Language, culture and social interaction : an introduction

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Language, culture, and social interaction: An Introduction

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In the 20th century, a theoretical insight surfaced and gradually prevailed as an agreed upon framework to (re)thinking children's socialization and socio-cognitive development: language and interaction are the main tools through which cultures, social organization, moral orders as well as individuals' identities are constituted on everyday bases. Philosophical arguments, anthropological systematic observations, psycho- and socio-linguistic empirical studies and some strands in developmental psychology converged toward a dialogical turn and set the premises for studying the constitutive role of language and social interaction in children becoming culturally competent members of their communities. This introductory essay reconstructs the landscape of theories and research that paved the way for contemporary sensitivity to children's socio-cultural and cognitive development as a complex, multifaceted and radically dialogical phenomenon.

1. Introduction

The 20th century's emphasis on human agency – i.e. the individual's competence in making the difference, shaping reality and socially constructing it – nurtured and was nurtured by a renewed attention to human interaction and the semiotic devices it makes use of, first and foremost language (for a recent overview see Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017; Weigand 2017). This introductory essay outlines the theoretical and historical background underlying contemporary interest and research on language and social interaction as foundational dimensions of the development of humans as cognitive, social, and cultural beings. It is aimed at outlining the different, often independent but interestingly coherent, voices that animated theoretical debates during the twentieth century and that still nurture our contemporary views on children's development and socialization. Most of them remain outstandingly relevant and support our understanding of some inedited phenomena occurring in these first decades of the 21st century. For example, the spread of technological mediated communication as well as large-scale migration of

populations and the challenges they pose to both our taken-for-granted, culturally established, scientifically ratified ways of raising children and unshakable models of (formal) education.

In depicting the relevant landscape of theories and research that animate our contemporary views on dialogue and education, we can't help taking a stance and therefore a selective gaze towards the phenomena this book deals with (i.e. children's development, socialization and education), as well as the (mostly European and North American) theories or paradigms through which these phenomena have been conceived. We cannot but see phenomena within a perspective, as even scientific accounts are historically (and often morally) driven lenses (Caronia and Caron 2019). We hope that acknowledging the unavoidable selectivity of our gaze in reconstructing the landscape of the ideas that nurtured contemporary ways of thinking and acting towards children's socialization may reduce the risk of unaware positioning.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the opening section (2), we reconstruct the philosophical background within which the notion of human agency and the emphasis on language as the primary tool for understanding and – ultimately – constituting the world we live in as our world emerged as a theoretical framework. By outlining Vygotsky's socio-historical developmental approach, the sections 3 and 4 focus on the various ways in which the emphasis on the role of language in shaping cognition and, therefore, the perceived reality, impacted on the twentieth century studies on children's socialization. The renewed attention to Vygotsky's theory and its claim about the social nature of mind converged in the 80s with coeval concerns about linguistic diversity and its theoretical corollary, language relativity. Sections 5 and 6 outline the ways these crucial concerns gradually emerged in fields of study originally distant from education and developmental psychology, such as (linguistic) anthropology, sociolinguistics, and the ethnography of communication. We owe to the pioneering work of Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin the first attempt to make perspectives on linguistics, anthropology and developmental psychology converge within a single, identifiable, cross-disciplinary paradigm: the so-called language socialization paradigm (section 7). A brief excursus on perspectives that have paid attention to the constitutive role of semiotic artifacts other than historic-natural languages concludes the essay[1].

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2. The constructivist stance: human agency and the centrality of language

At the beginning of the 20th century, a groundbreaking notion appeared in the European philosophy landscape: Husserl's concept of intentionality, i.e. the inherent directedness, aboutness of human mental life and its primarily representational functioning (Husserl 1983[1913]). The idea of the mind's orientation towards reality and its consequent unavoidable work of sense-making[2] lies at the roots of one of the most relevant legacies of the 20th century: a theoretical model of human subject as an active builder of the same world she or he depends on. Since then and whether philosophers and scholars in social sciences and humanities agreed upon this Promethean view of the human subject or not, they could no longer act as if it had never been advanced.

Thanks to Alfred Schütz's diffusion of Husserl's ideas (Schütz 1962, 1964, 1967[1932]), "the phenomenological postulate of intentionality" (Tiryakian 1973, 196), its corollary concept of intentional object (i.e. the mind-constituted version of the object "out there") and the groundbreaking notion of "Life-World" (Husserl 1970[1936]; Schütz 1967[1932]; Schütz and Luckmann 1973), slowly yet increasingly spread within the social sciences and account for a growing wariness regarding behaviorism as well as structural–functionalism as perspectives from which to investigate humans' ways of life. Drawing on the phenomenological theoretical emphasis on the subject's constitutive role in the making of reality, the idea of human agency gradually emerged. Despite the different and not always overlapping definitions of this notion (see among others Giddens 1984, Wertsch *et al*. 1993, for an overview see Duranti 2004b; Brummans 2018), a shared core meaning can be identified. Humans are conceived of as agents constantly and actively engaged in building: who they are, what they are doing, talking about referring to, as well as the relevant dimensions of their world such as social orders, moral horizons and even the perceptive saliences of the world "out there". As Goodman (1978, 1984) had it, the world we experience as our life-world is inescapably constituted by our mind. Venturing along the dangerous drift of radical anti-realism and into the "difficult versional territory" (Goodman 1980, 211), what Goodman provocatively pointed to was the unavoidable role of the mind (e.g. categories, notions, representations, narratives, knowledge, commonsense ideas, culturally established certainties, or specific "vocabularies of motives", Wright Mills

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[2] On the impact of this *lectio* of Husserl's theory - for many a neo-Kantian perspective on the primacy of mind in the constitution of experience – on social sciences, see Caronia and Besoli 2018).

1940) in mediating our encounter with reality. Pointing to this mediating role is but a way to affirm that our mind shapes if not the reality "out there" (whatever this means), at least what we perceive, understand and cope with as our reality. As the "invisible elephant" (Mantovani 1998), human intentionality –i.e. the subject's minimal form of agency- is always at stake and impacts on the making of whatever we make out of any already existing world. In any way this activity of world-making is enacted, it implies "making not with hands but with minds, or rather *with languages or other symbol systems*" (Goodman 1984, 42, emphasis added). Beyond the classic performatives studied by Austin, i.e. linguistic expressions that constitute reality *eo ipso* for the mere fact that they are uttered (e.g., stating "I promise" amounts to creating a social fact like "a promise"), a simple and basic example can illuminate how this "world-making" quality is at stake even when we are not necessarily aware of it. Think about a *Wh-* question: it not only establishes – right here right now – the existence of two social realities (the speaker and the addressee), it also makes identity-work by indexing the speaker as the one who does not know (or, as in educational dialogues, the one who tests the addressee's knowledge) and the listener as the one who allegedly knows. Through the ways they engage in the subsequent dialogue, participants display familiarity with these language-constituted realities and how they orient to them (Heritage 2012; Heritage and Raymond 2005).

