11

Language Socialization and Marginalization

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1 Introduction

Language socialization, with its traditional attention to culturally preferred subjectivities and ways of being in the world, and marginalization, as a relationally liminal sociocultural positionality and/or power status, are processes that have not often been considered in relation to each other. Yet this chapter is concerned with the value and usefulness of studying issues of marginalization from a language socialization paradigm. The chapter charts the past and present contributions of language socialization to the study of marginality, and considers how these contributions, even if limited, offer exciting possibilities for future scholarship that can open up new paths for the exploration of complex and dynamic language socialization trajectories in contexts of social, political, and economic marginalization.

In the first part of the chapter, I consider why, in language socialization studies, attention to marginalization work has been relatively limited. I argue that while the language socialization paradigm has ample theoretical breadth and methodological flexibility to enrich our understandings of the everyday and institutionalized ways in which individuals, or entire groups, come to occupy marginal subject positions and how these positions are shaped dialogically by power relations, the field has tended to foreground other sociocultural conundrums of language socialization processes. In these first sections I attempt to shed more direct light on some of these implicit historical inclinations so that the paradigm can be opened up to new issues and topics. I then describe how, for the last two decades in particular, and in spite of the paucity of marginalization studies mentioned above, language socialization scholars have made important contributions to our understandings of marginalization processes. Lastly, I describe how I have built on this previous scholarship and on insights from the language socialization paradigm in my own work among Moroccan immigrant children in Spain, further addressing some of the challenges and paradoxes that I have encountered along the way.

2 Historical Perspectives: “Competent” Membership as an Idealized Endpoint of Language Socialization

In their early formulation of language socialization, Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) observed that “the process of acquiring a language is deeply affected by the process of becoming a competent
member of a society” (p. 277). This defining focus on sociocultural practices, knowledge, and ideologies that allow individuals to be recognized as intelligible cultural actors and competent members of communities has remained a central part of programmatic statements about language socialization studies well into the mid-2000s (e.g. Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Garrett 2006; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Ochs 2002; Schieffelin 1990). While, from their inception, language socialization studies were sensitive to the agency of children and other novices, and elegantly struggled with the tension of continuity and change that permeate even the most normative of developmental trajectories, the focus on competent membership did tend to foreground those normative developmental trajectories at the expense of other possible endpoints of socialization. While this emphasis was particularly true in the first wave of language socialization studies, often conducted in relatively homogeneous, monolingual—sometimes also relatively isolated—communities, this trend was also present in later studies carried out in more heterogeneous, multilingual, and culturally syncretic settings.

At this point, it may be useful to recognize how the emphasis on culturally preferred practices and trajectories is a legacy of the historical development of language socialization. The field arose in the early 1980s to address important lacunas in psycholinguistic studies of language acquisition, developmental psychology studies of child development, and anthropological studies of socialization (see Ochs and Schieffelin 2008 for a historical overview of language socialization). Not coincidentally, those three lines of inquiry, especially during that period of time, had developed strong traditions of centering much of their scholarship around the description either of universal and/or culture-specific normative developmental milestones, whether linguistic, cognitive, psychosocial, or sociocultural. In effectively critiquing the gaps left in these other disciplines and examining sociocultural and communicative aspects of social engagements involving novices, some of the theoretical and descriptive concerns of those disciplines seem to have carried over, giving many language socialization studies an implicit, if not explicit, focus on normative trajectories. This direction may have been reinforced by the use of elements of practice theory, such as Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, that were also crucial in the formulation of the paradigm, but that have long been noted for their focused attention to practices of reproduction of culturally predictable and preferred subjectivities. The end result is that other types of language socialization experiences, such as those having to do with difference or marginality, while sometimes acknowledged and even analyzed to varying degrees, remained in the background of many language socialization studies.

Despite this trend, by the early and mid-2000s, when the field had developed its own strong research agenda and had expanded its scope to consider the communicative practices of novices in more diverse and contested sociopolitical contexts, such as among formerly colonized nations and populations and/or immigrant and diasporic communities, scholars within the paradigm itself started to recognize the dangers of focusing too narrowly on normative language socialization trajectories and experiences. For example, Ochs (2000) discussed the problem of how a heavy emphasis on these types of generalizations in language socialization processes can obscure, and even sometimes erase, the considerable variation in communicative practices and in socialization experiences that can be found in any community, an observation that was later picked up and further developed by Garrett and Baquedano-López (2002).

