

RESEARCH ARTICLE

De-Naturalizing the Novice: A Critique of the Theory of Language Socialization

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ABSTRACT This article critiques the concept “novice” in the language socialization paradigm. Although rarely theorized, the concept “novice” has framed what is seen as an event of language socialization: it must include at least one person who has not yet acquired some socially valuable characteristic or skill. Conversely, we propose that novicehood is not a natural category: agents who appear as “novices” only do so relative to ideological worlds in which they are made to appear relatively incapable. We then go on to consider three consequences of this reformulation: agents and objects of socialization do not have to be human, socialization does not necessarily lead “upward” towards expertise, and the linguistic mediation of these processes does not always summon agents towards maturity. This critique leads us to propose a theory that both includes a broader range of socializable agents and connects socialization to questions of power and exclusion. [*language socialization, novice, ideology, life course, race*]

RESUMEN Este artículo critica el concepto de “novicio” en el paradigma de la socialización del lenguaje. Aunque teorizado raramente, el concepto “novicio” ha enmarcado lo que es visto como un evento de la socialización del lenguaje: debe incluir al menos una persona que no ha adquirido aun alguna característica o destreza valiosa socialmente. Por el contrario, proponemos que el noviciado no es una categoría natural: agentes que aparecen como “novicios” lo hacen solamente en relación con mundos ideológicos en los cuales ellos se hacen aparecer relativamente incapaces. Luego vamos a considerar tres consecuencias de esta reformulación: los agentes y los objetos de la socialización no tienen que ser humanos; la socialización no necesariamente conduce “al ascenso” hacia la pericia; y la mediación lingüística de estos procesos no siempre convoca a los agentes hacia la madurez. Esta crítica nos lleva a proponer una teoría que incluye un rango más amplio de agentes socializables y conecta la socialización con cuestiones de poder y exclusión. [*socialización del lenguaje, novicio, ideología, curso de vida, raza*]

Although definitions of language socialization vary, many include a view of socialization as something that happens to “novices.”¹ For example, language socialization “hinges on the potential of embodied communication to engage novices in apprehending and realizing familiar and novel ways of thinking, feeling, and acting with others across the life span” (Ochs and Schieffelin 2017, 3). It is “the process through which a child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to

participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community” (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002, 339). In earlier accounts of the theory, it contrasts with the concept “expert”: “novices recurrently engage in these practices with more expert members of society” (Ochs 1996, 408).

The theory of language socialization has been enormously influential and illuminating. It highlighted the importance of the study of children for linguistic anthropology and

revealed that some of the central claims of language acquisition scholars—such as the importance of motherese—were culturally specific ideologies (Ochs and Schieffelin 1994). In doing so, it has laid the basis for scholars to challenge discriminatory practices and beliefs in educational and other institutions, leading to new theories of second-language socialization, multilingualism, language shift, literacy, race and ethnicity, and more (Avineri et al. 2015; Baquedano-López 2004; Duff and Talmy 2011; Fader 2009; Garrett 2007; Heath 1983; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Meek 2011, 2019; Paugh 2012; Shohet 2013; Zentella 2005). Increasingly, language socialization work goes beyond children to examine the workplace, aging, and autism and disability (Ochs, Solomon, and Sterponi 2005; Roberts 2010; Saunders 2017). Much of this work, as well as work in formal educational contexts, highlights the production of marginal identities (Duff and Talmy 2011; Figueroa and Baquedano-López 2017; García-Sánchez 2014; He 2003b; Heath 1983; Philips 1983; Sterponi and Shankey 2014; Talmy 2008). Both of us have been profoundly influenced by this work (Berman 2014, 2019; Smith 2014, 2016; Smith and Barad 2018). At the same time, however, the theory contains an assumption that has hindered its development: it has assumed that the “novice” is its central analytical object.

We argue that there are no novices. In some ways, this conclusion is not new. Rather, it follows from recent arguments that age is an interactional production (Berman 2019). It should also come as no surprise for scholars of language socialization and childhood studies who have long argued that children are cultural actors in and of themselves as opposed to simply adults in the making, that socialization starts at birth and is multidirectional and lifelong, and that language socialization happens to everyone, not just children (de León 2012; Duff 1995; García-Sánchez 2010; Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2007; James and Prout 1997; Ochs and Schieffelin 1994; Ochs and Schieffelin 2017, 8; Reynolds 2008; Schieffelin 1990, 17; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986, 164, 170; Stephens 1995; Talmy 2008). Nonetheless, the category “novice” is still present explicitly and implicitly in language socialization research, even if rarely theorized. In such literature, invocations of “novices,” including the common phrase “children and other novices,” frame socialization as largely a process of gaining knowledge, children as natural novices, and novicehood as an *a priori*, natural category.

In what follows, we reframe the “novice” as an ideological category. We argue that novicehood is a sociopolitical status regularly imposed on, embraced by, and/or evaded by interactional agents. In interaction, ideologies of novicehood invite practices that either incorporate or exclude the agent from being seen as such. We define novice status as agents who are *perceived* (and may perceive themselves) to be: (1) lacking a quality of character or form of skillfulness (i.e., possessing a form of immaturity or inability) that is (2) valuable in some sociocultural context and that (3) the agents are expected to eventually mobilize. In this model, language

socialization is not the study of how, through interaction, novices move into novel forms of being and knowing, but rather the study of how and why some agents are produced and produce themselves as able or unable, as well as how they move out of that subject position.

