

BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND BILINGUALISM 39
Series Editors: Nancy H. Hornberger and Colin Baker

Language Socialization in Bilingual and Multilingual Societies

Edited by
Robert Bayley and Sandra R. Schecter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS LTD
Clevedon • Buffalo • Toronto • Sydney

2003

Chapter 3

Collaborative Literacy in a Mexican Immigrant Household: The Role of Sibling Mediators in the Socialization of Pre-School Learners¹

MARÍA DE LA PIEDRA AND HARRIETT D. ROMO

This chapter focuses on a literacy event that occurred in the home of the Valdéz family, a Mexican immigrant household, involving a pre-literate, pre-verbal 18 month-old child. Our analysis of this literacy event addresses two main points: (1) the important influence of siblings in language socialization and literacy development, (2) the ways in which language and literacy are socially constructed in a non-mainstream immigrant family and community. This case study is part of a larger evaluation study of an Early Head Start program.² The definition of literacy used in this chapter is one of literacy as a cultural and social phenomenon. We explore the sociocultural contexts of a literacy event in which older siblings mediate the meaning of words through mutual knowledge, and play an important role in the language socialization of their younger sibling, Lilitana (L).

We draw on theoretical frameworks presented by the "new literacy studies," which focus on cultural meanings and uses of local literacy practices (Baynham, 1993; Bloch, 1993; Camitta, 1993; Chirinos, 1997; Hornberger, 1997, 1998; Kulick & Stroud, 1993; Probst, 1993; Rockhill, 1993; Street, 1993, 1995) and the anthropological literature of "funds of knowledge" (Gonzales *et al.*, 1995; Moll *et al.*, 1993; Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992). The "funds of knowledge" literature emphasizes the

role of social networks in the transmission, redefinition, and recreation of ways of knowing, and the significant role of culture in formal and informal education.

Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Wertsch (1991, 1998) emphasized the importance of social conditions in understanding thinking and development, and viewed thinking as a characteristic not of the child alone but of the child-in-social-activities with others (Moll, 1990). Kreckel (1981) makes a distinction between common knowledge, which two or more people have in common as a result of being brought up under similar conditions such as culture, subculture, religion, and education, and shared knowledge, which is the negotiated common knowledge based on mutual interaction used for future interaction. Mutual knowledge refers to something that an individual holds to be true with great certainty – knowledge that the individual knows for sure that the other individual she is communicating with also knows for sure. Mutual knowledge is a basis for successful communication, and is key to the development of reading. For example, in the Valdéz family certain knowledge and beliefs may be unique to L and her sisters, since they share a separate set of world experiences from those of their mother. There is also the common background knowledge that the members of this particular family and members of this immigrant community assume to be held common by virtue of the fact that they have similar background or up-bringing (Lee, 2001).

Much of the traditional literature on language socialization has been conceptualized as a one-on-one, unidirectional process and has focused on the socialization process during adult caregiver–child communication. Studies of caregiver–child interactions in story reading and play have demonstrated the processes by which a young child learns not only to speak, but to speak and feel like a native speaker (Kanagy, 1999). Additionally most studies of child language acquisition have been conducted in mainstream families or mainstream classrooms where mothers talk to children using formulaic patterns or routines found in mainstream school settings. Heath (1982a) reminds us that the culture that children learn as they grow up is, in fact, ways of taking meaning from the environment around them. She emphasizes that the “ways of taking from books are as much a part of learned behavior as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games, and building houses” (reprinted in Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986b: 97). As parents interact with their children in the pre-school years, they give them, through modeling and specific instruction, ways of taking from books that seem natural in numerous institutional settings such as schools, banks, post offices, businesses and government offices. Heath (1983) emphasized that each community’s ways of taking from the printed word and using this knowledge are interdependent with the ways children learn to talk in their social interactions with caregivers.

Studies of language socialization in pre-school and elementary school classrooms have shown how teacher–student discourse in first and second language contexts socializes students to follow cultural norms of language interactions. However, recent studies of language socialization and cognition have found that peer interactions also serve as language socializing processes (Tudge, 1990). Cook (1999) demonstrated, for example, how peer presentations encouraged students to

be active listeners and to provide reactions to peers while the teacher played a supportive, rather than an evaluative, role in the process. The impact of interactional routines on language socialization in a kindergarten setting was explored by Ruth Kanagy (1999). Analysis of naturalistic data from three classroom routines from several points in the year revealed incremental changes in the form, content, participant structure, and nonverbal behavior of teachers and students as learners moved from peripheral to autonomous participation. Through repetition and scaffolded help provided by teachers and peers, the children were socialized toward interactional competence. Language socialization studies show clearly that, whether in native or target contexts, language socialization and the acquisition of pragmatic competence require extended participation in culturally-mediated interactions. Empirical studies weave together new insights into the specific linguistic means used by caregivers (both parents and teachers) and peers in the socialization of interactional competence in children in home and school environments. This study contributes a unique perspective of how, in a non-mainstream, immigrant home, siblings help socialize young children to understand what it means to know a language.

