

Language socialization across borders

Producing scalar subjectivities through material-affective semiosis

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Recent scholarship on language use has developed a resurgent interest in the complex interrelationship of language and materiality; given its longstanding investigation of both non-verbal communication and political economy, language socialization research is well-positioned to make important contributions to this investigation of language materiality. This paper advances such a project by demonstrating how the discursive processes of language socialization make the material affectively meaningful. Through an exploration of prompting interactions in cross-border conversations within transnational Salvadoran families, the paper elucidates how processes of material-affective semiosis produce subject positions that are made normative for some individuals, in this case, differentiating between migrant and non-migrant kin. Drawing out the role of materiality in such processes thus reveals how language socialization functions as a scale-making resource that turns the inequalities of transnational migration into constitutive features of family life.

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1. Materiality in language socialization

In recent years, linguistic anthropological scholarship has increasingly challenged the presumed separation between discourse and materiality inscribed in Saussurean models of language. Building on Marxist-inspired work in literary and cultural studies, one strand of this scholarship has emphasized value, focusing on the role of language in political-economic systems (Gal 1989; Irvine 1989; Urciuoli 1995; Woolard 1985); a second strand has taken a semiotic approach, exploring how the material is both produced by and productive of meaning

(Keane 2003; Kockelman 2006, 2013; Lee 1997; Manning 2012). Shankar and Cavanaugh suggest that these two bodies of work can be productively unified in a “language materiality” framework in which materiality is understood broadly as “the state or quality of being material, embedded within and taking meaning and value from sociocultural and political-economic structures and processes” (2012, 356). Such an approach is particularly useful to understanding the role of language in today’s globalized world, characterized as it is by new forms of commodification and circulation (McElhinny 2007; Urciuoli and LaDousa 2013; Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014).

Language socialization research is well positioned to make important contributions to this broad exploration of language materiality. Early language socialization research, such as Schieffelin’s foundational work (1990), highlighted political economic considerations; this attention to the communicative work that reproduces political economic relations has continued in scholarship on food exchanges (for a recent review see Karrebæk, Riley, and Cavanaugh 2018). In addition, this approach has been shown to productively illuminate recent interest in the production of subjectivities, which conceptualizes the verbal routines of language socialization as Foucauldian technologies of the self that constitute particular subject positions and make them more or less desirable to particular individuals (Fader 2009, 2011; Kulick and Schieffelin 2004; Smith and Thompson 2016). For example, Senegalese children’s participation in the semiotic negotiations that shape material exchange practices are linked to asymmetrical but complementary subject positions defined in terms of caste and gender (Yount-André 2016). Age-graded subjectivity can also be produced through political-economic relations, as shown by Berman (2014) who demonstrates that the social status of Marshallese children *as* children (rather than adults) is constituted in part by the expectation (and practice) that they violate the norms of material exchange.

In addition to such political economic research, language socialization scholarship has also long explored the importance of non-verbal semiotic resources both as tools for socialization and as the objects of socialization. For instance, particular built environments create communicative affordances and inhibitions that shape socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin 2012), as do the embodied configurations in which infants are habitually carried (De León 2011). Non-verbal actions also play important roles in the socialization of both children (Goodwin 2006, 2015) and adults (Arnold 2012). Extending this historical focus and arguing for a more prominent role for material objects in language socialization, Smith (2016) contends that artefacts such as the marbles and pastureland playing fields of Aymara boys in Peru may come to act as socializing agents in their own right through semiotic processes in which materiality is not only construed as meaningful but itself becomes a resource for producing meaning.

This paper takes up Smith's call to expanding our understanding of how material objects participate in processes of language socialization, situating this semiotic approach within a broader political economic approach to materiality. I draw attention to how the discursive practices of language socialization interweave materiality and affect, another topic of longstanding interest in the field (Ahn 2016; Goodwin, Cekaite, and Goodwin 2012; Paugh 2014; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Rather than exploring affect as a distinct phenomenon, however, I examine processes of material-affective semiosis in which affective orientations to others are materialized and in turn, material objects take on affective meaning. The analysis presented here demonstrates that close attention to the particular communicative enactment of material-affective semiosis reveals how such orientations are constitutive of particular subjectivities. Through language socialization, specific subject positions are made normatively inhabitable for some individuals, while being proscribed for others. As demonstrated by the research of Yount-André and Berman, the discursive constitution of such subjectivities inevitably positions them vis-à-vis other locally available positions.

By revealing such systems of interlocking and asymmetrical subjectivities, attention to material-affective semiosis opens up insights into how mundane communication participates in social reproduction, or "the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Nakano Glenn 1992,1). Although such carework produces the subjectivities and social capital necessary for capitalist accumulation, capitalism systematically un(der)remunerates carework and pushes those who provide care – often women and people of color – to the margins of the global political-economy (Folbre 2014; Fraser 2016). In the face of this devalorization, feminist scholarship has long argued for the fundamental role of social reproduction within political economic systems (see recent perspectives in Bhattacharya 2017). The analysis presented here supports these claims by elucidating how mundane communication, understood as communicative acts of care (Arnold forthcoming a), enmeshes affective labor and political economic relations. Utilizing language socialization as a framework that elucidates the discursive production of marginalization within political economic systems (García-Sánchez 2016), I demonstrate how cross-border language socialization in multigenerational extended families living stretched between El Salvador and the United States is simultaneously produced by and reproduces global inequalities between North and South.

