Socializing Identities through Speech Style

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Socializing Identities through Speech Style

Learners of Japanese as a Foreign Language

Haruko Minegishi Cook

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Chapter 1

Introduction: An Indexical Approach to Language and Language Socialization

Taking an indexical approach, this book examines how learners of Japanese as a foreign language (henceforth JFL learners) and their host family members express their identities through uses of the so-called 'addressee honorific' *masu* form (verbal ending) during dinnertime conversation.[1] I define 'indexicality' as the function of language that points to an aspect of the social dimension in the immediate situation at hand. As the same linguistic form can be used in varied situations, an indexical approach takes the view that a linguistic form evokes multiple indexical (or social) meanings.[2] This book explores multiple social meanings of the *masu* form in Japanese.

This book differs from previous research on learners' acquisition of the honorifics in important ways. First, the focus of the book is not on the statistical analysis of learners' development of sociopragmatic competence (e.g. Rose & Ng Kwai-fun, 2001; Takahashi, 2001; Tateyama, 2001), but rather on ways in which the learners and their host family members use linguistic resources to construct their social identities in the daily routine of dinnertime talk. The pragmatic development of foreign language learners is intricately interwoven with their social identity in the target community (Kasper, 2001). In order to understand how foreign language learners acquire appropriate use of the *masu* form in interaction with host family members, 'it is critical to observe learners in social engagements and include the co-participants' situated actions in the analysis' (Kasper & Rose, 2002: 301). Secondly, this book questions the conventional and widely accepted meaning of the *masu* form as a marker of politeness or formality. It demonstrates that the *masu* form is not limited to politeness or formality but has multiple social meanings, and that these meanings are also fluid and context-dependent (cf. Cook, 1998). To approach the topic of how JFL learners are socialized to use the *masu* form, it is essential to analyze use of the form in interaction. This study examines use of the *masu* form under the assumption that it occurs in conversation among people in close relationships and plays an important role in socializing learners. Previous studies on JFL learners' pragmatic development assume that the *masu* form only occurs in talk with people in distant relationships (*soto* 'out-group/outside' context) and does not occur in conversation with people in close relationships

(*uchi* 'in-group/inside' context). To date, studies that examine learners' use of the *masu* form in conversation with people in close relationships are scarce. Thirdly, this book is different from previous research on learners' acquisition of the *masu* form in that the data come from naturally occurring conversation outside of the classroom. Previous studies collected data from formal settings such as classroom interactions (Ishida, 2001) and interviews (Marriott, 1993, 1995). The significance of examining learners' use of the *masu* form in dinnertime talk with the host family is that this informal setting is paralleled by the context of family conversation in which L1 Japanese children first learn to use the *masu* form (Clancy, 1985; Cook, 1996a, 1997).

By going beyond the assumption that *masu* is uniquely a form related to honorifics, this book contributes to our knowledge of the nature of honorifics and their functions. This book draws on language socialization (Ochs, 1988, 1990, 1996; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, 1996) and a theory of indexicality (e.g. Hanks, 1990, 2000; Ochs, 1990; Silverstein, 1976), both of which are founded on the assumption that language is an integral part of the social world. This introduction briefly discusses the indexical approach and language socialization as they relate to the study of this book. It also summarizes the significance of an indexical approach in examining the so-called 'addressee honorific form' in Japanese.

An Indexical Approach: Language as an Integral Part of the Social World

In an indexical approach, language is a socially organized phenomenon, and meaning is not a sole property of language but is situated and negotiated in social context (cf. Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Hanks, 1990, 2000). A linguistic form has the potential of taking on a variety of meanings. For example, the linguistic expression *here* points to a place closer to the speaker, which is the literal meaning of *here*. When this meaning is used in context, the indexical function of language can evoke multiple social meanings. If the speaker is standing by the table in the room *here* refers to the area where the table is located. If the speaker is standing by the door, *here* denotes the area where the door is located. If the speaker points to the window by her side and utters 'Here!', then this expression refers to the window. In each instance, the linguistic expression *here* indexes a different object in the immediate situation. This function of language has also been referred to as deictic function, and classic examples of deixis are person, place and time (cf. Levinson, 1983). The indexical function, however, is not limited to person, place or time deixis. For example, the utterance 'Can you hold this for me?' is usually understood as an indirect request in ordinary

conversation, but may be understood in a clinical setting as a question asking the addressee's ability to use his or her arm (in particular, if the patient is asked this question by a nurse or a doctor). The fuzzy boundary between linguistic form and context indicates that all linguistic forms are potentially indexical, i.e. that the meaning of the linguistic form is relativized to social context.

