

Language Socialization Research and French Language Education in Africa: A Cameroonian Case Study

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Abstract: This article reports on exploratory ethnographic research on language acquisition and use in a village located in the Mandara Mountains, Cameroon. The study indicates that members of this community share several beliefs and practices related to multilingual communicative competence and its development. In the school attended by children of this village, classroom practices of communication and language socialization differ significantly from those of the community. Discontinuities between community and classroom practices and their implications for French acquisition by children of this community are discussed. The article concludes with a discussion of how language socialization research can contribute to our understanding of community/classroom discontinuities and their consequences for classroom French acquisition, and thus to efforts to improve French language pedagogical practice in Africa.

Résumé : Cet article décrit une étude ethnographique exploratoire menée sur l'acquisition et l'utilisation des langues dans un village multilingue situé dans les monts Mandara au Cameroun. L'étude indique que des membres de cette communauté partagent plusieurs croyances et pratiques concernant la compétence communicative multilingue et son développement. À l'école fréquentée par des enfants de ce village, les pratiques de communication et de la socialisation de langue diffèrent de celles de la communauté. Ces discontinuités et leurs implications pour l'apprentissage du français en milieu scolaire par des enfants de cette communauté sont discutées. L'article conclut en discutant de la contribution que la recherche en socialisation de langue peut faire à notre compréhension des discontinuités entre salle de classe et communauté et leurs conséquences pour l'apprentissage du français, ainsi qu'aux efforts d'améliorer les méthodes d'enseignement de langue française en Afrique.

Introduction

This article argues for the contribution to be made to French language education in Africa by language socialization research – the study of how novices are socialized through language and socialized to use language in culturally specific ways (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b, 1996). This argument is based on findings from exploratory ethnographic research on language acquisition and use in a village located in the Mandara Mountains, Cameroon. The study indicates that members of this community share several beliefs and practices related to multilingual communicative competence and its development. In the school attended by children of this village, classroom practices of communication and language socialization differ significantly from community practices and reflect the teacher's different view of language acquisition and use. In this article I will discuss the discontinuities between community and classroom practices and their implications for French acquisition by children of this community. I will then discuss the contribution language socialization research can make to our understanding of community/classroom discontinuities and their consequences for classroom French acquisition, and thus to efforts to improve French language pedagogical practice in Africa.

French language education in Africa

Since the 1970s, French language education in Africa has been declared by many to be in crisis. This crisis is characterized by low student proficiency in French, high rates of failure and grade level repetition, and low rates of student retention. Many researchers attribute these problems to the linguistic and cultural gaps between home and school (Champion, 1986; Dumont, 1986, 1990, 1992, 1993; Dumont & Maurer, 1995; Makouta-Mboukou, 1973; Manessy, 1992, 1994; Mercier-Tremblay, 1982; Mutomé, 1982; Tchegho, 1981).

Efforts have been made to understand and to bridge these gaps. African varieties of French have been described (e.g., de Feral, 1993; Equipe IFA, 1988), and sociolinguistic studies have sought to ascertain the extent and domains of French usage (e.g., Juillard, 1994). Research centres such as Le Centre de linguistique appliquée à Dakar (CLAD) and La Section de linguistique appliquée de l'Université fédérale du Cameroun (SLAC) have used error analysis and contrastive analysis to develop pedagogical methods and materials for African students

(Champion, 1986; Dumont, 1984, 1986). Textbooks have been adapted to include African themes and images. SLAC's series of textbooks and teacher's manuals, *La Canne et le coussinet* (published by Edicef), is one example of such linguistic and cultural adaptation.

Despite such efforts, scholastic achievement is on the decline in northern Cameroon (Tourneux & Iyébi-Mandjek, 1994). In the Far North Province, two-thirds of the children who start primary school do not complete it, and only a small proportion of primary school graduates complete the six-year cycle within the statutory period (Tourneux & Iyébi-Mandjek). Inadequate French skills are by far the most common reason for a student not to be advanced to the next grade level (Martin, 1982; Tourneux & Iyébi-Mandjek, 1994).

