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Reflexivity

By reflexivity in language we mean the capacity and indeed the tendency of verbal interaction to presuppose, structure, represent, and characterize its own nature and functioning. Reflexivity is one of the defining features of natural languages and the discursive practices implemented through them, and it has, therefore, been of increasing concern in linguistic anthropology and related fields over the last quarter century. Reflexivity can be *explicit*, as when we make language form and use the subject matter of our speech. This is most transparent when we directly speak about the language code, interpreting, for example, the meaning of a lexical form. Similar interpretations can be made regarding larger idiomatic constructions (e.g., "*He has lost his marbles* is an expression that means 'he has gone crazy' "). Examples of grammatically oriented comments would include classifying words as to formal type, stating grammatical rules, or evaluating grammatical correctness. Similar statements can be made about phonological rules or larger discursive patterns. All these cases focus on relatively stable aspects of the language code structure especially as they contribute to acts of reference.

However, regular patterns of language usage can also be subject to comment. Hence we encounter characterizations of typical or appropriate use (e.g., "the expression *He is losing his marbles* is more likely to be used by an older person and most appropriately in reference to an older person"). In cases of this type, the focus is on pragmatic rules of use—that is, who uses certain forms, in what contexts, and to what effect. The concern is not referential correctness as such but broader discursive appropriateness. Whether these explicitly reflexive utterances concern structure or use, they focus on general patterns rather than particular utterances. It is also possible to use speech to report or characterize particular utterances. Such utterances may have actually occurred or they may not have, being then only purported or imagined. Here we find the various explicit forms of reported speech, namely, direct report (e.g., "Tom said 'Oh no, I have lost my marbles' "),

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indirect report (e.g., "Tom said that he had lost his marbles"), and free indirect report (e.g., "Tom said: oh no, he had lost his marbles"). As such reports lose contact with the form of the purported original utterance, they tend to become more like characterizations of persons or events or renderings of essential message rather than mere reports. Some can follow the original fairly closely (e.g., "Tom lamented the loss of his marbles"), while others only very distantly represent or allude to it by reference to its pragmatic effects ("Tom lost them today"). Included here would be all those cases where we explain what someone meant by a particular utterance. All these reflexive forms, whether focused on general patterns or on particular utterances, explicitly signal the presence of two or more functional orders by clear markings whether they involve specialized metalinguistic terms, conventional syntagmatic arrangements, or some combination of the two. Some portion of the utterance functions as metalanguage while another part functions as object language, that is, as the object of metalinguistic presentation, representation, interpretation, or comment. In all the cases considered thus far, the language spoken and the language spoken about have been the same. Of course, it is also possible to use one language to speak about another language in all the ways just described: giving the meaning of a lexical item in another language, characterizing its rules of grammatical structure and usage, reporting particular utterances, interpreting meaning, and so forth. Translation proper presents a particularly interesting problem from this point of view. Although typically treated as a type of glossing such that a construction in one language is equated with a construction in another, this is only viable at the level of explaining general patterns. As soon as we go to the level of translating a particular utterance, the proper model is that of reporting speech. Indeed, direct translation constitutes a fourth logical type of reporting, sharing with direct report the preservation of deictic center and with indirect report the freedom from the original forms. A reporting or matrix frame is necessarily implicated in every translation, however formally elided it might be in practice, a fact that should alert us to the situated nature of even the most neutral translation. In short, translations are close kin to reflexive constructions within a single language.

Reflexivity also operates *implicitly* in the production of each utterance insofar as it takes account of its own nature and functioning. However, in place of explicit lexical or syntagmatic marks, implicit reflexivity emerges from paradigmatic equivalences across different aspects of the speech event.

First, implicit reflexivity of one sort operates in the very construction of utterances as we use indices of person, tense, status, and so forth that require the listener to take account of the immediate contexts of use for their proper interpretation. Here a paradigmatic calibration must be made between the parameters of the speech event and the elements in the utterance for a proper interpretation. The situation rapidly becomes more complex in those cases where we rely on configurations of markers, so-called contextualization or framing cues, to signal how these very contexts of use, and hence the forms that index them, are to be interpreted. Looking next within the utterance itself, ensembles of cross-referencing and hence implicitly reflexive structuration elements work together to compose and interrelate higher

order units. On the one hand, boundary markers, clausal cohesion, stylistic unity, structural parallelism (of both structure and trope), and organized embedding work together to create the sense of durable, object-like qualities we routinely apprehend in spoken and written discourse. Such poetic or entextualization processes in conjunction with the content of the utterance make possible the various genres, registers, and voices we identify and distinguish by such terms as poetry and prayer, formal and informal speech, dominant and subordinate voice, and so on. On the other hand, the careful intercalation of these larger verbal paradigms, that is, reflexively taking account of the existence of stable structures of this type, makes possible the creative, expressive multifunctionality of everyday speech, the active coordination of multiple voices in a single utterance.

We have spoken here primarily of the reflexive nature of linguistic form. But such forms do not exist in a vacuum; they respond to and create psychological and cultural conditions. During the course of child development, the latent reflexive potential of language is learned and then brought under voluntary control. Whereas implicit reflexivity of the indexical sort is operative at a very early age, its full elaboration and deployment comes later becoming the foundation for the more complex metalinguistic and poetic processes described earlier. These complex reflexive capacities in turn undergird the development of the reflective and narrative activities of our mature years, activities essential to the emergence of the symbolic structures we call self and culture.

(See also *indexicality, interview, narrative, participation, poetry, prayer, socialization, translation, voice.*)

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