In developing this chapter, we first present a review of studies of immigrant communities. Second, we include a transcription of a segment of a videotaped literacy event in the home of this immigrant family and use discourse analysis to show how the family members engage in "collective literacy" and how an older sibling uses mutual knowledge to mediate this literacy event for L. The findings demonstrate that siblings as well as adults act as literacy mediators to help young children participate in literacy events in the home. This interaction demonstrated the strong influence of siblings who may have mutual knowledge, outside of the experiences of adults, that can assist in the language socialization of a young child.

The Ideological Model of Literacy

Gathering evidence from an ethnography of middle class households and schools in the United States, Street (1995) argued that literacy is defined by middle class parents and schools within a framework of learning, teaching, and schooling – a process that Street and Street (1995) have called the "pedagogization of literacy." Street and Street (1995: 117) found that literacy practices within middle class household contexts were similar to literacy practices found at school, and parents were concerned about socializing their children in ways legitimized by the school. Studies of immigrant families have suggested that researchers have conceptualized these domains in over-simplified ways, and perhaps the boundaries between family and community networks may not be as sharply delineated as in mainstream settings.

Ethnographies of "literacies" among immigrant populations (Baynham, 1993; Farr & Guerra, 1995; Rockhill, 1993; Weistein-Shr, 1993, 1994) and studies of indigenous people in developing countries (Bloch, 1993; Chirinos, 1997; Hornberger 1988, 1997, 1998; Kulick & Stroud, 1993; Probst, 1993; Street 1984) have found that "local

literacies" contest a hegemonic conception of literacy in diverse ways. These studies challenge the stigmatization of the "illiterate," who have been described as lacking cognitive abilities. They attempt to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded (Bloch, 1993; Godenzzi, 1997; Hornberger, 1997, 1998; Hornberger & Hardman, 1994; Street, 1993; Street & Street, 1995).

Viewing literacies from the perspective of an ethnography of communication suggests that speaking (and reading and writing) are ways of communicating that are characteristic of a particular cultural group, and context is crucial to the interpretation of behavior and meaning (Hymes, 1974a; Farr & Guerra, 1995: 7; Hornberger & Hardman, 1994). These theories can be illustrated by the following review of three studies of literacies among immigrant populations.

Local Literacies

Literacy for immigrants learning a new culture becomes a valuable resource in the new context, one that is shared within the social network. Farr and Guerra (1995) focused on literacy practices among Mexican immigrant families in Chicago, and found that in the bilingual Mexican community there were literacy practices in both English and Spanish that were linked to different domains of the lives of the families. The religious domain incorporated mainly literacy uses in Spanish. The researchers described two literacy events: *doctrina* (catechism) and the *levantamiento* (putting away the baby Jesus after Christmas) (Farr & Guerra, 1995: 15). Farr (1994) found that the extended social network, which is part of a way of living as Mexican immigrants, plays an important role in the literacy practices of the immigrants.

Weinstein-Shr (1993) studied the meanings and uses of literacy practices among Hmong immigrants in the United States. Like Farr and Guerra (1995), she focused on the relationship between literacy practices and other resources, such as kinship ties and the Hmong's native language literacy. She presents in-depth portraits of two Hmong men who used literacy in different ways depending on their own conceptions of their lives in Philadelphia. One of the men, Chou, wanted to assimilate as quickly as possible to the Philadelphia community. The second man, Pao Youa Lo, was not interested at all in learning English or becoming part of the larger Philadelphia community. Both men had positions of authority within their communities; however, these positions were defined by the host community standards and by traditional standards, respectively. Chou chose to live in a community where the majority of the Hmong held the same ideals towards assimilation. Chou used standard English literacy in order to reach his goals. He was a resource in English literacy for members of his community. His literacy enabled him to become a "cultural broker" among other Hmong members of his Church.

In contrast, Pao Youa Lo had poor English oral and written skills and did not really use them. Instead, he relied on alliances he had developed with the members of his clan. Pao used his native literacy skills to become informed about important

events in his country and in the world, becoming a "community news keeper." The uses of literacy affected social relationships and created new roles (cultural broker and news keeper) for these two men within their local communities.

Baynham (1993) focused on "interpreters" and "mediators of literacy" to understand literacy practices among Moroccan immigrants in London. Baynham paid close attention to the *interactional context* of the literacy event in addition to ethnographic accounts and oral histories, where the "situatedness" of the interaction is important for Baynham's approach. From his perspective, literacy practices are a "joint construction" (Baynham, 1993: 301). Baynham compares "mediators of literacy" with "interpreters." Both include the participation of more than one person and the joint construction of the communicative (literacy) event. Mediators are not just passive participants of the event; they also interpret the meaning of the text. Baynham's research shows how communicative purposes can be achieved in situations where one or more participants lack the code knowledge needed to participate.

