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# Language Socialization and Schooling

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## Abstract

This chapter reviews language socialization research conducted in schools over time and across the globe. It begins with an overview of early conceptual and empirical research conducted during the field's first 25 years. The focus then shifts to recent work conducted since the year 2005, organized thematically into three areas: first, studies of contact and change in communities where contemporary communicative practices echo historical processes of social and political stratification; second, research highlighting difference within diaspora that provides empirical lessons regarding the tensions produced during interactions among members of different social groups; and third, ideological considerations that draw attention to the underlying beliefs that often shape everyday interaction. The chapter closes with a discussion of existing, at times enduring, challenges and with a call for new directions within school-based language socialization research.

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## Keywords

Globalization • Immigration • Cultural contact • Diaspora • Ideology • Ethics

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## Introduction

Language socialization is a theoretical and methodological paradigm that examines the ways participants are socialized *through* language as well as *to* use language (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008). As a field primarily concerned with the linguistic and social development of individuals across the lifespan, language socialization situates schools and other educational institutions as integrated sites for socialization within society rather than as self-contained autonomous settings. Language socialization researchers view educational settings – including schools, churches, community centers, after-school programs, and youth groups – as interdependent and interrelated sites of broader social processes involving the learning of communicative and cultural competence. While schools play a role in reproducing the macro social order, social actors in schools (students, teachers, parents, and others) may also redefine and resist social norms in everyday micro interactions.

Language socialization studies make significant contributions to the field of education by examining these broader dimensions of the socialization process while continuing to address fundamental questions concerning language development. In industrialized Western countries where much of the recent language socialization research in schools is conducted, those demographic, social, and linguistic changes that accompany large-scale mobility have become integral to understanding the micro and macro qualities of learning and schooling. Language socialization studies of student-to-student exchanges, storytelling practices, classroom recitation, and second/foreign/heritage language learning are now largely inflected with concerns regarding the impact of globalization on schooling. This chapter reviews language socialization research conducted in schools over time and across the globe. It begins with an overview of early conceptual and empirical research conducted during the field's first 25 years. The focus then shifts to work conducted since the year 2005, organized thematically into three areas: contact and change, difference in diaspora, and ideological considerations. The chapter closes with a discussion of existing, at times enduring, challenges and with a call for new directions within school-based language socialization research.

## Earlier Contributions: 1980–2005

A generative point in the early development of the language socialization paradigm was an interdisciplinary concern with understanding how and why everyday participation in social and institutional practices became habitual and structured by sociohistorical antecedents (Bernstein 1974; Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984). At a time when sociolinguists became increasingly concerned with classroom language use (Mehan 1979), Basil Bernstein's (1974) empirical studies of home and school language use in England provided a starting point for understanding the reproductive qualities of the socialization process. Bernstein's studies were innovative because they viewed schools not merely as sites where learning took place but rather as loci for reproducing social inequalities. Heath's (1983) 10-year ethnography of literacy practices in the southeastern USA supported Bernstein's findings, focusing on the ways in which Black and White middle- and working-class children's experiences of language learning at home shaped their relationships with one another and with language in newly desegregated schools. The role of institutions and their effects on social actors was also emphasized by Giddens (1984), who viewed the relationship between the individual (in his words, *the social subject*) and the social structure as recursive – contending that schools, like other social institutions, are sustained through ongoing, purposeful, and agentic human activity. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that schools reproduced the very social structures that legitimized the institution and the cultural and social norms of the broader society. These insights are especially relevant to studying the heterogeneous and multilingual sites of globalization that schools have become, making the synergy between social theory and the field even stronger.

From its inception, language socialization research has been conducted in situations characterized by cultural contact and rapid social change (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008). Cultural upheaval impacts language use and, for the critical observer, provides an opportunity to understand tacit beliefs and power structures that shape what a language is and who is sanctioned to speak it. In her studies of secondary school classrooms in post-Soviet Hungary, Duff (1995) examined the ways that recitation routines (*felelés*) reflected and enacted broader political, economic, social, and moral changes in the state. She found that, accompanying political and social shifts in Hungary, interlocutors began to display preferences for classroom interactions associated with new democratic values while discourse indexing the prior regime waned. Jaffe's (2001) study of Corsican language revival demonstrated the ways dominant language ideologies organized everyday experience and the language revitalization discourses of language planners. The emerging ethno-regionalist discourses authenticated bilingual practices as constitutive of Corsican identity through a call for mandatory Corsican-French bilingual education in public schools. In her study of Hasidic Jews in New York City, Fader (2001) noted that language ideologies and beliefs about gender roles, assimilation, and religious integrity structured literacy practices for girls and boys across languages, as well as the differential use of Yiddish and English among the two gender groups. She demonstrated the ways in which schools became arbiters of legitimate linguistic practices, mediating the

communities' perceptions of the process of borrowing English words in Yiddish speech.

