

METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS

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THE HANDBOOK OF PRAGMATICS, Kluwer 2003

Editors: Jan-Ola Östman, Jef Verschueren, Jan Blommaert, Chris Bulcaen

1. Introduction

Theories of metalanguage have a long and venerable history in a number of traditions, from logic through cognitive science. However in recent years, an exciting new approach to the study of metalanguage – focused upon the issue of metalinguistic awareness – has emerged from empirical research on language pragmatics and metapragmatics.[1] This work moves beyond an older conceptualization of metalanguage as language that talks about language, analyzing in depth how metalanguage also creates, structures, and forms language and ongoing speech. Speakers have varying degrees of awareness of metalanguage as it both refers to and performatively formulates communication. At times, participants explicitly recognize a metalinguistic level that structures their conversation. At other times the structuring role of metalanguage may be partially or completely concealed, operating in subtle ways of which speakers are partially or totally unaware. Even in these instances, speakers' partial awareness – or even total misunderstanding – of metalanguage can help to shape linguistic interaction. Understandings and misunderstandings of the role of metalanguage may also be regularized in the form of socially-shared 'linguistic ideologies'. In this paper we outline the implications of the new, empirically-informed approach to metalinguistic awareness, locating this scholarship in relation to work on metalanguage from a number of other traditions.

We begin with an examination of different conceptualizations of 'metalanguage' and its role, tracing antecedent formulations in philosophy and linguistics (section 1), and then presenting recent work from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics – with particular attention to the writings of Michael Silverstein and John Gumperz (section 2). In section 3, we provide a similar exegesis of

* We are indebted to Michael Silverstein for his very helpful, detailed comments on an earlier draft. We also thank Chris Bulcaen, our patient editor, and three anonymous reviewers for their help.

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varying approaches to the relationship between metalanguage and metalinguistic awareness. The next two parts of the paper (sections 4 & 5) discuss the relevance of these concepts to analytical and empirical studies of metalinguistic activity and awareness, as well as to pioneering syntheses of the language ideology field by linguistic anthropologists such as Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin, and others. In section 6, we briefly examine some of the research arising from cognitive, psycholinguistic, and developmental approaches to metalinguistic activity – focusing, for example, on issues such as language acquisition and attainment of advanced linguistic skills such as writing. Finally, section 7 considers the implications of attention to metalinguistic awareness for future research.

2. Conceptualizing Metalanguage

2.1. *Metalanguage and object language*

Metalinguistic (used as an adjective in English and a noun in French, *métalinguistique*) has come to mean different things to different traditions, even within the customary divisions of disciplines of language studies – as has metalinguistic awareness (and lack thereof). In its original sense metalinguistic awareness is linked to the concept of metalanguage, originally invoked in different contexts by the logician Alfred Tarski and the linguist and literary scholar Roman Jakobson. Metalanguage is contrasted to “object-language.” The latter is used to talk of “things” and characterizes most of natural language, while the former is used to talk of language and characterizes (according to Tarski) logic – and obviously much of linguistic discourse. This allowed Tarski (1956) and later Kripke (1975) to deal with some hitherto unsolvable problems, such as the so-called “liar’s paradox” (“This sentence is false,”) by removing the truth predicate from object-language to metalanguage (see also Quine’s work taking a similar direction (1960)).

Drawing upon communications theory (e.g., Shannon & Weaver 1949) to deepen Tarski’s conceptualization, Jakobson (1960) pointed out that metalinguistic talk is typically embedded in communication. Thus speakers can deploy object-language – in Jakobson’s terms the “code” of the communicative interaction, but also operate at a metalinguistic level to talk about the code. Indeed, as Jakobson (1957[1971]) points out in his famous article on “Shifters, verbal categories, and the

Russian verb,” speakers ubiquitously rely upon duplex signs in which both functions occur simultaneously (see Verschueren 2000 for a discussion of important distinctions among Jakobson’s duplex sign categories). This is characteristically done with no special awareness (as with Molière’s Monsieur Jourdain, who spoke prose without knowing it). Jakobson’s communicative model assumes that sender and receiver use a homogeneous code. Linguistic interaction carries with it metalinguistic information about the code; this information is a necessary aspect of communication, externalized through speech. While broader than Tarski’s approach, this view of metalinguistic discourse is still restricted to talk about a presupposed object, which just happens to be language (as “code.”) Indeed, as Verschueren (2000:440) notes, had this been all there is to metalinguistic speech – that it is language about language – it might not have merited so much distinctive treatment and attention. But just as practical reason is not theoretical reasoning about practical matters (vide Aristotle) – so metalinguistic speech is not in the least confined to talk about language.

2.2 Constitutive and creative functions of metalanguage

From the perspective of recent empirically-based research on metalanguage, a core function of metalanguage is its role in constituting and framing ongoing discourse. In other words, metalinguistic features can be performatives whose domain is discourse. They do not merely discuss the communicative code but actually shape it, because they are embedded in discourse and are morphologically indistinct from “object-language” strings or segments (over which the metalinguistic features have functional scope). This is not universally accepted; authors who would refrain from typifying object-language as a “vehicle of thought” may still characterize metalanguage this way, being more aware of the former’s performative aspects but less so of the latter’s. The bulk of this essay will explore the constitutive functions of metalanguage and the role that awareness of metalinguistic talk plays in them.