Two current approaches to innovation in French language education in Africa call for research into communicative practice. The approach known as *le français langue de scolarisation* (Cuq, 1991; Vigner, 1987, 1992) seeks to develop French instruction specifically for instruction in French. Research into classroom communication is motivated by the need to identify and analyze the communicative skills required for successful participation in school. Critics of this approach claim that by focusing exclusively on scholastic communicative competencies, *le français langue de scolarisation* exaggerates the gap between home and school (Dumont & Maurer, 1995) and ignores the linguistic reality surrounding the African child (Dumont, 1990, 1992; Manessy, 1992, 1994). Both Dumont and Manessy argue that French language education must take into account language contact phenomena such as multilingualism and local norms of French usage, or *normes endogènes*. Their approach advocates the de-stigmatization of local norms and their use as a point of reference in classroom French instruction. This approach calls for the study of communicative practices outside the classroom in order to understand the competencies – in French and in African languages – that children bring from their community to their classroom learning of French. Dumont (1990) proposes that such research may reveal naturalistic first and second language learning strategies that could be used to improve French language pedagogy.

Language socialization theory

Language socialization theory offers a framework for the study of communicative practices in home and school communities that integrates anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and sociology – disciplines long acknowledged as crucial to educational research in Africa but too seldom combined (Dumont & Maurer, 1995; Mateene, Nwachukwu, &

Dalby, 1979; Santerre & Mercier-Tremblay, 1982). Based on the premise that language acquisition and culture acquisition are interdependent, language socialization theory studies the interaction of these two processes towards the better understanding of both (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995).

Language socialization research examines recurrent communicative interactions between novice (or less competent) members and expert (or more competent) members of a group in order to understand how such interactions shape novices' development of communicative competence. Further, by embedding the microanalysis of novice-expert interactions in the broader ethnographic study of the community, language socialization research explores how 'communicative practices of experts and novices are organized by and organize cultural knowledges, understandings, beliefs, and feelings' (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1996, p. 255). Language socialization research has provided insight into culturally specific ways of using, teaching, and learning language in many different settings (e.g., Demuth, 1986; Heath, 1983; Kulick, 1992; Ochs, 1988; Palotti, 1996; Peirce, 1995; Poole, 1992; Rymes, 1997; Schieffelin, 1990; Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1986; Siegal, 1996; Willet, 1995).

When first starting school, a child relies on ways of communicating and learning acquired in her community (Johnson, 1995). For many children, however, the language behaviours expected at home are significantly different from those required at school, and such discontinuity has been shown to have implications for educational practice (e.g., Boggs, 1985; Christie & Harris, 1985; Crago, 1992; Heath, 1983, 1986; Phillips, 1983). When teachers are unfamiliar with community patterns of language use and interaction, they can easily misread students' abilities and intentions and may use styles of instruction that conflict with community norms (Delpit, 1995). If the behaviours and skills acquired at home are impeded or punished and those of the classroom are not explicitly taught, the child will have great difficulty participating successfully in classroom activities (Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Johnson, 1995).

In her study of primary language socialization in two Inuit communities, Crago (1992) observed that Inuit children learned from their caregivers to communicate in ways very different from those expected by their non-Inuit teachers. Connecting this incongruity with the difficulties experienced by Inuit students in classroom learning of second languages and with the frustrations expressed by their teachers, Crago argues that second language (L2) teaching strategies must take into account culturally specific patterns of novice-expert communicative interaction.

In the community where the present study was conducted, children are socialized to use their primary language (L1) or languages in ways quite different from those required at school. Furthermore, children are socialized to use one or more second languages before they ever enter the French language classroom. Having been exposed to more than one language from birth, and having watched family members and neighbours learn and use L2s, the children of this multilingual community bring to the classroom considerable experience – personal and vicarious – with second language acquisition and use. Despite their multilingual competencies, most children of this community have great difficulty learning French in the classroom.