Another set of early language socialization studies examined the development of subjectivities as intersectional and dynamic. These studies analyzed the ways in which broader social, historical, and political trajectories, such as immigration, religion, and language policy, converge in local schooling practices. Willett (1995) observed the interactions of four kindergarten language learners in the USA – three girls (Maldivian, Palestinian, and Israeli) and one boy (Mexican-American) – revealing that language development intersects with social identity, gender, and class to shape the ways students' academic and social competence are perceived by others. Baquedano-López (1997) compared narrative practices in Spanish-language *doctrina* and English-language catechism classes at a Catholic parish in California and analyzed the ways teachers socialized young immigrant children to particular social identities (as Mexican, Indian, Mexican Catholic, and American) and to their Spanish heritage language. These studies focused on children as central actors who enact their identities and demonstrate their uptake of surrounding social and cultural cues, contributing important conceptual and methodological tools for the continued study of learning within and across learning contexts.

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## Recent Studies: 2005–2015

Building on language socialization research that began in the 1990s – which shifted from comparative fieldwork conducted across societies to fieldwork taking place within heterogeneous multilingual societies (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002) – recent studies have examined schooling experiences of communities undergoing contemporary processes of language and cultural contact in their home countries as well as those of immigrant groups entering new social contexts in diaspora. By focusing on the opportunities and challenges that arise when different linguistic and cultural communities meet in schools, the studies reviewed here are uniquely positioned to demonstrate how and when “verbal practices and repertoires are not devoid of value within the social hierarchies of class and race” (Baquedano-López and Mangual Figueroa 2011, p. 555). We organize this recent work thematically into three areas: first, studies of contact and change in communities where contemporary communicative practices echo historical processes of social and political stratification; second, research highlighting difference within diaspora that provides empirical lessons regarding the tensions produced during interactions among members of different social groups; and third, ideological considerations that draw attention to the underlying beliefs that often shape everyday interaction. In keeping with these themes, we draw the reader's attention to a 2015 special issue of the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* in which the editors intervened in the larger debates over language and schooling known as the “language gap” by “offering ethnographically informed descriptions of language socialization processes within micro- and macro-level contexts” (Avineri and Johnson 2015, p. 68). The research in this special issue, and in the paragraphs that follow, straddle macro and

micro scales of interaction to show how social and institutional structures intertwine with the everyday experiences of learners in schools and communities.

## Contact and Change

A series of studies focused on language socialization in North America demonstrate how, in moments of cultural contact, dichotomous categories often taken for granted in educational settings are destabilized. In a study of elementary-aged Chinese heritage language learners' and their teachers' interactions, He (2003) found that speakers activate particular social and cultural frames of reference when being socialized into a heritage language community that differ from the English mainstream children encounter in school. Through a focus on "multi-performance" – the moments in which heritage language speakers employ "original, creative utterances with structural transformations and transpositions that are impossible in mono-language" – she urges us to look beyond the study of communication in one *or another* language but instead to locate interlocutors' communicative resources across languages (He 2015, p. 315). Similarly, Abdi's (2011) research with students of Latino-heritage attending secondary school in Vancouver, Canada, calls for educators to think beyond static conceptions of competence that presume a one-to-one correspondence between fluency and identity. She showed that a teacher's assumptions about students' oral proficiency and authentic ethnic heritage was, in fact, limiting and alienating to Latino students who demonstrated communicative competence across domains of literacy.

These nuanced perspectives on cultural competence in heritage language settings demonstrate the agential role that children and adults play in educational settings and question traditional assumptions about who wields power in school settings. In a critical ethnographic study in Hawaii, Talmy (2008) described the ways that long-term English language learners resisted learning English. He argued against the notion that language socialization practices produce expected outcomes, showing how these students not only resisted and disengaged from curricular activities but also socialized their teachers to enact "ESL teacher identities." In response to student disengagement, teachers produced their own form of pedagogical detachment – reducing assignments, extending deadlines, and not issuing sanctions for noncompliance. Guardado's (2009) study of parents' and children's participation in Boy and Girl Scout activities that he describes as a "voluntary group . . . with school-like characteristics" underscores the significant roles that both adults and children play in language instruction (p. 107). Despite an intended goal of resisting English dominance by socializing children to speak Spanish in the scout troop, parent-led activities sometimes reinforced the centrality of English while the children questioned its prominence. Taken together, these studies attune us to the significance of unexpected interactional patterns, and these scholars urge us to closely examine these anomalies rather than discarding them as exceptional moments in a coherent and linear socialization processes.

