# 30 Child Discourse

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## 0 Introduction: Placing Child Discourse in a Tradition

In the years since Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan published the first book on child discourse (Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977), the field has moved through a series of changes. By turning to a discourse-centered approach, researchers have been able to shift focus, placing the child's learning process and productive pragmatic use at the center of their concern. The early discourse approach developed as a counter to traditional language acquisition studies, which centered on discovering how children could overcome the limitations of their incomplete grammatical system. Such studies made judgments of the child's ability to approximate to the adult norm based on direct elicitation in quasi-experimental settings. The impact of *Child Discourse* (Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977) along with *Developmental Pragmatics* (Ochs and Schieffelin 1979), began a movement towards situationally embedded activities as the domain of child language studies.

Researchers' interests began to turn away from exclusively psycholinguistic concerns with factors underlying the development of formal structures to concentrate on contextually situated learning. The discourse focus looked at children in naturally occurring settings and activities, and paid attention to their speech and communicative practice in everyday situations (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1976; Keller-Cohen 1978). This research went beyond linguistic competence to what became known as the child's acquisition of communicative competence, which is seen as the knowledge that underlies socially appropriate speech. This approach was influenced by ethnography of communication (which saw communicative competence as a contrastive concept to the Chomskyan notion of linguistic competence), and involved theories of sociolinguistics, speech act usage, and conversational analysis. Although little conversational analytic work was done at that time, by the late 1970s and 1980s there was a growing interest in children's conversational competence (McTear 1985; Ochs and Schieffelin 1979).

## *0.1 Language socialization and the acquisition of discourse*

The ethnographic approach to acquisition served to refocus studies of children's acquisition to the problem of how language learners are able to be participating members of a social group by acquiring social and linguistic skills necessary for interaction. The term **language socialization** came to represent this new focus. As Ochs and Schieffelin, who provided one of the first collections to address these concerns (Ochs and Schieffelin 1986), commented: language socialization involves "both socialization through language and socialization to use language" (Ochs and Schieffelin 1986: 2). The focus on language-mediated interactions as the mechanism of production–reproduction is the unique contribution of language socialization to the core problem of how societies continue. From this perspective both the sociocultural contexts of speaking, and the ways of speaking within specifically defined speech events of a social group or society, became primary research sites (Heath 1983). In contrast to earlier studies of language acquisition, which focused on the acquisition of grammatical patterns, and later studies, which looked at children's speech acts, the new approach looked at speaking embedded in specific interactive situations and at the communicative, as distinct from linguistic, competence that these practices revealed (Hymes 1962).

By the mid-1980s the shift to language socialization was responsible for highlighting what it means for a young child to participate in meaningful language exchanges and to become an active agent in her or his own development, to which discourse competence was an essential key (Cook-Gumperz et al. 1986). Children require both broad cultural knowledge about social relationships and an understanding of the social identities that define their position in a social world. Yet they also need to be active producers of the linguistic practices that construct these identities. While language socialization studies introduced the idea of studying child-centered communicative activities, interest in the later 1980s in peer speech redirected these concerns toward the child as member of a culture that was different from that of the adult world (Corsaro 1985). As part of this rising interest in peers and peer cultures came a concern with the particular speech activities that children generate for themselves. Goodwin's collection *He-Said-She-Said* was an example. This ethnographic study looked at the role of children's disputes in organizing peer cultures (Goodwin 1990). Within this peer context, the whole notion of conversational competence was shifted, such that children became the arbiters of their own conversational practices and rules of appropriateness.

Thus the growing interest in how the child's language knowledge differs from adult linguistic knowledge, and helps children organize their social and emotional worlds, refocused child discourse inquiry. For example, the edited collection *Narratives from the Crib* (Nelson 1989) represents a new direction focusing on different genres of communicative activity. In this volume, a young girl's bedtime narratives are instrumental in her understanding of the social and emotional events taking place in her life.

To summarize, in child discourse research through the 1980s, discourse-centered studies address the following areas. First, what does it mean socially and psychologically for the child to have an ever-increasing linguistic control over her or his social environment? Secondly, these studies focus on sociolinguistic practices and on events that are meaningful from the child's point of view, such as games, teasing rituals, and pretend play routines. They explore children's developing competence in their own peer world. Thirdly, child discourse studies began to focus on children's lives in a broader sociocultural context, looking at children as learners of particular social-cultural and linguistic knowledge. The studies look at how using language and acquiring language is part of what it means to become a member of a wider society.

### 0.2 Present-day studies of children's discourse

The themes that most characterize the field today, and that we pick up on in this chapter, involve looking at the child within a more complicated social context, one which leaves some space for her or him to have a role in its construction. Current studies are for the most part looking at a much richer notion of context, at children making meaning in their lives, not just having transmitted to them an already-formed notion of culture from adults. They look at children's worlds as a valid part of socialization theory. The concept of children's social worlds is one in which children organize their concerns and social experiences through talk. From this perspective, researchers look at how talk is part of an interactional sequence and at how it realizes social goals. Finally, we suggest that children's discourse studies have come full circle from language acquisition, which started with diary studies of children's language in meaningful contexts (e.g. Halliday 1977; Locke 1993), to now, when concern with the implications of language for self-relevance, for sense-making, and for the construction of peer cultures and children's worlds once again focuses on detailed studies over time of a child or children's language and discourse. An example is M. Shatz's *A Toddler's Life* (1997), which looks not just at children's patterns of acquisition, but at how a space is made for children to become effective communicators and sense-makers of their world.