Baynham (1993: 309) found that an interaction that at first glance seemed like a fairly simple mix of the "oral" contains in fact some rather complex shifts and switches of footing in the ways that the text is related. For example, in order to explain the content of a letter from a government agency, the mediator of literacy switched mode from literate to oral, and also switched register from technical to non-technical. Baynham (1993: 313) argued that the mode and code-switchings are a result of living in a multilingual setting "where individuals and groups struggle to make texts speak and work for them, struggle to make and exchange meanings."

Each of these studies challenges the dominant belief that there is one "literacy" and that it is autonomous and isolated from social context. Contexts are mutually constructed, constantly shifting, situationally defined, and accomplished through the interactional work of participants (Erickson & Schultz, 1997). These studies provide conceptual and methodological tools to better understand the literacy practices found in the Valdéz family, a Mexican immigrant family in Texas.

Methodological Approach³

The participants in this study were a Mexican immigrant mother, Julia Valdéz (32 years old), and her five daughters: Juana (12), Ana (7), Milagros (5), L (18 months), and Melba (6 months). Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants' identities. We met this family at Head Start activities and spoke with them several times before conducting this study. This family is one of several families who agreed to allow us to observe their child in their home and in the Early Head Start classroom. The data presented were gathered through fieldwork consisting of ten hours of participant observation, two 90-minute interviews with the mother about literacy meanings and uses, an interview with the oldest daughter, and videotapes and audio tapes of storytelling, songs, and natural interactions in the family's living room and front yard. In addition, approximately three hours of an afternoon with

the family were videotaped. The interview with the mother included questions that could be part of a life history interview, as recommended by researchers of literacy among immigrant groups (Baynham, 1993; Weinstein-Shr, 1993, 1994). The interviews and videotaped literacy events were transcribed and analyzed in a search for the ways "mediators of literacy" participated in these literacy events. As mentioned above, "mediators of literacy" are participants of the literacy event who have literacy skills in the code being used. The mediators of literacy participate actively in the construction of the literacy event, not only reading or writing the message of the text, but also interpreting the meaning of it and constructing the social context in which it occurs. In this case study, adults and children became mediators of literacy when they helped L, who lacked knowledge of the written code (Spanish or English). By drawing upon "mutual knowledge," the older siblings were able to mediate L's participation in the literacy event and her understanding of the relationship between words and print.

The Valdéz Family

The Valdéz parents and the oldest daughter were born in Mexico, but the four youngest daughters were born in Texas. The main language spoken at home is Spanish. Some English is spoken among the children. The three oldest children are enrolled in public school. Two of them (the 5 year old and the 7 year old) attend a bilingual program at the local elementary school. The 18-month-old and 6-month-old children are enrolled in the Early Head Start program. The teachers talk to the youngest Valdéz children mostly in Spanish, although English is also used. The older daughter, Juana, attends middle school and takes all her courses in English. She said she felt more comfortable reading and writing in English than in Spanish. In oral language she felt comfortable in both languages. During our home visit the mother spoke mostly in Spanish but used words in English when she pointed to pictures during the literacy events (e.g. "fish," and "ice cream").

The family's rural, mobile-home community comprises mainly residents of Mexican origin. Juan, the father, works full time with a construction company. Julia has done a variety of jobs outside the home in the United States. She cleaned houses, worked at a factory, and presently works full time at the local high school cafeteria. Both parents finished high school in Mexico. Julia worked as a nurse and a literacy teacher in Mexico. They have been working to obtain residency papers for Julia and their oldest daughter. By May 1998 Julia had obtained permission to work in the United States, but she was still waiting for residency papers.

Literacy meanings

Julia explained that, as a child, she wanted to teach her father to read and write, but he did not see the need for learning literacy skills. He relied on his literate children as "literacy mediators." Since then, Julia has wanted to become a teacher.

She argued if a person is literate in a language, it does not matter if it is English or Spanish. She encouraged her friends to learn English literacy skills to meet basic needs in the United States. Thus, for Julia, literacy was not strictly related to getting a better education or becoming socially mobile. Her definition of literacy was not related to a "frame of schooling" as described by Street (1995). Literacy was necessary for survival. She used various strategies to improve her English abilities at home. For example, she and her daughters read the English captions that appeared on the TV screen as they watched programs.

Julia gave "consejos" (advice) about literacy to her children and friends through "storytelling," relating personal experiences that exemplified the messages she wanted to impart. Julia used her own schooling experience in Mexico to advise her daughters about homework and school projects. She gave advice to her friends who did not know how to read or write, and encouraged them to make an effort to learn because she considered literacy necessary to meet basic needs. The literacy meanings reported by Julia reflected the ways that she used literacy for everyday purposes.

