Social Interaction, Social Context, and Language

Essays in Honor of Susan Ervin-Tripp

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LEA
LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
1996 Mahwah, New Jersey

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers
10 Industrial Avenue
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430-2262

Cover photographs by Katya Tripp
Cover design by Gail Silverman

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Social interaction, social context, and language: essays in honor of Susan Ervin-Tripp/edited by Dan Isaac Slobin . . . [et al.].
p.cm.
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
ISBN 0-8058-1498-1 (cloth: alk. paper). — ISBN 0-8058-1499-X (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Ervin-Tripp, Susan M. (Susan Moore), 1927– 2. Sociolinguistics. 3. Language acquisition. 4. Discourse analysis. I. Slobin, Dan Isaac, 1939– . II. Ervin-Tripp, Susan M. (Susan Moore), 1927–
P40.S5444 1996
306.4'4—dc20 96-18567
CIP

Books published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates are printed on acid-free paper, and their bindings are chosen for strength and durability.

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

16 THE MICROGENESIS OF COMPETENCE: METHODOLOGY IN LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion that follows centers on the enterprise of conducting language socialization research. We consider practical and theoretical issues and tools that enhance description and analysis of communicative practices and their socialization within culturally organized speech communities. Our discussion outlines five goals of language socialization research. In so doing, we suggest a framework for comparative research on language socialization across communities.

A turning point in the history of research on the cultural organization of children's talk was a symposium on child discourse organized by Susan Ervin-Tripp and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan at the 1974 Meetings of the American Anthropological Association. Both authors of this paper participated, one as presenter (Ochs) and the other as a member of the audience (Schieffelin). The session stimulated at least two important outcomes: one, an enduring collaborative partnership between the co-authors of this chapter; and two, the volume, *Child Discourse* (Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan, 1977), which was the first comprehensive appraisal of the complexity of children's discourse across speech communities and genres. This volume inspired a number of research projects that formed the basis for a second collection, *Developmental Pragmatics* (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1979). In the last fifteen years developmental pragmatics has become an important theoretical domain of inquiry, examining children's developing competence in the use of language within and across socially organized contexts. Ervin-Tripp's studies of children's competence in performance of speech acts, conversational turn-taking, and verbal activities more broadly (Ervin-Tripp, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1982) have been a model for many of us engaged in research on children's pragmatic competence (cf., Andersen, 1990; Clancy, 1986; Garvey, 1984; Iwamura, 1980; Keenan & Schieffelin,

1976; McTear, 1985; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1983; Schieffelin, 1981, among others).

Research on language socialization extends the program of study on children's pragmatic competence by situating children as novice members of a community, who, through interaction with more expert members, become competent participants of that community (Cook-Gumperz, 1977; Heath, 1982; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b). Like developmental pragmatic research, studies of language socialization examine children's skill to use language; however, the emphasis is on relating children's knowledge and performance to the social and cultural structures, processes, activities, understandings and ideologies that give meaning and identity to a community (Crago, 1988; Goodwin, 1990; Heath, 1983; Kulick, 1992; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin, 1990; Scollon, 1982; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986).

Language socialization has as its goal understanding how persons are socialized to become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process. The study of language socialization, therefore, concerns two major facets of socialization: socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language (Ochs, 1986; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The notion of language socialization is premised on two assumptions about the nature of language, culture, and socialization. First, the process of acquiring language is deeply affected by the process of becoming a competent member of a society, and second, the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized to a large extent through language, by acquiring knowledge of its functions, social distribution, and interpretations in and across socially defined situations. This is largely achieved through participation in exchanges of language in particular social situations. From this perspective, language is seen as a source for children to acquire the ways and world views of their culture (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin, 1990; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a).

Research on language socialization focuses on the language use of novices and members in and across culturally meaningful social activities. The emphasis is on understanding the mundane, everyday, and routine. Language socialization has as a goal linking microanalytic accounts of children's discourse to more general ethnographic accounts of cultural beliefs and practices of families, social groups, and communities into which children are being socialized. The relation between language behavior and cultural ideologies is not explicit or obvious, but must be constructed from a range of ethnographic data, including recorded and transcribed social interactions, interviews, and participant observations. The linking of micro interactional and linguistic structures to social, cultural, and historical processes is what distinguishes language socialization from both language acquisition and developmental pragmatics and what places it within the domain of anthropological inquiry (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

2. GOALS OF LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION RESEARCH

In the discussion that follows we will detail five goals of language socialization research and methodological tools for achieving those goals.

