Aspects of Luo Socialization

Author(s): Ben G. Blount

Source: *Language in Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Oct., 1972), pp. 235-248

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4166686>

Accessed: 04/02/2014 11:56

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Language in Society*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Aspects of Luo Socialization¹

BEN G. BLOUNT

Department of Anthropology, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas

ABSTRACT

Socialization is defined as the incorporation of a child into society on the basis of social and linguistic interaction. Central to this process is a child's advancement in communicative skills. As a child progresses in linguistic competence, the structure of interaction changes to accommodate his new-found skills, and underlying these changes are the Luo attitudes and beliefs on child-rearing, language acquisition, and the position of children in society. (Socialization; speech acquisition; social interaction; language attitudes.)

INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this paper is a description of the socialization of Luo children during the first twenty months of their lives. Socialization is defined here as the incorporation of a child into society in terms of the child's ability to participate in social interaction. Accordingly, the major focus in this study is on the emergent social interaction process, the devices and means through which interaction is initiated, sustained and reinforced.

Central to the interaction process is language, both in terms of the acquisition of language by a child and the parental speech to which he is exposed. Indeed, the socialization process can profitably be viewed as the interplay among a

[1] The Luo represent the Southernmost extension of Nilotic people in East Africa. Linguistically and culturally they are closely related to the Acholi, Lango, and Alur of Uganda and the Nuer, Shilluk, and Dinka of the southern Sudan. In Kenya, the Luo live in the Districts (Siaya, Kisumu, and South Nyanza) which border on Lake Nyanza (formerly Victoria), and they number approximately 1,250,000.

The present study is based on research conducted in Sakwa Location, South Nyanza during fifteen months in 1967-8 and four months in 1971. The research was sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health Grant No. MH 12, 649-01 (1967-8) and by National Science Foundation Grant USDP GU-1598 (1971). In both instances, the position of Visiting Research Associate was awarded by the University of Nairobi - by the Institute for Development Studies in 1967-8 and the Institute of African Studies in 1971.

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Institute of African Studies Seminar (University of Nairobi), where insights were gained through seminar discussion. Particularly helpful were comments by Berndt Heine, Tom Gorman, David Kettel and Henry Anyumba. As well, I am especially indebted to Dell Hymes and Elise Padgug for their comments and suggestions. The author, though, must accept responsibility for any shortcomings of the paper.

child's acquisition of linguistic competence, the parental assessment of this competence, and the cultural expectancies brought to bear as they engage the child in social interaction. The communicative tasks which are set for a child are, in part, based on his linguistic ability. His competence, in turn, is affected by the nature of the tasks and the manner in which they are structured. The acquisition of linguistic competence thus forms an integral part of socialization, but the process should be viewed, dialectically, within a cultural context. Assessment of a child's ability or capacity is made in relation to some standard of behavior, i.e. a form of behavior to which cultural rules contribute and delimit. The parent's or caretaker's behavior must be interpreted within the context of cultural rules which serve to define the standard set for the child and which the child incorporates into his own cultural repertoire as he becomes socialized. The cultural rules become internalized and thus have operative potential in the child's interaction. The description of socialization, then, is at the same time an account of a culture, or at least of particular domains of a culture.

The communicative tasks which confront children during their first twenty months derive from a second source as well. In addition to the expectations of parents or caretakers, there is the necessity for children to communicate their needs for basic biological requirements such as food and drink. Of course, in time, communicative acts related to these biological needs become culturally regulated, but the needs are common to the human species and the communication of these needs by neonates is unlikely to be strongly culturally influenced.

Thus, communication of such needs affords a common standard of comparison. Cross-cultural comparison of socialization from birth to twenty months should provide a better understanding of both the communicative tools available to children and the initial cultural influences. The description of Luo socialization below is intended as a contribution toward those goals.

The study of socialization as defined and pursued here represents a pioneer effort in sociolinguistic research in East Africa. Only a limited number of studies on child-rearing in East African societies have been published (Ainsworth 1970; Fox 1967; Mayer 1970; Read 1960), and although they provide important information on socialization, they do not view language learning or language use as central to the socialization process. Otto Raum's *Chagga Childhood* (1940) furnishes more and valuable information on language usage, but again, linguistic competence as a factor in socialization is ancillary to his analysis and discussion. These authors of course had other concerns and should not be faulted uncritically for what they did not do, but their studies, by comparison, serve to highlight the new direction of the present study.

