Language and socialization? It is all about sociosemiotics

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Abstract Language socialization is an interdisciplinary area of linguistic inquiry that addresses the question of how the processes of socialization and language acquisition lead to and benefit from each other. It comprises both a theoretical perspective on the processes of socialization and language acquisition and a methodological approach to the study of human development in socio-cultural milieus. Its comparative research agenda is an amalgamation of longitudinal research, microanalysis, and ethnography, and it is founded on the assumptions (1) that socio-culturally defined contexts are prerequisite to human learning, and (2) that human language has the capacity to index implicit and explicit meanings present in character or emergent from content and context. This paper provides an overview of language socialization and expatiates upon its potential to predict the future of human societies. The *pars destruens*, *à la* Bacon (1620), of this paper aims at removing all errors and misunderstandings that exist in connection to language socialization, and its *pars construens* aims at presenting a true picture of the topic from the perspective of sociosemiotics. The landslide aftermaths of language socialization for human societies in general, and totalitarian and/or theocratic societies in specific, are discussed.

0. Introduction

Language socialization (LS) is an interdisciplinary area of applied linguistics that accounts for how socialization leads to language acquisition, and how language use in social contexts can lead to socialization. It describes how children and novices acquire/learn, reproduce, and transform communicative competence and socio-cultural knowledge which empowers them to socialize and become adept members of their communities of residence. Language socialization has brought (a) theories of language acquisition from psychology and (b) theories of socialization from both anthropology and sociology to bear on a developmental-psycholinguistic account of first and/or second language acquisition and socialization. This paper overviews the status quo of language socialization and seeks to describes its potential to predict the future of human societies.

1. Background

The term "language socialization" was first broached by Sapir: «Language is a great force of socialization, probably the greatest that exists» (Sapir 1949 [1933]: 159, Sapir 1921). Although Sapir had the foresight to see the interface between language and socialization, no academic effort was made to intermarry the two concepts until the late 1960s when Slobin (1967) published his field manual for the cross-cultural study of the acquisition of communicative competence. In the meantime, developmental psychology was busy with its accounts of the psychological development of young children, and developmental psycholinguistics was concerned with its accounts of how young children develop linguistically and acquire one or more languages (Brown, Cazden, Bellugi-Klima 1968, Slobin 1969, Bloom 1970).

The basic claim of language acquisition research is that any human being is endowed with an innate capacity to acquire his/her mother tongue – and also to acquire a good number of other natural languages in the same way as his/her mother tongue to become a compound or simultaneous bi- or multi-lingual. Chomsky (1965) referred to this capacity as Language Acquisition Device (LAD) – and later as the Universal Grammar or UG (White 1989) – but other scholars (e.g., Lenneberg 1967, McLaughlin 1987) have called it the Latent Language Structure (LLS). The commonly accepted idea is that LAD or LLS atrophies at the age of lateralization (say, around age 5 up to puberty) when parameters have already been set, and the neural functions or cognitive processes of the human brain have already become specialized to one specific brain hemisphere or hemispheric area (Halpern, Güntürkün, Hopkins, Rogers 2005, Doyle 2014)[1].

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the human capacity to "learn" a new language after the critical age of lateralization is lost for good. Scholars have argued in favor of the existence and psychological reality of a sister system which they have called the Latent Psychological Structure or LPS (Lenneberg 1967, McLaughlin 1987). Selinker (1972, 1992) argued that this structure comprises five cognitive processes which work in unison to shape L2 interim grammars and approximative systems: (1) L1 transfer, (2) overgeneralization of TL rules, (3) transfer of training, (4) implementation of communication strategies, and (5) implementation of learning strategies (Nemser 1973, Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982, Salmani Nodoushan 2018a, Tarone 2018). All in all, the accepted claim is that LPS, mainly responsible for the learning of other cognitive abilities (e.g., sewing, driving a car, etc.), also adopts language learning as a new cognitive challenge to be tackled. Second language (L2) learners older than the critical age of lateralization bring LPS to bear on their learning of any number of new languages; hence, the distinction between language acquisition and language learning – a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. To put it in a nutshell, languages learnt through the implementation of LPS are not on a par with languages learnt through LLS, and people who have learnt them are subordinate or asymmetric bi- or multi-linguals (Rodriguez *et al.* 2021).

