
REVIEWS

Bambi B. Schieffelin, *The Give and Take of Everyday Life: Language Socialization of Kaluli Children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. viii, 278, figures, appendix, glossary, bibliography, index. US\$49.50 hardcover, \$16.95 paperback.

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This is an extraordinary book, both for its focus and for its accomplishments. The exotic aspects of New Guinea societies and cultures have long been celebrated, and each year sees the appearance of new analyses of ritual, ceremonial exchange, and warfare. Usually lost in the background is the less glamorous, routine social interaction that fills most of the lives of the people. Schieffelin's book is different--"a particular type of ethnography, one that focuses on the microanalysis of everyday speech and conduct between caregivers and children" (p. 13). Her overall concern, to be sure, is with "linking their practices and patterns to others expressed through myths, rituals, song, exchange, and other symbolic systems" (p. 13), but the center of attention throughout the book is just what its title indicates: "the give and take of everyday life."

More specifically, the "everyday life" that especially interests Schieffelin is that of language socialization, that is, the contexts in which Kaluli children are "socialized to use language and socialized through the use of language" (p. 239). Studies of socialization, under the rubric of "childrearing," have a long history in anthropology, and the acquisition of language is a common subject of interest for many linguists, psychologists, and others. But, as Schieffelin correctly notes, research on the former topic has usually ignored the pivotal role of language and speech, while our understanding of how children acquire language has depended too much on observations of white, middle-class children,

with "culture" seldom considered explicitly as a significant variable. Schieffelin, like others who have focused on language socialization in the past fifteen years or so, argues for an *integrated* approach, combining "a semiotically based ethnographic perspective with an ethnomethodological interest in examining the details of social interaction and talk for what they reveal about members' methods and preferences" (p. 13). The results are both impressive and persuasive.

The book, as with Schieffelin's preceding doctoral dissertation in 1979, is based on her extensive fieldwork in Sululib, a longhouse community of about one hundred Kaluli-speakers on the north slopes of Mount Bosavi in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. The Kaluli are well known through the ethnographic publications of Steven Feld and Edward L. Schieffelin, perhaps justifying the brief section provided here on "the ethnographic setting" (pp. 2-7). However, more information on Kaluli society and culture is appropriately supplied throughout the book, and sufficient detail is provided on topics that are the main contexts for caregiver-child interaction, such as daily activity routines (pp. 37-43).

Following a clear exposition of Kaluli notions of child development (some, but not all, of which Kaluli themselves articulate), Schieffelin effectively organizes her material in terms of three "structural themes" in Kaluli society: autonomy versus interdependence; authority; and gender and reciprocity. In this nonhierarchical society, the first two "themes" represent problematic dimensions of social interaction, reflecting "a central tension in Kaluli social life: the importance of giving and sharing in the face of the desire to keep what one has for oneself" (p. 136), and, in the absence of rigid social stratification, the need to deploy personal sentiments "to negotiate interpersonal boundaries" (p. 241). Moreover, while Kaluli relations between the sexes are said not to be as "antagonistic" as those reported for many New Guinea societies, gender-appropriate behaviors can be distinguished clearly at two levels: in "the social organization of domestic and expressive activities" and "the conventions and preferences within particular social interactions" (p. 205). The author of a conventional anthropological monograph might be satisfied with the systematic demonstration of the salience and embeddedness of these "themes" in everyday social life, and we would be well served in the process. But Schieffelin aspires to, and accomplishes, more in showing us how Kaluli children learn and gradually manifest the "themes" in their behavior and speech.

By the age of three, Kaluli children "are expected to participate in the reciprocal sharing that is part of family life" (p. 5), which itself incorpo-

rates and is built around the three “structural themes.” Thus, for caregivers (especially mothers and older siblings) faced with “soft” infants, the “goal of socialization and development is the achievement of ‘hardening,’ the production of well-formed individuals in control of themselves as well as able to control and influence others” (p. 5). Schieffelin shows us how this “hardening” occurs by focusing on four children as they are learning to talk. She draws on eighty-three hours of audio-taped, transcribed, translated, and annotated natural interaction that occurred between caregivers and the children, all of which she was able to contextualize through her own direct observation of the events.

