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Input: A Socio-Cultural Perspective

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I. GOALS

In the discussion to follow I introduce a particular approach to the study of language acquisition. This approach is socio-cultural in nature in that language acquisition processes and behavior are examined for their sensitivity to social order and cultural ideology. Another dimension of this perspective is its emphasis on the socializing function of talk, in this case, talk to and with language acquirers. As children (or adults as second language acquirers) are acquiring language, they are acquiring knowledge of social norms and cultural beliefs and values.

I will consider two acquisition phenomena, egocentric speech of children and requests for clarification by caregivers. These two behaviors have been of central importance and interest to those pursuing the language acquisition process, but they have been examined almost exclusively in terms of social or cognitive psychological processes. I believe that such behaviors can be better understood if psychological perspectives are integrated with socio-cultural perspectives.

Egocentric speech and clarification are likely universal and have a profound impact on the organization of social life everywhere. On the other hand, social life organizes these behaviors. In each society, the behaviors have a characteristic socio-cultural status. Societies will vary in their attitudes toward egocentrism and clarification, particularly concerning the contexts in which they are appropriate.

SOCIAL AND FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

These attitudes are linked to a broader network of beliefs and values held by members of a particular society. The work of the ethnographer of child language is to specify these linkages and where possible to propose general principles of social order, theories of knowledge, and conceptions of the world that constitute the culture of a community of language users.

II. THE SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Most people who have spent time in a foreign culture, struggling to communicate in a language not their own, have experienced situations in which they can understand literally each utterance but can not understand the point of the discourse that is the outcome of the utterances in sequence. The nonnative tries to formulate possible goals and contexts, hoping that the pragmatic presuppositions formulated approximate those underlying the talk at hand. In this process the speaker may ask himself questions such as "What is going on here?" or "Why did he/she say that?" Until the nonnative can get a grasp of speech activity taking place (e.g., making plans, telling a joke, teasing, making an announcement, greeting, inviting one to dinner, inviting one only in a token fashion to dinner), it is extremely difficult to know how to respond in a sensible and appropriate way. Sometimes the nonnative remains silent, hoping to mask his nonunderstanding. Sometimes the nonnative interprets the speech activity in terms of his own first language frames ("Oh, I see that he is inviting me to dinner"). In both cases, the consequences can be unfortunate. The nonnative may only too late discover that he was NOT invited to dinner or that he had committed himself through silence to some future plan.

Ethnographers make a profession out of asking questions such as those our nonnative posed. Whatever society they examine, they work hard to capture the natives' understanding of "What's going on here?" They treat their own and native speakers'/members' interpretations of behavior as topics of talk both with native speakers/members in the field and with colleagues as audiences. Ethnography, as Geertz has stated many times (1973, 1983), is a reconciled or negotiated interpretation (incorporating many points of view) of acts and events and relationships.

In these situations, we would want to say that if a nonnative consistently fails to grasp (even roughly) the nature of social activities taking place, that person understands very little of the language in use. And this is exactly the point I want to make about first language acquirers. IN MAKING SENSE OUT OF WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING AND IN SPEAKING IN A SENSIBLE FASHION THEMSELVES, CHILDREN HAVE LEARNED TO RELATE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTIONS TO CULTURAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL SITUATIONS.

This perspective on language acquisition, which Schieffelin and I (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) have called the SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE, is grounded

in the notion that MEANING IS EMBEDDED IN CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS OF CONTEXT AND THAT ACCORDINGLY THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING LANGUAGE IS EMBEDDED IN THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING CULTURE. All along the developmental path, linguistic systems constructed by children interact with and respond to their understandings of cultural configurations of the physical and social world. Children's understanding of socio-cultural relations is enhanced and in certain cases actualized through acquisition of language, including its registers and dialects (Andersen, 1977). Similarly, children's linguistic competence, particularly in the area of semantics, rests on their emerging knowledge of social functions, acts, events, relations, roles, and settings.

As a working definition, culture is here treated as a SYSTEM OF IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT IDEAS THAT UNDERLIES AND GIVES MEANING TO BEHAVIORS IN SOCIETY. THESE IDEAS ARE RELATED (IN VARIOUS WAYS, TO VARYING EXTENTS, ACCORDING TO SCHOOL AND PARADIGM) TO POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, RELIGIOUS, AND KINSHIP RELATIONS, EVENTS, INTERACTIONS, AND INSTITUTIONS; TO VALUES; TO CONCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD; TO THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE; AND TO PROCEDURES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING.