With these issues in mind, we will review some of the most relevant studies in two main situational domains: adult–child discourse and child–child discourse. Under adult–child discourse, we review studies in pragmatics of family life, personhood and self-identity (where space is made for the child to begin to reflect on her or his own experience), and morality in the talk of everyday life (such as dinner-table narratives, politeness routines, and other adult–child exchanges). Under child–child discourse, we review studies in the areas of peer talk for organizing peer group ranking and morality within the peer group and the interactional accomplishment of gender.

## 1 Adult–Child Discourse

### 1.1 The pragmatics of family life

The world of the family, with its often subtle distinctions of power and authority, provides children with their earliest learning experiences of how verbal communication can effect interpersonal relationships. By participating in family life, children gain practical experience of family dynamics and how talk is used to control, to persuade, or to conceal real intentions. Family discourse, particularly at mealtimes and on other ceremonial occasions, provides the essential testing-ground where children hone their skills as communicators. It is in the family group that children listen to and learn to construct narratives, tales that reflect past and future events (Heath 1982). And it is through the pragmatic conventions of daily conversations that the relative positioning of family members is constructed as part of daily discursive practice. In family discussion, children are able to observe how talk reflects, and at times constructs, status relationships of gender, age, and power by the ways people talk to each other and about each other. It is also through family discussion that children first become aware of relationships in a world beyond the family.

### *1.1.1 Issues of power and control*

Ervin-Tripp, focusing on the pragmatic conventions of family talk, provides important insights into the linguistic means by which interpersonal relationships are negotiated through the daily activity of family talk. Her analysis concentrates specifically on the speech acts or activities, such as requests, directives, greetings and politeness expressions, jokes, and complaints, that demonstrate control of one person over another. In a paper on "Language and power in the family" (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1984: 119), she points out the need to distinguish between effective power, "the ability in a face-to-face interaction to get compliance from an addressee," and esteem, "as the right to receive verbal deference." In other words, there is not a direct correspondence between descriptors of status and everyday verbal behavior. Rather, by looking at everyday discourse, we become aware of the variety of factors of context, interactants, social position, and/or emotional involvement, as well as activity scene, that all enter into choices of verbal strategies, and on a situation-specific basis determine pragmatic choice. Ervin-Tripp et al., for example, examine how these factors influence choice of request forms (1984). Among other things, Ervin-Tripp argues that there is a relationship between the degree of indirectness of the request, the esteem of the person to whom the request is made, and the power of the speaker making the request (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990). It is now well known that children will issue direct commands to younger children in play, while recognizing the need to be indirect to those older and with higher status in the play situation. However, such indirect strategies are not necessarily employed with parents, with whom the child has a greater emotional involvement, for parents in their turn insist at least on politeness markers as a symbol of nominal deference to their adult status (Gleason 1988; Ervin-Tripp 1976, 1977; Wootton 1997). Thus, pragmatic choices, in something as apparently simple as request forms, reveal the real complexities of the discourse knowledge necessary for children to become competent communicators in everyday settings.

The range and complexity of children's social knowledge is further revealed by the way they act out family roles in pretend play (Andersen 1990). In a pioneering study of children's understanding of family and other adult roles, Andersen used puppets as supportive props for children to play out a freely chosen selection of roles and scenes, involving, among others, medical and family settings. Her findings go further in showing the range of children's knowledge of status relationships. In role-playing games, children reveal a range of understandings of the complexities of directives and requests. The social cost of the request becomes a part of the choice of pragmatic form. There is no absolute right and wrong form but a situationally appropriate choice (Andersen 1990; Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan 1977). For example, in a doctor-and-nurse game, while doctors may give direct orders, nurses must make indirect requests. The higher-status role will also use more discourse markers such as "OK," "now," and "so" (e.g. Andersen's example of the teacher puppet saying "OK, now, so"). In both medical settings and family play, girls and boys in nursery school compete for the high-status positions. They do not see any of these roles as being gender-specific, but rather as giving local power within the game action to exert control or give rewards (Cook-Gumperz in press).

### *1.1.2 Dinner-table talk*

A key site for looking at children's complementary roles within the family is dinner-table conversations. Children's discourse has been explored from the point of view of the participation frameworks of family routines and in particular looking at children's speech strategies during dinner-table talk and narratives. Richard Watts (1991), in a study of power in family discourse, states that the distribution of power in families can be directly related to members' success in verbal interaction, and in particular the ability to achieve and maintain the floor to complete any interactional goal. Blum-Kulka, looking at family dinner-time narratives in Israeli and American middle-class families, shows that in families, children are less likely to master the more complex kinds of interruptions and only manage to gain the floor if it is conceded to them by adults. Moreover, there is cultural variation in how interruptions of another's turn are interpreted, whether as involvement or as inappropriately taking the floor (Blum-Kulka 1997).