Our shift toward an ideological theory of the novice has four consequences. The most sweeping one is that it reframes a psychological and/or ontological concept as a sociopolitical one. In principle, the centrality of the concept “novice” suggests that the starting point for a language socialization analysis should be determining which agents in some sociocultural context are, in some psychological or ontological sense, less skillful or knowledgeable. Of course, most researchers of language socialization do not begin their research with a psychological assessment of which individuals genuinely lack some form of knowledge; some other variable (i.e., that some individual is young or younger or new to a context) often implicitly serves as a proxy. When reframed as a sociopolitical concept, however, the starting point of analysis is the ideologies that frame certain agents in terms of some local idiom of novicehood: as immature, incapable, less skillful, less knowledgeable, etc. Being a novice is no longer about an alleged state of individual knowledge (or lack thereof). Novicehood is a status that is socially imposed, produced, and (sometimes) overcome, rather than naturally inhabited.

Second, reframing “novice” as an ideological category means that the kinds of agents that can occupy the category are unconstrained by species designation or by some other ontological differentiation. Agents such as dogs, cats, herding animals, machines, etc., often get framed, ideologically, as less skillful or as lacking some characteristic considered valuable (Smith 2012, 2016). These agents are—likewise—subject to interventions designed to bring about these more highly valued skills or characteristics: training, domestication, engineering, or design, etc. The category “novice,” in other words, has smuggled in an assumption about the species subject to learning or growth. This assumption drastically limits the sociopolitical purchase of the theory: What are we to do in contexts like the United States where, in certain situations, dogs are treated like children (spoken to, dressed, named, etc.) and children treated like dogs (kept in cages)?

Third, recasting “novice” in ideological terms helps to make sense of how a notion of incapability analogically frames social asymmetries otherwise couched in terms of race, class, gender, ability, or even humanness. “Disability,” for example, “has functioned historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has also done so for women and minority groups” (Baynton 2017, 18). To put this in our terms, the concept that undergirds novicehood (i.e., ideologized renderings of inability) is regularly imputed to children, women, older people, “primitive peoples,” people with disabilities, and people of color (e.g., as being on the wrong side of an “achievement gap,” as an old dog incapable of new tricks, etc.). These processes are perhaps especially

potent when they impute nonhuman forms of incapability to human populations: for example, when certain groups are framed as subhuman, sheep-like, machine-like, etc. Under a psychological theory of novicehood, these analogical relationships would appear to be mere accidents. From our point of view, these kinds of relationships reveal how ideologies of socialization are recursively reproduced and implicated in widespread structures of power and exclusion, including those regularly structured by racial, gendered, or ontological difference.

Fourth, an ideological understanding of novicehood helps us to understand the process of socialization as one that involves recruiting agents into numerous types of trajectories. The concept of an unskilled novice is tied to an ideology of the life course understood as a unidirectional and apolitical process of learning more and more, a process that leads “upward” to competence. While agents who are privileged enough to be seen as current or past novices are regularly set onto some part of this upward life-course trajectory, others are excluded from this pathway and set onto nonascending or not-as-fully ascending trajectories. Later in this piece, we introduce a set of terms (i.e., ideologies of growth, stagnation, and atavism) that are designed to capture an array of ideological trajectories away from or toward perceived inabilities, many of which have rarely been seen as objects of a language socialization study. Such terms, we stress, are ways to capture ideologies; they are not actual characterizations of agents’ abilities. To understand socialization as an inherently sociopolitical process means that one must reckon with how the full diversity of trajectories toward or away from inability are manufactured.

Our concern with ideologized trajectories of change pushes us to reconsider the range of social processes that can be studied from the point of view of the language socialization paradigm. For example, the important work on deficit ideologies in education has not made extensive use of language socialization theory (e.g., Battiste 1998; Flores and Rosa 2015; Fu, Hadjioanou, and Zhou 2019; García and Otheguy 2017; González, Moll, and Amanti 2005; Gutiérrez and Orellana 2006; Valencia 2010). Reframing the concept “novice” in a more sociopolitical idiom, however, makes the broader theory more clearly relevant to the analysis of processes of racialization in the classroom. Part of our goal, then, is to not only critique language socialization theory but also reframe it and show how a different view of novices can change the way language socialization theory is relevant to, and illuminates, other social processes.

While we focus on trajectories surrounding inability in this article, we also want to raise the possibility that the centrality of inability to current ideologies of language socialization within and outside of the academy is a sociohistorical artifact of a world structured by forms of marginalization and the global expansion of specific ideas of education and growth. Our own approach, then, might be a tool crafted for a specific kind of historical moment, a possibility that both constrains and enables our understanding of socialization.

We start by unraveling the idea of a novice.

NOVICE IN LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION THEORY

Although the concept “novice” is frequently found in theories of language socialization, there have been relatively few attempts to explicitly theorize what it means to be a novice, how people become novices, or what a focus on novices means for the study of socialization and for language and education research more broadly. “Novice” appears in a number of related but distinct traditions. Within language socialization theory as articulated by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986, 165), “novice” serves the admirable goal of extending socialization beyond children to other parts of the life course: “the child or the novice (in the case of older individuals) is not a passive recipient of knowledge.” A similar but distinct idea appears in Vygotskian learning theories (Downey, Dalidowicz, and Mason 2014; Lave and Wenger 1991; Miller and Sperry 1988; Radziszewska and Rogoff 1991; Rogoff 2003, 272, 323, 324; Rogoff et al. 2003; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986, 166). These theorists also make use of metaphors for novicehood (i.e., apprenticeship and peripheral participation) that are less likely to invite assumptions that the apprentice/novice is a child. The concepts of novice and apprentice, however, both smuggle in ideas of socialization as the process of learning new skills—that is, that socialization is a process of moving from an absence to a presence, from an inability to an ability.

