Development; Communication, Development of; Language Disorders and Delay; Narrative; Sociolinguistic Diversity


LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL LIFE. A central tenet of linguistic anthropology is that language is the lifeblood of social life. Language is a symbol of political collectivities, a mirror of locally valued beliefs, and a tool for creatively attaining social ends. Children become not only speakers of languages but also speakers of cultures. The language varieties that they acquire are informed by and help to constitute sociocultural worlds. These worlds are generated through recurring social interactions that transpire within and across social groups. As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein emphasized, language forms derive their meanings largely from the contexts in which they are used. Particular language forms are conventionally linked to particular contexts, such that they signal or index those contexts. Just as a certain style of clothes can index a particular social identity, so can a certain way of asking for things index a particular social relationship. Likewise, the use of specialized vocabulary can index expertise, and pronunciation can index social class. Children come to know these meanings through a process of socialization with caregivers and other members of the group. Eventually, as children mature and participate in diverse social situations and institutions, they may transform these meanings, subject to the constraints of their sociopolitical positionings and educational opportunities. Such indexical knowledge is foundational to the communicative competence required of social agents across the world’s speech communities.

One of the illusions that contemporary anthropologists have put to rest is that “culture” can be mapped onto “society” as enduring and undifferentiated units. Instead, a prevailing anthropological view holds that children engage multiple social worlds, become aware of social difference, and eventually are drawn into struggles for power. At the same time, they are influenced by ways of thinking, being, and (inter)acting that shift across contexts and transcend local boundaries, as traditional expectations dialogue with the effects of migration, hybridization, and globalization. Children growing up in all reaches of the planet embrace sociocultural diversity in the home, school, sites of worship, workplace, and recreational environments.

For example, in the 1970s, young Samoan children wore an ie latulau cloth wrapped around them as primary dress while at home in the village but changed to European dress to attend pastor’s school in the late afternoon. At pastor’s school, they learned distinct Samoan language practices such as text question-answer sequences and reading numbers, letters, and texts from the Bible along with ideologies related to Christian morality and Anglocentric pedagogy. In addition, radio broadcasts, public schooling, trips to the capital, and migratory flows to and from New Zealand and American Samoa introduced English into children’s repertoires. By 1988, electricity had arrived in most villages and with it the first television sets bringing English language, largely American programming. Today, Internet, video, and other media further transport Pacific Island children into the English-language-dominated global market of ideas and material objects and allow Samoan family members to communicate across national boundaries.

Deeply rooted cultural orientations, however, make themselves felt, even, or especially, in a rapidly changing social universe. For example, when children act in ways that challenge social expectations, family members, teachers, and others often react by displaying culturally conservative views of how one ought to behave. Moreover, not only the content but also the form of communication directed to children tends to be resilient and widely shared by members of a social group. In many societies, a special register (baby talk), characterized by simplification and exagger-
Our Language

A FRIENDSHIP THAT TRANSCENDED LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL BORDERS

"Uweryumachini!" Colin and Sadiki kicked up puffs of pale yellow dust as they jumped up and down, pointing to an airplane flying high above them in the clear blue Kenyan sky. "Uweryumachini!" Again and again they shouted gleefully, giggles punctuating each utterance. I listened over the swirl of the warm morning breeze, certain the local Swahili word for airplane was ndage. I called them closer and asked them to slowly repeat what they were saying. They paused, looked at each other as if a secret had been revealed, giggled, and slowly pronounced, "Who-are-you-machini!" They uttered the phrase as a single word with a Swahili accent. It was their word for airplane. I was to discover this invented word was part of a unique growing vocabulary and grammar: a communication system two friends, one African and one American, from vastly different worlds, called "our language."

