
Reflexive language and the human disciplines

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What prevents a work from being completed becomes the work itself.

Marcus Aurelius

Human activity is saturated by speech and much of what is distinctive about the human species depends on the use of language. Yet it is not easy to specify exactly what it is about language that is so special. One aspect of language that has drawn extensive attention in this regard is its reflexive capacity: in its full form this property may be unique to human language (Hockett 1963: 13; Lyons 1977: 5; Silverstein 1976: 16). This reflexive capacity underlies much of the power of language both in everyday life and in scholarly research. A theoretical account of this reflexive capacity will be necessary, therefore, for progress in many of the human disciplines.

A number of approaches to the study of reflexive language have already been developed, but the general significance of this work has not been widely appreciated. The present chapter briefly surveys some of the forms of reflexivity in language, outlines how these have been approached by some prominent research traditions, and then explores the place of research on reflexive language in the human disciplines with special attention to its methodological implications for the research process itself.

Types of reflexive language

In every language it is possible to speak about speech, that is, to use language to communicate about the activity of using language. Such uses of language are *reflexive* in nature. Reflexive use of language may involve two distinct, named language codes (e.g., a comment in English about Chinese) or the reflexivity may operate more narrowly within a single such code (e.g., a comment in English about English). In the latter case, the same language is operating simultaneously in two functional modes as it serves as both the means and the object of communication.

A variety of types of linguistic reflexivity can be identified. Firstly, we may refer to

general regularities in the structure or functioning of language use (e.g., “*Get* is an irregular verb,” “*Cilantro* is another name for *coriander*,” “One shouldn’t say ‘damn it’ in front of children,” “Spanish consonants are pronounced slightly differently in Mexico than in Spain,” “A joke is a kind of humorous story”). We may even talk about language in general (e.g., “Many languages signal gender differences in their pronouns,” “Languages are capable of referring to their own structure and use”). Secondly, we may refer to or report particular acts of speech (real or imagined) in a variety of ways: by representing most of the speech as we remember or imagine it having happened (e.g., “He said ‘Hey, that’s a great haircut you got!’”), by representing part of the speech (e.g., “He said [that] I got a great haircut”), by characterizing the speech without overtly representing it (e.g., “Tom complimented me today,” “Bill told a joke at lunch”), or by some mixture of characterization and representation (e.g., “Tom complimented me today on how great my haircut was”). Perhaps because of their relative clarity, these two forms of reflexivity (i.e., overt reference to language regularities and reports of particular speech events) have been the main focus of research interest to date, but they do not exhaust the forms of reflexivity in language.

Within a given linguistic code, language use is reflexive in a variety of other ways. For example, all languages contain indexical forms which change their value depending on the actual event of speaking. In order to understand these forms a person needs to be able to compute the parameters of the use of language in a specific context. For example, the denotational meaning of the pronoun *I* depends on knowing the identity of ‘the person uttering an instance of *I*,’ that is, the form indexes an aspect of the specific speech event itself (an instance of language use) as part of its meaning and is, in this sense, reflexive. So too for other forms such as tense markers on verbs (e.g., English *-ed*, ‘past,’ which indicates that the event in question occurred prior to the present moment of utterance). These forms reflexively take account of the ongoing event of speaking itself, in terms of which we can use and understand their referential and predicational value. Still other forms are defined essentially with respect to regularities in the use of language code. For example, a proper name, in the pure case, denotes anything to which the name is assigned by convention. That is, in the pure case, a proper name denotes a particular object not by virtue of signaling some substantive information about its properties but only by indexing the existence of a conventional label for that specific object – that the object is so named. In just this sense, such names are reflexive in nature.

In addition to the above types of reflexive forms, there are a whole variety of other structural devices which also tell listeners how to interpret the speech they are hearing. In some languages, it is possible to help create an event centering on speech by explicit description of the particular speech event regularity as it occurs (e.g., “I baptize you John Henry”). Likewise, altering one’s intonational contour can tell a listener not to take a remark literally (e.g., [with a sarcastic intonation] “Hey, that’s a great haircut you got”). The reflexivity in such cases is not localized in a single form but rather in an overall design of the utterance. In a like manner, structural parallelism in poetry sets up formal equivalences that tell listeners that certain things are to be compared

with one another. Again, a constellation of textual features tells listeners how to interpret the ongoing speech. Indeed, to the extent that specific textual co-occurrences – even those based on grammatical patterns – have meaning value, they perform a similar guiding function. The orderly array of elements may guide speakers in their interpretation of an utterance. For instance, where there are regular word order patterns which place elements with an agentive role in initial position relative to the propositional utterance as a whole, then placing an item in that position signals to the listener that it is to be taken as the agent. In this sense, one part of the code structures the interpretation of another part.

In sum, speech is permeated by reflexive activity as speakers remark on language, report utterances, index and describe aspects of the speech event, invoke conventional names, and guide listeners in the proper interpretation of their utterances. This reflexivity is so pervasive and essential that we can say that language is, by nature, fundamentally reflexive.

Traditional approaches to reflexive language

These various forms of reflexive language have been explored from several different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Several of the historically significant problems and prominent approaches to them will be briefly sketched here with an emphasis on introducing certain important conceptual distinctions.

Logico-linguistic approaches

Philosophical interest in language stems in large part from the latter’s perceived relation to logic and truth. In particular, logicians and philosophical semanticists have been concerned to specify the conditions under which one can validly derive new propositions which are true from propositions whose truth is already given. These philosophers have long recognized that some linguistic forms can be used reflexively to refer to themselves, and they have devoted considerable attention to reflexive forms for two reasons. First, the presence of reflexive forms in an utterance often derails the usual derivations of true propositions (Quine 1960: Chs. 4 & 6). Secondly, philosophers have come to recognize that their own claims about terms and propositions are themselves reflexive; in particular, the claim in a language that a proposition in that language is “true” is a reflexive statement (Tarski 1944; Reichenbach 1975 [1947]).

In general, philosophical attention has centered on the most explicit forms of reflexivity illustrated above: reference to language regularities and reports of speech. Turning first to statements about language, these tend to be reflexive in several ways. The most obvious reflexivity involves denoting a particular form in the language. For example, in the statement “dog is monosyllabic” the form *dog* refers not to an animal but rather to itself as a linguistic form: it serves here as its own name. When *dog* is used in this way, it no longer has its usual referential value (it is not referentially transparent) and it is not possible to draw the usual inferences from it; that is, we

cannot conclude anything about dogs from the utterance. Notice, in particular, that if we substitute the word *canine* for *dog*, the statement becomes false even though most other ordinary statements about dogs would have the same referential value under such a substitution. Seeking to distinguish normal and reflexive reference, philosophers have employed the term *use* for the ordinary case and *mention* for the self-referential case (e.g., Quine 1940: 23–6). (Garver 1965 and Lyons 1977: 5–10 provide some criticisms of this distinction and references to the relevant literature.)

