# A stop at the end of the bus line: Nannies, children, and the language of care

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Berkeley, CA: Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley, 2002

# A Stop at the End of the Bus Line:
# Nannies, Children, and the Language of Care

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*Working Paper No. 51*

*May 2002*

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Acknowledgements: The research reported here was made possible by a grant from the Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley. I am profoundly indebted to the care providers who participated in this research. I am grateful to Barrie Thorne and Elinor Ochs for their advice and support.

**Abstract**

This paper reports on an ongoing project aimed at describing the ways in which language is a tool for socializing care. The study examines the local practices and ideologies of care that underlie the interactions of Spanish-speaking, Latina nannies and the mostly white, English-speaking children under their care at a park in the west side of Los Angeles. The paper further investigates the nannies' views on their profession as caregivers and their views on the children's development of Spanish. Finally, the affective and moral dimensions involved in nanny care are also explored.

In the early hours of the morning, the streets of the wealthy suburbs of Beverly Hills, Bel Air, and the Pacific Palisades are populated with two distinct groups of people. One is local residents on their way to work driving down the winding roads that merge with Sunset Boulevard—one of the main arteries that connects the urban lifeblood between West and East Los Angeles. The other group is made up of (mostly Latina) women purposefully walking up the hills, past manicured lawns and gated entrances, on their way to work as domestics and care providers in the surrounding homes. After dropping off the workers at various stops along Sunset Boulevard, the 576 MTA[1] bus line, locally known as "the nanny express," one of the few bus lines that makes it possible for these workers to earn their living as nannies in homes across a series of wealthy suburbs, slowly disappears towards the beach—the end of its route. Like clockwork, the bus returns in the afternoon to pick up the workers and take them back to their innercity homes, many in the neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles. The lifelines that keep these two worlds, the working poor and the rich, connected are primarily the public buses that serve as the economic and cultural links to distant communities, but whose total travel time (even on a heavily trafficked day) takes less than two hours.

During a temporary summer stay at one of these suburbs two years ago, I began to record observations on the aspects of daily life and work of nannies in these neighborhoods. I would often observe the women of the early morning hikes shopping with their young charges at local supermarkets. At other times, small groups of women would laboriously push strollers up the hills—alert babies peeking out from their padded chairs—after a morning visit to the local park. In all instances, the language of communication was Spanish. This was the language spoken by the women to the children they cared for and the language used to communicate among themselves. This paper reports on an ongoing project aimed at describing the intersection between care, language, and learning or more precisely, of the ways in which language is a tool for socializing care. The research described in this working paper constitutes an initial step towards documenting the language socialization practices of nannies in one suburb in West Los Angeles. The study has implications for understanding the dynamics between Spanish-speaking, Latina workers and the mostly white, English-speaking children under their care. The contact between two linguistic and sociocultural worlds along the dimension of care gives rise to

questions regarding the socialization to particular worldviews, dispositions, and moral understandings of self and others. What are the nannies' ideologies on care? That is, what are the nannies' views on the nature of their job as caregivers? To what norms of behavior and practices are children and nannies being socialized? How are notions of self (as child and as caregiver) socialized? What is the role of language in the socialization of children to their caregivers' views on care? While the larger research project recognizes the home as both residence and workplace—and as the interactional and ideological space where children and their nannies learn to negotiate the meanings of care in the daily span of activities—this initial investigation has focused primarily on documenting nanny care practices in the public space of a local park, which I call Sunny Park.[2]

## Global Perspectives on Care

The work-related circumstances of domestic workers in the U.S. have been a well-documented concern across many disciplinary fields. Such concerns have centered, for example, on analyses of First World economies responsible for the "pull" of Third World human labor in service of mainly white upper-middle-class families of the First World (Abramovitz, 1996, 2000; Chang, 2000, Chavez, 1992) and the increasing awareness of ecologies of care that straddle First and Third World economies in which women play pivotal roles (Parreñas, 2001). Domestic workers are central in a system of hired, inexpensive reproductive labor, which encompasses a range of activities that contributes to their employers' daily sustenance (Glenn, 1992; Higginbotham & Romero, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Lan, 2001; Romero, 1987, 1992; Romero & Steward, 1999). Such activities may include "purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties" (Glenn, 1992: p. 1) all of which are important home nurturing activities. As Parreñas (2001) indicates in her study of Filipina domestic workers in Rome and in the United States, the workforce that these women create illustrate the ways in which"[t]he hierarchy of womanhood—involving race, class, and nation, as well as gender—establishes a work transfer system of reproductive labor among women, the international transfer

of caretaking" (p.78). Everyday care and sustenance of middle-class families is thus performed by underpaid and undervalued transnational domestic workers, including child care providers—the central focus of this investigation. It is for these reasons that the present study remains mindful of global perspectives on care, that is, on the relations established between workers and employers and the economies that are invoked and involved in such negotiations.