Needless to say, the Chomskyan conception of language acquisition was the predominant and hegemonic perspective on the development of competence in children until some people, mainly from biology and sociology, began to question whether language can be the outcome of "nurture" instead of "nature" – or a joint effort by both nature and nurture (Snow 1972, Snow 1995, Pinker 1994). This was when the role of socialization in general, and language socialization in specific, came into focus. Socialization research has since been interested in explaining how children acquire

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[1] For the most recent work on the connection between language and thinking, please see "Language and thinking" by Allan (2021) available at: http://users.monash.edu.au/~kallan/papers/langthink.pdf

requisite cultural and social skills which effectuate their participation in society; such requisite skills enable children to act, feel, and think appropriately in any social/cultural setting (Schieffelin, Ochs 1986a, Schieffelin, Ochs 1986b).

Prior to the upsurge of interest in language socialization, the role of language in the socialization process had been ignored in spite of the fact that Sapir (1921) had argued in the early 1920s, that «Language is a great force of socialization, probably the greatest that exists» (Sapir 1949 [1933]: 159). Before Sapir, other scholars had also broached the topic. The famous words from Samuel Johnson, who called a nation's language its pedigree (Boswell 1785), is perhaps the earliest realization of the role of languages in the shaping of nations and human societies. Likewise, the famous quotation from Humboldt «Die Spracheist das bildende Organ des Gedanken» (1836: LXVI) connects language and thought intimately (Allan 2021), and it is perhaps the backbone of the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of "linguistic relativity" which holds that linguistic structures mediate world views (Allan 2021). Allan argues that Steinthal (1848) took Humboldt's views and passed them down to Whitney (1875), who also argued that mind is a function of the inner form of language, a view that was later adopted by Boas (1911) and also by Sapir (1929) as well as Whorf (1956).

Nevertheless, much of the research on socialization in the first half of the 20th century came from (1) foundational anthropology, which was interested in cross-cultural studies of childhood and early adolescence as well as from (2) pre-1960s sociology, which was interested in theories of social order and the factors that impact its continuation or discontinuation across generations (Mead 1928, Mead 1934, Parsons 1951, Whiting *et al.* 1975, Schieffelin, Ochs 1986a, Schieffelin, Ochs 1986b, LeVine *et al.* 1994). As such, language as the greatestforce of socialization – *à la* Sapir (1921) – remained the Cinderella of socialization research, and "language socialization" remained an uncharted and pristine territory for academic research. This is not to deny the fact that psycholinguistics did indeed address the paths of linguistic knowledge acquisition; rather, the point is that no attempt was made prior to the 1960s to bridge between psycholinguistics and sociocultural approaches to children's acquisition of (linguistic) knowledge.

According to Ochs and Schieffelin (2012), the University of California Berkeley Language Behavior Research Laboratory team of psychologists, linguists, and anthropologists was the first to have the foresight to realize the need for bridging between psycholinguistics and sociocultural theory. Slobin's (1967) initiative entitled «A Field Manual for Cross-cultural Study of the Acquisition of Communicative Competence» sought to establish a comparative research agenda the job of which was to chart the uncharted territory of "language socialization" and to bring the affordances of Hymes' (1972a) formulation of "communicative competence" and Gumperz's (1968) notions of "speech community", "speech situation" and "speech event" (Hymes 1972a, Hymes 1972b, Duranti 1985, Salmani Nodoushan 2006, Salmani Nodoushan 2016, Salmani Nodoushan 2018b, Salmani Nodoushan 2019, Salmani Nodoushan 2021) to bear on a psycholinguistic-sociocultural account of novices' language acquisition or learning (Ochs, Schieffelin 2012).