Schieffelin deploys this rich data base by providing numerous detailed examples and analyses in a series of chapters “linked by cultural themes” (p. 10). In chapter 4, *elema* routines--in which a mother provides a child with an appropriate utterance followed by *elema*, “say like this”--illustrate well the Kaluli concern with “showing” language to children so their speech will be “hard.” The subject of chapter 5 is the *ade* relationship, primarily important between elder sisters and younger brothers; through explicit linguistic instruction, a child is taught both to appeal to others by making them “feel sorry” for one and thus give up some desired object (especially food), and how “to respond sympathetically and empathetically to the appeals of others” (p. 112). Chapter 6, “Socializing Reciprocity and Creating Relationships,” focuses on the strategies used by older children and caregivers to socialize younger children in what to expect and from whom, how to ask as well as how not to ask, and how to share or refuse to do so. The development of requests, which can be either by appeal or assertion, is the subject of chapter 7. Chapter 8 deals with the socialization of gender-appropriate behaviors and, since *context* is crucial to defining these, how social identities are socially and culturally constructed. Schieffelin’s judicious use of detailed examples of speech interaction gives all these issues an immediacy and a credibility that are seldom achieved by other expository methods.

While masterful, Schieffelin’s study has its limitations and grounds for further questions. Her sample of children (four) was admittedly small, although one could hardly cavil at the masses of data obtained nevertheless, and a larger sample might prove overwhelming to any analyst; moreover, one must acknowledge the small size of the community itself, with demography imposing its own limits on such a study. On the positive side, the smallness of the community and sample made it possible for Schieffelin to achieve the degree of intimate knowledge of the society and culture that is necessary to contextualize properly all of

this talk. On the other hand, the fact that uncontrollable circumstances led to the loss of one-half of her sample before her research was completed (see pp. 53, 64) further reduced the amount and comparability of data available for the four children. More serious, perhaps, is the fact that the loss was of the two girls in the sample. As Schieffelin admits, "relationships between gender and language . . . are extremely subtle" (p. 247), leaving one to wonder if her analyses of the "socialization of gender-appropriate behaviors" (chapter 8) may require more qualification than otherwise appears to be the case.

Against such limitations, however, one must place Schieffelin's obvious sensitivity, insightfulness, and skills as an ethnographer (supplemented with the knowledge available from her co-researchers). Still, one might raise the concern that vexes all good ethnographers, namely, the degree to which our understandings and representations of others faithfully reflect, or at least can accommodate, their own. While Kaluli are perhaps unusually straightforward in some domains, for example, in the *elema* "say it" routines, we are told that they "do not have a verbally explicit set of beliefs concerning the nature and development of the child, nor do they elaborate on the metaphor of 'hardening' . . . when asked about it" (p. 64). Moreover, even with respect to the *elema* routines, it "is hard to determine how conscious anyone is about the socializing functions of these exchanges while they are occurring," although they might be later, on "reflection," inspired by the ethnographer (p. 96). So, as with any good work, a certain amount of Schieffelin's argument must be taken on faith (although she invites us "to consider alternative interpretations" and, to be sure, her "presentation allows that" [p. 34]). In this case, I believe such faith would be well placed.

Anthropologists often tell students that a fieldworker needs to be like a child, learning to understand a culture the way an infant must--by starting "from scratch" with the simplest, most mundane aspects of daily life and, making no assumptions, by asking the most basic questions imaginable. Yet few of us have paid much attention to such learning as it occurs among real children in front of our eyes. Schieffelin has paid a great deal of attention to this "everyday life," and we as well as she have been enriched by such a shift in perspective.