The proximity to the Mexican border and the large numbers of workers from Mexico and Central America[3] add a dramatic twist to the nature of domestic work in Southern California. Although the border is a highly policed space and the brown body is the center of public surveillance, many domestic workers and care providers in the affluent white suburbs of Los Angeles are undocumented Latina women (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Sassen, 1990; Wrigley, 1995). This situation proves to be of extremely high risk to these care providers. Given the antidiversity sentiments in the state of California, which have translated into a series of restrictive immigration policies in recent years,[4] current policies enforce a double-bind of work ethic whereby child care providers from Mexico and Central America, who are in particular demand, find themselves at greater risk of being severely penalized by current immigration laws.

But the city thrives and recognizes its economic needs and in particular the needs of populations that rely for their daily sustenance on paid domestic and child care workers. The city has put in place a transportation system that revolves precisely around this need. Soon after the 1965 Watts riots, a bus route was created to "bus" nannies and domestic workers to their workplace in the most protected, direct way. The 576 bus, along with three other routes (including a commuter express line), is one of them. Leaving South Central L.A. in the early hours of the morning, five 576 outbound buses pick up workers across the city on their treck to the west side. In the afternoon, the buses slowly reverse the process, with the last bus leaving the end of the route bus stop at exactly 5:09 PM (MTA Data, 1997; O'Connor, 2000; Shuit, 2000). The riders of the bus line have had their share of transportation troubles. These have included a month-long strike in the fall of 2000 staged by MTA bus drivers against the proposal to have split shifts and longer work schedules (ten-hour four day shifts), which would overwork drivers for no pay increase. During this time, bus riders, including day laborers, domestic workers, and others in the service industry who were the most affected at first, organized carpools and utilized

alternative bus routes to get to work. In fact, after a month, the strike proved to be largely ineffective and more like another public transportation inconvenience Angelenos had to endure (Hall & McDonnell, 2000). Similarly, the growing pressure by the Bus Riders Union has contributed to the riders' anxiety about impending conflicts with bus drivers and members of the union. The union, publicly representing the economically disadvantaged bus riders (a total of 68% of mass transportation users have an income of less than $15, 000 and 51.9% are Latino as indicated in the MTA Data, 1996-1998, 2000), advocates against "transit racism" manifested through overcrowding, fleet reduction, bus route eliminations, and generally poor service. With a growing membership claiming more than 3,000 members, the union demands better bus service on the basis of civil rights violation (Shuit & Rabin, 2000). Yet none of these transportation hurdles have done much to reduce the number of riders. In a city known for its sophisticated system of freeways and exuberant car culture, the percentage of bus riders who use mass transit to get to work is a growing 69% (MTA Data, 1996-1998, 2000). Without a doubt, the existing resource of public transportation contributes to this type of care as a viable alternative for both employers and caregivers.

## A Situated Perspective on Care

One of the goals of this study is to understand learning and the local socialization practices in the daily activities of nannies and the children under their care. In particular, a language socialization lens allows us to examine how young children (and other novices), through interactions with older and/or more experienced persons, acquire the knowledge, orientations, and practices necessary for them to function as, and be regarded as, competent members of their communities. This is the situation of children who are cared for by nannies or *las nanis*, as they call themselves in Spanish at Sunny Park. In the daily span of activities, children interact with their Spanish-speaking nannies to accomplish a variety of tasks that have as their end goals the achievement of particular competencies, from dressing up and eating a morning meal, to the peaceful collaborative playing with peers at the park, to the preparation for evening activities with siblings and parents. Children also learn to see their roles as consumer of care as well as their nannies' roles as providers of care. From a language socialization

perspective, the study of the practices of nannies and children in a care relationship involves socialization to and through language as they interact and construct shared worldviews during collaborative routine activities (Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The process of socialization then takes place through the use of language, the medium through which knowledge is communicated, reproduced, and transformed (see also Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002).

The socialization of children by nannies is not the only type of socialization that takes place at Sunny Park. Nannies also socialize each other to certain language practices, professional behavior and management, to norms and expectations of child care. Language is the primary means through which notions of care and the nannies' practices are enacted in their daily interactions with each other and with the children in the park. Framing this aspect of the study, makes several questions of concern readily apparent. More particularly, in the case of norms and expectations of "care," it is necessary to determine the ways in which nannies construct and participate in care routine activities, as well as identify the linguistic and interactional resources that are deployed in such activities. In this respect, at Sunny Park, language (Spanish and/or English) is both a setting and an instrument in the socialization of daily activities.