Studies of settings characterized by language contact resulting from colonization and expansion have documented language shift and the processes by which social

hierarchies are mapped onto multiple codes (Field 2001; Garrett 2005; Howard 2009; Makihara 2005; Meek 2007; Moore 2004). Garrett (2005) demonstrated how novel language practices across domains of social life shifted to the use of English and the acceptance of monolingual norms in a context characterized by contact among three codes: local St. Lucia Afro-French creole Patwa or Kwéyòl from the island's French occupation period, the vernacular English from the British colonial period (heavily influenced by Kwéyòl), and standard English as the national language. Moore (2004) studied Fulfulde children who learned French and Koranic Arabic at two different school sites in Cameroon. Her comparison of the socialization practices at home and at the two school sites showed that the practice of *guided repetition* in the public French school and in Koranic instruction was evident in language socialization practices. Moore concluded that these practices were "realized in different ways, for the languages, texts, institutional settings and identities involved are rooted in socially, culturally, and historically distinct traditions" (pp. 457–458).

## Difference and Diaspora

Baquedano-López et al. (2005) outlined a theory of adaptation that focuses on tension and change within heterogeneous classroom spaces to show how the negotiation of expert and novice roles in classrooms provides evidence of broader, contested notions of time, space, and development in school-based learning. Mökkönen (2015) considered the ways in which state education policy is negotiated by children and adults in multilingual classroom interactions and the ways in which children's displays of communicative competence affirm, question, or challenge the pedagogical mandates embedded in English-only policies. Focusing on the experiences of two newcomer students from France and Italy attending a Finnish elementary school, Mökkönen argued that immigration and other large-scale processes shape students' dispositions and willingness to sanction or disrupt routine schooling practices. These studies highlight the tensions produced between teachers and students in daily classroom interaction – conflicts that are productive sites for examining role-taking, conflict and resolution, and stakeholders' underlying beliefs about the purpose of schooling.

The focus of recent language socialization research in schools centers on immigrant families' practices as they grapple with the new affordances of schooling in diaspora as well as the constraints of immigration and language policy. These studies highlight the preconceived, and limiting, roles that schools have historically offered immigrant parents. Howard and Lipinoga (2010) identified how parent and teacher roles were co-constructed during parent–teacher conferences in a primary school, examining the discursive resources used in narrowing the set of interactional possibilities for Latino immigrant parents within schools. Hernandez (2013) focused on the experiences of Latino youth and families attending public middle schools in California and the way in which language education policy traveled across home and school sites. She ultimately questioned whether attention to the home-school

mismatch (an earlier, enduring language socialization concern) contributes to social and educational change or reproduces enduring ideologies and practices that further inequality. Mangual Figueroa et al.'s (2015) analysis of interactions between pre-service teachers and immigrant families during role-plays simulating traditional parent–teacher interactions demonstrated the ways in which teachers' ideologies regarding families' communicative competence constrained the possibility for rich exchange between these two groups. McConnochie & Mangual Figueroa work (2017) draws our attention to elementary school learners growing up in Latino immigrant households in the USA, centering teachers as key actors in framing student competence and demonstrating how school-based evaluations are taken up at home in ways that shape family stances toward literacy and achievement. In an ongoing study of immigrant indigenous students and families from Yucatan at a Northern California elementary school, Baquedano-López and Borge Janetti (in press) examine teachers' responses to a new immigrant student population that re-evaluate the long-standing (and US based) category of “Latino” against emerging discourses of indigeneity at the school.

Finally, García-Sánchez (2014) and Mangual Figueroa (2011) focused on populations whose very presence is marked as linguistically, racially, and culturally different – and in some cases undesirable – while also remaining integral to the social and economic history of the society. These populations evoke a breach in the routine, as demographic change and the presence of immigrant populations renders existing schooling processes untenable and unjust. Focusing on Muslim children and families living in rural Spain and undocumented children living in mixed-status families in the USA, respectively, these researchers tracked the ways in which geopolitical processes of surveillance and (in)visibility, linked to national borders and processes of exclusion, show up in everyday schooling and socialization practices (see García-Sánchez and Nazimova, this volume). These studies have shown that breakdowns in routine interactions are informed by and are indexical of broader power relations within society. Related to these studies investigating the effects of social asymmetries in interactions across educational settings, we now turn to research that examines language ideologies that may lead to and arise out of those asymmetries.