A number of scholars, however, have challenged this idea, showing how the roles and identities of expert and novice are not given but interactionally achieved in specific sociopolitical contexts (Carr 2010; Duff and Talmy 2011; García-Sánchez 2014; He 2003a; Hsu and Roth 2009; Jacoby and Gonzales 1991; Lee and Bucholtz 2015; O’Connor 2003; Orellana 2009; Pontecorvo, Fasulo, and Sterponi 2001; Takei and Burdelski 2018). For example, various members of a physics lab may “be momentarily constituted as ‘more knowing’ . . . while a novice may be one who is momentarily constituted as ‘less knowing’” (Jacoby and Gonzales 1991, 152). In language-brokering work, children often reverse the traditional idea of adult as expert and child as novice in interactions that distribute novicehood and expertise across interlocutors. Orellana (2009, 102–4) argues that language brokering challenges not just the concept of novice but also sociocultural learning theory. This work usefully considers “novicehood” and “expertise” as social statuses subject to the full contingency of interaction; it still assumes, however, that these statuses have to do with some analytical understanding of who knows more or less.

Recent work on the socialization of marginalized identities and on the production of disfluency and incompetence brings additional complexity to our understanding of socialization as an ideological process. Wortham (2005) argues that socialization takes place not only across recurrent events but also across chains of events, what he calls “trajectories of socialization.” Often, these trajectories do not

lead to fuller, less novice-like participation. For example, although not formulated as a language socialization analysis explicitly, Wortham's (2004) account shows how one student, over the course of an academic year, goes from being positioned as a "good student" to being positioned as a "social outcast"; García-Sánchez (2014) similarly considers how immigrant Muslim children come to be racialized in contexts of marginalization, a process that could be framed as an instance of "raciolinguistic socialization" (Chaparro 2019). García-Sánchez (2016, 161) captures the essential point: analyses of socialization must capture how agents "come to inhabit . . . positions culturally recognizable and recognized as devalued and marginal in the social order."

There is an increasing number of scholars who have analyzed the production of disfluencies or positions of incompetence. Work in language and education has long shown how schools are infused with deficit ideologies that construct some students, typically those who are ethnoracial Others, as deficient or behind, and then recruit them into such practices as well as a perceived incomplete participation in school life (e.g., Battiste 1998; García and Otheguy 2017; González, Moll, and Amanti 2005; Gutiérrez and Orellana 2006; Flores and Rosa 2015; Fu, Hadjioanou, and Zhou 2019; Valencia 2010). In turn, scholars of disability have revealed that students framed as "learning disabled" are often recruited into positions of incompetence (Ochs, Solomon, and Sterponi 2005; Sterponi and Shankey 2014). Finally, work on language socialization and language shift reveals how interaction can socialize children into not only an ability to speak a new language but also an inability to speak their elders' language (Garrett 2007, 2012; Meek 2011, 2019; Paugh 2012).

Our own approach takes considerable inspiration from work that treats marginalization, incompetence, and disfluency as regular outcomes of processes of socialization. We seek to formulate a theory that, if anything, sharpens the sociopolitical purchase of these formulations. We treat "marginalized identities" and "incompetence" and "disfluency" as not just another thing that novices must learn. Rather, these concepts are parts of ideologized fields of relative inability/ability that subjects are made to enter and exit. Once framed in this way, we can begin to understand the full range of agents subject to practices of socialization, the analogies made across positions in this field (e.g., the "child-like" adult or the "subhuman" person), and the variety of movements or trajectories made possible across these hierarchized arrays of inability. The starting point, however, is to consider novicehood as not an a priori category; rather, we invite scholars to consider it to be an ideological position permitted to some and refused to others.

NOVICE AS AN IDEOLOGICAL SUBJECT POSITION

Consider an example from Berman's (2019, 2020) research in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Karina, an adult woman, has made bread and intends to share it with her family in a house nearby. She puts the bread on a plate

and gives it to her son, Tito, who is in elementary school. As her son carries the bread across the yard, he passes his father, who is sitting with another adult visitor. Tito does not offer the visitor any food.

This interaction seems to fit quite nicely into the prototypical idea of children as novices who are gradually learning valued cultural knowledge as they engage in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991). First, Tito's mother involves him in food sharing between relatives, likely helping him value the sharing of food, close kin relationships, and hierarchy (since he must obey his mother). Second, from a Marshallese adult perspective, Tito participates in a distinctly immature way. In Tito's village, when food is seen, it must be shared. Therefore, adults do not display without sharing. Walking with ready-to-eat food is the prototypical example of an action that exhibits a lack of shame (*āliklik*). Shame is a mature emotion that adults say that babies lack and children slowly gain as they grow. Tito's actions reveal that he lacks shame and position him locally as an *ajri*, a "child" or "immature person" (Berman 2019).

But Tito did not shamelessly carry food in public because of some natural tendency toward novicehood. Rather, his mother *explicitly* commanded him to carry food, thus also explicitly commanding him to be immature and to engage in work that requires an inability—that is, a lack of shame. When Tito obeyed, he embodied a locally immature subject position.