Literacy uses

Julia and her family used literacy in many ways that are different from schooled literacy. Julia's literacy practices fit all the categories developed by Heath (1980: 128-129; 1983) in her study of a working-class, African-American community. We use these categories in this chapter, but suggest an additional category that emerged from the analyses of the data gathered from Julia's family. Julia and her family used literacy practices related to everyday needs, religious purposes and entertainment. There was a divide, which is not rigidly fixed, between English literacy and Spanish literacy. English literacy served primarily instrumental purposes and work-related tasks. Thus, English literacy was used primarily within the framework of US institutions, such as government agencies, the post office, the hospital, the schools, and diverse corporations. Spanish literacy was used primarily for religious, family, and educational domains. Spanish literacy also served to maintain connections with Mexican culture and institutions (writing letters and advising the children by telling them stories about schooling in Mexico).

Julia's family used one category of literacy practices that has not been described by Heath: *adaptations of schooled literacy*. Examples of adaptations of schooled literacy include family members reading from school notebooks, children pointing at the pictures in a book, and the family playing a word game. Materials used in these literacy events were books and notebooks from the US school, but the materials were not necessarily used as intended in the school context; the main purpose of these literacy events was not to practice reading or to read for new knowledge. Rather, the purpose was entertainment and distraction for the daughters. These literacy events occurred when the toddler was whining and crying for attention, and Julia started to "read" her a book. The daughters initiated the literacy events, asking their mother to read to them from the notebooks. Their informational

questions served functionally as requests for their mother's attention. For example, a child asked, "Qué dice aquí?" ("What does it say here?") and Julia turned her attention from household tasks to the child.

A school-adapted word game that we videotaped in the home was also played for the purpose of entertainment. The two oldest daughters (12 and 7 years old) started the game spontaneously. At the same time, the mother and the third daughter (5 years old) were involved in another literacy event, reading school materials. The mother at times involved the toddler in this activity by making explicit that the toddler was the addressee of the reading. At one point, the mother and the third daughter were drawn into the word game. The girls created different categories, such as "country or city," "name," "last name," "fruit," or "animal." One of the girls repeated the alphabet silently. When the other said "basta!" ("enough!"), the first girl had to identify the last letter of the alphabet she had repeated to herself. Both girls had to write words beginning with the letter. Afterwards they earned points for each word, and the one with more points won.

The game was clearly competitive and learned at school; however, in this literacy event the sisters helped one another and received help from the mother during the game. In this way, the daughter who was not literate (the 5-year-old) and the second oldest daughter (the 7-year-old), who did not have the same literacy skills as the oldest daughter, could participate in the game. The mother and the older siblings could be conceptualized as "mediators of literacy." This construct allows us to see that, in this household, children do not interact with print by themselves as much as they interact with print with the assistance of others.

The literacy event observed in this household and reported in this chapter is part of a much broader range of language practices in the family. Analyzing the interaction in detail helps us to recognize the sources of knowledge, beliefs and values that are integrated in family literacy practices, and the role of siblings as mediators in the socialization of younger children in language and literacy acquisition.

Mediators of literacy

When this family settled in the local host community, they brought with them literacy practices and meanings and uses of literacy from Mexico. During the interview, Julia recalled the ways she and her family used literacy in Mexico. Julia referred to oral and written language events as collective activities. When she gave examples of such practices, she referred to activities that involved two or more people. Usually the literacy event occurred within the framework of everyday life and entertainment. For example, Julia recalled that she had initiated learning to write her name. Her mother responded to her petition showing her letters from labels of food packages (such as "maceca," a flour used to make tortillas).

Julia gave other examples of how she and her family used literacy in Mexico. She described reading the newspaper:

... mis hermanos más grandes que yo, a ellos, para lo que les interesaba a ellos, para leer el

periodico, los deportes sobre todo. Querían saber quien ganó o quien perdió. A nosotros, mi mamá a veces le gustaba que le leyera yo los chistes que venían allí, y a mi me gustaba a veces hacer el crucigrama, el juego de palabras. Y allí estábamos leyendo y buscando la respuesta también.

(... my older brothers needed literacy to read the newspaper, especially the sports section. They wanted to know who won or who lost. Sometimes my mother wanted me to read the comics to her, and I liked to do the crossword puzzles. And there we were, reading and looking for the correct answers.)

The literacy events we observed and taped in Julia's US home were also collective activities. These included reading the girls' school notebooks, reading books, pointing at pictures of the family and naming the relatives, reading words that appeared on the TV screen, the game played by Julia and her daughters, and storytelling. All of these literacy events involved at least two people.

In the eleven years this family has lived in the United States, family members have had contact with numerous institutions new to them that introduced new demands for literacy practices. Among others, the institutions included immigration and tax agencies, the children's schools, adult education classes, the telephone company, the post office, city services, and the hospital. Each institution required literacy practices that included a new language and different ways of doing things. Julia utilized her social networks and other resources to deal with these demands because she did not have the English skills to complete them alone. Literacy resources were shared among the members of the immigrant social networks. Within the context of the household, literacy resources were also shared, particularly among adults and children and among siblings.