Both followers and critics of Jakobson came to doubt the notion that metalinguistic functions merely externalize code-knowledge in socially recognizable modes (e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980). To begin with, to presume homogeneity and presupposed metalinguistic consensus regarding the code seems an over-simplistic way to conceptualize communication. In the fields of sociolinguistics

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and linguistic anthropology, the question of power emerged as a key metalinguistic concept: which speakers and institutions are able to frame, form, and dictate the “code” – the vocabulary, grammar, poetical and other aspects of the linguistic interaction that are presumed to be to some extent independent of the speech event? What social structural and ideological traits – both tacit and manifest – shape discourse, and how?

The work of linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein took yet a further step in developing a socially-grounded understanding of metalanguage. Shaking up many traditional assumptions about the primacy of syntax and semantics, he used cross-linguistic and cross-cultural data to demonstrate the crucial structuring role of pragmatics – both in the conveying of linguistic meaning generally, and in the particular workings of metalanguage (see Silverstein 1976a, 1976b, 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1987, 1993, 1996; for exegetical discussions see also Lucy 1993b; Mertz 1985; Mertz and Weissbourd 1985). Further, he demonstrated the centrality of metalanguage to how language operates in general.

Focusing on the functions of metalanguage in practice, Silverstein began by distinguishing between metasemantics (language referring to its own semantic meanings – e.g. “A cow is a kind of animal,”) and metapragmatics (language referring to its own pragmatic meanings or use – e.g. “I didn’t mean to insult you.”) While many linguists and philosophers might view pragmatics as the “frosting” on language’s fundamental syntactic-and-semantic structure, Silverstein makes the case for understanding semantics as a subset of pragmatics – and, similarly, metasemantics as a subset of metapragmatics. Under this approach, language is understood as fundamentally structured around its ability to be deployed in use, in particular situations; all speech depends upon this pragmatic functioning of language. As John Lucy has explained: “Pragmatics encompasses semantics as a special case when the latter is conceptualized as regularities of meaning presupposed by and instantiated in [grammaticized] patterns of language use.” (Lucy, 1993b:17). Similarly, as Lucy notes, for Silverstein: “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 ... a special, yet privileged subcase of the more general reflexive activity.” (Id.; see also Silverstein 1993: 43) Although the importance of pragmatics had long been recognized by many

scholars, Silverstein's work highlighted the way pragmatics and metapragmatics were deeply involved in the core grammatical structuring of language – at the same time as they also provided the framework that made ongoing communication possible in practice.[2] In this sense, Silverstein built upon insights from Prague School linguists and other scholars such as Kurylowicz (1972), who analyzed deictic elements as “founding” much of the rest of the system of language, including semantic categories.

John Gumperz reached somewhat similar conclusions in his research on “contextualization cues and conventions,” and on “conversational inference:”

If interpretation presupposes conversational cooperation and if such cooperation must be achieved through tacit understandings conveyed in talk, then theories of interpretation cannot rest on distinctions between literal and nonliteral meanings or direct and indirect speech acts. Knowledge of the world and socio-cultural presuppositions must not be regarded as merely adding additional subtleties to or clarifying what we learn from the propositional meaning of utterances. (1982: 207)

Gumperz notes that in order to communicate at all, speakers must make inferences about the overall structure of conversation (assessing, for example, whether a particular linguistic exchange is an idle exchange of greetings, or an argument, or an important exchange of information) (1982:1-2). Silverstein would refer to this level of structuring as metapragmatic, as it involves ongoing meta-level calculations regarding the pragmatics of the speech exchange. Like Silverstein, Gumperz connects this overarching level of metapragmatic structuring, or conversational inference, with the subtle, minute-to-minute pragmatic signals that permit speakers to make assessments and convey their intentions. Gumperz characterizes these signals as “contextualization cues,” those “constellations of surface features of message form” which allow speakers to discern the overall structure, semantic meaning, and connections among parts of utterances (1982: 131). These cues are governed by shared social conventions, which permit speakers to decipher the intended meaning of cues.

These developments in anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics opened up exciting vistas for researchers interested in the relationship between power and metalanguage. Now it would be possible to examine overarching connections between the metalinguistic organization of discourse

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and larger social-institutional power dynamics. This would permit us to capture the ideological structuring of society in and through language and discourse. Work in this tradition moved on to explore language in complex, institutional settings as well as in the micro-level dynamics of individual interactions.