It is also around this time period that Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) produced one of the most theoretically elaborated examinations to date of language socialization in relation to issues of marginality and deviance. In this, they presented some productive and necessary ways for language socialization to move away from accounting only for normative trajectories, or in their own words “culturally predictable and desirable outcomes” (p. 354), to include other types of socialization trajectories related to undesirable and dispreferred subject positions.
Following Althusser and other French poststructuralist thinkers, they widened the horizons of the paradigm to include the examination of bad subjects, or individuals who engage in conduct considered culturally deviant, who display culturally unexpected traits, or who otherwise possess attributes associated with what in other brands of scholarship has been called “social stigma” (Goffman 1963). Furthermore, they challenged future scholarship in the paradigm to take up questions crucial to the study of “culturally problematic subjectivities” (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004, p. 365) and marginalization, such as: how social actors come to understand certain positions and social identities as (un)desirable; how certain individuals come to occupy, or end up being positioned in, these differentially regarded positions; and how these processes are mediated by mechanisms and relations of power.

3 Crucial Issues and Topics: Studying Marginalization Across Contexts and Analytic Scales

Currently, the idea of normative trajectories associated with competent membership is seen more as a desired, or even something of an idealized, developmental endpoint among a number of language socialization trajectories (see Ochs and Schieffelin 2012 for a state-of-the-art formulation of the paradigm), and among a number of differently valued forms of societal membership and cultural subjectivities. While the ways in which this more recent scholarship has refocused, and attempted to overcome, the early theoretical limitations of this field of inquiry have been very helpful, there is still much room for both theoretical and empirical development of language socialization in relation to marginalization and related forms of sociocultural, linguistic, political, and economic disenfranchisement. Let me point out here some directions this development could take.

Theoretically, it would be important to continue to build upon, but simultaneously move beyond, the notion of bad subjects, or “cases in which socialization does not occur, or where it occurs in ways that are not expected or desired” (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004, p. 355). By all means, we should continue documenting cases where the endpoints of language socialization trajectories are culturally “problematic,” for example cases involving individuals’ resistance and other modes of praxis that promote or hinder sociocultural change. This is particularly important because empirically we still do not know much about how these marginal subjectivities come into being.

It is also important, however, to recognize that getting a handle on the mechanisms of marginalization involves understanding how some individuals, or groups of people, are ascribed negative social identities and come to inhabit, often with varying degrees of possibility for resistance against, positions culturally recognizable and recognized as devalued and marginal in the social order. This is the case, for instance, when certain kinds of individuals or groups of people are actively discriminated against at various levels of sociopolitical life and are routinely positioned in structurally marginal categories, often being blocked from more desirable positions and identities by hegemonic ideologies and power relations. In liberal nation-states, in particular, the deep irony is that the marginal positionalities of certain groups are often covertly promoted through unequal structural arrangements, even though they are often ideologically deplored as undesirable outcomes. Indeed, there are usually a number of ideologies manufactured precisely in the service of justifying why many marginalized individuals or groups often “fail” to achieve preferred sociocultural trajectories, such as deficit theories that explain the educational failure of poor minority children as the result of environmental family and community factors. Yet it behooves us to be sensitive to these power mechanisms that mask how marginal positionalities and devalued identities can become de facto socialization endpoints for children and other novices who belong to marginalized communities.
There are a number of theoretical orientations and methodological features of language socialization that make it a productive intellectual tool to probe the mechanisms and tensions involved in the study of marginalization. To conclude this section, I mention three dimensions that are not only paradigmatically key, but that I have also found particularly useful in my own work among Moroccan immigrant children in Spain. First, language socialization is deeply process oriented, focusing heavily on how sociocultural practices are promoted, discouraged, negotiated, acquired, resisted, subverted . . . etc. This is a great strength because, unlike other paradigms in the social sciences where complex phenomena, such as discrimination or social reproduction, are often just assumed, language socialization research can show empirically the intricate architecture of socially organized practices that position certain groups as marginal members of the social group. Moreover, it can account for both practices that are explicitly organized as exclusionary and practices that are implicitly organized as marginalizing through indirect indexicality and other similar semiotic mechanisms, as well as for all the range of language-socializing practices that lies in between.

