LANGUAGE AND IDENTITIES

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Locating Identity in Language[1]

Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we propose a framework for the analysis of identity as constituted in linguistic interaction. The need for such a framework has become apparent in recent years, as linguistic research on identity has become increasingly central within sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, discourse analysis and social psychology. But the concomitant development of theoretical approaches to identity remains at best a secondary concern, not a focused goal of the field. We argue for the analytic value of approaching identity as a relational and socio-cultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories. We believe that the approach we propose here, which draws together insights from a variety of fields and theorists, allows for a discussion of identity that permits researchers to articulate theoretical assumptions about identity often left implicit in scholarship, while avoiding the critiques of this concept that have arisen in the social sciences and humanities in the past two decades. Given the scope of such scholarly research, our definition of identity is deliberately broad and open-ended: *identity is the social positioning of self and other.*

The framework we outline here synthesises key work on identity from a number of scholarly traditions to offer a general socio-cultural linguistic perspective on identity – that is, one that focuses on both the details of language and the workings of culture and society. By *socio-cultural linguistics*, we mean the broad interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection of language, culture and society. This term encompasses the disciplinary subfields of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, socially oriented forms of discourse analysis (such as conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis) and linguistically oriented social psychology, among others.[2] In incorporating these diverse approaches under a single label, our purpose is neither to deny the differences among them nor to impose new disciplinary boundaries; rather, it is to acknowledge the full range of work that falls under the rubric of language and identity and to offer a shorthand device for referring to these approaches collectively. The interdisciplinary perspective taken here is intended to help scholars recognise the comprehensive toolkit

already available to them for analysing identity as a centrally linguistic phenomenon. Identity does not emerge at a single analytic level – whether vowel quality, turn shape, code choice or ideological structure – but operates at multiple levels simultaneously. Our own approach privileges the interactional level, because it is in interaction that all these resources gain social meaning. Our goal is to assemble elements of socio-cultural linguistic work on identity into a coherent model that both describes the current state of research and offers new directions for future scholarship.

We propose five principles that we see as fundamental to the study of identity. The first and second principles challenge narrowly psychological and static views of identity that have circulated widely in the social sciences. We argue instead, in line with abundant socio-cultural linguistic research, that identity is a discursive construct that emerges in interaction. Further, we expand traditional macrosociological views of identity to include both local ethnographic categories and transitory interactional positions. The third principle inventories the types of linguistic resources whereby interactants indexically position self and other in discourse. The heart of the model is described in the fourth principle, which highlights the relational foundation of identity. To illustrate this principle, we briefly outline our own recently developed framework for analysing identity as an intersubjective accomplishment. Finally, the fifth principle considers the limits and constraints on individual intentionality in the process of identity construction, while acknowledging the important role that deliberate social action may play in producing identity. Throughout the chapter, we argue for a view of identity that is intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an *a priori* fashion.

2. The emergence principle

The first principle that informs our perspective addresses a traditional scholarly view of identity as housed primarily within an individual mind, so that the only possible relationship between identity and language use is for language to reflect an individual's internal mental state. While individuals' sense of self is certainly an important element of identity, researchers of individuals' language use (for example, Johnstone 1996) have shown that the only way that such self-conceptions enter the social world is via some form of discourse. Hence, accounts that locate identity inside the mind may discount the social ground on which identity is built, maintained and altered.

Our own view draws from the sustained engagement with the concept of emergence both in linguistic anthropology, where it is linked to performance and culture, and in interactional linguistics, where it informs a usage-based theory of grammar. We extend the insights of this previous linguistic work on emergence to the analysis of identity. As with performance, culture and grammar itself, we maintain that identity emerges from the specific conditions of linguistic interaction:

1. Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon.

This is a familiar idea within several very different branches of socio-cultural linguistics: the ethnomethodological concept of 'doing' various kinds of identity (for example,

Fenstermaker and West 2002; West and Zimmerman 1991) and the related conversation-analytic notion of identity as an interactionally relevant accomplishment (for example, Antaki and Widdicombe 1998); the poststructuralist theory of performativity (Butler 1990), developed from the work of J. L. Austin (1962), as taken up by researchers of language, gender and sexuality (for example, Livia and Hall 1997); and more generally the semiotic concepts of creative indexicality (Silverstein 1979) and referee design (Bell 1984). Despite fundamental differences among these approaches, all of them enable us to view identity not simply as a psychological mechanism of self-classification reflected in people's social behaviour but rather as something constituted through social action, and especially through language. Of course, the property of emergence does not exclude the possibility that resources for identity work in any given interaction may derive from resources developed in earlier interactions (that is, they may draw on 'structure' – such as ideology, the linguistic system, or the relation between the two).

