

Second Language Socialization and Learner Agency

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Second Language Socialization and Learner Agency

Adoptive Family Talk

Lyn Wright Fogle

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Transcription Conventions

(adapted from Tannen *et al.*, 2007)

((words))	Double parentheses enclose transcriber's comments.
/words/	Slashes enclose uncertain transcription.
/???/	Indicates unintelligible words.
Carriage return	Each new line represents an intonation unit.
-	A hyphen indicates a truncated word or adjustment within an intonation unit (e.g. repeated word, false start).
?	A question mark indicates a relatively strong rising intonation (interrogative).
!	An exclamation mark indicates rising intonation (exclamatory).
.	A period indicates a falling, final intonation.
,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation.
..	Dots indicate silence (more dots indicate a longer silence).
:	A colon indicates an elongated sound.
CAPS	Capitals indicate emphatic stress.
<laugh>	Angle brackets enclose descriptions of vocal noises (e.g. laughs, coughs, crying).
Words [words] [words]	Square brackets enclose simultaneous talk.

1 Introduction

At the turn of the century, transnational adoption emerged as a growing and important phenomenon in contemporary society that has changed the way people view family and kinship and, by extension, culture (Howell, 2007; Volkman, 2005). The rates of US adoptions from abroad nearly tripled in the years 1990 to 2004 (Vandivere *et al.*, 2009), and the phenomenon of transnational adoption has touched numerous lives around the world. In addition, transnational adoption has been a topic of intense media attention and public discourse in Western cultures. Celebrities such as Madonna and Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have been both admired and maligned in the popular press for the motives and methods of their multiple adoptions from various nations (Russell, 2009; Simpson, 2009). Further, cases such as Artyom (Justin) Hansen, who was returned to Russia alone on a plane by his US adoptive mother, incited anger and fear on the part of parents, government officials and the general public both in the US and in Russia (Levy, 2010). In short, transnational adoption has become a touchstone issue for understanding the West's position in a globalizing world.

In this maelstrom of high-profile media attention, it has been hard to hear the voices of everyday adoptive families and harder still to understand what life in an adoptive family is like. How do adoptive families create lasting bonds and how, for example, do older adoptees manage the transitions to a new country, language and home? This book focuses on one important aspect of transnational adoption – the second language acquisition of English by older children adopted from abroad by US adoptive families. In examining everyday conversations audio-recorded by three Russian adoptive families, I discuss the role language plays in forming a family across linguistic and cultural differences, how learning and using a second language (for children and adults) relates to establishing bonding relationships in the family, and how children themselves develop agency in language socialization processes. I provide detailed linguistic analyses of discourse level processes (such as storytelling [narrative talk], talking about language [language episodes] and switching between languages [code-switching]) in these families' everyday conversations to show the active role that children play in shaping language learning and identity formation. This research contributes to how we view second language learning and socialization as well as how we understand learning processes in the transnational adoptive family.

Language Socialization

The language socialization paradigm originally sought to integrate psycholinguistic perspectives on first language acquisition by children with anthropological insights on socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Language learning from this point of view is considered an essentially social phenomenon that is mediated by culture and language. Language socialization, or the socialization of children or other novices to language and through language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984), has most often focused on top-down processes, or the role of experts (parents) in shaping novices' (children's) behaviors and practices. Recent approaches to the study of socialization in childhood, however, have begun to emphasize the active role children play in their own learning processes and the co-constructed and collaborative nature of socialization (Corsaro, 2004; Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004; Luykx, 2003; Luykx, 2005). Concomitantly, recent studies in second language socialization, or the process in which non-native speakers of a language (or individuals who have lost competence in a language they once spoke) seek both competence in the second language and to become members of a community in which it is spoken, have emphasized the contradictory and conflicted nature of such processes as learners may reject or resist target language norms (Duff, 2011). Drawing these two strands together, this book takes as a starting point the notion that young second language learners can actively shape the interactional contexts in which they participate, and in so doing, create opportunities for learning for themselves and socialize adults into meeting their linguistic, interactional and identity needs.

Focusing on the ways in which children and other learners affect the world around them is important for understanding second language learning processes, as well as the processes of socialization that occur in contexts such as the transnational adoptive family. In the chapters that follow, I illustrate two main points: (a) that second language socialization, or the apprenticeship of young transnational adoptees into the linguistic and cultural norms of the US family, is a bidirectional and often child-directed process (i.e. parents often accommodate linguistically to children's direct influence), and (b) correspondingly, life in adoptive families requires quotidian negotiations that entail the creation of new family practices and norms. Through the analysis of interaction in these three families, I demonstrate both the collaborative and co-constructed nature of language socialization processes and elaborate on the transformations that Duff (2011) notes are characteristic of second or additional language processes (see also Garrett & Baquedano-Lopéz, 2002; Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004).

Most studies of the second language socialization of young English language learners have been conducted in classroom settings. The past two decades of research on young English language learners' experiences in schools has ushered in a new focus on the complex social worlds and identities associated with second language learning. Norton and Toohey (2001), for example, argued that being a good language learner was the result not only of the acquisition of linguistic competence (i.e. the language code), but also of having access to conversations and discourses that make it possible for learners to become members of their new communities. Sociocultural and ethnographic approaches to second language learning have emphasized a focus on learner participation in communities of practice, such as classrooms and peer groups, as a way to understand these complex and sometimes confounding processes (Duff, 2008b; Hawkins, 2005; Toohey, 2000; Willett, 1995). In studying the language socialization processes that occur in adoptive families, this book sheds light on socialization and learning processes in middle-class US families that connect with school and classroom practices and, specifically, how children in the family environment achieve a sense of agency that facilitates language learning in interactions with adults.