The study

This article is based on two periods in the field. While working as a community health and development agent from 1992 to 1994, I observed communicative interaction in the community and the local school and gained first-hand experience of what it was like to be a linguistic novice in the Mandara Mountains. Systematic data collection was conducted in the summer of 1996. The ethnographic study focused on four adolescents, the only residents of the village to have completed primary school.¹ They represented three of the four main ethnic/linguistic groups in the village and three of the four main religions. The database from this second period includes (a) semi- and unstructured interviews with the four adolescents and their parents, (b) essays by the adolescents, (c) 10 hours of natural discourse video & audio recordings, (d) meta-commentary by participants and assistants on language assessment activities and transcripts of natural discourse, (e) interviews with the local primary school teacher and district school authorities, (f) informal discussions with residents of the village and county, and (g) observation notes.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted in French with each adolescent. Interviews focused on their language learning experiences, language practices, and language attitudes. Semi-structured interviews with each parent addressed his or her feelings about the linguistic repertoire of the child, as well as more general attitudes and beliefs about language learning and use. Observation and audio and video recording of natural discourse allowed for comparison of reported and actual communicative competence and behaviour. Essays and natural discourse collected primarily for the purpose of assessing proficiency also provided data on attitudes and behaviors relevant to second language acquisition (SLA), as did the meta-commentary of

participants and assistants on transcripts and assessment activities. All local language data were locally transcribed, translated into French, and evaluated by native speakers.²

Sociocultural context of the Mandara Mountains

The study was conducted in Jilvé, a village located on the plain in the northern Mandara Mountains, in the Far North Province of Cameroon. The population of approximately 1,100 inhabitants is linguistically and ethnically diverse (Programme National d'Éradication du Ver de Guinée, 1992). At one level, there are two sociocultural groups: the Wandala (or Mandara³) and the montagnards (Breton & Maurette, 1993; MacEachern, 1990, in press). This article is concerned with the latter. Population density is high in the region, and intergroup contact is frequent.

In the northern Mandara Mountains, 25 closely related languages belonging to the Central branch of the Chadic family are spoken (Breton and Maurette, 1993). MacEachern (1990, in press) uses the term 'ethnic/linguistic' for groups associated with each of these languages in order to emphasize the fact that these groupings do not always match the ethnic identifications used by the people themselves. MacEachern observes that, depending on context, montagnards may identify with their lineage, their ethnic/linguistic group, their mountain origins, or their religious affiliation. In this article, beliefs and practices of the community are compared with those of the classroom. The word 'community' is therefore used to refer to the many overlapping montagnard communities within the village.

The montagnard groups are exogamous, patrilingual, and patrilocal (Barreteau, Breton, & Dieu, 1984). A bride must learn the language of her husband and use his language with their children (Breton & Maurette, 1993). Despite this patrilingual convention, children receive plentiful maternal language input and usually develop equal fluency in their mother's language, while considering the father's language to be their primary language (see Sorenson, 1967).

Migration to the plain and the introduction of markets increased acquisition and use of four regional languages of wider communication that intersect in this region: Wandala, Fulfulde, Hausa, and Kanuri (Barreteau, Breton, & Dieu, 1984; de Colombel, 1987; MacEachern, 1990). As in most of francophone Africa, French is widely regarded as the language of socioeconomic advancement (see Adegbiya, 1994). A high level of French proficiency is required for all civil service jobs, and a good command of French in combination with local language

skills has secured jobs for some young montagnards in mission clinics and development programs (see MacEachern, 1990). The churches and missions in the area offer concurrent translation of services into several local languages, and there are Fulfulde, Mada, and Wandala translations of the Bible available. Many Christians, however, value French literacy as a means for greater access to and understanding of their faith. Despite socioeconomic and religious motivations to learn French, only a very small percentage of residents of the village were conversant in French at the time of this study.

Multilingual communicative competence

Trilingualism seems to be the norm for montagnards: in addition to their home language(s), most people speak Wandala and the language of at least one neighbouring montagnard group (Kordass & Annett, 1977; MacEachern, 1990). The spread of intergroup languages seems only to have expanded linguistic repertoires; montagnard languages do not appear to be endangered. Productive competence in five or six languages is not unusual. However, the individual who knows six languages may speak two or three of them well and have far stronger receptive than productive skills in the others (see MacEachern, 1990).

Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence stresses its integral connection with 'attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses' (p. 277). In the northern Mandara Mountains – a region long characterized by linguistic fragmentation, exogamy, and frequent and frequently volatile inter-ethnic/linguistic contact – communicative competence seems to entail proficiency in at least three languages. Montagnard participants regarded multilingual competence as normal and essential, emphasizing the necessity of being able to understand and to communicate with whomever you meet.

In inter-ethnic/linguistic communication, several factors are involved in language choice, including topic, setting, relative status of participants, and linguistic competence of participants. There is a strong preference for accommodating one's interlocutor, or at least displaying that accommodation is possible. It is not always necessary to accommodate all persons present. If the topic is not of concern to someone, then exclusion by language choice is not a problem, as long as the excluded party does not suspect that he or she is being abused. Language choice may also be used to conceal, but the strong likelihood that the excluded party has at least some receptive skills makes this risky.

A participant may be accommodated by translation or code-switching. Another option is cross-linguistic communication, wherein each

participant speaks his or her own preferred language and has sufficient comprehension of the language used by interlocutors (see Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1991). According to one participant, this strategy is sometimes initially questioned but always readily accepted after some explanation, as in the following example:

S'ils parlent [in Fulfulde], je parle en français, il y a des gens qui me disent, 'Est-ce que tu ne connais pas parler langue foubé [Fulfulde]?' Je dis 'Non, je ne connais pas parler.' [They ask,] 'Pourquoi si on parle [in Fulfulde] tu reponds en français?' Je dis, 'Je comprends [Fulfulde] seulement comme ça.' [They ask,] 'Tu restes où?' Je dis, 'Je suis à Jilvé, je suis Ouldémé.' Ils me disent que, 'Bon, tu es un gars Ouldémé, tu ne pourrais pas comprendre [Fulfulde]. Tu n'es pas sûr de comprendre. Parce qu'il n'y a pas les foubé chez les Ouldémé.' Et puis, ils ne vont plus se moquer de moi. S'il parlent [in Fulfulde], je réponds en français.

Use of an intergroup language is another strategy in inter-ethnic/linguistic communication, but even then there is frequent language mixing – by which I mean translation, cross-linguistic communication, and intra- and inter-sentential switching.

Language mixing is a regular feature of conversations among monagnards even when all participants share the same primary language and linguistic accommodation is not an issue. A shift of topic or activity may be marked by an inter-sentential code-switch. Identity and affect also may be marked by language choice; for example, young males often use French words in peer group interactions in order to sound worldly. Mixing in any word or phrase not understood by all participants in the conversation is considered impolite but still occurs frequently.

In this community, multilingual communicative competence means not only being able to speak or understand multiple languages, but also being able to use the communicative resources of multiple languages in ways that are effective and appropriate to the context. Often, effective and appropriate language use involves language mixing. In novice-expert and inter-ethnic/linguistic interactions, language mixing can be used to avoid or resolve communication breakdown. Mixed discourse can also serve as a resource for second language learning and teaching.

Language socialization in the community

In many respects, primary language socialization practices observed in the northern Mandara Mountains resemble those of Western Samoa,

as described by Ochs (1988). Pre-linguistic infants are not treated as conversational partners, and their vocalizations are usually ignored. However, infants are played with and sung to by their mother or by sibling caregivers. Domestic work is often done outside the family compound alongside neighbours, and visits between households are very frequent. Once a child is too big to be carried to the field on her mother's back, she is left at the family compound under the supervision of siblings and grandparents who no longer farm. Children roam freely among the compounds of their community. Thus, children spend almost all of their time in multiparty interactions, 'continuously contextualized' (Heath, 1986, p. 117) in the daily routines of their family and neighbourhood.

Montagnard children are regularly exposed to more than one language from birth. Because the montagnard convention of exogamy often leads to marriage outside one's ethnic/linguistic group, bilingual households and early bilingualism are very common. Particularly for montagnard children growing up in villages on the plain, their loosely supervised daytime wanderings may bring them in contact with playmates who speak other languages. Several participants reported that they had learned one of their secondary languages from playing with children of another ethnic/linguistic group.