3. Metalanguage, metalinguistic activity, and metalinguistic awareness

3.1 The problem of metalinguistic awareness

The concept of metalanguage and of metalanguage activity, even in the referential and “aboutness” sense offered by Jakobson (1960, see above), does not necessarily entail a sense of metalinguistic awareness. Benveniste (1974) addresses the issue of awareness when discussing a speaker’s ability to distance herself from the language – to recognize language as a communicative device distinct from herself as a subject. Further work emphasized speakers’ reliance on language’s reflexivity to discuss, form, and manipulate communication in various social contexts (see generally articles in Lucy 1993a). Certainly, such phenomena and processes as bi- or multi-lingualism, translation, learning to write, and manipulating language in complex, heterogeneous social contexts, involve a certain “distancing” from language, in Benveniste’s terms; it requires users of language to become more self-conscious. Once the same object-referent is both “apple” and “pomme,” the speaker realizes that the words are not attributes of the object apple but of the English and French languages, respectively. A certain basic awareness of language’s semiotic nature – the fact that it organizes not the signified (“things”) but signifiers (“words”) – becomes necessary for adequate, competent, or even effective use of language in these contexts.

The case is even more so in non-referential speech, such as in instances where the functions of the speaker’s language are mainly rhetorical. Reflection on rhetoric by Protagoras, Gorgias, and their sophist students, ushered in an awareness of language – its possibilities, freedom, and choices. This focused attention on the ways in which grammar is manipulable in social settings, where – to use Austin’s terminology (1962) – the function that counts is perlocutionary, or affective, rather than representational (“locutionary”) speech. Once a speaker confronts numerous possibilities in framing and executing her speech, language becomes less a rigorous system of representation (as in

Wittgenstein 1922) and more a framework for communication that involves complex use of framing, footing, as well as poetic, esthetic, and other attributes of speech (see Jakobson 1957[1971], 1960; Goffman 1974, 1979; Bateson 1972). These elements in turn frame, rely upon, and manipulate the communicative context of any linguistic interaction, including aspects of the relationships and power dynamics among speakers (see *infra*; see also Duranti 1997; Verschueren 1995, 2000). Metalinguistics thus becomes a potentially liberating force with respect to the powerful tendency of speakers (particularly Western philosophers and linguists) to concentrate unduly upon reference.

3.2 Language structure and metapragmatic awareness

This tendency to emphasize reference was a primary focus of Silverstein's seminal analyses of metalinguistic awareness (see, e.g., 1979, 1981a, 1985a). Building from the important insights of Whorf (1956) and Sapir (1949), Silverstein connects systematic aspects of language structure with speakers' access to metalinguistic awareness (on Whorf, see Lucy 1992a, 1992b; on Silverstein's analysis, see Mertz & Weissbourd 1985; Mertz 1993). Like Sapir and Whorf, Silverstein (1981a) found evidence that speakers are generally more aware of "surface" segmentable (lexicalized) features of language – as, for example, when they are easily able to identify obviously segmented lexical "chunks" of language ("words,") but cannot necessarily delineate more subtle grammatical categories.

Silverstein distinguishes between presupposing and creative language forms (1976b; he has also used the terms presupposing /entailing). Presupposing forms depend upon aspects of context that exist relatively independently of the speech itself, whereas creative forms act upon and change ("entail") aspects of context. For example, if I say "that cow and this cow," I do not change the animals to which I am pointing. Furthermore, I rely upon presupposable aspects of the context to successfully convey meaning (e.g., there are cows to which I am referring, one of them is further away from the vicinity of the utterer than the other, etc.). On the other hand, if I suddenly use formal address in speaking with a close friend ("Good-bye, Mr. Bascom,") this usage may actually alter a crucial aspect of the linguistic context, creating a new linguistic/social/pragmatic reality. Note that both presupposing and creative uses of language are heavily pragmatic and that both index context,

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but presupposing language is more readily specifiable in the abstract. Silverstein finds that speakers tend to be more conscious of presupposing than of creative indexicality.[3]

Silverstein (1979, 1981a) also concludes that the referential function of language is more available to conscious reflection than are pragmatic or indexical functions. Thus, it is generally obvious to speakers that they convey referential meaning by speaking (surface segmentable) words, and they generally conceive of that meaning as specifiable in presupposed terms. It is far less common for speakers to have a conscious and systematic picture of how prosody, gesture, and creative indexicals work together to shape social relationships in and through speech. And just as did Whorf, Silverstein points out that these limitations on ordinary awareness, built into language structure, affect professional scholars as well as laypeople. For example, he criticizes ordinary language philosophers for concentrating on explicit primary performatives as a model for understanding speech acts, because these performatives tend to be (1) segmented surface forms (“I promise”); (2) analyzed in terms of presupposable aspects of context (felicity conditions); and (3) located precisely at the point where reference appears to be transparently identified with pragmatic function (it “names” what it “does.”) Yovel (2000) has extended this critique to the area of legal scholarship, where particularly in the area of contract theory obligatory relations between parties are formed in complex relational modes that cannot always be captured by presupposing models of linguistic action (such as those centering on “offer” and “acceptance” as the pivotal contractual “acts.”)

As Lucy (1993b) notes, the Whorf-Silverstein challenge to standard linguistic and philosophical methodologies parallels similar challenges across the human sciences, which are increasingly wrestling with the problems posed by researchers’ own limitations regarding awareness. In particular, when researchers have not adequately analyzed their own metapragmatic assumptions, they may miss crucial aspects of the linguistic situations they study. Briggs (1986), for example, has explicitly delineated metapragmatic problems in the cross-cultural use of social science interview formats, while Mertz (1993) has explored the ways in which researchers’ own metapragmatic frameworks and assumptions might make it difficult for them to understanding their informants’ somewhat different frames.