My view is that culture is a loose set of guidelines and premises, shared to varying extents by members of a society. Among other routes, members may alter their theories of the world through exposure and reaction to others' orientations. The extent to which we as adults transform our theories about the world will be limited by our egocentric tendencies and our willingness to empathize with others. Socialization, in this view, is a lifespan experience (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Throughout our lives we are socializing and being socialized by those we encounter.

In the socio-cultural perspective advocated here, considerable attention needs to be directed to the interface of the language, culture, and society at different points in the life cycle. At present we know very little indeed about such relations, particularly in the early stages of life. There have been few attempts in language acquisition research, even developmental sociolinguistic research, to relate speech of children and caregivers in a particular society to more general principles of social order, symbolic systems, and/or ethnotheories characterizing that particular society. Further, general theoretical models of society proposed in sociology (e.g., structure-functionalist models, Marxist, symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, hermeneutic, ethnomethodological) have been largely ignored in this research.

To summarize, the speech patterns of children and caregivers are usually not linked to socio-economic principles and cultural beliefs and knowledge within a society. For example, verbal behavior in the language-acquiring years is generally not integrated with cultural concepts of caregivers, children, childhood, development, competence, and knowledge. Further,

when this information is noted, there is little attention to theories of society to which these observations are relevant.

In other words the SOCIO- element of the developmental sociolinguistic studies is somewhat thin in terms of descriptive and theoretical scope. I recognize that those engaged in this research have strengths in certain fields more than others, but nonetheless, the result is that the "socio" aspect of sociolinguistics has become a no-man's-land. We need more efforts to bridge the theoretical range that this term specifies.

This discussion is both a call for more research in this direction and an illustration of how language acquisition is part of society and culture. The discussion will focus on language acquisition and socialization in rural households in Western Samoa. The orientation of the discussion is comparative, with Anglo White middle class language acquisition and socialization given special consideration.

III. DATA BASE

In this discussion I am drawing on previous analyses carried out by Ochs (1982), Ochs and Schieffelin (1985), Platt (1982), Shore (1982) and Duranti (1981, 1984). I am also drawing on basic field research carried out in the village of Falefaa by A. Duranti, E. Ochs, and M. Platt in 1978-1979 and by A. Duranti and E. Ochs in 1981. In the first period of research, the language development of six children (19–35 months of age at the onset of the study) was documented, yielding 128 hours of audio and 20 hours of video recording, all transcribed *in loco*. In both first and second field studies, classroom language was also recorded (6 hours of audio, 1 hour of video, 1 hour of sound super 8 film.) Further, the lifespaces of children (including children's activities) were documented through 700 color slides, several hundred black and white photographs, video, film, and consistent observational notes. In addition, 50 hours of adult–adult speech were recorded, 26½ transcribed *in loco*. Methods of data collection include participant observation, note taking on micro and macro features of context, electronic recording, and formal interviewing on grammatical, discourse, and social relations.

IV. A SKETCH OF SAMOAN HOUSEHOLD AND VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

Before consideration of acquisition and socialization phenomena, a brief introduction to the social organization of traditional Samoan family and community life is needed.

Western Samoa is part of an archipelago lying "approximately in the center of the Pacific Ocean" (Pawley 1966, p. 1). Western Samoa is a Polynesian society hierarchically organized. Every Samoan village is

governed by a council of persons who hold chiefly titles called *matai* titles. Each village has its own set of *matai* titles, and each title has its own history, associated with a particular descent group and its family lands. When a title holder dies, the family elects another to assume this title and represent the family in the village council. The titles themselves are ranked along several dimensions. Further, all those who have titles are considered of higher rank than untitled persons. Particular demeanors are expected of persons of differing rank. Briefly, higher ranking persons are expected to be relatively stationary or to move with deliberation, whereas lower ranking people are expected to move frequently and quickly. Higher ranking persons are expected to assume an air of detachment when surrounded by lower ranking persons, whereas the latter are expected to be attentive and responsive to what is happening in their surroundings. The ideal is for lower ranking persons to notice and serve those of higher rank; this is the essence of respect.

Samoan families usually reside in one of several houses on a family compound. The houses are traditionally open sided and within close proximity of one another. There is considerable communication among family members in different dwellings and untitled persons; particularly, children are always attentive to the actions and talk of others in the immediate area.

