

## CHAPTER

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# 8 Metapragmatics

## 8.1 Introduction

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Language use involves choices. In the previous chapters we have examined the consequences of such choices for language users. One point that we have only alluded to so far is that language users are self-aware: we are aware not only of the choices we make when using language, but also the choices of others.

Consider the following extract from the column *You've got male* in an Australian newspaper, where the columnist is reporting on an interaction between a married couple that he recently witnessed. The columnist begins by describing relevant contextual details about the incident, which involves his friend, Jeff, who is hosting, along with his wife, a group of friends for a barbeque lunch. Jeff has just offered a piece of steak to the dog, but it has been rejected by the dog, so Jeff has picked it up and turned to walk back to the kitchen:

- [8.1] His wife then emasculated him in front of his guests. "Don't put that back with the steak. Put it in the bin." Jeff froze on the spot, his face a mask of incredulity. I instantly saw his dilemma.

He could meekly let the comment go through to the keeper and proceed silently to the bin in the interests of a harmonious lunch, thereby running the risk that his guests would go away thinking that he's someone who regularly scavenges for food the dog has slobbered over and his wife has to admonish him for it.

Or he could have pointed out to his wife how utterly absurd it was for her to suggest he would do such a thing, thereby running the risk of upsetting her in front of the guests, spoiling the mood of the lunch, or seen to be protesting too much to hide the fact that he is indeed an eater of rejected dog food.

Jeff toughed it out with a bit of banter, but I could see in his eyes that a little piece of him died that day.

("How to have a long and happy marriage (part 4)",  
Rory Gibson, *U on Sunday*,  
5 February 2012)

By now we hope you will be able to readily observe that the above passage interweaves allusions to numerous pragmatic phenomena, including particular referring expressions, pragmatic meanings and inferences that go beyond what is said, including not only what is implicated but also assumptions about presumed common ground, pragmatic acts such as admonishing and ordering, as well as indications of what others think of Jeff and his relationship with his wife (i.e. interpersonal relations and attitudes). The columnist is, of course, not an objective observer of events in making such comments, but rather is occupying a particular participation footing (namely, that of a side participant who is friends with one of the actors involved). Moreover, there are allusions to social discourses about what it means to be a (married) man in contemporary Australian life, which arise in part through the way in which the columnist makes reference to the other protagonist alongside Jeff as "his wife", thereby identifying her vis-à-vis a particular social category or role, rather than using her first name (in clear contrast to references to "Jeff"). Underpinning these social discourses are numerous assumptions about what constitutes an ideal relationship between married couples, as well as (stereotypical) assumptions about how such relationships are often assumed to play out in reality. Such assumptions might be widely accessible to users of English around the world, but inevitably you, our readers, will have your own "take" on this commentary. And this is only how it should be. Pragmatics matters for all of us, not just for the columnist and his mate, a point we have made repeatedly in this book.

An important phenomenon underpinning this anecdote is the way in which the columnist displays awareness of the ways in which participants at the party themselves would be aware of a whole raft of pragmatic meanings, pragmatic acts, interpersonal relations, attitudes and evaluations, as well as social discourses that go way beyond what the wife was reported to have said. In reporting on possible interpretations of these, the columnist thus makes a number of assumptions about what the others might have been thinking, including what the other guests might have been thinking Jeff's wife thinks of Jeff, as well as what Jeff might have been thinking the other guests were thinking about what Jeff's wife thinks of Jeff, and so on. It is often difficult to talk about this kind of reflexive thinking, yet it is something we easily accomplish in the course of using language. This kind of reflexivity, or recursive awareness (briefly touched on in section 2.5.3), lies at the heart of what is studied in metapragmatics.

In this chapter, we first introduce in more detail what is encompassed by metapragmatics, and the notion of reflexive awareness which lies at its

core, before outlining the three main dimensions of reflexive awareness that underpin the pragmatic phenomena we have discussed in the preceding chapters. In our concluding section we discuss how such reflexivity is drawn upon in negotiating pragmatic meanings, pragmatic acts and interpersonal relations and attitudes, and so on, in interaction.

## 8.2 Metapragmatics and reflexivity

The prefix *meta*, which comes from the Greek *μετά* meaning “above”, “beyond” or “among”, is normally used in English to indicate a concept or term that is *about* another concept or term. For example, *metadata* is data about data, *metalanguage* is language about language, while *metapragmatics* refers to the use of language about the use of language. In order for participants to talk about their use of language they must, of course, have some degree of *awareness* about how we use language to interact and communicate with others. This type of awareness is of a very particular type, however, in that it is almost inevitably **reflexive**. What this means is that awareness of a particular interpretation on the part of one participant, for instance, is more often than not inter-dependently related to the awareness of interpretations (implicitly) demonstrated by other participants. In other words, in using language to interact or communicate with others, participants must inevitably think about what others are thinking, as well as very often thinking about what others think they are thinking, and so on. And not only do participants engage in such reflexive thinking in using language, they are also aware of this reflexivity in their thinking, albeit to varying degrees. We can thus observe various indicators of such reflexive awareness in ordinary language use.

Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from an episode of the HBO comedy, *Flight of the Conchords*. The two characters, Brett and Jermaine, have just met a lady in the park who was looking for her lost dog. They start singing a song about being in love with a girl, at the conclusion of which they realise they are singing about the very same lady they have just met (hence the title of the song, *We're both in love with a sexy lady*). Much of the song involves a back and forth between the two characters as they attempt to establish who they are referring to:

- |   |   |                               |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <p>[8.2] Brett:        Maybe I'm crazy but when did you<br/>                              meet this lady?</p> <p>          Jermaine: Just then.</p> <p>          Brett:        When?</p> <p>          Jermaine: Then.</p> <p>          Brett:        Right then?</p> <p>          Jermaine: Right then.</p> | <div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; height: 150px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | <p><b>temporal deixis</b></p> |
|---|---|-------------------------------|

Brett: Where?	}	<b>spatial deixis</b>
Jermaine: Here.		
Brett: Over there?		
Jermaine: Over there.		
Brett: Over there, there?		
Jermaine: Over there, there, there!	}	

[...]

Both: Oh, oh, oh, oh, no, oh no, no, no, oh no, no no	}	<b>metapragmatic commentary</b>
Jermaine: What?		
Brett: Are you thinking what I'm thinking?		
Jermaine: No, I'm thinking what I'm thinking.		
Brett: So you're not thinking what I'm thinking?		
Jermaine: No, cause you're thinking I'm thinking what you're thinking!	}	

("Love is a weapon of choice", *Flight of the Conchords*,  
Season 2, Episode 6, 22 February 2009, director:  
James Bobin, writer: Paul Simms)

In the course of this excerpt Brett and Jermaine attempt to establish the real world referent of "the lady" each is in love with. They begin by attempting to establish the time they met the girl (temporal deixis), then move to discussing where they met her (spatial deixis) (see section 2.5). Eventually, they start to realise they might be singing about the same girl. This metapragmatic discussion breaks down, however, when Brett's suggestion that they might be referring to the same girl (*Are you thinking what I am thinking?*) is treated literally by Jermaine. What happens here is that while Brett implies that they are talking about the same girl, Jermaine only responds to what is said by Brett (that Brett is thinking what Jermaine is thinking). In that sense, Jermaine's response to the reformulation of the question by Brett is strictly speaking correct (*No, cause you're thinking I'm thinking what you're thinking*). However, since it is a very complex utterance – about Jermaine's belief about Brett's belief about Jermaine's thought in relation to Brett's thought – it becomes almost impossible to follow in the context of the song. Nevertheless, while up until this point in the song they have not yet successfully established the referent in question, it is clear that they are reflexively aware of the other's use of language and, moreover, that this reflexive awareness enters into the language they use in the form of explicit metapragmatic commentary.