Ochs and Taylor (1995) documented children's understanding of the linguistic marking of status and power relationships within families in a different way. They focused on the participation structure of dinner-time storytelling among family members. In white middle-class American families, mothers and children share reports of trouble and fathers take the role of problematizer, often negatively evaluating other members' actions. This participation structure, in which children share, helps to construct power differentials within the family.

One way in which the child becomes aware of the social order is that it is modeled for them by the adult caretakers around them. Their place in the social ordering can differ cross-culturally or with other social-cultural factors, such as social class, family size, and birth order. As we explore in the next section, the child's identity is not a social given, not merely an expression of the social world into which she or he is born; rather it is realized through the interactive use of language.

## *1.2 Personhood and self-identity*

### *1.2.1 How children understand their own position in a social world*

How the child gains a realization of who she or he is as a person within a social and cultural world is a critical part of child discourse inquiry. Language is used by the child actively to construct a social identity and a self-awareness that comes with the self-reflexiveness made possible through the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic resources of language.

Shatz, in a diary study of her own grandson, Ricky's, language development through the first three years of his life, describes how, in acquiring a language, the child becomes a social person. She comments:

> I argue that the toddler acquires in language a powerful tool for learning. By coupling language with self-reflectiveness and attention to internal states that have begun to manifest themselves, the toddler can learn in new ways about new things. She can get from others information not based on immediate experience, and she can compare her own experience of feelings and thoughts with statements of others about theirs. Thus, the world becomes many-faceted, beyond immediate experience and limited perspectives. (1994: 191)

With many examples, Shatz shows how Ricky gives voice to a sense of social belonging. One example describes his growing awareness of familial group membership, of belonging to a social entity with common practices and discourse. At age three, during a family gathering, he looked around the dinner table at everyone and said, "I think you call this a group" (Shatz 1997: 191). Yet at the same time, this dawning sense of his or her place in the familial group provides the child with a reflexive awareness of himself or herself as a person who is able to recognize the group and his or her own place within it. The child's growing ability to refine his or her language to be able to discuss and consider whether events are possible and to contemplate nonimmediate phenomena requires a growing control over complex grammatical features like verb aspect and modality. The result becomes the ability to realize someone else's viewpoint as different from your own and to hold these two contradictory views in mind at once. Shatz gives an example of Ricky's situationally embedded counterfactuals. He is able to say to his grandmother when he surprises her for a second morning without his pajamas, "You thought they was wet," as they had been the previous morning. The intent is counterfactual but relies on the situation rather than the more explicit lexical means of adult usage. Although this is a fairly simple utterance, Ricky's joke depended on his ability to recognize his grandmother's perspective as different from his own, and only a detailed discourse study would be able to capture such events and so account for the child's growing competence.

In a similar vein, Budwig shows how children's uses of self-reference pronouns give rise to differences of perspective on their social world and their position as an actor and active agent within it. Looking at the development of agentive causality and the use of self-reference forms, she points out that it is only by focusing on discursive practice that the real range of children's usage can be appreciated (Budwig 1990). In a detailed study of six different children's developmentally changing uses of self-reference forms between two and three years of age, she noted that the idea of personal agency appears earlier in children's discourse than the ability to attribute intentions to others (that becomes part of a wider sense of independent agency). Budwig discovers a major difference in orientation between children who habitually use only first person reference pronouns ("I") and those who in similar situations use two different forms, "I" and "me–my." These choices did not vary with age or gender but rather reflect what could be considered a personal difference in orientation to the world, as either ego-focused or nonego-focused. Other studies have found similar differences in children's choice of self-reference forms that seem to reflect a difference in self-as-experiencer/reflector-on-world and self-as-agent/controller-of-the-world (Gerhardt 1988). Through these means children can be seen as experiencers/reflectors-on-reality as well as actors-on-reality.

The child's sense of herself or himself as a reflective person able to distinguish her or his own feelings and thoughts from others is illustrated by many of the chapters in Nelson's edited volume *Narratives from the Crib* (Nelson 1989). In this volume, researchers analyze the bedtime monologues of a two- to three-year-old child, Emily. They demonstrate how, through her night-time retellings of the day's events to herself, the little girl learns to come to terms with her feelings and her reactions to the events surrounding the arrival of her new baby brother. At the same time, she gains awareness of herself as a separate person within the nexus of her family. By examining how the narratives become linguistically and pragmatically more complex, Nelson and her collaborators provide a basis for the understanding of the relations between a growing narrative skill and the development of the sense of personhood.

## 1.3 Talk and the morality of everyday life

As the growing child engages others within a complex set of relationships, issues of right and wrong arise. What actions mean to others, whether hurtful or supportive, and what others mean by their words and deeds, become the subject of both adult–child and peer exchanges. It is through such everyday conversations that children gain knowledge of the fabric of everyday morality, that is, of how the social world works. Talk about emotions, caring for others' feelings, recognizing your own feelings, and how to manage your body and self in socially appropriate ways all have culturally different and conventionally expected ways of expression. Such cultural differences in ways of talking about these matters range from formulaic expressions of regret for such minor infringements as bodily noises (Clancy 1986), through sanctions against overtly expressing annoyance (Briggs 1997; Scollon and Scollon 1981), through expressions of care showing concern for others and responsibility for younger siblings and other children (as Schieffelin (1989) shows with the Kaluli), to children's use of respect forms of address which show the obligations not only of caring for others (Nakamura 2001) but of paying respect across generations (Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986).