While from a Marshallese perspective Tito is definitely an *ajri*, from an analytic perspective Tito is only a novice if we erase how his inabilities and lack of shame have been socialized. Specifically, Tito is interpreted as a novice because two different groups of people—the adults in his own society and outside researchers—see him as (1) lacking something that is (2) valuable—shame—that they (3) expect him to eventually acquire. Tito is not the only person in this interaction who exhibits an inability. His mother also exhibits an inability—the inability to walk across the yard carrying food. But her inability is ideologically perceived as a valuable ability—the presence of the mature emotion of shame, which, although uncomfortable, is one of the emotions that lead people to behave in culturally appropriate ways. In addition, Tito is expected to eventually gain shame (something that supposedly comes naturally as children grow), while his mother is not seen as someone who will eventually be able to carry food across the yard. Thus, many adults told Berman that children "do not know [*n̄ak*]" shame, because "there is nothing in their brains. There is not enough to think with." In contrast, several adults said that adults "know/feel [*jelā*]" shame (see also Berman 2019). These linguistic constructions clearly ideologically interpret Tito's status as an absence, an inability, and adults' status as an ability. But such a perspective could easily be reversed. One could easily say that Tito's mom does not know how to walk across the yard with food, while Tito does. Here, we have a local ideology of Tito as a novice, as someone who is lacking something valuable.

Although from a local perspective Tito's lack of shame appears as an inability, from another perspective he is quite capable at being a child. Being a child in Jajikon requires running errands. Running errands often requires lacking shame. Ideologies of Tito as incapable thus lend him unique capabilities, or, in Berman's (2019) words, "aged agency." Tito's lack of shame is not a mark of a novice but rather of an expert—an expert child. He engages not in legitimate peripheral participation but actual participation; his child-specific forms of action are the only way that some food is shared at all.

From an analytical perspective, viewing Tito as an actual novice (rather than a locally perceived novice) creates several distortions of Tito's situation and of our understanding of language, socialization, and the life course. First, the phrase "children and other novices" links children and novicehood, undercutting simultaneous efforts to analyze children like Tito as cultural beings in their own right as opposed to adults in the making (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 2007; Esser et al. 2016; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2007). Conflating "child" with "novice" also undermines arguments that socialization is lifelong and that this interaction has as many effects on Tito's mother as it does on Tito (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Ochs 1988, 130; 1992; Pontecorvo, Fasulo, and Sterponi 2001; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Talmy 2008). Third, the word "novice" implicitly constructs Tito's novice status as "asocial," erasing how Tito's immaturity and inabilities themselves are ideologically constructed and produced (Berman 2014, 111). After all, Tito did not naturally come to lack shame. Rather, his mother explicitly commanded him to engage in an activity that requires exhibiting a lack of shame. She explicitly commanded him to be immature.

Seeing Tito as a novice thus requires a good deal of ideological erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000). It requires viewing children as naturally immature and incapable rather than as being perceived and produced as such, while also erasing all of the ways Tito has learned to lack shame, as well as his mother's inability to carry food in public (among other inabilities).

LANGUAGE MEDIATION AND INTERPELLATING NOVICES

If people are not naturally novices, then many of the interactive routines that have previously been seen as functioning to pull people *out* of novicehood may have an alternative or additional function: to interpellate people *into* inability and novicehood. Here, we focus on two routines that have received a lot of attention in language socialization research: prompts and directives, like Tito's mothers' directive to carry food.

Many have interpreted prompts and directives as serving to encourage children to produce culturally specific forms of mature behavior, thus socializing them into that behavior. Demuth (1986, 63), discussing Besotho prompts such as "say 'Thank you, mother,'" writes, "perhaps the major . . . function of prompts as a child matures is the imparting of social norms and values" (76). Schieffelin (1990, 78, 90)

argues that Kaluli prompting/*ε*lema routines, such as "you take it/say it," "socialize young children to the social identity, knowledge, and capabilities of the addressee." Moore (2012, 213) reviews numerous prompting routines, arguing that they teach important social values, such as assertiveness, or prepare children for important social functions, such as serving as a messenger.

While prompts and directives do teach social values, they also recruit addressees into immature subject positions. Asymmetrical distribution of directives has long been shown to mark differential status positions (Berman 2018; Howard 2012; Platt 1986; Shohet 2013). We go further and use the concept of "dual indexicality," in which utterances simultaneously index two opposing subject positions (Kulick 2003). Billig (1999, 95) asserts that many lessons, such as the command to say "thank you," teach a surface behavior and also how to repress the opposite: "the mother, in teaching politeness, provides a model of rudeness." Kulick (2003, 146), instead of viewing such models as a form of repression, interprets them as indexical; he argues that some commands, such as "no" in sexual encounters when uttered by women, are interpreted as "yes." They index a culturally salient metapragmatic frame of "persuasion," a frame that produces sexual subjects who are "differentially empowered and differentially gendered." Similarly, if we take the prompt "say 'thank you'" and interpret it indexically, it indexes addressees as people who are not yet polite but on a developmental trajectory of learning to be polite—that is, as novices. In this case, the prompt indexes a frame that produces not sexual objects but immature objects who, to use Kulick's words, are differently empowered and differently aged.