Acknowledging the inescapable mediating role of language and other symbol systems in shaping the ways we perceive, understand and even "make" the crucial dimensions of the social, material and cultural world we live in, is one of the major groundbreaking legacy of 20th century philosophy. Not surprisingly, the research programs of many social sciences (e.g. sociology, linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, social psychology, education) started to focus on the range of symbolic practices through which human beings act as intentional subjects involved in building the crucial dimensions of the world they live in (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and actively defining which culture, social structure and other "affairs" (Sacks 1984) count as relevant for them. The convergence toward a focus on language as both a system to represent reality and a tool to fabricate this same reality goes under the name of "linguistic turn" in philosophy (Rorty 1967, 1979, 1982) and social sciences (see Duranti 1997; Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

The interest for language as the "primary modeling system" (Lotman and Uspenskij 1975) sustained not only the investigation of language structure, functions and properties, its ways to enable referencing, encode meaning and allow for a theoretically infinite number of newly produced utterances thanks to its double articulation. The so-called linguistic turn also animated a growing interest for *language use*, i.e. talk-in-interaction or – as continental scholarship names

it – dialogue (see Stati 1982; Linell 1998; Bazzanella 2002; Weigand 2009, 2010a, b). Indeed, while a whole line of thought and investigation followed the track of structural linguistics set by Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of "*langue*" at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century, other approaches focused on "*la parole*" and the pragmatic dimension of language use gradually emerged somehow peripherally with respect to mainstream linguistics. It is only relatively late in the 20th century that these approaches would be integrated and fully recognized as constitutive of the field of linguistics, or at least of the larger field of language studies (Weigand 2018; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017, on such a difficult confluence see also Duranti 1997).

It is hard to establish precisely when, where and who first paid attention not only to language as an abstract system to be investigated as such, but also (or mainly) to its use-in-interaction as the primary source of both meaning and functions. As far as philosophers are concerned, many attribute this primer to Wittgenstein (1953) and stress both his claim for the contextual and use-based root of meaning and his activity-based conception of language (vs. a denotative conception) conveyed by his famous metaphor of the "language game" ("'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life", §23). In regard to social science, many scholars consider Bronislaw Malinowski and Lev Vygotsky as the initiators of such an insight. Although we needed to wait until the '80s to fully appreciate Vygotsky's contribution (see below), his view on the mutually constitutive relationship among language and thought, social interaction and culture, and Malinowski's sense of language as a form of social action strongly influenced fields apparently as unrelated as linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics on the one hand, and developmental psychology and education studies, on the other.

Perhaps because his field experience made him realize how crucial dialogue is in the making of that kind of intersubjectively negotiated meaning and joint interpretation that we call ethnographic understanding (Throop 2018; Caronia and Orletti 2019), Malinowski understood very early on that pragmatics is the primary access to semantics. Indeed, the referential properties of speech are less relevant than or – more radically – dependent on its performative proprieties. For those involved in language use, what later would be called the representational function of language (Halliday 1975) is not the most relevant function, although it is the one we are most reflexively aware of (Silverstein 1981). When language is observed *in use* we cannot but appreciate the "give and take of utterances" (Malinowski 1923, 315) and, thus, its social functions (e.g. instrumental, regulatory, interpersonal, see Halliday 1975) emerge as the prominent ones. As Malinowski (1923) had it: language should not be conceived of "as an

instrument of reflection but as a mode of action" and words, rather than primarily representing meaning, "fulfill a social function, and that is their principal aim" (p. 315). Since this pioneering voice, other perspectives slowly emerged in different fields of study and progressively gave theoretical as well as empirical consistency to the idea that language is fore and foremost a form of social action. From speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1979) to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Heritage 1984; Pomerantz and Fehr 1997; Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007), from linguistic anthropology (Duranti 1997, 2001b, 2004a) to sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication (Gumperz 1982; Hymes 1974b; Gumperz and Hymes 1972), from interactional linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017) to dialogue studies (Weigand 2010b, 2018), scholars interested in unpacking the multiple ways through which language use and culture create each other, theorize and analyze their object of study in terms of what people actually do (and how they do what they do) in *talking to each other*. Within this pragmatic (or, better, dialogical, see Weigand 2018) turn, language use and its "emergent properties" are conceived of as the backbone of culture (Heritage 2010). Among the various forms of language use, talk-in-interaction has been considered "the very bedrock of social life […] the primary medium through which cultures are transmitted, relationships are sustained, identities are formed, and social structures of all sorts are reproduced" (Heritage and Clayman 2010, 7). As Duranti (2003) had it, "speech – a specific and at the same time fundamental use of language – is the primary constitutive element of human agency, i.e. of our making and unmaking of the world" (p. 45, our translation).

Not surprisingly, the sciences of human development and education have been profoundly concerned with the linguistic turn. In the next section, we outline the progressive relevance language and interaction acquired within the fields of developmental psychology and education.

3. Language and interaction as socialization practices: Vygotsky and the social nature of mind

If any human experience is essentially linguistic (Gadamer 1978), education and socialization experiences are "linguistic phenomena" (Bertolini 1994) in a distinctive, perhaps even paradigmatic, way: it is mainly through language (and other symbolic resources) that adults (and experts in general) transmit declarative as well as procedural, explicit as well as tacit cultural knowledge and introduce children (or novices) to the socio-cultural and material world they are going to live in. In the same vein, it is mostly through signs that children display their basic needs as well as their local understanding of adults' contributions when engaging them (and

being engaged) in proto-conversational interaction since their birth. Children enter the social world as communicatively competent beings or – better – they are constructed and ratified as such by the caregivers[3]. Any time a caregiver responds to whatever newborn's behavior he interprets as a sign expressing a need; anytime this need is fulfilled, the candidate sign is endowed with meaning and this meaning is conveyed to the child through the adult's "next turn", be it a word, a "motherese" sound, a gesture, an attuned touch or a gaze (Emiliani and Carugati 1985, see Pileri this volume). In a few words, even the non-verbal or proto-verbal interactions between new born children and their caregivers are "semiotic transactions" (Bertolini 1994, 59) structured according to the basic form of dialogue (Weigand 2009; Bazzanella 2002): a "give and take" formatted sequence of turns. Through the inherently dialogical form of holding, handling and object presenting (Winnicott 1971), adults convey and make children develop a sense of self as an agentive source (i.e. competent in making the difference) and of the surrounding environment as a responsive resource. As children grow older, the interaction with adults is mediated increasingly by the use of the historic-natural language(s) of the community they belong to.

These observations sound quite familiar and – to a certain degree – can be generalized to the ways humans raise their offspring. According to some authors, it is precisely because dialogue is – ontogenetically – "the prototypically kind of language usage, the form that we are first exposed to" (Levinson 1983, 284) that supports the claim of dialogue being "the primordial site of human sociality" (Schegloff 2006, 70) and even the "architecture of intersubjectivity" (Rommetveit 1976). However, once we enter into the details concerning the actual unfolding of these "dialogues" differences emerge precisely because of what Tomasello (1999) – crossing developmental and cultural psychology – identified as "the cultural origins of human cognition".