Participants maintained that the home language(s) need not be taught to a child, who was expected to learn by listening and watching (see Crago, 1992; Ochs, 1988). Child-directed speech did not appear to be markedly simplified, and unintelligible utterances by a child were not 'unraveled by older persons' (Duranti & Ochs, 1986). Children speak far more with peers and sibling caregivers than with adults, and there is little pressure for the child to perform linguistically before she does so spontaneously.

Prompting or elicited imitation as described by Demuth (1986), Schieffelin (1990), and Rabain-Jamin (1998) were not observed. However, from the age of four or five, montagnard children routinely carry messages for adult members of their household (see Duranti & Ochs, 1986; Rabain-Jamin, 1998). These messages can be fairly long, and it is not unusual for the message to be in a language the child does not yet understand well or at all. The child is expected to memorize the message, and the nature of the errand is explained at least in part. One participant remembered such messages as his first lessons in L2 Wandala:

On m'envoie chez les Mandara [Wandala], comme mon père a appris avant moi. (Interviewer: Ah oui?) Oui, il me dit, 'Si tu pars acheter les

choses à Mandara [Wandala], va demander comme ceci.' Il me dit en mandara [Wandala] et puis moi je garde. Tous les jours, on me dit d'acheter ceci, ceci: 'Si tu vas dire en mandara [Wandala] ceci, ils vont comprendre.' Je garde, puis j'ai connu.

Second language acquisition in the community

All participants declared second language acquisition (SLA) to be simply a function of exposure and use. A language was judged difficult to learn if opportunities to hear it and speak it were limited. Aptitude was not considered a factor, nor was age. Participants explained that one simply expanded one's linguistic repertoire as need and opportunity arose. Many people gave the example of a newlywed woman who, within a year or so, learns the language of her new household from the conversations of her new household, instruction from her female in-laws, and explanations and translations from bilingual friends.

Participants expressed clear ideas about how to learn an L2: listen in on experts' conversations and seek private help from and practice with expert friends. An Uldeme participant described his plan for learning to speak Mada, in which he already had receptive skills: 'Il faut rester avec des amis mada. S'il y a un Mada qui connaît un peu parler oudémé, tu pars chez lui, tu le parles en oudémé, en mada: c'est quoi? Ils vont t'apprendre.' One can safely make L2 errors with friends because 'ils ne rient pas, ils disent seulement que ce n'est pas ta langue donc.'

In their accounts of second language learning experiences, participants emphasized the importance of opportunities to practise, ask questions, and make errors with an expert in private. In addition to learning by overhearing and private instruction, participants cited as essential to their SLA the informal use of the L2 with more expert family members and peers. With particular regard to French, opportunities for informal instruction by and interaction with a teacher or other expert were reported to be crucial by the primary participants in my study. Each had had regular extra-scholastic interaction with a more expert speaker of French – a neighbour, a missionary, a *bénévole* (an uncredentialed and locally recruited teacher) of the same ethnic/linguistic group, or a *tuteur* (someone who houses a child attending school far from his or her family). All four participants considered themselves privileged in having had many opportunities to use French with an expert in informal contexts, and they stressed the importance of these contacts to their development of unusually high proficiency in French.

Language mixing was cited as a helpful feature of informal L2 use and instruction. Many participants commented on the value of explanations of L2 linguistic forms and structures given in the novice's L1 or in an L2 of which he or she had better command. Two of the primary participants also pointed out that language mixing in conversation provided contextual clues to the meaning of unfamiliar words in the L2.

In the interactions recorded for this study, L2 errors by novices were ignored unless they caused a breakdown in communication, in which case interlocutors displayed non-comprehension. Novices were reticent to reveal non-comprehension in large or unfamiliar groups, but they frequently asked friends for clarification in private. Clarifications and repairs took the form of repetition, reformulation, or translation of the non-comprehended utterance. Translation was sometimes partial, producing a mixed-language utterance. No error correction in public interactions was observed, but correction and teasing did occur in dyads and in small groups of friends.