As in many other societies, child care is a responsibility distributed across several family members (Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). Not only a child's mother but siblings of the child, siblings of the parents, and grandparents take on major childrearing duties. Of interest to the discussion at hand is the fact that caregivers are hierarchically organized and are associated with activities appropriate to higher and lower rank. Older, higher generation caregivers take on activities that demand little movement on their part; most of the active child care is performed by younger family members who are present. Further, when there is someone younger and capable present, the older family member will try to assume a somewhat detached demeanor and rely on the younger person to monitor the behavior of the infant or small child needing care (see Ochs, 1982, forthcoming, for more detailed information on childcare organization).

V. EGOCENTRIC SPEECH

Egocentrism in verbal and nonverbal behavior of children has been an object of interest and controversy in developmental research. As conceptualized by Piaget (1929, 1962), egocentrism in communication means the inability to take the point of the listener, a lack of decentering. It has also been considered as "a failure to differentiate or distinguish clearly between one's own point of view and another's" (Flavell, 1977, p. 124). Piaget's earlier view that children first use egocentric speech and then develop social speech has been modified in light of Vygotsky's insistence that children's

speech is social from the start and that egocentric speech is a later development in which the child is using speech to direct himself in some activity. Both frameworks now distinguish between talk that is intended as social and talk that is intended for the self. The latter is often referred to as "private speech," reserving the term "egocentric speech" for social speech that does not display decentering (Kohlberg, Yaeger, & Hjertholm, 1968; Braunwald 1980, 1981a,b).

As an ethnographer, I can not help wondering if Piaget's emphasis on egocentrism and Vygotsky's emphasis on socio-centrism in early childhood reflects their socio-cultural milieu. There may very well be cultural differences in the way in which their societies (Swiss and Russian) organize communication with infants and small children, leading them to observe different communicative capacities in the early stages of development. We can keep in mind this possibility in considering Samoan and Anglo White middle class (WMC) cultural differences.

The impression one gets in comparing transcripts of caregivers and children is that AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS CAREGIVERS "GIVE IN" TO THE EGOCENTRIC TENDENCIES OF CHILDREN, WHEREAS CAREGIVERS IN OTHER SOCIETIES SUCH AS TRADITIONAL SAMOAN CAREGIVERS "RESIST" THESE EGOCENTRIC TENDENCIES.

American WMC caregivers appear to compensate for what they perceive to be an inability of infants and small children to meet the informational and social needs of others, by carrying out a lot of this work themselves. When children express themselves, these caregivers will often fill in missing information or paraphrase (expand) what the caregiver interprets to be the child's intended message. In getting the caregiver's own message across to the child, the caregiver will often adapt the form of the message to secure the child's attention and so on. A possibility we should consider is that these caregivers may, indeed, allow egocentric tendencies of children to flourish for quite an extended period of time through their heightened socio-centric demeanor (taking point of view of other, in this case, the child) toward infants and young children.

Caregivers in other societies have another way. The traditional Samoan way, for example, is to sensitize infants and young children early in life to the language and actions of others around them. Infants are fed and held OUTWARD, facing toward others in the setting. They are directed to notice movements, remember names, and repeat phrases of caregivers. When small children display egocentric speech, caregivers will characteristically not try to formulate what the child might be trying to communicate. Rather the child is given the greater responsibility in producing a communicatively competent utterance.

These responses of caregivers and others toward egocentric speech of the child are linked to different cultural concepts and values, but of particular

relevance here is the Samoan attitude that EGOCENTRIC SPEECH IS APPROPRIATE ONLY FOR HIGH STATUS PERSONS IN CERTAIN CONTEXTS, such as orators (talking chiefs) delivering a formal speech.

SAMOAN CHILDREN ARE INSTEAD SOCIALIZED AT A VERY EARLY AGE INTO A SOCIO-CENTRIC DEMEANOR—to notice and take the perspective of others. This demeanor is tied to two basic forms of competence expected of young children by around 4–5 years of age: the show of RESPECT to higher ranking persons and the CARE OF YOUNGER SIBLINGS. By this age, Samoan children are capable of carrying out several activities at the same time—always with an eye or an ear ready to respond to a request by an elder or to notice the movements of a younger sibling.

