

tudies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language

The aim of this series is to develop theoretical perspectives on the essential social and cultural character of language by methodological and empirical emphasis on the occurrence of language in its communicative and interactional settings, on the socio-culturally grounded "meanings" and "functions" of linguistic forms, and on the social scientific study of language use across cultures. It will thus explicate the essentially ethnographic nature of linguistic data, whether spontaneously occurring or experimentally induced, whether normative or variational, whether synchronic or diachronic. Works appearing in the series will make substantive and theoretical contributions to the debate over the sociocultural-functional and structural-formal nature of language, and will represent the concerns of scholars in the sociology and anthropology of language, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and socioculturally informed psycholinguistics.

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# Language socialization across cultures

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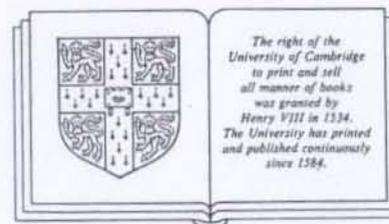
**BAMBI B. SCHIEFFELIN**

*New York University*

*and*

**ELINOR OCHS**

*University of Southern California*



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# 1. Introduction

ELINOR OCHS

## Socialization

Socialization has been defined in a variety of ways, each reflecting theories of the individual and society. According to Wentworth (1980), theories of socialization have swung back and forth in terms of the role assigned to the individual in the process of becoming a member of society. Nineteenth-century theories followed Hobbes's notion of the individual as aggressive, selfish, and asocial by nature and saw socialization as the process of reshaping these natural impulses into pro-social feelings and desires (Ross 1896). Freudian theory in the early twentieth century also emphasized conflict between human nature (the id) and society (the superego) (Freud 1960). Then, with the rise of functionalism in the work of Parsons (1937, 1951) and Merton (1949), the individual is viewed as more passive and more socially directed. Through the process of socialization, individuals internalize the values of society, including those relating to personality and role behavior.

George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism (1956) also emphasized the impact of society on an individual's view of "self"; individuals' perceptions of themselves are influenced by how interactional partners see them and treat them. However, for Mead, the individual is an active agent in his own socialization throughout life; individuals do not automatically internalize how others see them and the rest of the world but rather have the capacity to select images and perspectives. In this sense, individuals and society construct one another through social interaction. The selective, active role of individuals in constructing social order has been a theme of phenomenologists such as Schutz (1967) and Berger & Luckmann (1966). In this perspective, individuals acquire through socialization certain "stock knowledge" (rules, preferences for how to act appropriately, etc.), which they use in constructing contexts, in interpreting what is going on. Ethnometh-

*individual subjectivity... phenomenology* 1

odologists have adopted much of the phenomenological perspective and advocate examining closely the interactional procedures or methods that interactants (including older members of society interacting with young children) use to construct a sense of shared context or shared realities (Cicourel 1973; Garfinkel 1967; Mehan 1979; Mehan & Wood 1975; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974).

The editors of this volume (Schieffelin and Ochs) consider socialization to be an interactional display (covert or overt) to a novice of expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Becker et al. 1961; Wentworth 1980). Following Wentworth, we say that social interactions themselves are sociocultural environments (Wentworth 1980:68) and that through their participation in social interactions, children come to internalize and gain performance competence in these sociocultural defined contexts (Leontyev 1981; Vygotsky 1978). They learn to recognize and construct (with others) contexts and to relate contexts (and elements within contexts) to one another (Nelson 1981). We do not consider children to be passive participants in the process of socialization. First, like G. H. Mead, we see children and other novices as actively organizing sociocultural information that is conveyed through the form and content of actions of others. For example, the acquisition of sociocultural stock knowledge will be constrained by children's level of cognitive, social, and linguistic development. Second, children are active socializers of others in their environment. Even infants and small children have a hand in socializing other members of their family into such roles as caregiver, parent, and sibling. As such, second children enter a different social environment than do first children; often first children "break in" adults as caregivers. As older children, they may further socialize parents into modes of acting and communicating associated with their school and peer-group experiences. Currently this is vividly illustrated by children's role as socializers of computer literacy within their respective households.

