Elinor Ochs, *Culture and Language Development: Language Acquisition and Language Socialization in a Samoan Wage.* Social and Cultural Foundations of Language Series, no. 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. 272. US$49.50 hardcover, $16.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Jeannette Marie Mageo, University of California at San Diego

Ethnography is multilingual, having the unique capacity to speak between varying domains of experience and in a host of academic tongues. It is for this reason that I can comment on Elinor Ochs's *Culture and Language Development.* Perhaps also for this reason I find Ochs's work richest when it reaches beyond the perimeters of linguistics and touches my own work and that of other Samoan ethnographers. Therefore, in this review I will provide connectives between Ochs's work and other ethnographies on Samoa. Supplying these connectives will also allow me to draw out some larger implications of her study.

Ochs's book opens with a graphic example of how ethnography, by contextualizing ideas, bridges disciplines. In Samoa there is a genre of formal speech and one of informal speech. Sitting in a *fale,* a traditional house, Ochs realizes that her subjects are talking to her in formal speech and thus putting on a performance for her benefit. It occurs to her that she is located at the front and center of the house and that, according to Bradd Shore (1977, 1982), this territory is the "face" of the house. Hence, it is the area in which Samoans feel it incumbent upon them to put on a mask of special politeness. Ochs relocates herself in other areas of the house. To use Goffman's metaphor, she attempts to get backstage. We should then judge her book in its own terms, upon how well it succeeds in transporting the reader to the linguistic backstage of the socialization process.

There are several major areas in which Ochs attempts to get backstage through the analysis of language practices that I shall consider here: the self, social relations, social values, socialization, and gender.

In Samoa the *'aiga,* the extended family group, is the basic social unit, rather than the individual. This communal organization has profound linguistic implications. For example, in Ochs's chapter on clarification she tells us that Samoans prefer "the minimal grasp strategy," in which speakers ask that a remark be repeated, to "the expressed guess strategy," in which the speakers venture a guess at the other's meaning (pp. 133-136, 144, 219). It is not immediately obvious what this dispreference has to do with a communal orientation. However, elsewhere I have argued that Samoans tend to repress and to dissociate subjective experience (Mageo 1989a: 187-190). [1] Because of the resulting distance between subjectivity and social commerce, Samoans lack avenues through which to access the inner life of others. Thus, Samoans believe they cannot know what is going on in another person's mind (Gerber 1975; Mageo 1989a).

Ochs traces the roots of the dissociation of subjectivity in linguistic childrearing routines. In our society we treat infants as subjects in parent/child exchanges by guessing at what infants' personal responses might be and by verbally imputing meaning to their first garbled utterances. In Samoa, however, the language of infancy and early childhood is treated as nonsense and children are encouraged to imitate the speech patterns of their elders (pp. 23-26). By documenting these and other techniques, Ochs shows us how the child is oriented in a sociocentric direction (pp. 23, 25, 142, 164-165).

Samoan styles of employing linguistic practices, such as clarification, have social as well as psychological implications. According to Ochs, in Samoa persons of higher status do not clarify for those of lower status; rather, the lowly clarify for their superiors (pp. 137-138). If those who serve require further information about the dictates of their elders, they learn to acquire it through peers (p. 139). These rules for clarification exchanges are one aspect of the Samoan hierarchy. One does not question authority, even as to what they mean to say. Samoan hierarchy does not simply entail the placing of one individual above another, though. Rather, the Samoan hierarchy is the core of an organism, the group. Those who are lower in status are perceived as the active limbs (pp. 81-85; see also Gerber 1975:49; Mageo 1991a:410). By implication, those "higher up" are associated with the more central and less mobile parts of the body.

Ochs delineates the linguistic dimension of this organic model of the group through her analysis of what she calls the *taapua'i,* or doer/supporter relationship (p. 199). In this relationship all tasks are regarded as collectively undertaken. Although only one person may actually perform the task, others are seen as supporting it and, therefore, as equally responsible for its accomplishment. For example, when one person drives another to a destination the polite exchange that follows is, "Thank you for your good driving," responded to with, "Thank you for your support" (pp. 199-200). Similarly, several ethnographers have noted that family members are held responsible for one another's misdeeds (Mead [1928] 1961:22-25; Shore 1981:197-199; Mageo 1989a:186).

What is perhaps lacking in Ochs's portrayal of the organic model of group life is a sense of the conflict generated by this model. A Samoan comedy skit *(faleaitu)* I once saw, called "Malo People" (Government of the People), illustrates Samoan ambivalence about that allotment of tasks predicated by the Samoan hierarchy. [2] In this skit, various body parts complain to the stomach that it takes the profit of their labors

without doing any work. Like the stomach, the role of elevated persons in Samoa is to distribute that which is acquired and produced by other members of the body politic. Thus, commoners *tautua,* "support," their chief, feeding him on Sundays and contributing food, goods, and money when someone in the *'aiga* has a *fa'alavelave* (a problem or a ceremonial obligation). However, Samoans are wont to remark, "Too many *fa'alavelave*" (Mageo 1991b). But it is useless to complain to one's stomach, as the body parts in the play quickly discover. After all, stomachs are simply in the nature of things. Thus, this organic model of the group functions as an ideology. Ideologies are by definition self-confirming, but they do not allay the feelings of the working class.