Marshallese prompts and directives, also very common in Berman's (2018) fieldsite, function similarly. Elders (both older children and adults) often issue prompts to younger individuals, as when an older child prompted a younger one to stand up to a child who was annoying him: "Larry, you should say, 'bad'" (*Larry, kwōn ba, "nana"*). Elders also regularly issue directives to youth that include prompts, as when an older sibling said to her younger sister, "Go and say, 'Hey Michael! Kirinrose says to bring one . . .'" (*Etal im ba, "Ia Michael ah! Li Kirinrose ej ba bok juon . . ."*). The former prompt marked the speaker as more capable, older, and more authoritative (synonymous with being older in the RMI), as well as capable. It simultaneously marked the addressee as younger, subject to commands, and relatively incapable (unable to stand up for himself) *but* on a trajectory of learning to do so—that is, a novice. Agents perceived as either already capable (i.e., older children), or not ready to learn (i.e., dogs or babies), would not be addressees of such an utterance. Similarly, the latter command marks both the speaker as a mature shame-feeling individual *and* the addressee as someone who is younger, subject to commands, and lacking shame. It thus provides a model of the future, of maturity, while also calling the addressee into immaturity. Such forms pull entities into novicehood both immediately—as an immediate interpellating effect of the directive itself—and over time as they

are linked to other novice-producing interactions (Berman 2019, 129–48).

Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) use “dual indexicality” to theorize the “bad subjects” produced when socialization “turns out in ways that are not expected or desired.” We view dual indexicality as relevant regardless of conformity or rebellion because both require constructing someone who lacks some socially valuable quality. This unable, or immature, individual is sometimes called a “bad subject” and sometimes “novice,” differentiated partly by the perceived temporal status of the socialization process (Smith and Thompson 2016). Bad subjects are supposed to have already acquired some form of more fully mature subjectivity, while novices are seen as appropriately not yet mature. To use Neugarten’s (1996) terminology, novices’ inabilities are perceived as on time and developmentally appropriate, while bad subjects’ inabilities are perceived as off time and developmentally inappropriate. Both have to be created, their inabilities and immaturities inculcated, socialized, and interpellated through language, such as prompts and directives.

NOVICEHOOD AND THE NONHUMAN IN SOCIALIZATION

If immaturity or inability is not a natural but ideological category, we must consider how other kinds of agents (i.e., agents other than children) may be recruited and recruit themselves into immaturity. A wide range of entities and agents can be seen as inhabiting an “immature” persona. The list becomes essentially indefinite: obstinate herding animals, unruly toddlers, a forty-year-old living with their parents, a dog who is not house-trained, an engine that won’t start, older people with dementia, a group of people positioned as disabled, a group of humans racialized as “subhuman.” If we reframe the novice as an ideological category, and inability as one possible ideological instantiation of this category, then language socialization research ought to give an account of all of those agents that are ideologically framed as incapable.

Some of the classic scholarship in the language socialization paradigm suggested that differences in inability articulate with species difference. Schieffelin (1990) observed that Kaluli mothers sought to suppress children from engaging in language play that had qualities like high pitch because “bird-like” talk would prolong processes of language development and create an unwelcome equivalence between children and birds. For Kaluli, a broader field of immaturity includes not only children and “child talk” but also birds and “bird talk.” In the United States, an analogy can be made between “baby talk” and speech directed toward companion animals. Both involve “communicating with a limited and inattentive addressee, controlling the addressee’s attention and behavior by focusing on an object or activity, and expressing friendliness and affection” (Mitchell 2001, 183). Here, ideologies position the human “novice” as belonging to broader categories of immaturity associated with nonhuman animals, as well as the language practices tied to such categories.

Rather than presupposing the ontological characteristics of a novice, one must map out who or what counts as “immature” within some ideological context before examining it as a context of socialization (Smith 2012, 2014, 2016). For example, Smith (2012) analyzes an interjection (*shhkk*) that constitutes a field of “quasi-agents” imputed as “immature,” a field that cuts across species and other ontological differences. The interjection—which functions as a directive “stop!”—is most frequently used with nonhuman animals like alpacas, llamas, and sheep about to cause trouble in human-controlled worlds. When a herder’s alpaca is about to eat from a neighbor’s pile of potatoes, it is time to yell out a string of “shhkk,” or “stop!” But the interjection is also regularly used with young children and motile things. It might be used toward a child about to place a hand onto a hot surface, an orange about to fall off a fruit vendor’s table, or a marble about to run back down an incline. “Shhk,” here, counts as an unsolicited response in relationship to an addressee’s negatively evaluated behavior, behavior that is negatively evaluated precisely because it perturbs the projects of adults. For both children and material things, then, these are interactional moments in which they are interpellated as immature or incapable: children are framed as mischievous, or *lisu*, and material things are thought to be afflicted by bad luck, or *qhinchá*. Relative to this field of inabilities, a relatively complete vision of a full, adult position becomes clear by way of contrast: one should be compliant and obedient and predictably not disorder inducing. In such a context, the project of overcoming novicehood requires moving beyond not just a particular ideology of childishness but also of materiality and alpaca-ishness.

These fields of relative inability are constructed according to a developmental or graduated logic, a fact that has consequences for processes of language socialization. Different kinds of agents are ideologically ranked as more or less capable, able, or discipline-able. In the Aymara case, the scale is adults > children > herding animals and moving things. This is evident in ideologies about who is understood to count as the most appropriate speakers and addressees of animal-oriented interjections. People view adults as the most appropriate speakers and herding animals and material things as the most appropriate addressees of these forms. Adults control and discipline, while animals and material things are positioned as acting in relatively immature ways within practices of labor and play. Children, however, can be either a speaker or addressee. They are appropriately positioned as relatively incapable or immature within adult social worlds; however, they also position other children (typically, younger ones), herding animals, and material things as needing to be regulated. Neither always a speaker nor always an addressee, children occupy a spot in this graduated scale of agency that is situated between the adult and the nonhuman animal/thing.