We owe to the pioneering work of Lev Vygotsky (1962[1934]) a theory of human development as the *product* of language mediated social interaction. His socio-historical perspective of human development and its major claim about the social constitution of the mind account not only for the human capacity to construct representations of reality and skillfully cope with it, but it also explains the fact that humans construct representations and develop skills that are compatible with the specific representations and skills elaborated by, and relevant for, the communities they belong to. If Piaget's theory (1953[1936]) explained the basic and arguably universal processes through which the child's mind processes information, cognitive skills

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[3] For a cross-cultural problematization of the universal validity of such a theoretical stance as well as of the universality of "motherese" and related assumptions in North-Western developmental psychology, see below.

progressively became more complex and abstract, and language acquisition (starting broadly at the sixth sensory-motor stage) allows for the transition from sensory-motor to representative intelligence, Vygotsky's theory explained – in an unique and still unparalleled way – why and how these universal processes give rise to those dramatically diverse symbolic and practical systems that we conventionally call "cultures". The reference to the role of language and interaction in shaping human ways of thinking is the keystone of a theoretical approach to cognitive development as a socio-culturally shaped process.

For both Vygotsky and Piaget, the human mind does not passively encode information coming from reality affordances; rather, it processes it and actively constructs representations of reality. Although adopting different vocabularies, both scholars claimed that the individual mind develops by means of assimilating external information to already existing schemata (in Vygotskian terms, the internalization process) and – recursively – accommodating these schemata to newly incoming information (i.e. changing, in Vygotskian terms). However, and differently from Piaget's embodied yet "solitary cognitivism" (Carugati and Selleri 1996, 20), Vygotsky emphasized that this "mind-reality" encounter never occurs in a socio-cultural vacuum. On the contrary, it occurs within specific historic, social, and interactional contexts. These contexts are characterized by at least two dimensions: the presence of other human beings (adults and/or peers) and the historical heritage that these beings bring into being in and through the ways they set up the material environment, stage their behavior and interact with children. Even apparently, solitary interaction between the child and the environment should be conceived of as socio-historically mediated by the ways in which this environment is organized and equipped (Wertsch *et al*. 1993; Pontecorvo 1993a; Caronia 2002). These culturally animated and socially inhabited environments provide or make available symbolic and material tools that allow for specific kinds of (bodily) mediated encounters with reality, suggest and constrain the range of legitimated activities and operations that can be enacted, display models of behaviors, and make possible and accessible certain encounters with reality rather than others. In a few words, socio-material and culture-specific contexts impact on the child's (cognitive) development as they mediate the encounter between the individual mind and the reality.

Reversing Piaget's main hypothesis on socialization and cultural acquisitions as consequences of cognitive development, Vygotsky set that cognitive development *depends* on socialization and, therefore, mind and its cognitive processes are socially constituted (Cazden 1979, 1988). This is the fundamental meaning of his *general genetic law of cultural development,* which affirms that cognitive functions are firstly experienced as social processes

and only secondarily are they internalized as intramental psychological functions. As Vygotsky stated in *The genesis of higher mental functions* (1997[1931]):

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition. […] but it goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships (Vygotsky 1997[1931], 107).

For Vygotsky, mind is socially constituted in two strongly intertwined although not necessarily overlapping ways: through the internalization and elaboration of social interactions (Forman and Cazden 1985) and through the mediation of semiotic artefacts, first and foremost, language (Cazden 1993). To appreciate the extent to which Vygotsky's view on language was at that time – revolutionary, consider another excerpt concerning the genetic primacy of forms of talk on thought:

> Formerly it was thought that every child was capable of reflection reaching conclusions, proving, finding bases for whatever position. From the collision of such reflections, argument was generated. But the matter is actually something else. Studies show that reflection is generated from argument (Vygotsky 1997[1931], 107).

As the extract above illustrates, Vygotsky proposed to reverse the genetic relationship between language-use-in-interaction (e.g. argument) and thought, which was dominant at that time and well represented by Piaget's theoretical approach to human development. As Bruner (1990) clearly held, the main difference between the Piagetian view of language and the Vygotskian view is a shift from a representational to an instrumental view of its primary function:

> "for Piaget language *reflects* thought and does not determine it in any sense. That the inner logic of thought is expressed in language has no effect on the logic itself. [The structures of thought] are unaffected by the language in which they are expressed" (Bruner 1990, 144).

For Vygotsky, on the contrary, language is more than a simple vehicle for the transmission of knowledge or the mere expression of already formatted thoughts: "language was an agent for altering the powers of thought – giving thought new means for explicating the world. In turn, language became the repository for new thoughts once achieved" (Bruner 1990, 143).

In short, from a genetic point of view, language (use in social situations) precedes thoughts. Anticipating contemporary findings by neurosciences, Vygotsky set the premises for conceiving of the mind (or, radically, the brain) as a language – and therefore culturally – crafted entity.

4. The Vygotskian renaissance in the 80s

The late discovery of Vygotsky's theory led to major changes in the ways child development and the role of socialization were conceived of (see Wertsch 1985a, b, 1991a, b, for an overview see Forman *et al*. 1993). We owe to this discovery a Galilean revolution in the ways individual differences in cognitive and language mediated performances were accounted for. Once the social matrix of cognition was accepted, individual differences were no longer conceived of as caused by differences in the child's evolution along a universally valid sequence of cognitive stages and, therefore, interpreted in terms of early or late onset of specific skills, but rather as the result of children's interaction with people and semiotic artifacts. Although universal as to its occurrence, this interaction and the artifacts it is mediated by can dramatically differ across social groups and thus its cognitive correlates. As Wertsch *et al*. (1993) had it, according to Vygotsky, "different forms of intermental functioning give rise to related differences in the forms of intramental functioning" (p. 338).

Not surprisingly, a first generation of theoretical as well empirical research on children's development focused on the relationship between language and cognition and the dependency of development on context-bounded social interaction. Groundbreaking cross-cultural research informed by a socio-historical approach to socialization and cognitive development challenged views that at that time were mainstream. They suggested that cognition is bounded to specific contexts of social activities and development consists in the mastery of culturally legitimized and expected ways of thinking, acting and speaking or otherwise performing through oral or written language (Cole and Bruner 1971; Cole *et al*. 1971). For instance, research on literacy and the kind of reasoning it presupposes and – at the same time – allows for, demonstrated that it is less

a matter of gaining a certain development stage than of the social occasions and interactions where literacy practices are embedded (Scribner and Cole 1981; Heath 1983). In a similar vein, research on the development of cognition in and through dyadic interaction (Wertsch 1979; Wertsch *et al*. 1980) provided empirical support to Vygotskian theory on the embeddedness of social interaction, language and thought. Focusing on a cognitive competence as typical as problem solving, research demonstrated that before being an intramental competence of "independently functioning cognitive agents" (Wertsch *et al*. 1980, 1215), problem solving is a socially shared activity where both the caregiver and the child engage in sequentially organized and mutually coordinated actions (gazes, gestures as well as accompanying words). Although age is still recognized as a relevant factor, what makes the difference is how the adult differently engages with children of different ages. These studies showed that while older children appeared to have internalized the adult's gaze as a model for their autonomously undertaken subsequent step (choosing the correspondent piece of a puzzle), younger children needed additional adult assistance in terms of further instruction or confirmation. The whole problem-solving sequence of cognitive and practical actions appeared to be interpretable as the progressive internalization of socially distributed agency during an interpersonally shared activity.