## Methodological Framework

The ethnographic data for this phase of the project have been collected through visits to the field site located in the suburb I have named Seaside Village and primarily at Sunny Park. Participant-observation has included interviews and phone conversations with nannies, bus drivers, and personnel from the MTA over a span of eight months. Interviews, field notes, artifacts (pamphlets, newspapers, job ads), video recordings of the field site and general area around Seaside Village, as well as the ongoing interactions with care providers offer a varied database for analyzing the formulation, development, goals, and outcomes of nanny care activities across space and time. During my visits to Sunny Park I took care not to intrude into the nannies' work hours without official consent of the parents of the children they care for. The observations of nannies and children were thus limited to the public space of the park. Most of my conversations and interviews with the nannies took place in the park and its immediate vicinity, and at the nearest bus stop (also a stop for the 576 bus), where several of the nannies I

met in the morning returned in the late afternoon as they made their journey back home towards the east.

Given the high risk involved in divulging personal names linked to possible contact with immigration officials and in securing the identity of the children and the families they work for, anonymity at the park is highly valued and respected. I honored this practice and did not seek out information beyond a first name basis, although I freely distributed my business cards in the park. This was primarily to ensure that the nannies were unequivocal about my presence and identity in a highly gendered and ethnically marked space like the public park and because, as a Latina, I would often be mistaken for a nanny by children and other adults, including the nannies themselves. The methodology for the larger project also draws from my expertise as an applied linguist and ethnographer investigating language socialization practices of young Mexican and Central American children in out-of-school contexts (Baquedano-López, 1997, 1998; 2000; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1997; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Turner, 1997). Similarly, my bilingual skills in English and Spanish proved to be particularly useful. Indeed, the majority of my interactions with the nannies took place in Spanish.

In this phase of the study, the analytical lens moves from the immediate to the larger context of interaction. The goal has been to document the daily language socialization practices through direct observation and through the nannies' narratives about work while remaining conscious of the larger socioeconomic dimensions that influence nanny care. In this way, the study contributes to a more complex understanding of the multiple dimensions of care. Through the particular lens of language, the methodology employed in this study sheds explanatory light on both the local processes and the larger social processes that shape child care.

## Mornings at Sunny Park

Located at the center of a quiet, shady cul-de-sac that includes Seaside Village's main recreational facilities, Sunny Park is a small open space surrounded by a line of tall pine trees that shelter picnic tables scattered around the park. The perimeter of Sunny Park is demarcated by a black iron fence (approximately four feet high), which serves as a barrier to prevent young toddlers from walking out onto the street. Nannies and children enter and exit the park through a self-latching door at one end of the front fence. Immediately behind Sunny Park is a newly

constructed auditorium and an open soccer field, which has been the focus of much recent local speculation as the possible site of an attempted abduction of a child under the care of a nanny on a Wednesday morning in early February.[5] The recreation center next to Sunny Park includes an indoor basketball court and is the site of a number of classes organized by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. The weekly schedule of classes includes activities designed for preschoolers (designated as three-year-olds), to organized youth sports activities, to "hatha yoga" for seniors, illustrating the range of participants at Seaside Village's recreation center.

The range of activities at Sunny Park is also varied. The main activities for the children brought there include playing in the sand playground. The main attractions include a 360-degree spiral slide, two large modular climbing structures, and two sets of three-leg swings. The activities at Sunny Park also include mealtime interactions (mostly the consumption of snacks), cleaning activities (of self and surroundings), book reading, storytelling, brief and extended conversational exchanges with other children and adults, as well as the general use of toys (sand toys, dolls, cars, among others) in the sand playground and surrounding walkways. The nannies participate with the children in these activities to varying degrees. While few nannies actively engage in play at the sand pit, the majority limits itself to the periphery, occasionally venturing into the sand area for arbitration or safety reasons. As a general rule, the younger the children under their care, the more active participation of the nannies in the sand pit.

The demographics of the park are in constant shift. Very few nannies come to the park on a daily basis. Most come twice, or at most, three times a week. This is the only park that the nannies in this initial study frequent and is the closest to the children's homes. Many nannies walk to the park; others drive their own (or their employers') cars, which they leave under the trees that line the curvy entrance to Sunny Park. During my visits to the park, I observed that the park's peak morning hours occurred between 10 AM and 1 PM, after which time many nannies and their children return home to meet older siblings who return from school. As for the remainder of the afternoon, the nannies report that they supervise nap time and perform light cleaning or cooking activities until the time they must drive or catch the bus back home, around 4 PM each day.

The children population at Sunny Park is comprised of mostly babies and toddlers, their ages varying from seven months to three years. Most are pushed in strollers to the park and only very few are able to walk to the park with their nannies. The children generally communicate in English with other children, and they communicate with the nannies primarily through body gestures, silence, and, occasionally, in English. I often observed the following routine upon arrival at the park. The nanny usually parks the stroller by one of the tables or near the sand playground. She then unstraps the child's seatbelt, occasionally feeding her or him a snack (e.g., cereal, crackers, or juice). Soon after, the children are free to run in the sand area and climb the equipment. Children often request to be pushed on the swings, and on these occasions, the nanny reformulates the children's requests in Spanish.