The author's interest in Luo socialization owes its origin to a project begun at the University of California, Berkeley, that has as its specific goals the cross-cultural study of language acquisition and speaking competence (cf. Slobin 1967 for a detailed account). After preparation of a *Field Manual* (Slobin *et al.* 1967),

ASPECTS OF LUO SOCIALIZATION

a number of individual research projects were initiated, of which the Luo study was one. The results from the studies hopefully will provide substantial data for productive cross-cultural comparisons, identification of linguistic and sociolinguistic universals, and contribution toward a theory of linguistic socialization. The first step in these directions is a description of aspects of socialization, as in the present article (cf. also case studies deriving from the Berkeley project: Blount 1969; Kernan 1969; Stross 1969).

THE FIRST NINE MONTHS

From birth to the age of approximately nine months, an infant's verbal abilities remain sharply restricted. When he needs the attention of others, he relies in the last resort on crying. As well, he acquires a distress signal [æ], which becomes louder and shriller as distress mounts. Other than these two devices, an infant's phonations have little communicative value. In the first five to six months of his life, he produces vowel-like sounds (cooing), which are often associated with states of contentment. Likewise, once an infant enters the babbling stage at approximately six months, back consonants [g, k, h], are often produced when he is content, for example after he has been fed (Lewis 1936).

The communicative value of an infant's phonations during the first nine months remains basically undifferentiated. Almost exclusively, their effect is to attract and demand attention. The signals may be repeated often, but once an infant's immediate needs are satisfied, communication stops. The basic motivation for communication on the part of the infant is likely to be not social but physical and physiological, and therefore all children probably follow similar paths of development during this period (cf. Blount 1970).

Societies differ in terms of the values adults attach to their interactions with infants. The adults may insist on using baby-talk with infants only a few days old, as many American mothers do, and they may be tireless in their efforts to elicit reaction from the children. The effects of such behavior on the development of infants are not clear, although, most likely, the major social rewards are derived by the parents. Not until a child reaches the age of nine months, approximately, is he able to benefit directly in social interaction terms.

Luo adults' behavior towards infants throughout the socialization period is dominantly pragmatic. In particular, they realize that verbal interaction with infants is a one-way process, as the infants are not yet capable of reciprocating. Luo parents and nursemaids, of course, do talk to infants. Mothers in maternity wards were observed saying *misawa* 'hello' and *ingima* 'you-are-well?' to one-day old infants. Nursemaids frequently ask infants *iywak nang'o?* 'why-are-you-crying?' and *idwa ang'o?* 'what-do-you-want?' but the input remains infrequent and there clearly is no expectation that the infant can interact or even understand the intent of what was said. To expect reactions from the infants was considered

impractical, and Luo adults appeared ill-at-ease whenever they were requested to elicit cooing or babbling from very young children. Their attempts were always brief and sparing, interspersed with embarrassed laughter and explanation to the observers that the child was too young to understand or that he could smile but not talk.

It should be noted that the inability of infants to interact verbally is not sufficient to account for the low frequency of speech addressed to them. In fact, in some societies, infants are thought to have a special language which can be understood by a specialist. Among the Wishram Indians of the north-western coast of the United States for example, old people may specialize in interpreting the vocalizations of infants (Hymes 1966: 133). The Ashanti of Ghana attribute fetuses with the ability to understand, and questions may be addressed to a fetus (Hogan 1968: 170). Likewise, Ashanti infants in the cooing and babbling stages are thought to understand speech addressed to them. In contrast, the Luo attribute no communicative content to infant cooing and babbling, other than to recognize that the infant is content.

