INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 8: LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION

Since the late 1970s, considerable research has been conducted on how children and other novices become both communicatively and culturally competent within their homes, schools, and other discourse communities. The research has examined spoken, written, signed, and additional linguistic and semiotic systems people use to convey meanings. It has also studied the identities, stances or values, and practices that characterize membership in a particular cultural group that newcomers are expected to appropriate when learning language.

This eighth volume of the Encyclopedia of Language and Education, with its focus on language socialization, has been added to the original set published a decade ago to reflect the burgeoning research in this area, especially since the late 1980s. Language socialization complements research on language acquisition and formal language education by paying particular attention to the social, cultural, and interactional contexts in which language and other kinds of knowledge are learned, both formally and informally, and by examining the role of teachers, peers, siblings, and other more experienced members of the culture who explicitly or implicitly help novices gain expertise in the ways of the community.

Although most chapters in this volume include a section on the early developments of research within the particular learning context that is featured, Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin, in the first chapter, provide an important 30-year retrospective of the historical and disciplinary roots of language socialization in psychology, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and education and its development in the USA, particularly, where the majority of scholars doing language socialization research have been educated—many of them by Ochs and Schieffelin themselves. Because of its early and enduring association with American linguistic anthropology, language socialization research has only gradually been taken up by communities of researchers in non-English-dominant societies or approaching similar phenomena from different analytic traditions but also framed as “language socialization.” Unfortunately, Volume 8 has fewer authors from different countries than other volumes do, as a result. Yet the research represented in this volume does include, to the extent possible, work being undertaken in...
a wide and diverse range of linguistic, ethnic, and geographical regions of the world, from small-scale and pre-industrialized societies to highly industrialized ones. Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Cameroon, Thailand, Japan, Hungary, Sweden, Israel, Italy, Canada, the UK, Australia, and the USA are just some of the countries whose cultures and languages and socialization routines are examined here.

One crucial aspect of language socialization that is emphasized in each chapter as well as within and across the sections is the following: that gaining competence in new ways of using language and representing meanings, including in our own primary languages, is an ongoing one that occurs throughout one’s life, from birth to death. However, whereas many studies of children’s language and literacy socialization have been conducted, insufficient research to date has examined the other end of the continuum, namely, communities of the elderly living together or elderly persons functioning within their own multigenerational communities. Too little attention has been paid to aging and, in some cases, the attendant degenerative conditions that necessitate the learning of new ways of speaking, signing, writing, and comprehending texts for geriatric populations themselves and also for their loved ones and caregivers. In view of the quickly aging populations in most industrialized countries, future editions of this volume or similar publications would ideally have a section on language socialization and aging, assuming that sufficient research will be conducted on these topics in the near future: among healthy older individuals learning new languages and literacy practices required for work, leisure, or (im)migration, for example; among older adults learning new communication strategies as their erstwhile “normal” functioning begins to change or deteriorate for a variety of social, psychological, and medical reasons; and among the caregivers who assist these individuals, who must also be socialized into comprehensible new modes of communication, responsive to the needs and conditions of their interlocutors.

In addition to being a lifelong process, language socialization and its accompanying discourse practices vary across the activities and communities one participates in at any given age or stage in life. Each community of practice has its own norms, preferences, and expectations about language and literacy practices and ideologies within that local “culture.” The chapters in this volume reflect that diversity of experience by noting the different ways in which people may engage in language socialization across activities within the home, or at school, or in youth groups, gangs, gendered groups, in cyberspace and in community organizations, or in higher education or vocational training, across a range of professions, and among people with disabilities affecting their socialization and communication.
Certainly, these are but a few of the communities that could have been included. Missing are accounts of language socialization within religious communities (for indigenous members as well as outsiders seeking entry), in transgendered or other sexual-minority subcultures, in sports clubs, in the myriad professions or vocations not described here, in South Asia, the Middle East, and other underrepresented regions in this volume and their ethnolinguistic populations, and among people across a wider spectrum of disabilities (apart from schizophrenia, which is included) as well as abilities. Thus, the chapters in this volume represent just a partial selection of current scholarship on language socialization. Fortunately, the research surveyed in the other nine volumes in the Encyclopedia complements what is presented here to some extent.