### Language socialization

Language socialization is a concept the editors take to mean both socialization through language and socialization to use language. In the perspective taken in this volume, children and other novices in society acquire tacit knowledge of principles of social order and systems of belief (ethnotheories) through exposure to and participation in language-mediated interactions. We take for granted the noncontroversial and obvious sense of this statement, that the development of intelligence and knowledge is facilitated (to an extent) by children's communication with others. Instead we pursue the nontrivial dimensions of this statement. Our approach is to examine closely the verbal

interactions of infants and small children with others (older children, adults) for their sociocultural structure. Our perspective is that sociocultural information is generally encoded in the organization of conversational discourse and that discourse with children is no exception. Many formal and functional features of discourse carry sociocultural information, including phonological and morphosyntactic constructions, the lexicon, speech-act types, conversational sequencing, genres, interruptions, overlaps, gaps, and turn length. In other words, part of the meaning of grammatical and conversational structures is sociocultural. These structures are socially organized and hence carry information concerning social order (as has been demonstrated by Labov 1966, 1973). They are also culturally organized and as such expressive of local conceptions and theories about the world. Language in use is then a major if not the major tool for conveying sociocultural knowledge and a powerful medium of socialization. In this sense, we invoke Sapir (Mandelbaum 1949) and Whorf (1941) and suggest that children acquire a world view as they acquire a language.

Let us now turn to some illustrations of the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge through language.

### Acquiring language and culture through interactional routines

Discourse is structured by speaker-hearer conceptions of the social activity or social event taking place. One critical area of social competence a child must acquire is the ability to recognize/interpret what social activity/event is taking place and to speak and act in ways sensitive to the context. Children must also have the competence to define activities/events through their language and nonverbal actions. In many cases, language is not simply responsive to the social activity/event; it is the social activity/event (Hymes 1974), as in teasing, negotiating, telling a story, tattletaling, explaining.

The importance of the activity/event in information processing has been emphasized by Bateson (1972), Minsky (1975), and Schank and Abelson (1977), among others. In this perspective, information is processed in a top-down fashion, with social event or activity being a primary information-organizing notion; objects, persons, and verbal and nonverbal behavior are given meaning vis-à-vis how one defines the activity or event in which they are embedded. Psycholinguists such as Nelson (1981) have argued that children acquire lexical knowledge in this manner; they come to understand lexical items first in terms of their role in particular situational contexts of use and later in terms of properties that generalize across contexts of use. Peters & Boggs (this volume) make the more sweeping claim that certain situational contexts are routinized in children's communication with others and that such

routinization provides a language-learning environment for the child, "enabling her to perceive and analyze speech in a predictable and recurring context and to practice utterances with immediate reinforcement."

The Vygotskian or sociohistorical school of psychology has also emphasized the role of social activities in the development of the mind. Proponents of this perspective have argued that the organization of behavior in such activities affects cognitive growth (Cole & Griffin 1984; LHC 1981; Leontyev 1981; Luria 1976; Scribner & Cole 1981; Vygotsky 1978). Of particular relevance here is the idea that cognitive skills are the outcome of using language for particular purposes associated with different activities. Language is seen as a tool that can be used to serve a number of ends; speakers will differ in the ends for which they use language and these differences will lead to the development of different cognitive skills.