Part of the reason so little error correction was observed may be that novices avoid speaking an L2 in public until they feel quite competent. The same strategies used to accommodate an interlocutor – use of an(other) intergroup language, code-switching, translation, and cross-linguistic communication – could also be used to avoid making L2 errors in public. Until they were able to produce L2 utterances competently and confidently, participants preferred to produce in public only those forms they felt they mastered. Forms not yet mastered could be practised privately with an expert friend. One participant explained why:

Peut-être je dis bon ... je vais ... je ne pourrai pas prononcer un mot fulfuldé, les gens vont se moquer de moi, moi je reste. (Interviewer: Ah oui?) Oui, parce que tout le monde connaît parler, et toi, tu ne connais pas parler, et si tu veux, tu veux apprendre, et si tu parles, tu ne connais pas, il faut appeler quelqu'un d'autre pour que un jour causer avec lui pour qu'il t'aide à parler. Sinon tout le monde parle, tu vas parler, tu ne pourras prononcer les mots, on va se moquer de toi.

Learning by overhearing, delaying production, and seeking private instruction and practice were widely cited language learning strategies. Participants described and demonstrated the use of several other strategies associated with effective second language learning (see O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Reiss, 1985). These included cognate recognition and translation, whereby the participants used their L1 or a mastered L2 as a base for the comprehension or production of the

target language. Participants also demonstrated self-monitoring, correcting their own speech and checking their own and their interlocutor's comprehension. They planned and rehearsed for anticipated language tasks and, particularly with respect to tone and lexicon, identified and directed their attention to specific problems they had in the L2. Inferencing – the use of available information to guess the meaning and function of new forms (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) – was a very frequently cited and demonstrated strategy. Participants made conscious use of linguistic, paralinguistic, and situational information in order to assign meaning to unfamiliar L2 words and structures.

In their narratives about learning French at school, the primary participants reported heavy reliance on parallel input and situational knowledge in their efforts to relate L2 forms to their function and meaning. Recalling his first year at school, one participant described his efforts to comprehend the teacher's French utterances by attending to gesture:

A l'école là, si on te dit de venir [holds up his hand and folds his fingers into his outward-facing palm, a gesture signifying 'come'], tu peux connaître. Si on te dit, 'Viens!' comme ça là [repeats gesture], tu comprends. Tu peux partir non? Si tu pars c'est que tu on t'a dit que c'est que tu sais que venir c'est venir. Tu peux expliquer en ton patois.

Participants also recalled relying on routines, what Kleifgen and Saville-Troike (1992) call scripts for school, to understand the intentional structure of the teacher's utterances. One participant remembered assigning meaning to new linguistic forms by identifying chunks of language linked to salient and routinized events (see Wong-Fillmore, 1979):

[The teacher says] 'va va va chercher la chicote!' Demain on dit encore, 'Va chercher la chicote,' tu vas connaître, non? Et puis tu viens le matin, on dit, 'Allez sonner, allez sonner là!' Si demain on dit encore, 'Allez sonner! Allez sonnez!' tu peux tu peux tu peux connaître que 'aller' c'est partir en ton patois et puis un peu expliquer toi même. Et puis c'est comme ça de devenir comprendre.

Communicative practice in the classroom

In the canton of Warba, where this study was conducted, most students leave school after three or four years (D. Doka, Division Inspector of Primary Education, personal communication, 1996). The primary school attended by participants was in disrepair, with leaking

roofs, not enough desks, only a few worn-out textbooks, and only one teacher for six class levels. Of the 24 students in the first three grade levels that finished the 1995–1996 school year, 11 failed because of inadequate French skills (Doba, 1996).

Like most teachers in the Far North, the teacher was not from the area and did not speak any of the local languages⁴ (see Mercier-Tremblay, 1982; Tourneux & Iyébi-Mandjek, 1994). Trained in the audio-lingual method, he provided instruction that was highly structured and primarily form focused, with a strong emphasis on literacy skills. Each textbook lesson revolved around a dialogue carefully constructed to introduce specific syntactic, phonological, and lexical elements. Much of the language use was in context-reduced activities, such as *dictée*, *récitation*, *conjugaison*, and *copie*. The teacher tried to compensate for the lack of textbooks, maps, and other visual teaching aids with gestures and blackboard drawings.