Although nearly all contemporary linguistic research on identity takes this general perspective as its starting point, it is perhaps easiest to recognise identity as emergent in cases where speakers' language use does not conform with the social category to which they are normatively assigned. Cases of transgender identity and cross-gender performance (for example, Barrett 1999; Hall and O'Donovan 1996) and ethnic, racial and national boundary crossing (for example, Bucholtz 1995, 1999a; Rampton 1995) illustrate in diverse ways that identities as social processes do not precede the semiotic practices that call them into being in specific interactions. Such situations are striking only because they sever the ideologically expected mapping between language and biology or culture; that is, they subvert essentialist preconceptions of linguistic ownership. While the emergent nature of identity is especially stark in these cases, identity is discursively produced even in the most mundane and unremarkable situations.

3. The positionality principle

The second principle challenges another widely circulating view of identity, namely that it is simply a collection of broad social categories. This perspective is found most often in the quantitative social sciences, which correlate social behaviour with macro identity categories such as age, gender and social class. Within socio-cultural linguistics, the concern with identities as broader social structures is particularly characteristic of early variationist sociolinguistics (for example, Labov 1966) and the sociology of language (see Fishman 1971, among others). The traditional forms of these approaches have been valuable for documenting large-scale sociolinguistic trends; they are often less effective in capturing the more nuanced and flexible kinds of identity relations that arise in local contexts (but see, for example, Labov 1963). This analytic gap points to the importance of ethnography. Linguistic ethnographers have repeatedly demonstrated that language users often orient to local identity categories rather than to the analyst's sociological categories, and that the former frequently provide a better empirical account of linguistic practice.

In addition, more recent socio-cultural linguistic work has begun to investigate the micro details of identity as it is shaped from moment to moment in interaction. At the most basic level, identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants, such as evaluator, joke-teller or engaged listener. Such interactional positions may seem quite different from identity as conventionally understood; however, these

temporary roles, no less than larger sociological and ethnographic identity categories, contribute to the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in discourse. On the one hand, the interactional positions that social actors briefly occupy and then abandon as they respond to the contingencies of unfolding discourse may accumulate ideological associations with both large-scale and local categories of identity. On the other, these ideological associations, once forged, may shape who does what and how in interaction, though never in a deterministic fashion. Our own perspective therefore broadens the traditional referential range of *identity* to encompass not only more widely recognised constructs of social subjectivity but also local identity categories and transitory interactional positions:

> 2. Identities encompass (a) macrolevel demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles.

These different kinds of positions typically occur simultaneously in a single interaction. From the perspective of the analyst, it is not a matter of choosing one dimension of identity over others, but of considering multiple facets in order to achieve a more complete understanding of how identity works.

4. The indexicality principle

While the first two principles we have discussed characterise the ontological status of identity, the third principle is concerned with the mechanism whereby identity is constituted. This mechanism, known as *indexicality*, is fundamental to the way in which linguistic forms are used to construct identity positions. In its most basic sense, an *index* is a linguistic form that depends on the interactional context for its meaning, such as the 1st person pronoun *I* (Silverstein 1976). More generally, however, the concept of indexicality involves the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings (Ochs 1992; Silverstein 1985). In identity formation, indexicality relies heavily on ideological structures, for associations between language and identity are rooted in cultural beliefs and values – that is, ideologies – about the sorts of speakers who (can or should) produce particular sorts of language.

Indexical processes occur at all levels of linguistic structure and use. The third principle outlines some of these different linguistic means whereby identity is discursively produced:

> 3. Identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups.

The most obvious and direct way that identities can be constituted through talk is the overt introduction of referential identity categories into discourse. Indeed, a focus

on social category labels has been a primary method that nonlinguistic researchers have used to approach the question of identity. Researchers in socio-cultural linguistics contribute to this line of work a more precise and systematic methodology for understanding labelling and categorisation as social action. The circulation of such categories within ongoing discourse, their explicit or implicit juxtaposition with other categories, and the linguistic elaborations and qualifications they attract (predicates, modifiers, and so on) all provide important information about identity construction. Less direct means of instantiating identities include such pragmatic processes as implicature and presupposition, both of which require additional inferential work for interpretation.

Recent work on stance – that is, the display of evaluative, affective and epistemic orientations in discourse – has made explicit the ways in which other dimensions of interaction can be resources for the construction of identity. In his framework for the analysis of stance as both a subjective and an intersubjective phenomenon, John Du Bois characterises stance as social action in the following terms: 'I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and align [or disalign] with you' (Du Bois 2007: 163). Stance and related concepts that have developed in various fields of socio-cultural linguistics are productive for the study of identity because they show how, even in the most fleeting of interactional moves, speakers position themselves and others as particular kinds of people. Moreover, stances can build up into larger identity categories. In an influential paper, Ochs (1992) extends the concept of indexicality by arguing that the indexical connection between a given linguistic form and a particular social identity is not direct. Rather, linguistic forms that index identity are more basically associated with interactional stances such as forcefulness, uncertainty, and so on, which in turn may come to be associated with particular social categories, such as gender. Within interactional linguistics, Rauniomaa (2003) has developed Du Bois's (2002) concept of stance accretion to capture the way in which stances accumulate into more durable structures of identity.