There is a sense of predictability at Sunny Park, marked by a slow, almost punctuated, tempo, but the activities at Sunny Park are still verbally negotiated on a day-to-day basis. Although the main locus of children's activity at the park is the large sand playground and its climbing equipment, there are other areas in which the children and their nannies also interact. These include two large wooden picnic tables and benches, bolted down metal chairs located around the periphery of the sand pit, the grassy area under a large tree near the tables, and the restrooms (or during construction, portables) adjacent to the recreation center.

My interviews and ongoing conversations with the nannies provided an important window into "home" as workplace that suggests most centrally a heavily guarded environment. This I have interpreted to be for safety reasons, because the parents/employers are often high-ranking CEOs and other central figures of corporate America, as well as from the movie industry. The nannies' efforts not to divulge information about their employers is rivaled by their efforts to remain anonymous themselves so as not to reveal, primarily, immigrant statuses. This makes anonymity a highly valued practice in Sunny Park. There is a price, however, that comes with anonymity: the potential weakening of social networks. Contrary to my first assumption about strong social networks within the park, the nannies know very little about each other. During my initial observations, I had begun mapping relationships through the nannies' nationalities and age groups. I soon found out that these variables were not necessarily operating as primary identifiers at Sunny Park. In fact, when I pointed out nationalities as I met new

nannies, they were surprised to learn of each other's national origin (there were Mexican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, and one Chilean nanny). There were also, surprisingly, no follow-up questions, such as place of origin (town, city), time of arrival in the U.S., or address of employment, at least not in my presence. Instead, the nannies form groups according to three main distinctions: (1) ages of the children, (2) genders of the children, and (3) general vicinity of the employers' homes—that is, for the potential to walk in each other's company to and from the park. Many nannies, however, knew each other through agencies, references of prior employers, and previous visits to the same park.

This in no way suggests that nannies in Sunny Park do not create or utilize existing social networks. On the contrary, several had obtained their jobs through such social networks, particularly, recommendations from relatives and friends. Most of the nannies I met at Sunny Park were recent immigrants and hoped to work as nannies only temporarily, but some were born in the U.S. and had inherited their profession from relatives. Many find themselves at Sunny Park in a new, potentially temporary environment with the responsibility to "watch" the children and the impending need to protect their identities. The more successful they are at this, the greater their chances for continuing in their current employment. Contrary to popular expectations about child care, nannies are largely temporary employees (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Only those who have worked several years for the same family are more inclined to share details about the families they work for or about themselves. For them, employment is more secure, which is reflected in the ways they tend to occupy discursive space during encounters with other nannies in the park. They often provide advice and counsel to newly hired nannies and those in great distress and at the brink of losing their jobs. Yet in all these interactions, the identities of the employers and the nannies remained highly protected.

**Nanny Care as a "Real Job": The Discursive Construction of Professionalism**

After only a few visits to Sunny Park, a group of nannies already anticipates my presence and is eager to share their individual stories about their jobs and theories of child care and language development. The nannies who occasionally visit the park and those I describe as newcomers often watch guardedly as I interact with those I have already met. As is my custom, I

begin my morning observations by introducing myself to the new faces I see, telling them about my research project and my intention to spend the morning in Sunny Park. Sometimes I am prompted to talk about my work and about myself by the nannies who have met me on prior visits, in part, I think, to doublecheck the story of the language researcher from the university up north. Yet, after I explain the purpose of my study, I am invariably asked for the same information: marital status, approximate remuneration for research performed at the park, and whether I had prior or current employment as a nanny. This last question in particular reveals an ideology about a system of stratified jobs where Latina women naturally fall into service professions.

The conversations among the nannies take place primarily in Spanish. I met one black Belgian nanny and one African American nanny.[6] The nannies talk to the children, their own and others, with very few exceptions, entirely in Spanish. As expected from a very heterogenous group of Latina workers, there are many varieties of Spanish spoken in Sunny Park indicating class, degree of education, and regional origin. Many nannies commented on the fact that they could not go to school as children and instead had had to work, revealing a history of child labor in their countries of origin. Jenny's and Eva's experiences, however, constituted an exception.