Such reflexive awareness does not, however, always surface so explicitly in language use. As Niedzielski and Preston (2009) point out, participants may not always be able to articulate their reflexive understandings of language use, despite such understandings being inherent in that very same usage. It is also apparent that such awareness may be more or less salient across different situated contexts. Thus, while metapragmatics often involves the

study of instances where participants attend *to* communication, that is, where language is used to “evoke some kind of communicative disturbance” (Hübler and Bublitz 2007: 7) or “to intervene in ongoing discourse” (ibid.: 1), it is not restricted to instances that are explicitly recognised by participants, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter.

**Reflection: The metalanguage of explicit metapragmatic commentary**

In the example above, a number of instances of explicit metapragmatic commentary have arisen. These explicit metapragmatic comments drew, in turn, on a folk **metalanguage**. The term metalanguage was introduced into academic discourse in the work of Alfred Tarski, a Polish logician. It refers to language that is used to talk about language, and in the case of “scientific” metalanguage, to theorise about it. In the instance above, clearly Brett and Jermaine do not use the term *think* in any scientific sense. In order to analyse these explicit metapragmatic comments, then, we must carefully examine this folk metalanguage. In the case of *thinking*, there are at least four (inter-related) senses in which it can be used in English, with the first sense arguably being basic to the other three:

- think<sub>1</sub>: cogitate (e.g. Brett is *thinking*<sub>1</sub> about the girl he just met)
- think<sub>2</sub>: infer/presume (e.g. Brett *thinks*<sub>2</sub> Jermaine is *thinking*<sub>1</sub> about the same girl)
- think<sub>3</sub>: believe (e.g. Jermaine *thinks*<sub>3</sub> Brett is *thinking*<sub>1</sub> about a different girl)
- think<sub>4</sub>: evaluate/judge (e.g. Brett *thinks*<sub>4</sub> highly of the girl he has just met)

Such metalanguage, in English at least, directs us towards an account of Brett and Jermaine’s *thinking* as distinct and separate from what they might be *feeling*, but this is not a distinction that is necessarily as salient across all languages. It is apparent, then, that metapragmatics not only involves the study of reflexive awareness on the part of participants in relation to their use of language in interacting and communicating with others, but it also involves an analysis of the metalanguage those participants inevitably draw upon.

Thus, what we mean by metapragmatics in this chapter is that it concerns the use of language on the part of ordinary users or observers, which reflects awareness on their part about the various ways in which we can use language to interact and communicate with others. It is worth briefly noting that the term metapragmatics itself was initially coined by Michael Silverstein (1976, 1993), a linguistic anthropologist, who drew, in turn, from work by the linguist Roman Jakobson (1971) on the metalingual function of language, which refers

to the ways in which we can use language to “explain, gloss, comment on, predicate about or refer to propositional meaning” (Hübler and Bublitz 2007: 2). However, while Jakobson was focused more narrowly on how language can be used to help participants to understand what the speaker is meaning in light of what has been said, Silverstein took a much broader view, as he defines metapragmatics as awareness that helps users to discern the relationship between linguistic forms and situated contexts (which is what allows the use of language in interaction to be an ordered, interpretable event). Metapragmatics in the broad sense advocated by Silverstein is essentially about anchoring linguistic (and non-linguistic) forms to contexts, a point we have largely covered in the preceding chapters.<sup>1</sup> Metapragmatics in the narrower, more focused sense of Jakobson, in contrast, is concerned with the use of language that reflects reflexive awareness on the part of users about their use of language. In other words, metapragmatics involves the study of “the language user’s reflexive awareness of what is involved in a usage event” (Verschuere[n] [1995] 2010: 1), including choices they have made in producing and interpreting talk or discourse. It thus generally encompasses the study of pragmatic indicators of this kind of reflexive awareness, and the communicative purposes to which these metapragmatic indicators are put. It is this latter, more focused sense of metapragmatics that we explore further in this chapter.

### 8.3 Forms of metapragmatic awareness

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Metapragmatics, in our view, encompasses the study of language usages that indicate reflexive awareness on the part of participants about those interactive or communicative activities they are currently engaged in. A number of indicators of metapragmatic awareness have been identified in studies thus far. These range from those that are expressed explicitly when language use becomes the subject matter of speech, through to those that arise implicitly insofar as the production of talk “takes account of its own nature and functioning” (Lucy 2000: 213). The latter involves anchoring linguistic (and non-linguistic) forms to contexts, an area that we have already discussed in this book. We have therefore only focused on relatively explicit indicators of metapragmatic awareness in Table 8.1. The four key types listed are (1) pragmatic markers, (2) reported language use, (3) metapragmatic commentary, and

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<sup>1</sup> This contrasts with the very broad definitions of metapragmatics as either metatheory or the analysis of constraining conditions on language use (such as the Cooperative Principle, conversational maxims, speech act theory, felicity conditions etc.) (Caffi 1998; Mey 2001). The former involves debate about what constitutes pragmatics and what the field should properly comprise (a stance on which is implicitly taken by the contents of this textbook, for instance). The latter is to some extent what the field of pragmatics itself is all about, namely, the analysis of the units that are constitutive of language use (and which has been the focus of the preceding chapters).

(4) social discourses. Underpinning all of these different forms of metapragmatic awareness is the folk metalanguage drawn upon by users, in this case, users of English.

**Table 8.1** Explicit indicators of metapragmatic awareness

Type	Description	Examples
Pragmatic markers	Expressions that signal how something should be understood in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) surrounding talk</li> <li>(b) epistemic status of what is meant</li> <li>(c) evidential status of what is meant</li> <li>(d) specificity or precision of what is said</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) <i>anyway, okay, even, also, but, however, so, on the contrary</i></li> <li>(b) <i>you know, actually, frankly, undoubtedly, of course</i></li> <li>(c) <i>think, believe, suppose, guess, according to</i></li> <li>(d) <i>sort of, kind of, in a sense, so far as I know</i></li> </ul>
Reported language use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Quotative use of language</li> <li>(b) Echoic instances of language use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) <i>John <u>said</u> he can't go. He <u>thought</u> he sounded angry.</i></li> <li>(b) <i>A: I was a bit surprised. B: <u>A bit surprised?</u></i></li> </ul>
Metapragmatic commentary	Situated comments about or evaluations of language use, which often involve the use of metalinguistic descriptors such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) linguistic action verbs</li> <li>(b) attitudinal categorisers</li> <li>(c) emotive-cognitive state-processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) <i>Am I <u>complaining</u>? What are you <u>saying</u>?</i></li> <li>(b) <i>That's not <u>very polite</u>. He's a very <u>courteous</u> young man.</i></li> <li>(c) <i>What are you <u>thinking</u>? I <u>intend</u> to take a day off tomorrow.</i></li> </ul>
Social discourses	Elements of metapragmatic commentary which form persistent frames of interpretation (and are often treated as no longer open to doubt or questioning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value placed on <i>not taking oneself too seriously</i> amongst Australian and British speakers of English</li> <li>Value placed on <i>closure</i> amongst American speakers of English</li> </ul>

It is important to note that we have collapsed finer distinctions in some cases for the sake of simplicity in our presentation of these indicators. Categories such as pragmatic markers, for instance, can be further sub-divided by making distinctions between discourse markers, sentence adverbs, hedges, self-referential expressions, explicit intertextual links and so on (see Verschueren 2000). Such classifications, and the theoretical debates around them, are indeed important, at least to a point, but they often neglect the fact that the same indicator can often be used for a range of quite distinct functions. Therefore we have chosen to focus instead on exemplifying how these different indicators can be used by participants to display different forms of reflexive awareness in language use. It is to these different kinds of reflexivity that we now turn.