### 1.3.1 Rules and routines

However, moral talk essentially is embedded within the routines of daily life and its ordinary talk about actions, events, and the outcomes of these. For example, Wootton (1986) argues that morality is not a matter of learning to match behavior to abstract rules or principles, but rather depends on awareness of the local possibilities for actions that follow in response to sequences of talk. That is, it is through situated action that the child becomes aware of the social ordering of relationships and grows to realize the obligations these entail. In a later detailed study of a two-year-old learning to use request forms, Wootton demonstrates how sequencing in everyday talk contexts provides local occasions of social knowledge of rights and wrongs. He shows how a two-year-old protests when a parent, having forgotten what she had previously said, proposes a course of action that conflicts with the child's expectation (Wootton 1997). Children, in other words, pay close attention to adults' actions and words, early in life developing a sense of the infringement of a "moral order" that results from what they see as inconsistencies. In this way, a sense of right and wrong emerges from involvement in apparently trivial daily discourse. It is through participation in such communicative encounters that children become everyday moralists, who, by paying attention to the details of interactions and talk, hold others to the expected outcomes of what has been said.

### *1.3.2 Expressing feelings and politeness*

A critical aspect of moral learning is emotional socialization. Children develop the capacity to recognize the consequences of actions for their own and others' feelings, and learn to express these feelings in an accepted form. Mothers' and other caretakers' expressions of love, joy, annoyance, displeasure, concern, and admonishment provide their children with moral insight into human relations and how these are encoded in a discourse of feeling. In enacting family relationships during peer play, children reveal and often overcommunicate mothers' or fathers' caring talk by scolding, shouting, cajoling, and other expressions of concern for the correct behavior of others. In this way, what Cook-Gumperz (1995) has called "the discourse of mothering" not only reproduces a version of the activity but enables the child to practice the situational enactment of relationships through talk. The process of acquisition here is somewhat similar to that illustrated in earlier grammar acquisition studies, namely an overgeneralization followed by a progressive refinement of patterns governing both grammar and a discourse of feeling (Ochs 1988; Duranti 1992). Schieffelin goes further in her ethnographic study of the Kaluli children by showing how children are socialized into the performance of the relationship of talk in action, by making appropriate voicing and prosody to communicate concern. That is, as both Ochs and Schieffelin (1987) argue, it is not only through the correct formulaic expressions and the appropriate lexical and syntactic forms that emotion is conveyed, but through correct performance in which children may learn to display an appropriate understanding or stance vis-à-vis their own and others' actions. In a similar vein, Heath (1983) in the Trackton study and Miller (1982) in south Baltimore have shown how many working-class mothers encourage their children to engage in challenging verbal routines, even with adults, which reveal their ability to be resilient in a difficult public world. These community-based displays of toughness can be problematic for children in the multicommunity-based context of school and preschool (Corsaro and Rosier 1992). In teasing routines, child and adult enter into a mutual verbal sparring exchange. These are part of a cultural nexus of challenge that enables children to rehearse the skills deemed necessary by adults to show resilience to life's adversities (Eisenberg 1986; Miller and Sperry 1988).

Politeness strategies constitute an alternative to verbal challenges, and may be seen as a way to avoid offense and anticipate or deflect possible difficulties (Brown and Levinson 1987). And as Brown has shown in a traditional Highland Chiapas village, women in particular engage in complex strategies such as hedging and the use of indirectness markers to manage their relations with others, and these strategies become part of young women's talk (Brown 1994). Similarly, in Nakamura's (2001) study of pretend play, for Japanese nursery children, the use of politeness becomes a part of the rehearsal of adult roles (1999).

### *1.3.3 Narrative accounts as everyday morality: narrative form and topic inclusion*

One of the key discourse domains in which everyday morality is most apparent is personal narratives used to justify actions, to recall past events, or to express opinions about others. Blum-Kulka (1997), in comparing family dinner-table talk, found that Israeli and American middle-class families differed in the extent to which they allowed the child to be the focus of the storytelling attention, and the extent to which parents stressed that "tall tales" or exaggerations were inappropriate. In contrast, working-class families, such as the Trackton African-American working class community that Heath (1983) studied, and the white working-class families studied by Miller et al. (1986), valued exaggerations as a display of linguistic competence (smart talk). It is just such mismatches in the expectations about discourse practices between the home and mainstream school community that can be a source of difficulty for young children (Michaels 1986).

As Gee (1988) and Michaels (1988), among others, have shown, adults take up topics that children offer in conversation and use these to guide children toward telling stories that display canonical narratives. These narratives are in line with a literate standard, having a beginning, a middle of complicating actions, and a highlighted ending (Gee 1986; Michaels 1988). Other studies exploring spontaneously occurring narratives between parents and their young children that happen during daily activities at home also show how adults appraise children's stories and see their own role as encouraging them to find a coherent story line, and how children can differentiate narrative genres (Hicks 1991; Hudson and Shapiro 1991).