3.3 Metapragmatic performance, social power, and cultural context

If a thorough understanding of metapragmatics opens the door for liberation from the powerful tendency of reference to dominate our understanding of language, then one of the obvious consequences of this liberation has been heightened awareness of the impact of social power on language structure and use.

Thus Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980) notes that language's alleged homogeneity has come under powerful critique from work in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and other branches of language studies. As Camps & Milian explain,

The metalinguistic function, even though it keeps referring to the code, diversifies its object as a consequence of the confrontation between the general reference model and the sociocultural diversity in linguistic usage. At the same time other factors which are not strictly related to linguistics but which influence the perspective on metalinguistic function need to be noted – factors related to the sociocultural background of the interlocutors as well as the setting of the communicative situation. (2000:5)

As a result the study of metalinguistic awareness has shifted from Benveniste's focus on the intimate relation between a speaker and the language she uses (and subsequent instances of alienation from this language), to more complex communicative settings.

Two related points emerge from a Silversteinian perspective on metalanguage: (1) while object-language has both referential usage and performative functions in relation to the world, so does metalinguistic speech (it has a referential relation to talk and a performative function in shaping talk), and (2) even when functioning at the referential level, metalinguistic talk is itself performative in relation to language and to the communicative event. How to talk of things? What is the correct verbal approach to, e.g., description or representation? The fascinating insight here is that language's basic structure is fundamentally multifunctional: talk that purports to be referential simultaneously performs metalinguistically. And, as metalinguistic talk is always a matter of linguistic exchange and communication, power is involved as much in shaping the linguistic aspects of the exchange as in formulating its non-linguistic aspects.[4] Performative metalinguistic talk is not morphologically distinguished from referential talk. Ecclesiastics' maxim does not hold here: there is no "time" (or

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medium or locus) for seemingly-separate things to be performed separately, *inter alia* because, in the complexity of communication, things are never that separate. Referential and performative talk are distinguishable functionally, but not morphologically. We may paraphrase the late poet Yehuda Amichai (1983:50): “a man needs to laugh and cry with the same eyes, / to cast stones with the same hands that gather / ... to hate and forgive and forget and remember, / to organize and mess up and eat and digest, at once.”

Like rhetorical speech, referential speech performance involves metalinguistic manipulations inasmuch as it involves semantic and pragmatic choices. As opposed to the atomistic model of reference-referent, speech about more complex situations must, consciously or not, respond to such questions as: what is significant about a given situation? what should be emphasized? whose perspective should be expressed through this speech activity? Language cannot, nor does it aspire to give “full descriptions” in Leibnitz’s sense; its full descriptions always apply tacit, yet communicatively significant, criteria of relevance (Grice 1975). Different verbal and textual approaches, arguing for different relevant elements, compete in discourse, some subscribing to what Bakhtin (1981, 1987) termed “the general language”-- which is the verbal approach accepted as stipulatively correct for any community of speakers. Metalinguistic activity thus frames not only rhetorical and performative speech but also referential speech that purports to belong strictly to object-language.

There is, as well, a further dimension – one characterizable as “post-Foucauldian”-- which has been better understood due to work by scholars such as J.L. Austin (1962) on linguistic performativity, and Silverstein and Kerbrat-Orecchioni on metalinguistics: language can no longer be analyzed only as a collective, egalitarian enterprise, where senders and receivers are constantly concerned with tuning and adjusting their mutual communicative interest for the shaping of better understanding within a discursive community. As language does things in the social world – whether in reliance on presupposed conventional “procedures,” as in Austin (1962), or, more complexly, through the ongoing, event-bound metapragmatic shaping of language itself – it becomes inherently involved in questions of power relations.[5] While, as Habermas (1984) points out, communication requires a necessary level of consensus and cooperation at the speech-act level, language is also used

to do things in an often unequal, competitive, and even violent world. An arguably efficient vehicle for achieving this is ideological language – e.g., language that internalizes relations, power, and biases, while masking them as neutral or commonsensical (see Silverstein 1979, 1985a; Eagleton 1991). Thus language becomes a key agent of hegemony (Gramsci 1971), not merely in its representational functions but in how it shapes the way we say things (or, in Silversteinian terms, how we entextualize representations) – and thus how we engage in much of social action. Essentially Marxian in origin, this insight generates much of the current effort to apply critical theory and deconstruction to discourse and institutional language – for example, in legal theory, in studies of race / gender / other forms of social inequality, and so forth. We continue to explore the related notion of “linguistic ideology” below.