Jenny had almost completed a bachelor's degree in science in Chile prior to her coming to the U.S. five years ago. During our interview, she indicated that she still dreamed of a medical profession. Although she often joined the larger group of nannies at one of the tables in the park, Jenny's noticeably marked South American academic Spanish and lighter skin tone kept her on the periphery of conversation. This is not to say that Jenny was not a member of the group. She was always welcomed at the group's table, yet her accent and mannerisms marked her as different. During our many conversations, Jenny often mentioned that she wanted to relocate permanently to the west side. She was looking for an apartment to share, preferably with college students, a population she thought she could get along with. Twice a week after work she went to a west side adult community center where she was taking advanced ESL classes. She longed to enroll at a community college in the west side, but she worried about her undocumented immigrant status and hesitated to ask the local community college for assistance. The fear of being reported to immigration officials was palpably paralyzing to her. Thus Jenny attended the

free classes at the adult center to improve her English skills and better communicate with her employers while slowly growing dissatisfied at the quality of teaching she was receiving.

Jenny was of the firm belief that relationships between employers and employees can work out only when matters are clear between them. During a group discussion at one of the picnic tables where the nannies had congregated to discuss a nanny's current dispute with her employer, Jenny had remarked emphatically: "Las cosas claras y sobre la mesa" (matters should be clear and on the table). Such categorical statements, however, do not always work uniformly across care providers and their employers. Several nannies report on communication problems and breakdowns with their employers and the general sense of "disposability" that they encounter in the workplace (Chang, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1991, 2001). Jenny is very aware of the divide between the worlds:

> Hay que tratar de llevarse como se dice una-una relación buena porque son mundos muy diferentes y hay que haber-tiene que haber una comunicación.
>
> (One has to try to get along like they say, a good relationship, because they are different worlds, and there needs to be communication)

Jenny's position is clearly a bit more advantageous than those of other nannies I interviewed. Her command of English and her educational background are certainly assets in her negotiations with employers. She believes communication is of essence in good employer-employee relations in trying to bridge two worlds. Jenny often took great pride in her job and verbalized it. On more than one occasion, she commented on hearing local radio talk show hosts dedicate a morning show to the nannies.[7] She was very pleased at how the "nanny as a professional" had been talked about. She noted that the radio talk show hosts had said that they admired those who worked as nannies for the difficulty of their job ("que admiraban a las que trabajaban como nannies, porque es un trabajo muy difícil") and for having, by and large, a thankless job. In these various ways nannies like Jenny make sense of their profession and regain pride and commitment to their job.

Another example of the range in educational background among the nannies is the case of Eva. After enrolling in a nursing program for a few months, Eva returned to her job as a babysitter (the term she preferred to use during our conversations). Feeling that the demands of

the new academic environment were far too great on her finances and time commitments, she had decided to return to babysitting. She had felt that she was financially better off as a babysitter than as a student. Eva often referred to her babysitting job as "a real job" and often compared her flexible nine to five schedule to that of her boyfriend, a postal worker. Eva had found her nanny job through an agency, which had also arranged for her to receive medical benefits. "It's a good deal," she told me as she watched over the two boys under her care, the oldest one sliding down the spiraling metal slide. Eva's ideas of a "good deal" might rest on the fact of the added medical benefits, but stories about nanny agencies are not always as positively portrayed. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) reports, the hiring costs and fees are often prohibitive for many nannies. The agencies charge a processing fee that ranges from $50 to $70 in addition to the first week's paycheck. The fear that nanny agencies work in concert with the INS also makes it difficult for some to even inquire about the added benefits.

**Local Theories on Children's Language Development and Language Use**

Only a few visits to Sunny Park make it clear to me that the children there are in their majority speakers of English, yet some have clearly developed receptive skills in Spanish. During the course of daily activities, from feeding to play, the children's nannies speak to them directly using a range of language forms (commands, questions, to more interactively complex exchanges such as story-telling). This is consistent with other studies on early language socialization that indicate a more child-centered frame of interaction between caregivers and children (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Children respond to the nannies' commands, questions, and admonitions mostly in silent agreement, nodding or shaking their heads, or with the desired action (throwing objects in the trash, putting on or taking off their shoes, leaving toys in strollers, picking up items from the sand pit, or even ceasing to cry). On several occasions, I observed evidence of these receptive skills, in particular when children had to choose between two different tasks or options (that is, when they had to chose between two alternatives). When asked about the children's current and potential linguistic development in Spanish, nannies in Sunny Park agreed was that the children "entienden" (they understand). As Olga explained with great conviction: "Ellos entienden. Yo solo les hablo en español y ellos saben lo que yo quiero decir"

(They understand. I only talk to them in Spanish, and they know what I mean). On one occasion, a nanny turned to the child on her lap and requested a specific performance: "Sabes contar hasta diez? Dí uno, dos, tres…" (Can you count to ten? Say one, two, three…), but continued counting to ten herself. Even after ventriloquating for the child, the nanny congratulated the child in Spanish.