This example shows how a specific kind of directive helps to construct a graduated field of immaturity that includes children as well as nonhuman agents not traditionally

considered in studies of language socialization. Given the parallels between the Aymara context, the Kaluli, and the United States in this regard, this raises a question of some comparative importance: What would a theory of language socialization look like if it were to recognize this broader array of agents as potentially socializable? What might our theory look like if it were to recognize that only certain kinds of agents are framed as experiencing a trajectory “out of immaturity”?

REFRAMING SOCIALIZATION: TYPES OF IDEOLOGICAL TRAJECTORIES INTO OR OUT OF INABILITIES

Once we understand the complexity of many fields of inability, and consider the breadth of agents who fall within this field, we must consider whether and how these agents are understood as experiencing trajectories across these fields. Given the prominence of the concept “novice” or its analogs in the study of socialization, the most familiar type of trajectory is when some agent is understood as becoming more mature, adult-like, responsible, knowledgeable, or capable. In such a case, an agent is perceived as socialized “upward” within a hierarchy of inability. In the terminology we are developing here, we refer to such perceptions as *ideologies of growth*. Although this is the ideology that is most fully inscribed as normative in our educational systems, it is by no means the most common. Agents are also understood as incapable of change or growth. We refer to these as *ideologies of stagnation*. Finally, agents are also seen as becoming less mature, responsible, knowledgeable, or capable. These are *ideologies of atavism*.

We stress that these terms—ideologies of growth, stagnation, and atavism—are categories we use to classify ideologies that target the social pathways of individuals. We do not claim that agents are actually becoming less capable or returning to a less developed state (i.e., as “atavized”)—nor do we wield these terms as a typology of cultures. The question of which of these processes are rendered salient, as we saw with Tito and his mother, is determined neither by the character of these individuals as individuals (i.e., as genuinely being more capable) nor by a “culture of growth.” These terms are interpretive tools for making sensing of how the communities in question understand agents as moving (or not) across some graduated, ideological trajectory into or out of inability, tools that are especially useful in contexts where such trajectories are highly institutionalized. To be clear, as interpretive tools, these terms do not presuppose social worlds in which ideologies are uniform, even if the examples we discuss below do not highlight this complexity. As multiple scholars of language socialization have shown, cultural contexts, as well as the ideologies of inability that are a part of them, are always multiple and contested (Baquedano-López and Hernandez 2011; Fader 2009; Paugh 2012).

A benefit of this reframing is the purchase it provides on the sociopolitical character of semiotically mediated pro-

cesses of socialization. In all cases, the movement that agents experience relative to some notion of inability is a sociopolitical accomplishment. Who and what are understood as capable of change or are seen as susceptible to atavism and stagnation? Which agents are privileged enough to be seen as appropriately growing and learning in some sociocultural context? Or, to put it more technically: How do institutions, relationships of power, and semiotic resources conspire to make agents perceived as growing, stagnating, or atavizing relative to some local, ideological rendering of what counts as incapacity?² In what follows, we do not aim to give a comprehensive account of the full conceptual reach of this approach; we simply aim to show how the theory works and give a sense of its utility for future work, especially in contexts that are rigidly structured by ideological renderings of inability.

Ideologies of Growth

The most recognizable ideology of moving across a graduated scale of inability are ideologies of moving “upward”—of agents becoming more skillful, mature, learned, participatory, knowledgeable, expert, or even simply social. Although these kinds of processes have been well described, in our model they are at least partly transformed. For one, as discussed, the range of actors susceptible to growth is expanded, opening up the study of socialization onto other processes of becoming (animal training, domestication, engineering). Second, growing is framed as a fully sociopolitical process that depends on perceptions of both salience and timing. It is, in many cases, a privilege to be understood as an actor capable of learning, maturing, and becoming more complex relative to an ideologically normalized timescale. To be seen as growing, so long as that growth is seen as on time, is a heightened social status within some broader, power-laden system of difference.

In a series of articles focused on the socialization of masculinity among Indigenous Aymara-speaking boys, Smith (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016) has described a trajectory of growth that cuts across human/nonhuman lines (among others). Young children are ungendered, relatively nonhuman agents of disorder and mischief. Slightly older children can be gendered as masculine, speciated as human, and understood as relatively tractable yet still susceptible to deceitfulness and the evasion of challenges and complexity (characteristics linked in play to what it means to be gay). Older boys are capable of meeting challenges (i.e., tough) and being authoritative with respect to younger children and are understood as guardians of the moral order of child life, a persona that is tied to heterosexual masculinity. Taken together, these ideologies sketch out a trajectory of growth: from (ungendered) mischief and disorder, to a masculine form of deceitful participation, to a tough guardian of the way things should be done.

Approaching this trajectory as ideological shapes how one understands the character of its semiotic mediation.