Slobin's field manual paved the way for the emergence of "ethnographies of communication" (a) that make possible what can be called a "falcon eye" perspective on child language development and (b) that bring linguistic, social, and cultural factors to bear on holistic and adequate accounts of language acquisition/learning. As such, Slobin's (1967) initiative has indeed opened a new portal to language learning, teaching and research which has revolutionized our understanding of society, culture, and language. It has also affected our understanding of the way language should be taught in formal classroom settings (Cazden *et al.* 1972, Heath 1978).

In this context, language socialization (a) claims to be a holistic falcon-eye perspective on language learning or acquisition and (b) relies heavily on Slobin's field manual. It also draws on the affordances of discourse competence (Ervin-Tripp, Mitchell-Kernan 1977) and developmental pragmatics (Ochs, Schieffelin 1979). According to Ochs and Schieffelin (2012), developmental pragmatics (a) has to do with both the discursive and the interactional contexts in which children acquire linguistic competence (i.e., syntax, semantics, phonology, orthography, etc.) and (b) addresses the development of conversational and discursive competence in children. As such, language socialization is mainly about developmental pragmatics and, as we will see below, sociosemiotics.

2. Socialization versus language socialization

Socialization accounts for the processes that turn children and novices into adept members of their socio-cultural communities. Language socialization, on the other hand, holds that language acquisition is rooted in, and constitutive of, socializing kids and novices in such a way as to turn them into adept and competent members of their communities. Ochs and Schieffelin (2012) argue that (a) socialization practices, (b) the socio-cultural ideologies of any given human community, and (c) neurodevelopmental influences work in tandem to impact novices' and children's language acquisition. As such, linguistic competence is a component of Hymes' (1972a) communicative competence, but societal ideologies and individual's biological capacities determine how their communicative competence is shaped and acquired. The basic idea at the heart of language socialization in general – and the notion of situated language teaching/learning in specific – is that humans' use of language is in essence a social behavior, a behavior in which they constantly, and quite often implicitly, exchange knowledge or negotiate beliefs, opinions, feelings, etc. through embodied communication (Schieffelin, Ochs 1986a, Schieffelin, Ochs 1986b, Duff, Kobayashi 2010).

Embodied communication (EC) argues that communication does not involve overt language use or mechanical exchange of verbal information *per se*; rather, it involves the "whole body" and encompasses a rich repertoire of manual and facial gestures, proxemics, postures, actions, feelings, silence, imitative/mimic synergies, shared contexts, acting in unison, working in tandem, and so forth that at least (a) unveil potential verbal deceptions, (b) ooze out communication partners' feelings, and (c) illustrate speech (Wachsmuth *et al.* 2008). Embodied communication rules out the traditional engineering metaphor of signal transmission (or the source-channel-destination-feedback model) on the assumption that it is inadequate. EC draws on research findings from psychology, sociology, neurolinguistics, and anthropology to argue that human communication is only possible through a delicately interactive and closely parallel coupling between the two sides of communication. Such couplings involve a "cline" of interaction at one end of which fall low-level systems best suited to the performance and appreciation of instrumental actions (e.g., mirror system), and at the other end fall higher systems suited to the correct interpretation of signs and symbols in their cultural contexts (Wachsmuth *et al.* 2008, Dascal, Weizman 1987, Weizman, Dascal 1991).

Along the same lines, language socialization assumes that novices (e.g., beginner FL/L2 learners, low-proficiency members of diaspora communities, etc.) and kids subconsciously bring the potentials of EC to bear on their language acquisition and development in their host societies. That is, EC enables novice language learners to apprehend and realize new ways of engaging with others in acting, thinking, and feeling over time, and this, in turn, leads to both socialization and language acquisition (Ochs, Schieffelin 2012). It is a quite normal and natural pattern in any human community that

members of that community expect novices (e.g., children, immigrants, and the like) to socialize – that is, to comply with and respect the norms of their community and show suitable forms of competence and sociality (Ochs, Schieffelin 2012).