The reflexive status of *dog* in the above example would be clear to most speakers of English by virtue of the specialized meaning value of the term *monosyllabic*, whose primary function is to ascribe states to language forms. However, we can further clarify the reflexive status of *dog* by saying, for example, “The word *dog* is monosyllabic” – employing another special term *word* to signal directly that *dog* is now being referred to as a language form, that is, is now being used reflexively. (And in written texts we might find other forms of special visual marking such as italics or quotation marks: “[The word] *dog* is monosyllabic” or “[The word] ‘dog’ is monosyllabic”.) These various special forms, so essential to modern philosophical and linguistic discourse, effectively refer to and/or predicate of other forms in language. As forms, they are not narrowly reflexive in the sense of referring to themselves (unless they are “mentioned” in the sense introduced above), but rather they facilitate the reflexive use of language generally. Their status is not really captured by the use-versus-mention distinction and a somewhat broader conceptualization seems needed to adequately characterize them.

In many traditional philosophical and linguistic accounts, ordinary language is conceived of as referring, in the first instance, to a world of nonlinguistic objects. The use of language to refer to language itself is seen, then, as a higher order or iterative use worthy of special attention. Language referring to language in this way is called *metalinguage* and the ordinary language referred to is called *object language*. For some theorists, use of the term *object language* specifically indicates that the first order language deals with actual objects of one sort or another (e.g., Reichenbach 1975 [1947]: 14; cf. Jakobson 1980a [1956]: 86), whereas for others, it is just a relational term in contrast to *metalinguage* (e.g., Lyons 1977: 10). In either case, all of the above forms can be characterized as metalinguistic and “mention” is, then, just a particular type of metalinguistic pattern. And in both cases there can be higher order *metalinguages* about a first order *metalinguage*. Although the argument cannot be developed here, Reichenbach (1975 [1947]: 9–17) and others differentiate several levels within *metalinguage* depending on the aspect of *object language* to which they refer and the scope of generality involved.

One particularly troublesome question in this tradition concerns the autonomy of *metalinguages*. On the one hand, many if not most languages contain a number of specialized metalinguistic forms, so the *metalinguage* seems at times to operate as a separate code. Yet in the case of terms which are “mentioned,” the forms are clearly identical to or based on those of the *object language*. Further, some forms such as *is* seem to be duplex in that they can serve in both *object language* (e.g., “The dog is brown”) and *metalinguage* (e.g., “Dog is a noun”). In the narrowly reflexive case,

then, where a language is being used to describe itself, it is not possible, in the last analysis, to make the “*metalinguage*” formally independent of some *object language* (usually the general scholarly language in use). Some “words” of the *metalinguage* must be identical to words of the *object language*:

mixed sentences cannot be completely dispensed with, as is shown by a sentence like ‘Peter’ denotes Peter’, where the second word ‘Peter’ belongs to the *object language*. (Reichenbach 1975 [1947]: 11; cf. Garver 1965)

Because of this, in the fully reflexive case, the notion of a *metalinguage* as a formally and functionally independent or autonomous language is not tenable. This means that a *metalinguage* is always to some degree a function of or dependent on the nature of the *object language* out of which it is implemented – an implication the significance of which we will explore below.

If we broaden the *metalinguage*–*object language* distinction to include the use of one language to describe another (e.g., using English to describe French), then an independent *metalinguage* is conceivable (cf. Lyons 1977: 10). However, the *metalinguage* is reflexive now only in the broad sense that language use is being directed at language use and not in the narrow sense of a particular language referring to its own use. Under such circumstances the particular *metalinguage* is technically independent of the particular *object language* although it is not independent to the extent that there is comparability of grammar of *metalinguage* and *object language*. Even in the case of the use of a separate code there may still have to be a relation of similarity or logical interdependence for certain metalinguistic utterances to be made. For example, the predicate “(be) true” is a predicate of *metalinguage*, but it is not at all clear (*contra* Lyons 1977: 168–9) that it can ever be legitimately applied to a proposition formulated in another language without having established equivalence in reference between *object language* and *metalinguage* – that is, without having to establish the equivalent of the narrower type of reflexivity. (Cf. Quine 1960: 216–17.)

Turning secondly to reports of specific speech events, traditional philosophical and linguistic interests again center on their deflection of (or nontransparency to) ordinary reference. The problem, once again, is that if terms designating the same thing are substituted into such expressions, they do not, in general, yield equivalent truth values (Quine 1960: 146–56). The nontransparency is obvious with *direct quotation* or *oratio recta*, that is, where the reporting utterance purportedly presents a speaker’s exact words. So, for example, the utterance “Mary said ‘Bring that pig here’” is not equivalent in truth value to the utterance “Mary said ‘Bring that hog here,’” even though *pig* and *hog* essentially have the same referential value, because the report is about Mary’s exact speech. (In a sense “Bring that pig here” is a mention of the utterance, that is, a use in the *metalinguage*.)

Reports of specific speech events which do not purport to represent exact speech events, known as *indirect quotation* or *oratio obliqua*, present many of the same problems. When these cases of indirect discourse are analyzed as syntactically and semantically unified sentences, they do not allow the logical entailments they should if truth is conceptualized in one of the usual ways. By assuming instead that the

reported material in fact belongs to a separate utterance referred to by the reporting utterance, many of the problems encountered in providing a logical treatment of these forms can be resolved (Davidson 1968–9). In this view, for example, the utterance “Gallileo said that the earth moves” should be analyzed as “The earth moves. Gallileo said that” (Davidson 1968–9). Once it is recognized that there are two independent utterances involved, they need not be truth-linked as if they formed portions of one higher order unit (e.g., a sentence). The interrelation of these forms then requires an appeal to a discourse level of analysis which takes account of the speaker’s interpretation of the forms as encoding reported speech (Partee 1973: 418). This approach is perhaps the only one possible given a unifunctional view of language, that is, one which focuses solely on the referential function and ignores the other functions of language and the stratified, multifunctional nature of any given utterance.

In such indirect discourse, the reporting utterance presents what the speaker takes to be an equivalent of the reported utterance. It is not always clear from the utterance itself what specific equivalence the speaker has in mind. The ambiguity of such forms arises because one cannot be sure whether the speaker’s *that* refers to the speech forms that have been used, known as the *de dicto* interpretation, or the referential content of those speech forms, known as the *de re* interpretation (Quine 1976). Under the *de dicto* interpretation, the assumption is that the reporter means to convey the speaker’s actual words with only a minimum of grammatical adjustment to fit the reporting frame. Under the *de re* interpretation, the assumption is that the speaker means to convey the central message the reported utterance had for him (or her). The ambiguity makes rigorously deterministic logical derivations impossible.