Classroom talk was controlled and dominated by the teacher. Sometimes in chorus, sometimes individually, students were required to perform linguistically on command in front of the class. They were expected to display linguistic competence by following instructions, answering known-answer questions, repeating or writing what was said by the teacher, or reading aloud or copying what was written by the teacher on the blackboard. French errors were rarely ignored, and the teacher provided rigorous linguistic correction even when the lesson was not focused on language (see Mercier-Tremblay, 1982; Mutomé, 1982; Tourneux & Iyébi-Mandjek, 1994). The teacher punished talk among students, which he regarded as distracting and dangerous. He made a point of seating children of different ethnic/linguistic groups together in order to prevent L1 usage and to promote integration of the different groups.

The teacher was sympathetic to the difficulties that French immersion posed for his students, and he tried to accommodate them by slowed speech, repetition, and syntactic and lexical simplification of his utterances. He was very strict, however, about maintaining a French-only school environment. The use of local languages was punishable by chores, suspension, switching with a strip of rubber, or having to kneel for several minutes in front of the class with outstretched arms. The teacher cited several reasons for the strict prohibition of local language use at school. Himself unable to understand more than the basic greetings, he feared losing control of the class; students could insult him and other children without his knowledge, and he would be unable to detect and correct misinterpretation of his instructions:

Ça serait le désordre! Peut-être un enfant va dire qu'il comprend la leçon, et il explique aux autres en patois ce qu'il comprend, mais il ne comprend pas du tout. Donc tout le monde va croire qu'ils comprennent, alors qu'ils ont eu une mauvaise explication de leur camarade.

Furthermore, the teacher pointed out, school was the only place most children had a chance to hear and speak French, and he was their only source of correct input and correction. He explained that learning French was also an important part of developing a national identity: 'À l'école, l'enfant mandara, l'enfant montagnard, il apprend la lecture, l'écriture, les calculs. Mais, il apprend aussi qu'il est camerounais. C'est pour cela aussi qu'il faut apprendre le français.'

Implications of community/classroom discontinuity

In the community, a novice has several options for participation in L2 learning and communicative interaction. He or she may simply listen to the conversation of experts as a legitimate peripheral participant (see Lave & Wenger, 1991) or may request translation. If her receptive skills are adequate, a novice may communicate cross-linguistically, replying to target language utterances by her interlocutor(s) in her L1 or an L2 in which she is more expert. Or, he may communicate in the target language if he feels competent or comfortable enough to do so. Code-switching may be used by the novice as a relief strategy if she finds herself unable to express something in the target language, or the expert may switch codes to ensure the novice's comprehension. Moreover, a novice may initiate and direct private instruction in the target language. In such informal instruction, the novice's L1 or more mastered L2 is used for explanations and as a point of reference.

A novice's options in the classroom are far more restricted. Only French may be spoken, and the teacher is the only source of French input and the only sanctioned interlocutor. French production is required on command and is subject to rigorous correction in front of the class, practices reported by participants to have caused considerable anxiety. In instances of non-comprehension, there is no recourse to the novice's L1 or more mastered L2. The teacher tried to accommodate his students by providing syntactically and lexically simplified French input. In the community, however, experts do not make these kinds of modifications when communicating with novices. Instead, accommodation is achieved by code-switching, translation, and cross-linguistic communication, practices not permitted at school.

The teacher expressed the firm conviction that his methods should be sufficient for his students to learn French. He attributed their low success rate in French acquisition to the poor material conditions under which he taught, the students' low motivation, and their parents' lack of commitment to formal education. Community members attributed difficulties in learning French to the lack of opportunities to hear and speak the language with experts in settings other than the classroom. Participants also cited the French-only rule at school as a source of great anxiety and frustration in their early years of schooling; as one participant recalled, *'sauf le français en classe. Même si on ne connaît pas, on est obligé de parler.'* Frequent punishment for breaking the French-only rule was given by some participants as a reason for having left school.