In addition to the low frequency of speech input for Luo infants, there was a general absence of baby-talk features. The input did not differ stylistically from speech to much older children, except that the volume of speech was lowered. Sudden loud noises were known to frighten infants and input was accordingly soft and low. However, as noted, there were no special linguistic features of the type to attract attention or to facilitate interaction. Infants were not addressed frequently by their names, and such verbal instruction as, e.g., sit down, say mama, etc., were seldom heard. In brief, Luo adults do not consider infants able to benefit from input or instructions, and they make no attempt to engage them in interaction. In fact, to encourage infant verbal behavior would be viewed as irregular. An infant whose linguistic skills were extremely advanced at an early age would be regarded as abnormal, subjecting the infant and his family to suspicion from their neighbors.² Accordingly, no responsible person will risk the consequences of furthering linguistic development during an infant's first nine months.

NINE TO FOURTEEN MONTHS: EMERGENCE OF LINGUISTIC INTERACTION

Once Luo children reach the age of nine months, they begin to exhibit a greater awareness of the objects and activities around them. They become especially interested in small objects, grasping, examining and playing with any that happen to be nearby. Furthermore, once they focus attention on an object or the activity of a person they have the capacity to maintain the interest for several minutes. Often their attention span is short-lived, lasting only several seconds, but they

[2] I am indebted to Henry Anyumba for this point.

are far more advanced in their ability to focus and maintain attention than in previous months.

Together with their heightened awareness, Luo children at nine months begin to acquire the ability to imitate sounds. They listen to the speech of others, often looking from speaker to speaker, as if they are trying to locate the source of the sounds. Not infrequently, they attempt to imitate some of the sounds they hear, particularly when they are aware that the sounds are addressed to them and when optimal conditions are provided. As the children are still restricted in their interaction potential, despite their recent advances, the responsibility for structuring interaction is incumbent on the Luo adults or nursemaids.

The behavior of Luo adults toward their children alters radically when the children begin to demonstrate their new-found abilities. The adults apply a new set of behavioral expectations, one which capitalizes on the children's capacities for focusing and maintaining attention and for imitating input speech. As well, the expectancies are based on the realization that accommodation must be made for the still limited skills of the children. The input is adjusted so as to be consistent with the children's linguistic abilities, and the interaction structure remains simple but basic. At a more fundamental level, the most marked change in parental expectations is the attitude that children can now be counted as social actors and that they should be accorded that status.

The first task confronting Luo adults when they desire to interact with a child is to attract his attention. The Luo employ a variety of techniques, the most common being the use of a child's name. Whereas in previous months, a child was seldom addressed by his name, he now is hailed by it constantly. A child's name may be repeated with intermittent pauses ten or twelve times, until he recognizes that his attention is demanded, and he acknowledges the demand acoustically, or visually by looking at the speaker. As another technique, adults capitalize on the children's penchant for small objects. A key-ring, a spoon or even a stick or piece of paper may be used to attract a child's attention and to entice him into interaction.

Other devices serve a double function of capturing a child's attention and of serving as the appropriate code for linguistic interaction. One such device is whispering. Aware of the fact that children react adversely to loud speech, Luo parents speak lowly and softly. Frequently, they speak to the children in a low but intense whisper. In the beginning stages of a child's development, whispering is a successful device for capturing his attention, due to the appropriate volume and perhaps, also to the contrast with other speech. In subsequent development, a new function for whispering emerges, although it continues to be an attention-getting device as well. Whispering, in time, comes to be an intensifier within the dyadic addressor-addressee relationship. Third parties are excluded from sharing the message, as indeed, one dimension of the message is that only one particular receiver is intended as the recipient. Furthermore, there is the implication that a

special relationship holds between the two participants, and the shared knowledge of this relationship sanctions the appropriateness of the code. In one sense, the parent and child establish collusion, bracketing off their relationship from the remainder of the environment and thereby intensifying the interaction routine. Whispering attracts a child's attention, and in the course of development he learns that whispered speech indicates that he and he alone is to receive the message, that his relationship with the sender warrants the exclusion of the remainder of the world, and he can proceed to interact, oblivious to all but the interaction.

