

Book Review

Second language socialization and learner agency: Adoptive family talk

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The book under review touches upon a very up-to-date and practical topic of linguistic development of children in the transnational adoption process, focusing on adoptees from Russia and the Ukraine living in American families. Its principal component is a case study which examines *language socialization* (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) and identity formation as well as family bonding from the perspective of language use in three distinct families. As the author states in the introduction, the main aim of the publication is to “discuss the role language plays in forming a family across linguistic and cultural differences, how learning and using a second language (for children and adults) relates to establishing bonding relationships in the family, and how children themselves develop agency in language socialization process” (p. 1). With this purpose on mind, it presents an in-depth analysis of language samples of adoptive families, which are examined from the perspective of learners’ *agency* (cf. Ahearn, 2001; Al Zidjaly, 2009). More specifically, the main emphasis is placed on the role of children

themselves in the process of socialization, which refers both to their own language socialization in the new cultural and linguistic context as well as to their parents, who need to embrace the process of becoming the members of a bilingual family. The book offers an innovative way of understanding and researching language socialization, and it is definitely worth attention as it does not put parents in the dominant position but highlights the role of youngsters in becoming members of a new community.

The volume is comprised of seven chapters, of which the three initial chapters are intended to establish the theoretical background for the further, research-oriented Chapters 4, 5 and 6, whereas the closing part offers concluding remarks, seeking to reconcile theory and the collected empirical evidence. In the first introductory chapter, Lyn Wright Fogle outlines the central themes discussed in detail in the subsequent parts of the volume. It is crucial to highlight the author's perception of learner agency as not only traditionally viewed readiness to act and participate in interaction which triggers language learning, for example, in the language classroom, but also as unwillingness and resistance on the part of learners (cf. Morita, 2004). These are particularly noteworthy because the occurrence of both types of agency is further supported by the empirical data included in the publication. The second chapter focuses specifically on the dominant theoretical constructs of the book, that is socialization, agency and identity, and develops the outlined ideas in a comprehensive manner. Fogle explains the crucial role of language acquisition for becoming a member of a society, which is especially important in a second language context, with the adoptees arriving in America without any knowledge of English or with very limited proficiency in the case of older children. Importantly, the author indicates the role that linguistic ideologies play in socialization and language acquisition, and how parents' preconceived beliefs may change in the course of family formation with the active role of adoptees. In the following chapter, the author discusses the issue of transnational adoption, focusing not only on the tendencies concerning adoptions in the USA but also on related topics of the language and culture of the adoptees as well as the acquisition of a new language and culture after arrival, also touching upon problematic *deficit-oriented approaches* (Valencia, 1997), understood here as the perception of adoptees' L1 as a potential obstacle negatively influencing the process of L2 acquisition. Apart from offering a theoretical background concerning adoptive families, the chapter functions as a transition to the research part of the book as, towards the end, the author outlines the research questions and offers a justification for the choice of participating families as well as describing the data collection tools used.

The subsequent chapters are devoted to a description of research findings and present the analysis of the collected language samples, with each of them

concentrating on a separate adoptive family. More specifically, the fourth chapter is devoted to the Sondermans and presents socialization and agency by means of most prevalently exhibited elements of the family's interaction, that is, narratives and children's resistance. Although resistance is deemed a negative factor in language acquisition, especially in a language classroom, the study shows how it can move conversations to different topics in child-initiated narratives, which may, in fact, translate into meaningful moments of identity creation and linguistic development as it oftentimes involves a transition from the here-and-now to the pre-adoption period, thus allowing a reconciliation between the present and the past. The fifth chapter describes the Jackson-Wessels, a family of four with two parents and two adoptive children from Russia, in which children agency operates as their participation in conversations and posing questions. The author shows how children seek attention by excessive use of questions, which serve a number of functions, such as participating in interaction, requesting clarification of words and concepts and directing parents' attention to specific issues. The presence of metalinguistic talk gives valuable insights into how new meanings and concepts are established and how their understanding is negotiated. Talking about language, defined in the book as *linguaging* (Swain, 2006), not only positively affects communication and alleviates existing problems with comprehension of world and language but also benefits cognitive development in youngsters. The sixth chapter, describing the Goellers family, presents data including recurrent instances of code-switching, which are frequently speaker-oriented, and shows the process of identity-creation and adoptees' agency from the angle of code choice. It demonstrates how language may serve as a common ground for some members of the family and how it may exclude others from interaction because of their unwillingness to communicate in a given code or their insufficient level of proficiency. There is clear evidence of micro- and macrolinguistic factors influencing the language policy in the family, and the author presents instances of ideology-driven conflicts, related, for example, to linguistic purism or beliefs concerning overuse of Russian instead of developing English. The chapter also discusses problems of *language maintenance* (Zentella, 1997) and *attrition* (Sato, 1990) as it shows the difficulties that adopted children experience with the maintenance of their native tongue. In the final chapter, the author points to the dominant role of children and the effects that their agency has on caregivers and, more generally, to the influence of transnational adoptive families on the cultural landscape of the family life in the United States. These conclusions will definitely help cater for adoptive children's needs in terms of language, but also with respect to their belonging in the society. The implications stemming from this book should be taken into account by policy makers as they may initiate steps that need to be taken in order

