



Rye bread and halal: Enregisterment of food practices in the primary classroom



Martha Sif Karrebæk*

University of Copenhagen, Department of Scandinavian Studies and Linguistics, Njalsgade 120, DK-2300 Kbh.S, Denmark

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 23 September 2013

Keywords:

Enregisterment

Ideology

Food

Classroom interaction

Minority–majority relations

ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates how primary school children use food to organize social space, how they do it linguistically, and how they draw on different cultural and social models when doing it. Data comprise recordings from lunch encounters in a primary classroom over two years, and Linguistic Ethnography, as well as Language Socialization constitute the methodological frameworks. The food registers analysed are the Health register and the Halal register. It is shown that there is a specific interpretation of the Health register, and the Halal register is marginalized. On a more general level it is suggested that examination of food events enables us to understand the everyday significance for children of grand notions such as health, hierarchy, and globalization.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

“(t)he organization of social life is shaped by reflexive models of social life, models that are made through human activities and inhabited through them” (Agha, 2007, p. 2)

In this paper I will discuss how children and teachers use food to organize social space, how they do it linguistically, and how they draw on different cultural and social models (Agha, 2007) when doing it. With a particular focus at a primary classroom I argue that one of the human activities that shape and reflect social life is food encounters, and more notably lunch. I also argue that food is an important semiotic resource. On a more general level I suggest that the examination of the organization of food events enables us to grasp the everyday life significance for children of grand notions such as health, hierarchy, and globalization.

The classroom studied and reported from in this paper is socially and ethnically complex. This is significant for the social models that are available and enacted as well as for the indexical meanings of specific food items. For instance, I find social models and groups such as ‘the good student’, ‘the incompetent minority child’, ‘the virtuous Muslim’. I will focus on two registers and models of food: a health register and a religious register, but there are others, of course. All have different origins and, to a certain degree, different social ranges and social domains, in Agha’s (2007) terms. This means that they are recognized, oriented to and adhered to by different groups of people. All models organize food items hierarchically, in terms of preferred and dispreferred food items, or even moral and immoral food items, and the ways models organize food items may even be mutually incompatible. In addition, the models themselves are subject to hierarchical ordering. In this way food items can be used to create social divisions in classrooms between children who bring certain food items and children who do not, between children who orient to a particular food model and children who do not, and children who talk about food in a certain way and children who talk differently about it. Notably there is a difference between models that are acknowledged

* Tel.: +45 27281084.

E-mail address: martha@hum.ku.dk

and given importance in the peer group and those that are recognized by the institutional adults. The socialization into what is institutionally recognized as a competent and appropriate school-child necessitates that the child learns to recognize this and to juggle different, sometimes incongruent, values of food items. Therefore I argue that what the child brings for lunch, and how this food is linguistically evaluated, or enregistered, is consequential for the child's possibilities for positioning in social space. I also argue that this can be important for a child's long-term understanding of social identity.

Methodologically the study which the paper reports from builds on Linguistic Ethnography (Creese, 2008; Rampton, 2007). I did fieldwork over two years in the first two grades in an urban school in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. Micro-analysis of verbal and nonverbal actions in conversational segments are complemented with ethnographic insight and other approaches to social and semiotic relations, including frame and footing (Goffman, 1974, 1981), indexicality (Silverstein, 2003), and enregisterment (Agha, 2007). The study also contributes to research on food socialization (Aronsson and Gottzén, 2011; Ochs et al., 1996; Ochs and Shohet, 2006; Paugh and Izquierdo, 2009) by adding the perspective of socialization in an institutional context, by foregrounding children as socializing agents, and by focusing on cultural differences. Furthermore, as it investigates an ethnically complex setting which results from waves of migration over the recent decades, and as it does this from a sociolinguistic and linguistic ethnographic perspective, this study contributes to the 'sociolinguistics of globalization' (Blommaert, 2010).