The way that students act and behave, the extent to which their own participation patterns match those of their teachers and the amount of control and power they feel they have both in the classroom and in interactions with others can play a role in how students are perceived by their teachers, how much access they have to learning opportunities and how much they learn (Harklau, 2000; Hawkins, 2005; Philips, 2001). In many cases, these ways of participating in the classroom are related to home socialization. Further, language socialization research in monolingual middle-class homes has shown how children are socialized in these families into practices that coincide with the expectations and goals of formal schooling (e.g. theory building and narrative practices) (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Ochs *et al.*, 1992). New perspectives from bi- and multilingual families have pointed to the ways in which children themselves socialize other family members (parents and siblings) into discourse practices and language choice in family interactions (Fogle & King, *in press*; Luykx, 2003, 2005), the point of focus for this book. Here I start with discourse practices known to be important sites of language socialization and, in some cases, precursors to literate activities in the classroom (i.e. narrative activities, metalinguistic talk and code-switching) and show how, as the adoptees in this study become competent participants in these activities, they also find ways to change and transform these practices in interaction with their parents.

Focusing on the unique and vulnerable population of transnational adoptees opens the door for a better understanding of how mainstream language ideologies (of parents) intersect with language learning processes of second language-learning children and how socialization into middle-class, mainstream norms prepares these learners for contexts outside of the family (see Fogle, in press). It also provides a micro-level view of what cultural change can encompass as the language-learning children in this study achieve and exert their agency in the new home. The fact that middle-class, Western parents are known to use a 'self lowering' or accommodating style when interacting with children (see Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) guides my analysis of how the children are able to influence their parents and establish agency in family interactions as parents and other family members accommodate to certain linguistic strategies (e.g. resisting, questioning and negotiating) that transform the family discourse.

Agency and Identity in Second Language Socialization

A primary finding in studies of school-based second language socialization has been that the achievement of agency by learners is necessary to facilitate learning processes. Learners who are able to act, in the sense that they are able to recruit assistance and scaffolding and gain opportunities to use language, do better in classroom environments than learners who remain silent and do not actively seek out language learning opportunities (Hawkins, 2005; Rymes & Pash, 2001). Language learning and being a 'good learner' in school settings entails negotiations among learners' individual agency, structures put in place by the teacher and school and ideologies that mediate learning and interactional processes (McKay & Wong, 1996; Toohey, 2000).

But what do we mean by learner agency in second language studies? The construct is most often invoked in studies of second language learning to explain learner behaviors that facilitate learning, such as participation and actively seeking out assistance (e.g. Hawkins, 2005; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). However, Morita (2004) and others (Harklau, 2000; McKay & Wong, 1996) have effectively shown how learner actions that do *not* lead to participation and positive learning outcomes (such as resistance through silence and subversion) are also agentic. Agency as a construct, therefore, can both afford and constrain language-learning opportunities depending on the sociocultural context and the intentions or goals of the learner. This contradiction results in the construct of agency as yielding potentially *no* explanatory power in understanding language learning processes without a

more nuanced discussion of the conditions under which learner agency emerges, the types of agency that are possible in the particular context and, crucially, the effect of the action.

Sociolinguists have expanded on notions of agency in the social sciences by considering the linguistic construction of agency, both embedded in grammars and instantiated in interaction. Ahearn (2001) defines agency as the ‘socioculturally mediated capacity to act’, and Al Zidjaly (2009: 178) elaborates on this definition by suggesting that these processes are also linguistic, explaining that ‘agency is best conceived as a collective process for negotiating roles, tasks, and alignments that takes place through linguistic . . . or nonlinguistic mediational means’. Like Al Zidjaly, my analyses of children’s agency will be primarily linguistic with a focus on the interactional strategies children use not only for action in the family, but also to transform the interactional context in which they participate. I will further argue that it is the outcomes of agentic actions in which we are most interested in second language learning.

Three adoptive families participated in the research presented in this book, and each family context gave rise to a different type of agency that gained importance in negotiating the interactional context and language-learning opportunities for the children. In the first family, The Sondermans (Chapter 4), I examine the children’s resistance to the father’s prompts and questions. In the second family, the Jackson-Wessels (Chapter 5), I look at elicitation of parental talk and control through children’s questioning practices as a type of agency. And finally, in the third family, I discuss the children’s negotiation of language choice and the use of Russian as an agentic practice. These different types of learner agency – resistance, control and negotiation – do lead to important language learning and identity construction opportunities in the adoptive families despite the fact that they do not always coincide with the parents’ desired practices and norms. In this way, the second language socialization processes in these transnational adoptive families, where bonding and becoming a family are central to family interactions, are negotiated and collaborative.

Families both reflect and construct ideologies and processes found on the macro or societal level (see King *et al.*, 2008), and the microinteractional roles that are established in families have been posited to connect with larger, macro-level identities (Ochs & Taylor, 1995; Ervin-Tripp *et al.*, 1984). In this book I focus on how the micro-level roles that children take on in the family (as resistor, questioner or negotiator) influence parents to change their linguistic and interactional strategies. I argue that these interactional-level identities do relate to the children’s larger, desired identities as they establish certain child-directed discourse practices as the norm over other,