Hence all linguistic interactions contain an inherently political dimension. This may seem a far cry from the philosophically elegant formulations of Tarski and Carnap, but is an unavoidable conclusion if one indeed follows the intellectual heirs of Jakobson, mainly Silverstein. Note, however, that metalinguistic activity and awareness do not necessarily entail a true realization of language’s performativity and other systematic pragmatic characteristics. Metalinguistic awareness is not an epiphany – nor does it guarantee that metalinguistic representations correctly express language’s true nature. Indeed, Silverstein has tellingly critiqued the “drive for reference” that pushes speakers and scholars to understand all speech in semantico-referential terms, thereby failing to grasp language’s performative functions as well as its ideological structure. Thus the “distancing” aspect of complex linguistic manipulations such as translation – the first step towards metalinguistic awareness -- evoke, but do not in themselves assure, a clearer and true realization of language’s nature. We turn now to a more detailed account of the complexities of metalinguistic structure, activity, and awareness in actual social settings, using linguistic analyses and/or empirical studies.

4. Linguistic/empirical studies of metalinguistic structure, activity, and awareness

In recent years, a number of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have studied the role of metalinguistic awareness (whether accurate or not) in filtering the effects of social structure on language use and form. This work carries forward Bahktin’s earlier concern with the social functions

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of “speech genre,” and also brings linguistic specificity to the work of social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu who have drawn attention to the power dynamics at work in discourse.

For example, in an article on Warao narratives, Charles Briggs (1993b) traces the quite different metapragmatic frames surrounding three renditions of the same narrative, told by the same speaker in different settings. Briggs traces a range of relationships between metapragmatic frames, metalinguistic awareness, and social functions of discourse. In the most formal and socially-valORIZED kind of telling, the narrator insists upon a monologic structure that holds the floor against all challenges. This sets the metalinguistic signaling surrounding the actual telling of the story off as quite separate from the metalinguistic frame of the story itself – the reported event. Silverstein (1993) calls this kind of separation “nomic calibration” between the metapragmatic structures of the story-telling (the “signaling event”) and the story (the “textualized event-structure.”) This form of calibration minimizes overt metalinguistic signaling and awareness, and occurs in the most formal or ceremonial performances. By contrast, Briggs describes a more “dyadic” telling of the same story, in which a second speaker participates actively in the performance. Here the metapragmatic frame permits far more overt recognition of the powerful effect of the performance and context upon the story’s structure (Silverstein’s “reportive calibration.”) Finally, Briggs presents an example of an “acquisition-oriented” performance, in which the narrator’s goal is to help younger men learn to tell this story correctly. By contrast with monologic performances, this form of narrative contains maximally explicit metalinguistic signaling:

While the performance itself recedes into the metapragmatic background, as it were, in monologic narration, both the ongoing performance and the process of narrating constitute the metapragmatic center of acquisition-oriented examples. Elements of form, function, and narrative content are all taken up in turn by explicitly metapragmatic discourse. (Briggs 1993b: 202)

As Briggs points out, this is an example of Silverstein’s “reflexive calibration,” in which the contexts of the current telling and the story told merge. In each case, Briggs traces a strong connection between the degree of explicitness of metalinguistic signaling, and the social contexts and power relations in play (on connections between metalanguage and social structure see also Bauman 1983; Hanks 1993; Philips 1998a, 1998b).

At an even broader level, Richard Parmentier has demonstrated the way in which complex interplays of metalinguistic signaling and awareness affect the production and reception of political speech (1993). In particular, he tracks the metapragmatic structuring of a political speech given by high-ranking Belauan chief, at a moment of challenge to the older system of chiefly authority. This challenge was enacted in and through metalinguistic markers signaling disrespect and demanding deference – respect that was at once linguistic and social. Interestingly, despite the successful construction of an intricately-structured speech that powerfully mirrored, indexed, and enacted a reassertion of chiefly authority, an unintended alternative metapragmatic interpretation arose.² This alternative interpretation looked to the anchoring of the entire speech in a setting that itself challenged traditional chiefly power (a democratically-elected municipal council), with attendant metalinguistic signals that undermined the impact of the speech (for example, the chief had to ask permission from a magistrate to get the floor, and used a form of speech that itself violated traditional norms). Here dynamics of reported speech, metapragmatic structure, and divergences in metalinguistic awareness not only signal and perform aspects of social structure; they in fact shape an event that is one turning point in a process of social change (see also Banfield 1993; Irvine 1998; Mertz 1989; Silverstein 1985a).

In her recent linguistic ethnography of disputing in a Kenyan Islamic court, Susan Hirsch (1998) provides an exemplary analysis of how metalinguistic structuring and awareness play an integral role in broader social shifts. Her book documents the crucial role of metalinguistic ideologies in the struggles over gender roles being played out in Kadhi's Court:

... the ideological level of language plays a significant, though largely under-recognized, role in the construction and transformation of gender In court, the production of the [] ideologies described above has directive force in shaping interaction The force comes in part because the ideologies operate not only through explicit statements that propose moving the metapragmatic frame away from stories but also in more implicit ways that are displayed through the structure of stories and reported conversations (1998: 234).

Thus women bringing claims to court must operate against a backdrop that associates women's speech with storytelling and men's speech with authoritative utterances that overtly frame and interpret stories at the metalinguistic level. Women are also disadvantaged by a dominant linguistic

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ideology that casts suspicion on attempts to air family problems. Nonetheless, Hirsch demonstrates how Swahili women are working within and around these metalinguistic frames, using their own powerful metapragmatic techniques to win court battles. These linguistic victories have social entailments; they enact and motivate ongoing shifts in the power dynamics and cultural understandings surrounding gender roles.