This discussion should not be taken to mean that egocentrism is not universal or that egocentrism is not an interesting analytic concept in the study of Samoan children's behavior. On the contrary, egocentrism is a tendency in young Samoan children's actions and speech just as observed of French, Italian, Swiss, British, American, and other children. The difference is in CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS TOWARD EGOCENTRIC BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN, AS EVIDENCED IN THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF OTHERS WITH WHOM THE CHILDREN INTERACT. There are cross-cultural differences in attitudes toward children's egocentric speech and actions and in responses to such behavior at different developmental points, e.g., Samoans ignore much of a child's egocentric speech, letting the topics in such speech drop. (From the Vygotskian perspective, they are probably quite correct to do so.) Societies will vary in the extent to which they "indulge" or accommodate the egocentric behavior of young children. They will also vary in expectations concerning the age at which children should display socio-centric skills and the social contexts in which they should display them (e.g., in caregiving, reporting news, or delivering messages to higher ranking persons, in talk in the presence of guests or strangers, etc.). These expectations will be linked in complex ways to social organization, concepts of person, and competence.

Before turning to the next topic, I would like to note here that SOCIETIES DIFFER IN THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY ENGAGE INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES THAT IN THEMSELVES REQUIRE SOCIO-CENTRIC SKILLS.

One way of interpreting the numerous observations of middle class mothers engaging their infants in greetings and other forms of conversation is to say that these mothers place their children in an activity (conversation) in which the children can not competently (in the adult sense of competence) participate. A child who is only 24-hours-old (Stern, 1977) can hardly be said to have the competence to greet.

In other words, it looks like middle class mothers set up an activity (like greeting) for themselves and their children, where only one participant (the mother) is competent. If the mother has the goal of carrying out the activity,

then this goal can be carried out only by the mother taking on all or most of the infant/child's communicative roles (varying with maturity of child). These mothers will interpret their own messages for the infant and provide responses (Trevarthen, 1979) on behalf of the infant as well, and in this manner, they engage in "proto-conversations" (Bates, Camaioni, & Volterra, 1979).

The traditional Samoan pattern is different from that just described. SAMOAN CAREGIVERS TEND NOT TO GIVE VERY YOUNG INFANTS AN ACTIVE ROLE IN COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES. Particularly in the first months of life, these infants are not usually treated as conversational participants in the middle class sense. They are showered with affection, cuddled, and sung to but are not usually placed in a conversational exchange as an active "speaker-hearer." The Samoan tendency is rather TO HOLD OFF engaging in conversational exchanges with very young children until the children mature a bit more. In some sense, Samoan caregivers DO NOT CREATE situations that demand a series of accommodating, socio-centric behaviors on their part.

To summarize, many middle class children engage in communicative exchanges practically from BIRTH ON, but their caregivers (mothers primarily) take over most of the work involved in sustaining this activity. Samoan children usually participate actively in such exchanges somewhat LATER in their development, but when they do, they are expected to carry out their own communicative work to a greater extent than middle class American children of the same age.

VI. REQUESTS FOR CLARIFICATION

Every society has at least one theory of knowledge. Among other functions, these theories specify THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE (what can be known) and the PATH TO KNOWLEDGE (procedures for arriving at knowledge, including ethnotheories of learning.)

An interest in epistemologies is shared by scholars in all fields. It is, of course, a crucial component of the study of children's intellectual development; the work of Piaget and colleagues has pursued this concern by examining children's concepts of reality and procedures for acquiring knowledge over developmental time. For those interested in relations between thought and language development of young children, this concern is also of considerable importance.

One of the major motivations for looking at the strategies for acquiring knowledge and the scope of knowledge is the desire to understand capacities, concepts, and skills that are common to all humans, which in turn might lend credence to some particular philosophical position on epistemology.

One of the problems plaguing comparative work on thought is the ecological validity of the situational contexts in which behavior is examined and evaluated. There has been a move away from experimental situations originally designed for Western urban adults and children to examining situations and activities that form part of the indigenous socio-cultural system.

In the research on cross-cultural cognition, the indigenous "situations" under study are usually of a special sort. The situations examined in naturalistic surroundings are associated with well-articulated goals, often manifest in a material product, e.g., weaving cloth (Childs & Greenfield, 1980) or making a garment (Lave, 1977).

A semiotic perspective would indicate that in the stream of behavior observed, there are many situations/activities and associated goals. One activity that runs parallel to and participates in innumerable other activities, from the most formal and defined to the least, is that of HOLDING A CONVERSATION. If we want to observe, for purposes of cross-cultural comparison, an activity that pervades experience and is common across cultures, then I believe conversation is an appropriate locus of study.

Like many activities, conversation itself is a complex social endeavor, with embedded activities requiring a variety of intellectual skills. For purposes of this discussion, I would like to consider conversation as an activity that poses a number of problems for participants—e.g., turn-taking problems (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), face-saving problems (Goffman, 1963, 1967, 1981; Brown & Levinson, 1978), information-processing problems (Clark & Haviland, 1977; Clark & Lucy, 1975; Grice, 1975)—and to focus on one very common problem or task for what it can reveal concerning folk epistemology, particularly local notions concerning paths to acquiring knowledge and limits of what can be known through these different paths.