A second dimension of language socialization that helps illuminate how the marginalization experiences of children and other novices are mediated by (in)direct semiotic practices and other modes of social action is the way in which the field has paid attention to how microinteractional social phenomena are embedded within, and are to a certain extent constitutive of, macro social conditions and ideologies. For example, considering the tensions between local interactional exchanges and larger sociocultural phenomena, such as language ideologies or ideologies of personhood, has been another traditional strength of the paradigm. An important caveat to consider here, however, is that to address the theoretical and empirical issues implicated in the study of marginalization, scholarship within the field needs to pay more attention to how interactional negotiations of local power relations or of group membership are shaped by sociohistorical and macro-political dynamics regulating hierarchical categories of belonging, mechanisms of citizen subject-formation, and other processes related to membership. This caveat has also been noted recently by other scholars in the field (i.e. Baquedano-López and Mangual Figueroa 2012; Fader 2012). Finally, while language socialization scholars have productively utilized a variety of ethnographic methodologies, a most valuable orientation has been its longitudinal, cross-context perspective. This integrated approach is especially effective when studying processes of marginalization for several reasons. On the one hand, studying children’s and novices’ social engagements across situations of language use allow us to chart the relative constraints and affordances that novices experience in different settings. This is important because processes of marginalization and exclusion are very rarely totalizing across areas of social life. While it is possible to find examples of extreme cases of absolute social disenfranchisement, most often novices are likely to encounter varying degrees of marginalization in different contexts and spheres of their social lives. Even within a given context, an aspect I will elaborate later in relation to my own work, it is possible to find contradictions among different mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion, or among different social actors’ actions and stances regarding constraints and affordances for participation. Furthermore, equally important in this regard is the fact that novices’ agency to resist and subvert their own marginal positioning in favor of more advantageous forms of social participation is also likely to vary across sociocultural contexts. The power of a cross-context perspective in being able to determine the degree of redundancy (in Bateson’s sense 1972) with which children and novices experience marginalization and social exclusion cannot be underestimated. On the other hand, a longitudinal orientation powerfully combines with this cross-context perspective to allow us to trace what Wortham (2005) has called “trajectory of socialization,” or how language socialization takes places intertextually across speech events and interactional encounters.
Taking into account multiple analytic- and time-scales in a variety of contexts is crucial to making robust generalizations about relative routinization or exceptionality of novices’ participation in marginalizing discursive events over time, and how this (in)consistent participation may lead to individuals’ development of more or less enduring marginal and negative forms of social identification.

4 Current Contributions and Research: Marginalization as Trajectories of Language Socialization

While issues of marginalization may not have been an overriding focus in most language socialization scholarship to date, as a wider variety of communities and research topics have been explored, there has been an increasing sensitivity to the everyday and institutional production of negatively marked categories and forms of membership. In particular, I have identified four areas of inquiry in which a language socialization perspective has already enriched our knowledge of marginalization and the social processes that underpin it, such as ostracism, discrimination, and exclusion: (a) marginalization as structural product of institutional policies and practices towards individuals with stigmatized identities, such as students from racial and linguistic minorities and students with disabilities; (b) marginalization as production of social difference in children’s and youth’s peer networks; (c) marginalization as community ostracism in orthodox, nonliberal religious communities; and (d) marginalization as sociocultural and sociopolitical exclusion in migration settings. This section is not intended to be an exhaustive literature review on scholarship conducted on these four lines of inquiry (see Duranti et al. 2012 for wide-ranging coverage of language socialization). My purpose here is to showcase a few important examples of language socialization research in these thematic areas, pointing out specifically their contributions to our current understandings of marginalization processes.

Marginalization as Structural Product of Differential Participation in Institutional Policies and Practices

Historically, one of the first domains in which language socialization researchers paid attention to issues pertaining to processes of marginalization was in the documentation of linguistic and interactional practices sanctioned as legitimate in formal schooling activities. Most often this legitimization came at the expense of other productive patterns of language use that, while devalued in institutional practices, were fundamental in the primary socialization of children in their homes and communities, particularly for children from indigenous, minority, and/or working-class backgrounds (e.g. Cook-Gumperz 1977; Heath 1983; Miller 1982; Moore 2006; Philips 1983; Watson-Gegeo 1992). The now classic studies of Philips (1983) and Heath (1983), for example, make a powerful case for how the routine marginalization within the classroom of interactional and literacy practices favored in minority and working-class communities impacts not only these children’s differential participation in school activities, but also their overall academic achievement. Focusing on forms of classroom participation, in particular, Philips (1983) examined how the communicative arrangements consistently favored by teachers on the Warm Spring Reservation were at odds with how their Native American students were encouraged to participate in learning activities in their homes and communities. Complementarily, Heath (1983) investigated the richness of literacy events across a number of diverse communities in the US, including African-American and white middle- and working-class communities. In comparing children’s early literacy socialization in their communities to literacy socialization in schools, she found that the literacy practices treated as legitimate in school tasks were those
most closely aligned with literacy practices actively socialized in white, middle-class house-
holds. These studies inspired a second generation of researchers to continue to explore how the 
mismatch between children’s early language socialization and preferred institutional language 
practices, in addition to the routine devaluing of the cultural funds of knowledge (Moll 1992) and 
literacy skills of certain groups of students, greatly contribute to marginal educational trajectories 
among poor, minority, and immigrant students (e.g. Ballenger 1992; Delpit 1995; Pease Alvarez 
and Vasquez 1994). The critical mass of research accumulated throughout the last twenty-five 
years in this regard has been an important force in counteracting deficit ideologies that blame the 
educational “failure” of children from communities who experience multiple levels of sociocul-
tural exclusion on their supposed linguistic and sociocultural deprivation, demonstrating instead 
how institutional practices and policies do not allow space for children from these communities 
to build on the rich bodies of social and linguistic knowledge already in their repertoires.