Work within the logico-linguistic tradition clarifies that a concept of metalanguage will be central to the analysis of language and provides a set of preliminary conceptual distinctions which will be crucial in such analyses. But the focus on rigorous derivation of true propositions has tended to confine these logico-linguistic analyses of reflexive language to rather narrow quarters. The exclusive focus has been the formalization and discussion of the referential or descriptive function of language, that is, language as a vehicle for knowledge conceived of as the statement and derivation of true propositions about the world. There is little open-ended exploration of the variety of types of metalinguistic structures and virtually no serious attempt to understand the broader functions of metalinguistic speech as a human activity. Therefore, this approach cannot address questions about the functioning and significance of reflexive language in social and psychological life. For this, a more broadly gauged approach will be necessary, one which involves recognizing the multiple functions of language in communicative activity.

Semiotic-functional approaches

A second line of research dealing with reflexive language stems from work on the semiotic functions of language. Much of this work is closely related to communications theory and cybernetics. Semiotic functionalism is concerned with the relation of semiotic structure to semiotic practice and should be distinguished from more

reductive functionalisms which attempt to account for sign activity entirely in terms of psychological or social functions. The emphasis here is on the existence of multiple levels in language, whether multiple levels of abstraction or multiple levels of functioning.

Bateson (1972 [1955]: 178), expanding on the work of the logico-linguistic tradition with a cybernetic approach, distinguished between *metalinguistic* messages, where the subject of discourse is language, and *metacommunicative* messages, where the subject of discourse is the relationship between speakers (e.g., “My telling you where to find the cat was friendly”) – although, in his view, most messages of both types remained implicit. Bateson argued that metacommunicative messages *frame* communication, that is, they “explicitly or implicitly” give “the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame” and define “the set of messages about which it communicates” (1972 [1955]: 188). So, for example, the metacommunicative message “This is play” signals to other interactants that activities within the frame do not have their ordinary communicative value:

“These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote.”... The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite. (1972 [1955]: 180 – italics in the original)

Bateson was concerned to show how these metacommunicative frames entail certain paradoxes of abstraction that are essential in the evolution and use of communicative signals. In particular, metalinguistic rules are essential to ordinary speech:

Denotative communication as it occurs at the human level is only possible *after* the evolution of a complex set of metalinguistic... rules which govern how words and sentences shall be related to objects and events. (1972 [1955]: 178 – italics in the original; cf. Quine 1974)

This insight, that metacommunicative messages frame action, has subsequently been developed and extended to a much broader range of social activities, most notably in the work of Goffman (1974, 1981) in sociology and Geertz (1973 – especially pp. 412–53) in anthropology. See Sanches (1975) and Babcock (1980, 1984a, 1984b [1977]) for overviews of this work on metacommunication.

The framing of communicative interpretations is particularly salient in the case of *explicit primary performatives*, conventionalized utterances present in some languages which accomplish social acts by reference to/description of their own occurrence (Austin 1962). For example, in the performative utterance “I promise I’ll come” the reporting event and reported event are indistinguishable and the utterance cannot be subject to judgments of truth value in the usual ways. In a sense the first portion of the utterance makes explicit the way the second portion is to be read. In seeking to account for the operation of these forms, extensive research has been conducted on the grounds of ordinary speech. In fact, using performatives as the prototype for all speech acts, a theory has been developed which ultimately interprets all speech in terms of these levels (Searle 1969). The analyses of these reflexive forms have had wide impact both in philosophy and in the human sciences (e.g., Habermas 1984).

Among the most influential work on reflexivity in language is that of Roman

Jakobson working out of the Prague School tradition. In one early paper, Jakobson (1971 [1957]: 130–3) characterized utterances as consisting of messages (M) in codes (C) and introduced four types of reflexivity. There are, first, messages about messages (M/M). Here are included the various types of reported speech already illustrated – direct and indirect quotation as well as various intermediate types. Second, there are messages about codes (M/C). Here are included the various references to linguistic regularities (i.e., so-called autonomous speech) whether intralingual (circumlocutions, synonyms) or interlingual (translation). These two types of reflexivity correspond to the explicitly metalinguistic activities discussed above.

Jakobson's last two types involve the general meaning of a code unit *implying* a "reference" to message or code. Hence, third, are grammatical units called *shifters*, whose general meaning as code cannot be defined without reference to (i.e., taking account of) the particular message event (C/M). Here are included, for example, the various indicators of person (i.e., pronouns such as *I, you*) and tense (e.g., 'past') illustrated earlier which effectively direct the listener to attend to some aspect of the present speech event in order to deduce the full meaning. Finally, fourth, are proper names, elements of the code which also refer to (i.e., index) the code – that is, the conventional assignments currently in use – for their meaning (C/C). Despite a number of conceptual problems with this typology (e.g., the use of the term "refer" in several different senses), it does highlight the pervasiveness and diversity of reflexive activity in language.

In other work drawing on communications theory and building on the work of Bühler (1934), Jakobson (1980a [1956], 1960) attempted to provide a formal characterization of the basic functions of language. He began by identifying six basic constituents of the speech situation: addresser, message, addressee, context, code, and contact (i.e., a physical channel). Each component was associated in turn with a specific function of language. Although each speech event involves all of these constituents and their associated functions, one may be emphasized in a given speech event. For example, emphasis on the context foregrounds the *referential* function as dominant. And within the terms of this typology, emphasis on the code foregrounds the *metalingual* function as dominant.

This characterization of metalinguistic activity appears to correspond to autonomous speech (M/C) in Jakobson's earlier discussion of reflexivity but it leaves out reported speech (M/M), the other explicit form of metalinguistic activity. In some cases (e.g., direct quotation), reported speech can perhaps be construed as a variant of an emphasis on code in the sense of a specific encoding but this classification seems strained. Interestingly, in formal terms, the closest approximation to a focus on message form for its own sake would be where the poetic function is constituted as dominant – a suggestive linkage to which we will return further below (cf. Jakobson 1960: 358; Mannheim 1986; and Bauman 1987 on the interrelation of the poetic and metalingual functions). Silverstein (1985a) adopts the approach of treating reported speech as an aspect of the context.

