

Words at Work and Play

Childhood and family life have changed significantly in recent decades. What is the nature of these changes? How have they affected the use of time, space, work, and play? In what ways have they influenced face-to-face talk and the uses of technology within families and communities? What are the effects of race and social class on early and later language development and education and career choices?

Eminent anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath sets out to find answers to these and similar questions, tracking the lives of 300 black and white working-class families as they reshaped their lives in new locations, occupations, and interpersonal alignments over a period of thirty years.

From the 1981 recession through the economic instabilities and technological developments of the opening decade of the twenty-first century, Shirley Brice Heath shows how families constantly rearrange their patterns of work, language, play, and learning in response to economic pressures. Determined to enter the mainstream, parents and children navigate newly desegregated schools, the need for new skills for new jobs, and the realities of compressed and overlapping time demands in family life. In the care of “intimate strangers” – including childcare workers, coaches, music teachers, and community organization leaders – children become closely aligned with peers in their ways of talking and choices of special interests that engage them with play, work, and technology.

Combining social history, language records, and a close examination of community life over many years, this outstanding study is a must-read for anyone interested in family life, language development, and social change.

SHIRLEY BRICE HEATH, a leading social historian and ethnographer of family life, is Margery Bailey Professor of English and Dramatic Literature and Professor of Linguistics, Emerita, at Stanford University. Her previous publications include *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms* (Cambridge, 1983/1996) and *On ethnography* (2008, with Brian Street).

Words at Work and Play

Three Decades in Family and Community Life

Shirley Brice Heath



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*In memory of Marjorie Martus
and
In tribute to
Jerome Bruner and Courtney Cazden*

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Acknowledgments

Since 1969 I have followed the lives of children and grandchildren of 300 families I first met in the Piedmont Carolinas just as the Civil Rights Era was drawing to a close. Individuals from these families and their friends have found my persistent presence in their lives occasional diversion and support, as well as erratic annoyance and provocation. We have laughed and cried together. We have gathered in one another's homes to take in the horrors of accidents, the loss of young and old family members, and to reckon the toll of twists of fate on those we have known and loved. Together we have been to churches and prisons, hospitals and schools, soccer games and piano recitals, and funerals and graduations of sons and daughters, mothers and fathers.

I am deeply grateful to all the individuals whose lives this book reflects in one way or another. Their perceptions and philosophies have given the depth of history and interpretive power critical to social history and ethnography. Though families will recognize themselves and their friends in these pages, none of these individuals can be mentioned by name. I hope they will, in the main, agree with my account and analysis of the values and habits that have shaped the course of their lives.

This book benefits from the intellectual nourishment of scholars who have debated and critiqued the papers and talks that have reported my research over past years. I cannot adequately acknowledge or thank them. My offering of appreciation is this book. As all scholars do, I take full responsibility for the findings and interpretations given in these pages.

Foremost among those whose ideas have advanced this book is Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, my colleague and friend at Stanford University, with whom I worked for a decade on research funded by the Spencer Foundation. Her wit and wisdom have been with me through many tough spots. She and I spent years thinking together about how social scientists can most effectively study the lives of young people living in under-resourced communities. The approaches I bring as linguistic anthropologist to this methodological challenge have been amplified by Milbrey's expertise in policy analysis, as well as her commitment to a range of qualitative and quantitative methods of research.

Other colleagues at Stanford University in the School of Education and the Departments of Linguistics and English will also see their influence here. Elliot

Eisner graciously joined with me in debates about the lasting influence on children's learning of participation in the arts. Ingram Olkin, my long-term colleague in statistics, listened to my account of tracking from year to year details of language and life in families scattered across the United States. He advised me against excessive use of quantitative records to support the interpretive narrative of this volume. Readers will, I trust, be grateful for his wise counsel. The work of linguists Elizabeth Traugott, John Rickford, and Penny Eckert, all keenly interested in language change and style, has deepened interpretation of the spoken and written language of children and adolescents in their peer interactions. I have also benefited from Andrea Lunsford's longitudinal research on how young adults bring to their ways of writing expertise in the performative power of other media.

Scholars who have followed literacy into community settings will find their ideas on nearly every page of this volume. David Barton, Deborah Brandt, Marcia Farr, Mary Hamilton, Elizabeth Moje, Beverly Moss, and Brian Street have taken ethnographic routes on their own journeys to follow reading and writing in schools, churches, youth activities, and homes. In our explorations of contemporary uses of oral and written language, all of us have benefited from historical portraits of reading and writing. Central in this research has been the work of historians Elizabeth Eisenstein, Harvey Graff, and Elizabeth McHenry.

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of language use in the complex interdependence of family, school, and community life.

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Since 2005, scholars within the Science of Learning Center on Learning in Informal and Formal Environments (LIFE) at the University of Washington and Stanford University have brought me as linguistic anthropologist into their vibrant intellectual mix of neuroscientists, psychologists, and learning scientists. Their company has meant several years of steep-curve learning to expand my ways of thinking about nurture, brain development, and ecologies of learning. I am grateful to them for helping me understand how language development moves in close coordination with the human capacity for visual perception and sustained attentiveness to role fulfillment in the environment.

In the final months of bringing to a close a manuscript whose creation has taken too many years, every scholar needs the fresh eye of a patient engaged reader. Paula Little, a wise teacher, has played this role for me with good humor and a discerning wit. She has my deep appreciation.

Acknowledgments

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Marjorie Martus, my supportive friend and ready listener, was very much part of the early history of this book before her death. I sorely miss her warm and spirited presence.

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The Blue Canoe
Anchor Bay, California

Note on transcriptions

In transcribing the speech of the characters in this book, I have made no effort to provide phonetic representation. Words are presented in an approximation to standard orthography, with as much “eye-dialect” as seems necessary to indicate the varieties of English used, primarily African American English Vernacular and Piedmont Carolina dialect. The children of the two working-class communities of Trackton and Roadville grew up learning local dialect forms. Trackton children who did not leave the community until they were in their adolescence retained more features of African American English Vernacular than those who left before they entered school. The children of the children of both Trackton and Roadville spoke southern dialects only if they grew up in the South. In the interest of saving space, I have not included self-interruptions or expressions of hesitation (such as *uh*). There is no intention to stigmatize any variety, and the modified spellings are used in full awareness that all natural English speech differs from what standard orthography indicates.

Nonverbal behavior during talk and immediately prior or following talk is indicated within closed [square] brackets.

All material in quotation marks or set off from the text in blocks is a direct quotation. Texts of youth in groups and other long text blocks that are multi-party were taperecorded. Long text blocks of my conversations with individuals were also taperecorded. Quotations embedded within the text were either taken from taperecordings or written down in field and interview notes. Detailing of the situational context of the speech was part of the routine of taking fieldnotes. The following transcription conventions are used for long text blocks.

CAPS	Loud volume in utterance of words or phrases
<i>Italics</i>	Heightening of primary stress by vowel-lengthening and raising of pitch
.	Sentence-final falling intonation and a full pause
,	Clause
?	Rising intonation and pause
[Overlapping utterances (used to mark the point at which an utterance in progress is joined by another interrupting utterance)
=	Contiguous utterances (used when there is no break between adjacent utterances, the second latched to, but not overlapping, the first)

All is mere breath. That which was is that which will be, and that
which was done is that which will be done, and there is nothing new
under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1: 9 [Translation from Alter 2010]