The creation of the sections used in this volume on language socialization, within the home or at school (with a focus on children), among adolescents and adults, or, alternatively, in particular communities where one age group is not being foregrounded, is meant to reflect an organic and situated lifespan approach. However, this clustering of chapters and thus of research approaches, populations, and communities might be construed as too delimited and restrictive. As many authors note, successful engagement in the discourse practices in one context (e.g., at school, in higher education, or work) typically presupposes prior language/literacy socialization of a particular type in other contexts. Furthermore, acknowledging, as many scholars do, that language socialization is a bi- or multidirectional process in which not only novices but also more experienced community members are being socialized by mutual engagement in language/literacy practices, a focus on children in the home or at school may inadvertently obscure the notion that within those same contexts older siblings, parents, teachers, and others are being socialized into new practices, orientations, and understandings at the same time. Also, language socialization at home, in community groups, and at school is often concurrent and interdependent; it may occur in a very similar, compatible, and complementary manner, or in a completely different, even contradictory, way. Thus, the section divisions are mainly used for heuristic thematizing purposes but readers should think of these sections as layers in multi-layered and heavily textured experiences of lifewide as well as lifelong socialization.

In addition to conceiving of these contexts as different, overlapping and intersecting layers of experience, we must understand the potential for innovation and syncretism within any particular stratum or locus of socialization. Language socialization for many people and communities in the twenty-first century involves the co-existence of more than
one language or dialect, may be mediated by new information and communication technologies, and may entail the development of syncretic linguistic, discursive, and cultural practices and correspondingly hybrid identities. Nowhere is such hybridity and multilingualism more apparent than in some of the transnational, diasporic, immigrant, and postcolonial communities described in this volume, in contrast, perhaps, to some earlier work that focused on primarily monolingual populations and discourse processes. Of course, in many regions of the world, numerous local languages and cultures have co-existed or been in contact for many generations so this is not a new phenomenon (as other volumes in the Encyclopedia demonstrate so well) but it is an important current focus in language socialization. Much research in “foreign-“ or second-language learning contexts, as well as in multilingual or diglossic contexts in which a colonial language may be the language of formal education, foregrounds the different language ideologies and norms into which newcomers are socialized and the discontinuities as well as continuities that may exist between home/community and school practices.

This volume is organized around five sections. Section One, the largest section, highlights historical, theoretical, and methodological approaches to language socialization research and the emergence of language socialization as a distinct subfield of linguistic anthropology and applied linguistics with obvious relevance to education. In addition to the previously mentioned overview piece by Ochs and Schieffelin, Claire Kramsch and Sune Vork Steffensen examine theoretical issues in second-language acquisition and socialization in light of current “ecological” perspectives (the primary focus of Volume 9). Betsy Rymes describes the relationship between language socialization and the linguistic anthropology of education, a conceptual and methodological orientation. Matthew Bronson and Karen Watson-Gegeo examine language socialization in contrast with the shortcomings in second-language acquisition research that is uncritical, socially uncontextualized, and unconcerned with issues of learner agency and voice. Next, Geoff Williams presents a Systemic Functional Linguistic approach to language socialization, drawing on the foundational social and linguistic scholarship of Basil Bernstein, Michael Halliday, and Ruqaiya Hasan, in particular. The sixth chapter, by Duanduan Li, examines research on the socialization of pragmatics, such as speech acts and politeness routines, in first- and second-language contexts and among children and adults. Readers are also referred to the chapter by Paul Garrett in Volume 10 on research methods in language socialization, which we have not wanted to duplicate in this volume.

Section Two focuses to a great extent on children in their interactions with family members, siblings, and peers at home and in the
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community. Shoshana Blum-Kulka describes studies of language socialization in the context of family dinnertime discussions in the USA, Italy, Greece, and Israel, among other countries. Amy Paugh looks at how children are socialized into understandings about the nature, value, and tensions connected with work as a result of hearing about and observing the working lives of their parents. Kate Pahl highlights language socialization and multimodality (e.g., involving different kinds of juxtaposed images, scripts, and texts) in multilingual urban homes. Delyth Morris and Kathryn Jones focus specifically on minority language revitalization in Europe (and especially Wales) by investigating home language socialization. The last chapter in this section, by Amy Kyratzis and Jenny Cook-Gumperz, describes gendered language socialization among children, critiquing earlier work that examined gender in an overly static, dichotomous, or essentialized manner and presenting currently favored approaches that take context, contingency, and agency into account more fully.