Research has demonstrated that immigrants' social networks play an important role in survival and adaptation to the host community (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Farr, 1994; Fernandez Kelly, 1995). Social networks play a crucial role in the distribution of knowledge and literacy resources among the members of the network. When Julia first arrived in Texas and did not know English (spoken or written), she turned for help to various members of her social network. Julia's first friend, also a Mexican immigrant woman who had children in the same school that Juana attended, helped Julia get a phone installed, and a postal box. Julia also sought assistance from her daughters' teachers, who referred her to English classes at the community education center and helped her fill out forms in English. The staff of an immigration agency helped her acquire residency papers and a work permit. Her own English teachers in the Community Learning Center helped her. Members of this social network, established after Julia came to Texas, were clearly "mediators of literacy" as well as cultural and linguistic interpreters as described by Baynham (1993).

As noted by Baynham (1993), "mediators of literacy" actively interpret the meaning of the text. Mediators of literacy, by interpreting and communicating the text, include the cultural and institutional information missing in the text. Thus, mediators of literacy provide the cultural frames necessary to avoid misunderstandings. They might choose to use a frame that is already known by the partici-

pant who lacks the code knowledge to explain a text based on an unknown frame. In the next section we present an example of how siblings, as mediators of literacy, provide opportunities for the participant who lacks the code knowledge to actively participate in the literacy event and understand what is in print. This example demonstrates how mediators of literacy re-represent print in ways they believe the person lacking code knowledge would better understand. They use mutual knowledge to facilitate understanding and in doing so socialize the learner into language and literacy practices of the new context or situation.

Mmmmm! Eating Ice Cream from the Book

The literacy events observed in Julia's household were among the children or among the children and the mother. In all, either the mother or the older sisters clearly acted as mediators of literacy. The older daughters and Julia constructed the meaning of the text, allowing the younger daughters who had little knowledge of the code to participate actively in the literacy event. In this sense the literacy events observed were "joint constructions" (Baynham, 1993: 301). Because of the young age of some participants, such as L, much of the active participation in the literacy event was conducted with gestures. Gestures functioned in this case as an accommodation to the toddler's frames of reference. Gestures, as well as the oral language, were transcribed (see Note 4 at the end of the chapter for the meanings of the symbols used in the transcriptions).

While this literacy event was occurring, another literacy event, the word game described earlier, was on-going. Before these events, the daughters had engaged in play activities (making a train, jumping on the bed, etc.). During this visit to the home, the girls also spent time kneeling in front of the sofa coloring pages of a Dinosaur coloring book placed on the cushions. The older daughters assisted the toddler, L, in the coloring and playing. Similar literacy events took place minutes before and after the literacy event presented here.

Literacy event

This literacy event took place in the living room of the home. The main participants were Julia (the mother), Milagros (5), and L (18-month-old toddler). Juana, the oldest sister, joined in in the middle of the interaction and participated by smiling and laughing at one point of the interaction, supporting the literacy event and contributing to its construction as a frame of entertainment. The baby (6 months old) was sleeping in an infant seat placed on the sofa. The mother sat on the sofa next to the baby during the literacy event. Milagros sat next to the mother. The three main participants formed a circle around one book, which became the focus of the interaction. Interestingly, the book was not arranged facing the reader, but was placed on the mother's lap directly facing Milagros. Thus, neither the mother nor the toddler could see the pictures of the book face-forward; both saw it from the side. In this

case, it made sense to have the book in this arrangement. There was not just *one* reader, but four participants who were actively constructing the literacy event. The position of the book is meaningful to the literacy practices found in this household, which were predominantly collective literacy events.

The literacy event begins when the toddler (L) reached for a book that Juana (aged 12) was passing to Ana (aged 7). The sisters did not let her grab it and L started to cry, dropping herself to the floor, face down. The mother called L: "Vente" ("Come here"). After a couple of seconds of crying and being patted by Juana, L stood up and went toward the mother. At this moment Ana (7) put the book, which had been the motive of the struggle, on her mother's lap. Then the mother held the book to let L know that attention was directed to her, and that she was going to read the book to her: "Ven L, ven. A ver qué quieres ver de este libro. Hm?" ("Come L, come. Let's see what you want to see in this book. Hm?").

After this utterance, which signaled the beginning of the literacy event, L started to turn the pages of the book. Julia helped her, turning the pages or holding the pages that L had already turned. The mother pointed at a picture of a fish and said the word "fish" in English. At this time, Milagros (5) joined the mother and L, holding her school notebook. By looking at her mother and opening her book she indicated her desire to be read to also. Milagros said something inaudible; however, the mother immediately looked at Milagros, nodded, and said: "Hmm." At the same time L was turning the pages of the book. The following is a transcription of the interactions that illustrate how Milagros (Mi) and Julia (M) are mediators of literacy for L:

- 1 **Mi:** PT and looking at notebook
- 2 Qué dice?/ [What does it say (here)]
- 3 **M:** RD Mi's notebook
- 4 A (.)mi mamá./ [To my mother]
- 5 **Mi:** PT at the book and >]
- 6 No/ aquí./ [No. Right here] ↑>M
- 7 **M:** Espérame [Wait]
- 8 Mother places the baby's bottle out of the reach of Milagros, in order to avoid spilling the bottle.⁴

