

## RETHINKING CULTURAL EMBEDDEDNESS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON SOCIOLINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

**Nadine Nasef**

English Language, Linguistics, and Literature

Misr International University

Cairo, Egypt

**ABSTRACT:** *Do human beings exhibit the same attributes with no slight difference? Is this really the case when it comes to human nature, shared culture, norms, and values? When we say “same”, it is about the way we communicate, our etiquette, our lifestyle, and our emotions as well. From different sociological, anthropological, cultural, and therefore linguistic perspectives, we are the opposite of the same! For this purpose, it becomes a major essentiality to inspect or investigate the theoretical anatomy of Sociolinguistics. This paper offers to throw light on the basic theoretical framework on sociolinguistic relativity, mainly focusing on Language Socialization to rethink cultural embeddedness through language within the humanities.*

**KEYWORDS:** sociolinguistics, linguistic relativity, cultural linguistics, linguistic anthropology, humanities, interdisciplinary studies, multidisciplinary studies

### INTRODUCTION

At the outset, an effort is made to tackle the world of the term Sociolinguistics. This branch stands for the study of the relationship between language and society. It is an interdisciplinary field of research which prospered through the interaction of linguistics with a myriad of other academic branches of study. It has a strong correspondence with culture through the study of language with sociology in which the language plays a role in forming social groups and institutions. Sociolinguistics covers a wide area of research, which, as Meyerhoff (2006) puts it, “*can be confusing if you are coming new to the field.*” In such a broad field of knowledge, one studies how all ingredients of society have an aftermath on language, and how language has an impact on society. The field of Sociolinguistics can be described as a conglomeration of sociology and linguistics, or of anthropology and linguistics. “*Language and society are so intertwined that it is impossible one without the other. There is no human society that does not depend upon, is not shaped by, and does not itself shape language.*” (Elaine Chaika 1989). Using language is not only linguistic behavior, but also a social activity. Without a comprehensible language to all the members of a group, the community could by no means exist. Accordingly, language is life-and-death to the existence and flourishing of a society. In opposition, language would never be existent without society as it is the essential condition on which language depends on for its survival. It is clear that neither language nor society could be alive without the existence of each other. To narrow it down and get focused on the research topic, the term “Language Socialization” exists to prove the link between society and language. How does a novice become a member of a particular cultural community? Language socialization research has proposed that language plays an indispensable role in such a process. At every level of the linguistic structures -phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic, pragmatic, and conversational- underpin cultural and societal meanings

for members of a community. For those novices or newcomers in a community to gain a communicative competence, they must learn to apprehend and make usage of those linguistic structures in the appropriate way. They do so through repeated face-to-face contact with cultured community members. Having experienced those encounters, the novices not only understand more and more about the nature of language and the culture they are surrounded by, but they also get to know how to behave and develop their frame of mind by understanding more about themselves. That is, through taking part in interactions with more expert members of the community, the novices are socialized through the use of language and socialized to use language.

### **Theoretical Background**

To nurture a sense of inquisitiveness within a novice and to help see them as an involved partaker in the process of language socialization, there are some landmark works in the erstwhile literature that have focused on the research topic this paper tackles. Drawing upon and paralleling functionalist approaches to language at the time, Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin's early research project in two clear-cut non-Western societies called into question the hypothesis that "language development could be understood as a purely mental, automatic, or universal process independent of the social and cultural settings in which it takes place. For example, their essay "Language Acquisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories" (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984, cited under Kathryn Howard's Language Socialization) showed that baby talk -a simplified and/or exaggerated style of speaking with young children- is not a universal feature of mother-child interactions, thus showing that this form of linguistic accommodation could not explain language acquisition, as some researchers had thought." (Kathryn Howard) Their research out-turn showed that the ways and roles children used to play in early interactions and the set of language or discourse to which they were exposed and diverged completely across cultures. Cultural differences have also been noted in the ways in which language is used pragmatically. For instance, in the American culture, new skills are typically taught and learned through verbal instruction (Slobin, 1979). In some other cultures, new skills are learned through nonverbal observation. Dissimilarity has also been made among cultures that stimulate independent learning and those that inspire and invigorate cooperative learning (McLeod, 1994). The field of language socialization has widened in novel directions by maintaining a firm adherence to investigating linguistic, lengthy, and literacy practices. Simultaneously, this branch of study has followed trends in anthropology predominantly, as Howard puts it, "to interrogate the very stability, provenance, and ontology of culturally based norms and practices." Into the bargain, after decades following the foundation of the field, a plethora of far-reaching and broad-ranging overviews of language socialization theory and research have been produced. The field's founders, Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin, have focused on a multitude of aspects of language socialization. Later, Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez in 2002 and Kulick and Schieffelin in 2004 expanded on outstanding theoretical and empirical developments in the field through recent work reviews. Additionally, Garrett 2008 is an in-depth treatise on research methods for those interested in carrying out a research on language socialization. The latest outline or overview piece, Ochs and Schieffelin 2012, particularly, highlights developments to language socialization theory. This paper is to be added to the literature as it has the complete focus on applying the theory to a real-life offered course; Language and Society.