2. Language socialization, care, and transnational migration

Studies of language socialization in contexts of migration have shown it to be a particularly productive site for examining the discursive constitution of both marginalization and resistance. Research with immigrant communities has demonstrated how the language socialization paradigm allows scholars to “more comprehensively examine processes and practices of continuity and identification, as well as discontinuity and dis-identification” (Baquedano-Lopez and Mangual Figueroa 2012, 536). Through language socialization, immigrant communities negotiate belonging in multiple communities, navigating contradictions and ideological tensions between diasporic heritage identities and belonging in their receiving societies (García Sánchez and Nazimova 2017; Reynolds and Chun 2013). Language socialization demonstrates how discursive processes come to have consequential outcomes for the position of individuals, families, and communities within political economic systems and migration regimes (Gallo 2014; Mangual Figueroa 2013). Moreover, through everyday language socialization, children and other newcomers learn about the political-economic conditions of migrant life; in such encounters, for instance, families and children work out the meanings of juridical categories of citizenship and the implications of differing forms of legalized exclusion (Mangual Figueroa 2012).

Such research reveals how language socialization functions as a discursive form of scale-making (Carr and Lempert 2016); questioning pre-given scalar hierarchies, this approach examines how semiotic processes produce relationships between scales, such that some are presumed to be of a higher order and thus more significant than others. The scholarship on language socialization in contexts of migration demonstrates how these practices scale up the presumably intimate domain of family life even as seemingly large-scale political economic regimes are scaled down, producing kin ties indelibly permeated with the global inequalities that drive regimes of (im)mobility. Moments of language socialization in contexts of migration can thus only be fully understood through perspectives that are open to their scalar effects, and it is just such a perspective that is advanced in the analysis presented here.

While most existing scholarship on language socialization in contexts of migration focuses on co-present immigrant households, this article explores cross-border language socialization in technologically mediated conversations between migrants in the global North and their non-migrant relatives in the global South. Due to political-economic policies that limit visas to workers without dependents or necessitate dangerous unauthorized migration, such transnational families are often forced to sustain their relationships across borders for years at a time with no face-to-face contact. Moreover, for such families, migration

is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing process that often involves not only the migration of new generations, but also changes in individuals' migration status that impact their ability to work, to access education, and to travel. Such changes have implications for how individuals are able to participate in the work of family care across borders; thus, the current global resurgence of xenophobic rhetoric and anti-immigrant policies places increasing strain on the social reproduction of transnational families.

Nevertheless, research with cross-border families in a range of contexts has demonstrated the wealth of strategies these kin networks develop to enact multidirectional forms of care across borders (e.g. contributions to Baldassar and Merla 2013). Increasingly, this scholarship has drawn attention to the importance of technologically mediated communication for sustaining social reproduction in transnational families (e.g. Benítez 2012; Mahler 2001; Madianou 2012; Wilding 2006). However, because such work relies largely on interviews and participant observation, it is often not able to describe the specific communicative practices enacted in these conversations (though see Francisco-Menchavez 2018; Inoue 2012). Attending closely to the precise communicative labor enacted in such conversations is crucial under the ever-more restrictive regimes of (im)mobility that structure the lives of transnational families today; for many, the material and affective work of kin care is managed largely through transnational communication, which becomes the primary means by which families meet increasing political-economic, ideological, and discursive threats to their continued survival.

Transnational communication should thus be understood as a key *transfronterizo* (cross-border) practice, a lifeway that has emerged out of continued encounters with borders and crossings (Fránquiz and Ortiz 2017; Zentella 2016). Through cross-border talk, kin work out how to manage the everyday concerns of family life, providing housing, food, clothing, education, and health care to the members in both countries; in addition, and often simultaneously, these conversations provide the primary venue through which transnational families can connect, re-working and sustaining their affective ties to one another. Language socialization participates fully in these forms of care-work, allowing families to manage not only common lifecycle transitions in which children are born and grow up, new partnerships are formed, and elders pass away, but also to navigate the changes that migration introduces and the challenges it presents for social reproduction. To fully grapple with the implications of transnational talk for social reproduction under these conditions, the grounded approach offered by the language socialization paradigm is productive, shedding light as it does on the concrete communicative and semiotic practices through which change and continuity are both managed and produced.

3. Prompting in transnational Salvadoran families

The families in this study participate in a well-worn migration pathway produced and reinforced by a long history of U.S. involvement in Central America. Interventionist U.S. policies during the Cold War destabilized the region, leading to an exodus of Salvadorans who sought to escape violence by traveling North. Since that time, the United States has pushed neoliberal economic policies that have undermined rural livelihoods in the region, thereby encouraging continued emigration (Velasquez Carillo 2010). At the same time, U.S. immigration policy has consistently denied Salvadorans the opportunity for authorized migration, resulting in a high percentage of undocumented individuals and mixed-status families among the Salvadoran immigrant community (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Continuing instability and poverty within Central America has fueled widespread violence and impelled yet another generation of Salvadorans to flee home (Varela 2014). Arriving in the U.S. in search of safety, these newest migrants instead encounter xenophobic rhetoric that portrays all Salvadoran migrants as dangerous gang members; this dehumanizing discourse has fueled increasing enforcement, detention, and mistreatment that further marginalize undocumented migrants.

