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# Reflexivity in sociolinguistics

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any utterance whatsoever – as much constructing as construing the world-as-denoted – are a constant concern of reflexive constructivism as an epistemological stance.

In the study of cultural texts, e.g., in literary and media criticism, reflexivity is the quality of signaling a metapragmatic relationship of a text to its genre conventions and intertextual field of comparison. An art work thematically depicting ‘doing art’; advertisements that quote or spoof other advertisements or that imply with a wink that addressees know this is one; a film that sets up a scene that is diagrammatically like a famous earlier one, etc. – these all show textual reflexivity, and, by interpretative inference, reveal that the communicators – senders and receivers – too, probably have the metapragmatic agentive consciousness to formulate and understand the reflexive message.

Reflexivity is, increasingly, becoming an important concept in research methodology in the social and behavioral sciences, as well as in contemporary humanistic fields. Originally seen as merely a source of potential bias or error against which positivist social and behavioral science had to struggle, we now recognize the researcher’s own reflexive metapragmatic consciousness and inevitable actual participant status in any contexts of research on humans. This makes all research a dialectical process of moving, reflexively, back and forth between ‘objective’ and

inductive accounts of data in a research context, on the one hand, and on the other, a metapragmatic analysis of the communicative situation in which such data arise to and for the researcher.

*See also:* Deixis and Anaphora: Pragmatic Approaches; Metapragmatics; Reflexivity in Sociolinguistics.

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## Reflexivity in Sociolinguistics

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In pragmatic theory, ‘reflexivity’ labels the ways language inevitably refers to itself (Jakobson, 1960; Silverstein, 1979; Lucy, 1993; Taylor, 2000). The reflexive function of language is easiest to see in overtly metalinguistic genres such as dictionaries and usage guides, but every utterance is potentially normative, providing a model for one way utterances can sound and be structured and how recurring forms can be linked with recurring functions.

Variationists’ own discourse is reflexive. People who interact and identify with one another may tend to talk alike, but ‘dialects’ and ‘varieties’ are artifacts of the ways sociolinguists talk about talk. If we ignore the reflexivity of our work, we risk mischaracterizing its value, which is greater in illuminating processes of

social identification and linguistic change than in describing ‘varieties’ or ‘dialect areas.’ Our choices about what to study and the claims we make about it are always liable to prescriptive, normative interpretation, as claims about what ‘authentic’ dialect speakers do. If we ignore this when we talk about our work to the people we study, we risk mystifying or offending them.

The talk of the people we study is also reflexive. Laypeople have their own ways of describing varieties of speech (Preston, 1989). Folk-linguistic categories and boundaries are reflected, modeled, and created in activities involving explicit talk about talk, such as folk dictionaries or interactive dialect websites (Johnstone and Baumgardt, 2004). This also happens in metalinguistic activities that foreground the social meanings of linguistic features less explicitly, such as momentarily assuming an exaggerated accent (Schilling-Estes, 1998). Such activities may feed into the sociolinguistic processes that lead to change.

Acknowledging the reflexivity of variationist discourse and the discourse variationists study requires methodological reflexivity in a more general sense: systematic self-reflection about how researchers' ways of talking about things constrain what they are likely to see.

See also: Jakobson, Roman (1896–1982); Language Ideology; Metasemiosis and Metapragmatics; Reflexivity.

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## Reformation, Northern European

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### Introduction

The Reformation began in 1517 as a protest by the German monk Martin Luther against abuses within the Catholic church. It ultimately resulted in the emergence of the various Protestant traditions alongside the Catholic church in Europe, but it also had profound cultural consequences, changing the way both the vernaculars and the 'sacred' biblical languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew) were perceived, taught, and studied.

### Translations of the Bible into the Vernacular Languages

A central tenet of the Reformation was the primacy of biblical authority, and the belief that ordinary people should be able to read the Bible in their own language. In Scandinavia, the New Testament was translated into Danish in 1524, into Swedish in 1527, and into Finnish in 1551. The full Bible was translated into Swedish in 1541, and into Icelandic in 1584. In England (where Wycliffe had produced a handwritten translation as early as the 1380s), William Tyndale's translations were printed from 1525 to 1531. Martin Luther's German Bible translation (the New Testament, 1522, the full Bible, 1534) was far from the first printed (the first appeared in 1466) but enjoyed massive influence. Written in an

idiomatic, lively, and highly readable High German, it was cited as the model of good language use throughout Protestant Germany for centuries to come. Johannes Clajus's *Grammatica Germanicae Linguae* (1578) – the most influential German grammar well into the 17th century – claims in the first edition to be based on the German language *ex Bibliis Lutheri Germanicis et aliis eius libris collecta* 'taken from Luther's German Bible and others of his books.' So great was the authority of the Lutheran High German Bible that it was widely used in churches and schools throughout Northern Germany, even though these areas in fact spoke the radically different Low German dialects and had to learn High German as a foreign language. Ultimately, High German would replace Low German altogether in the north as the language of schooling, church, and administration.

In the Low Countries, the Protestant provinces of the north, which had successfully rebelled against the rule of the Catholic Spanish, ordered the first translation of the Bible into Dutch directly from Greek and Hebrew sources in 1618/19. The so-called *Statenvertaling* (literally 'States' translation'), printed in 1637, was the work of a committee of representatives of all the provinces, who sought a supra-regional form of the language, avoiding any linguistic forms which were restricted to certain dialect areas. The language of the *Statenvertaling*, used in churches and schools, had considerable influence on the further development of Dutch linguistic norms. In Scandinavia, the Reformation likewise provided the key incentive to turn Swedish and Danish (also used in Norway) into written languages, and languages of