We propose that there are three key types of reflexive awareness underpinning this ability to recognise or talk about pragmatic phenomena: metacognitive awareness, metarepresentational awareness and metacommunicative awareness (see also Lucy 2000). **Metacognitive awareness** refers to reflexive *presentations* of the cognitive status of information, such as whether it is known, new, expected (and so on) information for participants (see especially Chapter 3). **Metarepresentational awareness** involves reflexive *representations* of the intentional states of self and other (as in their beliefs, thoughts, desires, attitudes, intentions etc.), or what we have earlier termed pragmatic meaning representations (see Chapter 4). Finally, **metacommunicative awareness** refers to reflexive *interpretations* and *evaluations* of talk, which arise as a consequence of our awareness of self and other as social beings (see Chapters 5–7). There is, in addition, a specific form of metacommunicative awareness worth drawing attention to in passing, namely, **metadiscursive awareness**. The latter refers to a persistent frame of interpretation and evaluation that has become objectified, or reified, in ongoing metapragmatic commentary about a particular pragmatic phenomenon. Metadiscursive awareness underpins particular **ideologies** relating to language use, that is to say, ways of thinking about language and language use that intersect with ways in which language is actually used. Given the evident influence of such ideologies vis-à-vis language use, metadiscursive awareness is arguably deserving of analysis in its own right, separate and distinct from the metacommunicative awareness through which it is ultimately derived, although space does not permit us to do so here.

We shall now discuss each of these different forms of metapragmatic awareness in greater detail.

### 8.3.1 Metacognitive awareness

Metacognitive awareness refers to the reflexive *presentations* of the cognitive status of information and understandings of context and common ground



amongst participants. It includes reflexive awareness about who knows what and how certain they are about it (i.e. its epistemic status), and what counts as new or given information for participants (i.e. its given/new status), as well as the expectations of participants about what can, may or should happen (i.e. its deontic status). In other words, it involves reflexive presentations amongst participants of cognitive-emotive states or processes, such as what is assumed to be known (or not known), their respective attitudes, expectations and so on.

This may involve speakers directing the attention of recipients to particular elements in the context, for instance. We have already discussed one of the key ways in which this occurs in Chapter 2, namely, through referring expressions. In section 2.5.1, we introduced the Accessibility Marking Scale and the Givenness Hierarchy. These both involve the speaker making assumptions about how accessible the referent is for the recipient. More generally, the use of referring expressions involves a consideration of the assumed cognitive status of the referents in question for the recipient. The cognitive status of a referent can range from being in focus, through being in memory but not currently active, to being completely unknown. The metapragmatic exchange between Brett and Jermaine that we discussed in the prior section is, in part, an example of metacognitive awareness surfacing in interaction. The confusion arises in this instance because while the referent should have been in focus for both of them (at least from the perspective of the viewing audience), they treat the referent as unknown to the other. In other words, the interaction is driven by both parties assuming the other participant does not know this contextual information.

Reflexive presentations of information may also involve attempts by speakers to direct the attention of the recipient to some particular information. We briefly discussed this in Chapter 3, when we introduced discourse markers, particles and formulae that speakers use to direct the attention of recipients to particular information, or more generally, to indicate how recipients should take or process upcoming information (section 3.3.2). We also briefly touched upon this issue in Chapter 4, when we discussed the particle *yet*, which is analysed by (neo-)Griceans as giving rise to a conventional implicature. For the sake of simplicity, we did not point out that Relevance theorists offer a somewhat different account of such phenomena, namely, their claim that there is another kind of meaning that contrasts with the conceptual or representational type of pragmatic meaning, which was the primary focus of Chapter 4. This second type of meaning is termed **procedural meaning** (Blakemore 1987, 2002; Wilson and Sperber 1993), and is assumed to encode “constraints on the inferential phase of comprehension” (Wilson and Sperber 1993: 102) rather than having any conceptual content. Conventional implicatures, for example, have thus been re-analysed by Relevance theorists as

forms of procedural meaning, in part because it is well-known that the meanings of words such as *but*, *even*, and *yet* are notoriously difficult to be brought to consciousness. Relevance theorists argue that this difficulty indicates we are dealing with a fundamentally different kind of meaning. Here, we suggest that a metapragmatic account allows us to acknowledge that while certain linguistic units do not necessarily have any conceptual “content” that can be readily pinned down, they nevertheless do indicate a particular cognitive state or stance on the part of the speaker vis-à-vis the recipient.

Let us reconsider the example of the use of *yet* from the novel *High Fidelity*:

- [8.3] (Rob is desperate to find out whether his ex-girlfriend, Laura, has slept with Ian)
- Rob: Is it better?
- Laura: Is what better?
- Rob: Well. Sex, I guess. Is sex with him better?
- Laura: Jesus Christ, Rob. Is that really what’s bothering you?
- Rob: Of course it is.
- Laura: You really think it would make a difference either way?
- Rob: I don’t know.
- Laura: Well, the answer is that I don’t know either. We haven’t done it yet.

(Nick Hornby, *High Fidelity*, 1995: 95)

The question for Rob is what is meant by *yet* here? It belongs to the general class of discourse markers used to indicate contrast. But this begs the question of just what is being contrasted here. From a metacognitive perspective, Laura is reflexively presenting her expectations vis-à-vis Rob. In other words, Laura indicates that what she expects might happen in her relationship with Ian (i.e. a possibility), contrasts with what Rob might expect should, or to be precise, should not happen (i.e. an obligation). The upshot is what we have here, a contrast in their respective expectations in regard to her relationship with Ian (and by implication, with Rob). This contrast involves a reflexive display of the cognitive status of particular expectations on the part of those participants.

Another well-known instance of a pragmatic marker that can be analysed as reflexively displaying awareness of the cognitive status of information for participants is the use of *oh*. Heritage (1984a) was the first to demonstrate that when *oh* is produced in response to information, it indicates (on the surface at least) a change of knowledge state on the part of a participant. In other words, it is used to register this information as new in some way for that user. Take the excerpt below, which is taken from a recording of a conversation between two friends:

- [8.4] 1 J: When d’z Sus’n g[o back.=  
2 M: [hhhh

- 3 J: =[( )  
 4 M: =[u-She: goes back on Satida:y=  
 5 J: =Oh:.  
 6 M: [A:n' Stev'n w'z here (.) all las' week...  
 (adapted from Heritage 1984a: 308)

After hearing the information offered by Mel that Jack sought (i.e. when Susan is going back), he responds with *oh* in line 5. Heritage argues that when *oh* occurs in this position, and is followed by a shift to a new action (in this particular example, an assertion of other information by Mel about Steven), the user reflexively displays the assumption that the information is somehow new to him or her. In other words, the use of *oh* in this way involves issues of epistemics, that is, how certain a participant is about information, and whether it is taken to be given or new. It thus indexes reflexive awareness of the cognitive status of information for the participants in a manner analogous to the example of *yet*, which we considered above. It is important to note, however, that the particular cognitive state that such pragmatic markers reflexively index depends on their sequential environment. *Oh* may also be used to register or mark a change of state in orientation or awareness, such as when noticing something, as well as to foreshadow possible forthcoming trouble in responding to a question (see Heritage 1998).

*Actually* is yet another example of a pragmatic marker where the metapragmatic function of the particle depends on its sequential environment. In early work it was characterised as marking an assumption as “true at one particular point in the past time (which the speaker does not further specify) but not necessarily at any other point in time” (Watts 1988: 254). In subsequent research, the work that *actually* does was broadened to include the negotiation of (often implicit) claims that contradict the recipient’s expectations (Smith and Jucker 2000). These expectations relate specifically to either (1) a user’s commitment to a particular claim, (2) an affective evaluation of a fact or set of facts, or (3) a judgement about the newsworthiness of information. Consider the following excerpt from a conversation between two undergraduate students:

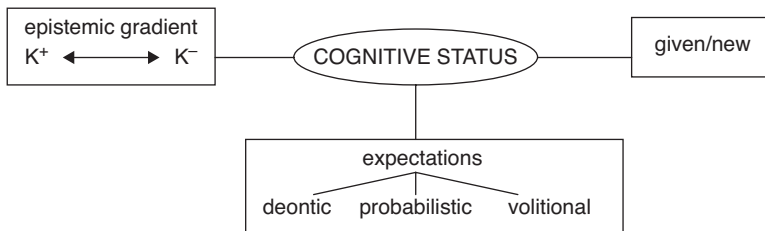
- [8.5] Ann: do you like psychology?  
 Betty: er yeah, actually I think it’s really interesting.  
 (adapted from Smith and Jucker 2000: 223)