More recently, the area of disability studies, particularly those of children with autism spec-
trum disorders, has also allowed language socialization researchers to explore additional aspects 
of how institutional practices and policies, including culture-specific interactional habitus and 
ideologies about human communication and sociality, may hinder or promote the social and 
educational participation of individuals with marginalized identities (e.g. Ochs 2002; Ochs, 
Solomon, and Sterponi 2005). An interesting perspective on the multiple dimensions of insti-
tutional inclusion comes from Ochs et al.’s (2001) study of the interplay between institutional 
policies of inclusion and the everyday realities of what negotiating meaningful inclusion means 
for children with autism in public school contexts. While in his seminal paper on the discursive 
processes by which a student comes to be labeled learning disabled, Mehan (1996) had already 
shown that this category of identity may construct social facts about people, very often social 
facts that can marginalize a person, Ochs et al. (2001) went on to examine how these social 
facts organize, and emerge in, everyday interactions involving children with autism with their 
teachers and peers. Exploring how children with autism attempt to position themselves in these 
interactions in relation to what categories and subject positions they are allowed or encouraged 
to occupy, Ochs et al. concluded that, while educational laws and policies may guarantee access 
and physical placement of students with disabilities in US public schools, the degree of success 
to which these children experience inclusion in the social life of the school is highly dependent 
on the outcome of their daily engagements with their unaffected peers.

Marginalization as Production of Social Difference in Children’s 
and Youth’s Peer Cultures

An area of language socialization research that has been the focus of intense elaboration in the 
last couple of decades is how children and youth negotiate status, identities, and relationships 
as they construct forms of social organization within their own peer cultures (e.g. De León 
Minks 2010; Paugh 2012; Reynolds 2008). Important dimensions of this negotiation often 
involve establishing group boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, while simultaneously posi-
tioning oneself and others in the local peer social order. Researchers studying those dimensions, 
in particular, have made important contributions to our understandings of children’s sophis-
tication at deploying interactional moves and strategies to ascribe negative categories to their 
peers, as well as to bar other children from occupying socially prominent roles, or to exclude 
them completely from participating, in the activities of the peer group. This research has dem-
onstrated that children can be crucial agents in the social marginalization of other children in 
powerful ways, even from a very young age. Preschool girls studied by Sheldon (1996), for
example, effectively obstructed the participation of another girl in their games, by assigning the role of an unborn baby brother to this girl within the pretend-play frame. Among preadolescents, Goodwin (2006), studying the consistent exclusion of one particular African-American girl, whom she calls Angela, in a multi-ethnic, multi-class peer group in Southern California, documented in great micro-detail the many linguistic resources and forms of transmodal stylization (Goodwin and Alim 2010) mobilized by the other girls to co-construct the degraded status of an at best devalued and pesky tag-along that Angela occupied in the peer group. In my own work among Moroccan immigrant children in Spain, on which I elaborate below, I have examined how, during the school day, Spanish peers routinely enact linguistically-mediated forms of racialized exclusion towards Moroccan immigrant children in the form of tattle-tales, peer directives, and fueling the fire. Through these practices, which belie official curricular principles built around the notion of inclusion, Spanish children mark the behavior of their Moroccan immigrant peers as deviant and, furthermore, are able to perpetuate with their actions larger historical-political realities concerning social and ethnic relations in their immediate environment (García-Sánchez 2014).

If language socialization studies have shown how interactions with peers can be a source of alienation, crucial in the development of negative forms of social identification for many children and youth, closely related research has also analyzed a complementary aspect of this phenomenon that is also important to mention here, namely how the peer group can also be an important community of practice for the development of what Bucholtz (1999) has called positive identity practices. This seems to be particularly the case among youth who inhabit stigmatized subjectivities or social identities, such as being a nerd (Bucholtz 1999), and youth who are routinely framed as problems (an educational problem, a delinquency problem, a teen-pregnancy problem . . . etc.), such as Latino female gang members (Mendoza-Denton 2008) or youth in alternative educational programs for “at-risk” students (Rymes 2001). As these scholars have suggested, in these cases active engagement in semiotic resources for constructing their own difference (e.g. speech, make-up and clothing styles, taste in music, or embrace/rejection of formal education) within the context of the peer group offers them a path of resistance to build alternate social networks, as well as to pursue alternate identities. By allowing them to opt out of the disenfranchised subject positions offered to them, these positive forms of membership can, therefore, counteract wider mechanisms of marginalization that these youth are experiencing in other domains of their social lives.

Marginalization as Community Ostracism in Nonliberal Religious Communities

Because of its central role in the development of morality, the formation of subjectivities, and processes of community membership and affiliation, language socialization into religious practices and orientations has traditionally been a fruitful focus of research within the paradigm (e.g. Baquedano–López 2008; Benor 2012; Ek 2005; Fader 2009; García-Sánchez 2010; Moore 2013; Schieffelin 2014). Schieffelin and Fader, working respectively on Evangelical Christian communities in Papua New Guinea and on Hasidic Jewish communities in the US, have additionally considered issues of marginalization as community ostracism directed at those individuals who fail to embrace or remain on the religious path.