Not surprisingly, the first empirical evidence on the constitutive role of language and social interaction in cognitive development gave rise to a second and richer wave of studies (see Forman, Minick, and Addison Stone 1993 for an overview). This second wave focused on how children become competent in a wider range of ways of thinking, acting and speaking in and through their participation in socially organized activities occurring in different social contexts, namely, home and school (Rogoff and Lave 1984; Tharp and Gallimore 1988). By making relevant the role of language and social interaction in the "making" of cognition, studies in child development and education joined contemporary studies in anthropology, sociology and linguistics as to what appeared to be an inescapable major focus: *language diversity*. Before turning to this crucial theme (see the next section), it is worth summarizing the main theoretical contributions of neo-Vygotskian studies as they had an impact far beyond educational research and developmental psychology: they also reach workplace and organizational studies (Zucchermaglio 1996) as well as theoretical approaches to language use in anthropology, sociology and linguistics (Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

Thanks to the theoretical and empirical work of this generation of Vygotskian inspired studies on human cognition and development, it is now assumed that cultural and social dimensions are crucial mediating factors in the learning process and therefore in children's

development (Bruner 1986, 1990, 1996). As Cole (1996) had it – endorsing the relevance of cultural psychology as a new discipline – mind is cultural insofar as it develops in and through social participation in culturally saturated contexts (Lave and Wenger 1991). Knowing (and therefore knowledge) is "situated and distributed. It is situated as it depends on contexts, contents and interlocutors; it is distributed because it is embedded in the cultural tools and artifacts we ordinarily use, even within what appears to be isolated and abstract understanding" (Pontecorvo 1993b, 60, our translation). According to Bruner (1990), undermining the situated and distributed nature of knowledge amounts to missing not only the cultural dimension of knowledge (e.g. ideas, conceptions, representations, canonical versions of reality, ways of doing and acting, forms of talk), but moreover, the cultural nature of the processes through which we acquire such knowledge. Culture, of course, does not necessarily mean something exotic or radically different (although cultural differences can be of major impact, see below); it means, firstly, the system of tacit background assumptions, certainties and taken-for-granted ways of acting and thinking that are at the same time presupposed and talked-into-being by the members of a social group in and through interaction. Having moved "culture" from the periphery to the center of developmental process entailed a new analytical attention: the focus is not only nor primarily on the individual competences and developmental stages, but moreover, on the role of context and interaction in allowing for and shaping the access to knowledge and the construction of competences. This new and rather groundbreaking theoretical framework in developmental and social psychology gave rise to a coherent research program.

Since the 80s a growing body of research have built on the idea that "social interaction is an essential part of the developmental process itself and that structures of interaction determine the acquisition of specific abilities" (Corsaro and Streeck 1986, 14). Around this idea converged studies on ordinary socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, b; Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Heath 1983; Pontecorvo and Duranti 1996) as well as studies aimed to account for the learning and teaching process occurring within institutional contexts (Pontecorvo *et al*. 1991; Mehan 1979; Cochran-Smith 1984). In both domains of enquiry, the analysis no longer focuses on the individual performance as an index of the acquisition of cognitive abilities nor on cognitive development conceived of as independent from social interaction. On the contrary, the analytical focus is on how the interpersonal dimension affects the acquisition of cognitive abilities, the strictly related development of social and cognitive abilities, the intersubjective production of socially constructed knowledge, and the impact of the context on learning (Doise *et al*. 1976; Perret-Clermont 1980; Pontecorvo 1993c). Rather than be conceived of as a mere inert bucket for cognitive development, context and interaction became the main focus of a research

perspective aimed at establishing *how* the development of social and cognitive skills is rooted in and depends on social contexts and interaction (Cook-Gumperz, Corsaro, and Streeck 1986; Goodwin 1990; Schieffelin and Gilmore 1986). Yet what about language?

Although language use and social interaction are not co-extensive phenomena (see Goffman's example of the two mechanics working on a car where "rarely might a context of one utterance be another utterance", 1981, 143), it is undeniable that most social interaction is mediated by language. While underlining the role of social interaction, neo-Vygotskian approaches to child development and socialization also stressed the impact of language as both a system of representing the world and a tool to perform (and make people perform) activities. In short, they joined the "ubiquity of language" assumption (Rorty 1982, 8)[4] that hermeneutics and pragmatism advanced in the same years. Assuming the primacy of language in shaping thought, its being the starting-point of and the medium for the formation of our "clear and distinct ideas, sense-data, categories of pure understanding, and structures of [allegedly] pre-linguistic consciousness" (idem) has consequences that are difficult to overestimate.

One major consequence has been enlightened by Jerome Bruner who – building on Bakhtin's work – introduced his groundbreaking notion into the domains of education and developmental psychology: "language is not a neutral medium" (Bakhtin 1981, 294). This position goes far beyond the potential homology between linguistic structures and thought structures. On the contrary, as Bruner (1990) admits, it entails the recognition that language "imposes a point of view not only about the world to which it refers but toward the use of mind in respect of this world" (p. 121). From a Vygotskian viewpoint, the "generativeness" of language (Bruner (1990, 143) consists not so much in its capacity to originate an infinite number of sentences from a finite set of structures and rules, but in the power of embodying cultural history and in its being the main tool of the tutorial process through which a child's mind crosses the famous "zone of proximal development" and becomes cognitively as well as culturally competent. Within this zone – which is the zone of cultural learning par excellence – the stances inscribed in language and in the ways we use it become features of the world toward which the speakers of a language are taking and – at the same time – displaying stances. As Bruner (1990)

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[4] As Rorty (1982, 8) had it: "The ubiquity of language is a matter of language moving into the vacancies left by the failure of all the various candidates for the position of "natural starting-points" of thought, starting-points which are prior to and independent of the way some culture speaks or spoke. (Candidates for such starting-points include clear and distinct ideas, sense-data, categories of the pure understanding, structures of prelinguistic consciousness, and the like.)".

had it: "*How* one talks comes eventually to be how one *represents* what one talks about." (p. 131, emphasis in the original).

This view of language as unavoidably shaping cognition and its outcomes (e.g. representations, categories, cultural assumptions, and the like) joined coeval perspectives on language diversity and cognition (see below) and raised a major issue for scholars as well as practitioners engaged in understanding or implementing education: what are the consequences of having been raised and living in different languages? The reassuring universalistic (or we should say Eurocentric) perspective implied and guaranteed by the Piagetian theory on children development seemed to be challenged.

Although raised in fields of studies apparently unrelated to typically "psychological" concerns, few issues nurtured the 20th century sensitivity toward children's socialization and development as language mediated phenomena like "language diversity". The next section outlines the emergence and development of research on language diversity in linguistic anthropology, ethnography of communication and sociolinguistics and its progressive convergence toward an issue that developmental psychology and education studies were investigating from an ontogenetic point of view: how the intentionality human mind crafts and – at the same time – is crafted by intersubjectively created and socio-historically shared forms of living together.

5. Language diversity, culture, and cognition

Differences in language and forms of interaction are, for Vygotsky, the basic explicative principle of differences in ways of thinking and coping with reality. In advancing such a view, Vygotsky and the so-called neo-Vygotskians joined many other voices that, in the 20th century, were focusing on the impact of language diversity in culture and cognition.

> Language, socially built and maintained, embodies implicit exhortations and social evaluations. By acquiring the categories of a language, we acquire the structured "ways" of a group, and along with the language, the value-implicates of those "ways." Our behavior and perception, our logic and thought, come within the control ambit of a system of language. Along with language, we acquire a set of social norms and values. A vocabulary is not merely a string of words; immanent within it are societal textures-institutional and political coordinates. Back of a vocabulary lie sets of collective action.

