Mentoring identity: How one Khmer speaking child learned who she was
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1. Introduction.

In 1975, Clifford Geertz wrote in his article "On the nature of anthropological understanding" of his quest to discover "how people represent themselves to themselves" and thus to discover the idea they have of what a self is (48). This work of an anthropologist is rather difficult work, requiring as it does, the sifting and winnowing of all ways people represent themselves in talk and actions. This work is also, I would claim, difficult for and required of children, apprentice members of their society, who must learn how to present themselves and represent themselves, in all conversations.

Working at the confluence of three branches of the social sciences, -linguistics, psychology and anthropology, I have been influenced in this particular by notions that are, of late, coming together under the term social or cognitive constructionism. As C. Fosnot (1996) explains, this approach to cognitive development has been influenced by the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. From Piaget's work comes the concept of the dynamics of concept formation, that is, "of progressive equilibria, adaption and organization, growth and change" (14). From Vygotsky comes the concept of the dialogical nature of learning and the belief that concept formation is achieved by the child in cooperation with an adult. Finally, from Bruner's work there is the idea that the best place to study language acquisition is "at home, in vivo, not in the lab, in vitro" (Bruner 1983: 9). His work on mother/infant dialogues emphasized jointly constructed meaning. In sum, the area of psychology has legitimized the search for the construction of meaning in the dialogues between parent and child, recognizing that these initial constructs may change as the child becomes immersed in the myriad of conversations that she inevitably will be caught up in as an apprentice and later an adult member of her society.
Another influence on this study comes from Geertz's anthropological work in Bali. In his 1973 article "Person, Time and Conduct in Bali" Geertz looked at three areas which shed light on how members of that society view themselves: the many terms they used to refer to each other in conversations, the notion of role, and the concept of "shame" or what Geertz wrote would be better translated as "stage fright", the fear that one is not performing their role and that others may perceive this.

Finally, in the field of linguistics, both the recent work in discourse and in pronominal reference have been influential. Candace West, Michelle Lazar and Cheris Kramarae in their article "Gender and Discourse" claim that "gender is accomplished in discourse" and "that which we think of as 'womanly' or 'manly' behavior is not dictated by biology, but rather is socially constructed" (1997: 119). In 1990, in their book Pronouns and People. The Linguistic Construction of Social and Personal Identity, Peter Mühlhäusler and Rom Harré discuss the complexity of personal reference systems and their relationship to an understanding of self and society. They are particularly interested in how pronouns are used indexically to signal the relationship between self and others. To use them correctly, they claim, one must be able to locate oneself within a "spacio-temporal structure of things and events" and "in a structure of rights and obligations" (p. 89). Thus, to engage in conversation and to do so in a grammatically and socially acceptable way, one must acquire and possess a sense of self. To talk to others, and even to oneself, one must make paradigmatic choices among sets of pronouns and nominal terms of reference such as names expressing kinship or birth order, choices which reflect one's understanding of one's position in the moral order of things.

2. Methodology.

The data for this study come from a three year longitudinal study of the language development of the oldest daughter of a Cambodian and English speaking couple living in America. Cambodian was the predominant language in the
environment of this child until, at the age of three, she entered an American preschool. To conduct this study, I, along with this child's parents, have audiotaped and videotaped the child at her home approximately every two weeks from the time this child was born. All the videotapes were made by the father without the investigator present. Transcripts of these tapes have been written in Khmer and English, and the examples I will use here come from these transcripts.

3. The Data The Child Encounters
As those of us working in Southeast Asian linguistics know, the indexicality of reference terms, that is, how terms of reference force interlocutors to rely on context to determine the referent, presents a different problem to someone learning Khmer, for example, than to someone learning a Western European language like English. In English, in order to engage in conversation one must learn to make a paradigmatic choice from a set of pronouns which label participant roles in a speech act (speaker, addressee, or neither speaker nor addressee). In Khmer, in order to engage in conversation one must learn to make a paradigmatic choice from sets of nominals which label social interrelationships between interlocutors (kinship names, birth order names, occupational role names, etc.). The fact that these terms like "I" in English, and បាខ (older) in Khmer can have multiple referents presents a problem to language learners. In Khmer, a mother can refer to her child using several terms. What the child has to sort out is: Which of these terms should she use for herself when speaking to her mother? Which should she use for herself when speaking to others? And on what basis should she make this paradigmatic choice?

In the Cambodian household I looked at, the primary caretaker and interlocutor for the child was the mother. As I indicated in my talk for SEALS II ("Cambodian Caretaker Speech and Teaching Routines"), this mother began talking to her daughter from the time the daughter could make eye contact with her. She talked to the daughter and for the daughter, modeling what the child ought to say. The following conversation between the mother and her two month old daughter show both the
talking-to and talking-for phenomenon as well as the variation in terms used to refer to the child:

Conversation 1.

nəh  mə:l  pa:  nəh
over-there look-at father over there
Over there! Look at Papa over there!

pra:p pa: ʔəʊ yə:  nəh
tell father have carry missy there
Tell Papa to carry you. There!
pa: ʔəɬ yə
father oh
"Oh Papa!"

pa: ʔəɬ yə pa:  nəh
father oh carry missy
"Oh Papa! Carry me!"

pa: pa:  nəh  qəʔ  ʔəʊ yə: pa:
Papa Papa missy want have carry
"Papa! Papa! I want you to carry me."

pa: ʔəɬ yə
father oh
"Oh Papa!"

(The child wiggles and kicks.)
thvɣ: ʔə nən kə:n
Do what this child
What are you doing child?

rəm ʔəɬ kə:n ʔəɬ
dance what child what
Are you dancing child or what?

(The mother returns to the previous topic.)
pa: ʔəɬ yə pa: ʔəɬ yə pa:  pa:
father oh father oh father carry