There have been several subsequent attempts to correct or expand on Jakobson's approach. On the basis of attempts to employ the scheme to describe diverse

languages, Hymes (1974: 9–24) was led to elaborate it in a number of ways. The innovations he makes are of two types: he breaks down *context* into a number of more particular categories which speakers may focus on and he adds *event* as a constituent whose emphasis constitutes the *metacommunicative* function. This effectively provides a place within this tradition for Bateson's concerns. In most respects, however, Hymes follows Jakobson.

More recently Silverstein (1976, 1981, 1985a, 1985b, this volume) has reformulated Jakobson's insights in both of these lines of work in a number of ways. Silverstein (1985b: 217–19) draws a basic distinction between two great classes of sign function: *semantic* and *pragmatic*. The pragmatic aspect of language is all the meaningfulness of signs connected with ongoing usage in contexts of communication (e.g., indexical meaning). The semantic aspect of language is that portion of the meaningfulness of signs which is constant across, and therefore independent of, specific contexts (e.g., form–class meaning). That is, semantics is the realm of meaning predictable from code-internal regularities and highly general and stereotypic symbolic referential values. Pragmatics encompasses semantics as a special case when the latter is conceptualized as regularities of meaning presupposed by and instantiated in patterns of language use. (Yet, in another sense, pragmatics contrasts with semantics when the latter is taken as that aspect of meaning which is symbolic and independent of use in any given speech context.)

Metalinguistic activity, in this view, is fundamentally *metapragmatic*, that is, most reflexive activity deals with the appropriate *use* of language. That part of metalanguage dealing with semantics is *metasemantics* – a special, yet privileged subcase of the more general reflexive activity. In this sense, metapragmatics both encompasses metasemantics and contrasts with it. Metalinguistic functioning may be explicit, such as metapragmatic reference to and predication about particular speech events as pragmatic activity (e.g., reported speech), metapragmatic characterization and evaluation of speech types (e.g., as gossip, as appropriate, etc.; cf. Stross 1974; Urban 1984), or metasemantic reference and predication about regularities of meaning equivalences in the language code (e.g., glossing). In such cases we may speak of *metapragmatic discourse*.

But metapragmatic activity is also implicit in ordinary discourse as speakers undertake to contextualize pragmatic forms, that is, signal how such forms are to be appropriately interpreted. In such cases, where metalinguistic functioning has not been explicitly foregrounded, we may speak of *metapragmatic functioning* (or of a *virtual* metapragmatics). Explicit metapragmatic discourse, in this view, results from the special manipulation and foregrounding of forms employed in ordinary metapragmatic functioning. For this reason, all metapragmatic discourse, including scientific and other learned discourse, ultimately depends for its specific form and content on the general metapragmatic framework of the everyday language(s) in use. To the extent that everyday metapragmatic activity generally is subject to certain limitations, specialized metapragmatic discourse will be too; to the extent that metapragmatic activity is subject to the pragmatics of the particular language at issue, specialized metapragmatic discourses implemented with it will be too.

The semiotic-functional approach moves beyond a concern with the relation of linguistic reference to knowledge and considers language use as a form of social action, most particularly, as communicative action. From this perspective, reflexive activity is essential to language use. Metacommunicative and metalinguistic activity takes place all the time to help structure ongoing linguistic activity. The explicit and specialized metalinguistic uses analyzed by the logico-linguistic tradition seem to depend in important ways on this ongoing, naturally occurring metalinguistic functioning.

Literary-performance approaches

A final body of research dealing with reflexive language has developed out of attempts to understand verbal art. Literary scholars have focused on the aesthetic significance of alternative modes of framing, reporting, and characterizing utterances. Work in this tradition does not concern itself with the determination of truth value, although it may draw on the logico-linguistic tradition for insight (e.g., Banfield 1982), nor does it concern itself with the requirements of communication, although it may use the semiotic-functional tradition to frame its analyses (e.g., Jakobson 1960; Barthes 1968). Rather, the focus is on the way specific artistic effects are achieved and the ends to which they are put. In particular, there has been concern with the ways verbal art can effectively represent different perspectives simultaneously and with the ways verbal forms become constituted as poetic.

In languages which contain both direct and indirect quotation as modes of reporting speech, the two styles of reporting differ in details of their function and structure (Vološinov 1986 [1929]: 125-40; Banfield 1982: 23-64). Although both modes use verbs of speaking (*verbum dicendi*) to frame and report speech events, the direct form *imitates* or presents the reported speech event from the perspective of the reported speech situation whereas the indirect form *analyzes* or interprets the event from the perspective of the current reporting event. For example, in the utterance "Sam said 'Frank, how come I saw you here so early this morning?'" it is clear that the reported utterance is to be taken as imitating or presenting what Sam actually uttered. By contrast, in indirect quotation, such as "Sam said that he was surprised I was at work so early yesterday," Sam's utterance typically will be construed in terms of concerns operative at the time of the report.

Direct quotation adopts the frame of orientation of the reproduced speech event and claims to convey it as it actually occurred. The reported speech is, therefore, indexically anchored to the reproduced event and bears no necessary formal relationship to the reporting event (i.e., the speaker, the time, etc. may be completely different). In the above example of direct quotation, the pronoun *I* refers to Sam as speaker, the pronoun *you* to Sam's addressee Frank, the *morning* in question to the day of Sam's utterance (whenever that was), etc. Direct quotation typically foregrounds the original *form of the utterance* although it conveys its substantiative message as well. Thus direct reports readily incorporate a variety of verbal constructions that cannot occur (or only rarely occur) in indirect forms, for example, incomplete sentences, subjectless imperatives, vocative noun phrases, sentences of different dialect or language, etc.

(Banfield 1982: 28). In the present example, the use of the vocative *Frank* and a question intonation are reproduced. By re-presenting the very expressive forms that the speaker used to communicate, these forms can be used to indicate the point of view of the speaker of the original utterance, indicate contrast or distance from the reporter, etc.

By contrast, indirect quotation appears to adopt the perspective of the reporting speech situation, that is, it adopts the frame of orientation of the reporting speech event and interprets relevance according to the concerns of the current event. The indexical anchoring is to the current reporting event and the reported speech must be properly related to it in formal terms. The reported speech is typically introduced by a syntactic subordinator (e.g., by *that* in English) and certain rules of concordance govern the relationship between indexical elements in the main and subordinated materials (e.g., tense, pronouns, and demonstrative elements) (Banfield 1982: 25). In the above example of indirect speech, the pronoun *I* refers to the current speaker (not Sam), Sam is now referred to by the pronoun *he*, the *yesterday* in question is the day before the reporting event (not the day before Sam's utterance), etc. Certain relevant elements of the original speech event which were implicit in it now have to be overtly introduced (e.g., that the conversation took place at work). Further, the underlying psychological significance of Sam's original remark has been interpreted for the current report, namely, that Sam was surprised at the reporter's presence at work at a certain time. Indirect quotation thus foregrounds or introduces the effective *content* of the original utterance with respect to current concerns and may have a variable degree of formal resemblance to the original. Because the reported material may be stripped of much of its original form in this process, certain expressive qualities, if they are to be available at all, must be conveyed by explicit representation. Thus, in the above example, Sam's surprise as expressed by his question is now explicitly characterized rather than re-enacted.