(Wright Mills 1939, 677)

Although some general claims on the constitutive role of language in the making of intersubjectively constituted, socio-culturally different world-visions can be traced back to German Romanticism, the issue raised by the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on the constitutive relationship between "language and thought" is far from being resolved once and for all. Reconstructing the centenary history of the notion of language diversity since Humboldt's investigations on "the connection between linguistic diversity […] and the growth of human mental power" (1988[1936], 22), as well as language as a mirror of the speaker's world-view, or Herder's claims on the consubstantiality between language and a nation's culture (see Duranti 2001b, 2011), goes far beyond the aim of this essay. Nor do we aim to reconstruct the fine details of the longstanding and never-ending debate on the theoretical corollaries of this notion: "linguistic relativism", "linguistic functionalism" and "linguistic relativity" (Duranti 2001b, 11; for a recent overview and proposal on linguistic relativity see Sidnell and Enfield 2012). However, we cannot ignore the relevance of these issues for developmental as well as educational studies and the impact research on language diversity had on developmental psychology, language acquisition studies as well as the sciences of education.

We owe our contemporary sense of how culture and cognition create each other in and through (different) language-mediated practices mainly to the 20th century development of linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication. These domains of inquiry and their specific research programs developed mostly in the United States where the issue of language diversity emerged as a major theoretical as well as political and practical concern, thanks to the unique contribution of Franz Boas' historical particularism. Research in these domains collected evidence of the different ways in which different languages segment reality, prioritize qualities and attribute them a primary or secondary status as to the definition of a given *eidos* or even *ethos* (Duranti 2001b, 2004a). This issue was first raised regarding the ways different languages denote (and therefore produce) discrete realities, be they material (e.g. colors or snow) or social, e.g. status or kinship relationships. Particular attention has been paid to the ways the lexicon of different languages (or varieties) segment (relevant) semantic fields along a continuum from hypo-coded to hyper-coded fields (Eco 1975). The classic examples of language variation for color terms as well as the highly controversial case of different words for

types of snow and ice in Artic languages have illustrated this point for decades[5]. As Duranti (2011) observes, research illustrated that lexicon and grammar of different languages also differ as to the potentially relevant dimensions of the referent they encode (or not): substance, form, gender, number, the grammatical function the referent accomplishes within the clause, or even the location with respect to the speaker, the evidential modality of the speakers' knowledge claim as well as the source of the information delivered (reported or first-hand, see Mithun 2004). As is well known, languages also differ in the ways they encode the famous Kantian universal a priori categories of experience: space and time (Hanks 1990).

Lexicon and grammar in different languages also differently mark (or do not mark at all) features of social reality. They differently code or do not code social identities (e.g. through gender indexicals and gendered speech, Ochs 1974, Haas 1964[1944]) and social relationships, e.g. using honorific address terms or pronouns to convey respect and display recognition, attribution or denial of hierarchical status (see the Italian *Tu-Lei* or the French *Tu-Vous* alternative, Duranti 1984; Jacquemet 1994). Historic-natural languages also differ as to the level of normativity regulating the use of these grammatically coded social meanings in the formation of (grammatically) acceptable utterances. All these differences in whatever dimensions of (social) reality are addressed to, encoded in or otherwise made relevant by different languages, *potentially* make a difference in the ways the speakers of a language are socialized to, and make sense of the world they are talked about or are talking about.

Decades of studies devoted to collecting empirical evidence of language diversity made relevant exploring the consequences of language diversity on perception and cognition and providing an answer to the "linguistic relativity" core questions: if and to what extent different lexico-grammar structures impact on cognitive structures, and what kinds of impact (e.g. permanent, provisory, local, trans-contextual, mutually exclusive), if any, language would have on the speakers' perception, cognition and even "ontic commitment", i.e. the beliefs about the

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[5] This famous academic controversy on Franz Boas's 1911 observations is still alive after a century (see Martin 1986; Pullum 1991; Pinker 1994; Lucy 1992a; Krupnik and Müller-Willer 2010, for an overview see Duranti 2011) and is particularly representative of the kind of debate the issue of linguistic relativity put forth. Since Laura Martin's (1986) famous discredit of what she considered a "folk myth" (p. 420) grown on bad scholarship, the dispute continued - often in the form of strong, even personal, attacks - focusing on different facets of the issue: the exact vs. wrong number of words for snow and snow related phenomena inventoried, the inaccurateness of using "Eskimo" categorization term for a highly differentiated group of Artic languages, the "word" vs. "root" based ethnographic classification and comparison, the empirical validity of the data, the fact that English was both the term of comparison and the meta-language to account for the comparison, as well as, of course, the theoretical (or even ideological) standpoints that these empirical observations - if valid – would imply or allegedly sustain, i.e. "the instrumental treatment of supposed linguistic evidence" (Cichocki and Kilarski 2010, 346). Not surprisingly, "the Eskimo snow words case" and the misconceptions it generated (or supposedly proved) became an arena for the 20th century "science war" between "relativistic" and "universalistic" approaches to human language and cognition.

reality they experience in and through the denotational forms (or opportunities) provided by the language (Silverstein 2012, 325) .

The relevance of such an issue is quite obvious, considering its practical as well as political implications and it explains the harsh controversy it raised. Although some issues remain controversial and some empirical questions are still open (e.g. the direction of the correlation between language and thought, or language and culture, Mithun 2004, 131), some findings are generally agreed upon.

First of all, radically relativistic visions entailing linguistic determinism, the incommensurability of language-based conceptual schemata and world-visions, as well as underlining conceptions of language as a prison constraining cognition within inescapable language shaped tracks have been discredited and discarded (see Duranti 2001a, 2011). The relative translatability of languages, the human capacity to reflect upon, learn and master different languages, as well as empirical data showing the active competence of speakers to skillfully and often strategically shift from one language or variety to another according to the contexts and activities, are convincing arguments against any deterministic view of linguistic relativism. As Erickson (2011) maintains, speakers are "active agents rather than passive rule followers" (p. 395). Secondly, it is widely accepted and even empirically documented that - while not determining ways of thinking – nevertheless, language channels perception and cognition in terms of favoring (i.e. making more probable) certain cognitive behaviors (e.g. regrouping objects according to the categories encoded in the language, Lucy 1992b) rather than others. As John Lucy's experiments in psycholinguistics have demonstrated, speakers of a language display "classification preferences" that depend on the grammar categories (Lucy and Gaskin 2001, see also Levinson 2003a, b; for an overview of experimental approach to the language and cognition issue see Sidnell and Enfield 2012). This does not imply by any means that those speakers cannot use other classification criteria or are unable to perceive what is not encoded in a given language once they gain access to other languages or semiotic artifacts enabling different visions (Goodwin 1994). A third point that appears to be agreed upon concerns the evolution of natural languages as well as their inner "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin 1981). Although it is commonly accepted that "the words in a language provide a record of the concepts speakers have considered nameworthy" (Mithun 2004, 132), grammaticalization of semantic categories evolves over time (e.g. through the phenomenon of "erosion", some once crucial and normative semantic categories can disappear over time from the lexico-grammar level) and this can happen even within an individual's life span. The same is true for top-down changes