As noted by Silverstein in his programmatic essay on the topic, there remain many avenues for future exploration of the precise relationship between metalinguistic awareness and the active participation of language in the constitution of society (1993:55). Because important dimensions of this relationship have now been delineated with new technical specificity, ongoing research can incorporate consideration of factors such as degrees of denotational explicitness, and forms of pragmatic calibration in developing this genuinely social linguistics (see *id.*).

5. Linguistic ideology

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning literature in the area of “linguistic ideology” which focuses explicitly on how forms of metalinguistic awareness interact with speech and social power. A full discussion is beyond the scope of this article; we here merely sketch the area. Linguistic anthropologists Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin (1994) have provided a programmatic framework for the study of “language ideology” or “linguistic ideology.” Their work outlines a developing paradigm that builds from traditions in linguistic anthropology – particularly Silverstein’s work on linguistic ideology (1979, 1985a) -- and research on contact among languages in educational and other settings (see Heath 1989; Hill 1985; Woolard 1989), among other areas, to focus upon the social concomitants of metalinguistic conceptualizations. As Woolard summarizes it, a focus on linguistic ideology “implies a methodological stance, a commitment to consider the relevance of social relations, and particularly of power relations....” (1998:10). At times, this focus leads researchers to focus on overtly-stipulated ideas about how language works, while at other times, scholars may focus on the assumptions about language implicit in speakers’ talk (see, e.g., Gal 1993; Kroskrity 1998; Philips 1998b). Some studies contrast speakers’ overt typifications regarding their own language use with their observed linguistic practices (see, e.g. Irvine 1998), and some

researchers combine analysis of overt and tacit linguistic ideologies in studying the nexus between language, power, and social change (see, e.g., Hill 1995, 1998; Silverstein 1985a).

Much of this work demonstrates the importance of linguistic ideology as a point at which language and social structure meet. For example, Gregory Matoesian's exacting linguistic analyses have specified in minute detail the ways in which language ideologies surrounding law and gender contribute to the silencing of rape victims in U.S. courts (1993, 2001). Susan Philips has demonstrated that ideologies regarding the relationship between legal texts and spoken practice in court have helped to conceal the raw political input to criminal court procedures (1998a). James Collins (1996) and Elizabeth Mertz (1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2000) have outlined how linguistic ideologies surrounding primary and law school education in the U.S. embody and reproduce social power. A growing interest in the metalinguistic structuring of text has led to creative theories of the social processes surrounding textuality (see, e.g., Briggs and Bauman 1992; Hanks 1989; Janowitz 1993). And leading anthropological linguists, along with other scholars concerned with language, continue to develop our understanding of linguistic ideologies through careful ethnographic and theoretical research on this meeting point between language and social power (see, e.g., Blommaert 1999; Cameron 1985, 1995; Collins 1998; Gal and Irvine 1995; Joseph & Taylor 1990).

6. Awareness and intentionality: Cognitive and developmental approaches to metalinguistic activity

How is metalinguistic awareness connected to the development of language skills in general, and of specific language skills -- e.g., writing, bilingualism, self-correcting ability -- in particular? Under the heading "cognitive approaches" to metalinguistic awareness we shall briefly discuss a growing body of work that explores the relations between metalinguistic capacities and both basic and complex language skills ("complex" here designates linguistic manipulations beyond the generative structure of language acquisition). Many of these approaches share similar suppositions and concerns, as they respond to the growing body of evidence that connects metalinguistic awareness with the development of language skills (e.g., Ehri 1979, Gombart 1992, Francis 1999). For instance, they are concerned with the question of awareness in the sense of conscious metalinguistic

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manipulations (as opposed to metalinguistic functions that neither command nor enjoy a special conscious performance, mingled as they are with linguistic performance). They also focus on the question of what stands as metalinguistic knowledge as opposed to linguistic knowledge. And perhaps the most significant of all, they explore the social, cultural, and political aspects of developing metalinguistic awareness, capacity, and skills, in relation to (and perhaps as opposed to) standard approaches to language acquisition.

When examining these and other emerging bodies of work, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between methodology and subject-matter. Many (but not all) cognitive studies of metalinguistic awareness and metalinguistic performance examine linguistic performances where the linguistic apparatus is more observable than elsewhere. However, “predicting” or inferring linguistic awareness from performance can cause difficulties. Several research programs assume that metalinguistic awareness of some sort is required for more complex discursive and metadiscursive performances. Such, for instance, is the assumption underlying Markman (1979), Flavell (1981), Flavell et al. (1981), who studied children’s ability to evaluate the comprehensibility of instructions and stories. Pratt & Grieve (1984: 9-10) warn that

[t]here remain conceptual and empirical problems in ascertaining the exact relationship between knowledge or awareness of aspects of language and the influence of this awareness on performance. The development of awareness of language does not necessarily entail its application to monitoring the use of language in all contexts. For example, in a referential communication task, children may be aware that a good message should be unambiguous and should provide a listener with a clear description of the referent in question. However, there are many occasions when they do not apply this knowledge, and produce messages which remain ambiguous. Consequently, within the cognitive domain there remains a major question concerning the nature of the relationship between awareness and monitoring performance.