Alternation of direct and indirect speech can be used to create both practical and aesthetic effects. Among the more important contrasts is the shifting back and forth between a narrator's and a character's point of view. Because of their capacity to instantiate directly the expressive character of language, the direct reports are often seen as more vivid and authoritative. Because of their capacity to describe explicitly the reporter's understanding of the original event (e.g., relevant motives and intentions), indirect reports often signal more clearly the reason for reporting the speech. However, speakers can manipulate the use of these forms in such a way as to achieve a variety of social ends. For example, appropriate direct quotation can make a point seem to be authoritative rather than merely an individual speaker's point of view. Second, indirect quotation can eliminate aspects of the original that the reporter does not want stressed. The interplay of these two modes of report and of each of them with framing narration have been widely investigated in recent years because of their significance for understanding the emergent and transformative nature of verbal art.

Other forms of reporting speech exist which combine features characteristic of both direct and indirect style and achieve some interpenetration of the voice of the reporter and the reported, the narrator and the character (Vološinov 1986 [1929]: 129-59;

abstracted in Coulmas 1986: 6–10). The most controversial of these complex forms is that known variously as quasi-direct discourse, free indirect style, or represented speech and thought. The following examples of direct, indirect, and quasi-direct reports of speech (adapted from Banfield 1982: 71) illustrate the distinctive quality of the latter:

Direct: John said "Oh, am I tired."

Indirect: John said (that) he was tired.

Quasi-direct: John said: oh was he tired.

The presence of the interjection and the order of constituents in the quasi-direct form are similar to those in direct form, but the tense and pronouns follow the pattern of the indirect form. This has led some to see quasi-direct reports as a formal blend of the first two types of report, but this is by no means certain. Consider, in particular, whose point of view is being represented. The first and second forms of report rather straightforwardly represent John's and the reporter's point of view whereas the point of view in the third example is less obvious. The utterance seems to represent John's report of his own point of view but without indexing him as an *I* speaking at a definable present moment. Somehow we seem to have access to John's own sentiments without employing the usual indexical signs indicating that he has communicated them.

Banfield (1982; this volume) argues that such a form does not present the speech from the perspective of the first person (whether quoted speaker or quoting speaker) but from a third person point of view. Consider the perspective represented in the following examples (again drawn from Banfield 1982: 72–3):

'Where were her paints, she wondered? Her paints, yes.' (Woolf 1974: 228)

Oh how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. (Mansfield 1956: 287)

In a sense, the consciousnesses of these characters have been directly represented but without quoting actual speech. More generally, Banfield argues, the expressive function in language is bound with the communicative function. Directly quoted speech fuses expression and communication. Indirectly quoted speech represents only communication without expression. Thought reported in indirect form is neither communicative nor expressive. Thus expression is left without a form of its own. It is only the language of literary narrative with its use of constructions such as quasi-direct reports of speech and thought that effectively provides a way of reporting expression without reporting communication. In this view, consciousness itself can be represented apart from its verbal communicative form. Here the reflexive devices of language are being manipulated to try to break some of the limitations imposed by the verbal code itself. Banfield (1982) and Vološinov (1986 [1929]) both give historical interpretations of the emergence of this form, seeing it as determined by and determining of a peculiar form of subjectivization of speech in the West. A more adequate characterization of these phenomena would require a more sophisticated and differentiated conceptualization of the functions of language and their formal interrelation.

Other work within the literary tradition has focused on the qualities that make

certain uses of language "poetic" or, more broadly, "artistic." Jakobson (1960) lists the poetic function as one of the basic functions of language. In this mode, the message becomes foregrounded for its own sake. Here the basic semiotic activities of selection and combination are manipulated to achieve aesthetically pleasing forms (e.g., in sound structure, meaning equivalences, etc.). Depending on which other functions get secondary emphasis, one gets epic, lyric, or other specific poetic forms. The central device and diagnostic criterion for the poetic function for Jakobson (1960: 358) is *parallelism (broadly conceived)*, which serves to take one part of the message as an icon for another, where each part can be taken then as a key to reading the other (see also Jakobson 1966, 1968). Silverstein (1984) has explored how such "poetic" structuring emerges in mundane verbal interactions thereby revealing the metapragmatic quality of such interactions.

Recent work in folklore studies has conceptualized the processes of producing verbal art in terms of performance, that is, the employment of metacommunicative framing devices to signal that the current speaking is a performance of an entextualized "piece." In Bauman's (1984 [1977]: 11; Bauman and Briggs 1990) view performance is a reflexive mode of communication which consists of the assumption of responsibility for displaying communicative competence, that is, for speaking well in socially appropriate ways. Recognition that one is assuming responsibility in this way is keyed or indicated by a confluence of signals in the verbal forms themselves rather than by the presence of a single diagnostic mark. Silverstein (1985b: 226) calls this a *virtual metapragmatics* residing in a configuration of enactable indexical forms. In such cases, the exact nature of a given utterance as a performance may be subject to some negotiation in the course of verbal interaction. The attempt to sustain a particular interpretation of ongoing usage can be a source of social and psychological creativity. Such attempts to establish a particular mode of speech as the one in progress (i.e., as the relevant communicative context) in conjunction with individual style and *situational specificity* give performances an emergent quality. More generally, the same can be said of all speech (cf. Gumperz 1982, Bauman and Briggs 1990).

The literary-performance approach emphasizes the use of reflexive language to establish and transform existing contexts. In the reporting of speech, it becomes possible to have the reporter's "voice" (in the sense of point of view) alternate with or penetrate into the reported speech. The creation of poetic forms is seen to depend integrally on the use of metalinguistic forms and skills both to define performance contexts and to establish paradigmatic equivalences within those contexts. And finally, some metalinguistic forms can be used to transcend some of the naturally occurring limitations implicit in ordinary reflexive uses of language. In a sense, verbal art is a form of creative metalinguistic play with the power to affect social reality.