It was 1975. I was a graduate student studying a troop of olive baboons on a 48,000-acre cattle ranch in the up-country Kenya bush. My son, Colin, was 5 years old. The English ranch owners had made a remote old manager's quarters available to the baboon research project. The dozen hillside African residents worked for very meager wages either for the research project or the ranch. Everyone lined up to greet the wazungu (white foreigners) when we pulled our Volkswagen bus into the courtyard. Sadiki, the son of Samburu ranch workers, stood out in the crowd. He was Colin's size and 5 years old. Their eyes fixed on each other immediately. In the midst of the formality and confusion of the introductions, everyone observed the instant magnetism between the two boys. They were to become inseparable friends, playing together daily for the next 16 months. A soccer ball, a wheel rim and stick, an old rope swing hanging from the lone tree in the courtyard, and Colin's collection of matchbox cars were favorite and frequent play props.

Each family on this multilingual hillside spoke their own tribal language to one another: Luo, Abaluhya, Samburu, or Turkana. We spoke English. The language used to communicate across linguistic and cultural borders was a regional variety of Swahili. Initially, Sadiki and Colin struggled to communicate in Swahili, using lots of gestures and charades. Lying side by side in Colin's bed looking at comic books, they softly pointed out simba (lion), samaki (fish), and the few Swahili words they knew in common. Sitting in the shade, Sadiki patiently taught Colin melodic traditional songs. Within weeks they seemed to be in effortless continual conversation, pretending to hunt herds of Thompson's gazelles in the tall grasses, or racing matchbox cars in an imaginary African Safari Rally game, playing "Action Man" or "Batman."

Soon, however, everyone noticed that their Swahili was "different." It was unintelligible to Swahili speakers. Visitors, hearing the children play, would be impressed with Colin's Swahili only to remark a few minutes later, "That's not Swahili, is it?" Sadiki's older brother, home on his school break, offered, "The language they speak is a very complicated one. Nobody understands it but the two of them." Sadiki's parents declared that because the boys loved each other so much, Mungu (God) had blessed them with this special language. Sadiki's grandfather traveled several hundred miles from the Samburu Reserve to see the nafile mazi (good friends) that Mungu had blessed. His spear gleamed in the sunlight as the lean old muscular warrior, draped in a loose blanket and adorned with traditional earplugs and beaded armbands, nicate with children, along with relevant artifacts such as books, writing tools, and video and audio recordings.

A central idea in language socialization research is that as children acquire language, they become members of one or more communities; conversely, membership entails competence in the language code itself (including phonology, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse). Through interactions with other members, children become socialized into the preferences and expectations surrounding use of phonological forms (e.g., sound variants that mark socioeconomic and ethnic affiliations), lexical or vocabulary items (e.g., kin terms, respect terms, personal names), morphosyntactic structures (e.g., active/passive voice to emphasize/de-emphasize agency), and discourse (e.g., genres that attempt to influence the thoughts and behaviors of others). Mature members of a social group may use language to present an explicit socializing message. For example, they may sanction a child's social move (e.g., "That's not the way you ask for it") or otherwise direct novices to behave in a certain manner. Overwhelmingly, however, language...
Our Language

(continued)

blessed the boys' special friendship. He strode up to Colin, took his hand and split twice in his palm, an intimate Samburu gesture of lasting friendship.

I began to record the boys' interactions. Using ethnographic and linguistic analysis, I studied their unique communication. I discovered their private language shared characteristics of pidgins or simplified contact languages all over the world. They had an extensive lexicon that included English and Swahili loan words, modified words, and many newly invented words. For example, "sun" in Swahili is just. Instead, using two Swahili words in vivid metaphor, they called the sun kibwana moto (big fire). When I asked Colin what their word diding meant, he provided a translation and an etymology. Sadiki and he were playing soccer one day when Colin saw baboons coming. The rule was that when baboons came near the headquarters, the boys should be inside with windows and doors locked. Sadiki could not see the baboons behind him. Colin could not remember the Swahili word for "fast." Colin shouted out the play noise they made for speeding cars. "Diding!" Sadiki immediately understood. They ran "fast!" and safely entered the headquarters. Their invented language generated original tense and aspect markers. For example, they used the Swahili verb kuje (to come) to mark future tense and the verb ende (to go) for ongoing action. These creative grammatical features are linguistically sophisticated and more common to creolized pidgin languages that have been used by large populations over generations. Surprisingly, the boys created these innovations within a few months and at an age when the literature identified them as developing language learners rather than virtuoso language inventors.