Baby-talk features also serve as attention signals, although their primary function appears to be stylistic appropriateness. The vast majority of utterances addressed to children in this early developmental period contain such features – falsetto, exaggerated intonation, and vowel gemination – which occur usually as a set, although any individual feature may appear alone. For example, /mama/ may be uttered with only double vowel gemination [maa:ma:], but far more common

is [maa:ma:] in falsetto. Parents use these features liberally, almost exclusively, once Luo children attain a minimum of interaction proficiency, and the children learn to recognize the style-set as a signal for them to perform. Falsetto and exaggerated intonation appear to have greater signalling strength than vowel gemination, as they have greater success in attracting a child's attention. The degree of contrast between falsetto and normal register and between exaggerated and standard intonation operates as a strong code marker, embellishing the speech input to children, and maximizing its attention-attracting potential.

As noted, the baby-talk serves as a model for the children to imitate. The contrasts which are designed to attract attention also operate to select the features of speech which the children learn first. They imitate the features which attract their attention, and the result is highly stylized early speech. Children in the early one-word utterance stage tend to speak with intonation even more exaggerated than the input, and one child at fourteen months spoke almost exclusively in falsetto and with extensive vowel gemination.

The relatively extensive vowel duration assists in the imitation process rather straightforwardly. Sustained for a longer time, the exposure is greater and the recognition possibly enhanced, furthermore, lengthy vowels at this stage are consistent with earlier development, when almost all of the vowel sounds produced by the children were sustained. This provides another instance of parents taking stock of the children's ability and using it to advantage. Additionally, control of vowel length is a learned feature. Proper timing for vowel closure requires breath and articulation control, which the children have not yet mastered. In the cooing and early babbling stages, children produce lengthy vowels; adults likewise provide lengthy vowels at the onset of imitation for interactional reasons, and once the children have progressed into one-word utterance stage,

ASPECTS OF LUO SOCIALIZATION

they learn, through hearing and imitating correct forms, the proper vowel length for individual terms.

As indicated, Luo parents dramatically alter their speech to young children when the children develop the ability to focus attention and to imitate speech sounds. The frequency of input increases markedly, attention-getting devices become common, and baby-talk style predominates. These new speech characteristics all assist in the children's linguistic development, providing models and reinforcement, but they contribute most directly to development by encouraging social interaction. A child learns from the attention-attracting devices that he is to concentrate his attention, that he has been signalled to be attentive as something will occur to reward his compliance. The reward may be food, drink or speech which is tailored especially for him. If he responds to the input, attempting to imitate it, he often hears either an imitation in return, or more likely a repetition of the original sound. Mutual imitation is a characteristic of Luo child-adult interaction at this stage of the children's development. Not infrequently, several exchanges will occur before the interaction frame is terminated. In one instance, for example, the following interchange was recorded from a twelve-month old child and his elder sister:

Sister	Child
[ma:]	[mæ]
[ma:]	[mæ:]
[ma:]	[mæ:]
[ma:]	[ma:]
[ma:]	[ma:]

Aside from the obvious phonological instruction contained in the interchanges, a more subtle form of learning is engendered. The structuring of interaction is underway; concerted regulated action unfolds between the participants. Through experience the children learn that one act of speech follows and indeed calls for another. In effect, taking turns is established, a pattern which is social in nature and which must be learned. Mutual imitation between parent and child initiates the child's learning of conversation structure, even before true linguistic forms are present.

Social interaction appeared to be a rewarding experience for the children. One consistent feature of the nascent interaction was mutual satisfaction and at times exhilaration. Single exchanges between caretaker and child produces smiles, multiple ones apparent joy, and interchanges of five or six terms evoked laughter from the caretaker and squealing frenzy from the child. As each round progressed, the children's verbalizations became louder and louder, climaxing in shrieks of joy and accompanied by flailing of hands and feet. Clearly, the interaction was a pleasurable activity.

The complex of interaction and development which begins at approximately

nine months for Luo children continues with mainly quantitative changes for a period of four or five months. Throughout this period, the children's attention-spans increase and their abilities to imitate improve. Interaction becomes more frequent, and the children become more adept at completing rounds. The social contract of turn-taking is reinforced, and as well, the children advance in their acquisition of linguistic skills.