Reflexive language and consciousness

The study of reflexive language is of great significance in its own right. Reflexivity plays a crucial role in the very functioning of language and therefore has obvious

implications for all those disciplines which focus either on language itself or on data obtained in linguistic form – which is to say, all of the disciplines concerned with the meaning of human action. But reflexive language also is important because it stands at the center of our own practice as analysts of human activity. Scholarly accounts represent in verbal form not only the discourse of social actors but also the discourse of other scholars. In this sense, an understanding of reflexive language is essential to methodological rigor in the human disciplines and, indeed, in all scholarly activity. To understand this claim properly, we need first to sketch out the methodological significance of conscious reflexivity in the human disciplines generally, then to show how the same need for methodological reflexivity operates in the linguistic-semiotic domain, and, finally, to indicate how a concern with reflexive language interacts with traditional concerns.

Consciousness as a methodological problem

The history of the human sciences can be characterized as a series of reflexive, consciousness-raising experiences in which we have first discovered and then explored disjunctions between everyday understandings of phenomena and those understandings possible with systematic, critical research. Typically, these disjunctions are first recognized as characteristic of the social actors who constitute the object of our studies, and then, only later, do we come to realize that we as analysts are vulnerable to the same difficulties. We then face the challenge of incorporating these insights into a more sophisticated theory and research methodology so that we can conceptualize and transcend our own naive views in a systematic and rigorous way. In short, many of the most important advances in the human sciences have resulted from attempts to grasp the reflexive implications of our findings and to transcend them.

Research on psychological processes has revealed a variety of cognitive and emotional limits to awareness. Thus, during the late nineteenth century it steadily became more apparent that not all aspects of the self which were evident to an analyst were readily subject to conscious awareness by the subject. William James's (1950 [1890]) efforts to establish psychology as an autonomous professional discipline hinged on this insight and its implications for the study of human life. Various cognitivists, beginning with the early work of Bartlett (1977 [1932]), believed that this disjunction could be studied and they undertook to understand how people came to alter perceived reality in regular ways by selective perception and memory as well as by systematic errors in reasoning. In time it became clear that researchers themselves were subject to these problems and a variety of methodological techniques were adopted in some disciplines to guard against researchers' perception, memory, and reasoning biases.

In the affective realm, Freud (1966 [1917], 1962 [1923]) felt that unconscious processes could be studied, and his research into ego development and the various defense mechanisms remains the central work in this area. At the core of Freud's theory is the notion of a dynamic unconscious, operating principally through systematic repression (or exclusion from consciousness) of certain psychic elements which are emotionally threatening. In cases of personal dysfunction, psychoanalytic

therapy provides an opportunity to bring these psychic elements to consciousness in part by means of a transference of crucial emotional response patterns onto the therapist. With time, again, has come an understanding that researchers themselves bring a variety of emotional or affective issues to the research process which affect their approach to it. This realization has had particular impact among anthropologists, where discussions of transference phenomena in field settings are now commonplace.

A similar set of developments occurred in those fields concerned with society and culture. Human actors are embedded in specific experiential worlds and this embeddedness shapes and limits their understandings in a variety of ways.

One general source of limitations is the sociological position actors occupy within a given society. One important goal of Marx (1977 [1867]), Weber (1946), Durkheim (1938 [1895]), and other analysts of the social world was to account for these regular disjunctions between ideology and practice, norms and behavior, actors' understandings and externally and systematically observable system-level regularities. The gap between the normative and the actually observable is now recognized as an important theoretical problem faced in all social science inquiry. It becomes a methodological problem when we consider the impact of ideology stemming from the social position of the analyst on the practice of social science itself – a point developed by Lukács (1972 [1923]) and extensively in recent years by Bourdieu (1982, 1984).

A still more general dimension of the social shaping or limiting of actors' understandings stems from their participation in regionally and historically specific traditions of social organization. In this case the concern is not with the actor's place within a system but with the place of the system in a historical-comparative framework of human possibilities. Here the classic sociological thinkers mentioned above are joined by comparative specialists such as Boas (1966b), Malinowski (1961 [1922]), their students, and others who have tried to describe entire cultural traditions as highly specific, yet potent behavioral environments. Since analysts often see the culture differently than do native participants, one of the central tasks in any ethnographic work is grasping the native's point of view and its relation to observable cultural practices. A deeper problem in this area is that the dynamic relationship between cultural outlook and actual practice may not itself be a constant across human groups.

In this sort of comparative work, the ideology/practice problem is redoubled as two sets of ideological systems and two sets of practices have to be co-ordinated. One of the irreducible problems in any comparative analysis is giving an account of the conceptual categories of others in terms that do not reduce them to our own cultural views in the disguise of a scientifically neutral metalanguage. It was relatively easy to discover that other peoples behaved differently from us. It was more difficult to discover that they conceived of the world in fundamentally different ways than we do. But it is proving especially difficult – and divisive within the human sciences – to cope with the implicit methodological problem this poses for us: our own descriptions of alternative traditions inevitably contain numerous distortions deriving from our own cultural assumptions, from our own ideological position within our own cultural system, and from our own discursive goals with a disciplinary matrix. Perhaps the

major agenda in contemporary human science lies in this struggle to identify and come to terms with the limits of Western science as a mode of knowing.

Semiotic limits of awareness

In each of the above cases, we have first recognized a problem of consciousness in the actors and then, later, we have recognized it in ourselves as analysts. A similar pattern is emerging in the area of semiotically oriented language studies, although it is perhaps less well known and its consequences not as yet widely understood.

It is a commonplace among linguists that speakers are unaware of the complex regularities they routinely use when speaking (e.g., Saussure 1966 [1915]: 72–3; Jakobson 1980b). In fact Boas (1966a [1911]: 63) argued that this unconscious quality distinguished language from other sorts of ethnological phenomena which were extensively distorted by what he called secondary reasoning and re-interpretation. Sapir (1949 [1927]: 547–55) echoed Boas's observation and speculated on some possible reasons for this unconscious quality. He noted that speakers seemed able to become aware of functions of certain of the individual forms of language, but had difficulty recognizing the place a form occupied in an overall constellation of behavior. In particular, speakers focus on words rather than on patterns of relations among words, that is, their place in a system. Sapir saw limitations of awareness as characteristic of all cultural phenomena and, in this sense, the limited awareness of language can be given an account in either psychological or social terms. However, in Sapir's various characterizations of the importance of formal relations in language in his emphasis on the completeness of the linguistic system as a referential device, he touched on characteristics that might distinguish language from other cultural systems.

Whorf (1956; Lucy 1992a,b) added to these observations. Like Sapir, he noted the tendency of speakers to focus more on discrete words than on grammatical patterns. And he emphasized how difficult it is to recognize any truly background phenomena such as language without exposure to some alternative case. In the absence of experience with a contrasting language, speakers tended to construe the inventory of experience in their own language categories as "necessary."