Discourse analysis focuses on the ways in which children give narrative sequencing to events, provide coherence to the actions in the story, and are able to attribute motives to themselves and others, as well as provide an emotional evaluation. In this way, recent study of narratives, building on Heath's original point in "What no bedtime story means" (Heath 1982), shows that narratives become not only a means of developing a literate sense of story, but also a means of knowing how to express feelings and thoughts in culturally acceptable ways. In this way, narrative experiences help to develop a moral sensibility about the consequences of actions for both the self and others.

# 2 Child–Child Discourse

## *2.1 The language of children as peers: creating discourse cohesion and coherence*

As described, peer talk is important in the development of the study of child discourse, in that it shifts the focus away from how children reproduce culture as it is transmitted to them from adults to how they produce culture for themselves. One area in which this has been explored extensively is in that of gender, where children appropriate gender ideologies from the adult culture, displaying and altering them for their own purposes. This topic is explored below.

One of the earliest concerns in the study of peer talk was in the creation of coherence and cohesion (McTear 1985). This concern arose from Piaget's (1926) claim that children were incapable of nonegocentric speech until age seven. Piaget characterized children's peer conversations in the pre-operational period of development as "collective monologue," conversations where children's responses to their conversational partners were noncontingent. Only older children were capable of engaging in cooperative speech. Later researchers, including Parten (1933) and Bakeman and Gottman (1986), graded levels of the cline between noncontingent and cooperative speech.

McTear (1985) examined turn-taking in children's conversations. It had been proposed that children's turn-taking differs from the model proposed by Sacks et al. (1974) for adults in that there are fewer overlaps and longer gaps. Children have difficulty projecting possible turn completion points; Garvey and Berninger (1981) reported that gaps were only slightly longer than in adult conversation in their child data. McTear (1985) reported that in a longitudinal sample of two children's talk, overlaps increased as the children grew older. However, even younger children displayed the ability to monitor the turn in progress, not only for its projected completion, but for its projected content, as seen in self-initiated other-repair when the partner had trouble completing her turn.

McTear (1985) also studied the development of coherent dialogue. He examined children's use of various surface devices which are used to show cohesive ties between utterances, including ellipsis, pronouns, and connectives. Even at younger ages, children could use various functions. "Now" would be used to signal a switch in topic and "well" to indicate a dispreferred response. "Because" was used first as an attention-getter ("it crashed because it's broken") before it was used in the sense of strict event causality ("it crashed because I dropped it"). This mirrors other researchers' developmental findings. Kyratzis et al. (1990) and Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp (1999), relying on terminology developed by Sweetser (1990), found that speech act-level uses of "because" developmentally preceded content-level uses. In speech act-level uses, the reason justifies why the speaker is making a specific claim or speech act (as in McTear's "it crashed because it's broken") rather than explaining why an event happened, that is, in a content- or event-based sense. This developmental progression from pragmatic to mathetic uses was explained in terms of children's discourse practices. Young children are more likely to seek to justify and get compliance for requests than to explain event contingencies in the world, a more cognitive-reflective practice (see also Sprott 1992).

In terms of coherence, the earliest type that children could construct was that between questions and answers. Responses to questions initially tended to be repetitions of the partner (Ervin-Tripp 1976). Older children could respond to statements as well as questions, but they also did this first through repetition. Older children displayed more diverse ways of creating continuity in dialog. McTear (1985) examined children's next-contributions. He found that most were relevant, but older children were more likely to add new information, such as justifications and elaborations, to which partners could, in turn, respond. Younger children's next-contributions tended to be responses without initiations, meaning that conversational topics abruptly ended and new ones had to be introduced abruptly, lending a choppier feel.

Children's coherence has been examined in play and dispute exchanges (McTear 1985; Garvey 1974). These start out as series of rounds, repeatable exchange units. In both play and disputes, young children often engage in ritual cycles of assertion/counterassertion. In play, this can take the form of sound play. In disputes, it takes the form of rounds of assertion, challenge, and counterchallenge. What develops to move children away from rounds-structure in disputes is the ability to supply justifications (Dunn and Munn 1987). Dunn and Munn's findings can be reformulated in terms used in McTear's (1985) analysis. While younger children's next-contributions were relevant (e.g. objections), older children could add new information (e.g. justifications for the challenges) which in turn could be responded to (e.g. challenged and justified). Younger children display format-tying through repetition while older children do it through more varied means, introducing new elements (Brenneis and Lein 1977).

## 2.2 The language of children as peers: organizing ranking in the peer group

The early work on peer talk dealt heavily with how children use repetition and other strategies to display format-tying and create cohesion, and how they violate norms, rules, and context-specific expectations in playful ways to create meaning in play and humor (Garvey 1977). The focus was on linguistic competence. More recent work has focused on how children use linguistic strategies to create their own norms of the peer culture.