Regardless of whether our readers assign the same importance to social activities/events as do those noted above, most would concur that tacit knowledge of these notions is critical to communication in a particular society and must be acquired by children and others entering the society (cf. Gumperz's [1983] discussion of native-foreigner crosstalk due to differing conceptions of the social activity in which native and foreigner are engaged [including goals and strategies for achieving them]). Language plays a major role in the acquisition of activity/event knowledge. Language, as noted, is both sensitive to and constructive of activities and events. In other words, language indexes situational context (Jakobson 1960). When caregivers and others use language to and in the presence of children, they are providing information or cues (Gumperz 1983) concerning what members are doing. As young children acquire tacit knowledge and competence in use of these cues, they are acquiring knowledge and competence in the social organization of activities and events. (We do not mean to suggest here that all of situational knowledge can be reduced to linguistic knowledge.)

There are many features of language and discourse that index activity/event (e.g. terms of address and reference, evidentials, tense/aspect, ellipsis, prosody, speech-act forms and sequences). Some activities and events may have (among certain social groups) highly predictable discourse structures (e.g. greetings, jokes, ritual insults, teasing, begging, tattletaling, clarification sequences, trick-or-treat routines), whereas others may have more variable discourse organization (e.g. gossip, negotiations, giving advice, explanations, instructions). In addition, in all societies activities and events are marked linguistically and nonverbally for the dimension of seriousness/playfulness (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974). Goffman uses the term "keyings" to refer to the features that mark activities/events as playful or "not serious" or "not real." These keyings indicate to addressees how they should interpret what is being said and done. In many languages, prosody functions as a major keying

device, distinguishing, for example, teasing from serious forms of speech activities such as insults, criticisms, or claims.

Heath (this volume) indicates ways in which communities organize events in which written language is used. She calls such occurrences "literacy events" and emphasizes that speech communities will differ in the kinds of literacy events that characterize their everyday lives. Children growing up in white middle-class, white working-class, and black working-class households in the Carolina piedmont area of the United States have different experiences with literacy and develop different expectations concerning behavior and attitudes surrounding reading and writing events. Conforming to these behaviors and attitudes establishes children as communicatively competent members of their households and communities. On the other hand, many children from non-middle-class environments experience difficulties in certain school literacy events that draw on areas of knowledge not part of their early interactions with literacy materials.

We are still in the early stages of research into the acquisition and language socialization of activity/event knowledge. What has been consistently observed across cultures, however, is the practice of caregivers providing explicit instruction in what to say and how to speak in a range of recurrent activities and events. In this volume, such practices are reported for the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (Schieffelin), the Kwara'ae of the Solomon Islands (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo), the Basotho of Lesotho (Demuth), white working-class Americans (Heath; Miller), black working-class Americans (Heath), and Mexican-Americans (Eisenberg). Explicit instruction in activity/event speech behavior has also been observed to be characteristic of white middle-class American (Grief & Gleason 1980), Samoan (Ochs 1982), and Wolof (Seregal) (Wills 1977) adult-child and child-child interactions.

Typically such instruction takes the form of explicit prompting by the caregiver or other member of a group. An older person will instruct a younger child in what to say by modeling each utterance for the child to repeat. The prompting routine is itself marked by characteristic linguistic features. For example, the routine is usually but not always initiated by an imperative verb form meaning "say" or "do," followed by the utterance to be repeated. Very often these utterances have a distinct voice quality and intonational contour, which mark them as components of the prompting activity. Young children will respond appropriately to utterances with these prosodic features, even when they are not preceded by an explicit directive to repeat (Schieffelin 1979 [now in press]). It may very well be that these prompting routines are some of the earliest verbal activities (along with, for example, greetings) children gain competence in.

There has been quite a bit written about other ways in which caregivers in certain societies facilitate children's participation in verbal activities/events

(cf., among others, Bruner 1977; Bruner & Sherwood 1976; Greenfield & Smith 1976; Wertsch 1980; Zukow, Reilly & Greenfield 1982). Other verbal practices that assist children in understanding what is going on and/or helping them to perform include

- announcing to the child what activity/event is about to occur, is now occurring, should be or should not be occurring (e.g., "Let's look at a book"; "Those girls are teasing that little boy"; "He should tell the teacher what they did"; "The girls should not be teasing him");
- providing leading questions that indicate what the child should say next (e.g., "What do you say?"; "How does the story end?");
- simplifying the semantic content and grammatical structure of prompting directives, activity/event announcements, and the like;
- repeating utterances and/or entire verbal activities/events with the child as direct participant or observer;
- expanding the child's utterance into an activity/event-appropriate contribution (e.g., Child: "Trick treat"; Mother: "Trick or treat").