## **Ideological Considerations**

Language socialization researchers have also studied schools as sites of change and/or reproduction focusing on one of two areas: the role of ideologies in structuring school practices (Fader 2001; Field 2001; Jaffe 2001) and the ways in which language learners in diaspora respond to school and language ideologies by developing their own in-community beliefs about language and learning. Language ideologies are understood here as the moral and political dimensions of beliefs that individuals and groups hold about their language, how it should be used, and to what ends (Schieffelin et al. 1998). This line of research has examined ideologies of language in settings in which two languages have been in ideological contestation – namely, those undergoing

processes of language shift or demographic change – because in these settings it is possible to witness users choosing one language over another and developing indexical relationships to those languages. Schools, within such a framework, become one of the primary sites in which the legitimacy of one language or another and the identities associated with each are contested.

Within this framework, language socialization studies of ideology have demonstrated how practices within and across school and community sites reflect ideological positionings derived from but also potentially altering the social structure. Avineri (2012) described how a “metalinguistic community” is formed – a term used to denote the process of being socialized to language through reflexive commentaries about the code and what it indexes. In the Jewish community that Avineri studied across US college campuses and community events, building metalinguistic community may have had more to do with cultivating a shared cultural, political, geographic identity than actually demonstrating communicative competence in the Yiddish language. Kattan (2010) also found that the metalinguistic aspect of language socialization among *shlichim* – families who take up the charge of serving as emissaries in the USA to recruit Jewish families to return to Israel – was made visible when families co-constructed norms about who was an authentic community member (in his case evidenced by being a speaker of Hebrew) at home and in school. While being careful not to overgeneralize the findings of language socialization research conducted in diasporic Jewish communities, we are compelled to highlight three shared concerns emerging in this area. These concerns – the movement of individuals in families and institutions across multiple sites and national borders; the triangulation of ideological becoming across historical, contemporary, and real-time scales; and the significance of authenticity and belonging in historically persecuted communities – are shared by other language socialization researchers who study language ideology in schools.

Ideology circulates not only through ideas, but it is also embodied in the actions, literacy practices, and the “body language” of students and teachers. (See Curdt-Christiansen, this volume, for a discussion of the ways in which ideologies circulate through printed educational materials as well.) Sterponi’s (2007) study of clandestine reading in US elementary classrooms where traditional reading habitus is evidenced by individual silent reading is a good example of this work. In the classroom that she observed, children subverted the teacher’s directions to read individually, instead finding covert ways of reading together “under the desk” in a collaborative literacy practice that was beyond the teacher’s disciplinary gaze. Cekaite’s (2012) study of one Somali first grader’s schooling experiences in Sweden demonstrated how the students’ socialization to being a “bad subject” through focus on “willingness” to participate in individual seat work was evident in linguistic and embodied practices. She found that conflicting ideologies of learning and development can negatively impact a student’s sense of self, her relationship to her peers and teachers, and her standing in the school. While this work focused explicitly on ideology, it also relates closely to research on difference and diaspora reviewed in the previous section of this chapter. The research reviewed here is especially important because it demonstrates how immigrant communities and individuals



experience the crisis that may accompany arriving in a new land. The research also shows what is at stake in students' educational experiences and rejects mainstream ideologies that frame immigrants as problems to be managed. Through this work, we learn that ideology becomes more visible as subjects are compelled to make it explicit in socializing children or novices and as they are called upon to defend it when they encounter newness across languages and national borders.

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## Problems and Difficulties

As we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the language socialization paradigm has provided a productive and creative means by which to examine the role of schools in the acquisition and reproduction of linguistic and cultural competence. Many of the studies reviewed in this chapter have provided evidence for the role of language in the constitution of society, including its educational institutions. Just as recent work has complicated understandings of home and school as separate, bounded spaces for learning, so too must we continue to trouble the artificial boundaries of what counts as local, because they are likely to include community, language, geopolitical, and even historical configurations. This is especially imperative in the context of globalization in which moments of cultural contact in diaspora contexts can lead to new social configurations not previously evident in the empirical literature available to researchers. We must continue to verify empirically grounded phenomena with community members' emic perceptions (see Baquedano-López and Mangual Figueroa 2011, for a similar discussion related to the concept of speech community in contexts of immigration). By learning from participants' own metalinguistic insights regarding the ideological underpinnings of their everyday practices, language socialization researchers can write against monolithic views of one identity and one ideological point of view. We must remain diligent to ensure that our findings do not reify static categories of identity or culture, trends that the field has been working against since its inception.