Very often in conversation a participant produces an utterance that is not comprehensible to another participant. That is, very often a coconversationalist will take some utterance to be troublesome or, to use the terminology of conversation analysis, to be a trouble source (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). Of the many cases to which this applies, I am interested in those in which the SPEAKER HAS NOT ARTICULATED CLEARLY OR HAS INCOMPLETELY EXPRESSED SOME PROPOSITION AS WELL AS THOSE IN WHICH THE HEARER'S PROBLEMS STEM FROM HIS/HER NONATTENTIVENESS TO THE SPEECH ACT. That is, a potential recipient of an utterance has not been able to make sense out of that utterance because it was garbled, because it was telegraphic, or because it was not heard. This is emblematic of more subtle occurrences of communicative distress of the sort that are of interest in hermeneutic philosophy (the science of interpretation and understanding as outlined in Bleicher, 1980, 1982; Gadamer, 1976; Ricoeur, 1981; and others).

These occurrences establish a series of related problems for speaker and/or recipient of an utterance if communication is a goal: the superordinate problem is to make intelligible to the recipient/addressee the proposition(s) and the social act(s) with the unintelligible utterance.

Several alternatives are potentially available to participants in conversation, across languages and societies, faced with this problem. If we can examine strategies for making utterances intelligible in everyday conversational discourse, we will gain insight into the local epistomological system.

Of particular interest for me are the alternatives observed for RECIPIENTS (or addressees). Recipients may assume several different communicative roles with respect to the process of "making sense" out of an utterance. For example, recipients may request that the original speaker alone make the utterance intelligible. That is, the recipient may initiate clarification by exhibiting minimal grasp or no grasp of what the speaker has said or done and rely on the speaker to resay or redo the unintelligible utterance. Let us call this strategy the MINIMAL GRASP STRATEGY. This may be accomplished indirectly through quizzical facial expressions or through verbal statements such as "I don't understand," "I can't understand what you saying," and the like. Or the addressee may directly ask the speaker "What did you say?" "Pardon?," "What?" "Who?" "He went where?," and so on. The addressee may also request or order the speaker to redo an utterance through utterances such as "Say it again" or "Could you say it once more?"

On the other hand, recipients may themselves formulate an explicit guess as to what the problematic utterance/proposition might be, leaving the original speaker to validate or reject the hypothesis. We can call this strategy the EXPRESSED GUESS STRATEGY, e.g., illustrated in caregivers' talking to children, guessing "Oh you want to get down?," "Is something hurting you?," or "You don't like this?" In contrast to the minimal grasp strategy, here it is the *recipient* who attempts a reformulation of the unclear act.

The speech act of guessing covers a range of uncertain knowledge. One may formulate a guess when not at all certain of one's knowledge. This is what we mean by wild guesses. On the other hand, one may formulate guesses when one is fairly certain of what the other speaker is saying or doing. In these cases, the addressee is using the guess to make sure of or to double check his/her understanding.

I propose first that THESE TWO STRATEGIES ARE UNIVERSAL and second that while both are universal, THE MINIMAL GRASP STRATEGY IS MORE PREVALENT ACROSS SOCIETIES. That is, members of different societies, and perhaps even social groups within societies, will vary in their preferences for responding to unintelligibility. Societies and social groups may differ not only in their preference for one over another but in the contexts in which each of these strategies are appropriate. Third, I propose that THESE PREFERENCES REFLECT

MORE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND FOLK NOTIONS CONCERNING THE ACQUISITION AND SCOPE OF CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE.

In traditional Samoan communities, speakers far prefer strategy 1 over strategy 2. Further, in certain settings, they do not use strategy 2 at all, for example, in conversing with young children. I have noted earlier that Samoan caregivers expect small children to assume most of the burden of making an unintelligible utterance intelligible; that is, Samoan caregivers rely heavily on strategy 1 for clarification; and I have indicated that this practice is tied to expectations concerning social rank, i.e., that a socio-centric demeanor is expected more of lower to higher ranking persons than of higher to lower ranking persons. Guessing requires greater perspective taking than indicating simply nonunderstanding, hence this strategy is not compatible with expectations surrounding the rank of caregiver vis-à-vis child.