Although most of the explanations to the children's language development in Sunny Park tended to be in the rather general terms described previously, Marta had a different perspective on language development. Upon my inquiry into her assessment of the acquisition of Spanish by children in Sunny Park, she compared the children under her care to herself: "Son como nosotros aprendiendo inglés. Ellos aprenden de diferentes maneras, no todos aprenden igual" (They are like us learning English. They learn in different ways: they don't all learn the same way). When the conversation turned to the reasons children do not grow up speaking Spanish, the general feeling was that the children forget Spanish when they go to school for the first time. Celia laments the fact that the older brother of the boy she now takes care of spoke Spanish but forgot it all when he went for an extended visit with his grandmother in New York.

Another topic of great polemic during conversations with nannies in Sunny Park was the children's parents' responses to the nannies' use of Spanish to the children. For the most part, nannies in Sunny Park believe that the parents are supportive of their use of Spanish. "A ellos les gusta que hablemos español con los niños" (They liked it that we speak Spanish to the children), commented Celia. She added, "Por eso emplean nomás beibisiters que hablan español" (That's why they only hire babysitters that speak Spanish). But Marta had different views. She commented that the parents were racists and did not really want their children to learn Spanish. In her case, she could talk in Spanish to the children under her care only when their parents were not around. These contrasting ideologies about language development and use are illustrative of the range of local theories on language use and language as capital. These theories are imbued with the personal experiences of the nannies and possibly influenced by the working relationships with their employers. But perhaps the most revealing example of the disproportionate give and take involved in a care relationship of this nature is captured in Susana's comments. Speaking for all nannies, she expressed the following: "No es justo. Les

hablamos en español y cuando vamos a aprender el inglés?" (It's not fair. We speak Spanish to them [the children], and when are we going to learn English?).

**Affect and Morality in Nanny Care**

Two foundational notions in studies of language socialization are morality and affect and their role in interaction. From this perspective, words are infused with an emotional orientation and are tied to the construction of a moral order (Ochs 1986; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Ochs & Schieffelin 1989, Schieffelin & Ochs 1986). As several studies of language socialization indicate, the language used to encode emotions also forms the basis for socializing morality, that is, of the social sanctioning or rejection of self and others' actions (Briggs, 1998; de León, 1998; Fader, 2001; Field, 2001; Fung, 1999). Local cultural practices are thus infused with morality. The development of personhood, of the self, through the language of affect is thus intricately related to the development of moral ways of acting and being in the social world. In this way, participants in everyday routines learn to internalize, manage, express emotion and to make sense of the moral order that they are actively constructing with others (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). In this study of nanny care, the role of affect is central to the construction of a moral order that involves "care." This affective dimension of paid care has already been reported in studies of domestic work and child care, including the emotional attachment between nannies and the children under their care (Constable, 1997; Lan, 2000, 2001; Romero, 1992) and the feelings of guilt and abandonment often experienced by employers (Hochschild, 1983, 1997).

At Sunny Park, there is a great deal of physical contact between children and their nannies mediating affect and morality in their interactions. The nannies' bodies are touched, caressed, tugged, cuddled, and, during fits of anger, hit and spit on by the children under their care. The nannies' contact with children includes touching, kissing, hugging, and verbalized expressions of affect in Spanish: "cariño, mi vida, mi amor," (literally, love, my life, my love). When a child falls or is hurt in Sunny Park, there is collective concern to make sure she or he stops crying right away and is not hurt. Often more than one nanny is summoned by the cries of a child in distress. The nannies immediately smooth out the child's clothes and pick up the scattered toys, and, after briefly dusting off the sand, hand them back to the child, all the while

talking soothingly in Spanish. Calming down a child is a distributed task in Sunny Park, with other nannies providing help in appeasing the child by talking to or amusing her or him. The topic of love and care between nannies and the children under their care is often a difficult and emotional one, as the following vignettes illustrate.

Alicia is a U.S. born, second generation nanny of Mexican descent. At Sunny Park, she takes care of two-year-old Jeremy. She has worked for his family for less than a month. During our conversations, Alicia would often talk about one of her mother's jobs taking care of a boy for more than ten years until his family moved to the East Coast. The family's relocation had devastated Alicia's mother and was equally painful for the boy who had been under her care. In a heart wrenching narrative, Alicia explained how the boy's mother had accused Alicia's mother of stealing her son's affection. Alicia described in great detail the little boy's attempts to reach her mother, which included writing surreptitious letters to her for several weeks after his departure. Alicia's mother had continued to suffer from this separation to the point of being emotionally depressed for years. Alicia's new job offers many opportunities for developing such affective and moral commitments with Jeremy. As I observe their interactions, I see the work that both Alicia and Jeremy do as they get to know and trust each other. I wonder too the extent to which Alicia's interactions with Jeremy are influenced by her mother's professed attachment to the boy under her care and why this narrative was so spontaneously shared in our conversations. But Alicia's present circumstances are in no way as emotionally distressful as Maritza's situation.