2.1. The organization of communicative practices

A basic goal of language socialization research is to articulate the organization of recur rent *communicative practices* of novice and expert members. These members routinel use a range of vocal and nonvocal semiotic modalities to convey and interpret message including grammatical, lexical, discursive, and gestural structures.

To analyze the linguistic organization of speech activities language socializatio researchers prefer not to use idealized accounts of talk or reports of ideological stance nor do they rely on spot observations or randomly taken language samples withou contextual notes. Instead, they examine in detail video/audiotaped naturally occurrin social interaction organized as coherent practices or activities related to each other ove time and across situations (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991; Leontyev, 1981). Electronicall recording and analyzing both the details and cultural framing of such naturalistic dat distinguishes language socialization research from other socialization research based o handrecorded field notes of observations.

Video and audio taperecording with contextual notetaking allows the researcher t capture a continuous lengthy behavioral record of interactions involving young childre and those with whom they regularly interact, including peers and more mature member Continuous recording of interaction enables analyses of how novices become competer in recognizing shifts from one type of communicative context to another. A continuou detailed record provides a basis for establishing the extent to which children and othe novices utilize diverse linguistic and nonlinguistic structures to signal and interpret shift in communicative act, activity, identity, affect, and knowledge of interlocutors (Goodwi 1990; Ochs, 1979a; Schieffelin, 1979; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986). Such a recor allows the researcher to illuminate not only how novices are socialized to develo communicative skills within a single language but also how they are socialized to dra on **multiple** codes to constitute shifts in communicative acts, activities, identities, affec and other facets of the situation in linguistically heterogeneous speech communitie (Kulick, 1992; Schieffelin, 1994; Zentella, in press). A continuous audio and vide record also allows analysts to explore how novice interlocutors are socialized to us immediate and more distant interactional history to make sense of attitudes and idea conveyed through talk and action.

If we want to understand ordinary, unremarkable, taken-for-granted everyday even from the perspectives of the participants, attention to the details of talk, including pause and overlaps, unintelligible utterances, is critical (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Sach Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). These details provide critical information about stance actions, activities, and social identities of interlocutors as well as the cultural patternin of conversation and other discourse genres in diverse speech communities. We shoul not be fooled into thinking that ambiguity and indeterminacy disappear because we hav captured interaction through electronic recording and detailed transcriptions. Ambiguit and indeterminacy are important social and communicative resources, necessary i conversation and social life, and the best we can do is identify them as such when the occur. As Goffman (1976) reminds us, the laconicity of talk, what is not said, is centr

to interpretation and social conduct. We need to incorporate speakers' interpretations into our own linguistic and ethnographic accounts, including local theories of interpretation and intentionality (Duranti, 1993a, 1993b). Native speakers do not rely on the spoken record alone — neither should we.

An annotated transcript is an important theoretical and methodological component of language socialization research, and the first step in its creation is the integration of contextual notes with transcription of speech and nonvocal conduct (Ochs, 1979b; Schieffelin, 1990). Preparation of an annotated transcript, however, is neither a simple nor a mechanical data collecting task, but is in itself a deeply ethnographic process. Annotation and translation require on-going discussions with native speakers about the cultural significance of the recorded events, culturally recognized types of speech activities, and named discourse strategies, all of which contribute to the interpretation of conduct and speech (Goodwin, 1990).

Both participants in those events, for exammple, caregivers and older siblings and other members of the community are often excellent assistants in the transcription and annotation process in that they can identify speakers in multiparty talk, specify the history and ownership of objects involved, and convey their own interpretations and evaluations of the event itself. Relistening with them provides a context for their opinions about the speech and conduct of novices and others, which in turn, are valuable sources for constructing analyses of local interpretive procedures and linguistic ideologies (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990).

In Schieffelin's field research on language socialization of Kaluli children, meta-commentaries by members of the community who did not participate in the recorded interactions were especially critical in learning how features such as prosody, voice quality, affect-marked affixes and expressives and formulaic expressions convey affect and stance (Schieffelin, 1990). In Kaluli, requests for assistance, food, and other objects are usually in one of two modalities: an assertive, demanding modality or one based on appeal where the speaker hopes to get what is wanted by making the addressee "feel sorry" and comply. In Kaluli request sequences based on appeal, these metacommentaries revealed that children must demonstrate particular verbal competence to achieve the desired responses. They must select the appropriate set of linguistic resources, including expressive words to elicit compassion, vocatives to frame the request within a particular relationship based on sharing, morphemes to mark affect such as intimacy and to intensify each repeated request, affect-marked pronouns to elicit pity, particular syntactic constructions to put the agent in focus in addition to the use of a whining voice, which Kaluli call *geseab*. Transcripts of situated speech plus elicited commentary on them thus provide important sources for examining and interpreting linguistic details of the interactions between experts and novices, including how they are organized to achieve particular social ends.