This national history is reflected in the lives of the families in my study who first became transnational in the early 2000's, when young men – seen as the best breadwinners – traveled North without documentation. In the intervening decade, these migrant sons continued to send remittances to their relatives back home, even as they established nuclear families in the United States. Their migration coincided with the advent of cell phone technology in rural areas that had never been reached by land lines, and this new communication infrastructure facilitated continued connection between migrants and their relatives back home in ways that were more difficult for previous generations of migrants. Since 2014, these established migrants have been joined by young people who migrated North to flee being forcibly recruited to participate in increasing violence. These youth have become part of the transnational economies of their extended families, finding work and participating in the sending of remittances upon which their families in El Salvador rely for survival. The inequality that characterizes international relations between the United States and El Salvador is echoed within families (Dick and Arnold 2018) in the sustained economic asymmetries between migrant bread-winners and their non-migrant, financially dependent kin.

I first came to know these families before they became transnational, when I lived and worked in their village as a volunteer with gender development and youth engagement programs. During this time, I learned the Spanish spoken in this rural village, gaining the communicative competence necessary to conduct my research. Moreover, my fifteen-year relationship with these families made

possible this intimate investigation, which involved not only ethnographic interviews and participant observation in everyday family life, but also recordings of mundane family conversations. These recordings were collected using collaborative methods (Chevalier and Buckles 2013) that aimed to protect the intimacy of the conversations. I collaborated with family research assistants, who were trained in the use of the recording technology and provided with a small monthly stipend; these individuals then decided which interactions to record and which recordings to pass along to me. Most of the recorded conversations were serially dyadic, consisting of a string of two-person conversations between migrant and non-migrant family members. Here, however, I examine cases where this technologically shaped norm temporarily gives way to multi-party interaction when a third person, co-present to one of the interlocutors in the phone call, is incorporated into the cross-border conversation.

All of the multiparty transnational interaction in my data involves prompting, or instances in which one person tells another what to say. Prompting is a widespread practice by which adults socialize children into valued communicative competencies (e.g.; Bhimji 2005; Demuth 1986; De León 1998; Iwamura 1980). Part of what makes prompting a canonical language socialization routine is its reliance on repetition, which helps children identify key communicative practices (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986) while also encouraging creativity (Duranti and Black 2012). Examining prompts can reveal ideologies about what kind of speech is important and must be taught, as opposed to that which children are assumed to learn spontaneously (Moore 2012). Nevertheless, although prompting seems to be an overtly pedagogical form of language socialization, prompts are always produced as part of ongoing interaction and thus have broader functions such as facilitating teasing routines (Moore 2012) or managing awkward situations (Miller 1982). The multifunctionality of prompting is due in part to the fact that such interactions tend to be triadic, involving the prompter, the child prompted, and a third party whom the child is encouraged to address as their recipient (Field 2001; Pfeiler 2007). At the very least, therefore, the modeled utterance must be understood as designed as much for its intended recipient as for the child it aims to prompt (Ochs and Schieffelin 1982). Because of its prominence in multi-party interaction, prompting teaches children about who can say what to whom, in what setting, and to what ends (De León 2011).

Prompting can therefore be considered a form of metacultural positioning (Smith 2012) through which claims are staked as to the normativity of particular ways of acting, being, thinking, talking, and feeling. For the transnational families in this study, prompting in multiparty cross-border interaction is utilized to constitute particular material exchanges and associated communicative practices as normatively enacting care across borders. In the analysis that follows,

I demonstrate how this communicative production of care is accomplished through particular forms of material-affective semiosis that create particular subject positions and make them differentially available for individuals to inhabit; distinctions between migrants and non-migrants emerge as particularly salient in this context of transnational language socialization. Prompting routines socialize both migrants and non-migrants into the forms of material-affective semiosis seen as normative for their particular subject positions. In so doing, this material-affective semiosis sets up a fractally recursive relationship between global North and South and the normative subjectivities of migrants and non-migrants (Dick and Arnold 2018), enacting social reproduction that is both shaped by and simultaneously reconstitutes the inequalities of the global political economy. The analysis thus reveals how language socialization practices function as a form of scale-making through which seemingly fleeting everyday interactions take on durative significance.

4. Material-affective semiosis in cross-border prompting

Four months after he arrived in the United States, Adán had finally saved up enough money to send his first gift to El Salvador: a small pair of sneakers, which he sent not to his younger brother but to his cousin Wilbur, who was two at the time. All members of the family described Wilbur's relationship with Adán prior to his migration as *apegado* (very close). When he said goodbye to Wilbur before migrating, Adán promised his disconsolate younger cousin that he would send him something that they had both long coveted: sneakers in a particularly trendy brand and style. The shoes would provide Wilbur with a concrete reminder of a relationship that might otherwise have faded from his developing memory, while also demonstrating to others in the family the special status of this cousin bond. As soon as he could, Adán made good on this promise, insisting on buying the shoes in the United States where he could be sure they would match his own despite advice from more experienced migrants that a different pair of shoes could have been purchased for half the price in El Salvador, which would have also saved the cost of sending the shoes via private courier.

