Abstract

This book is an inquiry into the concept of belonging and its relation to language use. The empirical focus lies on a Guatemalan rural community and how its members achieve belonging in interaction. The concept of belonging is defined first as the spatial, social and temporal categories that speakers use to attribute themselves and others *to*. Second, belonging is conceptualized as encompassing specific practices that are distinctive to a community and that index belonging *with* it. These practices are shared by group members, and together with the categorical attributions often determine who can belong and who cannot. The analysis is based on data collected in 2009 and 2011 during four months of ethnographic research. The corpus combines two broad types of spoken data: first, narratives on the community's transformation in semi-structured interviews and for visiting tourists; and second, other community interactions with visiting outsiders and amongst group members. The analysis of these interactions follows the methodological considerations developed in membership categorization, ethnographically informed conversation analysis and positioning theory. The findings suggest that "place" is pivotal in grounding belonging, emphasizing collectivity and tracing a temporal trajectory that connects group members' "origin" to that place. The analysis of the narrative corpus reveals shared elements in the individual narrations of the community story. Narrating the community's story in this way points to the participants' shared experiences and knowledge, and thereby consolidates belonging *with* the community through engaging in this language-based practice. This book, thus, offers a new theoretical approach to the concept of belonging and its relation to language use. Furthermore, it offers a holistic analysis of the community's belonging as it is achieved in interactions with different outsiders.