Some literature thus discusses metalinguistic “skills” or “competence” instead of “knowledge,” the former two presumed “manifest” while the latter being “inferred.” The theoretical problem raised by Pratt and Grieve seems nevertheless to apply to most cases.

With this caveat in mind, we can note that awareness of language seems more evident when higher language skills are involved, such as learning a second language, learning to write, or

performing complex rhetorical manipulations. That does not necessarily mean that metalinguistic awareness does not play a significant role in language acquisition and other relatively basic processes (Schulz & Pilon, 1973; Gleitman, Gleitman & Shipley, 1972); it only means that demarcating linguistic and metalinguistic performances in basic linguistic skills may prove more difficult. What researchers look for, initially, is

[t]he gradual shift of attention from meaning to structure in tasks requiring deliberate control over language forms; the ability to decenter, to shift one's focus from the most salient attributes of a message (its meaning and contextual setting) to structure (the ordinarily transparent vehicle by which meaning is conveyed). (Ryan et al., 1984:157).

Two related qualifications (or clarifications), broadening the scope of metalinguistic functions, should be made to this definition: first, that metalinguistic awareness does not entail “deliberate” action, although that is where it is perhaps most noticeable; second, as this article emphasizes, performative metalinguistic functions shape and frame discourse in modes that cannot be reducible to the semantico-referential sense of “meaning” that much of “object-language”-oriented linguistics seems to ascribe to “messages.”

The second clarification to the “cognitive” heading is that “psycholinguistic” or “developmental” approaches should absolutely not be understood to express a Cartesian, monological perspective on language, and do not stand in strict contrast to “sociolinguistic” or “communicative.” Indeed the communicative and intersubjective aspects of metalinguistic talk have been stressed already by Jakobson (1960). However, later authors have questioned the Jakobsonian position, according to which metalinguistic talk is in some sense independent from the sender and the receiver and is used to externalize their shared knowledge of a code whose homogeneity has come under powerful critique (see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980).

We shall now briefly go over a few paradigmatic cases of “cognitive” MA research.

6.1 *Metalinguistic Activity in Learning to Write*

In summing and commenting on different approaches to the study of the role of MA in learning to write, Camps & Milian (2000) seem most comfortable with the Vygotskian interactive perspective

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(also explored from different vantages by Greimas 1987, 1990, Silverstein & Urban 1996, Blumberg 1998, Derrida 1977.) In language, Vygotsky recognized the capacity to draw away from the immediate communicative context, through decontextualization, towards abstraction and reflection through reiteration and writing. As this happens, some contextual elements become verbalized and as such integrated in the text in a process that Silverstein & Urban (1996) refer to as a “natural history” of discourse. Thus portions of “non-readable” context (the singular frame of any communicative event, in which discourse is embedded) go through a semiotic transformation as they are recontextualized – now as text or “co-text” to originally processed discourse – in a new social, historical, and cultural context. Some language mechanisms, such as quotations, are more transparent to this process of “entextualization” than others, such as reported speech (see Briggs and Bauman 1992 on this and other concepts related to the formation and recontextualization of text). Nevertheless speakers use metalinguistic indexicals and deictics to signify their awareness of this process: e.g., parenthesis (with or without an indexical such as “X said:,” which are sometimes incorporated into speech by use of appropriate body gestures (such as the “parenthesis” gesture with two fingers of both hands)). There is something even more immediately metalinguistic about writing, in that the linguistic apparatus becomes an artifact, and as such the object of talk, study, and reflection. And, according to Silverstein & Urban’s position, contextualization – a core metalinguistic function – comes “naturally” as the linguistic tool allows ever more complex modes of forming texts and thrusting them in new contexts.

6.2 *MA in young children and schoolchildren*

Two of the major interdependent questions propelling MA research in children are: (1) whether MA and metalinguistic abilities are part of linguistic competence, and (2) if they are not, how are they developed? Both questions raise conceptual and empirical concerns. While studying MA in children, some research programs (e.g., Tunmer et al.: 13-14) insist on distinguishing “genuine” MA from the concepts of generative grammar, such as tacit knowledge (the unconscious knowledge of a language’s system of rules that determine grammatical acceptability, that underlies the Chomskian concept of linguistic competence) or linguistic intuition (which unconsciously underlies all linguistic performance). Nevertheless, linguistic intuitions, such as those constraining phonological

performances of newly-encountered words or those involving grammatical acceptability surely imply metalinguistic abilities, and the demarcation between “competence” and “MA” may seem more difficult than postulated by Tunmer and Herriman. Grammatical acceptability intuitions, such as studied by Gleitman et al. (1972) (children aged about 30 months were asked to judge sentences “good” or “silly”) and de Villiers and de Villiers (1972), were considered by those researchers to manifest a metalinguistic ability. However, the question of how that ability was acquired – as part of Chomskian competence or in a separate or complementary cognitive development -- can be argued either way. Most recent efforts tend toward the separate channel (Hakes 1980, Birdsong 1989, among others). Hakes’ position, unsurprisingly influential among Piagetians, is that

[m]etalinguistic abilities are different from, and emerge later than, the abilities involved in producing and understanding language... their emergence is the linguistic manifestation of the cognitive developmental changes which Piaget has characterized as the emergence of concrete operational thought. (1980: 2)

According to Hakes, metalinguistic abilities manifest between the ages of 4 and 8 years (ibid.)

