

Language Socialization and Language Teaching:

An interview with Patricia (Patsy) Duff

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Sociolinguistics has grown in importance in recent years, and we have become aware of the role of language not just as a means of communication, but also as a creator of social identity. Additionally, in our current globalized world, contact between users of different languages has increased, especially in countries with large immigrant populations. This interview with Dr. Patricia Duff explores the major issues in Language Socialization. Dr. Duff is currently Co-director of the Centre for Research in Chinese Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia, Canada, where she is Professor of Language and Literacy Education. Her primary research activities concern the processes and outcomes of (second) language learning and language socialization in secondary school and university classroom contexts (foreign/second language, bilingual/immersion, mainstream content courses), as well as in workplaces and communities more generally.



Daniel Dunkley (DD): Dr. Duff, thank you for giving your time for this interview. Could you please explain what you mean by Language Socialization (LS)?

Patricia Duff (PD): LS is a theoretical perspective that also has a methodology associated with it. The goal of that perspective is to understand how people learn to become proficient in the ways and linguistic conventions, and other kinds of cultural conventions, of a particular culture or community, the kinds of assistance they get in doing so, and how that affects their life trajectories as a member of that community or other communities. It started out by looking at children becoming proficient in their first language and in other aspects of communication in their own culture, in their communities, schools, and so on.

DD: What led you to this field?

PD: Well, I came to it informally through lots of experience abroad, in Japan among other places. I was interested in local cultures, ways of using language, learning language, and the pragmatics of communication. As I've worked as a teacher in Japan, China, Korea, and other countries, I've always been a kind of amateur anthropologist. But I came to it more formally when I went to UCLA to study second language acquisition (SLA) traditionally from a functional linguistics perspective.

DD: How did you move from psycholinguistics to sociolinguistics?

PD: At that time Elinor Ochs, one of the pioneers in this area, was at UCLA. Having studied a lot about mainstream SLA up to that point at the University of Hawaii and then at UCLA, her arriving (as a newly appointed full professor in applied linguistics) with a very different perspective opened a new window onto things. Ochs has a background in linguistic anthropology. At the time I happened

to be involved in a project in Eastern Europe and I thought this would be a very interesting context to apply Ochs's ideas. So it was my own prior interest to a large extent, coupled with expertise from the work that Elinor was involved in, that led me into the exploration of LS in the second language field, which was not her main interest. In Hungary I planned to look at changes in discourse, political discourse, as well as the languages of education, Hungarian and English, in bilingual schools from an LS perspective.

DD: What LS research have you done in Canada?

PD: The work in Hungary was my first major project for my dissertation. Since then I've done similar projects in the Vancouver area, in the Canadian high school context. Here I've studied the integration of newcomers, mainly from Asia, into mainstream social studies classrooms, which was of concern to me from my work in Hungary. I wanted to see what was going on this side of the Atlantic, and how the insights I got in Hungary might help me understand what was going on here.

Subsequent to that, I was involved in a number of studies here at the university, looking at similar issues, but as students move from high school to university in ESL, mainstream, or sheltered language instruction contexts. In that work I was not particularly interested in immigrant students, but rather international students and English first-language students. What does it take to give an academic presentation in a course in arts and sciences? What are the different cultures around that—around knowing, representing knowledge, engaging in discussions about that? More recently I've been looking at the same kinds of things in academic writing, for term papers, for theses, and dissertations.

That has been my main work in connection with English language socialization, something which refers to the previous language experience of the student. At UBC, in connection with the Centre for Research in Language and Literacy Education I'm also working on issues connected with Chinese (heritage) language education and socialization. That's not concerned explicitly with LS, but implicitly it is. The reason is the particular situation in Vancouver. Here we have such a big Asia-Pacific population, whether it's people from Asia or those born here but with Asian backgrounds. So it seemed very timely for us to look not at people learning English, but those learning Chinese. The students are both heritage language learners of Chinese and

English native speakers. We try to understand their language development, their experiences, social aspects, and LS too, to some extent.

DD: What aspect of LS do you deal with now?