When it comes to language, (a) compliance with the social norms of a language and (b) using language as an instrument to achieve the expected sociality can be called language socialization. Language, as Edward Sapir has rightly said, «[…] is a great force of socialization» (1949 [1933]: 159) because it has symbolic and performative capacities in its arsenal that can mediate human experience (Ochs, Schieffelin 2012). Needless to say, language socialization is not formally taught (except in the form of "situated language teaching"), nor is it overt and explicit; rather, novices (i.e., children, FL/L2 learners, low-proficiency immigrants, and so forth) often pick up the implicit and tacit sociocultural and linguistic norms of the target community subconsciously.

To this end, they bring their abilities and innate endowments to bear on the processes of inferencing and internalization of sociolinguistic, cultural, semiotic, and pragmatic meaning. According to Ochs and Schieffelin (2012), this is achievable through routine indexical associations; indexicals, *à la* Kaplan (1989), are linguistic and semiotic formulae and expressions the reference of which may shift from context to context (e.g., demonstratives, deixis, etc.); they are said to have two types of meaning: (1) a linguistic meaning – or "character" *à la* Kaplan (1989) – which is context-independent and unvarying, and (2) a "content" which is context-dependent and varies from context to context (Almog *et al.* 1989, Salmani Nodoushan 2012, Salmani Nodoushan 2013, Salmani Nodoushan 2014, Salmani Nodoushan 2015, Salmani Nodoushan 2016, Salmani Nodoushan 2017, Capone, Salmani Nodoushan 2014, Allan, Salmani Nodoushan 2015). Ochs and Schieffelin (2012) argue that novices rely heavily on routine indexicals to bridge between linguistic or verbal forms (i.e., character) and sociocultural and semiotic practices, institutions, emotions, relationships, thought worlds, and so forth (i.e., content).

While socialization is often viewed as a passive transmission of knowledge and content from experts to novices (Ochs, Schieffelin 2012), language socialization emerges from synergistic communicative engagements of novices with human and non-human sources of knowledge and content (e.g., social media, realia, etc.). In spite of the naively-accepted simplistic viewpoint that asymmetries in knowledge observed among elders/experts and novices are doomed to neatly and naturally map on to – and lead novices into – maturity and competence, this is far from reality. Novices are not monkeys to "monkey see, monkey do" what they passively pick up from the social and cultural milieus in which they live and grow, through a mindless process of imitation without any understanding of how and why it works, and with limited knowledge of, and/or concern for/about, its consequences. Rather, novices (a) bring a lot of flexibility to bear on their active implementation of technological gismos that fuel innovation and (b) engage their perceptible, false, and hidden affordances (*à la* Gaver 1991) as well as their physical, cognitive, pattern, sensory, functional/explicit, and negative affordances (*à la* Hartson 2001) in an active process of shifting their own cultural and socio-political conditions and personal perceptions and conceptions; this can also happen in language socialization – e.g., a lot of people are already (un)knowingly mapping the affordances of *Instagram, Facebook,* etc. on to language socialization.

In the context of language socialization, human communities adopt one of the following two approaches to the process – and this is often a natural default function of cultural and social habits. As Ochs (1982) and Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) have argued, some communities engage their children in dyadic conversation and communication (i.e., direct interaction between elders and infants). Such communities resort to baby talk – or motherese – to establish the foundations of language development in their kids

(Solomon 2012), and resort to foreigner talk to interact with older novices that have immigrated into their communities (e.g., diasporas, tourists, etc.). In such "child-centered" communities, elders (1) accept children as partners/addressees in dyadic conversations and communication, (2) use simplified forms of language and speech in the presence of kids and novices, and (3) put up the scaffolding they need in their early steps in language acquisition and socialization. In such child-centered communities, social situations are adapted to kids and novices (Ochs 1982, Ochs, Schieffelin 1984).

However, there are also "situation-centered" communities (Samoan, Kaluli communities) that do not engage in dyadic communication with kids and novices; rather, they direct their kids' attention to others in the surrounding. In such situation-centered communities, kids are aligned as, and persuaded to be observers, overhearers, relayers of prompts, and onlookers (Ochs 1982, Ochs, Schieffelin 1984, Ochs, Schieffelin 2012). In such situation-centered communities, children and novices are expected and "scaffolded" to adapt to social situations. The situation-centered approach is driven, *à la* Ochs and Schieffelin (2012), by local ideologies concerning (a) the paths and limits of knowledge, and (b) the social status and positioning of children. It would not be wrong to claim that situation-centeredness is tantamount to an immersion program where kids are immersed in appropriate linguistic (and social) input often provided by elders other than the kid's parents (e.g., caregivers, older siblings, other adults, social media, etc.).