At this point L was about to continue turning the pages, as she had while the last segment of interaction occurred. However, a picture of an ice-cream cone caught her attention and initiated the following interaction:

- 9 **L:** PT at an ice cream picture in the book.
- 10 Mira. Ese **book**/ [Look at that book]
-h/ Bah/ [here L seems to be saying "ball." During observations of L at her household and at the daycare center she repeated that word "bah" continuously. Most of the time she related the word "bah" to indicate a real ball.]
- 11 **M:** ∇↓< L, PT at the picture
- 12 -h/ Ice cream/

At this point Milagros is doing what the mother told her to do, waiting. While she

"waits" for a couple of seconds, she turns her face, looking at the baby on the sofa behind her. Milagros did not see the picture in the book, but she listened to the word "ice cream." This caught her attention and she immediately turned back to the group and looked at the book saying:

- 13 Mi: Mmmmm.
 14 ∇↓ book. Makes gestures and sounds as if she were eating the ice cream from the book.

Milagros' repetitive and exaggerated gestures did not represent the way ice cream is generally eaten (with a spoon or a cone). Eight times she placed her hand on the picture of the ice cream and then rapidly moved her hand toward her mouth, as if she were scooping ice cream into her mouth with her hands. These gestures represent a way of using a frame that is known by L to explain a frame that is not familiar to her. Milagros is mediating this literacy event by reshaping the abstract picture of an ice-cream cone into something familiar to L. The frame of reference of pretending to do something is familiar to L because she has learned that frame by playing with her older sisters. This play-acting is shared knowledge among the sisters. However, the idea that print can represent reality is a concept that L is learning at this point and that frame is less familiar. As will be seen later, the gestures facilitated L's understanding that the picture in the book represented food in the real world.

After the eighth time, looking at L, Milagros continued to use frames of reference that were familiar to the toddler. She said: "*rico!*" ("tasty"). Immediately looking at the picture, Milagros said: "Oh!" and began again pretending to eat the ice cream with scooping hand gestures. However, this time Milagros placed her hand on the page, then on her mouth, and moved her hand several times to her mouth, as if she were eating a lot of ice cream, making the gestures more exaggerated. At this point Milagros smiled and looked at the camera:

- 15 Mi: ∇ camera smiling
 16 Smiling ∇<↓L
 17 ∇>↑M
 18 L: Δ<↑M ((LF))
 19 Makes gestures and sounds as if she were eating ice cream.
 20 M: ∇↓<Mi ((LF))
 21 J: Smiling joins the group

In the above segment, the participants laughed with each other as if they were pretending to eat ice cream. At this point, L began to mimic the repetitive gestures that the older child had made (line 19). It is clear in the video that L progressively understands that the picture in the book represents something real. When she also pretends to scoop up the ice cream, she is sharing her older sister's knowledge. By repeating the gestures of the other participant in this interaction, L represents an action that persons do not do in text, but do demonstrate in the real world. The mother, realizing that L was repeating her sister's gestures, looked at Milagros and

56 Part 1: Language Socialization at Home

smiled, taking a sharp breath. This last breath represented joy and surprise and reinforced the participation of the toddler.

- 22 M: Ice cream/
23 L: PT book
24 ya ya ya/
25 M: Mhm./ Ice cream./

The last segment of the interaction is illustrative of how the mother interpreted L's "talk." It was impossible for non-family members to decipher what the toddler was saying. But the mother, who had participated in the shared practices of language within the family, interpreted the toddler's utterance as "ice cream" (line 25).

- 26 Mi: ∇↓ book. Makes gestures and sounds as if she were eating the ice cream from the book. This time Milagros scratched the ice cream two times before taking her hand to her mouth.

After this last sequence of gestures, Milagros indicated that she wanted her mother to read to her. She had held her book during the "ice cream" segment waiting for her mother to allocate her attention towards her. In order to get her mother's attention, Milagros intervened:

- 27 Mi: Covers L's book with her notebook.
28. Mira mami. [Look mom.]
29 M: ∇↓ Mi's notebook
30 Juana, quieres que te lo lea (ella)? / [Do you want Juana to read it to you?]
31 Mi: No
32 L: PT at the refrigerator in the kitchen
33 ke/ ya ya, pa?
34 >↑Δ M
35 PT at the picture of the ice cream
36 ya/ya/

The last segment is important in the sense that it presents evidence that after the repetition of gestures by Milagros, repetition of the word "ice cream" by the mother, the interpretations of L's "talk" by the mother, and the step taken by L to treat the picture as something real, L was able to connect the picture of the ice cream with the ice cream in the refrigerator (lines 32-36). At the same time she seems to be trying to say something about the ice cream.