2.2. The Context of Situation

A second goal in language socialization research is to examine the context of situation (Malinowski, 1978) relevant to talk and nonvocal conduct. In coming to understand the context of situation as constructed by novice and expert members, the researcher asks

questions such as: When do different utterance types and actions of novices and experts occur? How are these utterances and actions organized with respect to one another? How do novice and expert members use these structures to form coherent sequences, practices, acts, and/or activities (Crago, 1988; Duranti & Ochs, 1986; Ervin-Tripp, 1979; Heath, 1983; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Miller et al., 1990)? What are the preferred and dispreferred, routine and unusual, participant roles in interactions involving novice and expert members (Goffman, 1979; Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Philips 1983)? How is attention to the situation socialized (Ochs, 1979a; Rogoff, 1990)?

Features of the context of situation interact in nonrandom, that is, culturally coherent ways. Indeed, such syntagmatic relations are a crucial component of what novice members must come to master to successfully participate in social life (Ervin-Tripp, 1972). When particular contextual features routinely co-occur to create recognizable situations, the signaling of one contextual feature through language or other means may invoke other contextual features that usually accompany it. For example, in Kaluli communities, children must come to understand that when they use a particular type of vocative (*ade*), they not only signal a particular named relationship (siblingship), they also invoke a type of affect (sympathy) and social act (a request based on appeal). Requests for food are more frequently made by males to females, less often the reverse. This is consistent with Kaluli gender appropriate behaviors which vary according to recipient, activities, and developmental time, and language encodes these relevant factors. All Kaluli children are socialized to use these forms to invoke these situational features (Schieffelin, 1990).

2.3. The Context of Culture

A third goal of language socialization is to situate the socialization and emergence of communicative practices within the context of culture. A defining perspective of language socialization research is the pursuit of cultural underpinnings that give meaning to the communicative interactions between expert and novice members within and across contexts of situation. While researchers theorize about culture within different theoretical frameworks, we take culture to include "bodies of knowledge, structures of understanding, conceptions of the world, and collective representations [which are] extrinsic to any individual and contain more information that any individual could know or learn" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984, p. 284). The analysis of how communicative practices of experts and novices are organized by and organize cultural knowledges, understandings, beliefs, and feelings is what distinguishes language socialization approaches from developmental pragmatics.

For example, a developmental pragmatic analysis of Kaluli children's communicative skills might focus the extent to which Kaluli children are able to use the range of appropriate linguistic forms to perform the act of requesting (Schieffelin, 1990, pp. 183-201). A language socialization analysis, on the other hand, embeds that analysis in a larger discussion of how the acquisition of these practices is also part of a broader socialization into Kaluli about notions exchange and social relationships. From a Kaluli perspective, social relationships are fundamentally constituted through giving and sharing, a primary

social relationships are fundamentally constituted through giving and sharing, a primary means of conveying sentiment and affection. A primary means for accomplishing these sharing activities is through the use of appropriate request forms. Competence underlying sharing is indexed and socialized in everyday talk to children, and children's own ways of speaking express fundamental cultural concerns about reciprocity and social relationships. Sharing, accomplished through requests and responses, is linked to other social practices and symbolic forms such as exchange systems, gender roles, sibling relationships, rituals and myths. In Kaluli society, as in many others in Papua New Guinea, sharing, reciprocity, and exchange more generally organize and give meaning to social life.

Our approach to language socialization is similar to the anthropological perspectives of Bateson (1972), Gluckman (1958), and Turner (1967) — exploring a culturally focal event and its relation to other events and cultural meaning systems. However, language socialization research tends to focus on everyday, informal, even routine events and draws out connections between these ordinary events and the socialization of social and cultural skills. Such mundane events are significant in that they provide a basic, recurrent grounding for the socialization of cultural meanings.

2.4. The Context of Human Development

A fourth goal of language socialization research is to contribute to an understanding of connections between human development and culture, including relation between language acquisition and the socialization of cognitive and social competence. In other words, we are interested in how human development is situated in a cultural matrix.

One way of addressing the interface between culture and human development is to investigate developmental constraints on children and other novice's participation in particular communicative practices. For example, a discussion of Kaluli children's participation in culturally salient activities of sharing objects (reciprocity and exchange) could, and perhaps should, consider cognitive and biological processes that help organize children's performance and recognition of requests and other forms of conduct that are integral to these activities. Thus in examining the acquisition of requests based on appeal, we observe that Kaluli children's speech evidences formal elaboration over developmental time that reflects these cognitive and biological factors (Schieffelin, 1990, pp. 128-135, 183-201).