While language socialization studies have generally equated demonstrable changes in displays of communicative competence with learning, it may be necessary – as language socialization studies increasingly contribute to education research – to offer a more acutely defined relationship between competence and learning. Consistent with language socialization research to date, researchers must continue to develop frameworks that render visible the complex and ever-changing nature of social activity and structure. As Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) suggest, one of the biggest contributions that language socialization can make is a “processual account of how individuals come to be particular kinds of culturally intelligible subjects” (p. 351). By situating this account within the study of everyday activities, researchers can focus on the situated and shifting terms of the interactions that take place therein (Ochs 2002). In so doing, language socialization research has the potential to show how habitus is acquired, how competence is more varied (and at times contradictory), and why learning is not always a linear process.

## Future Directions

We propose a set of methodological considerations which can further engage with our conceptual work given the new empirical evidence reviewed above, in the hopes of amplifying the insights language socialization studies can make to educational research and to the study of language in culture. Language socialization originated with a commitment to understanding social and individual development. The paradigm, after all, engages theoretically and methodologically with developmental change longitudinally over the entire lifespan of both the individual and the community. We now consider the ways in which we, as language socialization researchers, situate ourselves as social actors within and alongside the communities that we study.

Language socialization scholars would benefit from returning to early work not only for its crucial repositioning of language as the center of socialization (evident in the oft-cited *to* and *through* construction coined by Ochs and Schieffelin and cited at the outset of this chapter) but also for its methodological insights and links to social theory. In the opening chapter of her book on the language socialization practices of the community of Falefaa in Samoa, Ochs (1988) describes a challenge she faced in data collection early in the field, which resulted from her ignorance about the very speech forms that she intended to study. She explains her purpose in recounting the dilemma: “not to convey the hazards of cross-cultural research and ways to overcome them . . . rather, to communicate to my readers, . . . the theoretical import of this methodological crisis” (p. 2). We take two lessons from Ochs: first, to engage in a reflexive fieldwork practice in which the researcher continually works to challenge prevailing deficit notions of historically marginalized communities. In Ochs’ case, she critically reflected on her own misunderstanding of the social setting rather than assuming that her participants were to blame for their miscommunication. Second, Ochs calls upon us to develop an integrated view of method and theory where dilemmas or discoveries in one necessarily lead to changes in another. Through early reflections during the formative period of language socialization research, Ochs (1979) gained new insights into the study of childhood interaction by rethinking the efficacy of traditional transcription notation for representing communication between young interlocutors.

Moving forward, in many of the sites where language socialization research has been conducted, immigration and demographic change resulting from globalization continues to be viewed as a crisis, and its attending social anxiety regarding integration (racial, class-based, linguistic, and ability-related) has been encoded in language, impacting policies aimed at shaping socialization in schools and communities. We must recognize the unique privilege we have as ethnographers and continue to consider the ethical dimensions of our research. As the communities we study face ongoing struggles to integrate into society and also find strength in joining social movements taking place on a global scale, we are responsible for situating ourselves within these larger phenomena instead of finding a comfortable distance through the study and representation of communities at either the macro or micro end of the social continuum. At the time of writing, shortly after the

inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the USA, we call upon our fellow language socialization researchers to continue to develop ways of listening to and aligning with historically marginalized groups with a shared goal of sustaining those human rights and language practices upon which we all depend for survival. Our call for more engaged ethnographic approaches – and the critical perspective that we relay throughout this chapter – is undertaken in the spirit of identifying new and productive research trajectories tied to the social exigencies of everyday life and learning.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Heritage Language Learning and Socialization](#)
- ▶ [Language Socialization and Immigration in Europe](#)
- ▶ [Language Socialization and Language Shift Among School-Aged Children](#)
- ▶ [Language Socialization in Children’s Peer and Sibling-Kin Group Interactions](#)
- ▶ [Language Socialization Through Textbooks](#)
- ▶ [Language Socialization: An Historical Overview](#)
- ▶ [Multilingual Socialization and Education in Non-Western Settings](#)

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## Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

- David Bloome and Sanghee Ryu: [Literacies in the Classroom](#). In Volume: Literacies and Language Education
- Jasmine Ching Man Luk: [Classroom Discourse and the Construction of Learner and Teacher Identities](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education
- Judith Green: [Classroom Interaction, Situated Learning](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education
- Elizabeth Birr Moje: [Theory and Research on Literacy as a Tool for Navigating Everyday and School Discourses](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education
- Angela Reyes & Stanton Wortham: [Discourse Analysis Across Events](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education
- Massimiliano Spotti & Sjaak Kroon: [Multilingual Classrooms at Times of Super diversity](#). In Volume: Discourse and Education

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