"The social groups within which we are located powerfully shape what we experience and know

as well as how we understand and communicate with ourselves, others, and the world” (Wood). Ochs and Schieffelin view language in their seminal work “as a medium or tool in the socialization process in particular speech communities.” That is to say, for them, language acquisition through socialization means learning the norms and rules of language use in a given community of practice and viewed as an interactional display (covert or overt) to a novice (child) of expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Since language socialization is the process in which children are socialized “through the use of language and to use language” From another frame mind, it is an ethnographic and interactional discourse analytic approach to the study of human learning and development and is a never-ending collaborative enterprise. The novice may resist being involved in the socialization process in the acquisition of skills, identities, and ideologies. The language socialization process continues and develops across the human lifespan, as we individuals become participants in multiple communities including families and neighborhoods, schools, peer groups, religious and many other institutions. Academic intellectuals have conducted research in a wide range of milieus and they have found an abundant cultural variation in the methods or ways novitiates are apprenticed to the language. (Leslie Moore) Being an interdisciplinary approach to the joint processes of language acquisition, enculturation, and language socialization, it is increasingly recognized that people do not only get acquainted with primary language socialization during the childhood phase, but they also experience second language socialization throughout their lifespan as they attend sociocultural contexts, join new communities to practice language such as an educational program or a workplace, and achieve a new social role, and involve themselves in the acquisition of a new language. As Ochs states, any expert-novice interaction has to involve language socialization. This augmentation in the language socialization domain allows it to stretch beyond its initial research interests in first language acquisition into the realms of bilingualism, multilingualism, and second language acquisition. Having noted that, witnessing the examination of how and why languages are alive and change within society, as well as highlighting the factors that lead to the displacement of one language by another and sometimes the death of a language. Moreover, exploring and investigating social reasons for language change, by looking at language in monolingual communities and the features of a diversity of dialects. Added to that, assessing how attitude to language has an impact on speech and showing that linguistic responses rely on a multifariousness of contextual factors as the status of the person being addressed and our reasons for speaking. By the end of the semester, candidates should be capable of identifying language in multilingual speech communities and clarifying the diverging patterns of language usage. Over and above that, they should be aware of the change in language, which leads to the banishment of some languages. Among the knowledge and understanding aims of this course is getting students to define the variation of producing innumerable linguistic mosaics globally. Shifting to the intellectual skills that students are supposed to achieve after sitting for this course, they are supposed to be able to analyze human behavior and search for generalizations that reveal common human responses to certain social influences, as well as being able to relate introduce examples of possible sociolinguistic universals or generalizations using certain scales or proportions. On top of that, students should be capable of developing professional and practical skills. For instance, developing their cognitive skills of language; moreover, investigating and evaluating different outlooks towards language. In addition, they should be capable of inspecting the social, psychological, and cultural factors affecting the language, as well as developing the second language acquisition. Lastly, students are believed to examine and decide the language style and relate it to its user.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a résumé, the concept of language socialization research is here to illuminate how children and other novices come to master the situated discourse practices of their communities, including how they are socialized to use language appropriately in culturally significant activities, and how they are socialized through language into local values, beliefs, theories, and conceptions of the world; how the processes of linguistic and cultural development are interlinked through longitudinal and ethnographic inquiry featuring in-depth detailed analyses of their social moment-by-moment interactions with more expert community members. Intertwined with such interactions are not only grammatical and linguistic forms of language that reflect and create social equilibrium, but also group- or community- specific ways of engaging in embodied communicative practice, and broader beliefs and ideologies. The goals, routes, approaches and applications of language socialization vary across cultures as local conceptions of language, childhood, child development; personhood, teaching, and learning vary. In current and future accounts of language socialization, the coexistence of participants' multiple communities and sociolinguistic norms, languages, registers or styles, hybrid activities, codes, and identities must be taken into account in a better viewpoint. We should also try to take into account levels of participation and learners' status within their chosen communities, the factors that prevent or enable greater integration and positive outcome (if that is the goal), and the consequences of that involvement (or lack of involvement). Thus, language instructors and researchers must strive to understand better not only the micro- and macro-processes of language socialization, but also how the linguistic socialization students' participation in the present as well as their prior experiences, if known, affects their future activities, opportunities, and identities. Hence, language socialization researchers give prominence to how novices are socialized "into and through" language and discourse substantially; that is, how they get to be socialized "into" specific uses of language or other semiotic devices, and "through" discourse to become acquainted with their community's ways of thinking, feeling, and being in the world.

## References

- Moore, Leslie C. *Language Socialization*. N.p.: Springer Verlag, 2010. Web.
- Howard, Kathryn M. "Language Socialization - Anthropology - Oxford Bibliographies - Obo." *Language Socialization - Anthropology - Oxford Bibliographies*. N.p., 18 Nov. 2016.
- "Intercultural Transformation and Second Language Socialization." *Intercultural Transformation and Second Language Socialization*.
- "Issues in Second Language Acquisition: Sociocultural Theory, Language Socialization, and Language Identity."
- Jourdan, Christine, and Kevin Tuite. *Language, Culture, and Society: Key Topics in Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Otto, B. "Culture and Language." *Education.com*. N.p., 19 July 2013.