Among the newly converted Bosavi in Papua New Guinea, for example, Schieffelin (2014) has reported how strong exclusion lines emerged, separating insiders, those who embraced the new Evangelical Christian faith, from outsiders, those who refused to convert to Christianity and maintained traditional Bosavi ways, or those who “fell” after conversion. Placing themselves
at the physical, social, and moral center of communities, Bosavi Christians positioned non-
Christians on the periphery of villages and mission enclaves, and regarded them as living “to
the side” (p. S232). Schieffelin (2014) has argued that this expression not only denoted spatial
configurations, but increasingly also indexed marginal social identities and reconfigured kinship
relationships, as many Christians came to assume positions of power and authority over their
non-Christian relatives in what had traditionally been a fairly egalitarian society with few hier-
archical divisions of this kind. Among Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, Fader (2009, p. 83) has also
discussed the specter of community exclusion for those young women who do not adhere to
Hasidic technologies of the self, and who therefore may not comply with community standards
for modesty or obedience. In later work, Fader (2014) has further elaborated that many Hasidic
youth who have stopped believing very commonly decide to remain within the faith nonethe-
less for fear of the social and familial marginalization they will have to endure if they leave. In
these cases, some youth start leading a “double life,” turning to social media and other spaces
where they can express themselves and their dissenting beliefs without endangering their mem-
bership in the community.

Marginalization as Sociocultural and Sociopolitical Exclusion
in Migration Settings

Given the global nature of contemporary migrations, the study of immigration has become
a focal concern across the social sciences, and language socialization has been no exception.
Indeed, in the last decade there has been a growing number of scholars who have made use of
the language socialization paradigm to illuminate issues of language as it relates to the immigrant
experience (e.g. Baquedano-López 2000, 2004; Bhimji 2005; García-Sánchez 2014; García-
Sánchez and Orellana 2006; Lo 2009; Klein 2009; Kyratzis, Tang, and Koymen 2009; Mangual
Figueroa 2011; Relaño Pastor 2005; Talmy 2008; Zentella 2005). While a number of themes
have been taken up in this growing body of literature, two research foci that are particularly rel-
levant to this exploration of language socialization and marginalization are the politics of belong-
ing in relation to how immigrant groups are able to negotiate membership and participation in
their multiple communities, and the sociocultural and linguistic categorization and stratification
of immigrants. With regards to structures of membership and belonging, Baquedano-López’s
(2000, 2004) studies of Catholic catechism classes at two parishes in California analyzed religious
literacy practices that socialize the children of Mexican immigrants to affiliate positively with
an ethnoracial collective identity that is often disenfranchised by societal hierarchies, that of
dark-skinned Mexicans living in the US. As the politics of the English Only movement swept
through these parishes, however, the opportunities for Mexican immigrant children to attend
these Spanish-language Catholic doctrina classes, in which they received empowering messages
relevant to their identities as Mexicans and US immigrants, also dwindled. Instead, Mexican
immigrant children were increasingly encouraged to attend English-language catechism lessons
in which they participated in religious literacy practices that promoted ideologies of belonging
strongly aligned with assimilationist US ideals of the melting pot, e pluribus unum.

Relatedly, in her study of mixed-status families (i.e. households with undocumented and
documented members in the same family unit) in the New Latino Diaspora in Pennsylvania,
Mangual Figueroa (2011) has investigated the impact of the legal and political codification of
immigrants on the everyday lives of, and language socialization practices in, immigrant house-
holds. She has examined, for example, the contested meanings of citizenship as articulated by
the children and their immigrant parents during homework completion routines specifically for
their citizenship class. Manual Figueroa has insightfully captured the poignancy of these family
interactions in which, while all family members conceive of themselves as good citizens, parents and siblings still have to struggle to position themselves differently in relation to notions of civic participation and still have to strive to imagine different ways in which they could one day contribute to the nation, depending on their legal categorization as either citizens, residents, or as undocumented immigrants who can be deported any time. Outside of the US, I (García-Sánchez 2013) have explored a complementary aspect of the politics of citizenship and belonging, that of cultural citizenship as a product of everyday practice in institutional contexts. I have shown how teachers in a Spanish public school play on essentialist notions of Moroccan immigrant and Roma children’s ethnolinguistic identities, upholding notions of sociopolitical belonging that are predicated on ideologies of homogeneity and monolingualism. While these discursive constructions of difference have the potential to exacerbate immigrant and minority children’s marginalization, crucially, however, in this research I have also emphasized how Moroccan immigrant and Roma children are sometimes able to contest teachers’ essentialist formulations, effectively resisting these forms of multi-cultural cooption by asserting multiple, hybrid forms of membership and belonging.