generated by societal concerns as to the potentially offensive or inaccurate meanings of some words. Lexical campaigns, such as those concerning person references or membership categorization devices, force people to see what went unseen in previous linguistic habits (e.g. the canonization of a given ideology, power relationships or stereotypical visions of the referent) and foster them to change not only their ways of speaking but, gradually, their ways of conceiving what they are talking about or referring to. As any caregiver knows, at least tacitly and procedurally, words (coupled with pointing) are the primary tool for segmenting the indistinct reality into culturally relevant entities and orient the child's attention toward these culturally segmented discrete realities. However, the first acquired vocabulary (and relative inscribed "world-vision") evolves over time as the child grows up, enters new communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and is exposed to their linguistic varieties or, in multilingual milieux, other languages endowed with allegedly different world-visions and ways to segment reality. Neither language nor cognition is static phenomena; they co-evolve over time. Research on linguistic diversity indubitably demonstrated that far from simply representing distinctions as they are in a reality out there, different vocabularies (e.g. the professional registers or languages for specific purposes within the same historic-natural language) project distinctions or at least transform objective affordances in meaningful saliences (Gumperz and Levinson 1996; Lucy 1992a, 1996, 1997). However, language is not a static monolithically or homogenous mold, but rather a flexible dynamically changing tool that can be (and actually is) tacitly or reflexively transformed to meet human (cognitive) activities, knowledge, ideologies, discoveries, new ideas or alternative views. As Hymes had it, "cultural values and benefits are in part constitutive of linguistic relativity" (1966, 116).

"Language is never a neutral medium" (Bakhtin 1981, 294) as it encompasses world views, sets meaningful differences and ways to classify (i.e. order) reality, canonizes legitimated and normative ways of speaking and therefore acting in the world, sustains, iterates *but also challenges and transforms* social organization and segmentation, moral orders and even ways of thinking. Although this view of language can (and actually did) provide a basis to claim for the incommensurability of cultures, the incompatibility of conceptual schemes or even moral relativism, this drift is far from being necessary. As Rorty (1996) maintains – building on Dewey's, Wittgenstein's and Gadamer's ideas –, sharing a language is sharing a way to see life and a minimal agreement on what is reasonable to do or say in various circumstances. Yet language does not (necessarily) close the mind within a conceptual scheme: provided that "thought" [is not] imprisoned within a single vocabulary" (Rorty 1996, 26), language potentially

enables speakers to multiply alternative views of reality and enhance their ways of thinking and experiencing, precisely *because* it "is not a neutral medium".

6. Societies, cultures, and ways of speaking: insights from the ethnography of communication

Linguistic research on language diversity and Vygotskian research on education and cognitive development evolved in parallel, yet they converged in conceiving language as – at the same time – structuring and being structured by thought, cognition and the multiple layers of socially shared knowledge we use to call culture. Differences in vocabularies and grammar are but one of the domains being explored by studies interested in language diversity since the 60s. We owe to research in sociolinguistics and ethnography of communication a specific research program centered on the inventory and cross-cultural comparison of ways of speaking and accomplishing language performances in different social groups and communities (Hymes 1962, 1974a, b; Gumperz 1982; Gumperz and Hymes 1972). The emphasis of this second wave of studies on language diversity was less on the referential properties of language as a code than on the ways language is used in "speech situations" to perform ritual as well as ordinary "speech events" (on the distinction, see Hymes 1974b). At least two major theoretical as well as methodological engagements characterized studies in this tradition: going beyond the sentence-grammar level of analysis in favor of adopting a discourse-based analytical approach, and collecting naturally occurring linguistic phenomena by means of (participant) observation and recording techniques. Thanks to this stream of studies, we can count on a huge number of empirical illustrations of how speech communities differ, not only as to the kinds of speech events they perform (e.g. the ritual insults in black urban communities in New York City, Labov 1972, gossip and verbal routines among urban black children, Goodwin 1990) but also in the ways they perform allegedly similar communicative events or activities such as greetings, sermons, prayers (see Duranti 1992; Scherzer 1983; Bauman and Scherzer 1974), school lessons (Mehan 1979), everyday story-telling (Ochs *et al*. 1989; Ochs *et al*. 1992), conversations (see Keating and Egbert 2004), literacy practices (Heath 1983; Cook-Gumperz 1986), and talking-to-children (Cook-Gumperz 1973; Ochs 1982). In any of these communicative occasions participants not only make use of a specific repertoire of communicative forms and functions to perform social activities, they also display their orientation to, maintain the validity of, and transmit to the new

generation the set of cultural assumptions, social expectations and moral ideas inscribed in the ways they perform these language mediated activities.

It would be impossible to account for the astonishing amount of empirical data and theoretical contributions of such a stream of research, both in its variationist (see Labov 1966, 1972) and interactionist versions (see Gumperz 1999, for a review of the empirical as well as theoretical contributions of studies in ethnography of communication, see Saville-Troike 2003); nevertheless, it is worthwhile outlining at least some of the themes and research findings that directly or indirectly impacted on studies of children's sociocultural and cognitive development (see among others Cook-Gumperz *et al*. 1986).

Studying the real-life acquisition of language learning in an English-speaking black community in Louisiana, Ward (1971) focused on "how families instill values about the use or non-use of language, and how they use it in an everyday context" (p. 2). She documented how children in this speech community learned to become culturally and linguistically competent members, mostly by an eavesdropping form of what, years later, Lave and Wenger (1991) would call "peripheral participation": "the silent absorption in community life, the participation in the daily commercial ritual […] and the hours spent apparently overhearing adults' conversations should not be underestimated in their impact on a child's language growth" (Ward 1971, 37). In 1984, Ochs and Schieffelin compared cultural modes of speaking with children by their caregivers: while in middle-class US families adults used forms of the simplified register generally called "baby-talk" and responded to children's vocal production as if they were meaningful conversational contributions, in the Kaluli (Papua New Guinea) and Samoan families adults didn't simplify forms of talk and oriented children's attention to the social circumstances they were prompt to notice. As Ochs and Schieffelin proposed, different forms of social organizations of the interaction as well as differences in the language register used presupposed and at the same time conveyed two very different models of child-adult interaction: the adult adapting to the child's world (i.e. the child-centered communication) vs. the child adapting to adult's world (the situation-centric orientation). These models of interaction, in turn, consistently presuppose and at the same reiterate cultural ideas concerning the communicative roles of adults and children, who has to adapt to whom, as well as where the participants' attention should be oriented: the child or the surrounding social situation. In the same years, Shirley Brice Heath (1982) compared practices of literacy in three different communities in the Southeastern United States: one was a mainstream, middleclass, school-culture oriented community; the second, a white working-class community of Appalachian origin; and the third, a working-class black community of rural origins. Comparing the patterns of language use related to books during the

"bedtime story reading" event, she demonstrated that the dichotomy between 'oral and written' traditions is raw as cultural communities also differ (and most relevantly for educational issues) as to their "ways of taking" meanings from books and written materials. These family patterns were not irrelevant as to the children's encounter with the school cultural model of copying with written materials and the development of literacy skills. Portraying the ways of talking to babies in Trackton – the African-American community –, Heath (1983) provided the following ethnographic account:

> Trackton adults believe a baby "comes up" as talker; adults cannot make babies talk: 'When a baby have 'sump'n to say, he'll say it'. Adults do not consider a young baby either to be able to or to need to say words. […] Even in contexts where the baby's utterance can be easily linked to objects or events, adults do not acknowledge these utterances as labels. "Mu-mu" screamed by a twelve-month-old at the sight of a bottle on the kitchen table is not interpreted as milk. […] If asked, community members explain away this lack of response to children's early utterances; they do not repeat the utterance, announce it as a label for an item or event, or place the "word" in an expanded, phrase or sentence. (pp. 75-76)

Differences with the model of the "infant as a communicatively competent interlocutor" presupposed by and implemented through (northwestern middle-class families') early use of baby–talk were striking.