PD: The work that I'm doing here is concerned primarily with second language learning in secondary schools, universities, workplaces and so on, where people have to learn how to communicate in context-appropriate ways through their second language. The most recent work I've been doing at this university is related to academic discourse socialization, both oral and written, and how people learn. For example, I'm teaching a doctoral seminar this afternoon with our new PhD students in language and literacy education and TESL, and a lot of it is about preparing them to become scholars—that is published scholars and presenters, thinkers in education and in other related spheres, policy, and so on. So what does it take for these students to become successful in the ways of academe? That's what we look at.

DD: How does LS relate to SLA?

PD: Traditionally, SLA has examined linguistic developmental patterns, stages of development, and some of the cognitive and linguistic explanations for that development. But since the late 1990s there's been a greater emphasis on the social aspect of that experience and how that affects learning. Also we've understood more about learners' perception of themselves, both as learners and as users of the language of a culture. So LS has developed a so-called social turn to some extent. That aspect of learning has become increasingly mainstream both in understanding linguistic repertoires and also the process of contact with the communities in which they participate using that language—the communities they strive to become active members of.

The intersection with SLA is that with LS it's all about developing cultural and communicative competencies in another language, but it also brings in their social experience, cultural experience, and community engagement.

DD: What is the relevance of LS to TESL?

PD: One of the things that is most relevant to teaching is making teachers aware that just exposure to different uses of language is not sufficient for their students to appropriate the kinds of discourse that are privileged or expected in a particular context. We know from the comprehensive input-output-interaction approach that

input alone is not enough, but if we look at the discourse level and not just the phrase or sentence level, it's commonly assumed that people will understand, for example, what APA style is, what the appropriate genre is for writing, say, a letter or newsletter, or what genre is used when you are asked to discuss something in class. It goes along with raising the awareness of students about the different conventions that they really need to be taken seriously in their different fields. In the piece I contributed to the Hornberger and McKay (2010) volume, it's quite applied in the sense that it would be helpful for teachers to know. I think every chapter in that book can be expected to have some direct application to teachers.

DD: How has our understanding of classroom teaching changed as a result of LS concepts?

PD: Firstly, in understanding the rituals of classrooms, in terms of interaction patterns for newcomers: What takes place at the beginning of a class? How do things proceed? What are the norms of interaction in the classroom? And how can teachers themselves help support those who don't already know what those norms are to get to know them?

Another thing in this work, which may be a little harder to tease apart, is that with language comes culture. This doesn't necessarily mean you're talking about the culture of Japan when you're teaching Japanese. Rather, as you study the language there are all sorts of verbal routines—for example, some which you use before you eat, after you eat, as you're leaving or returning to the house and many other kinds of formulaic, ritualistic types of interaction throughout the day. With Japanese so many parts of the language come not just with a semantic meaning but a pragmatic and cultural meaning as well, related to in-group/out-group and cultural expectations of hierarchy, deference, honorifics, and empathy building.

In fact lots of LS work has been done with respect to Japanese. Researchers such as Haruko Cook (2008) have studied what it is for learners of Japanese to appropriate those norms and to perform them as is customary. Furthermore, they have suggested what teachers can do to help students know what the options are. Conversely they tell us what the consequences are of not conforming to those expectations, whether they be gender-related language norms or others. So in summary, LS actually has a lot of relevance both to teachers and learners.

DD: How about your future publications?

PD: We're just in the process of publishing a book through this Center. The title is *Learning Chinese: Linguistic, sociocultural, and narrative perspectives* (Duff et al., 2013). Our original contribution is to study the ways people learn and engage in narrative production, annotation, and revision about their experiences of learning Chinese; to examine the sociocultural themes expressed in relation to identity and community, which have been looked at very little in relation to Chinese as a second/additional language; to examine the linguistic dimensions of learners of Chinese at different points in time and different levels of proficiency and how they might best be captured; and to consider Chinese literacy(ies), not just in terms of character knowledge but also how people engage in literacy in their everyday lives (i.e., outside of school). In the book and a recent presentation in Boston (AAAL), we examine some of the everyday uses of literacy in people's lives, whether through email, tattoos, Facebook, or logographic art.

DD: Thank you very much for your thought-provoking ideas, Dr. Duff.

References

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