During the course of four or five months, the children's repertoire of phones undergoes a process of convergence. From a multiple of random phones, they retain six predominant ones. Four of these are consonants [m, d, ŋ, g], which contrast on the dimensions of oral/nasal and compact/diffuse, and two are vowels [a, i] which contrast on the dimensions grave/acute, (front/back) and compact/diffuse (Blount 1970). Convergence results ultimately from phonetic control, which is acquired through imitation, repetition and tailoring of input by the adults. Acquisition of phonetic control by the children has a direct influence on the increase of completed round, and in addition, the children develop the phonetic skills prerequisite for their entry into one-word utterance stage. The same dimensions of contrast found in the late babbling stage, front/back, compact/diffuse and oral/nasal, constitute the phonological contrasts of the early one-word stage (Blount 1971).

To illustrate the relationship between linguistic and interaction training, we can examine two changes initiated by Luo parents during the period under consideration. Firstly, parents increase the number of syllables per utterance. Whereas at nine months, less than one-half of the input utterances contained more than one syllable, at fourteen months almost all input contained at least two. The majority of the disyllabic utterances were reduplications, such as /mama/, /baba/ and /tata/. The reduplicated forms facilitate phonetic control and the learning of code features such as intonation contours and vowel length. The earlier monosyllabic forms, on the other hand, were more convenient to imitate, thus reflecting the major concern of the parents at that time, enticing the children to interact.

The second example concerns subtle alterations in parental speech. Their input continues to be laced with baby-talk features, but the features are used more selectively. Instead of the features co-occurring as a set, falsetto and exaggerated intonation are frequently omitted, especially after interaction has begun. The complete set of features still appears as a catalyst for interaction, and it may be involved if a child is reluctant to participate. Otherwise, the input tends more and more to approximate unmarked speech style, and the earlier more stylized variety begins to assume a specialized function.

FOURTEEN TO TWENTY MONTHS: TOWARD SELF-SUFFICIENCY

At thirteen or fourteen months of age, Luo children advance into the one-word utterance stage, a stage of their lives characterized by their use of single words as

their predominant mode of speech. The transition into this stage is not abrupt. Both children and their socializers rely on earlier accomplishments, using pre-established skill and techniques. The earlier forms are not lost, but rather they acquire new content and function. The function of sound-units as indices of social interaction is maintained, although another function emerges. The units serve as the means through which the linguistic forms are imbued with meaning. To illustrate how this process unfolds, we can trace the semantic development of the three terms which appear as the first lexical items for most Luo children.

Two of the terms /mama/ and /baba/ are, at first, allomorphs with the common meaning 'caretaker'. Both forms are frequently uttered by Luo children at the terminal phase of babbling, at which time many of the children's utterances are spontaneous as opposed to elicited. Spontaneously produced [mama] and [baba] attract attention of parents, and through repeated instances of parental response to the terms, children learn that they now have another signalling device. They can utter [mama] or [baba], produce the distress signal [æ] or in the last resort, cry. A few weeks after children master the allomorphs /mama~baba/, separate morphemic status is effected through selective response to the children's output. A child's mother responds to /mama/, his father to /baba/, and reinforcement is provided through mutual imitative exchanges.

The lexical item /miya/ 'give-me' comes to acquire meaning in a similar fashion as /mama/ and /baba/, although in this case, objects are the foci of interaction.³ Capitalizing on a child's interest in small objects and on his need for food and drink, caretakers practice handing objects back and forth to a child, accompanying each exchange with the exclamation [mì:ya]. Inevitably, the child will imitate the form, prompting his caretaker to hand over the object. The caretaker will then extend her hand to receive the object, say [mì:ya], and the interaction proceeds accordingly. Eventually the child learns that objects will be given to him if he says /miya/, although at first, he makes certain the message is conveyed by extending his hand as well.

The one-word utterance stage begins for Luo children at 13-14 months and continues for 5-6 months. Their progress consists firstly of vocabulary acquisition which expands at an ever-increasing rate. Lexical development is continuous, although some discontinuities are evident in the socialization process. For example, some children continue to babble after they have entered the one-word stage, but babbling now is relegated to the privacy of play. Children babble when they are alone, and if they become aware that others are listening to their performance, they become silent. This behavior itself gives testimony for the strong social nature of language, even at its inception. Whenever another person displays an interest in the children's verbalizations, the private language of babbling

[3] The form /miya/ is an inflected imperative of the verb /miyo/ 'to give', with the first person object /-a/ suffixed. For the children, though, the form is most likely monomorphemic and can perhaps best be glossed as 'want' or 'need'.

becomes inappropriate, and one must resort to the shared conventions of social language.