It should be noted that language socialization has taken two complementary forms: (1) socialization through language, and (2) socialization into language (Ochs, Schieffelin 1984, Ochs, Schieffelin 1995, Schieffelin, Ochs 1986a, Schieffelin, Ochs 1986b). The former argues that children and novices socialize through the use of language and develop the communicative competence (encompassing linguistic, discourse, strategic, and pragmatic competencies *à la* Hymes 1972a) which they need to function appropriately in the society that hosts them. The latter, however, argues that children and novices socialize in order to be able to acquire or learn and use the language of the host community (Lee, Bucholtz 2015). It should also be noted that these processes are not unrelated, mutually exclusive, noncomplementary, or in complimentary distribution; rather, they are reciprocal in the sense that learning a language results in socialization and socialization (or becoming an adept member in a society) drives language learning. In other words, language socialization is essentially the reciprocal process of (1) learning how to use the language of a given community, and (2) becoming an accepted member of that community through the use of its language.

As such, the process of becoming an adept member of a given society (a) deeply affects the process of acquiring its language and (b) is mainly realized through language acquisition and exchange (Ochs, Schieffelin 1995) – i.e., through the acquisition and mastery of the (a) functions, (b) social distribution, and (c) interpretations of language, both "in" and "across" socially-defined contexts and situations. In this way, children's interaction samples (in L1) and novices' interaction samples (in FL/L2) can be analyzed (1) as linguistic corpora to see if they comply with the norms and regularities of the language system, and (2) as socio-culturally grounded actions that are expected to mirror the preferred and appropriate sentiments, aesthetics, moralities, ideas, maturity, etc. of the host communities (Heath 1983, Heath 1990).

It should also be noted that language socialization is essentially bidirectional in that children/novices can both (a) accept the existing social order, and (b) change the existing social order to suit their own existence. The first study that revealed this phenomenon in Nigeria was conducted by Keith Allan (1979). Likewise, Kulick (1992) observed that children in the Gapun community in Papua New Guinea) prefer to use the lingua franca "Tok Pisin" rather than their community vernacular "Taiap"; although their parents expect them to speak Taiap, the children have decided to change and

transform the social order and replace Taiap with Tok Pisin. My observations in Yazd, a central province in Iran, also shows that the new generation is resisting the local Yazdi dialect and prefers to use the standard academic Persian variant the stress and intonation patterns – and a lot of vocabulary items – of which are totally different. The same can be said about other local dialects of Iran.

These observations are reminiscent of Piaget's (1985) notions of assimilation and accommodation in his theory of the equilibration of cognitive structures. It seems as if intercommunication, prestige, and access to new technologies have worked in tandem to disrupt the long-preserved cultural-sociolinguistic equilibrium in local communities; new generations have opened their eyes on to a "brave new world" that awaits them out there and have decided to break away from the shackles of their long-preserved local values to establish their own preferred social order – and this is in no way good news for totalitarian or theocratic regimes and local ideologies that do whatever is in their power and within their reach to keep their societies closed.