In the same years or so, a group of researchers in social psychology adopted an anthropological lens to empirically explore the main Vygotskian theoretical assumption: development is a consequence, rather than a prerequisite of the teaching/learning process and it is dependent on the semiotic artifacts (first and foremost language) through which this process occurs. Adopting the guided participation Vygotskian framework, Barbara Rogoff and her group (Rogoff 1981, 1990; Rogoff *et al.* 1975, 1993) studied differences across cultures comparing toddlers and caregivers' interactions in families of low socio-economic status in a Mayan town in Guatemala and middle-class urban families in Salt Lake City. Differences clearly emerged as to the skills and values that were promoted as well as the cultural models of the child (e.g. her being or not a competent conversationalist) and the implicit cultural ideas concerning the learning and teaching responsibility. As William Hanks had it, in introducing Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on learning as a matter of participating in the practices of social

communities, the perspective of this anthropologically inspired stream of research in social psychology radically reversed the mainstream one: "Rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, [researchers] ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place" (p. 14).

Despite the richness of these studies, the real contribution of research in the ethnography of communication to the study of children's socialization and education does not consist, or not primarily, in the repertoire of empirical data concerning who speaks how, to whom, in what circumstances in various speech communities: these empirical data are, by definition, subject to change, historically bounded and not necessarily diachronically valid. In the long term, the very contribution of this strand of research has been more theoretical than empirical. As Saville-Troike (2003) maintains, the ethnography of communication findings clearly demonstrated that research on children's development and language acquisition should take into account not only the innate capacity of learning a language but also the particular ways of speaking children are exposed to or involved in across the growing up process within specific communities of practice. Even more significantly, ethnography of communication questioned the allegedly generalizable theoretical knowledge on how children behave or should behave at specific ages (namely, the normal and normative model of linguistic, cognitive and social development) as well as the experimental studies that – until the 80s at least - were designed according to supposedly universal models of socializing children through language and social interaction (see Perret-Clermont 1993).

If dialogue can still be considered the prototypical form of language use (Bazzanella 1998, 2002) or radically – as Weigand (2009, 2010a, b) maintains – the inner structure of language itself, what cross-cultural studies on language and education clearly demonstrated is that "culture is in dialogue": firstly because it shapes the ways dialogue is managed by participants and, secondly, because it is (re)produced through the forms dialogue takes within the speech communities. On this complex conceptual basis, nurtured by philosophical arguments, (linguistic) anthropology systematic observations, cultural informed psycho- and socio-linguistic empirical studies and the neo-Vygotskian developmental psychology, a comprehensive research program developed as a coherent framework to account for the constitutive role of language(s) and social interaction in children becoming culturally competent members of their communities. The next section illustrates the contribution of the language socialization paradigm.

7. The language socialization paradigm

We owe the progressive constitution of a specific research field (then, definitively, a paradigm see Duranti *et al*. 2012; Garret and Baquedano-Lopez 2002), focused on language socialization to the pioneering works and groundbreaking ideas of Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984, 1995; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, b).

As they recall (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008), the term "language socialization" is borrowed from Sapir's words who – in a 1933 article – wrote: "language is a great source of socialization, probably the greatest that exists" (cit. in Ochs and Schieffelin, 2008, 5). The foundational thesis of the language socialization research program is that in learning a language, children learn far more than a symbolic system to represent the world and develop more than their communicative competence. While being socialized into language (use) they are also and inherently socialized *through* language (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984) to becoming competent members of the social group they are raised in, or – as Ochs (2002) has it – "speaker[s] of culture[s]". This research program started as an interdisciplinary endeavor where insights and theories from linguistics, psycholinguistics, and developmental psychology (as well as its social and cultural variants) were intertwined with and strongly framed by an anthropological perspective. The latter, in particular, engaged researchers with an unique sensitivity toward the shaping role of culture in every dimension of human development and made relevant (namely unavoidable) the use of ethnographic methods for studying how children develop as linguistically, cognitively, socially, and morally competent members of their community. Joining the coeval Vygotskian renaissance and its innovative perspective on development and education (see above), the language socialization perspective conceived socialization as a language and therefore culturally based phenomenon.

The first generation of studies was mostly concerned with (first) *language acquisition* and focused on young children and caregivers' interactions (i.e. social organized language practices, Ochs 1985, 1988, Schieffelin 1990, Ochs and Schieffelin 1983). These pioneering studies illustrated how language acquisition is inseparable from culturally established "ways of talking" (to and by children) that, in turn, presuppose and display local ontologies, epistemologies and conceptions concerning typical and normatively expected ways to communicate and, more generally, behave. Interestingly enough, these studies also documented how language ideologies (i.e. cultural beliefs concerning what language is and ethnotheories on language acquisition) have an impact on children language socialization (Schieffelin 1983; Heath 1983, see above) as

they inform the ways of involving children in interactive spoken language (i.e. if, when, with which interactive role). In raising such an issue, these studies set the premises for contemporary studies of the social consequences of increasing globalization, diasporas as well as the consequent increase of culture contacts and multilingual settings where different languages, different ideologies of language as well as the positioning of these languages on the social prestige scale are at stake (see Garrett 2007; Baquedano-López and Figueroa 2012).

Since this first generation of studies, the domain of research expanded beyond infants and children's language acquisition process to encompasses the ethnographic study of many different developmental contexts, social occasions and activities where novices (not necessarily children, see Ochs and Schieffelin 2008, 2012) participate in various forms to the everyday work through which cultural knowledge is displayed, iterated, challenged, negotiated or simply assumed as valid through members' language mediated activities (for a recent review see Duranti *et al.* 2012). As Ochs and Schieffelin (2012) have it:

> In a variety of roles (e.g. speaker, addressee, audience, overhearer), developing children and other novices are typically required to recognize how and when to produce kinds of requests, questions, assertions, plans, stories, corrections, evaluations, confirmations, and disputes. They learn how to express their emotions and constitute themselves as moral persons in public places to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, while, universally, language socialization orients novices to the world around them, members of social groups use language and other semiotic resources to orient novices to notice and value certain salient and relevant activities, persons, artifacts, and features of the natural ecology. (p. 8)

Joining the phenomenological interest for everyday life (see above), most studies focused on ordinary interactions occurring between adults and children in family and at school which – in literate societies at least – constitutes the other "natural" developmental context where children are socialized to culturally appropriate ways of being in the world (Pontecorvo et. al. 1991; Pontecorvo and Fasulo 1999). These studies privileged (micro)ethnography and videorecording as their main tools to capture the cultural structuring of any dialogic interaction. Indubitably, the language socialization paradigm regrouped within a single theoretical framework different approaches that, from different disciplinary perspectives, addressed to co-development of language, cognitive and social competences, as well as the appropriation of cultural knowledge. This integrated yet still inherently multidisciplinary approach to culture and language development remains a reference for scholars adopting an ecological approach to children's way

of becoming "speakers of culture" (Ochs 2002).