It is important to emphasise that the process of creating indexical ties of this kind is inherently ideological, creating in bottom-up fashion a set of interactional norms for particular social groups. Conversely, in the process of indexical inversion described by Inoue (2004), indexical associations can also be imposed from the top down by cultural authorities such as intellectuals or the media. Such an imposed indexical tie may create ideological expectations among speakers and hence affect linguistic practice.

A somewhat related set of insights comes from the concept of style in variationist sociolinguistics. This term traditionally refers to intraspeaker variation in language use (Labov 1972a), but more contemporary approaches (for example, California Style Collective 1993; Eckert 2000), along with earlier work by Bell (1984) and Coupland (1980), understand style as a repertoire of linguistic forms associated with personas or identities. Whereas scholars concerned with stance concentrate on conversational acts such as evaluative expressions, sociolinguists of style typically look instead to linguistic structures below the discursive level, such as grammar, phonology and lexis. In an indexical process similar to what both Ochs and Rauniomaa describe for stance, these features become tied to styles and hence to identity through habitual practice (Bourdieu [1972] 1977). One of the important insights of the style literature is that the social meanings of style often require ethnographic investigation to

uncover groups that may seem homogeneous when seen through a wider analytic lens, but become sharply differentiated when ethnographic details are brought into close focus.

In addition to microlevel linguistic structures like stance markers and style features, entire linguistic systems such as languages and dialects may also be indexically tied to identity categories. This phenomenon – long the mainstay of a wide range of socio-cultural linguistic scholarship – has been especially well theorised in the literature on language, nationalism and ideology (for example, Gal and Irvine 1995). Work on language choice has also begun to appear in the emerging field of language and globalisation. Given the vast scale of such phenomena as nationalism and globalisation, much of the research on these issues is not interactional in its approach. However, some current studies, especially on the latter topic (for example, Besnier 2004; Hall 2003a), consider how large-scale social processes such as globalisation shape identity in interaction.

The range of phenomena discussed in this section attests to the wealth of linguistic resources that contribute to the production of identity positions. Disparate indexical processes of labelling, implicature, stance-taking, style-marking, and code-choice work to construct identities, both micro and macro, as well as those somewhere in between. By considering identity formation at multiple indexical levels rather than focusing on only one, we can assemble a much richer portrait of subjectivity and intersubjectivity as they are constituted in interaction.

5. The relationality principle

The first three principles we have discussed focus on the emergent, positional and indexical aspects of identity and its production. Building on these points, the fourth principle emphasises identity as a relational phenomenon. In calling attention to relationality, we have two aims: first, to underscore the point that identities are never autonomous or independent but always acquire social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social actors; and second, to call into question the widespread but oversimplified view of identity relations as revolving around a single axis: sameness and difference. The principle we propose here suggests a much broader range of relations that are forged through identity processes:

4. Identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice and authority/delegitimacy.

We have described these relations at length elsewhere as what we have termed *tactics of intersubjectivity* (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b), and we briefly summarise those discussions here. The list of identity relations we outline in this and our earlier work is not intended to be exhaustive but rather suggestive of the different dimensions of relationality created through identity construction. In addition, it is important to note that although we separate the concepts for purposes of exposition we do not view them as mutually exclusive; indeed, since these are relational processes, two or more typically work in conjunction with one another.

5.1 Adequation and distinction

The first two complementary identity relations we describe – similarity and difference – are also the most widely discussed in social-scientific research on identity. To highlight the ways in which we depart from traditional views of these relations, we use the terms *adequation* and *distinction*.

The term *adequation* emphasises the fact that in order for groups or individuals to be positioned as alike, they need not – and in any case cannot – be identical, but must merely be understood as sufficiently similar for current interactional purposes. Thus, differences irrelevant or damaging to ongoing efforts to adequate two people or groups will be downplayed, and similarities viewed as salient to and supportive of the immediate project of identity work will be foregrounded.

The counterpart of adequation, *distinction*, focuses on the identity relation of differentiation.[3] The overwhelming majority of socio-cultural linguistic research on identity has emphasised this relation, both because social differentiation is a highly visible process and because language is an especially potent resource for producing it in a variety of ways. Just as adequation relies on the suppression of social differences that might disrupt a seamless representation of similarity, distinction depends on the suppression of similarities that might undermine the construction of difference.