It seems as if the whole world has boiled down into a small village, thanks to the explosion of such social media as *twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *TikTok*, etc., which have put young generations across the world into direct contact, and the young generation is using English as the lingua franca – just like Tok Pisin inKulick's (1992) study – to socialize into the brave new world of the universal village, a new society in which local norms are replaced by universal norms. Nevertheless, totalitarian or theocratic regimes and local ideologies can survive in their sovereignties only if they can withhold their local young generations from reaching out to learn from their peers in the free world, and this is perhaps why such regimes spend so much money, effort and energy on the establishment of intramural intranet networks and also on jamming the internet. Add to this their hasty attempts at reopening schools and universities in spite of the regimes' total failure in bringing the Covid 19 pandemic under control and in containing the virus. It seems as if such regimes in countries with totalitarian, theocratic, authoritarian, or ideological systems – mainly in the communist world or the Middle East – have rightly understood that the internet is the bane of their grip on power, so action plans have been developed and executed to cut free access to the internet. The bad news for such regimes, however, is that the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic resulted in a sudden disruption of traditional "face-to-face" education in traditional classroom or school settings, and the lock-down programs forced kids and teachers to stay home and continue their classes through online learning tools; as such, "face-to-face" education has given way to "mediated" education, and this has its own implications. Once kids gain access to technological gismos and stay home, they are sure (1) to wander around the internet at their leisure times, (2) to learn things that their ideological governments do not want them to learn, and (3) to socialize in ways that are not welcome by such regimes.

It seems as if socialization no longer takes place in only the traditional two directions (i.e., through language and into language) that Ochs and Schieffelin (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984, Ochs and Schieffelin 1995) and Schieffelin and Ochs (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, Schieffelin and Ochs 1986b) delineated. A third and new path for socialization has also emerged in the era of social media, a path that can be called socialization through social networks or simply "mediated socialization". Some seventy-five years ago, Sir Karl Raimund Popper, the Austrian-British philosopher, expatiated upon the notions of open and closed societies first broached by Bergson (1932) to envisage the evolution of human societies as a continuum with organic communities at one end and abstract societies at the other (Popper 1945); now, it seems as if mediated socialization has already announced the debut and inauguration of abstract societies in the post-pandemic era.

All in all, the new generation seems to have brought its arsenal of cognitive endowments of (a) assimilation and (b) accommodation along with (c) mediated socialization and (d) English as the lingua franca to bear on the acceptance of the values and social order of the postmodern world and on the restructuring and transformation of its local social order into a global brave-new-world social order of abstract societies, and this encompasses not only its way of life but also its language preferences; as stated above, young generations have already started to resist local dialects, and this is just the silver lining.

3. It is all about sociosemiotics

What went before clearly shows that language is much more than a formal code. It is not a simple medium of interaction, nor a repertoire of meaning. Rather, it is a significant semiotic (and pragmatic) machine that can (1) drive social and moral sentiments, (2) shape individual and collective identities, and (3) hand down bodies of knowledge, ideologies, and beliefs to new generations (Sapir 1921, Hymes 1964, Duranti 1997, Duranti 2003, Duranti 2004, Duranti 2011). As such, language acquisition is not the simple acquisition of a linguistic system; it is the acquisition of the "socio-semiotic" machine just described. Language forms are not mechanical structures wandering in the void of social space; they are doused in social, cultural, and contextual significance (Baquedano-López, Figueroa 2012, Duff 2012, Loyd 2012).

The preference for one linguistic structure, and not others, is driven and constrained by social contexts and cultural frames of thought and feeling; this in itself is a semiotic (and even more so "pragmatic") preference. As such, the relation between linguistic "characters", *à la* Kaplan (1989), and sociocultural "content" is an indexical relationship; as soon as a linguistic form is used, it points to a certain type of sociocultural computation which is critical to the correct interpretation of social events and scenes (Ochs, Schieffelin 2012). As such, linguistic forms are in essence cues and clues (Dascal, Weizman 1987, Weizman, Dascal 1991) that, if acquired in the right way, help children and novices to become adept at computing correct sociocultural meanings from semiotic/linguistic signs. Children and novices do not normally receive explicit information about the workings of such cues and clues, and they are still expected to discover the implicit interconnections and links between linguistic forms and appropriate contexts of their use. This means that they are expected to develop a "socio-semiotic competence" rather than a short-sighted communicative competence. The acquisition of socio-semiotic competence enables them to discern (a) the role of context in shaping language development and (b) the impact of language on shaping context.