Consider Marco, a three-year-old who had been pestering his brothers as they played a game of marbles. He tried to scrape the ground clean of the little holes that were the targets of his brothers' marbles, and he tried to bump his brothers as they played. As he set about to kick one of his brother's marble at a crucial moment, his brothers finally noticed what he was up to. One brother ran toward Marco while the oldest brother, Alberto, yelled "stop," using an animal-oriented interjection, "shhk shhk." In this moment, Alberto positioned Marco as the disorderly nonparticipant in child life. By using a form associated with the regulation of alpacas and sheep, Alberto assimilated his younger brother to a broader category of "immature" nonhuman actors. These forms also make salient the category of the tough, older, masculine guardian of child life. Alberto—an eleven-year-old and authorized user of a form like "shhk" with younger children—struggles here to mind his youngest brother while also keeping a marbles game in good order.

In some ways, what is at stake in this brief picture of Ay-mara child life appears similar to the classic objects of concern for theorists of language socialization. From Marco to Alberto, there is an implied trajectory of increasingly full, semiotically mediated participation in sociocultural context; within this implied, longitudinal trajectory, Marco is the novice. Despite these apparent similarities, however, the terms are different in our approach. Marco here is not a novice. Ideologically, he is an agent of ungendered disorder, and he is quite good at it (as are other agents like alpacas and llamas). Although there is a chance that Marco will one day become an Alberto, this trajectory cannot be captured in nonideological terms as an apolitical process of learning. Rather, he is scaling up an ideologically rendered form of becoming (i.e., "growing") from mischief to deception to guardianship. When rendered as an ideological process, it also becomes deeply sociopolitical: alpacas and sheep, female-identified children, and gay boys do not have the privilege of ascending this hierarchy (even if they have other possibilities for growth).

Ideologies of Stagnating and Atavizing

In contrast to agents such as Marco, who are perceived as on a trajectory of gaining abilities and skills, some subjects are ideologically positioned as stagnating or atavizing, as agents perceived as either standing still or returning to an inability. Although these ideologies have not been well theorized in the language socialization literature, they have been theorized in a number of classic developmental theories. In Freud's (1988) rendering, "regression" refers to a defense mechanism through which a person—when confronted with some new, troubling circumstance—reverts to a developmentally earlier strategy for adaptation. In Erikson's (1950) account, an individual navigates a series of eight psychosocial challenges. When an individual does not satisfactorily navigate some challenge, they might become developmentally "stuck"—or at least this unresolved issue might crop up later in the life course with negative effects. In our account,

these issues are transposed more fully into a sociopolitical idiom: How do systems of inequality work through positioning certain groups or agents as incapable of or relatively less capable of growth and learning, as susceptible to regression or getting stuck?

Ideologies of stagnating and atavizing help to create forms of difference tied to the conjunction of race, class, and language. Chaparro (2019) refers to this as a process of "raciolinguistic socialization." She discusses the example of Larissa, a working-class Latina student in a kindergarten two-way English/Spanish immersion classroom, who from the beginning of the academic year is framed as "behind" and "disadvantaged." To use our terminology, Larissa is positioned, ideologically, on a trajectory of stagnation relative to her peers—that is, as someone whose abilities get framed as relatively stalled. Ironically, she is positioned as unable in a domain of knowledge over which she has clear mastery (Spanish) relative to a (white, privileged) student who is—by way of comparison—recruited to a trajectory of capacity and growth out of novice Spanish-speaker status (even though Spanish is her nondominant language). This rich example, along with the literature discussed previously, shows how educational institutions and their semiotic resources conspire to differentially distribute ideological trajectories of atavizing, stagnation, and growth across race and class. This analysis also shows how our ideological reframing of novicehood might be relevant for current theories that set language and race into relationship without using a concept of socialization (e.g., theories of "raciolinguistic ideology" [Rosa and Flores 2017] and "linguistic racialization" [Chun and Lo 2016]).

Ideologies of stagnation or atavism need not only take the human life course as its timescale; often, the perceived timescale is evolutionary or phylogenetic. One familiar example is nineteenth-century cultural evolution theory, in which whole societies were constructed as stagnant and stuck in some earlier, primitive state (i.e., as atavized). Cultural evolutionists explicitly compared such societies to "children" and saw a process of ontogenetic human development characterized by growth as analogically recapitulated in an apparent phylogenetic trajectory of human societies (e.g., Tylor 1913, 24). Thus, Wake (1878, 7) wrote that both infants and Australian Aborigines are characterized by "an entire absence of moral principle." The difference between infants and Aborigines, for Wake, is that while infants' inabilities are within a trajectory of growth and development, Aborigines are rendered stagnant, stuck (behind) in phylogenetic time, with their inabilities perceived as permanent as opposed to temporary.

These examples indicate the political stakes of ideologies of stagnation or atavism across an ideologized and graduated field of inabilities. Many of these ideologies, following Rosa and Flores (2017), are tied to a "colonial history of modernity" through which distinctions between groups are endlessly reproduced as a way to divergently classify and de/value cultural practices, languages, or individuals. An

ideological conception of the novice further sharpens how the language socialization paradigm intersects with concerns about power, coloniality, and violence. Although we have highlighted the issue of race in this section, our approach can be used to highlight the issue of power and violence in a number of different settings of socialization. For example, language socialization scholars have shown how children diagnosed with autism may be produced, and produce themselves, as incapable (Ochs, Solomon, and Sterponi 2005; Sterponi and Shankey 2014). Our perspective gives tools for theorizing such productions of inability as an integral aspect of language socialization.