Maritza is looking for a new job. After working for five years for Johnny's father, working for him through his marriage, the birth of his two sons (the first one with severe mental disabilities), and, recently, an imminent divorce, Maritza shares at one of the park's tables where we have congregated under the shade of a tree that she is upset at the way she is being taken advantage of. Just the day before, Maritza was asked to do the laundry of the mother's new boyfriend. She refused to perform this task and is certain that she will be fired. But the description of her interactions with her employer is only a window into the complex emotions she is experiencing. Her eyes grow moist as she laments that she will not see Johnny again. As soon as the divorce process had started, Maritza's duties included taking Johnny to see a

pychologist. Maritza, visibly upset at the turn of events in Johnny's life, explains that she has noticed a regression in his behavior. Upon hearing this, one of the nannies points out that Johnny is almost three years old and still sucks on a pacifier, in this way, corroborating Maritza's assessment of Johnny's development and behavior at the park. Other nannies comment on this fact as well. In the family saga, Maritza is caught in the middle of the family's breakup and feels that there is very little she can do about it. In an outburst of humor, she wonders aloud when will she be able to make an appointment with the family's psychologist.

Maritza's emotional revelation of her present working conditions sets a somber tone at the park's table. The nannies mutter expressions of support, and I notice that they try to steer the conversation to the larger topic of the professional code between employer and employee. Maritza follows their lead and begins to report on her boss's vituperations towards her and the fact that he often calls her names, including telling her that she is crazy. Maritza, tormented at work, is now actively looking for a new job. Even if it means not seeing Johnny again, she plans on breaking the news to her employers before they have the opportunity to fire her:

Maritza: **Ahora lo que estoy haciendo es que estoy buscando trabajo.**
Now what I'm doing is that I'm looking for a job
(pause)
**cuando ya lo tenga lo que yo quiero entonces le voy a decir a él,**
And when I get it, what I want to tell him
**sigo loca?**
Am I still crazy?
(laughter)
PBL: **No- ha-**
You haven't
Maritza: **Y- me voy.**
And I leave.
(pause)
**Y así va a sentir sorpresa de él, es que él-**
And this way he will be surprised, it's that he…
**ahí yo trabajo en un manicomio, no?**
there I work in a mental asylum, no?
(laughter)

While emotionally charged and in direct response to name calling and other offenses, Maritza's talk reveals an affective perspective that makes sense of her present environment, the workplace, as an asylum. Maritza's verbal exchanges with her employer, real or imaginary, also

expose a thin thread of trust and respect that go beyond what Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2001:114) describes in her study of domestic workers as a "blow out" or "a conflict over a minor issue, which quickly flares into an explosive verbal confrontation," revealing an unstable relationship between employer and employee. Maritza knows she is caught in the avalanche of a family breakup and wants to leave before her imminent dismissal. As the conversation topic shifts to finding new jobs (one of her immediate concerns), Maritza recalls a time when she was unable to find a job and the emotional and physical exhaustion she experienced that eventually required a visit to the emergency room:

Maritza: **Yo pasé eso? yo pasé tres meses.**
I have lived this. I spent three months.
**Fuí a parar al hospital. Yo sí fuí a parar al hospital**.
I ended up at the hospital. I ended up at the hospital.
[…]
**Pasé como veinte minutos en el hospital.**
I spent like twenty minutes at the hospital.
**Y ya me han cobrado como tres mil dólares y yo "¿qué qué?"**
And they charged like three thousand dollars. I was "what?"
Susana: ¿**De veras?**
Is it true?
Maritza: **Me ope-me opera-me hicieron la toda la reconstrucción de**
They operated (on me), they did an entire reconstruction of
**mi cuerpo, ¡qué carajo!((laughter))**
my body. What the hell!
Susana: ¿**Qué? Le transplantaron el hígado o qué hubiera dicho-**
What? Did they give you a liver transplant? You should have said-
Maritza: **Nada**
Nothing

Although co-narrated with great humor, Maritza's narrative is a statement about the potential health consequences of not finding a job or, in her immediate horizons, of losing one's job. Maritza compellingly describes the incomprehensibility of the emergency care she received and its prohibitive cost. But embedded in her narrative is the projection of uncertainty about her well-being. The images of mental and physical health in Maritza's talk are only revealing of the emotional load that she carries as she negotiates respect and dignity in the workplace and among

her co-workers. From these nannies' perspective, affect and attachment are work-related experiences that are never morally recognized or financially compensated.