At this point Milagros claimed the attention of her mother and started to read to her from her notebook. After some seconds L tried to reclaim the mother's attention by calling her. She did not get attention after the first call (line 41); however, she did after the second call (line 52). This second call was made by L simultaneously with gestures of eating ice cream. That seemed to work in getting the mother's attention. At this point the mother asked her if the ice cream was cold and L seemed to respond, "Yeah, ice cream":

- 37 Mi: ∇>M
RD
Aueces?/ [Sometimes? reading 'aueses' instead of 'a veces']
- 38 M: ∇<Mi. RD from Mi's book
- 39 A/ veces/ [Sometimes]
- 40 Mi: te [reflexive, 2nd person singular]
- 41 M: te [reflexive, 2nd person singular]
- 42 L: PT to the picture of the ice cream
- 43 Δ>↑M Ma, ma, MA, MA MA (each ma is louder than the previous one)/
- 44 Δ↓ book PT at the picture of L's book
co/co/.
- 45 M: oh/ co/co/ ((I.F))
- 46 L: co/co
- 47 Mi: ∇↓book, RD
- 48 i?
- 49 M: RD∇↓book
- 50 te (.) impacientas [you loose your patience]
- 51 Mi: ∇>M smiling, placing her head on her mother's shoulder
- 52 M: porque soy pequeño/ [because I am a child]
- 53 L: Δ>↑M Making gestures of eating ice cream
- 54 ma, ma, ma
- 55 M: Está frío? [Is it cold?]
- 56 L: ∇↓book PT at ice cream picture
- 57 ya/aui [yeah, 'ice cream']
- 58 M: Uy! Está frío. [Oh! It's cold]

In the literacy event presented, it is clear that the mother (M) and Milagros (Mi) were mediators of literacy for 18-month-old L. The interaction with print would not have been the same had L. "read" the book by herself. Milagros looked at the picture and listened to her mother saying "ice cream." She interpreted the picture and the mother's words and constructed a way of telling her younger sister "ice cream" by drawing upon shared knowledge. She used frames of reference familiar to L, such as pretending to eat food and using the word *rico* (tasty). The smiles and laughing also communicated to L that the girls were pretending. L repeated the gestures and tried to say "ice cream" several times. The picture of the ice cream in the book was a big colorful ice-cream cone with many layers. It was very different from the ice cream that L regularly ate in her home, which came from a carton. However, because of the help of the mediators of literacy, L began to understand the meaning of the picture and could relate that picture to the ice cream in the refrigerator. In the end, the picture in the book, the mother's word "ice cream," and Milagros' uses of familiar frames of reference helped L to understand that the picture on the page represented ice cream. This experience contributed to L's acquisition of a new frame of reference in which print represents reality.

This example demonstrates that mediating literacy events not only involves shared knowledge of oral and written language, but also of non-verbal gestures, body movements, and patterns of interaction. This is particularly important when the participants are toddlers in the process of learning how to speak and understand print.

Interpretation of the Findings

In some households, particularly those of middle class families, children frequently engage in reading by themselves for periods of time. Solitary reading is also common in the Early Head Start classrooms that we observed. In contrast, all the activities observed and videotaped in this home were collectively constructed, and siblings as well as the mother played an important role in socializing the youngest children. Literacy practices as collective activities were congruent with the shared values and cultural practices found in this Mexican household, in the Mexican immigrant community, and in the literacy events the mother recalled in Mexico.

One of the principles that governed this family and allowed for organization of the household (five children and two working parents living in a very small space) was collective activity. Anthropological literature has identified reciprocal relationships that develop among relatives and friends in immigrant households and serve as sources of mutual aid. Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg (1992) conducted research among Mexican families in the border region, and their findings suggest that children are born into a rich social context where they internalize social relationships that contain particular social expectations. The disposition to engage in generalized reciprocity orders social relationships, and children are socialized in these relationships. Frequent contacts among households, through formal and informal rituals, maintain and renovate social ties and also allow shared knowledge to flow. Based on the analyses of the literacy events we observed, we conclude that mediated literacy activities are a part of the funds of knowledge that are exchanged and transmitted among households engaged in reciprocal relationships. Knowledge, information, and cultural resources were shared among relatives and friends, among the members of the social networks, and among family members.

Within this household, mutual help was continuous. The older girls responded naturally when Julia instructed them to prepare the *mamila* (bottle), take care of younger siblings, or complete household tasks. Even L helped. The girls also helped one another. Juana watched L and shared the care of the infant with her mother. Mutual help and transmission of literacy resources clearly occurred during the literacy event presented above. Thus, there was a relationship between literacy practices and other social and cultural resources, such as social networks, common knowledge, and mutual help found in the local community.

Mediators of literacy are important in the literacy practices within this household. Older siblings and the mother helped the younger children participate in the literacy events. They adapted pedagogical literacy (school games, notebooks, etc.) to become shared play activities in the household. They provided familiar frames of

meaning to help the younger children participate in literacy events, learn English vocabulary, and acquire an understanding of the relationship of print to reality. The older child looked for strategies in her communicative repertoire (such as gestures and pretend play), that interpreted the meaning of the ice-cream cone in ways familiar to the toddler. In all of these interactions, older siblings were active agents of socialization.