Ervin-Tripp (1976), for example, argued that while it is possible to view the forms directives take as related to sincerity conditions underlying requests (Garvey 1975), the actual choice of directive type is socially motivated. For example, Ervin-Tripp et al. (1990) found that children use deferent forms with older, higher-status peers, who are more likely to expect deference as a condition of compliance, than with parents, especially mothers. So it is not only having linguistic knowledge, but having the ability to use it in manipulating status, that differentiate the competent speaker.

Children's sensitivity to status in using linguistic markers was studied first in play-acting contrastive status relationships such as doctor–nurse–patient, mother–father–child, and teacher–student in puppet play and role play (Andersen 1990). More recent work has gone beyond role and puppet play to examine how children index and construct status or hierarchical ranking in their peer and friendship groups (Goodwin 1990, 1993). Goodwin (1993) examined how girls accomplished hierarchical forms of social organization in their own peer relationships. Older, more powerful girls used pretend directives, (e.g. "pretend I'm the mother"), showing they had the power to shift the frame of play. They also allocated to themselves more powerful pretend roles (e.g. mother vs. child).

Goodwin (1990) examined how African-American children use discrediting stories to organize hierarchical forms of social organization within neighborhood friendship groups. She found that boys used discrediting stories about present group co-members to help win ongoing arguments, while girls used stories about nonpresent co-members to rally support against those co-members and form future alliances. Goodwin (1990a; b) emphasized that girls are not only as skilled at argumentation as boys but have types of arguments that are both more extended and more complex in their participant structure. While most studies examine how oppositional stances are created through such talk, children's strategies for displaying positive alignments are also examined. Hoyle (1998) examined two boys engaged in play-acting a sportscasting and how, by aligning to one another's pretend selves in role play, the two boys took a positive footing toward one another.

It is notable that children, even preschoolers, use language to organize hierarchical forms of social organization. Kyratzis (2000), observing a friendship group of preschool girls' drawing-table talk, found that the girls told past and future narratives about staying over at one another's houses. Some girls were consistently prevented from participating. Obstacles would be put up to their participation (e.g. one girl was told she could not come over to the leader's house because her babysitter characteristically came too late). This was a source of great anxiety to the excluded girl. Children command an impressive repertoire of linguistic strategies to organize hierarchy among themselves, including frame-shifting and role-allocation in pretend play, ways of manipulating participant structures in the telling of stayover narratives and discrediting stories, and other strategies.

## 2.3 *Peer moral talk: how the norms of the peer group are realized through gossip, chit-chat, pretend play, and conflict*

### 2.3.1 *Chit-chat and gossip in older children*

In addition to recognizing the importance of ranking within children's peer groups, researchers of peer talk began to study how children use talk to organize the social norms of the group. Many studies of older children, middle-school and beyond, have looked at gossip and chit-chat among peers. Those interested in younger children have focused on studies of pretend play. (These studies will be discussed below.)

With respect to chit-chat, Eckert's (1993) study, "Cooperative competition in Adolescent 'Girl Talk,'" a two-and-a-half-year ethnographic study, documented how, through their "girl talk", a group of adolescent girls negotiated the norms of the peer group. Eckert argued that, like adult women, girls gain "symbolic capital" and status through their relations with others and hence need to negotiate norms of behavior and balance conflicting needs for independence and popularity. Eder (1993) observed adolescent girls engaged in sexual and romantic teasing and argued that teasing provides girls with ways of reinforcing bonds, experimenting with gender roles, and managing newly experienced jealousy feelings. These are means to group belonging through working out a common ground of views and values (Eder 1993).

Jennifer Coates (1994) similarly studied the talk among a friendship group of girls, adding a developmental perspective. The girls she observed practiced the discourses of others (mothers, teachers) and subverted these discourses in a variety of ways. They accomplished femininity through positioning themselves as different kinds of feminine subjects, sometimes in conflict with one another. Developmentally, as they reached 14, a new type of talk, self-conscious in nature, emerged. Life was more serious. As they struggled with changes in their world, they looked to one another for support.

While the early years of middle childhood are the period of the morality of concern for each others' feelings, as Kyratzis (in press) detailed in her study of young girls' talk about emotions, the morality of later childhood and adolescence is most vividly revealed in moral outrage, either at personal affronts or at group norm infringements. Gossip is a key mechanism through which such outrage can be expressed without totally risking the long-term life of the friendship group. As Marjorie Goodwin has brilliantly shown in the *He-Said-She-Said* accounts of children's peer group talk (1990), members of friendship groups rely on the gossip chain to convey disapproval of others' actions. She shows how ritualized routines become a uniquely effective way for one girl's discontent with the actions of another to involve the entire group in repeating or denying their participation in the gossip chain.

Much of the peer talk work has looked at how norms (e.g. values about girls' "meanness": Hughes 1993) are negotiated through talk in girls' friendship groups. However, studies have looked at talk within boys' groups as well. Eder (1998) looked at collaborative narration in both girls' and boys' groups as a means of challenging adult perceptions and establishing adolescent peer culture: "A major theme of adolescent peer culture developed in collaborative narration is an opposition to adult views about teenagers. One way in which storytellers voice such opposition is by incorporating imagined adult dialogue into a narrative to dramatize the gulf between their own perceptions and those of salient adults in their lives" (1998: 86).