The third section surveys research on language and literacy socialization and schooling. Patricia Baquedano-López and Shlomy Kattan describe general themes in research in schools in the USA and elsewhere in terms of their sociological versus ideological orientation. Leslie Moore presents research on language education (second/foreign and multilingual) in non-Western settings in Africa (especially Cameroon), Asia, and Central Europe and the effects of colonialism, missionization, and globalization on indigenous practices and language ideologies. Examining cross-generational language shift among school-aged children, Kathryn Howard provides examples of research in a similarly broad cross-section of geographical domains, from Papua New Guinea and Thailand to islands in the Caribbean, where vernacular and national Standard languages at home and at school, respectively, may give way to syncretic or hybrid codes and practices or may cross domains (e.g., use of the vernacular language at school or the standard national variety at home). The last chapter in this section, by Agnes He, describes research on heritage language education and socialization, one of the newer domains for language socialization research, particularly in immigrant-receiving countries such as the USA.

In the fourth section, Shirley Brice Heath provides a far-reaching, multi-century perspective on the socialization and apprenticeship of adolescents and young adults into a range of language/literacy practices within their learning communities, both legal—or condoned by society—and not. Daryl Gordon reviews research on gendered second-language socialization among immigrant populations, focusing primarily on adolescents and adults but noting important studies involving children as well. Naoko Morita and Masaki Kobayashi then describe academic second-language discourse socialization at the
postsecondary level mainly. Finally, Patricia Duff examines the relationship between language socialization in higher education contexts, such as universities and vocational programs, and socialization for work in the service sector and in professions such as medicine and law.

Section Five concludes the volume with fascinating accounts of socialization within and across particular communities where the focus is less on childhood versus adolescence versus adulthood, or home versus school versus work domains, but, rather, on the particular languages, language ecologies, as well as modes of communication that are in use or, conversely, may be in decline. Diane Pesco and Martha Crago describe language socialization in Canadian Aboriginal communities, representing both rural and urban, and monolingual and bi- or multilingual groups (e.g., Cree, Inuit, or Algonquin, in combination with French and/or English). Carol Erting and Marlon Kuntze present research on language socialization into Deaf communities—or the “DEAF-WORLD”—both nationally and internationally, which often occurs in late childhood or even adulthood and thus presents a unique context for first-language socialization. Eva Lam describes language socialization and hybrid languages, identities, and textual practices fostered in online communities among diasporic and transnational groups, for example. Haruko Cook documents research on socialization in Japanese as a first and second language in Japan and elsewhere highlighting how learners of Japanese learn to encode affect, honorifics, gender-appropriate forms, and formal register in their speech. The final chapter, by Irene Walsh, deals with the challenges of language socialization (or resocialization) for people with mental health disorders, such as schizophrenia, and those employed to assist them.

As these chapters reveal, developments in the young field of language socialization are very exciting. The authors included in the volume have approached the phenomenon of language socialization from different but complementary traditions and disciplines, and using a variety of methods: drawing on linguistic anthropology, functional linguistics, psychology, applied linguistics, semiotics, speech and language therapy, and education, for example. As a set, the papers provide compelling insights into the intricacies novices encounter when trying to become proficient in another culture’s or community’s codes and practices.

The conditions for learning vary considerably across the chapters. In some contexts, strong, stable models of the target practices exist (e.g., in longstanding family dinnertime narrative traditions); in others, practices are being contested or are undergoing significant change or innovation, as in communities experiencing language shift, language revitalization, or the development of new communication codes (e.g., in cyber-communication). In yet other contexts, expert models of
communicative competence may be fleeting, inaccessible, or absent from language learners’ immediate lives (e.g., for the deaf children of hearing parents who do not have access to signed language in the home, community, or school sometimes for many years); and in quite different cases, the communication skills once possessed by mature, communicatively competent individuals, for complex neurological and cortical reasons, may have regressed dramatically; or, in the case of some autistic individuals, may never have fully attained a normal repertoire of linguistic and communicative ability and therefore require assistance to gain independence and greater functionality through specialized language-socialization interventions. The co-existence of multiple language codes, orthographies, and symbolic or semiotic systems only increases the possible range of trajectories, experiences, challenges, and epistemologies learners might experience in any of the above contexts.

It is our hope that this volume will contribute meaningfully to current understandings and debates about language socialization and language education and will also catalyze future research in areas recommended by the authors as well as in those ethnolinguistic, geographical, developmental, and other community contexts that have not been adequately represented here or investigated up to now. Further scholarship in language socialization, as demonstrated so well in these chapters, will help illuminate the often taken-for-granted richness and complexity of everyday interactions in the service of human learning, enculturation, and communicative competence, and will also inform effective educational interventions for novices seeking legitimacy, proficiency, and integration in their new discourse communities.

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