The two parts of the volume are dedicated to outlining the landscape of studies on language, interaction and culture in the two main contexts of children's socialization, namely, the home and the school. Yet, before turning to explore how the "mixed game of dialogue" (Weigand, 2010a) works within these two cultural environments, it is worth referring to the role communicative modalities other than talk-in-interaction play in the communicative constitution of (children's) culture and identities.

8. Beyond language: artifacts and other semiotic resources as socialization devices

Despite the undeniable "language centered" mainstream approach of most theoretical approaches and empirical research on children's socio-cultural development, some voices gradually emerged pointing to an often underestimated issue: semiotic artifacts other than historic natural languages as well as communication modalities other than the vocal-verbal modality are crucial tools in the process of socialization. Building on a rather underexploited yet crucial idea of Vygotsky, Wertsch (1985a, b, 1991a) introduced the notion of "mediated agency" to account for the fact that cognitive functioning is mediated by technical tools (i.e. material artefacts) as well as "psychological tools", i.e. (not necessarily linguistic) signs. As Vygotsky had it (1997[1930]), many different tools inhabit the zone of proximal development and serve the purposes of mediating the mind-reality encounter and making human action possible: "language; various systems of counting; mnemonic techniques, algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings, all sorts of conventional signs, and so on" (p. 85). Although first on the list, clearly enough, language is but one of the mediating artifacts and symbol systems that contribute in the social construction of mind. These artifacts are always situated within a historical, socio-cultural as well institutional context and channel human activity according to their affordances. Their presence, absence or modes of presence in the "scene of dialogue" (Cooren 2010) therefore make a difference in the unfolding of interaction and – consequently – on the socio-cognitive processes at play. Showing how this happens (or could happen under certain controlled circumstances) is an empirical question: a significant amount of Vygotskian-informed educational research has been devoted to investigating how the process and outcomes of education were situated in a specific environment and distributed among different agents (see Pontecorvo 1993a, b, c; Pontecorvo *et al*. 1991). Some scholars even

suggested defining the agent (i.e. the individual who carries out the activity) as being always a "mediated agent" i.e. an individual who acts with and within some mediation means (Wertsch and Rupert 1993, 33).

Interestingly enough, in the same decades a similar suspicion towards the "logocentric bias" (Erickson 2010) that dominated research on dialogue and social interaction gradually emerged. We owe to the pioneering work of Ray Birdwisthell (1970, 1974) and Adam Kendon (1967, 1974, 1977, 1990, 2004) as well as to the larger semiotic research program on what at that time was labeled as "non verbal communication", the premises of contemporary studies on embodied communication and multimodality (see among others Streeck 2010, 2011; Streeck *et al.* 2011; Mondada, 2011, 2016). However, it is perhaps Charles Goodwin (1979, 1981) who mostly contributed to setting a research approach that interpenetrates the study of the interactive construction of sentences in natural conversation and the analysis of the performative role of other communicative modalities: body positioning, gazes, gestures as well as the participants' use of the contextual features as resources. Studying how participants in interaction constitute themselves as social and moral actors in the midst of the mundane activities that constitute family daily life, Goodwin (2007) demonstrated how this complex work is made concurrently through body orientation (e.g. a father's and a daughter's positioning toward each other and the relevant object), object management (e.g. a printed page of the workbook), gestures (e.g. pointing) and talk. Far from being independent semiotic systems, language (e.g. conventional terms, deictic terms), gestures, gaze and the material structure of the environment constitute a "semiotic field" exploited by participants for reciprocal understanding and coordinated joint accomplishment of the activity at hand.

Since Goodwin's groundbreaking notion of "semiotic field", a great amount of research has demonstrated that the outcomes of social interaction (mutual coordination and mutual understanding) are by no means exclusively the product of talk, but of an entanglement of "a complex range of resources: the spoken, the bodily and the material" (Heath and Luff 2012, 283) including the use of artifacts and technologies (see among others Mondada 2011). This research program officially (re)legitimizes the domain of artefacts as both an analyzable and an analyzer of human conduct. According to Mondada (2011), multimodal analysis typically focuses on "the investigation of spatial and material resources including artifacts and technologies manipulated by co-participants" (p. 207). Human interaction is increasingly conceived of as accomplished through and mediated by heterogenic semiotic tools. The above outlined researches and theoretical approaches joined research programs mostly centered on language and language practices (see above) in providing an increasingly fine-grained account of how children become

competent members of their cultural communities by participating in socio-material language mediated activities in two main developmental contexts: the home and the school.

9. Structure of the volume

The volume is structured in two sections. The first section, *Dialogues at home*, regroups contributions that deal with family socialization. The second section, *Dialogues at school*, presents contributions dealing with learning and socializing at school. In its entirety the volume advances and empirically illustrates the inseparability of language from cognition, and the inseparability of language and cognition from social interaction. It does so by enlightening the role of everyday dialogues in displaying, maintaining, creating y*et al*so defying the crucial dimensions of the world we live in. Put in a nutshell, it claims that dialogue is the hinge connecting the micro-order of everyday life and the macro-order of shared culture and social structure. As Rommetveit put it forty years ago, dialogue is "the architecture of intersubjectivity" (1976): a tool for not only maintaining yet also constantly transforming our life-worlds. The volume makes the case by focusing on what probably displays this process the most: children socialization. As the chapters illustrate with updated empirical data, children and youngsters learn day by day, one dialogue at a time, to become competent members of the communities they (will) live in precisely because the dialogues they participate in as speakers, ratified addressees or even bystanders, structure and are structured by culture. Borrowing a well-known formula by John Heritage (1984) yet applying it beyond the micro-level of the *hic et nunc* discursive environment, we propose to conceive dialogues as "context-shaped and context-renewing": they are permeated by and informed to the Life-World where they occur, yet they are concurrently the *lieu* where and the means through which this same Life-World is made.

Far from being monological, the volume stages different voices that implicitly or explicitly take the notion of dialogicity as central and situate themselves in the large and polyphonic epistemic territory that, forty years ago or so, started bridging the gap between competence and performance (Weigand 2010a), grammar and interaction (Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson 1996), structure and agency (Giddens 1984). Within this large framework, the different disciplinary perspectives (applied and developmental linguistics, education, social psychology, sociology), theoretical frameworks and methodologies (e.g. conversation analyses, discourse analysis, language and social interaction analysis, PRAAT analysis, content-based quantitative analysis) at

stake are complementary and mutually enriching. They provide the reader with a multifaceted appraisal of what stands as a social fact: it is in and through their participation in dialogues with caregivers as well as peers, that children develop as cognitive, social and moral beings and become "speakers of cultures" (Ochs 2002). Interestingly enough, yet not surprisingly, all the different approaches put forward in the volume are consistent with a view of language as an inherently dialogic activity (see Weigand's *Mixed Game Model*, 2010a). Not only they corroborate with fresh data the well-established theoretical position according to which (cultural, social, linguistic, and communicative) competence is ontogenetically and analytically inseparable from performance. Reversing one of the 20th century mainstream position in developmental sciences, they add to this line of inquiry by illustrating that and how competence develops *through* performance.

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