### 2.3.2 *Pretend play in young children*

Hoyle (1999) documented how peers display alignments to one another by aligning to one another's pretend selves. Kyratzis (1998, in press) documented how preschool children explore possible selves and gender issues via dramatic play narratives of pretense. Their protagonists explore possible selves organized around gendered themes of power and physical strength for boys (e.g. "Shy Wizards," "Power Rangers") and of beauty, graciousness, caring for others, and nurturance for girls ("Batman's girlfriend," "Owner with Baby Kitties," "Making Chinese Friends"). Moral socialization goes on in these narratives, as children evolve norms of gender-appropriate emotion display. Girls develop positive attitudes toward nurturance/caring and boys evolve negative attitudes toward the display of fear. Children invoke gender-associated scripts of play (house for girls, good guys and bad guys for boys) even when materials do not readily afford them (e.g. boys enact a space scenario with domestic toys) (Sheldon and Rohleder 1996).

The norms-socialization that occurs among preschool-aged girls reproduces adult gender roles such as nurturance and mothering but has another aspect, resistance. In Cook-Gumperz's (in press) study, she finds that girls enact dramatic play scripts of mothering but incorporate antinurturance themes, such as boiling babies.

Pretend play may be an easier venue for norm-negotiation among preschoolers than chit-chat, although the latter can be observed on rare occasions (among preschool girls during drawing-table talk) as well (Kyratzis 2000).

### *2.3.3 Arguments*

Arguments have been thought to be an important venue for peer moral socialization. Dunn (1996) reports that it is in conflict with close friends that children are most likely to use reasoning that takes account of the others' point of view or feelings, more so than when they are in conflict with their siblings. Children may care more about managing to maintain continuous harmonious communication with their friends than with family members. For example, Kerry, in conflict with her friend over who should have a prized crown, says "I know – we'll both be queens because we both want to. Two queens in this palace, and you'll have the crown first, then it'll be my turn" (Dunn 1996: 192). A norm is invoked about turn-taking and equal partnership.

Kyratzis and Guo (2001) show how two girls use disputes over turns as "kitties" to negotiate their status:

*Jenny*: kitty, I'll rub the other kitty's back first/
*Peg*: why?
*Jenny*: Sue's back/
*Peg*: why?
*Jenny*: 'cause ("because") Sue is- is nicer/
*Peg*: no/I'm nicer to you too/
*Jenny*: you're both nicer to me, so I'll rub *both of your backs/
*Peg*: at the same time?
*Jenny*: I think I have to rub one at a time and then I'll rub yours second/

In this argument, Peg, like Kerry in the Dunn example above, invokes a norm, that if you are nice, you should have your back scratched. Jenny, in turn, appears to support this norm by countering that since both kitties are nicer, both will get their backs scratched. Implicit in Jenny's message is the continuance of her status as the person who sets the rules of the game. When points of view differ, standards are invoked to ground opponents' positions, hence rendering arguments a good forum for moral socialization.

## *2.4 Peer socialization about gender and its interactional accomplishment*

According to Coates's (1986) review of research on gender and communicative competence among children, the current thinking is that peers are largely responsible for gender-associated communication styles. Maltz and Borker (1983) framed an influential theory which has guided much of the more recent work on children's communicative competence, often referred to as the Separate Worlds Hypothesis (henceforth, SWH). This hypothesis states that as a result of gender segregation in childhood, with girls playing predominantly with other girls and boys playing predominantly with other boys, girls and boys evolve quite different goals for social interactions and distinct communicative styles.

Maltz and Borker (1982) argued that different activity practices of girls and boys, as noted by Lever (1976) and others, lead them to develop different genres of speech and different skills for doing things with words. Girls learn that talk is for: (1) creating and maintaining relationships of closeness and equality; (2) criticizing others in acceptable ways; and (3) interpreting accurately the speech of other girls. Boys learn that talk is for: (1) asserting a position of dominance; (2) attracting and maintaining an audience; and (3) asserting themselves when another speaker has the floor. Girls' talk is collaboration-oriented and boys' talk is competition-oriented. Maltz and Borker, and later Tannen (1990b), proposed that "the ways of speaking that adults learn growing up in separate social worlds of peers" are so different that male–female communication in our society constitutes "cross-cultural communication" (1990b: 131), often leading to miscommunication.

In terms of research, there have been several supportive studies (see Coates 1986 for an earlier review). Goodwin (1980), which influenced Maltz and Borker, reported that the girls in the African-American Philadelphia neighborhood where she observed friendship groups of 9–13-year-olds talked negatively about the use of direct commands to equals, seeing it only as appropriate in speech of older to younger children. While disputes were common, girls phrased their directives as proposals for future action (e.g. "let's . . ."). These mitigated the imposition of the request and helped constitute a more egalitarian form of social organization.

Tannen (1990b) analyzed the conversations of same-sex pairs of best friends aged between eight and 16 years asked to talk about something serious or intimate. Pairs of male friends seemed uncomfortable with the task, avoided eye contact, and sat parallel to one another rather than face-to-face. Pairs of female friends, in contrast, willingly discussed intimate topics, and when they did so, supported one another.