The importance of the physical resemblance between Adán's own shoes and those he sent to his cousin suggests that they are imbued with greater meaning than simply that of a material object with a particular use value. Of course, as stylish sneakers, they convey a certain social status upon their wearer, but their significance clearly goes beyond this. Adán's efforts to send shoes that matched his own produce the gifted footwear as an iconic sign that is connected to its object through a relationship of resemblance; Wilbur's new shoes are thereby

semiotically linked to Adán's own due to their similarity. Moreover, this connection extends beyond the shoes themselves to their wearers, producing meaning about the relationship between Adán and Wilbur. Here, the shoes become not simply iconic but indexical, pointing to the close relationship that these two cousins have; the iconicity of the shoes strengthens their indexical function as a signal of closeness between sender and recipient, suggesting that just as their shoes are connected by similarity, so too Adán and Wilbur remain *apegado* despite the distance that now separates them. This indexical reading of the gifted shoes emerges clearly in the following phone call, which was recorded a few days after the sneakers had arrived in El Salvador. Here, at the invitation of his mother and with her support, Wilbur talks to Adán. The child immediately mentions the shoes as a motivation for this conversation (line 1), and Sara then prompts him to thank his cousin for the gift; Adán responds by teasing them gently (lines 8 and 12) for the tardiness of their thank you.

Example 1. "Gracias por los zapatos" (Thank you for the shoes)

(In the transcript, A = Adán, S = Sara, W = Wilbur)

1. W: *Vaya, #### zapatos va.* Okay, #### shoes right.
2. S: *Sí. Hola Adán decile.* Yes. Hi Adán tell him.
3. W: *Hola Adán. Grac[ias ##] por, [[los za]]patos.* Hi Adán. Thank [you ##] for, [[the sho]]es.
4. A: *[Que ondas Wilbur?] [[Ah]]? Cómo?* [What's up Wilbur]? [[Huh]]? What?
5. W: *Zapatos.* Shoes.
6. S: *Gracias por los zapatos decile.* Thank you for the shoes tell him.
7. W: *Gracias por zapatos.* Thank you for shoes.
8. A: *Ah vaya ya. Y hasta ahora verdad?* Oh okay I get it. And finally now huh?
9. W: *Están bonitos.* They are nice.
10. A: *Ah:.* Oh.
11. S: *Que están bonitos dice.* They are nice he says.
12. A: *Y hasta ahora verdad?* And finally now huh?
13. S: *Sí decile.* Yes tell him.
14. W: *Sí.* Yes.
15. A: *Y y y, cuán- cuándo los recibiste?* And and and, whe- when did you get them?
16. W: *(Allá están la casa), zapatos.* (There they are in the house), shoes.
17. S: *Ahora me los voy a poner, en la tarde. Y voy a sacar fotos decile.* Today I'm going to put them on, in the afternoon. And I am going to take pictures tell him.

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| 18. W: | <i>Voy a sacar fotos.</i> | I'm going to take pictures. |
| 19. S: | <i>[Por la tarde].</i> | [In the afternoon]. |
| 20. A: | <i>[Ah pues quiero una] foto, bien bonita [[allí. Que tiores]] plante.</i> | [Oh well then I want a] photo, a really nice one. [[Where you look impressive]]. |
| 21. W: | <i>[[##]]</i> | [[##]] |
| 22. A: | <i>Wilbur?</i> | Wilbur? |

This interaction discursively produces the shoes sent by Adán as indexing close ties between the cousins in two ways, both of which rely on material-affective semiosis that actively scales this enchronic moment as participating in the perduring political-economic inequality of transnational family life. Most clearly, the prompting in this conversation is focused on socializing a normative response to receiving a gift: thanking. Wilbur initiates the thanking (line 3), which his mother Sara supports with a subsequent prompt (line 6); he then follows the thanks with a spontaneous positive evaluation of the shoes (line 9), showing his familiarity with the requirements of the genre. Following Smith (2016), this instance can be seen as an example of the agency that can be embedded in material objects in processes of socialization; here, the gifted shoes are understood as making normatively relevant a next action of thanking, a form of affective communicative labor. This response is positioned as normative by all participants, including the sender of the gift, who twice teasingly chastises Wilbur (and by extension his mother) for not having produced the thanks soon enough after receipt of the gift (lines 8 and 12). The talk thus constructs a material object as eliciting an affective response from the recipient, naturalizing a form of material-affective semiosis in which material objects give rise to affective forms of response produced via communicative practices. The affective labor that Wilbur is socialized into here attends to his relationship with Adán, as he learns to produce the affective response that is normative for someone who has received a gift; in thanking Adán for the shoes, Wilbur thus enacts his role of recipient relative to Adán's role of giver, thereby reaffirming their relationship as a close one in which such exchanges occur.

In addition, however, the converse relationship is also articulated here, with affect producing material consequences. Specifically, the shoes Adán has sent to Wilbur are discursively produced as a materialization of his affection for his younger cousin. This assumption is revealed by Sara's plan to take photos of Wilbur wearing the shoes (line 17); although she does not explicitly state who the photos will be for, Adán's eager response requesting a particular kind of photo (line 20) confirms that he sees himself as the intended recipient. Sara's assumption that Adán will want to see photos of Wilbur wearing the shoes, as well as his enthusiastic response to this idea, construct the gifted shoes as motivated by Adán's emotional connection to Wilbur, as a materialization of affect. In this inter-

action, then, the material is semiotically produced as affective and the affective is produced as material. The gift of shoes evokes an affective response, but is also preceded by a particular affect, and it is this interweaving that produces both the gift and the response to it as forms of care.