to ensure adoptees' first language maintenance. This is because the mother tongue is an asset rather than an obstacle for these children, since it "validates adoptees' prior experiences and knowledge and provides a way to deal with emotional difficulties and talk about problems as they arise" (p. 174). The author's engagement with the topic is without doubt strong as she includes an epilogue in which readers can find an update on the participants' lives four years past the study as well as invaluable advice on transnational adoption, given by the parents who contributed to this research project.

It must be admitted that the book is of considerable value as its author has accomplished a difficult task of investigating learners' agency outside the classroom and demonstrated that almost every case of socialization is different as it hinges upon specific circumstances and individual factors associated with the types of agency that children engage themselves in. For this reason, the choice of an ethnographic case study over other research designs, which might have held more promise of generalizability, constitutes one of the greatest assets of this publication. Because of the research design and the way in which the study is presented, this volume is suited not only for researchers but also for anyone (e.g., secondary or tertiary level students) looking for guidance on how to conduct similar studies, not least because of the great precision in the analysis of the data. In addition to specialists, the book might also constitute a valuable resource for parents of transnational adoptees struggling with linguistic problems, ideological issues and identity construction in second language development as it gives them a chance to see how similar families communicate, establish family relationships and deal with difficulties that each adoptive family of this kind may face. It is illuminating how this book shows identity creation in discourse, as visible in power distribution, negotiation of topic and language, and, finally, construction of a shared family history by learning about the pre-adoption lives of the children. Another great positive of this publication is the fact that it avoids a patronizing tone which would seek to instruct parents what they should do; quite the opposite, the book maintains its professional attitude while being descriptive in nature. Yet the issues discussed by the author are not of minor significance as they are clearly associated with language-related ideology and might be of importance for language policy-makers and educators. For instance, the issue of deficit-oriented approaches appears to be crucial from the point of view of linguists, but it is of no lesser importance to adoptive parents, who may tend to see children's mother tongue as an obstacle which prevents the adoptees from acquiring the second language. In consequence, those parents' attitudes may situate the first language and its culture in danger of being neglected and, in the long run, lead to attrition. Thus, the author's description of topics related to language maintenance, so closely linked to identity construction

and influencing language policy, comprises an invaluable and multidimensional report on transnational adoption without idealizing either the process itself or the possibility of developing bilingualism in these families in the future.

Even though the book is without doubt a valuable addition to the literature, it could have been beneficial for the research part to go beyond the context of adoptees from the post-Soviet countries, who, despite being a large group in the United States, by no means constitute the only group of transnational adoptees in that country. The contrast between the United States and Eastern European, Russian-speaking countries as well as the relationships between the countries may actually have an influence on the language behavior of some of the elder adoptees. It might also be considered somewhat ethically doubtful to audio-record intimate family life situations such as the ones shown in the book, although, in fairness, it is difficult to suggest how else such valuable and detailed could data be gathered. Moreover, it seems that some of the issues brought up in this publication might be of interest to a family psychologist rather than an applied linguist which, in turn, poses a question to what extent it is warranted for both the author and the discipline of language studies itself to delve into such topics. Nevertheless these concerns do not outweigh the overall positive evaluation of the publication and its relevance in view of the fact that theme of the book and in particular its research part are innovative, thus making the volume a valuable contribution to second language acquisition literature.

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