Several studies with younger children, aged five and below, show differences between girls' and boys' discourse. Miller et al. (1986) found that in arguments, 5–7-year-old boys used a more heavy-handed style, while girls used mitigated strategies (e.g. compromise, evasion, or acquiescence). Amy Sheldon (1990), observing topically similar disputes within a girls' and a boys' triadic grouping, found that the boys used a more adversarial style than the girls. Boys' conflicts were extended and disrupted fantasy play, while girls' conflicts were more quickly resolved. Girls seemed to strive to maintain interconnectedness through compromise and conflict resolution. A study by Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp (1999) similarly found that among dyads of four- and seven-year-old best friends, girls were more likely to sustain a joint pretense narrative while boys were more likely to lapse into arguments about how to proceed, disrupting joint fantasy. Leaper (1989) observed five- and seven-year-olds and found that verbal exchanges among girls employed collaborative speech acts involving positive reciprocity while exchanges among boys employed speech acts promoting negative reciprocity. Sachs (1987/1995), observing pretend play among groups of preschool girls and boys, found that girls used more mitigated forms of directives, forms that invited agreement (e.g. "pretend . . .", "let's . . .") while boys used more direct forms of requests (e.g. direct commands and declarative directives – "you have to . . .").

Several studies, then, supported the view that girls and boys have different sociolinguistic subcultures. In same-sex groups, girls interact so as to sustain interaction and realize group goals, and boys interact so as to top or one-up conversational partners and realize self-goals. Several features of communicative style go along with these goals.

Despite these sociolinguistic strategies that children learn in the friendship groups of childhood, they also have to learn situational variation. As Ervin-Tripp (1978) argues, we may expect that some situations maximize, while others minimize, gender marking. We need to examine situational influences upon styles within individuals' repertoires.

Goodwin (1993) found that the form of social organization that evolved in girls' pretend play (playing house) differed from that which characterized their task activities, making it "imperative that studies of girls' play be grounded in detailed analyses of specific contexts of use" (1993: 161). Goodwin (1990) found that girls shifted their style toward using more direct forms of requests when playing with boys rather than with other girls. Siblings vs. peers as an interactive context also influences language style; Dehart (1996) extended research on peer talk to the sibling context and did not find differences noted previously in peer talk research (e.g. Sachs 1987). Nakamura (2001), examining masculine and feminine marking among Japanese children's speech, found strong contextual variation. Feminine marking among girls was high in a gender context of family play and masculine marking among boys was high in a gender context of superhero (good guy and bad guy) play. However, gender-linked marking was reduced among both girls and boys when play was videotaped in a neutral context (e.g. grocery store play). We need to acknowledge that both girls and boys have a repertoire of speech strategies available to them and that they manipulate speech style for given interactive goals.

Sociolinguistic strategies such as directness in requests and conflict strategies may be a reflection of power as well as gender, as has been found for adults by O'Barr and Atkins (1980). Children have to learn the contexts where power display is warranted. Goodwin (2001) conducted a longitudinal study of talk within middle-school-aged children's friendship groups during recess. Both males and females used assertive forms when they were high in status, that is, experts on a topic (i.e. hopscotch). As children's expertise shifted over time, so did dibs over who used assertive forms of requests. In a mixed-sex nursery school friendship group, Kyratzis and Guo (2001) observed that preschool children varied their use of direct conflict strategies by context. Boys seemed to be licenced to use these strategies in doctor play, while girls seemed to be licenced to use these in borderwork play. Cook-Gumperz and Szymanski (2001) found that in contexts where domestic and family scenarios are instantiated, middle-school-aged Latina girls dominated boys during cooperative groupwork. So among themselves, children seem to work out that certain contexts licence males to be powerful while others licence females to take positions of authority.

In sum, the early research suggested that girls and boys spent much of their time in segregated groups and worked out among themselves different goals and styles of speech. These were thought to evolve fortuitously but to lead to fairly set ways of speaking that were consistent across context. More recent research has suggested that young children are sensitive to the power ramifications of different forms of speech, and allocate power among themselves in contextually sensitive ways that sometimes reflect gender-based links between specific contexts and power. Children show contextual fluidity in their use of speech registers.

## 3 Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, current research interests can be summarized in terms of the following themes: (1) focus on the child in a much richer, more complicated social context; and (2) a view of the child as constructing her or his own identity. Children in other words organize their concerns and thoughts through talk within children's social worlds. Finally, (3) peer cultures within children's worlds can usefully be studied through a fuller, diary-like, ethnographic, context-rich approach. As we have shown in the trajectory of themes of the chapter, increasingly, children get a sense of themselves in a wider social world as well as within the context of the family. Developmentally, children move from having to fit into the family discourse space and participant roles and identities as adults construct them in pragmatics of family life, then begin to make a space for reflecting and thinking about social worlds in personhood, and then later begin to organize others as well as themselves, in terms of social organization and morality, in peer talk.

In this chapter, it would have been possible to focus on the structural features of discourse analysis, such as cohesion, coherence, and discourse markers alone. Instead, we have chosen to focus on language socialization as more representative of current interests. In other words, our purpose has been to show how the field of child discourse studies has shifted focus onto children as active constructors of their world within the domains of adult–child and peer discourse.

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