Here, Betty marks the information in her response as unexpected in that she is making a stronger claim (i.e. she *really* likes it) than the candidate answer offered in the initial question (i.e. she likes it). Through the formulation of her question, then, Ann indicates, in the form of an implicated premise (see

section 4.3.2), that Betty wouldn't be expected to "really like" psychology. It is towards this *expectation* that Betty orients through her use of *actually*.<sup>2</sup>

Pragmatic markers are very complex. As we have seen, they are not restricted to reflexive presentations or displays of the cognitive status of information or understandings of context/common ground amongst participants (i.e. markers of metacognitive awareness). They may also involve other kinds of reflexivity, both metarepresentational and metacognitive awareness (which we will discuss in further detail in the following subsections), and so they can evidently indicate various different types of metapragmatic awareness. It is for this reason that pragmatic markers are so difficult to define categorically. It is also for this reason that we propose that they are analysed more productively from the perspective of different types of reflexive awareness. In the case of metacognitive awareness, we are dealing with the reflexive presentation of the cognitive status of information.

This cognitive status can encompass a number of different dimensions, as summarised in Figure 8.1. There are arguably three key loci for the cognitive status of information. The first is the so-called epistemic gradient between participants (Heritage 2012; Heritage and Raymond 2012). This involves the degree to which participants are aware (or, more accurately, display awareness of) who knows what, and to what degree of certainty. This degree of certainty lies on a gradient from "definitively knowing" ( $K^+$ ) through to "not knowing" ( $K^-$ ). A second related dimension is that between given and new information. The former is treated as lying within the common ground of participants, while the latter is treated as lying outside of it. Third, we can also talk of reflexive awareness in relation to expectations. The expectations be may be deontic (i.e. what participants think *should* or *ought* to be the case), probabilistic (i.e. what participants think is *likely* to be the case), or volitional (i.e. what participants *want* to be the case) in nature.



**Figure 8.1** Loci of metacognitive awareness

<sup>2</sup> Note that in example (8.5), B's response can be divided into two distinct analytical units: "er yeah" and "I think it's really interesting". The pragmatic marker "actually" is thus in utterance-final position here on this analysis (although not in turn-final position).

Pragmatic markers can be used to index reflexive awareness of all these different forms of cognitive status amongst participants, as we have discussed. Most importantly, the same linguistic form, as we have seen, can be used to present different cognitive states depending on its sequential environment. Accounts that treat pragmatic markers as either encoding constraints on the inferential phase of comprehension (i.e. as forms of procedural meaning), or as conventionally implicating non-truth-conditional meaning (i.e. as instances of conventional implicature), are arguably not able to do sufficient justice to such interactional nuances, although, to be fair, such accounts were not originally designed to do so.

### 8.3.2 Metarepresentational awareness

Metarepresentational awareness, as we noted earlier, involves reflexive *representations* of the intentional states of self and other (as in their beliefs, thoughts, desires, attitudes, intentions etc.). It is thus most salient when we come to consider pragmatic meaning representations (see Chapter 4). This is because a particular meaning representation, for instance, what is (literally) said, can be embedded within another meaning representation, for instance, an attitude. Instances where there is a lower-order representation (e.g. what is literally said) embedded within a higher-order representation (e.g. an attitude) are termed **metarepresentations**, that is, a “representation of a representation” (Wilson 2000: 411). Irony, for example, arguably constitutes a case of metarepresentation where a meaning representation attributed to a particular speaker (or set of speakers) is further embedded within “a wry, or sceptical, or mocking attitude” towards that attributed meaning representation (Wilson 2000: 433).

Consider the following example from a segment broadcast throughout the US, where comedian Steven Colbert spoke at the 2006 White House Correspondents’ Dinner for then US President George W. Bush:

- [8.6] Mr. President, my name is Stephen Colbert, and tonight it is my privilege to celebrate this president, ‘cause we’re not so different, he and I. We both get it. Guys like us, we’re not some brainiacs on the nerd patrol. We’re not members of the factinista. We go straight from the gut. Right, sir? That’s where the truth lies, right down here in the gut. Do you know you have more nerve endings in your gut than you have in your head? You can look it up. Now, I know some of you are going to say, “I did look it up, and that’s not true.” That’s ‘cause you looked it up in a book. Next time, look it up in your gut. I did. My gut tells me that’s how our nervous system works.

(“Colbert Bush Roast”, White House Correspondent’s’ Dinner, Washington DC, 29 April 2006, C-SPAN Cable television; cf. Gibbs 2012: 110–111)

Colbert is alluding to the way former US President George W. Bush frequently made references in the media to “trusting his gut” when making decisions. Whether the ironic attitude (higher-order representation) Colbert expresses towards this kind of decision-making (lower-order representation) is wry, sceptical or even mocking is open to debate (LaMarre et al. 2009) (see reflection box in section 5.2.1 for further discussion). But the point stands that we are dealing here with a meaning representation being embedded within another meaning representation, and thus metarepresentational awareness on the part of users.

Relevance theorists have argued that irony, reporting talk (including quotations of others’ talk), echoing questions and interrogatives can be productively analysed as involving higher-order representations within which lower-order representations are embedded. Quotations, for instance, involve a higher-order utterance that attributes a lower-order utterance to someone other than the speaker. Wilson (2000) suggests that metarepresentations inevitably involve resemblances, which are either **metalinguistic** (i.e. involve a resemblance in form) or **interpretive** (i.e. involve a resemblance in semantic or logical properties). Direct quotations – where the speaker claims the words being reported match exactly what the prior speaker literally said – involve metalinguistic resemblances, while indirect quotations – where the speaker claims the words being reported match what the prior speaker was taken to mean – involve interpretive resemblances. Irony, on the other hand, involves only interpretive resemblances, through which the speaker echoes a tacitly attributed thought or utterance with a tacitly dissociative attitude (Wilson and Sperber 1992). This thought or utterance may be attributed to someone specifically or may simply be attributed to the participants’ common ground (e.g. cultural stereotypes), while the dissociative attitude may be wry, sceptical or mocking, as we noted in relation to the example from Colbert (see also the example of sarcasm [4.27] we discussed near the end of section 4.3.2).

**Reflection: “He-Said-She-Said” in African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and recursivity in reporting talk**

While at their most basic level metarepresentations involve embedding a meaning representation relative to another meaning representation, these initial metarepresentations can be further embedded within other metarepresentations. This embedding is termed **recursivity**. The potential for recursive embedding of representations means that instances of reported talk, for example, can involve multiple levels of representations.

Consider, for instance, the practice termed “He-Said-She-Said” that is claimed to occur in AAVE (Goodwin 1990), particularly in disputes about gossip amongst pre-adolescent, working class African-American girls. The

practice involves one participant accusing another participant of talking “behind her back”. More specifically, the accuser uses “a series of embedded clauses to report a series of encounters in which two girls were talking about a third” (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004: 232). In the example below, taken from recordings of conversations between some African-American girls, Annette is accusing Benita of talking behind her back:

- [8.7] Annette (to Benita): And Tanya said  
 that you said  
 that I was showin’ off  
 just because I had that bl:ouse on.  
 (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004: 233)

Annette implicates this accusation by reporting on what Tanya has said Benita had previously said. It involves a complex form of recursive quotation where Annette is speaking to Benita about what Tanya told Annette (*and Tanya said*) that Benita said to Tanya (*that you said*) about Annette (*that I was showing off just because I had that blouse on*). Hence the term “He-Said-She-Said” or, to be more precise in this case, “She<sub>Tanya</sub>-Said-She<sub>Benita</sub>-Said”. This involves, from a metapragmatic perspective, a metarepresentation embedded within a higher-order metarepresentation. That is:

[a higher-order utterance]<sub>3</sub> about [an attributed higher-order utterance]<sub>2</sub>  
 about [an attributed lower-order utterance]<sub>1</sub>

The use of recursive quotation is not, of course, unique to pre-adolescent, working class African-American girls. But it is used here in a specific way, namely, as a response to situations where an “instigator” (here Tanya) tells someone (Annette) that another girl (Benita) has been talking about her behind her back. The He-Said-She-Said practice is thus not only a way for someone to hold another person to account for gossiping behind her back about her (or him), but also to implicate yet another person as the source of this accusation. It therefore becomes a way of establishing schisms and alliances within what is ostensibly a group of friends.