Their language and their friendship developed in an extremely isolated and insulated context. Wildlife was abundant and often potentially dangerous, including 30 varieties of poisonous snake, leopard, hippo, Cape buffalo, and predatory baboons. This intimidating environment made for a restrictive life for the children and brought them into a close and intimate space.

The oppressive English colonial history and overwhelming African poverty were potent aspects of daily life, sometimes making the boys' friendship controversial. English was the language of the colonizers; Swahili, the more formal language of government, employers, and strangers. The use of different languages conveyed power relationships, intimacy, and distance. On the hillside, each family had its own private language. Consistent with this practice, Colin and Sadiki created their own separate universe, a speech community enabling them to resist and transcend the harsh inequities of economics, class, and race that dominated the relationships all around them. Their private language bonded them as much as it reflected their bonds. It created an honored and respected space for their special friendship to flourish beyond the boundaries of extreme linguistic and cultural difference.

Note: This essay is dedicated to the memory of Colin Gilmore.

Perry Gilmore


socialization transpires implicitly as members of a social group recurrently involve children in language-mediated activities, where children are positioned to attend to the sequential orderliness of language practices and the ways in which language is conventionally indexed to indexical stances, actions, identities, and ideologies.

While the study of language development delves into how children acquire the linguistic code, the study of language socialization articulates novices’ appropriation of language forms in relation to organizing networks of domestic, political, economic, educational, religious, and aesthetic relationships, institutions, situations, and activities and their symbols, beliefs, and values. While language development scholarship is anchored in the individual child as a language acquirer, language socialization research is anchored in the horizons of society and the child as fledgling member. Thus, for example, researchers might analyze the range of persons who engage novices in socializing interactions, at different socioculturally specified points in their development, using a spectrum of language practices and related artifacts, to apprentice them into cognition (e.g., bodies of knowledge, ideologies), emotion (e.g., moral understandings, types and intensities of emotional experience), interaction (e.g., turn taking), activities (e.g., recounting a narrative, completing a homework assignment), participant frameworks (e.g., side-by-side versus face-to-face body orientations), identities (e.g., notions of self and other), and institutions (e.g., rules, sanctions, sources and consequences of power), across socially appointed communicative habitats (e.g., beds, slings, seats, open/walled houses).

Both language development and language socialization studies generally portray the child as an active agent in becoming a competent speaker-hearer and member of society. Language socialization research is grounded in the cultural psychological perspective that while social conditions structure children’s attention and access to knowledge, children interact with and modify their surroundings in the process of becoming adept. Indeed, rather than a transmission model of communication between older and younger generations, a bidirectional, interactive (albeit asymmetri-
cal) model characterizes the information flow between genera-
tions. In this model, young children can socialize adults
just as adults attempt to socialize them, a situation that has
assumed prominence as children become more competent
than their elders in managing information technologies.

IDEOLOGIES OF CHILD-DIRECTED
COMMUNICATION

Like all social relationships, how caregivers in a social
group engage infants and young children is organized by
prevailing, historically dynamic ideologies about the life
cycle, childhood, paths to maturity, gender, knowledge,
skills, and appropriate affect. As noted previously, such
ideologies may be explicit, as when the Kaluli (Papua New
Guinea) comment that infants are naturally soft and must
be made hard and assertive in the course of their socializa-
tion or when Northern Thai villagers emphasize that each
child is born with his or her own Karma, which cannot be
constrained by caregivers’ directives. Alternatively, socio-
historical ideologies are largely manifest implicitly as dis-
positions or what Pierre Bourdieu called habitus, lodged
in everyday social practices related to the socialization of
children within and across social settings.