Prohibition of language mixing was not the only aspect of classroom practice at odds with community patterns of novice-expert and inter-ethnic/linguistic interaction. Many ways of learning and using language preferred in the community were impeded or even punished in the classroom. The classroom prohibition of talk among students conflicted with the community norm that children speak far more often with peers and sibling caregivers than with adults. In the community, a novice is not expected to speak before she feels ready to do so, whereas in the classroom the teacher determined precisely when and how students should display French competence. While in the community L2 errors by a novice are largely ignored in public interactions, the teacher publicly corrected students' French errors even if the utterance was intelligible and a correct answer in terms of content. Moreover, most second language exposure and use in the community is embedded in the exchange of information and the negotiation of meaning. In contrast, French language input at school is primarily form focused, and student output is intended to satisfy the criteria of the teacher, not to communicate (see Geekie & Raban, 1995; Tourneux & Iyébi-Mandjek, 1994).

Although well intended, several aspects of the teacher's classroom practice may have hindered his students' acquisition of French (see Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Toohey, 1998). The French-only rule, performance on command, and public correction were reported by all participants to have caused confusion and distress. Further, practices such as the prohibition of child-child interaction and of any use of local languages may have prevented students from applying to classroom French acquisition the skills and strategies they had developed in their naturalistic SLA in the community.

A call for further research

The *français langue de scolarisation* and *normes endogènes* approaches to French language education reform in Africa both call for research into communicative practice, the former focusing on the classroom, the latter on the community. Effective innovation requires research in both contexts. The more clearly we can articulate the communicative skills and behaviours required for successful participation in school, the more effectively they can be taught. The more we know about the communicative competencies students bring to school from home, the better these can be used as a foundation upon which to build new competencies.

Effective reform also requires better understanding of how these communicative competencies are developed. From the language socialization perspective, the development of communicative competence is viewed as a process wherein the novice is socialized into the cultural/linguistic practices of the community (Rymes, 1997). This exploratory study makes evident the need for research that situates the development of communicative competence within its sociocultural context. In the community described here, members are expected to develop multilingual communicative competence. This expectation is reflected and reinforced by beliefs and practices related to second language learning and use. Language socialization research is needed to determine how these norms of multilingualism influence community members' approach to SLA (see Bartelt, 1997). Microanalysis of novice-expert interaction is also needed to understand how children of this community are socialized to become competent learners and users of second languages.

At school, language socialization research is necessary to identify features of communicative practice that foster or hinder the development of 'competent language learning communities in classrooms' (Hall, 1997, p. 304). Close study of the sequential flow of classroom interaction can reveal how teacher and students achieve mutual understanding, what causes failure to do so, and which interactional patterns facilitate the transfer and development of knowledge and skills. Such microanalysis is also needed to determine if and how classroom practice fails to make use of students' naturalistic language learning skills and strategies.

Language socialization relates communicative practices and SLA to participants' beliefs, values, and identities. Such a perspective is essential if community-learned competencies are to be incorporated into French language educational practice in ways that will be effective and acceptable for students, teachers, and parents. Changes in class-

room practice that conflict with some participants' beliefs about what it means to "'do" school appropriately' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 107) are likely to be resisted or rejected (Gallimore, 1996). Reform efforts must therefore take into consideration not only the structure of classroom routines but also their meanings for participants.

In the Mandara Mountains, as in

each cultural context, careful research is necessary to identify the necessary and sufficient features of culture to which teaching and schooling must be accommodated and to discover those aspects of natal activity settings that can be adapted for use in the classroom. (Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordan, 1988, p. 346)

Language socialization research can help us discover those 'necessary and sufficient features' through the culturally contextualized study of expert-novice interactions in the community and the classroom. Thus, in the Mandara Mountains and in other communities, language socialization research can contribute to better understanding and to bridging the gap between home and school.

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Notes

- 1 Most of the participants in this study had not completed primary school. Because of time constraints and lack of proficiency in the local languages, I worked most closely with the four adolescents who had attained a level of French proficiency that allowed much of the data collection to be conducted in French.
- 2 The Uldeme and Mada assistants were trained by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Yaoundé, the nation's capital. The Wandala native speaker assistant was the former assistant of Adelaide Kordass, a SIL linguist who has worked on Wandala since the early 1970s. The Fulfulde native speaker assistant was a student of linguistics at the University of Yaoundé.
- 3 Mandara, the Fulfulde name for the Wandala, is commonly used in the literature on the region.
- 4 This is due in part to the government policy of posting civil servants

outside of their native region and in part to the low rate of education and civil service employment among northern Cameroonians.

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