Furthermore, as this material-affective semiosis is produced, it becomes tied to particular individuals who are expected to display certain orientations to this interwoven materiality and affect. Here, the participants – including Adán himself – construct Adán's affect as materialized in the gift of the shoes. More obvious here is the orientation expected of Wilbur, who is socialized to produce the appropriate affective response to a material cue. Thus, as it carries out material-affective semiosis, everyday talk also carves out subjectivities characterized by certain normative orientations. Through language socialization, different individuals are encouraged to inhabit these subject positions, to understand their experience in particular ways. In this case, Adán is positioned as a gift-giver, motivated by affection for his kin, while Wilbur learns to produce himself as an appropriately thankful recipient. The distribution of these material-affective subjectivities is tied to individuals' position in the global political economy and produces relationships characterized by sustained economic asymmetries. The gift discussed here is one instance of a larger pattern of one-way material transfers from migrants to non-migrants, which most often take the form of remittances that meet the day-to-day needs of the relatives back home. Consequently, while Adán and Wilbur take up these subject positions in the enchronic moment of this interaction, these roles are not new but conform to durative expectations about appropriate subjectivities for migrants and non-migrants. Those who have greater access to material resources (migrants) are encouraged to experience themselves as motivated by affection to share these goods. Conversely, the non-migrant relatives who lack this material status are expected to produce affective labor that responds to these transfers.

Socialization into these asymmetrical but complementary normative subjectivities is thus shaped by broader political-economic inequalities in the distribution of wealth. At the same time, the habitual inhabitation of these positions reproduces such asymmetry over time, since it is this material-affective subjectification that maintains the economic and emotional ties upon which transnational families depend. The material-affective semiosis through which such subjectivities are continually reconstituted is thus the vehicle by which social reproduction is scaled up and global political-economic inequality is scaled down, becoming imbricated in the persistent asymmetry of transnational family connections. On first glance, it might seem that these asymmetrical subjectivities participate in the capitalist erasure of social reproduction, since the affective labor of non-migrants may seem to be subordinated to the remittances sent by migrants. However, close attention to the communicative enactment of these subjectivities reveals a more

complex picture. In the interaction shown here, all participants – including the migrant, orient to the importance of the affective communicative work conducted by non-migrants. In so doing, they demonstrate an understanding of such care work as upholding the ability of transnational families to sustain themselves as a family form. Thus, while material-affective semiosis constitutes familial asymmetries that replicate global inequalities, it simultaneously pushes back against capitalist logics by both envisioning and enacting the importance of social reproduction in the political economy of family life.

The importance of material-affective subjectivities for these families is most clearly revealed in cases where normative subject positions are oriented to as not appropriately enacted, as shown in the next example. This case involves prompting in a cross-border conversation between three adults, once again regarding management of a material gift sent by migrants to their non-migrant kin in El Salvador. Here, long-term migrants Magda and her husband Francisco have just shipped a box to El Salvador filled with new and used clothing, shoes, jewelry, and small household electronic items destined for relatives on both sides of the family. Francisco's sister Perla – the oldest sibling remaining at home – has been designated to receive the box. In this call, Francisco is discussing with his sister the logistics of the arrival of the box, and its contents, providing a detailed listing of which gifts are for whom. Magda consistently participates in this enumeration of the gifts, as she had selected and purchased the vast majority of these items, even those for Francisco's family. This particular extract comes part-way through the conversation, as Francisco's lack of participation in the gift-giving is foregrounded; here, the act of not sending gifts is constructed as meaningful through material-affective semiosis that once again carves out differential subject positions for migrants and non-migrants.

Example 2. “Regañelo para que se acuerda de ustedes” (Scold him so he remembers you)

(In the transcript, F = Francisco, M = Magda, P = Perla)

1. F: *Y para ustedes, yo no- no se- -- And for you, I don't- don't
no me acuerdo si les mando, o know -- I don't remember if I'm
no. @@@@ @@@@[@] sending anything, or not.
@@@@ @@@@@[@]*
2. M: *[Si] vos no mandastes n[[ada]].* You didn't send anything.
3. P: *[[@]]@@@* [[@]]@@@
4. F: *No más para Jacinta, creo que* Just for Jacinta, I think there is
va una, no se, va algo para la a, I don't know, there is
Jacinta, creo. something for Jacinta, I think.
5. P: *Mm.* Mm.

6. F: *No pues. Yo le dije a esta, "No, yo no ando comprando nada. Yo si les voy a mandar, les voy a mandar unos, .. unos diez dolares cada uno."* le dije yo. No then. I told this one, "No, I am not buying anything. If I am going to send them something, I'll send them like, like ten dollars each." I told her.
7. P: *(Está) bien. @@@@* That's ok. @@@@
8. F: *Sí vos. Esta que manda-* -- O -- Yes you. This one sends- -- Oh --
9. M: *Regañelo. Regañelo para q[ue se acuerda de ustedes].* Scold him. Scold him so that he remembers you all.
10. P: *[####]* [####]
11. F: *[[Yo siempre me acuerdo]].* [[I always remember]].
12. P: *[[#### nada]].* [[#### nothing]].