In their account of language socialization, "Language Ac-
quisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories
and Their Implications," published in the volume Culture
Theory (1984), Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin intro-
duced a typology of caregiving orientations, wherein care-
givers may exhibit a child-centered orientation (situations
are accommodated to child) or situation-centered orienta-
tion (child accommodates to situations). Caregivers in a
number of indigenous communities in Oceania and North
and South America orient infants’ bodies and eye gaze out-
ward to notice the ongoing activities of others in the sur-
roundings. Infants in these communities are immersed in
open, multiparty settings and positioned as overhearers to
the conversations of family members and neighbors. Care-
givers often prompt toddlers to look at and call out to other
children and adults and repeat certain utterances to them.
Alternatively, caregivers in other communities, including
the European and American middle classes, routinely make
excessive accommodations to infants. While these caregiv-
ers orient infants to inanimate objects in their environment
and attempt to engage them in dyadic protodialogues, they
also extensively simplify and otherwise adjust their speech
(using baby talk) and other behaviors to accomplish this.
They tend not to immerse infants in multiparty environ-
ments in which they position infants to listen and watch
what others are saying and doing. The social ecology of
children’s life worlds—environments characterized by mul-
tiparty versus dyadic interaction—may in these ways or-
ganize situation-centered and child-centered ideologies of
caregivers.

This typology was posited to contextualize and explain
observed variation in caregiving practices during early
childhood. While the two orientations have been mapped
onto whole social groups, they are better understood as
varying situationally as well as societally. Within a single
society, interactions involving children may sometimes be
centered and sometimes situation centered. Thus, for ex-
ample, Japanese caregivers tend to be child centered in
private, family-based contacts but expect children to adapt
to public situations in which outsiders are present. More-
over, Euro-American middle-class mothers tend to be more
child centered than fathers, who tend to be more demand-
ing of young children intellectually and interactionally.

Local ideologies of language socialization can have long-
term impact on language maintenance and language shift.
In bilingual and multilingual communities, each linguistic
code is ideologically imbued with kinds and degrees of
symbolic power linked to particular social, political, economic,
and affective conditions. In Don Kulick’s (1993) study,
Language Shift and Cultural Reproduction, conducted in a
Papua New Guinea village, the local vernacular (Taiau) was
associated with having fullness (bed), while the lingua
franca (Tok Pisin) was associated with worldly knowledge
(sabe). In addition to relative prestige of codes, language
ideologies may also extend to local views of how difficult or
easy different codes are for children to acquire and which
children should have access to which codes.

These ideologies organize which language variety will be
prevalent in communicating with and socializing children in
different social situations. For example, Kulick found
that villagers predominantly used the lingua franca rather
than the vernacular in addressing young children, a finding
that has parallels in other multilingual socialization studies.
Ideologically valenced language-socialization preferences,
in turn, are consequential for the historical viability of cer-
tain codes in the repertoire of a community. Where local
vernaculars are not preferred for socializing children, these
codes are giving way to lingua francas, or hybrid varieties
are being created out of local and regional languages. More
rarely, local language ideologies may promote the flour-
ishing of multiple codes, including local languages with little
symbolic capital in the geopolitical landscape. For example,
one study showed how a spontaneous sign language that
emerged in northwestern Thailand has been sustained by
a language ideology and language socialization practice in
which hearing as well as deaf members are expected to ac-
quire the sign language as well as the local spoken vernac-
ular and standard Thai.

In immigrant communities, wider language ideologies of
the host country may preclude family and home-based
language ideologies, as schools, churches, mass media, and
consumer culture attempt to socialize second-generation
children into valuing the dominant language practices as-
associated with these institutions. In some instances, these
socialization forces meet resistance from members of the
immigrant community. This happened, for instance, in a Los Angeles Catholic parish's religious school: Latino immigrants resisted a church board's decision to eliminate Spanish-based doctrina classes in favor of English-only catechism classes.