All of these practices provide a good environment for learning important linguistic and sociocultural structures. These practices illustrate what Bruner (1975, 1977) has called "scaffolding" and evidence support for Vygotsky's (1978) notion of "zone of proximal development" - that children develop social and cognitive skills through participating in structured cooperative interactions with more mature members of society. It is important to note here that *all societies do not rely on the very same set of language-socializing procedures. Indeed although prompting a child what to say appears widespread, expanding children's utterances, using leading questions, announcing activities/events for a child, and using a simplified lexicon and grammar to do so are cross-culturally variable*. These latter practices are not, for example, characteristic of adult-child or child-child interactions in traditional Western Samoan households, for example (Ochs 1982, in press).

#### Acquiring knowledge of status and role through language use

When members of a society interact with one another, their actions are influenced by their conceptions of their own and others' social status, i.e. their recognized position in society and/or in a particular social situation, and by the role behaviors associated with such statuses (Merton 1949; Mead 1956). These conceptions lead to expectations concerning their own and others' conduct. Included in these expectations are ones concerning language behavior. Languages have constructions at all levels of grammar and discourse that signal information concerning how interactants see their own and others' social positions and roles. As children acquire language, they are acquiring

knowledge of this vital aspect of social order. Another way of putting this is to say that part of acquiring language is the acquisition of the social meaning of linguistic structures. Let us consider two examples of the link between social status/role expectations and language acquisition.

Platt (this volume) has shown that Samoan children display very early in their language behavior an understanding of the highly stratified nature of Samoan society. In her study of the acquisition of deictic verbs, Platt found that Samoan children used productively the semantically more complex verb "give" earlier and more frequently than the verb "come." This order is surprising from a cognitive perspective but not from a sociological one. Most of the deictic verbs appear in directives (e.g. "Come here!"; "Give me!") of which the use is socially constrained. In particular, it is appropriate for very small children to direct older siblings and adults to give them items but not to direct them to come; hence the more productive and earlier use of "give" over "come." The few cases of "come" are used primarily to animals and younger siblings, or to others when the child is speaking on behalf of an older person (as "messenger").

Andersen's study (this volume) indicates that young English-speaking American children have acquired sociolinguistic awareness at an early age as well. At the age of three, these children use status- and role-appropriate speech in role-playing interactions such as mother-father-child, teacher-student-student, and doctor-nurse-patient. Such sociolinguistic knowledge entails competence in the use of indirect and direct speech acts (e.g., women using more indirect requests than men), discourse markers (e.g., high status using more "well," "now"), referential alternatives to referring to speaker and addressee (e.g., doctor to patient: "Let's take a look at your throat now" versus "I'll take a look at your throat now"), tag questions, and prosody.

Not only the linguistic system but the organization of communication as well encodes cultural concepts of social status. For example, next speaker rights and communicative role rights (e.g., source, speaker, primary addressee, secondary addressee, audience) in a situation are embedded in and/or constitutive of conceptions of social status and role of co-present persons. As children engage in communicative interactions, they are acquiring information relevant to status and role. Indeed as children interact with others, they acquire a tacit understanding of their own social identities vis-à-vis others in their environment. The researcher as well can find in communication patterns ways in which caregivers and others perceive young children. One particularly revealing dimension of communication is the communicative roles children assume at different developmental points in time. Even before a child's first words, social order organizes the communicative interactions in which infants participate (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984). In some societies, such as the Anglo middle class, infants are treated as communicative partners within hours after birth (Bullowa 1979). In this social group, mothers and others will