On the other hand, language socialization research suggests that, in certain communities, cultural preferences facilitate the use of certain grammatically more complex forms earlier in the developmental cycle than less complex comparable forms (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995). For example, while there is an acquisition trend among Kaluli children towards increased complexity **within** the category of requests based on appeal, there is another acquisition trend in which Kaluli children acquire the category of requests based on appeal before the grammatically less complex category of assertive requests. Requests in both modalities can be accomplished by single words, either imperative verbs or indirect pronouns. Young children's assertive requests, however, are usually single word utterances while requests based on appeal are multiword utterances constructed with vocatives, expressives, direct and/or indirect pronouns and imperative

verbs that are marked with emphatic particles (Schieffelin, 1990, pp. 187-198). Wh surprising from a developmental psycholinguistic perspective, this developmental progr sion is entirely compatible with Kaluli notions that children "naturally" beg, but must explicitly socialized to request assertively using a different set of linguistic resour (Schieffelin, 1990, pp. 132-135). Similarly, young Samoan children produce the seman cally more complex deictic verb *give/bring* related to begging before the simpler deic verb *come* related to requests of change of location of addressee. This developmen progression can be explained, in part, by the cultural appropriateness of childre begging for food, but the inappropriateness of their directing others to come to th (Platt, 1986). Thus there are indications that socially appropriate demeanors guide t acquisition of particular linguistic forms. Children are not only immature speakers, b also social beings participating in socially ordered interactions.

2.5. Universals and Particulars

For some time now an important goal of language socialization research has been articulate a model that reconciles what is particular and what is universal about t communicative practices of novices and of experts (Ochs, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992; Oc & Schieffelin, 1984, 1989, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a). The feeling of the auth is that anthropologists have been miscast as seekers of the exotic and the unique, a revelers in the exception to the rule. In our loosely articulated language socializati paradigm, universal and cultural are not logical oppositions but rather potentially compa ble qualities of practices; the same communicative practice may be both universal a cultural at once. If we examine ordinary verbal practices that constitute daily interacti we find that the vast majority of these practices are cultural universals. Further, we fi that these practices also have a similar linguistic form. For example, the cultural pract es of asking questions, requesting, and clarifying unintelligible utterances or expressi affect or epistemic stance are both universal in appearance and realized through comm linguistic structures (Besnier, 1990; Levinson, 1983; Ochs, 1982, in press; Ochs Schieffelin, 1989). These observations lead us to posit certain universal relations betwe utterance form and utterance function and certain universal outcomes of language soci ization. In many respects, children everywhere have been socialized to use language similar ways. Such similarities provide us with a basis for accounting for how inde people from vastly different speech communities manage some level of communicati

What then is culturally particular? In our view, while a particular communicati practice may occasionally vary in form across social groups, cultural variation l primarily in the features of the situation and cultural contexts which that practice invok In terms of the immediate context of situation, the same practice may dif cross-culturally in the extent to which it is **preferred** or **expected** given certain soc identities and settings. In one community, the practice may be unmarked for cert identities and settings, that is, expected and preferred; in another, its occurrence unusual and inappropriate for comparable identities and settings.

The same communicative practice in different communities may also differ in **duration** across interactional time. A practice may recurrently endure over twenty tu

of member–novice interaction in one community and in another, the practice typically occupies less than five turns. Such differences in duration certainly characterize the practice of elicited imitation across societies. While widespread in appearance, elicited imitation pervades the interactions of Kaluli (Schieffelin, 1990), Kwara'ae (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986), Basotho (Demuth, 1986), and Samoan (Ochs, 1988) caregivers and children far more than in caregiver–child interactions among the American white middle class (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976; Gleason, Perlmann, & Greif, 1984; Golinkoff 1983).

The net result of these differences in preference and duration is that communicative practices universal in appearance and form have different cultural significance across speech communities. From another point of view, the net result is that universal communicative practices have different social meanings in the hands of different groups of language users. In terms of cultural universals and particulars of language socialization, children everywhere are being socialized through language use to interpret and generate locally relevant social meanings. Children come to associate certain practices with certain situational and other contextual conditions and develop a sense of what is preferred and expected (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). It is in this realm of social meaning that cross-cultural communication flounders as interlocutors violate one another's expectations concerning conversational practices and fail to comprehend the social contexts indexed by one another's practices (Gumperz, 1982; Ochs, 1990, 1992). It is also this realm of social meaning that is so easily lost on audiences to language socialization research. Audiences tend to focus on the formal and functional universals of a socialization practice without grasping its situational scope and cultural significance.