The value that sustains the Samoan hierarchy is *fa'aaloalo,* "respect for status." Ochs argues that the base word here is *alo,* which in formal speech means "attentiveness" (p. 162). *Fa'aaloalo* is shown by service, that is, by attending upon others (Mageo 1989b:399-401). It follows that, when the child is taught to attend upon and imitate the speech of others, it is learning a linguistic form of *fa'aaloalo.* Ochs finds this capacity for attendance ubiquitous in Samoa. She is amazed by her informants' ability to hear conversation at a distance and to hear simultaneous conversations (p. 47).

But there is a linguistic counterpoint to listening in Samoa, with which Ochs does not concern herself, To carry out commands is to *fa'alogo; fa'alogo* means both "to obey" and "to listen" (Mageo 1989b: 399-401). Service is a form of "listening" in the sense that it involves obedience. Those in authority expend a great deal of energy trying to transform their children into attendants; nonetheless, parents are apt to remark that children are incorrigibly *fa'alogogata,* "disobedient," which literally translates as "hard to make listen." Children are apt to act like *gutu oso,* "jumping mouths." Children who do so are likely to be beaten and to be called *tautalaitiiti,* literally "to talk above one's age," --the most general term for childhood misdemeanor.

Ochs's lack of concern with the more conflictual aspects of Samoan cultural models is compensated for by her interest in the inherent duality of these models. This duality was first brought to light in Shore's work (1977, 1978, 1982). He dubbed as complementary the incorporative type of relation, evident in *taapua'i* interactions and in hierarchical interactions (Shore 1982: 197-220). However, Shore also found competitive relations in Samoa, to which he referred as symmetrical because the participants normally have an approximate status.

Ochs believes that Samoans socialize for this dual ethos by being systemically inconsistent in the demand for respect. Sometimes the child's

tautalaitiiti behavior is taken as a joke (p. 161). Thus children learn that in certain contexts attendance is called for and in others, expressiveness.

Samoans also reinforce the tendencies that they covertly encourage by classifying them as innate and, by implication, "natural" (Mageo 1989a:191-194). Ochs tells us that Samoans see the child as innately willful and cheeky (p. 161). Inasmuch as Samoans believe that it is natural to be willful, they also extend a social and a conceptual place to those competitive behaviors that are generated by willfulness and thereby foster the tendencies required in symmetrical exchanges.

Perhaps Ochs's major point throughout is that "children develop concepts of a socio-culturally structured universe through their participation in language activities" (p. 14). Samoan children do not learn language habits primarily from instruction, or from being told what to say. Instead, they learn to play at communicating with others, who know the Samoan version of the game and who structure it accordingly. This analysis of the structural features of language socialization resembles that of Nancy Chodorow's, albeit in another domain and another discipline. Chodorow shows us how children are gendered through the structure of early interpersonal relationships (1974); Ochs, how they develop a sense of self and sociality through the structure of early linguistic relations.

Another Samoan ethnographer, Penelope Schoeffel, actually applies Chodorow's structural theory of gender acquisition to the Samoan context (1979). Schoeffel concludes that, because the interpersonal structure of early life is similar for boys and girls in Samoa, status is a more determinative factor than gender in the shaping of adult personality. Similarly, Ochs's data on the linguistics of gender in Samoa indicate status to be more influential than sex in the shaping of language habits. For example, Ochs shows us that in Samoa women express more empathy than men. In the expression of empathy, though, status trumps sex --those lower in status consistently express empathy to their superiors (pp. 180-181).

Shore based his ethnography of Samoa upon the counterpoint between the brother's and the sister's roles (1977, 1982). One cannot but wonder how gender can be the primary grounding for Samoan meanings and yet at the same time of only limited importance in linguistic exchanges. Elsewhere I have suggested that, because of the social orientation of Samoan society, personality is based upon the persona (Mageo 1989a:182-187; Mageo 1989b:410-412). The persona consists of the social roles one plays (Hobbes 1950:33-134; Jung 1966:156-159). Perhaps Samoan gender inheres not in intrinsic features of personality but

rather in extrinsic personae. This would explain how sex roles in Samoa might have import as social symbol, as Shore suggests, yet might also be easily shed when hierarchical exchanges warrant it.

Bodies of data, such as Ochs's, always evoke more questions than they answer. Still, there is no question that Ochs brings us backstage, to the linguistic dressing rooms of socialization and social interaction in Samoa. I have heard a Samoan remark upon the Mead/Freeman controversy that we ethnographers are like the blind men, one of whom based his conclusions about the elephant's form upon an examination of the trunk, the other upon the tail, and so forth, thereby deriving highly contradictory pictures of the subject of their research. Perhaps our models do not fit like transparencies upon one another, but it is comforting to know that when ethnographers do not assume the postures of dispute our disparate sets and kinds of data tend to augment one another's insights, lending them new dimensionality.

NOTES

1. Many ethnographers have shown that the Samoan orientation is away from the personal and internal aspect of the self (Mead [1928] 1961:122-130; Gerber 1975:12-14; Gerber 1985:137; Holmes 1987:127-136; Shore 1982:148).

2. As the title of this skit includes the English term "people" it is likely that the dissatisfaction dramatized within it is associated in Samoan thought with modern and Anglo influences. There is evidence, however, that this dissatisfaction has a long history (Mageo 1991b).

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