The social nature of early language is reinforced by the behavior of the children's nursemaids, who increasingly assume responsibility for the care of children during this period. The young girls insist on Luo words as the medium for interaction, refusing to imitate or respond to babbling, and coaxing the children to use words. The children are allowed to babble, but not in interaction with other people.

Linguistic and social instruction for the children proceeds by example and practice. Instruction by example builds, once again, on the child's imitative capacity. The nursemaids point to, or hold, objects naming them for the children. The children repeat the sounds and learn that particular sounds are associated with particular objects. Actions and states of being are similarly labeled and learned. When a child is given *kwon* 'bread', for example, he is told *čam* 'eat', and as he ingests the bread, he is asked *ičamo?* 'you-are-eating?'. When a child displays symptoms of fatigue, he will be asked *iol?* 'you-are-tired?' or *inindo?* 'you-(want)-to-sleep?'.⁴

Instruction also proceeds in the absence of supportive objects or actions. Nursemaids practice naming with the children, reciting names of objects with which the children are familiar, but which are not immediately present. Initially, the children appear confused, looking about in search of the objects, although eventually they recite the names after the nursemaids. Once they overcome their initial hesitancy, the children readily name unseen objects, although they still are reluctant when a new term is introduced.⁴ Activity of this type must have a direct role in the formation of semantic displacement, whereby a referent can be conceived in the absence of immediate, direct stimuli and related to the exigencies of the moment. Displacement, as a fundamental property of language, assumes greater importance in later linguistic development, but at this stage, it represents one kind of discontinuity in the learning process. When children first encounter the discontinuity, they have difficulty understanding the change, as evidenced by their reluctance to name objects which they do not see.

Another important factor in Luo children's lexical development is parental guidance in the choice of items to be learned. The parental expectations reflect a practical, utilitarian approach to socialization. The first terms, as we have seen, are caretakers' names and generalized term for 'want/need'. Secondly, the terms for water and basic foods and other family members are selected, and a child is drilled in their use in daily-routine situations. Next to be acquired are the names of household objects and utensils, especially those associated with food. Con-

[4] A new term has to be identified in terms of its phonetic constituents, which requires more effort than repetition of a constellation of phonetic items which have phonemic status. The children's reluctance to repeat these new forms is attributable in part to this difficulty, but their hesitation in naming unseen objects is also a factor.

comitantly, the children learn terms for basic activities such as eating, drinking, going, wanting, bringing, and sleeping. In general, the bulk of communication with children of this age has the effect first of expanding their attention-getting repertoire, secondly of increasing the specificity of their need-labels, and thirdly of instructing them in the homestead's affairs and operations.

Throughout this process, the children become increasingly able to express and differentiate their needs and are able to participate more actively in the household routines. In this latter respect, they are being prepared for the tasks and chores which will later be assigned to them. A large portion of the transport of objects from one part of the homestead to another in the daily routine is done by children. They are expected to respond to the frequent demands for water, utensils, small objects, etc. Even very young children are given small specific tasks. Children who still toddle unsteadily may be requested to carry a spoon across the room or be sent into the house to fetch a drinking-gourd.

Luo parental expectations have still other dimensions that affect socialization. One such dimension concerns the type of comprehension that is expected of children. At the beginning of the one-word stage, the children are expected to understand that their task is to interact, by imitating and reciting names. Later, they are expected to understand the principle that sounds and objects may be systematically related and that the relationship is permanent. After mastery of a small number of lexical items, children are forced to rely on these terms to inform adults of their needs. Crying suffices in the last resort, but children learn that they cannot depend on crying alone, especially as they become more verbally advanced. Their only rewards come to be total neglect of their plight or requests to keep quiet. They must learn that their newly acquired linguistic forms have practical functions and that they are required to use the forms accordingly.