The notion of 'context' needs some clarification. Duranti and Goodwin (1992: 3) define 'context' as 'a frame (Goffman, 1974) that surrounds the event being examined and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation'. The frame that surrounds the event is not merely the setting that statically surrounds an utterance but the social and psychological world in which the participants of a speech event interact at a given moment. In other words, context is comprised of the setting, participants, language ideology, activity type, the sequential organization of talk and the state of knowledge of the interlocutors in the social interaction. Throughout this book, the term 'context' is used in this sense. The complexity of context provides an ongoing interactive process. Within the social context, the participants act in habitual patterns including their ways of interpreting linguistic forms (cf. Hanks, 1996). Underspecified linguistic meaning is enriched by the interlocutors' habitual pattern of joint orientation to the linguistic form in the local context. Thus, although the ways in which interlocutors interpret verbal forms are not rule-governed, their joint achievement is based on habitual routine patterns. The interlocutors may deviate from the habitual routine. These deviations are not considered as violations of social rules but seen as a 'marked' pattern of behavior in contrast to the habitual or 'unmarked' pattern (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

The interdependency of language and social context set forth by an indexical perspective of language sees language as a tool to construct social situations (cf. Ochs, 1988). Just as we use various tools to create the physical environment, language is a tool available to us to express who we are, how we feel, what we know and what activity we are engaged in. In other words, we choose particular linguistic forms to accomplish the interactional goal at hand. Thus, more emphasis is placed on the 'agency' (cf. Duranti, 2006; Giddens, 1979) of the language user. I will return to the discussion of indexicality in Chapter 2.

Language Socialization

From an indexical view of language, novices' acquisition of language is not simply seen as the development of grammatical competence (i.e. how novices acquire the tacit knowledge of abstract linguistic rules) but as a process of language socialization (i.e. the acquisition of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge in social context) (Ochs, 1988, 1990, 1996;

Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, 1996). An indexical approach entails that language acquisition is embedded in social context. Ochs and Schieffelin (1995: 74) state, '...in every community, grammatical forms are inextricably tied to, and hence index, culturally organized situations of use...' Thus, language socialization research contends that acquiring language goes hand-in-hand with acquiring sociocultural knowledge.

Language socialization draws on several research frameworks that investigate the social organization of context. These research frameworks include linguistic anthropology (e.g. Hymes, 1964), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Leontyev, 1981a, 1981b) and the dialogic approach to language (Bakhtin, 1981; Voloshinov, 1973[1929]), ethnomethodology (e.g. Cicourel, 1973; Heritage, 1984), conversation analysis (e.g. Sacks *et al.*, 1974; Schegloff, 1968), social psychology (e.g. Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991), semiotics (Silverstein, 1976) and social constructivism (e.g. Bucholtz, 1999, Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Holms & Myerhoff, 1999; Rogoff, 1990). In this theoretical tradition, social context, including social identities, are not given *a priori* but constructed in social interaction. Human beings use language to build sociocultural worlds, and language is an indexical tool to accomplish this end. Thus, language socialization research considers language acquisition to be embedded in cultural practice. It investigates how novices learn to become competent members in a social group by participating in the daily routines. In this process, novices are socialized through the use of language as well as socialized in how to use language (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

Language socialization can be either explicit or implicit. Explicit socialization includes overt statements about social norms, values and beliefs, as well as 'modeling', in which a member of the group models linguistic expressions for a novice to repeat.[3] While explicit socialization concerns the content of talk, implicit socialization can be achieved through the use of grammatical structures such as Japanese sentence-final particles (cf. Cook, 1990a) and interactional mechanisms such as repairs (cf. He, 2004). Although explicit socialization is more salient, implicit socialization is more pervasive. In Ochs' words (1990: 291), 'The greatest part of sociocultural information is keyed *implicitly*, through language use.' Implicit language socialization is a powerful socialization process, in which indexicality creates a link between language and sociocultural knowledge. While novices can resist the social norms inherent in explicit socialization, it is not easy to reject the sociocultural knowledge implicit in the use of grammatical structures or interactional mechanisms.

Learning to understand the 'indexical potentials' of linguistic forms is at the core of language socialization. Ochs states (1996: 414):

> A novice's understanding of linguistic forms entails an understanding of their indexical potential (i.e. the situational constellations of by whom, for what, when, where and to what ends forms are conventionally employed) in co-ordination with co-occurring linguistic forms and other symbolic dimensions of the situation at hand.

Language socialization studies investigate how particular linguistic forms are used and interpreted in a local community, and how novices are guided by experts/members to learn the semiotic processes of indexes in the routine practices of everyday life.

Language socialization takes place not only during the early years of human life but also across our life spans (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). We experience language socialization in our daily routines, as well as when we acquire the communicative skills necessary for participating in a new social group or community. For example, to become a doctor, we need to learn how to speak and act as a doctor acts, and to become a lawyer, we need to learn how to speak and act as a lawyer acts. Obtaining a medical degree alone does not make one a doctor. A part of being a doctor is an appropriate display of the social identity of a doctor and ratified by patients, nurses, lab technicians and other doctors in social interaction.