5 A Case Study of Marginalization and Its Paradoxes: Moroccan Immigrant Children in Spain

I now turn to consider how I have built on the three dimensions of language socialization identified above (theoretical focus on process; attention to different levels of analytic scale; and a longitudinal, cross-context methodological perspective) in my own research among Moroccan immigrant children in a rural community in southwestern Spain (García-Sánchez 2014). In this study, I have focused specifically on how local and larger sociocultural and economic structures, as well as historically informed politics of inclusion/exclusion, impact these children’s sense of belonging and emerging processes of identification as they negotiate membership and forms of participation across linguistic and community boundaries in familial, neighborhood, and institutional contexts. In examining forms of participation available, allowed, and encouraged for these children, I quickly realized that Moroccan immigrant children often came to occupy a relatively liminal sociocultural positionality and/or degraded status in certain social spheres of their lives. It also became increasingly apparent to me that the marginalization these children experienced in some settings was hardly an all-encompassing trajectory operating concurrently across contexts of their everyday lives, or with the same level of intensity and impact. Thus, I became particularly interested in understanding the paradoxes of marginalization and how they might affect sociocultural trajectories of children and other novices in contexts of social exclusion and disenfranchisement.

Indeed, the marginalization of individuals and/or communities almost always involves different, and often diverse, sources of exclusion (e.g. economic, legal, political, linguistic, religious). These multiple sources translate themselves into various social and semiotic mechanisms of marginalization (e.g. employment and housing practices, media (mis)representations, institutional policies, interactional encounters). I have come to believe that it is when we study the variable interplay between sources and mechanisms of marginalization on the ground and in the most immediate contexts of people’s everyday lives, that important paradoxes in how mechanisms may contradict or reinforce one another across contexts become particularly obvious. Moreover, in some cases, mechanisms at different levels of sociopolitical life can be clearly at odds in their inclusion or exclusion effect on individuals and communities. This is because, while these mechanisms are very often firmly held in place by unequal structural arrangements and hegemonic forces, in certain cases they can also be challenged and offset by some forms of social and
political (both institutional and more quotidian) praxis. This is especially the case in contexts of marginalization where these mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion emerge from the dialectic tension of two opposing sociocultural forces: forces of reproduction of unequal structural arrangements, historical discourses of discrimination, and exclusionary legal frameworks and forces of change that seek to lever open spaces for more social equity and justice.

In this regard, Spain is clearly a society deeply ambivalent about the prospect of cultural change and the multi-cultural politics of belonging provoked by recent migratory trends. And this ambivalence resonates particularly forcefully in the lives of Moroccan immigrant children, not only because of the current geopolitical climate of suspicion surrounding Muslim and North African immigrant communities in Europe, but also because of the problematic association of contemporary Moroccan immigration with the historical figure of the Moor; a model of personhood that has been consistently portrayed as diametrically opposed to authentic Spanishness in discourses and narratives of national belonging and formation (García-Sánchez 2014, pp. 28–60). In my analysis, I address how these various negative ideological positionings impinge upon Moroccan immigrant children’s lives in complex and powerful ways. Thus, while the analytical cornerstone of the study centers on how children attempt to position themselves and are positioned by others as they participate in micro-level communicative practices with extended family, friends, and peers, teachers, religious figures, medical doctors, and sport coaches, I always consider these everyday interactional practices against the larger sociopolitical backdrops of increased levels of disenfranchisement and problematization of Muslim and North African immigrants in Europe, in general, and of the more context-specific negative ideologies about, and legal codification of, Moroccan immigrant communities in Spain.

Bringing together these different levels of analytic scale and forms of sociocultural semiosis has allowed me to identify and discuss an important paradox in Moroccan immigrant children’s lives that I have characterized as negotiating membership as the “outsiders inside” (García-Sánchez 2014, p. 297). I have delineated how Moroccan immigrant children in Spain are able to negotiate the boundaries of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion at different levels of sociopolitical life and across different quotidian contexts. At the level of legal codification of belonging, this inherent contradiction stems from a restrictive set of citizenship laws, according to which children of immigrant parents are not considered Spanish nationals, even if they are born in Spain or brought to the country when they are toddlers (as was the case for all the children in my study). This paradox widens, particularly at the level of social and institutional policy, when, in spite of being legally defined as Moroccan nationals, because of their status as minors, by law they have the same legal protections as their Spanish peers, independently of their parents, immigration status. Therefore, they have access to the same free and public social, educational, and health services as other, Spanish, children, although only until their late teens (16 or 18 years old, depending on the type of social service and institution). The mismatch of being treated like insiders at the level of social policy but legally disenfranchised from citizenship, and ideologically degraded as immigrant children from a particularly undesirable and “unassimilable” group, also reverberates in children’s everyday social engagements.