As in the first example, in this excerpt, material objects are discursively constituted as indexical signs that can be read in ways that reveal underlying truths about relationships; in this case, the absence of gifts is produced as conveying a troubling lack of closeness in transnational relationships. This signification emerges most clearly when Magda inserts herself into the dyadic phone conversation, speaking loudly enough for her sister-in-law in El Salvador to hear her as she addresses her directly, prompting her to scold her brother (Francisco) so that he remembers the family in El Salvador (line 9). Her interjection counters Francisco's explanation for not having sent gifts; whereas he seeks to represent these actions as logical and therefore justified, Magda depicts them as sanctionable. In so doing, she draws on the normative assumption that material gifts emerge from the sender's affection for the recipient, so that a lack of gifts is evidence of a lack of affect. Magda thus depicts her husband as not caring sufficiently about his family, doing so in a way that makes a public statement of normativity. Although Francisco responds by insisting that he always remembers his family (line 11), the assumptions underlying Magda's prompt make it clear that this affect is meaningless if it is not materialized in normative ways.

Her prompt produces a particular subject position in which affect is only meaningful if it results in a material manifestation. Once again, it is the migrant, the one with greater access to material resources, who is urged to take up this subjectivity. In cautioning Perla that this box of gifts is not to be interpreted as a sign of affective engagement on Francisco's part, Magda implies that she had been the one to remember her husband's family, purchasing and sending the gifts. Of course, gendered assumptions about who is responsible for care work likely shaped Francisco's expectation that his wife would perform the labor that makes gift giving possible; like much social reproduction, this labor may have gone unrecognized, with the husband ultimately receiving credit for the end result. But by insisting on

making her contributions visible through her prompt, Magda challenges this gendered erasure of social reproduction. All migrants, including her husband, should participate in the labor of materializing affect into gifts sent across borders; the material-affective subjectivity expected of migrants overrides the traditional gendering of care.

In addition, Magda's prompt has implications for her sister-in-law. By cautioning Perla to scold Francisco so that he remembers the family back home, Magda uses a widespread shorthand in Salvadoran migration discourse whereby remembering non-migrant kin involves sending them material gifts or economic remittances (Arnold 2016). The existence of this pervasive formulation is itself evidence of the import of material-affective orientations to the subjectivities that are normative for migrants and non-migrants. Her interruption mobilizes this fear of being forgotten to impress upon Perla that Francisco has not fulfilled his expected role, despite the appearance of gifts. As Magda encourages Perla to rebuke Francisco for this failure, everyday talk once again constructs material items as producing a particular affective response. Whereas in Example (1), a gift produced gratitude, here Magda suggests that the lack of a gift should produce disappointment on the part of the non-migrant. The prompt urges Perla to take up this affect and articulate it through scolding. Again, non-migrants are normatively expected to inhabit a subjectivity in which the material actions of their migrant kin produce an affective response.

By reminding both her husband and sister-in-law of normative subjectivities for migrants and non-migrants, Magda's socializing efforts here hold both parties responsible for the lapse in familial relations signaled by Francisco's failure to send gifts to his relatives. This prompt sets forward a vision of family life in which the asymmetrical material-affective subjectivities of migrants and non-migrants are understood as working together to constitute their cross-border political economy. Only if migrants materialize their affect to support their families back home will non-migrants be able to respond affectively to these gifts; similarly, the affective labor of non-migrants is crucial for sustaining the emotional connections that are understood to motivate migrants' sending of remittances. Thus, even as material-affective semiosis imbues physical objects – or their absence, as shown here – with meaning and socializing agency, it continually reconstitutes the interrelated subjectivities through which the transnational family is sustained. While these subject positions reproduce firm distinctions between migrants and non-migrants and thus work to scale family life in ways that inevitably reinforce the irremediable economic inequalities between North and South, at the same time, such transnational socialization also serves as a powerful resource for the social reproduction of cross-border relationships. By weaving together materiality and affect, such discussions create subject positions in which all family members, whether migrant

or non-migrant, are understood as contributing to maintaining the transnational family, pushing back against the capitalist erasure of social reproduction by insisting on its vital importance.

One final example demonstrates the pervasive effects of material-affective semiosis in producing the subjectivities that sustain transnational family life. Unlike the first two examples, this example involves a gift sent by non-migrants to their migrant kin; the gift in this case is neither money nor an object with a particular use-value but rather a video recording in which non-migrants produce elaborate greetings to their migrant kin. Individuals greet different migrant relatives in turn, using the same formulaic expressions; often after the adults have performed their greetings, they attempt to induce children to participate as well, using prompting to model line-by-line the ritual organization of these cross-border greetings. The sending of such cross-border video greetings was a common practice among the non-migrants in my study, but migrants did not reciprocate. Thus, the communicative practice of cross-border greetings seem to play a crucial role in non-migrant but not migrant subjectivities. This dynamic can be seen clearly in the example analyzed here, in which a mother socializes her child into this subject position. In this instance, my video camera and my skills as videographer were recruited to record the greeting. I had gone to visit Rosa in order to video-record her house and surrounding lands at the request of her migrant siblings in the United States. Her young son Zacarias, age five, watched avidly and eagerly asked his mother if he could go to see his aunts and uncles. She denied this request without explanation, but then urged the child instead to send a greeting to his aunt Serena, the most recent migrant and the only one whom her son remembered. She prompted him unsuccessfully for a full minute, but he refused to repeat any of her multiple prompts, until she produced the threat shown in line 1.