This conception of socio-semiotic competence upcycles the notion of developmental pragmatics which, according to Ochs and Schieffelin (2012), has to do with the interactional as well as discursive contexts that (1) underlie children's and novices' acquisition/learning of syntax, semantics, phonology, and orthography (i.e., linguistic competence) and (2) account for their development of discursive and conversational competence. Needless to say, linguistic competence is part and parcel of communicative competence, and communicative competence, in turn, is part and parcel of socio-semiotic competence, but not the whole of it. Seen in this light, the language spoken around a novice in a social milieu, although considered natural "input", is definitely doused in a tangle of cultural, social, religious, political, and other forms of ideologies, so it is not simply the "language" that the novice will pick up from the environment; ideologies will also find their ways in.

It should be emphasized here that this conception of socio-semiotic competence and sociosemiotics builds on, and at the same time, deviates from both Peirce's (1934 [1902]) "semiotic" and Saussure's semiology (Chandler 2002). It is more in line with the more recent movements in France and Italy (Barthes 1964, Eco 1968, Foucault 1970, Derrida 1981, Lotman 1990, Landowski 2005, Marrone 2021). Nevertheless, it by no means denies the fact that Saussure did indeed predict that semiotics could comprise a wider science of which the job would be to study the life of signs in a society (Barker 2004), a prediction that was later taken up by Barthes (1964), whose works tacitly imply that a culture works in much the same way as a language does; as such, semiotics can be engaged in cultural studies. This conception of sociosemiotics takes sides with Derrida's (1981) and Eco's conceptions of "text" (Eco 1968, Eco 1986) but extends their notions to include metadiscursive narratives, metaphors, panopticism/panopticon (Foucault 1970, Foucault 1997), and enunciation (Benveniste 1974) as the infrastructure (or deep structure, if you will) of texts (Barker 2004). Seen from this perspective, sociosemiotics is indeed a tool in cultural studies that reveals and exposes the "genres of power" that underlie texts in the semiosphere. A text is no longer a static prefabricated piece of writing or speech that carries given meanings; rather, it is an organic, dynamic, and negotiated entity that encompasses absolutely "everything" in the semiosphere (Fabbri 1973, Lotman 1990). As an axiom of cultural studies, anything (e.g., images, sounds, objects, television programmes, logos, pop stars, space, time, rituals, practices, activities, rites, clothes, sporting events, etc.) that can generate meaning through their cultural conventions of use in particular sociocultural contexts (Barker 2004) as well as through signifying practices – i.e., the organization of signs into representations – is a text; as Derrida (1981) rightly noted, meaning is the outcome of no single originatory source but the result of intertextuality (Barker 2004). Once we (a) extend the notion of text to include absolutely "everything" in the semiosphere and (b) "deconstruct" the organization of signs as well as their representational orderings to show how meaning has been injected into them from outside, the subliminal discursive metaphoric intentions of the "genres of power" become self-evident. In this context, textual analysis «usually involves deconstructing the practices of cultural coding to show us how the apparent transparency of meaning is an outcome of cultural habituation» (Barker 2004: 199). This, as Derrida (1981) has correctly noted, implies that everything is text, and there is nothing but text. Textual arrangments are polysemic forms of representation that create meaning in that they bring about the possibility of a wide range of different discursively-loaded meanings; the bad news for totalitarian, theocratic, authoritarian, or ideological regimes is that the readers of discursively-charged texts (including local dialects) are not passive receivers of their intended discursive meanings; rather, they are active agents who bring their cognitive and relevance-theoretic affordances to bear on the deconstruction of the genres of power that lie at the heart of texts in their semiosphere and decide whether they would want to comply with those genres or resist them – just like children in the Gapun community in Papua New Guinea inKulick's (1992) study.Seen in this light, young children and novices are actors that give life to texts in their semiospheres and create their own versions of meaning (i.e., audience meaning) and then react to it with personal agency. As Barker (2004: 199) noted, «meaning is produced in the interplay between text and reader, that is, the hermeneutic circle».

With the explosion of the social media, the previously isolated young children and novices of local communities have opened their eyes onto a brave new world which contains a wide range of texts in its semiosphere. If we take Derrida's (1981) conception that «meaning is not generated because an object or referent has an essential and intrinsic meaning but is produced because signs are different from one another» (Barker

2004: 53), young children and novices of local communities resort to their own active agency to juxtapose their own semiosphere with the semiosphere of the brave new world reflected through social media, and my prediction is that they would opt for the latter (as its signs are already looming on the horizon); hence, movement towards the Popperian hypothesized abstract societies.