Language socialization research has begun to capture some of these universal and cultural facets of communicative practices. For example, the authors (Ochs, 1982, 1988, 1991, 1992; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) have posited a set of universal responses to unintelligibility under two conditions: The first is where one interlocutor perceives the utterance of *another* to be unintelligible (addressee-rooted unintelligibility). The second is where an interlocutor perceives his or her *own* utterance to be unintelligible to another (speaker-rooted unintelligibility). In the case of addressee-rooted unintelligibility, the coauthors propose that interlocutors everywhere employ the following four conversational strategies in responding to another's unintelligibility:

1) ignore unintelligibility;
2) display nonunderstanding;
3) verbally guess at what another might be saying;
4) negatively sanction addresee's unintelligibility (e.g., by teasing or shaming).

Similarly, in cases in which interlocutors perceive their own utterances to be unintelligible to others (speaker-rooted unintelligibility), they universally set in motion any of the following cultural strategies:

1) ignore unintelligibility;
2) repeat own utterance;
3) reformulate own utterance by simplifying, expanding, or otherwise paraphrasing it;

4) negatively sanction addressee's nonunderstanding of speaker's utterance.

We have pointed out that while universal, these practices differ in the extent to w they are employed and the contexts in which they are employed in different sp communities. Thus in American White middle class communities, verbally guessi a highly preferred response to addressee-rooted unintelligibility (Schegloff, Jefferso Sacks, 1977), whereas in Kaluli (Schieffelin, 1990) and Samoan (Ochs, 1988) comm ties, verbal guessing is rare, particularly where the unintelligible utterance is produce a young child. Kaluli and Samoans tend to ignore, display nonunderstanding and t or shame the producer of unintelligible utterances. In both communities, these pra preferences are tied to local notions of thinking and knowing. For both Kaluli Samoan interlocutors, there is a strong dispreference for guessing what another is th ing, that is, making explicit another's unexpressed intentions and feelings. Kaluli c that one person cannot know what another person thinks or feels, which results in extreme reluctance to explicitly verbalize or guess what another speakers means wants (Schieffelin, 1990, pp. 72-73).

Additionally, in Samoan communities, tolerance for and accommodation to unin gibility is hierarchically distributed in that unintelligibility among high ranking per is tolerated and accommodated to by low ranking persons far more than the reverse this sense each time American, Kaluli, and Samoan children produce unintelli utterances and are exposed to the unintelligible utterances of others, they are prov with opportunities for learning universal ways of responding to unintelligibility, yet a same time, variation in these responses across contexts provide opportunities for soci ing local ideologies and social orders.

Similarly, in American White middle class speech communities, speakers very grammatically simplify their utterances if they perceive that their utterances are intelligible, particularly when talking to a young child (Cross, 1977; Ferguson, 1 1982; Newport, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1977). In Kaluli and Samoan commun however, speakers rarely grammatically simplify under these circumstances, particu when talking to a young child. Kaluli and Samoan speakers typically assist the pro of comprehension by repeating or paraphrase a difficult utterance without necess grammatically simplifying it. These preferences in turn are tied to local ideology social order. Kaluli dispreference for grammatical simplification is tied to a local th of language acquisition in which children are thought to need to hear complex lang to become competent interlocutors (Schieffelin, 1990). In Samoan communities, g matical simplification is a form of psychological and social accommodation approp in speaking to high ranking addressees (Ochs, 1988). One finds grammatical simpli tion in talk to high ranking foreigners but not in talk to young children.

As the social and cultural contexts of grammatical simplification vary across com nities, so does the social meaning of this practice in these communities. In one com nity (Samoan), the use of grammatical simplification indexes only that the speak talking with a foreigner. In another community (mainstream white middle class Ar can), grammatical simplification can index that one is talking either to a foreign young child, an elderly person, or a pet. It is in this sense that a single practice has

cultural and universal structure. While speakers the world over struggle to achieve intelligibility, they do so in culturally arranged ways.

3. CONCLUSION

Language socialization research is committed to articulating interfaces between language, mind, and society by exploring the role of language in human development and socialization. Our perspective pushes research on children's pragmatic competence beyond the bounds of children's capacity to perform particular actions and participate in particular activities towards an integrated cultural account of children as members of communities with histories, values, ways of understanding the world and organizing their identities and interactions. This includes culturally-specific theories and practices surrounding child development. While language socialization is centrally engaged in the close analysis of perfectly ordinary recurrent language practices involving language and cultural apprentices, the field is more broadly dedicated to situating and visualizing the specific linguistic and interactional structures that constitute such practices in terms of culturally universal and particular processes and meanings.

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