

Pragmatic and Academic Socialization

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As Leslie's advisee for seven years in the 1990s, I had the privilege of studying with a master teacher, caring mentor, and brilliant researcher who, over time, also became a cherished friend. Leslie's compassion, sense of humor, passion for her subject matter as well as for life, and her academic vitality—or charisma—have impressed me more than she will ever know. I am indeed grateful for the foundation she gave me in sociolinguistics and second language (L2) pragmatics. I have never known a professor who could engage her students in such a powerful, enlightening, and entertaining way, as I experienced in the many captivating three-hour doctoral seminars I took with Leslie over the years.

My doctoral research was on the pragmatic socialization of Chinese immigrant women in a U.S. Chinatown clerical training program, and especially their socialization into appropriate and effective requesting behaviors in English in order to access social services as well as education and job opportunities in high-stakes situations. My research was crucially influenced by Leslie Beebe's seminal research on interlanguage pragmatics and sociolinguistic aspects of second language learning. Her seminars, articles, and feedback informed and transformed my research. She supported me wholeheartedly in my use of a language socialization framework and qualitative methods (a combination of ethnography, multiple case-study, and narrative), which at the time were quite new in second language pragmatics research.

The study examined the interactive nature and social functions of requests, which are deeply embedded within particular historical, social, and cultural contexts. The contextualized examples illustrated how the novices in my study (twenty women in total, of whom four were focal cases) developed their communicative competence by interacting with their peers and other more competent members in the community. As experts in their own culture and language (Chinese), they also contributed to the socialization of their L2 interlocutors' communication skills and styles, when the latter seemed too rude, for example.¹ Linking the microanalysis of requesting behavior and development to a more macroscopic understanding of the social structures, ideologies, and conventions in the L2 environment, the research depicted the pragmatic socialization of a new generation of immigrant women. It tracked the process of discovery (e.g., of L2 conventions) and self-discovery, and the struggle of negotiating and (re)constructing new social, cultural, and linguistic identities as they adjusted to life and language use in North America, and sought professional development and social integration at the same time.

As indicated above, my research was on language socialization and the challenges that face many immigrant women learning to make requests in their second language (English in this case). Yet, ironically perhaps, in my own life I was often very reticent to make similar requests, even of professors I had grown close to. I still remember how many years it took me to feel comfortable enough to ask someone to push an elevator number for me. It is therefore thanks to Leslie and her positive responses to my many requests for guidance with my study, and later for letters of recommendation, that I was able to graduate and to get jobs, first at Columbia University and now

¹ Rudeness was, coincidentally, a special interest of Leslie's when I was at Teachers College, and New York City provided a wealth of data for all of us.

in a tenure-track position at the University of British Columbia. Leslie has always been exceedingly generous and kind in such matters, despite her very heavy advising and administrative load, in addition to teaching and her own research.

Being a successful graduate student advisor involves much more than simply teaching and supervising well—although those are certainly major components of graduate education. It also involves creating a nurturing learning community for graduate students and faculty. Leslie created precisely that sort of community. Our doctoral seminars with her provided a supportive academic and social environment that united us in our common pursuits and interests. Some of these interests and community-building activities involved meals at local Thai restaurants at the end of term, shared Thanksgiving dinners (feasting on Leslie's "birds"), Macy's parades with the best view possible from a certain Upper West Side apartment, and visits to art galleries, museums, coffee shops, and other venues off-campus where we could get to know one another as colleagues and friends. (A few of us even became bird-watching fanatics under Leslie's tutelage.) Although I graduated ten years ago, these friendly social relationships endure today and the pleasant memories of those shared activities, with Leslie at the center, are still vivid.

As Leslie's graduate students, we were rigorously socialized into the world and language of intellectual discourse and critique, academic conference participation, and other professional activities. As our role model, Leslie guided us, nudged us, and sometimes pushed us (with her aerobically enhanced muscles) to a higher place. All of these influences, both tangible and intangible, are part of Leslie Beebe's enormous legacy at Teachers College, and in the field of applied linguistics more generally. Today, groups of former Teachers College students (also known as the "TC mafia") meet regularly at annual conferences to reminisce and share new developments in our lives and careers. I am truly grateful to have been one of Leslie Beebe's advisees and to have benefited from those rich and inspiring social and academic interactions. I only hope that in my own small way I can carry on her spirit and skill with my own graduate students in Canada.

Duanduan Li received her doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1998. She is currently Associate Professor of Chinese Applied Linguistics and Director of the Chinese Language Program in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Her research interests continue to be in the areas of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, language socialization, and second language acquisition (both of Chinese and English).