These brief discussions raise some questions tied to these conjunctions of power and exclusion in settings of socialization. To what extent are ideologies of stagnation and atavism at one timescale (e.g., the ontogenetic) used to analogically make sense of what are ideologically perceived as similar processes at some other timescale (e.g., the phylogenetic)? How systematically are ideologies of who is capable of growth, stagnation, or regression tied to broader ideological formations centered on racial, gender, sexual, age, cognitive, physical, or ontological difference? To what extent are ideologies about which agents can learn, which people are fully human, or which individuals are irredeemably immature, developmentally delayed, or liable to “infantile” or “animal” behavior also ways of bringing about these forms of difference?

CONCLUSION: RELATIVIZING SOCIALIZATION BEYOND LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION

Treating novicehood as an ideological category has a further and broader consequence: “socialization” itself becomes relativized. If the classic rendering of socialization emphasizes processes whereby novices become more fully cultural in some way, our approach suggests that this is just one among many processes whereby individuals position themselves or are positioned relative to ideologies of inability. When framed against the full range of possible ideological movements (including stagnating and atavizing), socialization theory based around “novices” stands out as partial and incomplete.

Once we relativize “socialization,” we can make sense of the multiple ideological categories that frame these trajectories, regardless of the ontological type of the agents implicated. Relatively few categories appear to make sense of stagnating and atavizing processes: regression, unresolved psychosocial challenges, delayed development, language gaps, deficits, and unlaunched adulthoods. More categories address ideologies of growth: socializing, training, disciplining, maturing, being designed or engineered, domesticating, learning, evolving, and developing. What kinds of trajectories of growth do people gesture toward when they describe a child, alpaca, or landscape as socialized, trained, tamed, or as learning, evolving, developing? What is assumed when people and institutions describe these trajectories using categories like regression, delay, becoming feral, or returning

to some wild state? With respect to the concerns of language socialization scholars more specifically, how do semiotic resources get divergently deployed across processes of learning or taming or regression? In posing these questions, it becomes clear how important it is to open our analyses to a broader ontological range of implicated actors. Without doing so, we would miss how categories like socialization are partly in continuity with categories like domestication. We would also miss how ideologies of socialization are embedded in the kind of sociopolitical work that frames individuals and groups as subhuman, animal-like, and machine-like. A broadened ontology here only helps to sharpen the sociopolitical stakes of socialization.


Once we relativize “socialization,” we need, also, to assemble its genealogy. How has the concept come to stand in as a sociocultural analog of the psychological concepts “development” and “learning”? Although this is far too large a task for our current project, this genealogy must, at least, trace its early-twentieth-century salience in sociology, its utility for post–World War II social science, its uptake in the study of culture and personality, its ongoing relationship with more fully psychological discourses on language acquisition and social development, its uptake in the language socialization paradigm, and the organizing role it plays in chronological age-graded educational institutions. How has this history foreclosed certain possibilities for the study of socialization? What becomes possible as we start to reassess this problem space? Following scholars such as Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) and Meek (2019), what might a decolonial approach to language socialization look like?

Finally, as we relativize the concept “socialization,” we need to do the same with our current framework. For one, these ideologies of growth, stagnation, and atavism suggest movement that is perceived as linear, or at least unidirectional. We emphasize that, although we have focused on these in this article, other scholars have suggested that these are likely only a subset of potential ideological trajectories of socialization. Here we are reminded of recent debates in evolution that have moved from images of trajectories of change as unidirectional to models of bushes with multiple branches and braided streams (Townsend 2015). Gottlieb’s (2004) account of the Beng life course has long shown the need for models of developmental ideologies in which people cycle between various subject positions (see also Bledsoe 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2002). Beng babies emerge from the afterlife where they speak all languages and know many things. Birth leads them to forget knowledge and abilities, things that they eventually remember. Many other practices of change across the life course suggest nonlinear movements: children who learn a language and then forget it as they move into new contexts; skills such as running or riding a bike can be trained, go dormant, and then retrained.

We suggest another way our model may need to be relativized. Questions of ability or inability appear to be highly salient in the current sociopolitical climate—potentially tied

to the globalizing nature of education and the concept of learning embedded in such institutions. But we must interrogate their limits. How much of the ideological salience of inability is embedded in the colonial history of modernity, in globalizing ideas of the life course, and in the spread of educational institutions? To what extent must ideological trajectories toward and away from inability (as well as the institutions that sustain them) be discarded and reimagined? Although ideologies of inability are widespread, we must consider whether the very concept of inability (and, especially, the highly graduated renderings of it) may provide special purchase on only a particular sociohistorical moment.

Whatever its special utility for the current moment, we put forward that our insight into the sociopolitical character of socialization (both the process itself and its study!) is likely to be of enduring use. Power relations are implicated in who gets access to privileged forms of learning and growth and who is denied or seen as less capable relative to these forms. We assert that studies of power and change, race and gender, must take into account this conception of the sociopolitical character of socialization. Much of the process of wielding power and creating subjects is entailed in this creation of—and positioning of entities into—relatively privileged forms of learning and growth (or their opposites: regression and stasis). How much more do we learn about gender, race, class, and other positions when we consider how they are subjected to the politics of socialization?

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NOTES

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1. The authors of this article contributed equally to this article. The ordering of authors was determined by three vigorous rounds of online rock, paper, and scissors.
2. These ideas are not always tied to disadvantage. For example, an ageless “eternal youthfulness” is a form of stagnation (i.e., never becoming “old”) that is a class privilege made possible by access to health care, anti-aging products, and lifelong access to healthy food and forms of exercise.

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