One challenge facing the Relevance theoretic account of irony as echoic, however, is the relationship between the examples of utterance-based verbal irony that they generally analyse, and instances of **situational irony**. The latter is generally understood to involve some kind of incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs. Littman and Mey (1991) and Clift (1999) have both argued that any account of irony should be able to deal with all kinds of irony, not just verbal irony à la relevance theory. Let us consider for a moment the rather savage situational irony that arises in

the following news report that originated from an international news agency based in the US:

[8.8] A man ended up in hospital after ordering a Triple Bypass burger at the Heart Attack Grill, a Las Vegas restaurant that jokingly warns customers “this establishment is bad for your health.”

Laughing tourists were either cynical or confused about whether the man was really suffering a medical episode amid the “doctor,” “nurses” and health warnings at the Heart Attack Grill, restaurant owner Jon Basso said yesterday.

“It was no joke,” said Basso

[section omitted]

Giggles can be heard on the soundtrack of amateur video showing the man on a stretcher being wheeled out of the restaurant where patrons pass an antique ambulance at the door and a sign: “Caution! This establishment is bad for your health.”

Eaters are given surgical gowns as they choose from a calorically extravagant [cf. calorie-extravagant] menu offering “Bypass” burgers, “Flatliner” fries, buttermilk shakes and free meals to folks over 350 pounds [cf. 159kg]. Another sign on the door reads, “Cash only because you might die before the check clears.”

(“Bypass burger lives up to its name”, Associated Press,  
17 February 2012)

Multiple layers of irony arise in the above excerpt from the news report. First of all, we have the ironic status of the place in question. The name of the restaurant (the *Heart Attack Grill*), its menu (*Triple Bypass burger*, *Flatliner fries*, etc.), the explicit warnings (*this establishment is bad for your health*), and the associated surroundings (e.g. having workers dressed as health care workers) all constitute potential instances of irony. They all echo in various ways general warnings that we have all heard about the negative impact that excessive consumption of fast food, such as the burgers and fries served at that restaurant, can have on our health. In echoing these warnings with exaggerated formulations, the restaurant management is echoing these warnings (which are attributable to the medical establishment and government bodies) with a dissociative attitude, more specifically, a kind of defiant scepticism or even mockery, and encouraging their customers to take a similar stance.

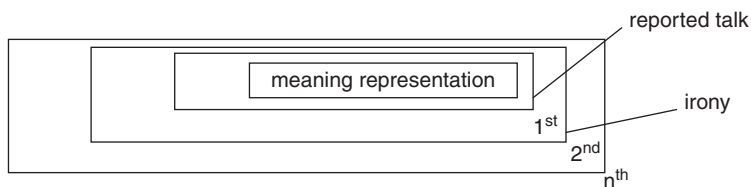
The second layer of irony arises from the primary focus of the news report, namely, that a customer at the restaurant fell ill and was taken to hospital after ordering a *Triple Bypass burger*. Notably, it is implicated through the formulation of the leading sentence that the man might have ended up in hospital because of ordering that burger (i.e. “A after B” implicates “A because of B”). It is, of course, moving into the realm of the ludicrous to even suggest this, but



therein lies the situational irony: a man was taken ill in a place that ironically mocks health warnings about fast food. The incongruity arises from a man falling ill (what actually occurred) in a restaurant that appeared confident enough to take an ironic stance on such a possibility (i.e. what appeared to be expected is that no one would ever really fall ill from the food, at least not there in the actual restaurant). The headline of the report plays on this situational irony (*Bypass burger lives up to its name*), by wryly echoing the ironic stance of the restaurant.

The third, and perhaps most savage, layer of irony arises from the report about the response of other customers to the man falling ill, namely, that some of them treated it as a laughing matter. Once again we have an instance of situational irony as there is a clear incongruity between what might be expected in such a situation (i.e. that no one would treat someone falling ill as a joke) and what actually occurred (i.e. some customers treated it as a joke). As a reader of the news report, we are, of course, privy to all these multiple instantiations of irony. What is significant here is that echoic irony, of the kind described by Relevance theorists, is interwoven with situational irony, for which they do not offer an explicit account. However, it is worth noting that their general claim nevertheless stands, namely, that metarepresentations lie at the heart of irony, and that irony inevitably involves some kind of dissociative attitude.

In summary, then, metarepresentational awareness involves reflexive representations of the intentional states and utterances of participants, as illustrated in Figure 8.2. Reported talk involves, at minimum, a first-order metarepresentation (e.g. an utterance about another attributed utterance), while irony involves, at minimum, a second-order metarepresentation (e.g. an attitude expressed about an utterance about an attributed intentional state). However, these metarepresentations can be further embedded in other metarepresentations as we saw in the case of He-Said-She-Said or in the report on the incident at the Heart Attack Grill. In the latter case, for instance, the name of the restaurant is assumed to echo general health warnings (first-order metarepresentation), about which customers are assumed to have a wry or dismissive



**Figure 8.2** Orders of metarepresentational awareness

attitude (second-order metarepresentation), but which is then quoted in a news report in light of their confused response to a person who was reported as falling seriously ill in that restaurant (third-order metapresentation), and towards which the writer presumably has a mocking, or at least wry, attitude (fourth-order metarepresentation), which we the readers attribute to that publisher, and may or may not entertain ourselves (fifth-order metarepresentation). In other words, both instances of echoic and situational irony, as well as reported talk/conduct, arise in the course of we, the readers, *attributing* to the publisher or writer of the report an *attitude* towards the customer's *allegedly* confused response in light of their presumed *attitude* towards the warnings and name of the restaurant that (ironically) *echo* general health warnings. In theory, metarepresentations can be extended to the *n*th order. In practice, they normally become too complex for users to process, or at least to talk about, at around the fifth or sixth order of metarepresentation (cf. the research mentioned in section 2.5.3).

### 8.3.3 Metacommunicative awareness

At the beginning of Chapter 7 we noted the importance of the “environment of mutual monitoring possibilities” that underlies all social situations (Goffman [1964] 1972: 63). Critical to these “mutual monitoring possibilities” is our awareness of self and other as socially constituted persons. This means that not only do we interpret and evaluate what we ourselves say and do and what others say and do, but we also reflexively interpret and evaluate these pragmatic meanings, acts and the like through the eyes of others. In other words, we include the perspective of others in our interpretations and evaluations of pragmatic phenomena. This kind of perspective-taking is what underpins the two forms of metacommunicative awareness that are critical to social interaction: interactional awareness and interpersonal awareness.

A key manifestation of metacommunicative **interactional awareness** is what is commonly termed recipient design, that is, where meanings and actions are reflexively designed with particular recipients in mind (a point we briefly discussed in section 6.6.1). The fine-tuned specificity of recipient design becomes evident in the incremental production of utterances, that is, in cases where speakers add further segments to utterances in order to adapt to changes in the participation footing of recipients. Goodwin (1979), for instance, examines in very close detail an excerpt from a conversation where the speaker, John transforms his utterance in line 3 from a *discovery* or *noticing* of an anniversary (i.e. having given up smoking for one week), about which the direct addressee, Beth (whose reciprocity is signalled through John's gaze), already knows, into a *report* about having given up smoking which is deemed to be *newsworthy* for another direct addressee, Ann (whose reciprocity is signalled through a subsequent shift in gaze by John).