engage young infants in greeting exchanges. In other societies, such as the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (Schieffelin 1979 [now in press], this volume), caregivers will talk about infants but not address them in the early weeks and months of life. On the other hand, Kaluli caregivers will hold up infants to face others (for example, siblings) and will speak for the infant (in a high-pitched voice) to these others. In other words, the Kaluli infant assumes the role of speaker. The important generalization is that although children the world over will ultimately assume all the basic communicative roles (speaker, addressee, referent, audience), societies will differ in the developmental point at which and the situations in which it is appropriate for children to assume particular roles, these differences being linked to their attitudes about children and their communicative competence.

### Expressing affect: input and acquisition

An important component of sociocultural competence every child must acquire is the ability to recognize and express feelings in context. Every society has ways of viewing moods, dispositions, and emotions, including how they are to be displayed verbally and nonverbally and the social conditions in which it is preferable or appropriate to display them (cf. Levy 1984; Rosaldo 1980). Language accordingly is a major carrier of affective information. Among the features that convey affect are word order, dislocated structures, tense/aspect marking, mood, evidential and affect particles and affixes, phonological variation, and prosody (Ochs this volume). When children are exposed to language in use and begin to use language with older members of society, they are presented with an array of affective structures, a set of contexts, and a set of relations linking the two (e.g. markedness of affective forms vis-à-vis social identity of speaker/audience, social setting, activity, etc.).

Several articles in this volume consider the acquisition and socialization of affective language. Certain articles discuss speech acts and activities that are particularly affect-loaded. Miller, for example, discusses the value placed on masking hurt feelings in public among working-class families in Baltimore, Maryland. It is important that even young children be able to display emotional strength in the face of insult or other damaging acts. An important means of accomplishing this end is to successfully tease the other. Teasing in its more playful variety is also valued as a means of defusing a conflict. Mothers and others in this community often engage small children in teasing, and children acquire some competence in appropriate linguistic expression and contexts of use quite early in their language development. By 25 months, one child (Beth) had some competence, and by 28 months she had both the appropriate intonation and situations of use in her sociolinguistic repertoire.

Schieffelin (this volume) shows how Kaluli (Papua New Guinea) children as well are exposed to teasing and shaming in the first year of life, as they are considered crucial expressions of competence in Kaluli society. These speech activities are linguistically and cognitively complex. For example, one form of teasing includes use of a second person pronoun with a third person verb minus the final consonant. Further, such constructions are used to convey the opposite of what is literally expressed by the verb (e.g., "You eat" conveys "You don't eat"). Kaluli children get direct instruction in the use of this construction and by 30 months have acquired the form and knowledge of appropriate situations of use. This is only one of several forms of *bale to* 'turned-over words' that these children acquire in the course of learning to express and interpret affect.

Samoan language development (Ochs in press and this volume) also follows this pattern of intense socialization of affect through adult and older siblings' use of affect-loaded grammatical forms in speech acts such as teasing, shaming, challenging, and assertions of love and sympathy. And like the children observed in other societies, Samoan children acquire competence in these forms and contexts of use quite early in their language development. Indeed the Samoan data indicate that affect constructions may be particularly salient to the language-acquiring child. Samoan children acquire, for example, high affect forms before more neutral forms that identify the same object or have similar referential content (e.g. sympathy-marked first person pronoun before unmarked first person pronoun).

While the papers on working-class Baltimore, Kaluli, and Samoan language socialization focus on what Americans might call hot affect, Clancy's work on Japanese communicative style considers the socialization of an indirect, somewhat depersonalized mode of expression, which is highly valued in many contexts in Japanese society. Japanese mothers simplify the acquisition of this communicative style by following their own indirect directives and assertions to the child with more direct, explicit paraphrases and by following children's inappropriate direct utterances with the more appropriate indirect phrases. The endpoint of acquisition of Japanese is a subtle communicative style that demands a great deal of empathy on the part of the listener.