Moroccan immigrant children encounter this simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, for example, when they have to come to terms with the juxtaposition of institutional and pedagogical practices of inclusion in school settings (such as bilingual Arabic–Spanish signs on walls, the institutionalization of a multi-cultural curriculum specifically designed to “teach” children tolerance), and the quotidian technologies of surveillance and racialized exclusion (such as tattles and peer directives) that Moroccan immigrant children face in school. Pedagogical practices attempt to emphasize interculturality and friendship. Yet, Moroccan immigrant children face negative recognition from their Spanish peers, who routinely abnormalize the Moroccan children’s
behavior in their everyday social activities at school (García-Sánchez 2014, pp. 125–167). This abnormalization often intensifies beyond the walls of the school. Moroccan immigrant children acutely felt their marginalization when Spanish children never invited them to their birthday parties or did not want to become their friends and play with them in the neighborhoods and parks of this town (García-Sánchez 2014, pp. 88–124).

Another powerful contradiction that Moroccan immigrant children had to contend with in school contexts had to do with educational classroom practices that, although intended to foster interculturality and class participation by immigrant and minority children, as realized in actual student–teacher interactions, had the paradoxical consequence of positioning Moroccan immigrant children outside of the national collectivity. Teachers and administrators were aware of the value of not marking others as overtly different and diligently took steps to prevent explicit exclusion and discrimination. Yet, they ironically took part in excluding immigrant children from a sense of sociocultural belonging, when, in class discussions and other forms of classroom discourse, they upheld traditional notions of membership predicated on a single shared culture and language (García-Sánchez 2013).

Moroccan immigrant children also navigated paradoxical positionalities of their ambiguous status as relative insiders and outsiders in other contexts of their daily lives. When translating for their families and for Spanish medical staff at the state-run health clinic in this town, children came to enact a double role as agents of the clinic, but also as advocates for their families. In their dual role acting for the clinic and as representatives of their families and neighbors, these children functioned as medical institution insiders when they conveyed institutional views and values to Moroccan families, but they also acted as outsiders when they took interactional steps in their translations to protect Moroccan immigrant adults from institutional surveillance (García-Sánchez 2014, pp. 222–256).

Children’s complex negotiation of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion was also visible in neighborhood play when Moroccan immigrant girls played together and rehearsed alternative processes of identification linked to valued forms of societal membership. In their games, for example, Moroccan immigrant children constructed desirable social identities for their play characters that positioned them as fully fledged insiders in Spanish society. Yet throughout these games, the children also displayed their understanding of some of the constraints in achieving this sense of membership. In their fantasy games, they challenged and transformed the marginalization and discrimination they often experienced in their everyday lives. They also contested subaltern socioeconomic positions and other structural marginal categories of Moroccan immigrant families within Spanish society more generally. Play frames often functioned as powerful counternarratives to the marginalizing constraints Moroccan immigrant girls encountered. Thus the play narratives allowed them to reject the disenfranchised subject positions offered to them and enabled them to fantasize about more desirable subjectivities and positions of power (García-Sánchez 2014, pp. 221–288).

In addition to tracing the nuances of Moroccan immigrant children’s experiences of marginalization, the cross-context, multi-scalar, and processual perspective of the language socialization paradigm has also been important in helping me identify different interactional frameworks and arrangements that enable children to become more active participants in negotiating their own positioning and sense of belonging. A key realization in this sense is that children’s interactional affordances to challenge their negative and/or differential positioning varied not only depending on the social context, but sometimes also on the type of interactional encounter and the participants involved, even within the same setting. Therefore, taking seriously the examination of immigrant children’s capacity to act on their own behalf and creatively produce interactional affordances to counter their own marginalization involves
being sensitive, at the very least, to two different types of variability in forms of social organization and structural arrangements: intercontextual and intracontextual variability. For example, in my own study, I encountered the children in contexts where power disparities between them and their interlocutors were very pronounced (i.e. educational institutions), but also in contexts that allowed them to exercise greater interactional agency to challenge how they were being discursively constructed by others and where they had more space to define their own forms of identification (i.e. medical clinics or neighborhood play with friends). In the first type of setting, the forms of agency available to Moroccan immigrant children were more limited, and, therefore, it was more difficult for them to counter their exclusion and how they were being defined as marginal outsiders. Being able to investigate immigrant children’s socioculturally mediated capacity to negotiate their positions in their social worlds across a wide variety of contexts is crucial to capturing the complex interplay between the constraints and affordances children experience in different settings. This holistic, intercontextual perspective is important for our understandings of how trajectories of marginalization emerge and become more or less enduring, as well as how they can be disrupted.