It should be noted that in a classroom setting, too, the language spoken to and around a learner is not devoid of ideology, culture, dogma, sensitivities, etc. Even non-authentic contrived materials prepared by language educators as textbooks for language learners have already been dunked in subliminal and tacit ideologies and frames of thought which educators and/or politicians have found relevant to the development of language learners' linguistic competence. As such, language socialization has important implications for language teaching and learning. It should be emphasized here that, in spite of the fact that Sapir had clearly emphasized the capacity of language for socialization, language teaching continued in the tradition of Bloomfieldian and Skinnerian structuralism, and it was not until the 1980s when applied linguistics came to realize the importance of the process of socialization in any attempt at language teaching and/or learning.

Foreign/Second language (FL/L2) socialization, the term used to describe this change of perspective in language education/acquisition, has since become a promising area of research and other scholarly practices. Unlike traditional approaches to language teaching/learning which were heavily based on mechanical and contrived materials and assumed that language teaching could take place in a traditional classroom setting (or what can probably be called a "traditional linguistic petri dish"), second language (L2) socialization argues that language teaching should incorporate (a) psychological, (b) social, (c) cultural, and (d) cognitive variables and factors into the process of language education; the offspring of this new approach to language education is what has come to be known as "situated language teaching/learning" (Shih, Yang 2008).

4. Conclusion

All in all, language socialization is perhaps a new call sign for sociosemiotics. Language acquisition does not take place in the void of social space, and social space is not empty. Language acquisition requires interaction, adjustments, scaffolding, etc. The mere naturalistic acquisition (or formal teaching) of grammar rules and vocabulary items will not create people who know how to act in verbally appropriate ways in target language societies; foreign language learners need to develop appropriate discourse and semiotic competencies, and semiotic research can lead to the development of materials that can make the teaching of discourse and semiotic competencies both possible and easy.

It was noted above that novices and children are not monkeys to "monkey see, monkey do" what they passively pick up from the social and cultural milieus, and that they (un)knowingly map the affordances of whatever they have at their disposal on to language socialization. A radical interpretation of this is that with the rapid developments in technology, languages are inevitably and inescapably brought into contact, and this is where the dominant hegemonic language wins over the recess weaker language – which is oftentimes the local language. This is, after all, what Allan (1979) has documented in Nigeria. As noted earlier, Kulick (1992) has also observed a similar phenomenon in Gapun community in Papua New Guinea where the dominant lingua franca (i.e., Tok Pisin) has won over the local vernacular (i.e., Taiap). Observations regarding the Yazdi dialect in Iran, too, lend support to Kulick's (1992) conclusions, and show that shifts in linguistic preferences and giant leaps towards a new brave world with its postmodern social order are both inevitable and inescapable.

It seems as if Huxley's (1932) *Brave New World* is no longer a myth, nor is Popper's open abstract society; theocratic totalitarian despots who crave full power and control over people will have to inevitably resort to turning their countries into isolated "Savage Reservations" that fall behind and lose all contact with the emerging global Brave New World. It seems as if local and/or indigenous languages have no chance to co-exist alongside a hegemonic dominant universal language (maybe a lingua franca such as English), and they are doomed to die sooner or later. It seems as if attempts at language purification and cleansing so ardently made by totalitarian regimes are doomed to fail, and that they are spending huge sums of money on what will not bear any fruit for them in harvesting season.

In brief, landslide shifts and transformations in long-preserved social orders and local cultures are inevitable and signs of such shifts and transformations already loom on the horizon. The question that remains to be answered is: «Are we finally rebuilding The Tower of Babel?». All in all, language socialization transpires in any place and at any time an asymmetry in knowledge and power is observed. Perhaps the only way out of this labyrinth for totalitarian regimes would be to do their best to counterbalance the asymmetry in knowledge and power they observe in their despotvilles.

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