Example 3. “*No te va a hablar*” (*She won’t call you*).

(In the transcript, R = Rosa, Z = Zacarias)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. R: <i>Decile pues. Si no, ya no te va a volver a hablar. No te va a hablar por teléfono. A ella decile allí. Hola tía Sere decile.</i> | Say it now. If not, she won’t call you anymore. She won’t call you on the phone. To her tell her there. Hello aunt Sere tell her. |
| 2. Z: <i>Hola tía Sere.</i> | Hello aunt Sere. |
| 3. R: <i>Le mando un saludo decile.</i> | I send you a greeting tell her. |
| 4. Z: <i>Le mando un saludo.</i> | I send you a greeting. |
| 5. R: <i>La quiero mucho.</i> | I love you a lot. |
| 6. Z: <i>La quiero mucho.</i> | I love you a lot. |
| 7. R: <i>Y cuídese.</i> | And take care. |
| 8. Z: <i>Y cuídese.</i> | And take care. |

In this example, Rosa socializes her son into an affective communicative ritual involving a formulaic greeting (lines 1 and 3) and well-wishing (line 7) along with an explicit statement of affection (line 5). This communicative practice is part of a subject position that involves specific orientations to the child's migrant relatives, which must be articulated in particular affectively coded ways. The fact that the affective labor of greetings is consistently produced by non-migrants for migrants, and not vice-versa, suggests that it participates in the system of interrelated material-affective subjectivities through which transnational family life is instantiated and sustained.

In this particular instance of socialization, the mother's threat to her son relies upon unspoken ideologies that assume the role of materiality in this seemingly affective form of subjectivity. Specifically, Rosa threatens her son that if he does not produce the greeting, his aunt will stop calling him; because the family lacks the resources to make calls to the United States, this would effectively end Zacarias' relationship with his migrant aunt. Thus, the threat here is one of disruption of the child's world, which helps to explain its immediate effectiveness in securing his cooperation with the prompted greeting. However, the relational disconnection threatened here is not just the severing of a connection between a child and his aunt, but more broadly between a non-migrant and a migrant. As seen in Example (2), there is a great deal of concern within transnational families to maintain these cross-border ties, with a common fear being that migrants will forget their non-migrant relatives and stop sending remittances. In threatening her son to induce him to greet his migrant aunt, Rosa implicitly draws on this broader discourse, suggesting to her son that his actions can cause such feared abandonment. If he does not inhabit the expected non-migrant subject position by articulating his love for his aunt in this ritualized way, she will forget him and stop calling. His engagement with this subjectivity is crucial to ensure that his migrant kin will remember him and will think of him affectionately. This threat constitutes perhaps the clearest valuation of the vital role that the affective labor of non-migrants is understood to perform in sustaining the political economy of transnational family life.

The cross-border greetings sent by non-migrants to their migrant kin participate in the same process of material-affective semiosis as the physical gifts sent by migrants. Just as material gifts (or their absence) index the nature of cross-border kin relations, so too does the communicative practice of greetings. In this example, for instance, the child is encouraged to greet the one migrant relative he remembers; in other cases, I have found that migrants are greeted in order of their participation in remittance-sending, with non-remitters at times being entirely excluded from the list of greeted individuals (Arnold forthcoming a). In addition to this indexical function, however, these video greetings also construct

and rework transnational ties by explicitly articulating the greeter's affection for and connection to the person greeted. The affective labor of these greetings is thus understood to play a crucial role in sustaining cross-border family life, in much the same way that migrant gifts and remittances are discursively produced as meaningful. The enactment and sustaining of transnational kinship relies on distinctive material-affective subject positions in which migrants are normatively expected to materialize their affect for non-migrants in the form of gifts and remittances while non-migrants are expected to produce affective forms of communicative labor that will evoke emotion in their migrant relatives and thus continue the cycle of care. Such forms of subjectification through material-affective semiosis have clearly contradictory effects. On the one hand, such semiosis produces fundamentally asymmetrical roles for migrants and non-migrants that continually scale family interactions and produce relationships permeated with global political-economic inequality. At the same time, these subject positions are constructed as complementary, such that all relatives, regardless of their migration status, are seen to participate in the work of sustaining family life, thereby advancing a political economic model that incorporates the importance of social reproduction.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored prompting interactions in transnational phone calls between Salvadoran migrants in the United States and their non-migrant relatives back home. My analysis demonstrates that these cross-border language socialization encounters constitute particular material goods and communicative practices as forms of care through material-affective semiosis. Material objects and economic remittances are constructed as indexical of relational closeness and read as the materialization of affection; at the same time, these gifts are imbued with the agency to elicit normative forms of affective responses from their recipients. Material-affective semiosis can also be seen in the ways in which the affectively-laden communicative practice of greetings is constructed as crucial form of labor by which non-migrants contribute to the sustenance of the cross-border relationships in ways that make material gifts and economic transfers such as remittances possible. Moreover, this material-affective semiosis produces particular subject positions and the verbal routine of prompting, functioning as a technology of the self, is utilized to encourage individuals to take up these subject positions. I have demonstrated that different subjectivities are discursively constituted as normative for migrants and non-migrants within transnational families; while migrants should materialize their affect towards

their relatives back home, non-migrants must produce affective labor in the form of communicative practices that reproduce cross-border kin ties and thus sustain the conditions for material goods to be sent.