Similarly, examining intracontextual variability in participation affordances and forms of social organization is critical to investigating how marginalized individuals may be able to take up interactional opportunities to actively negotiate their social positioning and identity, even in contexts involving large power differentials, where social relations are clearly asymmetrical. For example, one of the contexts where Moroccan immigrant children had fewer opportunities to stand up for themselves and redefine the subject positions to which they were very often relegated by their classmates, was at the school. As mentioned above, Moroccan immigrant children routinely faced a set of linguistically mediated technologies of exclusion, consisting of quotidian discursive practices, such as tattling, blaming, accusing, and shaming sequences, in which racialized and exclusion boundaries were instantiated through aggravated peer directives and other linguistic structures that encode unmitigated, negative types of agency and responsibility, and in which Moroccan immigrant children were either not ratified as full participants or were negatively ratified. A key aspect to consider here, and one of the reasons why Moroccan immigrant children often reported feeling lack of institutional support to be able to stand up to these forms of exclusion, is that these practices were so much part of the fabric of everyday social interaction in the classroom that they were rarely recognized by teachers as actual forms of exclusion. Thus, teachers often became unwitting collaborators in these practices: Spanish children’s accusations against Moroccan classmates were ratified, even if less than consciously, by teachers. It is noteworthy to point out in this regard, however, that even the most insignificant action of a teacher against a Spanish tattler (i.e. when teachers did not ratify the accusations, but rather negatively align with them) was enough for Moroccan immigrant children to defend themselves, often confrontationally, against their peers’ degrading characterizations and to reassign these negative social identities to the original perpetrators (García-Sánchez 2014, pp. 168–178). Indeed, a crucial common dimension of all of the examples where Moroccan immigrant children were able to counter these forms of exclusion, by overtly challenging their classmates, is that they all follow teachers’ explicit disalignment with the tattling action performed by their Spanish classmates. These examples speak not only to the decisive role that teachers can have in the everyday social inclusion/exclusion of Moroccan immigrant children at school, but also, more generally to how, even within contexts in which marginalized individuals face enormous constraints, the actions and stances of specific social actors, particularly those in hierarchically more powerful positions, can change the dynamics in participation frameworks so that marginalized individuals are not rendered so socially vulnerable and have more interactional opportunities to redefine the trajectory of marginalizing social encounters.

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6 Future Directions and Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have discussed some productive ways in which a language socialization perspective can illuminate marginality as a relationally liminal sociocultural positionality and/or power status. This paradigm can be especially effective in revealing how processes of marginalization emerge from the complex, dialectic intersection between individuals’ developmental trajectories of socialization and larger sociocultural, structural, and ideological arrangements that shape and constrain those trajectories. While experiences involving difference and marginality may not have been the central analytic focus of many language socialization studies to date, in this chapter I have shown how scholarship within the paradigm has been sensitive to the importance of sociocultural, linguistic, and other semiotic mechanisms by which marginalization is (re)produced in a variety of institutional, everyday, religious, and sociopolitical contexts.

Theoretically and methodologically, I have elaborated specifically on three traditional dimensions of language socialization (theoretical focus on process; attention to different levels of analytic scale; and a longitudinal, cross-context methodological perspective) that I consider extremely valuable in capturing the everyday and institutionalized ways in which individuals, or entire groups, come to occupy marginal subject positions and how these positions are shaped dialogically by power relations. One of the ways in which these intellectual tools can expand our understandings of marginalization processes is by allowing us to trace the relatively totalizing impact of marginalization mechanisms, precisely by exploring contradictions and paradoxes in these mechanisms, and how these paradoxes play out in quotidian social practice. I find the exploration of the paradoxes of marginalization an especially fertile ground for the ethnographic exploration of how individuals come to develop more or less enduring marginal and devalued forms of social identification because, from a theoretical perspective, paradoxes enable us to consider the multiple, and varying, levels of exclusion with which individuals from disenfranchised groups are confronted in different spheres of their social lives, and how different contexts may reinforce or contradict one another. Studying these paradoxes is also important from a more applied perspective, since it can allow us to discover arenas where it is more feasible to lever open spaces, or where marginalized individuals themselves are already creating those spaces, for more equitable forms of social action and practice.

Investigating the paradoxes of marginalization is, however, only one possible path for future scholarship in the paradigm to follow. As I have also discussed in this chapter, there is still much room for both theoretical and empirical development of language socialization in relation to marginalization, such as how marginal subjectivities come into being, how semiotic mechanisms of membership shape the ways in which individuals or entire groups are routinely blocked from socially desirable positions and identities, or how the social (re)production of structures of discrimination underpins the organization of marginalizing interactional encounters and institutional engagements that can lead to socialization trajectories of disenfranchisement, as well as how these forms of social reproduction can be disrupted.

Related Topics
7 Language Ideologies (Kroskrity); 8 Social Subordination and Language (Huayhua); 9 Language Socialization (Paugh); 10 Studying Language Acquisition in Different Linguistic and Cultural Settings (Stoll); 19 Language and Political Economy (McElhinny); 20 Language, Immigration, and the Nation-State (Pujolar); 22 Language in the Age of Globalization (Jacquemet).
References


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**Further Reading**

*This section includes highlights from the References section (first three entries), as well as additional readings (final two).*