### Cross-cultural patterns

This volume will attract researchers across several disciplines. For those relatively unfamiliar with cross-cultural research, a few orienting comments are in order. When one first discusses cross-cultural behaviors, the discussions dwell on phenomena that apparently never appear in the speaker's own society: "They do *x* and we don't." Though this characterization may have some truth, it usually warrants further thought. On further consideration, most

cross-cultural differences turn out to be differences in *context* and/or *frequency of occurrence*. For example, as noted, in many of the societies represented in this volume (e.g., white working-class American, Kaluli, Kwara'ae, Basotho, Samoan), caregivers engage young children in lengthy elicited imitation routines. Probably in all societies such routines occur (see Gleason & Weintraub 1976; Grief & Gleason 1980 for an account of American middle-class caregiver-child imitative routines). What is different across societies is the extensiveness of these routines in terms of the semantic-pragmatic content covered (e.g. politeness phenomena, role instruction, teasing, shaming, insults, language correction), the number of interlocutors involved (dyadic, triadic, multiparty), the social relationship of interlocutors (e.g., caregivers, peers, strangers), the setting (e.g., inside/outside household dwelling, private/public, formal/informal distinctions in setting), the length of the imitative routines (e.g., number of turns, length of time), and the frequency of occurrence in the experience of young children. What is striking about Kaluli, Kwara'ae, and Basotho routines, for example, is the extraordinary length of these routines and the wide variety of topics and interlocutors they incorporate, relative to, say, imitative routines in which American middle-class children participate.

Another example of cultural differences in context and frequency concerns teasing in childhood. As discussed earlier, teasing occurs in many and probably all societies; however, its occurrence is distributed differently in different societies and its significance varies. Teasing among the Kwara'ae is always playful whereas white working-class Americans may use teasing to confront and insult as well. Teasing occurs pervasively in white, black, and Mexican-American working-class conversations with very young children, but is somewhat more restricted in white middle-class conversations with small children. It tends to occur in the speech of middle-class fathers more than mothers (Gleason 1973), in contrast to other social groups in which teasing characterizes the speech of a variety of persons (mothers, fathers, and other kin; friends; strangers) communicating with the developing child. Teasing is regarded as a vital component of a child's developing communicative competence in these working-class communities as well as among the Kaluli. Kaluli indeed say that the work of caregivers is to make the language of children "hard" the way their bones must be, and learning to tease and shame is part of the hardening process. The amount of overt socialization devoted to teasing reflects the importance of teasing in each of these speech communities.

Another point about cross-cultural research is that expectations, preferences, and belief systems are not necessarily shared by all members of society. This is obvious when reflecting upon complex societies, but we often forget to make this assumption in discussing lesser-known communities. To some extent this is a reflex of the researcher's style of analysis and presentation of generalizations. Most of us carrying out research on young children's

speech behavior have limited ourselves to a handful of subjects because of the intense effort required to collect, transcribe, and analyze the data. We look first at what these studies have in common and from this evidence make generalizations about children's speech or caregivers' speech in the society as a whole. This procedure of course masks variation among members of a society. Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo (this volume) have transcended this orientation and have discussed differences in family communicative style. Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo have noted among Kwara'ae families distinct styles of child rearing, including procedures for instructing and making points. This variation appears related to both personal and social characteristics of family members. The extent to which orientations are shared or variable within society is a subject of considerable debate among anthropologists (cf. Geertz 1973; Leach 1982). The emphasis in this field has been more on presenting (hypothetical) cultural orientations than on assessing their scope within a society. In this volume as well, the emphasis is on presenting salient language behaviors of children and others and embedding these behaviors in broader patterns of social behavior and cultural knowledge. We take this to be a first step in understanding language in culture.

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