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The dynamics of interactional and intentional pattern formation in children's language socialization



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ABSTRACT

The paradigm of Language Socialization draws upon the theoretical and analytical concepts used in linguistic anthropology, poststructuralist approaches to the study of discourse and practice, and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. This blending of different philosophical positions leaves Language Socialization with an incoherent concept of subjectivity. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate, first, how a coherent concept may be reached. The article argues for a phenomenological approach to the concept of habitus that brings the intentionality of consciousness back into focus as the true object of socialization processes. Second, the article demonstrates how an integrational approach to language, invested in the first-person perspective, can further an understanding of socialization as a dynamics of interactional and intentional pattern formation in children's development.

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1. Introduction

Language socialization research, as an anthropological approach to the study of children and youth, was established and developed by Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin in the 1980s and 90s (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin, 1990). To this day, the purpose of their research is to 'capture the social structurings and cultural interpretations of semi-otic forms, practices and ideologies that inform novices' practical engagements with others' (Ochs and Schieffelin, 2012, 1). The framework of Language Socialization has proven empirically robust and viable in providing valid new knowledge, from many different parts of the world, of the multiple ways in which children are linguistically socialized into the everyday practices of their communities. Theoretically, however, it operates with three competing concepts of subjectivity. A clear and concise definition of subjectivity is, of course, very important, since it has to do with the understanding of what a developing child is; what it means to undergo processes of socialization and to participate and act in the complexities of everyday life from a unique first-person perspective.

The first concept of subjectivity goes back to the work of Edward Sapir (1921, 1924, 1949 [1933]) whose understanding of 'human subjectivity and personhood' is encapsulated in his 'early critique of anthropological reductionism' (Seeman, 2010, 367). The second concept is derived from the poststructuralism of Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 1977), Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) and Judith Butler (1990), especially; and the third is suggested in particular by Alessandro Duranti, in his continuous effort to clarify the equally contested concepts of intentionality and intersubjectivity. In his earlier work, Duranti critiqued and rejected a number of different theories of intentionality (Duranti, 1993a,b). In his later work, he

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integrates some insights from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl into the wider framework of Language Socialization (Duranti, 2009a,b, 2010, 2015).

A phenomenological approach is, on the whole, compatible with the early conceptualization of human subjectivity and personhood within linguistic anthropology, but it is incompatible with a poststructuralist approach to the subject as a set of dispositions that have been discursively and practically produced. Poststructuralist theory rejects consciousness, i.e. the intentionality of consciousness, as the organizing principle of human experience. Instead it maintains that discourses and practices structure the behavior and actions of historically and socially positioned subjects. In this article I advocate a phenomenological approach in suggesting that the intentionality of consciousness is the true object of socialization processes. What becomes *socialized* through interactional practices and communicational activities are children's embodied directedness at particular (language) phenomena in their immediate surroundings and wider community, as well as the way these phenomena come to appear to them with a particular *sense* (Husserl, 1973, 122).

The crux of the matter is to find a theoretically viable way of accounting for the decisive influence of discourses and practices on children's socialization without giving up the primacy of the intentionality of consciousness or the assumption that unique processes of contextualization guide the making and interpretation of signs (Harris, 1996). Instead of submitting to the limitations of a poststructuralist theory of practice in which the inculcation of objective social and linguistic structures into bodily experience is the analytical focal point (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), I recommend ethnographically including and appreciating children's directedness and the inherent meaningfulness of the phenomena they intend, as the precondition for analyzing the unfolding drama of their linguistic behavior and actions in everyday life.

2. Background

Methodologically, studies in language socialization combine and refine traditional methods within linguistic anthropology. Relying on ethnographic methods (extensive fieldwork and participant observation), researchers have explored immediate interaction as social practice and identified its wider cultural and historical ramifications. Early as well as recent theoretical and methodological discussions and procedures for analysis have formed the overall approach and conduct (Boas, 1938 [1911]; Duranti, 1997, 2004; 2009; Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz and Hymes, 1964, 1972; Gumperz and Levinson, 1996; Hymes, 1977 [1974], 1981, 1996; Sapir, 1921). Dell Hymes' (1972) considerations of communicative competence and ways of speaking have consequently been integrated into much language socialization research. Researchers have often drawn inspiration from Erving Goffman's (1955, 1974, 1981) work on the interaction order, the dramaturgical self, and from his concepts of facework, footing, production format, and interactional roles. The distribution of particular genres (Bakhtin, 1986; Briggs and Bauman, 1992; Hymes, 1997) and the way they regulate children's production of personal narrative and claims to knowledge have been meticulously studied and documented (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Ochs et al., 1992, 1996; Ochs and Taylor, 1995; Perregaard, 2010). Finally, a conversation analytic approach has often been adopted to capture the unfolding dynamics of social interaction (Goodwin, C., 1981, 2000; Goodwin, M.H., 1990, 2006; Sacks et al., 1974).

It therefore seems fair to say that methodological consensus has long since been reached and further consolidated through the publication of the first *Handbook of Language Socialization* (Duranti et al., 2012). However, the implications of bringing more recent poststructuralist thinking into the paradigm (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004; Ochs et al., 2005) are in need of further scrutiny. In their early work, Ochs (1988) and Schieffelin (1990) seem to rely on an understanding of subjectivity and agency that is derived from developmental psychology (Vygotsky, 1986; Vygotsky and Luria, 1994) as well as linguistic anthropology with some mentioning of Bourdieu and Giddens. In their more recent overviews of what they themselves call the paradigm of Language Socialization (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004; Ochs and Schieffelin, 2012), the inspiration from poststructuralism is more pronounced.

Since the 1970s, the social studies and the humanities have been hugely influenced by social constructivist as well as poststructuralist thinking. Ideologically and historically, these strands of thought are diverse, but in analytical practice – and especially in the analysis of discourse and interaction – they often converge, and their differences collapse. Social constructivism ranges from the sociology of knowledge of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) and the cultural psychology of Jerome Bruner (1990) and Richard Schweder (Stigler et al., 1990) (emphasizing the participants' linguistic co-construction of each other's social reality) to the more radical social constructionist thinking of Kenneth Gergen (2009, 2011) or Michael Bamberg (2007, 2011), for example, who have drawn inspiration from French poststructuralism, especially the writings of Michel Foucault (1970 [1966], 1972 [1969]). The discursive psychology of Michael Billig (1999), who integrates poststructuralism and social constructionism, has been applied to studies of language socialization as well (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004). As mentioned, Bourdieu's theory of practice has been particularly influential. Feminist or gender theory as developed by Butler (1990) is advocated by Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) as a perspective worth integrating into the paradigm of Language Socialization. They conclude that 'the questions asked by French post-structuralists are more compelling, broader in scope, and suggestive in potential than anthropological discussions about persons and personhood' (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004, 356). Thus the poststructuralist understanding of the way discourses organize power relations – namely, in distributing positions among participants who display and perform their socially constructed and negotiated identities in ongoing interaction – has been extremely influential in recent years.

Closer to my own set of claims is Duranti's (2009b, 2010, 2015) recent exposition of Husserl's phenomenology, Husserl's concepts of intersubjectivity, intentionality, attention, and attentional modification, and their relevance to language socialization research. In fact, Duranti's analysis provides an excellent example of the way that the dynamics of interactional and

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