But Whorf's account makes clearer that there is a specific semiotic problem involved stemming from the formal characteristics of reflexive uses of language. When using language reflexively (as metalanguage) to characterize the referents of forms in the language (as object language), speakers typically use the very same set of categories to describe the linguistic forms and to describe the reality to which those forms have reference. This makes it easy to see one's basic language categories as a "perfect match" with the essential dimensions of reality. Furthermore, it is always possible to describe more complex categories with combinations of these basic categories (by glossing, etc.). Here we have a special limitation to consciousness deriving from the fact that the formal instrument we are using to represent and describe our own linguistic system as a referential device is ultimately drawn from that very same system. In fact, the problem is doubly acute since the analyst's own language

categories may be so strongly felt that other languages will be interpreted or described in terms of them – effectively short-circuiting the possibility of developing clearly contrasting cases.

Whorf also formulated a number of more specific claims to the effect that when we do reflect on language categories, we do so in partial and misleading ways. In other words, our attempts at reflection are shaped by differential awareness and systematic patterns of implicit attribution. For example, he argued that lexical reference was especially salient for speakers. More generally, he elaborated the notion that forms with more concrete reference tended to influence the reflective interpretation of forms with more abstract referents. And he developed a distinction between *overt* and *covert* grammatical categories. Overt categories are those which are virtually always indicated by some substantive mark when they occur. Covert categories are rarely marked and then only under special conditions. Whorf noted that overt categories were, on the whole, easier to recognize. Here again, particular substantive or formal properties of the linguistic forms influenced their susceptibility to accurate characterization.

Whorf then attempted to show that this limited understanding of language had significant consequences in human thought more generally. Indeed, underlying his celebrated linguistic relativity principle is the recognition that speakers both fail to apprehend language itself correctly and tend to mistake it for reality. Lacking contrast cases and using their own language as a descriptive metalanguage, they come to believe that the forms in their language correspond to inevitable realities in the world. This is so strong an effect that, on occasion, speakers will even imagine the existence of certain tangible entities that don't exist because their language structure implies they must exist.

The tendency for speakers to misapprehend language structure in systematic ways lends a certain directionality and overall coherency to these construals of reality. Thus, the tendency to reflect on more abstract language categories in terms of more concrete perceptible structural equivalents privileges certain categories at the expense of others. Further, the formal quality of the category as lexical versus grammatical or overt versus covert will have an impact on speakers' reflections, with the lexical and overt categories having more impact. It must be said, however, that Whorf is not entirely clear with regard to the relative significance of overt and covert categorizations. Although he suggests that overt categories are more salient for speakers when they reflect on language, he also seems to argue that covert categories can also exert suggestive influences on thought, influences which are potent precisely insofar as it is difficult to bring such categories to conscious attention.

Whorf then takes the crucial additional step of suggesting that these influences do not just operate for the ordinary speaker but for scientists, philosophers, and others, who use language as a guide to reality (see also Bloomfield 1933: 270; Benveniste 1971a [1958]). Thus the use of our own language as a scientific metalanguage carries these problems into the research process itself.

In recent years, this concern with the limits of native speakers' awareness of their own language and its significance for linguistic research has been more systematically explored by Silverstein (1981). Silverstein argues that it is difficult if not impossible for

native speakers of a language to take account of those aspects of speech as social action that they have no ability to describe for us in their own (meta)language, that is, which they do not have ready terms or expressions for. Further, Silverstein argues that the limitations on awareness are not idiosyncratic, but pattern in predictable ways as a function of certain semiotic properties of the speech, both formal (e.g., whether the item is a continuous segment or not) and functional (e.g., whether the item is referential or not). For example, Silverstein argues that referential, segmentable, and relatively presupposing forms are the most obvious to native speakers and that accurate accounts of them can be more readily given. Among the items meeting these criteria are lexical items with clear referential values, and most folk theories of language center on such forms. Not surprisingly, our Western philosophical theories of language focus on precisely the same sorts of items. In particular, Silverstein notes that the focus on explicit primary performative predicates as a guide to understanding linguistic functioning within ordinary language philosophy is predictable and understandable in that they meet all the criteria for maximal awareness that he lays out. Unfortunately, susceptibility to awareness does not guarantee descriptive adequacy for language generally.

More recently Silverstein (this volume) has explored the nature of metasemiotic activity itself. He characterizes such activity in terms of three broad dimensions: the nature of the object of metasemiosis, the formal regimentation of the metasemiotic signal itself, and the constituted relation of the metasemiotic event to the object of metasemiosis. With regard to the object of metasemiosis we must distinguish whether it involves semantics, in which case we have metasemantics, or whether it involves pragmatics, in which case we have metapragmatics. All discursive interaction is characterizable by metapragmatic semiosis except for structurally mapped reference and predication, which also implies a metasemantics. The regimentation of the metasemiotic signal can be characterized in terms of its denotational explicitness. Explicit metasemiotic activity involves a specific localizable denotational mark in code (e.g., a verb of speaking) or in text (e.g., metaphoric use of descriptions as metapragmatic), whereas implicit metasemiotic activity gives a reading of an event only when certain functional features of nondenotational sort occur (e.g., taking on a voice quality that indexes a particular speaker). Finally, speakers may construe (or calibrate) the object of metasemiosis as an event distinct from the metasemantic signaling (reportative calibration), as the occurring event itself (reflexive calibration), or as from another epistemic realm such as the mythic, systematic-typical, or sacred (nomic calibration). The skillful co-ordination of these modes of calibration is essential to the perceived coherence, autonomy, interpretability, and authoritativeness of ongoing discourse. The dialectal interaction of metalanguage/metacommunication and language/communication along all three dimensions provides insight into how native speakers creatively actualize and interpret discourse.

Recent work (e.g., Briggs 1986) specifically examines the difficulties that arise when researchers lack an awareness of their own metacommunicative norms or any procedure for clarifying those of others. Just as ordinary speakers naively assimilate other languages' forms to their own, so do researchers do the same thing. The greater

difficulty, suggested by Silverstein's work, is that these problems are not accidental but are rather necessary outgrowths of the way language itself operates, and that they can only be illuminated by systematic, reflexively minded research on these issues.

In short, there is a third limitation on human consciousness which has to do with the formal properties of languages as semiotic instruments. Awareness of language itself hinges in important ways on the semiotic quality of and relations between object language and metalanguage. Further, because speakers use their own language as a metalanguage for describing and understanding their language and the reality to which it appears to them to refer, speakers often experience difficulty distinguishing between linguistic code and reality. And these limitations are not restricted to the activities of everyday life but are just as applicable to the research process itself and are reflected in the long history of intellectual debate over nominalism, realism, conceptualism, etc. – positions derived from folk guesses about the nature of reference.