- [8.9] 1 John: I gave, I gave u[p smoking cigarettes::.=  
 [((gazes at Don))  
 2 Don: =Ye:ah,  
 3 John: I-uh: [one- one week ago t'da:[y acshilly  
 [((gazes at Beth)) [((gazes at Ann))  
 4 Ann: Rilly? en y'quit fer good?  
 (adapted from Goodwin 1979: 111–112)

Notably, the utterance-final *actually* here marks this news as perhaps contrary to Ann's expectations (see section 8.3.1), and thus as reporting something that is likely previously unknown to her. In this way, he transforms the utterance from its previous design, when it was being constructed as a "noticing" directed at Beth of it already having been one week since he had given up smoking, into an utterance designed to function as reporting news to Ann. In interpreting talk or discourse, then, participants are inevitably aware of this finely-grained recipient design.

Metacommunicative **interpersonal awareness** involves reflexive evaluations of relations with and attitudes towards others, an area which was largely covered in Chapter 7. Here we focus on how manifestations of reflexive awareness of interpersonal relations (such as face, status and so on), attitudes (such as like/dislike, disgust and so on), and evaluations (such as politeness, impoliteness and so on) are critically dependent on a reflexive awareness of self vis-à-vis other. In the following example from the TV series, *Everybody Hates Chris*, we can see how Chris manipulates his mother's (over-)concern about how others evaluate their family. Prior to the excerpt below, Chris has been complaining to his mother about having to wear his younger brother's old clothes for picture day at school, but to no avail. He concludes (in the voice of the narrator) that the only way he can get his mother to buy him new clothes is through invoking the idea of what others might think of their family if he wears old clothes:

- [8.10] Chris: Mom, I'm the only black kid in the whole school. They  
 already think I'm a crack baby. Wearing this sweater  
 they'll probably think we're on welfare.  
 Rochelle: Who said we were on welfare? Be home from school on  
 time tomorrow. We're gonna go shopping.  
 Julius: I thought you said we didn't have the money?  
 Rochelle: Oh, I'll get it. Not havin' people think we on welfare.  
 ("Everybody hates picture day", *Everybody Hates Chris*,  
 Season 1, Episode 13, 2 February 2006, director:  
 Linda Mendoza, writer: Kevin A. Garnett)

What Rochelle, Chris's mother, is most concerned about here is that other people might think they are *on welfare*, or in other words, poor. This motivates

her to go out and buy new clothes for Chris, even though they can't really afford them. Once again irony arises here, as Rochelle seems much less concerned about people thinking they have a drug problem (*they already think I'm a crack baby*) than their being seen as poor. There is also epistemic slippage in this excerpt from others potentially "thinking" something (Chris's claim), to people actually "saying" these things (Rochelle's assumption).

**Reflection: "Yeah-no" as an emergent pragmatic marker**

According to BurrIDGE and Florey (2002), the pragmatic marker *yeah-no* is increasingly used by speakers of Australian English, although it is clearly not restricted to Australian English, as it can also be found in talk amongst speakers of other varieties of English. The basic function of *yeah-no* is to indicate reflexive awareness that there is more than one line of interpretation of current talk at play in the interaction (i.e. it is reflective of metacommunicative awareness on the part of users).

In the following excerpt from a conversation, two Australian friends are discussing football (specifically, rugby league), and who they are tipping (i.e. putting their bet on) for the upcoming game:

- [8.11] Clive: Yeah so who ya tipping this weekend? You got ah?  
 Bruce: Yeah-no I, have a look here. I made some bold statements actually<sub>i</sub>  
 Clive: Broncos definitely<sub>i</sub>  
 Bruce: Yeah Broncos I- did I pick the Broncos?  
 No. [No  
 Clive: [gone against them<sub>i</sub>  
 Bruce: I've gone against them<sub>i</sub>  
 Clive You're kidding.

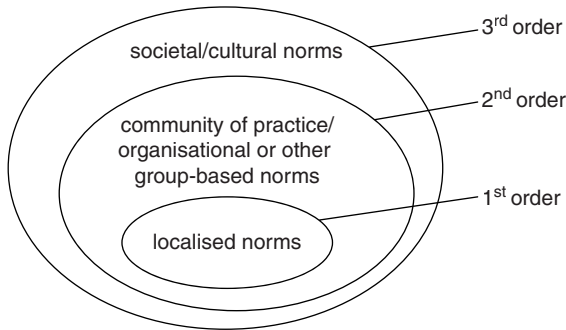
(BurrIDGE and Florey 2002: 163)

In this example, *yeah-no* is used by Bruce to indicate reflexive awareness of two possible lines of interpretation here. The first involves a "yeah-no" response to Clive's trailing-off question (*You got ah?*) about whether Bruce has a team in mind to tip. Through responding *yeah*, Bruce indicates that he does have a tip in mind. At the same time Bruce also projects that his tip this time will not be in line with Clive's expectations, by subsequently uttering *no*. This latter interpretation becomes clear when Bruce says that he is not going to tip for the Broncos (the name of a rugby league team in Brisbane). That this is counter to Clive's expectations is apparent from his expression of surprise (*You're kidding*). In other words, *yeah-no* is used here by Bruce to introduce a "surprise departure from his usual tipping practices" (BurrIDGE and Florey 2002: 163), and so constitutes an example of an orientation to the metacognitive status of particular information that is assumed to lie in the common ground of Bruce and Clive, namely, Bruce's usual tipping practices.

This pragmatic marker has been ironically adopted most infamously by Vicky Pollard, a satirical character on the British television series, *Little Britain*. She uses the catch phrase *yeah but no but yeah but*, and variants of it, to launch long rants where her breakneck speed of talk and the irrelevant information or gossip she offers is intended to confuse or annoy the recipient. *Yeah-no* is apparently being used by the comedian Matt Lucas, in the guise of Vicky, to invoke or comment on social discourses about “declining standards” of spoken English amongst younger generation speakers in Britain.

Such evaluations inevitably involve appeals to normative ways of thinking, speaking and doing things. Verschueren, for instance, argues that such normativity necessarily involves a “metalevel of awareness”, and it is at this level that “the norms involved are constantly negotiated and manipulated” (2000: 445). Silverstein (2003) goes further in proposing that these norms form what he terms **orders of indexicality**. This refers to the idea that normative notions about “how language works, and what it is usually like, what certain ways of speaking connote and imply” are reflexively layered. At the first layer (or first-order) of norms we find probabilistic conventions for language use. These are formed for individuals through their own history of interactions with others, and so while they may be similar, they are never exactly the same across individuals. At the second layer (or *second-order*) we find localised ideologies and evaluations of language use. In other words, normative ideas about language use that are shared across particular social groups. Finally, at the third layer (or *third-order*) we find language conventions as they are represented in supra-local (i.e. societal) ideologies and evaluations of language use. In being ordered, it is not necessarily assumed that third-order norms will always take precedence over second-order ones and so on (although they often do), but rather that in invoking first-order norms we inevitably invoke second- and third-order ones as well. In pragmatics our specific concern is evaluative norms relating to language use, namely, assumptions “about what is ‘correct’, ‘normal’, ‘appropriate’, ‘well-formed’, ‘worth saying’, ‘permissible’, and so on” (Coupland and Jaworski 2004: 36), and how these cut across all three orders.

These ordered layers of normativity can be represented as in Figure 8.3. There it is suggested that the localised norms which develop for individuals or localised relationships are necessarily embedded (and thus interpreted) relative to communities of practice, organisational or other group-based norms, which are themselves necessarily embedded relative to broader societal or “cultural” norms. While all three layers of normativity can be studied, we would argue that they are most productively analysed at the second-order level, namely, localised ideologies shared across identifiable communities of practice, organisations or other recognisable groups (see also



Sources: Kádár and Haugh 2013: 95; cf. Culpeper 2008: 29–31; Holmes et al. 2012: 1065.

**Figure 8.3** Orders of normativity

Culpeper 2010, which argues for the middle, as in second-order, level with respect to historical sociopragmatics).

Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from a radio interview with the singer, Justin Bieber, which went horribly wrong when the interviewer, Mojo, made a joke about Harry Styles and Bieber’s mother:

- [8.12] Mojo: do you worry about Harry, uh, you know when he’s around your mom, since it seems he likes older women?  
 Bieber: do I wonder (.) what?  
 Mojo: do you worry Harry around your mum, since he (.) u:h (.) he likes older women?  
 Bieber: I think you should worry about yo- your mom bro.  
 Mojo: .hhhHahhh I should worry about my mum?  
 Bieber: ye:a(hh)h  
 Mojo: Justin, my mum’s d[lead so unfortunately (.) that wouldn’t work.  
 Bieber: [jeez  
 (10.0)  
 ((line goes dead))  
 (Mojo in the Morning, Radio Channel 95.5, Detroit, broadcast 28 June 2012)

Here the interactional trouble begins when the interviewer, Thomas “Mojo” Carballot, teases Bieber about Harry Styles, who was reported in the news at the time to be dating older women, having an interest in Bieber’s mother. Bieber initially responds with a request for a repeat of the question, which is indicative of a possible challenge to the askability of that question, but when the question is essentially repeated by Mojo, Bieber then responds with a tease of his own about Mojo’s mother. After Mojo deflates Bieber’s tease in

countering that his mother is already dead (and thus not someone with whom Harry Styles could be trying to date), there is a long ten-second silence, and then Bieber (apparently) hangs up. It was subsequently reported that when the technician tried to get Bieber back on the line to continue the interview that “He [Bieber] got a little upset with the question”.

The following day Mojo discussed what went wrong in the interview with two other announcers, Rachael and Spike:

- [8.13] Rachael: but even (.) even the way he said it back to you  
 ↓”you got watch out for yer m- uhm yer mum”  
 Mojo: mm  
 Rachael: like you could tell, at that point he was pissed already  
 Mojo: ye:ah  
 Spike: here’s the thing I’m kinda getting bummed out because,  
 you know (0.2) I don’t listen to his music but I always  
 thought Justin was pretty cool but  
 Rachael: he i:s.  
 Spike: he[’s  
 Rachael: [he usually [is  
 Spike: [he- he’s starting to take himself way too  
 seriously.

(*Mojo in the Morning*, Radio Channel 95.5, Detroit,  
 broadcast 29 June 2012)

Here it is claimed by Rachael that Bieber’s initial tease (before hanging up) was indicative of him taking offence. The way Bieber dealt with the interview is then characterised by Spike as him taking himself *too seriously*, thereby casting the offence as not warranted.

We can analyse the metapragmatic comments by these two other observers in relation to the three different orders of normativity that we introduced above. At the first-order, or localised level, we can see in [8.12], about which they are commenting, how Mojo is evidently trying to establish a “joking” relationship with Bieber where this kind of “ribbing” or teasing is allowable. This reflects, in turn, second-order norms associated with the practices of radio “shock jocks”, such as Mojo, where guests are subject to joking, teasing, mocking and the like, and how celebrities, in particular, are expected to deal with that by not taking themselves “too seriously”. Finally, the negative assessment accomplished through casting Bieber as “starting to take himself way too seriously” in [8.13] invokes, in turn, third-order norms, namely, the social sanctions directed at those who take themselves “too seriously”, and the positive value placed on not taking oneself too seriously amongst Anglo speakers of English (see Fox 2004; Goddard 2009).

However, just because particular participants invoke these kinds of third-order norms, this does not mean to say that what counts as offensive or sanctionable behaviour is not open to dispute by others. In the following post, after a report about the incident was published in the online version of the *Daily Mirror*, one user claimed that Mojo was being “rude”:

- [8.14] That was rude for him to say if he worries about Harry around his mom he is just a kid not an adult. Mojo was wrong with the question. U all r adults expecting kids to act like adults. Inappropriate question! Grow up Mojo.

(<http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/justin-bieber-hangs-up-on-radio-946516>)

Here a different set of third-order norms are invoked, namely, what counts as (in)appropriate around adults versus kids, thereby challenging the second-order normative practices of radio jocks such as Mojo.

Investigating localised, as well as second-order, ideologies is a useful way to better understanding the normative features of interaction that are so often treated as simply “commonsensical” and thus rarely questioned by users (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). And it is this line of work that leads us into the analysis of metadiscursive awareness at the third-order level of normativity on the part of users (see Verschueren 2012 for a useful introduction to such work). This is not to say, however, that the pragmatic meanings and interpersonal relations and attitudes which arise in discourse through invoking such norms are not open to negotiation or dispute, as we saw above. Indeed, metapragmatic commentary can be strategically deployed for that very purpose, as we shall now discuss.

## 8.4 Metapragmatics in use

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Metapragmatic awareness lies at the core of a number of important pragmatic phenomena. In many instances, this reflexive awareness is not always accessible or highly salient to participants. It may be inherent to their use of language, but it is not necessarily something they can articulate. There are, however, cases where metapragmatic awareness itself may become highly salient in discourse. The most obvious example of this is the use of metapragmatic commentary to “influence and negotiate how an utterance is or should have been heard, or [to] try to modify the values attributed to it” (Jaworski et al. 2004: 4); in other words, the strategic deployment of comments about language use in order to (re-)negotiate interpretations of pragmatic meanings, pragmatic acts, and interpersonal relations, attitudes and evaluations. Hübler



and Bublitz (2007) term such phenomena “metapragmatics in use”. They list some of the functions of metapragmatic commentary, including:

- evaluating self and others
- doing conflict
- doing affiliation
- constructing identity
- reinforcing or challenging communicative norms
- negotiating meaning
- discourse organisation

(adapted from Hübler and Bublitz 2007: 18)

Given this list is not by any means exhaustive, it is clear that metapragmatic commentary (or, more broadly, acts) can be used to accomplish all sorts of different pragmatic work.

In a study of metapragmatic utterances that arise in computer-mediated interactions in a number of different mailing lists, for instance, Tanskanen (2007) illustrates how participants can use metapragmatic utterances to accomplish assessments of the degree of appropriateness of either their own or others' posts, or to clarify their own contributions where some misunderstanding is perceived. Such comments were thus found to be designed to (1) accomplish judgements of appropriateness (see example [8.15]), (2) control and plan subsequent interaction (example [8.16]), or (3) give feedback on ongoing interaction (example [8.17]):

[8.15] I am loathe to add yet another message to what has been an extremely long thread, but...  
(WMST-L) (Tanskanen 2007: 92)

[8.16] Well, you've certainly ended this discussion effectively. All that's left to say is "I rest my case."  
(YAHOO) (ibid.: 100)

[8.17] Such a wonderful discussion is being held here!!!  
(DBB) (ibid.: 101)

Such metapragmatic comments thus illustrate how users display reflexive awareness in making posts to such lists, as through them we can see how they “adopt the perspective of their fellow communicators” in “anticipating potential problems” in such forums (Tanskanen 2007: 88). More generally, we can observe how metapragmatic comments are designed to *avoid* both misinterpretation and unwanted relational or attitudinal implications, by other participants.

In some cases, however, metapragmatic comments are deployed in order to negotiate or even dispute particular pragmatic meanings, pragmatic acts, interpersonal relations and attitudes, and so on. Consider the following extract from a documentary where four Indians have been touring to get a first-hand understanding of race relations. Preceding this particular excerpt, Gurmeet has suggested to an Aboriginal elder that indigenous Australians should have “specific educational institutions for Aboriginals”, to which the elder responds that such institutions already exist. The excerpt itself begins when Gurmeet subsequently asks why the elder has “complaints” about the past and current situation of indigenous Australians:

- [8.18] 14 Gurmeet: then what are the complaints.  
 15 Elder: ((cocks her head)) uh uh, beg your pardon?  
 16 Gurmeet: why are you complaining then.  
 17 Elder: ((steps back)) am I ↑complaining?= ←  
 18 Radhika: =no::  
 19 Gurmeet: ((smiles)) heh [heh]  
 20 Elder: [I'm] answering questions that they ←  
 21 asked. I'm not complain-  
 22 Gurmeet: but but [you are ] saying ←  
 23 Elder: [you don't]  
 24 you don't live in my country, you don't- this is my ←  
 25 country, ((points her finger at Gurmeet)) Kamilaroi is  
 26 my country. I see what happens here, whatever  
 27 happens in your country.