**Language Socialization Practices and Human Development**

As mentioned earlier, baby talk is a language socialization practice associated with a child-centered orientation. Although baby talk registers generally display exaggerated affect, they are characterized more by lexical and phonological than morphosyntactic simplifications. Infants in speech communities both with baby talk (e.g., Marathi, Japanese, Hebrew) and without baby talk (e.g., Samoan, Kaluli, Quiche Mayan) become competent speakers and members, thereby challenging the status of simplified input as a requisite for language development.

A recent analysis of the practice of using American English baby talk register with children with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as severe autism, revealed that certain features—slowed tempo, exaggerated intonation, and lavish praise in the context of a face-to-face interaction—may impede these children's communicative development. Rather than simplifying the communicative task, these features may instead complicate it: Exaggerated affect may provoke sensory overload, and slowed tempo may strain the attention span of these children. An alternative language socialization practice imported from India, using rapid, rhythmic tempo, relatively evenly pitched intonation, and moderate praise in the context of a side-by-side participant framework, appears more attuned to the challenges of autism. This practice, in combination with allowing the children to point to symbols, afforded displays of communicative competence hitherto unrevealed in these children. These observations suggest not only that language socialization practices vary across cultures and situations but also that they are uniquely suited for atypical children.

The power of the deep culture of child-directed communication is such that, while innovation, borrowing, and hybridity are potentialities, parents, educators, and clinicians often perpetuate their sociolinguistically rooted language socialization inclinations in the face of unknown conditions, be they the challenges of multiculturalism, social upheaval, or encounters with children with neurodevelopmental impairments.

**Elif Simon**

**Language Disorders and Delay**

Language is a highly complex, specialized cognitive function that is unique to humans; it includes grammar, the unconscious, abstract rules underlying syntax (the rules for combining words into sentences), morphology (the rules for combining words and parts of words [jump + ed = jumped]), and phonology (the rules for combining sounds into words). Nevertheless, most children by 3 years of age can talk using simple sentences, a task that requires linking knowledge from different components of language. However, 7% of children who are apparently otherwise developing normally have specific language impairment (SLI). SLI is defined as a significant impairment in language acquisition in the absence of any obvious language-independent cause, such as hearing loss, low nonverbal IQ, motor difficulties, or neurological damage. The disorder affects comprehension and production in components of language, such as syntax, morphology, phonology, vocabulary, and pragmatics. The deficit can persist into adulthood, often significantly impairing communication and literacy and thereby preventing individuals from reaching their educational and vocation potential. Although SLI includes children learning a variety of languages, most of the literature has focused on English-speaking children.

**Biological and Cognitive Causes**

Historically, language impairments were thought to be caused by poor parenting, subclinical brain damage, or transient hearing loss. However, there is little empirical evidence for this viewpoint. In contrast, recent scientific advances, especially with the advent of genetic analysis, now reveal that SLI has a strong genetic component. This evidence comes from genetic analysis of twins and families. A breakthrough came in a study of a unique three-generation family in the United Kingdom who experienced speech and language impairment. Analysis of DNA showed a monogenic inheritance, inheritance based on a single gene. This led to the identification of the first language-related gene, known as FOXP2, on chromosome 7. However, this cause of language impairment turned out to be rare within the SLI population. Recent genomewide scans have identified at least four chromosomal regions (chromosomes 2, 13, 16, and 19) that may harbor genes influencing language. The general consensus now is that although developmental disorders of speech and language are heritable, the genetic basis is likely to be complex and to involve several, possibly many, different risk factors.

**See Also:** Bilingualism; Communication, Development of Family; Cephalic; Narrative; Peers and Peer Culture; Sign Language; Slang and Offensive Language; Socialization of the Child; Sociolinguistic Diversity