GONZALEZ, NORMA (2001) I am My Language. Discourses of Women and Children in the Borderlands, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press (220 pp.)

The author is a research anthropologist at the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona. Born in Tucson to a family rooted there since at least the beginning of the 20th century, she presents this academic study in the attire of narrative style, without disguising her own involvement in the subject during the research and the actual writing of the book. In the Introduction (xv-xxii) as well as in Ch. 1 "Tucson" (3-14) and Ch. 2 "Las Familias" (15-32), she describes her own background and that of members of her family who anteceded her, setting the background of the participants and the problems to be discussed.

G initially intended to apply the Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) and Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a, 1986b) theory about children's socialization through the analysis of children's interactions, among themselves and with their caretakers (including "motherese"), but the facts that emerged from her research changed her initial perspective. In addition, she was looking for the culture that exists behind language use, and even at the start she knew that to uncover that merely by language would not be as simple as it sounded.

For her study G chose 12 households as core informants, interviewed mainly from 1988 – 1991. The interactions studied include children, mothers and other female family members, although men were only occasionally interviewed. Her own experience and memories serve as another participant, which is in line with the "involved observer" methodology of ethnographic research.

The book has four themes:

1. "To speak of language is to speak of our 'Selves'" (xix), and the quotation "I am my language" by the poet Gloria Anzaldua serve here as the motto (and indeed also the title of the book). G asks what happens to persons with more than one "self," those who know more than

one language and live in more than one culture, such as Mexican-origin, English-dominant children in Tucson.

2. The experience of hybridity in women and children living in such borderlands as Tucson, which is so near Mexico, physically and psychologically, yet is a different world. This idea is discussed in Ch. 1 where she argues that the presence of the border profoundly influences the practice and ideologies of this population, but it permeates the book throughout.

3. The general relation between anthropology, education and culture gained by insights from children's education in such areas. This theme is further discussed in Ch. 7 and Ch. 9.

4. An attempt to push the traditional boundaries of language and culture, which are usually considered together as a bundle. She calls for focusing not only on texts but also on real interactions between people, which may expand the observer's vision to power and legitimization as parts of "culture." She refers here to the term "language ideology" as defined by K. Woolard (1998), namely, "representations whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world" (xxii).

Altogether, the book comprises nine chapters plus the Introduction: 1. "Tucson: A Place in the Borderlands" (3-14); 2. "Las Familias" (15-32); 3. "When the Facts won't Stay Put: Finding Emotion in All the Wrong Places" (33-44); 4. "The Hearts of Children: Emotion, Language and Identity" (45-71); 5. "Negotiating Ideologies across Social Memories" (72 –96); 6. "Testimonios of Border Identities" (97-128); 7. "Household Language Use: The Push and Pull (129-166); 8. Where's the Culture?" (167-178); 9. "Beyond the 'Disuniting' of America: Implications for Schooling and Public Policy" (179-198).

In Ch. 3 the author describes her interviews with women from two families at the beginning of the study, enriching it with quotations. She realizes at this stage that this material contradicts her initial theory, namely, that these women's language is the product of socio-

economic background. In this location it is also related to the Mexican origin, Spanish as mother tongue (home language) certain living quarters in the town, and certain employment types (blue collar, mainly). This conclusion leads her to find the real reason for this situation: emotion. These narratives, as well as other women's later interviews, were affected by or represented their emotions toward the context and the topic, e.g., religion, discipline and respect for one's parents, as forces thwarting daily problems of drugs and violence.

Ch. 4 further analyzes the notion of emotion and how it is defined and described in the literature. She starts from infants' understanding of (human) emotion directed at them, from which certain meanings are drawn and which gradually develop into a language system. "Utterances in English, Spanish or both are charged with the aggregate of their semiotic history" (55). Thus develops also the "emotion of minority status," related to the cultural legacy of the community involving family contacts, rituals and religious beliefs, colors and temperament characteristic of the community. This minority language status is exemplified by the (English-speaking) public disregard for phonetic, morphological and syntactic rules of Spanish in street names and billboards, which "marginalize the language as not being worthy of grammatical accuracy" (58). She describes the making of Mexican-origin children's language and reaches the metaphor for language use in this community: the dialogical staircase - an intertwined double helix, like that of the spirals of the DNA molecules. This figure correlates language with the biological-physiological structure of the human brain.

Ch. 5 describes standpoints of Mexican-origin women, quoting parts of interviews with five women about their lives and their goals in their children's upbringing and education. Here again emphasis is placed on "the complexity and multiplicity of the ideologies from which women draw in crafting their own and their children's identities" (95).

Ch. 6 also brings testimonies of border identities. The author notes specific language use

in the recordings, such as the use of diminutives in Spanish and speech forms mixing Spanish and English elements, and she discusses associations of Spanish and English with emotional (home) or functional (external) needs, respectively. "What can we learn about language form these stories?" asks the author (128) and answers:

> First of all, for me the emotional pull of these stories had to do with the fact that they were told in Spanish. Simply the use of another symbolic system to tell a story affected how I interpreted and visualized the images… We cannot simply map one set of words over another… In some way, different languages do create different worlds. In these narratives, I experience very personally the notion that Spanish and English are embedded in dimensions that do not overlay each other. Like the transcripts of household discourse reveal, I, too, see English as the medium of functional communication, of professional development and of economic mobility. But with Spanish, the roots of feeling, of emotion, and of identity pull me back and tie me to a social memory.

Ch. 7 describes in more detail the "the push and the pull" between Spanish and English, between the world of emotions and the American world of professional progress. Linguistic components of this "give and take" (129-30) include the contaminated expressions of Mexican-origin children, "Okay, well" (which does not occur in the speech of Anglo-American children, or adults, for that matter), apparently echoing the Spanish tag "pues," which does not occur in their Spanish.

The theoretical Ch. 8 asks, "Where is the culture?" Most of the chapter discusses the definition of culture, or rather its modern redefinition, after rejecting the old approach to culture as reflecting certain features of human groups. Gonzalez notes that "the idea of identity has replaced the use of culture, at least in studies of students and schooling" (173). What seems important is language, and the power of the word, in the large semiotic system used by humans.

Ch. 9 moves the discussion on the one hand to the practical and pragmatic area of schooling and education, and on the other hand, sums up the book. "Children live in complex worlds, and part of that complexity is inscribed in schooling. Issues of language, identity

formation and child development are at the forefront not only in the household but in classroom as well." (180). The author sees bilingualism (and multilingualism) as a necessary component for preparing the citizens for the future.

To sum up, this book is extremely readable in its personal narrative style and in the personal stories quoted in it. Yet it is an academic study, up-to-date theoretically, presenting the author's rich experience in the ethnographic, anthropological and sociolinguistic areas. Further, it contains many quotations from relevant literature on sociolinguistics, philosophy of language, text linguistics, ethnography, Hispanic Studies, and education, listed in a 13-page reference list. For a reader like me, whose point of view is firstly a linguistic one, the main contributions of this work lie in the attention paid to emotions as related to language development and use, in both children and adults, the pragmatic aspects bringing these sociolinguistic and ethnographic considerations to the school range, and the possibilities for generalizing from this Tucson "case study" to other communities with similar phenomena and problems. As the book describes mainly female communication, it could be viewed also from a feminist-linguistic perspective, but feminist ideology is neither its starting point nor its goal, in my opinion. Finally, as a linguist, I support the belief in the importance of the power of the "word."

## References

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