(*Dumb, Drunk and Racist*, Episode 4, 11 July 2012,  
 ABC2 and Cordell Jigsaw Productions)

While the elder's initial response in line 15 is indicative not only of possible forthcoming disagreement with what is supposed through Gurmeet's question (i.e. that the elder has been *complaining*), but also that there is some issue in regards to the propriety of Gurmeet's question. Gurmeet nevertheless repeats essentially the same question in line 16. This time the elder's offence at the terms of the question becomes more evident in her rising pitch, stepping backwards and formulation of a “rhetorical question” in line 17. She then attempts to reformulate her prior turns as simply *answering questions* rather than *complaining* (lines 20–21), and then finally makes explicit what appears to be the source of the offence she is taking at Gurmeet's line of questioning, namely, his implicit assumption that he has the right to judge the situation of “her” country (lines 24–27).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Haugh (in press 2014) and Kádár and Haugh (2013: 119–122, 127–131) for further analysis of this particular example.

We can observe a number of metapragmatic comments in the above extract, which are indicated by the arrows, in relation to the construal of pragmatic acts (lines 17, 20–21), pragmatic meaning and accountability (line 22), and relational entitlements (lines 23–27). In lines 17 and 20–21, the elder disputes the way in which Gurmeet has framed her prior talk as *complaining*, and offers an alternative formulation of her actions as simply *answering questions*. In this case, it is the way in which her prior talk is being construed as a particular pragmatic act, namely “complaining”, that is at issue (see Chapter 6). Studies of complaints in English have shown that complaining is regarded as an inherently moral act, and thus to characterise some talk as “complaining”, involves the question of whether there are sufficient grounds for launching the complaint, and thus whether the person complaining has the right to make such a complaint (see Drew 1998). Such research has also shown that participants will often engage in considerable interactional work to avoid what they are meaning being construed as *complaining* (Edwards 2005).

In line 22, Gurmeet moves to hold the elder accountable for *complaining* rather than *answering questions* by invoking the sense of *saying*<sub>2</sub> as meaning something (see sections 4.2.1 and 5.4.1). In other words, Gurmeet construes the elder as previously *implying* that the situation of indigenous Australians has not been very good because of the actions of others (in particular, the Australian government). He thus attempts to hold her accountable for this particular reflexively *intended* assumption.

Finally, in lines 23–27, we can see the elder disputing Gurmeet’s right to evaluate and comment on the situation of indigenous Australians by construing herself as an “insider” and Gurmeet as an “outsider” to “Kamilaroi country” (where the Indians are currently visiting). In other words, she is explicitly referring to her entitlement to comment on the circumstances of “her people”, as opposed to the lack of such an entitlement on Gurmeet’s part, thereby alluding to issues of interpersonal relations and their respective “sociality rights” (see section 7.4.2). It is also evident throughout that the elder is treating Gurmeet’s line of questioning as “inapposite”, if not outright offensive, thereby indicating an implicit orientation to a particular interpersonal attitude on the part of Gurmeet, namely, that he is being “impolite” or “offensive” (see section 7.5).

In order to understand the above excerpt, however, it is evident that we also need to have a clear understanding of what these participants mean by such terms as *complaint/complaining*, *asking questions*, *saying*, and *impolite/offensive*, as well as what these words mean for English speakers more generally, given the interaction was broadcast on television to an “overhearing” audience. Thus, while “technical” meanings can be ascribed to such terms, it is important to remember that this metalanguage means something to ordinary participants too.

### Reflection: Inter-ethnic metapragmatic discourse in New Zealand English

Metapragmatic commentary may, in some cases, be directed not only at pragmatic meanings or acts, but also at the norms that are assumed to underlie them. In an extensive program of research about discourse in New Zealand workplaces, the Language in the Workplace project has uncovered ethnic variation amongst speakers of New Zealand English. Holmes et al. (2012) report on the explicit negotiation of politeness norms between European (termed Pākehā) and Māori ethnolects of New Zealand English. The former has traditionally been considered dominant or mainstream, but in workplaces where Maori predominate, such assumptions can be challenged. In the following excerpt, we can observe a clash between Pākehā and Māori interactional norms that surfaces in the form of metapragmatic commentary. The exchange occurs in one of the regular meetings of Kiwi Consultations, where only three out of the sixteen participants are Pākehā:

- [8.19] 1 Steve: we have capability development um  
 2 the g m oversight here  
 3 ((overlapped by a quiet conversation involving Frank  
 4 and Daniel))  
 5 is from Frank with Caleb  
 6 the manager in charge budget of a hundred and  
 7 eighty seven k ((pause)) obviously key area we  
 8 want to ensure that um one of the important  
 9 things in communication is not to talk when  
 10 others are talking:  
 11 ((loud laughter))  
 12 Steve: I hope that the cameras picked up (that)  
 13 ((loud laughter))  
 14 Frank: Steve this indicates a need for you to be out in hui  
 15 ((laughter))  
 16 Frank: one of the things that you learn very quickly  
 17 is that a sign of respect is that other people are talking  
 18 about what [you're saying while you're saying it]  
 19 [(laughter) ]  
 20 ((laughter))  
 21 Steve: I see I see

(adapted from Holmes et al. 2012: 1070–1071)

Holmes, Marra and Vine claim that while Steve asserts a (Pākehā New Zealand English) interactional norm, namely, that one should not speak while others are speaking (lines 8–10), this is treated as an inappropriate

assertion by Frank, another Pākehā. Frank implies in line 14 that Steve is not sufficiently acquainted with Māori New Zealand English ways of speaking by suggesting that he needs to attend more *hui* (i.e. traditional Māori meetings). By doing so it is suggested that Steve would gain an appreciation of the Māori English interpretive norm that *a sign of respect is that other people are talking about what you're saying while you're saying it* (lines 17–18). By asserting a Māori interactional norm, Frank reframes Steve's metapragmatic comment as inappropriate for that workplace because it involves the assertion of a Pākehā interactional norm. Speaking English thus inevitably raises questions about just whose norms are assumed to be at play. Such issues can be approached at various orders of indexicality, including through the lens of ethnic varieties of English.

## 8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have suggested that reflexive awareness underpins all language use. We have alluded to our preceding discussions of referring expressions (Chapter 2), informational pragmatics (Chapter 3), pragmatic meaning (Chapters 4 and 5), pragmatic acts (Chapter 6) and interpersonal pragmatics (Chapter 7), in describing how metarepresentational, metacognitive and metacommunicative awareness lie at the core of such pragmatic phenomena. We have also suggested that some pragmatic phenomena, such as irony, reported talk, pragmatic markers, metapragmatic descriptors and commentary, and social discourses cannot be explained without making recourse to these different forms of reflexive awareness. It is for this reason that we have intentionally concluded this volume with an explicitly metapragmatic perspective on pragmatic phenomena.

A metapragmatic perspective takes pragmatic phenomena to be consequential for people in the real world. What people are taken to be referring to or meaning, for instance, has real-world implications for those people involved. People talk about language use and such discussions matter. In analysing metapragmatics in use it is clear that an analysis of the metalanguage that is both explicitly and implicitly invoked by participants (and observers) is necessary. It is important to remember, however, that this metalanguage is unlikely to be completely synonymous across languages, or even across groups of users of that language. Metapragmatics is thus ultimately a language- and culture-specific enterprise, a point we have tried to emphasise through using examples that not only highlight the ways in which English speakers display reflexive awareness of their use of English, but also touch upon the variation in such awareness across speakers of English.