Understanding mediated literacy in this family contributes to a better understanding of the ways that literacy mediators help young children construct meaning and acquire knowledge. Older siblings provided known frames of reference for the toddler L that allowed her to participate in the literacy event. The mediators helped her construct meaning from the text and helped her learn a new word. This case study reveals how siblings as well as adults socialize young children to interactional competence through co-construction of meaning during participation in shared activities. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986b) demonstrate how socialization – the process by which children become competent members of their social group – begins at the first moment of social contact, and how language plays an important role in this process. This case study suggests that, besides the adult caretakers and teachers, there are many socializing agents who play an important role in helping young children learn to speak and to form the cognitive basis for literacy.

Socialization research has shown that children acquire sociocultural knowledge of their native language through participation in language-mediated activities in the home and community. This case study suggests that siblings are important mediators in this process. Scaffolded help provided by the mother and older sisters encouraged increasing autonomy in the toddler in initiating, participating in the literacy event, and in incorporating the meaning of words and linking text to real objects. A crucial ingredient for the successful participation of L in this literacy event was group collaboration and mutual knowledge. Through the provision of modeling and verbal and nonverbal cues, the older sibling socializes the younger child into interactional competence beyond her initial ability. In doing so, the sibling also conveys an implicit cultural message that success involves a specific set of shared skills that can be learned by observing carefully and following. By following the older sibling's lead and repeating her utterances and gestures, the young child gradually moved toward independent production of a word and meaning. The shared practices and common knowledge among these family members were sufficient to enable this preverbal child to achieve success within the structure of a family-mediated literacy event. The next step is for L to learn to apply these familiar routines to new situations outside her family.

Observing the ways in which this family participated in collective literacy events demonstrates how research on the experience of children and adults in families supports the educational achievement of children by encouraging family practices and shared knowledge as a crucial resource. Cultural and social values are continually expressed through social interaction. Among the members of this non-mainstream family, the boundaries between "family" and "community" networks may not be as sharply delineated as in mainstream settings. Language and literacy

acquisition in this family context are clearly collaborative social processes involving more than one mediator located at different developmental levels. Nor are these processes unidirectional.

The examination of language and literacy interactions in immigrant, non-mainstream homes can furnish information about the variation in relationships between language and culture and what children are being taught about them. Since few studies of language socialization incorporate peer and sibling interactions, further research on how language and literacy are acquired in the social context of peer/sibling-mediated literacy events can shed light on this process of language and literacy acquisition.

Notes

1. We thank Elizabeth Keating for valuable advice on an earlier version of this chapter.
2. Early Head Start (EHS) is a federally-funded program that serves low-income families with children from zero to three years old. The EHS site of this study is administered by a community-based, non-profit organization that has administered Head Start programs since the 1960s, when Head Start was initially funded. This EHS program is one of seven such programs in Texas. The EHS provides, in collaboration with other programs, infant and toddler childcare, home visits, parenting sessions, parent-child activities, adult education and employment training for families that qualify. Four Family Advocates attend these families, providing weekly home visits. During these visits the Family Advocates provide information about social services and child development and check the needs that families may have. The EHS program is based on the belief that children's welfare depends on the family and community environment; thus its services integrate children, family and community. Families selected to participate have incomes below the federal poverty guidelines. Single mothers, families with special needs, or families taking steps towards self-sufficiency are given priority. The program facilitated our access to 75 families who participated in the evaluation study.
3. Over the past ten years Harriett Romo has collected data in the evaluation of several Head Start, Early Head Start, and Even Start literacy projects in this research community from approximately 200 families who participated in these projects. Working with these immigrant families has a special meaning for María de la Piedra. As an immigrant herself, she missed her country, her language, her friendships, and the conversations and family relationships she left behind. Working in the homes of these Spanish-speaking immigrants, seeing their children play, listening to the storytelling that goes on in the households, and the *consejos* (advice) parents gave to their children, made her feel close to home.
4. The following transcription conventions and abbreviations are used here and in subsequent examples:

Subjects:

Mother: M

Daughters:

J: 12

A: 7

Mi: 5

L: 18 months

Me: 6 months old

Context of interaction:

Family's living room.

Intonation:

((CR)) crying

((LF)) laughing

Audible breathing:

-h marks in-breath

Metatranscription marks:

() unclear reading, no hearing achieved

(ow) tentative reading

bold: English words.

[]: translation to English

Non-verbal transcription:

Present progressive used when the action and the utterance occurred simultaneously.

Simple present used when action is prior or after utterance. Line above when action is prior, line below when action is subsequent. Same line when simultaneous.

Eye gaze:

< towards left

> towards right

∇ facing camera

Δ back of head to camera

↑ Looks up

↓ Looks down

Gestures:

PT: pointing

R: reaching

HD: holding

RD: reading