Over the long term, the normativity of these differential subjectivities can lead to resentment as both migrants and non-migrants may feel trapped. Migrants regularly reported feeling frustrated, saying that their non-migrant relatives only called to ask for money. Their perception did not accurately capture the wealth of communicative practices in transnational conversations (Arnold 2016), but this interpretation nevertheless reveals the strength of a model in which the communicative work of non-migrants is understood as affective prompting of material and economic gifts. Although the non-migrants in my study did not articulate such overt dissatisfaction with their role, other scholarship with transnational families demonstrates that these expectations may lead non-migrants to feel intensely surveilled from afar (Madianou and Miller 2011). These frustrations can sometimes lead to overt conflict between migrants and non-migrants (Arnold forthcoming b). However, as Francisco-Menchavez argues (2018), care labor should not necessarily be assumed to emerge always and only from feelings of nurturance and love; rather, the work of social reproduction across borders continues even in the face of frustration and resentment. In light of this longer-term reality, it is important to highlight that the process of material-affective semiosis described here does not make any claims about what people actually feel, but rather focuses on understanding how affect is mobilized to do productive work. For the families in my study, gifts are interpreted as the materialization of affect, even as affective labor is used to prompt continued gifts. Thus, material-affective semiosis may function to manage negative affects, curtailing their effects and minimizing conflict in ways that contribute to maintenance of transnational family as a form of kinship.

The analysis put forward in this paper thus contributes to the long-standing tradition of anthropological work that examines how exchanges negotiate social relationships (Mauss 1925). As shown by the processes of material-affective semiosis detailed here, such exchanges always involve both material and affective components, a point that is particularly crucial to underscore in transnational contexts where the economics of remittances have long been emphasized while other forms of exchange have been elided (Cole and Groes 2016). Indebtedness is of course a key aspect of exchange (Graeber 2011), and the prompting interactions examined here emphasize the debt of gratitude that non-migrants bear towards migrants; this debt motivates their communicative efforts even as this affective labor then enacts an obligation of material reciprocation on their migrant kin. This finding demonstrates that in gifting, the recipient of the gift is not passive and dependent but rather has a crucial role to play, emphasizing

the importance of analyzing not only the gift itself but how such exchanges are prompted (Retsikas 2016). For the transnational families in my study, the affective labor of non-migrants is understood to be crucial in prompting gifts from migrants, thus highlighting the often invisible work that makes gift exchange possible (Josephides 1985), in this case socially reproductive forms of communication. In socializing migrants and non-migrants into their normative material-affective subjectivities, the exchanges examined here simultaneously envision and enact an understanding of transnational kinship in which the work of social reproduction is crucial to the cross-border political economy. Thus, even as language socialization constitutes the vehicle whereby asymmetrical subjectivities are reproduced, these practices also constitute a space in which the importance of social reproduction is continually asserted and maintained in the face of capitalist erasures.

Language socialization thus constitutes an important resource for the discursive constitution of scale. In this case, the verbal routine of prompting works to scale both family life and the global inequalities that cause transnational migration, weaving global inequalities into the very weft of everyday family life. While language socialization that is enacted across borders may bear a heavier burden in the reproduction of familial relationships and social life, the processes of material-affective semiosis and subjectification examined here are more broadly relevant to the study of language and social life. Particular material-affective orientations are of course part of other subjectivities beyond those discussed here and can be utilized to organize these subject positions relationally in a range of ways. Whereas in this analysis, the political-economy of transnational migration is particularly salient, in other settings, such analysis may help to elucidate the role of other political-economic structures, or of normative hierarchies tied to gender, generation, or institutional context. The distribution of these material-affective subjectivities is perhaps unusually stable in transnational families, tied as it is to the relatively durative status of migrant or non-migrant. For other relationships, subject positions may be more fleeting or may be more closely tied to developmental lifecourse trajectories. Moreover, while this analysis highlights interactions surrounding material gift exchanges as a locus of material-affective semiosis, the final example of the greeting demonstrates that such processes may be at work even in cases where materiality is not so explicitly focal. Further examinations of material-affective semiosis should therefore consider the full range of language socialization practices, teasing apart the political-economic grounding as well as the material-semiotic processes of even seemingly affective routines. Attending more expansively to the role of materiality by thinking through its relationship to affect can thus prove a fruitful avenue for future scholarship that seeks to underscore the

importance of the language socialization paradigm in developing a broad understanding of human experience.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

- @ laughter, each token marks one pulse
- [] overlapping speech
- [[]] overlapping speech in proximity to a previous overlap
- # unintelligible; each token marks one syllable
- () uncertain transcription
- self-interruption

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