## Conclusion: Present Context and Future Trajectories

In a society where at the turn of the 21st century, English continues to be the standard and norm in California, it seems almost contradictory that children in Sunny Park are spoken to, cared for, and loved by women who are largely monolingual speakers of Spanish. It is also a reality that many of these workers are "disposable" (Chang, 2000). Their jobs caring for other people's children do not come with security of employment.

Even though the 2000 Census data report the ethnic and racial composition of Los Angeles county as 44.6% Latino (California State Census Data Center, 2000), the largest ethnic group in the state, discrimination against Latinos has been operating for a long time. For example, the political discourses on the economy most pointedly blame Latino immigrants, particularly the undocumented workforce, for an unstable local and national economy. Yet, given the sustained daily interactions, indeed, the intimate contact between two ethnic and linguistic groups in Sunny Park, one could perhaps argue that current exclusionary attitudes and ideologies might eventually disappear with the growth of a new generation. Journalist Jorge Ramos (2002: 40) optimistically speaks of the influence of nannies on the development of the children they care for:

> They are the Spanish teachers for children who speak only English. I know children of English-speaking parents who communicate perfectly with their baby-sitters in Spanish. But more than teaching a new language, their mere presence is the best lesson these children can receive on the ethnic and cultural diversity that characterizes the United States. It is unlikely that a child who grows up with a Latin American nanny will become a person who hates those who speak Spanish and are different from him.

But what this perspective might fail to capture is that young toddlers in Sunny Park may already be exposed to a world where nannies are commodities and where young children learn at an early age to be consumers of care, where attachment and emotions are held tight by the grip of an economy that both affords and restricts the expression of those emotions. This dialectic was

perhaps vividly illustrated during an unannounced visit that Alicia's employer paid to the park one morning. As soon as Jeremy saw his mother enter the park, his behavior towards Alicia changed radically. He became abusive and started to throw objects at her, refusing her embrace when minutes earlier she had carried him in her arms around the park. When Jeremy's mother left after only seven minutes, Jeremy threw himself on the ground, and it took several minutes (and several nannies) to calm him down. Alicia began to spoon feed him cereal, which he slowly chewed and stored in his mouth only to spit entire mouthfuls on Alicia's face. The nannies (and I), who had been watching the scene, let out a collective, audible gasp. Alicia simply wiped up Jeremy's mouth and her face. She then slowly got up and, in a quiet, dignified way, dusted off the pieces of moist, chewed up cereal. Like other young children in a similar situation, Jeremy was testing the limits of his behavior, which can potentially go pretty far under Alicia's care. Recall that Alicia had only been a month in the job. Alicia and Jeremy have a lot that they still need to negotiate, including the dimension of care consumer/provider and the affective and moral orientations underlying their care relationship.

The study of interactions at Sunny Park has opened up potential venues for further studying the role of language in nanny care across settings, including the home and school. In order to obtain a multidimensional perspective on care, such as that provided for children in Sunny Park, it is necessary to investigate children's developmental trajectory over time and across settings. Similarly, the language and development of the nannies' own children, who are cared by others while the nannies' work at Seaside Village, would provide an important comparative lens to the daily care interactions that nannies organize for the children under their supervision and those of their own children back home. Finally, the differing learning trajectories and outcomes of the two populations of children for which the nanny is the pivotal socializer are also important to document if we want to understand children's development across communities.

At the conclusion of my morning field observations, and as I prepare to leave Seaside Village, I become aware again that the nannies' conversations, laughter, and even the camaraderie and occasional sharing of intimate details in Sunny park, are only relative to the palpable economic gap that exists between their world and that of their employers, including the

children under their care. I'm reminded of Jenny's words: "Son mundos muy diferentes" (They are very different worlds), as I walk through Seaside Village's winding streets, past lively, small sidewalk cafés and specialty stores. I slowly make my way towards the nearest bus stop, whose plain, wooden benches in the space of a couple of hours will be occupied by domestic workers and nannies waiting for the last bus that will take them back home after yet another day on the job at someone else's home.

## Notes

1. Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

2. All names have been changed.

3. The Mexican origin population of Los Angeles County is 44.6% Latino (California State Census Data Center, 2000).

4. I am referring in particular to Proposition 187, IRCA, Proposition 209, and the most recent, Proposition 227.

5. Given the amount of speculation among the nannies about the possible assault and the lack of public reporting in the local newspapers, I visited the local police department in search of a record of the event. None was found. Yet, the fear among the nannies at the possibility of the event having taken place led them to organize and enforce local park rules that discourage nannies with their children from walking alone beyond the confines of Sunny Park.

6. The Belgian nanny spoke to the child under her care in French. When I asked about her arrival in the U.S., she told me that she had traveled here with her American employers in order to help the child keep speaking French.

7. The local radio show is called “El Cucuy de la Mañana.” The date of the show alluded to by Jenny was February 22, 2002.

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