2. Socio-linguistic background

2.1. Agha's notion of register and enregisterment

Agha makes it clear that in his social theory of language, language is actually just one social semiotic resource (Agha, 2007, 2011, p. 26). It was demonstrated long ago that food is another one (e.g., Barthes, 1957, 1964). At the same time, Agha underscores that language is particular pervasive and powerful in that through language individuals create *reflexive* models of behaviour, social groups and social relations. The social world is, exactly, organized into various such social groups, relations, and models, and these are mediated and construed through utterances. In fact, utterances "form a sketch of the social occasion in which they occur; they make social relations construable as effects of their occurrence." (Agha, 2007, p. 15). In addition, social groups, social relations, and social models are mediated by and performed through social practices and semiotic resources; food practices constitute one example, as also shown by social and interactional studies on food (Aronsson and Gottzén, 2011; Anving and Sellerberg, 2010; Ochs et al., 1996; Paugh and Izquierdo, 2009; see Counihan and Van Esterik, 2008; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002 for extensive overviews on social and cultural food research).

Food items involved in food events are *typified* and sorted into linguistic categories such as *healthy*, *halal*, *gross*, and *delicious*. In some cases the linguistic categories may even name *repertoires* or what Agha calls *registers* (Agha, 2007, p. 80). A semiotic register is a repertoire of performable signs linked to stereotypic pragmatic effects (Agha, 2007, p. 80). The linking processes are called enregisterment. A register is a social regularity which only emerges through the confirming evaluation of an individual's metapragmatic activity (Agha, 2007, p. 153), and the identification and naming of a register is a metapragmatic typification that indicates, reflexively, how a particular register is to be understood. The variety of registers with which an individual is acquainted equips the individual with portable emblems of identity (Agha, 2007, p. 146) and influences the range of social activities in which the individual is entitled to participate.

As semiotic signs that are available for assignment to registers, food items are linked to social groups and models and to specific pragmatic effects. These pragmatic effects both comprise the assignment of food items to categories *and* to moral judgments – as wrong or right. Essentially, our social models are normative models. They are understandings of patterns of behaviour which are seen as 'normal' by members of a population, and therefore they are linked to judgments of appropriateness and value schemes of 'good' vs. 'bad' (Agha, 2007, p. 97). For instance, do you claim to eat pork or not, do you (claim to) eat white bread or not? With such stances, practices and orientations you demonstrate to be a particular kind of individual, who belongs to a particular social group (cf. Allison, 2008; Karrebæk, 2012, 2013; Vallianatos and Raine, 2008), and who orient to a particular social model (Bradby, 1997). This is the *social range* of a pattern of behaviour (Agha, 2007, p. 124). For instance, if you are competent in a wine vocabulary or *oinoglossia* (Silverstein, 2003), you orient to one social group and social model; if you eat sweets with your friend while hiding behind your bag during class (such as Rampton's (2006) Nanette and Joanna), you demonstrably orient to (and against) different ones. Similarly, other people will assign you to groups and evaluate your behaviour according to social models on the basis of your linguistic and non-linguistic practices, including food-related practices (Burgess and Morrison, 1998).

Food items do not have intrinsic meaning. A particular food item may be termed unhealthy, disgusting or immoral at one occasion and by specific individuals, yet, at the same time other or even the same individuals may describe it as delicious and healthy. Meaning emerges in context, and linguistic categories (*delicious*, *unhealthy*) show that different models of behaviour and registers co-exist, even within a single social group (Agha, 2007, p. 2).

Individuals have the competence to recognize such models of behaviour, although they do not necessarily adhere to them, as when children – and other social beings – know what is considered healthy food and yet they do not want to eat it (Aronsson and Gottzén, 2011; Husby et al., 2008). A group of persons that recognizes a norm constitutes its social domain (Agha, 2007, p. 124). Actually individuals may not even agree on the social meaning of registers, models and signs. For

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7298312>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7298312>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)