The children are required also to understand commands, both positive and negative. Most positive commands contain lexical items that are in the children's vocabulary, and thus comprehension is not difficult. Negative commands, however, contain items which appear in the children's speech only much later. The negative command particle itself, *kik*, does not appear until the children are approaching the age of three.⁵ For comprehension, the children probably depend on extra-linguistic features such as intonation and volume, but whatever the bases for comprehension are, negative commands regulate the behavior of the children and exclude them from certain activities.

Restrictions of the children's activities are, for the most part, designed to protect them from harm and injury. Their exclusion from one activity, however, is on social grounds and is part and parcel of Luo social behavior. Children are

[5] Although the negative command particle *kik* is an input speech item for the children, it is not one which they are encouraged to imitate. Another factor which accounts for its absence, however, is the degree of cognitive complexity required for a negative transformation. The children are not sufficiently advanced to use the form correctly.

not allowed to participate in adult social gatherings except ritually. When a gathering is at a child's home, he is expected to greet the guests on their arrival. The greeting consists usually of the verbal formula *misawa* and shaking hands. Even young children who cannot talk are brought forward to shake hands, but after the greeting routine, the children are expected to retire from the immediate area and above all, not to disrupt the activity. Young children are physically removed by their nursemaids and kept away from the activity.

One effect of this age segregation, which continues in one form or another throughout the course of an individual Luo's life, is a strengthening of peer-group relationships, and in the case of young children, a shift of socialization responsibility to their siblings. As a result, socialization is less ritualized and a stronger emphasis is placed on learning through observation and example. The younger children in a homestead follow the older ones around the homestead, observing and imitating their behavior. The necessity for sanctioning behavior through speech is minimized, and indeed, a striking feature of Luo socialization is the absence of direct linguistic sanctions. If a child interrupts adults by being noisy, he is not admonished verbally, but simply removed from the immediate vicinity. Likewise, if he misbehaves, efforts are made to divert his attention. Only in a last resort will direct scolding and physical punishment be applied.

The avoidance of negative sanctions applies to the children's speech as well. If they do not wish to take part in naming sessions, no pressure is applied. When they do not talk, they are asked, somewhat rhetorically, *idagi?* 'you-refuse?' and the matter ends there. Even if the children refuse to honor the all-important greeting routine, they are asked *ok imos wendo?* 'you-don't-greet-visitor?' and nothing more is said. Mistakes in pronunciation are similarly treated. When a child makes a mistake, the correct form may be repeated for him but no special effort is made to point out the error or to persuade the child that the correct form should be used.

CONCLUSION

In this description of early Luo socialization, stress has been placed on the importance of interaction to acquisition of language. The former precedes the latter developmentally and provides the mechanisms through which language is acquired. At the same time, interaction forms the basis for the social nature of language, as language becomes the major instrument of communication. These two interrelated phenomena constitute the core of socialization, the process which transforms biological individuals into social and cultural beings.

Interaction builds on the bases of biological development and needs. A child's ability to focus attention and to utter and imitate sounds is biologically determined, and biological needs must be satisfied, but cultural responses to these factors are organized differently. Cultural diversity in socialization embarks

ASPECTS OF LUO SOCIALIZATION

from a common, unitary base. This discussion has attempted to describe how Luo culture is organized in relation to these biological factors and what some of the individual features of Luo socialization are. Other than the specifics of language and interaction, three features in particular seem to orient Luo socialization.

The first of these features is a strong emphasis on practicality. At the point in a child's development when he displays a potential for interaction, a favorable environment is provided. Once interaction begins to develop, phonological training is instigated, and lexical acquisition ensues. Guidance in lexical development is designed to enhance a child's ability to deal more directly with the environment in the satisfaction of his needs. Having achieved some proficiency in this latter respect, linguistic instruction subsides and greater reliance is placed on learning through observation and example.

A second feature of Luo socialization is the general absence of direct, negative sanctions. Throughout the early socialization period, children are encouraged in their performances but seldom criticized or pressured. Negative commands are largely restricted to instances where a child endangers himself or others. Children are encouraged to interact, but they are not rebuked if they refuse. The strongest threat recorded in the observations was a reward denial when a child refused to talk. He was told by his mother that he wouldn't be given a biscuit if he didn't talk.