Interactions

Silverstein's analysis of the problem suggests that there are characteristically *semiotic* limits to awareness. From this perspective, we can see that Whorf's approach actually mixes two independent vectors of limitation – those due to the properties of semiotic instruments and those due to the socio-cultural specificity of experience. Universal semiotic limits always operate on particular languages and thus tend to produce language-specific understandings of reality. This raises the question of whether other research problems might also be reformulated in terms of interactions of different factors limiting consciousness. For example, a variety of arguments have been made for within-culture differences in the ways various social classes use speech to aid thought (e.g., Bernstein 1971, Hymes 1980). Such work needs to be rethought so as to separate differences attributable to actual differences in metalinguistic tools and skills, those attributable to class-specific ideological values, and those attributable to interactions of these two.

Other such intersection areas can be identified within the psychological realm and deserve brief mention. When Freud began to concern himself with how any inner process could, in fact, become conscious, he concluded that it depended on being "brought into connection with word-presentations" (1962 [1923]: 10). In a broader perspective, the whole rationale for the "talking cure" rests on assumptions about the central role of speech in making inner mental phenomena conscious. And, in terms of the process of scientific activity itself, Crapanzano (this volume) has traced how limitations in Freud's own reflexive understanding of language affected his theory of psychoanalytic practice. James (1950 [1890]: 183–98) too was aware that the biggest methodological obstacles in psychology stemmed from the ways in which language is (mis)used. Also important in the psychological domain is the role of reflexive language in the construction and consciousness of self (e.g., work of G. H. Mead 1934, Caton [this volume], Benveniste 1971b [1958]). Finally, the work of Vygotsky (1987 [1934]) is worthy of special note because it attempts to indicate how all three types of limitation – psychological, socio-cultural, and semiotic – intersect and interact. He

shows how intellectual functioning, socio-historical factors, and reflexive uses of language all converge in educational settings and literature to produce characteristically modern forms of thought and consciousness.

Directions for research

Because psychological experience and social life are mediated by semiotic forms (see Mertz and Parmentier 1985), these limits to linguistic and semiotic awareness have much broader theoretical significance in accounting for human action. And, the general limitations to semiotic awareness will interact with other factors limiting consciousness to produce complex outcomes. Further, because the research process itself represents or describes human action using language to do so, these limits are also of methodological significance in the human sciences. Not only will our attempts to grasp human experience be shaped by our semiotic practices but also our attempt to understand the operation of these semiotic factors will itself depend in crucial ways on those very same semiotic practices. In short, the limitations to awareness arising out of the semiotic-linguistic realm play a role in all of the human sciences and other humanistic disciplines and, in this sense, constitute an analytic "metaproblem" of the first order.

It is this methodological issue that makes the systematic study of reflexive language essential for progress in the human sciences and other humanistic disciplines as well. Since all formal systems and techniques of description are ultimately built on a base of everyday systems and techniques of description, a proper understanding of our own scientific semiotic will depend, initially at least, on the understanding of the possibilities and forms of ordinary, everyday understandings of semiotic activity. Attempts to understand the semiotic dimension of scholarly practice will have to be grounded in the first instance in a thorough "natural history" of metasemiotic activity. Such a natural history will have to explore four aspects of reflexive language.

First, we must describe techniques for formally differentiating functional modes. When metalanguage and object language are different languages, for example, when English is used to refer to Chinese, the formal differentiation of the two functional modes poses no special problem. However, when the metalanguage and the object language are one and the same, that is, when there is a reflexive use of language as its own metalanguage, then there arises the possibility of confusion in determining which portions of the utterance are functioning as metalanguage (i.e., signals for referring and predicating) and which parts are functioning as object language (i.e., as objects of reference and predication). In fact, however, such confusions are not a constant source of problems. This suggests both that these are clear signals differentiating those portions of the utterance functioning as metalanguage from those functioning as object language and that speakers exhibit some sophistication in interpreting these signals. Among the more important differentiating cues may be a variety of specialized forms which serve only metalinguistic function. Typologically oriented identification and

description of such forms, including the ways in which multiple functional levels are successfully intercalated in reflexive speech, is of central importance.

Second, we must clarify the functions of reflexive language. Reflexive language serves a variety of functions. Among the more important which have been illustrated and discussed here are the organization of ongoing speech, including the signaling of specialized discourse modes (e.g., poetry, personal narrative, etc.), the representation of earlier speech events (e.g., direct and indirect quotation), and the representation of the code structure (e.g., glossing). We need to explore the full range of such uses in various languages and then give them a theoretically coherent account, one which illuminates the full power and utility of a metalinguistic capability. Within such a framework, it will then be possible to characterize more precisely the nature of any given reflexive use, including our own research discourse.

Third, we must explore the limits of reflexive language. Explicit reflexive statements, whether about the code structure, rules of use, specific speech events, or particular utterances, all tend to be limited by the formal devices available to speakers to engage in such explicit discourse and by the sorts of formal and functional aspects of speech which are readily recognized. Only a few aspects of language or speech may receive formal recognition whereas many others remain unlabeled. Certain facets of speech may be very obvious to speakers, whereas others may be difficult to grasp even when appropriate formal devices are available. Regularly occurring patterns are more likely to be labelable whereas the specific one-time pragmatic effects of utterances will not (perhaps cannot) receive standard terminological form. The use of our everyday language (or a specialized code built upon its forms) as metalanguage presents serious limitations for description of languages and the reality partly constituted by them.

Finally, we must account for the creative uses of reflexive language. In any given language, speakers may develop a variety of special techniques or devices to transcend the limitations of metalanguage (or language itself). Examples which might be viewed in this way include the use of direct quotation to signal one-time pragmatic effects by simply replicating the original speech very closely (often with elaborate contextual description), literary techniques for blending voices or directly representing inner consciousness by careful manipulation of available devices, and specially invented philosophical notation for clarifying metalinguistic ambiguities. A cross-linguistic survey might well turn up additional forms useful in clarifying our own usages.

An understanding of the reflexive capacity of natural language will be essential for an adequate understanding not only of language but also of all those spheres of life which depend on the use of language – including the research enterprise itself. Historically, a lack of awareness of the semiotic constraints operating in human life has limited the amount of scholarly investigation of this topic and undermined our understanding of those aspects of human life that depend on language (cf. Barthes 1968: 9–11). Exploring the structure, functioning, limitations, and power of reflexive language must now become "the work itself" if we are to make any real progress in the human disciplines.

Acknowledgments

I thank Suzanne Gaskins and Michael Silverstein for detailed suggestions on a draft of this chapter.

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Reflexive language

Reported speech and metapragmatics

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