Using less rigorous Piagetian frameworks, some research applies a socio-cognitive approach with easily-recognized Vygotskian roots, according to which

The child's metalinguistic awareness is seen as a construct that is being constantly (re-)negotiated with the (linguistic) environment. We do not examine metalinguistic awareness only as a psychological, inner characteristic of the individual, nor only as a characteristic constructed in social interaction. Instead, we emphasize the close interrelationship of the two and maintain that the two aspects cannot be separated. (University of Jyväskylä Centre for Applied Language Studies, 1997).

There is a rich tradition of linguistic scholarship in this more social / Vygotskian framework that owes its vitality to researchers such as Maya Hickmann (1993), Bambi Schieffelin (1990), Elinor Ochs (1988), James Wertsch (1985), and Keith Sawyer (1997). This scholarship traces children's developing awareness of both metalinguistic devices and of the social world constructed and indexed in metalanguage.

There is, additionally, interesting research on the role of metalinguistic awareness in cognitive development, and on metalinguistic performance and bilingualism -- which, while beyond our present scope, is worthy of attention from those interested in metalinguistic awareness as well.

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Current research in all areas is increasingly emphasizing the important role of metalinguistic awareness in the acquisition and use of language from early ages -- and of the social embeddedness of this process.

7. Conclusion: metalinguistic creativity, awareness, and the social structuring of communication

Across multiple arenas, then, we see a convergent interest in the role of metalinguistic structure, awareness, and use. This interest is fueled by growing evidence that metalinguistic function and ideology exert a great deal of influence on language, at the same time as they form a crucial nexus with social processes. Thus both linguists interested in the structure and use of language, and scholars interested in studying social change and power, can find an exciting meeting-ground in the study of metalinguistic awareness.

Notes

1. This focus was to a certain extent anticipated in the work of Bateson (1972); however, more recent research has moved the field beyond his broad observations regarding the phenomenon of metacommunication to more precise delineation of the mechanisms and processes through which metalanguage operates.
2. Silverstein (1993:36) notes that in order for any discursive interaction to have coherence, there must be at least one (necessarily metapragmatic) model of what is going on at the pragmatic level -- a model that attributes some kind of cohesive structure to the interaction ("this is an argument; the deployment of indexicals in this exchange is ordered by an effort to be insulting.") Note that this model depends on a conception of "interactional text" -- i.e., some formal or conceptual ordering of otherwise random speech into a coherent "text" for interaction, instantiated in the actual discursive interaction. There can be multiple models of interactional text in play in any single discursive interaction, and this affects both speaker awareness and the unfolding of the actual exchange (and with it, power and other dynamics of relationship). Thus, speaker A may read an exchange as the enactment of the interactional text "argument" -- with accompanying interpretation of certain indexicals as "insults," while another speaker may understand the exchange as "just kidding around" -- with the very same indexicals interpreted as "teasing."

3. Silverstein also distinguishes between two kinds of pragmatic function, one of which is more unavailable to speakers' conscious reflection. This second kind of function (what Silverstein dubs "pragmatic function₂") is defined as the way in which language functions pragmatically inasmuch as by characteristic distribution of particular forms in certain contexts of use, these forms (or rather, tokens of them), serve as specifically linguistic indicators (or indexes) differentially pointing to (indexing) configurations of contextual features (Silverstein 1979:206).

Silverstein contrasts this more subtle, systemic form of pragmatic functioning with the more apparently purposive forms of pragmatic function -- of which speakers tend to be more cognizant. His argument is that native speakers -- including linguists and philosophers -- often fall prey to using the more easily recognized form of pragmatic function when attempting to analyze the second, more subtle form. This results in a recurring misunderstanding of the systematic creativity of pragmatic function as a central feature of linguistic organization.

4. Silverstein specifies this power as the ability "to entextualize under a particular metapragmatic model" (personal communication), i.e., to assert a particular metalinguistic frame as authoritative in deciphering this exchange.

5. The role of grammar and other linguistic structures in forming talk remains a complex and interesting issue. As Whorf pointed out, grammar can shape speakers' linguistic choices. For example, in French "it makes hot" ("il fait chaud"); in English and French "it rains," and the subject is the world that acts to make weather. But in Hebrew, the rain is the subject that "descends." Grammatical and other forms of linguistic channelling (metalinguistic conventions and structures, etc.) are perhaps best characterized as contingencies or choices available to speakers: while linguistic forms and structures (and their social contexts) permit these choices, the speaker in the given speech situation determines them.

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