The third feature is a corollary to the second, namely that the absence of negative sanctions accords the children a high degree of individual freedom. They may interact if they desire; if they refuse, they are merely exercising their own prerogative and no one questions or contests this right. This attitude toward the children's expression of their own volition is underscored in the Luo belief that one has to please children to secure their co-operation. If a Luo mother wants her twenty-month old son to co-operate in some activity, she may use a variety of honorifics in addressing him. These may be special nicknames for children, such as *Nyambuoro* or *Nyadundo* 'Little-one', or they may be terms of respect, such as *mzee* 'elder/important person'. If a child's mother especially wants to please him, she will address her son by the most honored term of all, *baba*, 'father'.

These three features – practicality, absence of direct negative sanctions, and emphasis on individual freedom – appear to be the defining characteristics of what might be labeled the *Luo Type* of linguistic socialization. In this type, parents first emphasize form of interaction above content of interaction, i.e. the vocal component of interaction need not have semantic content. Once interaction is established, it serves as a medium for children's linguistic development, which in the Luo case is directed toward early self-sufficiency for them. Independence and self-sufficiency, as strong cultural values of the Luo, find expression not only in early socialization but in childhood behavior in general. A young girl at the age of 5–6 may become the principal caretaker for a younger sibling, assuming the responsibility for feeding the child, protecting him from harm or

danger, and catering in general to his needs. Young boys may be given the responsibility for herding the family cattle, and for several hours of the day, they tend the herd, even though the boys may be only 7–8 years of age. In effect, children are expected to develop early the ability to organize their activities and provide for themselves and younger siblings. They do so with a minimum of adult participation. The absence of supervision and corresponding strong emphasis on individuality and self-sufficiency have been noted by numerous researchers as a characteristic of the Luo and closely related Nilotic groups (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Sytek 1965; Lonsdale 1964).

The *Luo Type* of linguistic socialization appears to be based on dimensions which are important themes in Luo society. Other studies of linguistic socialization may serve to define additional types and provide a basis on which the nature, range, and causes of differing types can be explained. In Ashanti society, the expectation that infants can comprehend input speech and that infants serve as a link between man and nature (Hogan 1968) most likely has a direct bearing on linguistic socialization. One would expect that Ashanti linguistic socialization is different in type from that of the Luo but further documentation is needed to substantiate this point.

REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1970). *Infancy in Uganda: infant care and the growth of love*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Blount, B. G. (1969). Acquisition of language by Luo children. (Working Paper No. 19, Language-Behaviour Lab.) Berkeley: University of California.
- (1970). The pre-linguistic system of Luo children. *AL* 12. 326–42.
- (1971). Socialization and pre-linguistic development among the Luo of Kenya. *SWJA* 27. 41–50.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1940). *The Nuer*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fox, L. K. (ed.) (1967). *East African childhood: three versions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hogan, H. M. (1968). An ethnography of communication among the Ashanti. (Penn-Texas Working Papers in Sociolinguistics, No. 1.) Austin: University of Texas.
- Hymes, D. (1966). Two types of linguistic relativity. In W. Bright (ed.), *Sociolinguistics*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kernan, K. T. (1969). The acquisition of language by Samoan children. (Working Paper No. 23, Language-Behaviour Research Lab.) Berkeley: University of California.
- Lewis, M. M. (1936). *Infant speech: a study of the beginnings of language*. New York: Harcourt and Brace.
- Lonsdale, J. M. (1964). *A political history of Nyanza, 1835–1945*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge.
- Mayer, P. (ed.) (1970). *Socialization: the approach from social anthropology*. London: Tavistock.
- Raum, O. F. (1940). *Chagga childhood: a description of indigenous education in an East African tribe*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Slobin, D. I. (ed.) (1967). *A field manual for the cross-cultural study of the acquisition of communicative competence*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Sytek, W. (1966). *A history of land consolidation in Central Nyanza, 1956–1962*. Papers, East African Institute of Social Research. Makerere, Uganda.