However, there is another basis for this preference of caregivers. In traditional Samoan communities, persons are uncomfortable making explicit guesses as to what other persons could be thinking, the thoughts of others that have not been clearly expressed in language or demeanor.

We find this dispreference in social interactions involving different social relations, e.g., among peers, low to high rank, high to low rank. Thus, this type of uncertain knowledge—unclear mental dispositions or thoughts of others—is "off limits" as an object of explicit guessing.

This does not mean that silent guessing does not go on. I am speaking here of the on-record speech act of guessing what another is thinking. What we find in looking at transcripts of Samoan discourse is that rather than "making a stab" at what an unclear utterance might be, recipients will tend to request a speaker to reproduce all or part of an utterance that is unclear.

This dispreference contrasts with what has been observed of other societies, such as White middle class American (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), where recipients, including caregivers listening to young children, may respond to unintelligible utterances by either using strategy 1 or by guessing what that utterance might be, particularly where the speaker seems unable to provide a clearer rendition. [N. B. Schegloff (personal communication) notes that in their transcripts there is a marked preference for guessing over requesting that the speaker resay the troubled utterance.] The preference for this strategy in certain societies reflects folk expectations that one can presume to know and explicitly guess what another is thinking. That is, what is going on in the mind of another as an object of knowledge can be legitimately pursued through the path of guessing.

The different responses to the problem of unintelligibility in conversation, then, display different EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES. Principles associated with different philosophical positions such as rationalist, positivist, realist, and hermeneutic ones, will manifest themselves differentially across cultures in these particular discourse situations.

Regardless of the various philosophical positions current in Western philosophy, it is apparent that among those middle class persons recorded and observed, there is a consistent philosophical orientation manifest in their discourse: unclear thoughts or mental dispositions of others are suitable objects of explicit conjecture. In our everyday conversations, even with the tiniest of infants, we propose, test, and dispute theories concerning others' intentions, motivations, attitudes, and the like. This philosophical principle runs rampant in our everyday speech. Among other routes, this perspective is transmitted to small children through repeated responses to unintelligible and partially intelligible utterances and gestures.

In the same way, Samoan conversational discourse evidences an orientation toward knowledge, namely, that unclearly expressed mental dispositions are most appropriately made known by the speaker himself or herself. Unclear thoughts of others are inappropriate objects of explicit guessing or hypothesis making by others, except in restricted contexts, suitable objects of conjecture only under certain, limited conditions. Generally, compared with the behavior of middle class speakers observed, there is in western Samoan communities a far greater reluctance to speculate about others' psychological states, but the reluctance varies according to rank of interactants.

In Samoan communities, this reluctance is manifest not only in day-to-day informal conversation but in a range of other speech activities, such as those associated with judicial concerns. The focus of judicial discourse is on ascertaining the immediate CAUSE of an action (agent) and its CONSEQUENCES rather than on uncovering the thoughts, including the motivations or intentions of those involved. This contrasts with Western, specifically Anglo judicial systems, where ascertaining intentions is critical to judgment and sanctioning procedures.

While young Samoan and American middle class children are not directly involved in formal court procedures, they are, like children the world over, involved in communicative breakdowns that lead to culturally patterned clarification sequences. As children the world over participate in such sequences, they acquire competence in the construction of conversational discourse, and in this process, they acquire expectations concerning the limits of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, and the social organization of knowledge.

To use Bateson's (1972) phraseology, through such contexts, children are not only learning language, they are learning to learn. To use the phraseology of Sapir and Whorf, children are acquiring through speech activities a way of viewing the world. Indeed this study supports approaches such as the socio-historical school (Vygotsky, 1978; Luria, 1976; Leontyev, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1981; LCHC, 1981; Wertsch, 1980, 1985) and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Mandelbaum, 1949), both of which view language activities or language practices (interpersonal processes) as having

a profound impact on thought (intrapersonal psychological processes). It is not just the content of language but the ORGANIZATION of language activities (e.g., how language is used in particular contexts, the socio-cultural premises that underlie language use in and across contexts) that impacts world view acquisition and the development of psychological and social skills.

VII. CODA

I would like to close this discussion by stressing once again the importance of integrating fine-grained analyses of language in situational contexts with macroanalyses of society and culture. I began this discussion with an image of a nonnative who can understand something of the propositions expressed by a native speaker/member but can not understand what the native speaker/member is doing in producing such a discourse. Many nonnative speakers never acquire an adequate tacit knowledge of the social order and cultural symbolic systems that organize and give meaning to language practices. All normal children do. Such competence evolves in the course of acquiring language within society and culture.

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