Identity in the language socialization paradigm

The notion of social identity is of relevance to the argument of this book, and can be defined as 'the linguistic construction' of group membership (Kroskrity, 2001: 106) within a particular context. As evidenced in the above example of the identity of a doctor, from the language socialization perspective, one's social identity is not *a priori* given but co-constructed in moment-by-moment social interaction by the use of particular languages or linguistic forms as resources. This does not mean that an individual does not have a social identity prior to interaction. For example, someone who has a medical degree is a medical doctor. Such an identity is referred to as a 'transportable identity' (Zimmerman, 1998). However, a medical doctor does not display this social identity all the time. In fact, he or she has multiple social identities, one of which is being a medical doctor. It is in interaction that he or she orients to a particular social identity. In this sense, identity is not treated as a static category but as a fluid and interactionally emerging process. The interlocutor's social identity may shift from turn to turn in order to achieve his or her interactional goals.

Language plays an important role in identity construction and some linguistic structures explicitly encode the speaker's identity. For example, the Japanese pronoun *boku*, meaning 'I', indexes that the identity of the speaker is a male. However, most linguistic structures do not directly

index social identities. Ochs (1993: 289) states: 'the relation of language to social identity is not direct but rather *mediated* by the interlocutor's understandings of conventions for doing particular social acts and stances . . .' In other words, most identities do not have a one-to-one relationship with linguistic forms but are indirectly indexed by social acts and/or stances directly indexed by linguistic structures. A given linguistic form is mediated by the interlocutor's understanding of conventions and infers a certain social identity. For example, the identity of a teacher can be indirectly indexed by the speaker's use of a quiz question. The identity of a female in Japanese society may be indirectly indexed by soft-sounding sentence-final particles in Japanese. In Chapter 2, I will further discuss Ochs' two-step model of indexical relations, which concerns identity construction. In this book, the term 'identity' is used in the sense that it is constructed and continually emergent in moment-by-moment social interaction.

L2 language socialization research

Language socialization research has largely focused on young children's first language socialization (cf. Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin, 1990; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). More recently scholars have expanded the scope of language socialization research to second language acquisition (SLA) (e.g. Bayley & Schecter, 2003; Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003; Zuengler & Cole, 2005). Assuming that language acquisition and acculturation are the same process, these scholars claim that L2 learners are novices in that they are in the process of acquiring a new language as well as relevant sociocultural knowledge. From the language socialization perspective, a second or foreign language is acquired as learners participate in daily routines with native speakers of the target language. Most L2 language socialization studies have examined educational settings, which include ESL classes (Duff, 2002; Duff & Early, 1999; Poole 1992), heritage language classes (He, 2000, 2003, 2004; Lo, 2004), foreign language classes (Ohta, 1999; Yoshimi, 1999) and study abroad contexts (DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Siegal, 1994, 1995, 1996). Only a few studies have investigated L2 socialization in the workplace (Duff *et al*., 2000; Li, 2000). As L2 socialization research studies a wide range of educational institutions and workplaces, in which L2 learners of different age groups study or work with varied goals, the issues that L2 language socialization research deals with are much more complex. While L1 learners are young children expected to become competent members of the community in which they were born, L2 learners have a choice as to whether or not to become or act like a member of the community in which the target language is spoken. Thus, Zuengler and Cole (2005) raise a question concerning the basic tenets of

L1 language socialization, namely, the end point of language socialization and the categories of 'expert' and 'novice'. Zuengler and Cole state (2005: 314):

> ...we must question the assumption of a presumed end point of language socialization. An additional concern is the assumption of neatly-bounded categories of 'expert' and 'novice'.

The basic notions that have been assumed in L1 language socialization may not apply to L2 language socialization research.

The claim that L2 learners may not choose to be socialized into norms of the target language and culture is made mostly by studies that examine explicit socialization processes, in which the member/expert explicitly tells the novice sociocultural norms. As proposed by Ochs (1990), however, a powerful language socialization process is implicit socialization. By participating in routine activities conducted in the target language, learners acquire sociocultural information, which is implicitly encoded in linguistic structures or interactional mechanisms (He, 2000, 2003; Lo, 2004). Without access to conscious knowledge of the social meaning of a given linguistic structure or interactional mechanism, learners are not able to make a conscious choice to accept or reject the social identity indexed through the language in context. Thus, the end point of implicit language socialization for L2 learners cannot deviate much from the sociocultural norms of the target language.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this book deal with a case of implicit language socialization, for there is a discrepancy between the host families' belief about the honorifics and their practice, and the host family members are not consciously aware of how they actually use the *masu* form. Therefore, they are not able to explicitly tell learners about their actual usages. Generally native speakers of Japanese believe that the *masu* form is not used in conversation among people in close relationships such as family members, and most Japanese language textbooks provide the same explanation about this form (see more discussion on this point in Chapter 7). This suggests that neither the Japanese host family members nor the learners are aware of the uses of the *masu* form in family conversation. In fact, none of the participants of this study indicated in a questionnaire that they were paying attention to the *masu* form in dinnertime conversation. Furthermore, as we shall see, for the most part, the *masu* form is not used in the prescribed fashion (i.e. as a marker of politeness or formality) in family conversation. Thus, as the nature of *masu* usages in this context is not overtly accessible to the participants, the *masu* form in this context serves as an ideal linguistic feature to study implicit language socialization.