5.2 Authentication and denaturalisation

The second pair of relations, *authentication* and *denaturalisation*, are the processes by which speakers make claims to realness and artifice, respectively. While both relations have to do with authenticity, the first focuses on the ways in which identities are discursively verified and the second on how assumptions regarding the seamlessness of identity can be disrupted. Like the focus on distinction, a concern with authenticity – that is, what sorts of language and language users count as 'genuine' for a given purpose – has pervaded the socio-cultural linguistic literature, although analysts have not always separated their own assumptions about authenticity from those of the speakers they study (Bucholtz 2003; see also Coupland, this volume). We call attention not to authenticity as an inherent essence, but to authentication as a social process played out in discourse.

In denaturalisation, by contrast, such claims to the inevitability or inherent rightness of identities are subverted. What is called attention to instead are the ways in which identity is crafted, fragmented, problematic or false. Such aspects often emerge most clearly in parodic performance and in some displays of hybrid identity, but they may also appear whenever an identity violates ideological expectations.

5.3 Authorisation and illegitimation

The final pair of intersubjective relations considers the structural and institutional aspects of identity formation. The first of these, *authorisation*, involves the affirmation or imposition of an identity through structures of institutionalised power and ideology, whether local or translocal. The counterpart of authorisation, *illegitimation*, addresses the ways in which identities are dismissed, censored or simply ignored by these same structures.

The tactics of intersubjectivity outlined here not only call attention to the intersubjective basis of identity, but also provide a sense of the diverse ways that relationality works through discourse. Relationality operates at many levels. As many socio-cultural linguists have argued, even genres traditionally thought of as monologic are fundamentally interactional. Identities emerge only in relation to other identities within the contingent framework of interaction.

6. The partialness principle

The final principle draws from a voluminous literature in cultural anthropology and feminist theory over the past two decades that has challenged the analytic drive to represent forms of social life as internally coherent. This challenge, inspired by the postmodern critique of the totalising master narratives characteristic of previous generations, surfaces in ethnography in the realisation that all representations of culture are necessarily 'partial accounts' (Clifford and Marcus 1986). This idea has long been central to feminist analysis, in which there is an ethical commitment to recognising the situatedness and partialness of any claim to knowledge (see Behar and Gordon 1995; Visweswaran 1994). The feminist commitment to explicitly positioning oneself as a researcher rather than effacing one's presence in the research process, a practice which echoes the politics of location in reflexive ethnography, has exposed the fact that reality itself is intersubjective in nature, constructed through the particulars of self and other in any localised encounter. This idea fits well with postmodern theorisings of identity as fractured and discontinuous, for as anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran has noted, 'identities are constituted by context and are themselves asserted as partial accounts' (1994: 41).

Whereas the critique of ethnography has been most interested in the partialness construed by one kind of identity relation – that of researcher and subject – our fifth principle attempts to capture not only this dynamic, but the entire multitude of ways in which identity exceeds the individual self. Because identity is inherently relational, it will always be partial, produced through contextually situated and ideologically informed configurations of self and other. Even seemingly coherent displays of identity, such as those that pose as deliberate and intentional, are reliant on both interactional and ideological constraints for their articulation:

> 5. Any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts.

Particular kinds of analysis will often bring to the forefront one of these aspects over others. However, the rich possibilities of the broad interdisciplinary research we include under the rubric of socio-cultural linguistics are most fully realised when multiple dimensions of identity are considered in a single analysis or when complementary analyses are brought together.

The principle stated above helps to resolve a central and long-standing issue regarding research on identity: the extent to which it is understood as relying on agency. From the perspective of an interactional approach to identity, the role of agency becomes problematic only when it is conceptualised as located within an individual rational subject who consciously authors his identity without structural constraints. (Our gendered pronoun choice here is quite deliberate and corresponds to the fact that male subjectivity was taken as unmarked by many scholars in earlier generations.) Numerous strands of social theory from Marxism to poststructuralism have rightly critiqued this notion of agency, but the litany of dubious qualities associated with the autonomous subject now functions more as caricature than critique of how agency is currently understood. Indeed, current researchers, particularly within socio-cultural linguistics, have found ways of theorising agency that circumvent the dangers identified by critics while exploiting its utility for work on identity. Socio-cultural linguists are generally not concerned with calibrating the degree of autonomy or intentionality in any given act; rather, agency is more productively viewed as the accomplishment of social action (cf. Ahearn 2001). This way of thinking about agency is vital to any discipline that wants to consider the full complexity of social subjects alongside the larger power structures that constrain them. But it is especially important to socio-cultural linguistics, for the very use of language is itself an act of agency (Duranti 2004). Under this definition, identity is one kind of social action that agency can accomplish.

Such a definition of agency does not require that social action be intentional, but it allows for that possibility; habitual actions accomplished below the level of conscious awareness act upon the world no less than those carried out deliberately. Likewise, agency may be the result of individual action, but it may also be distributed among several social actors and hence intersubjective. The phenomenon of what could be called distributed agency, though not as well documented as that of distributed cognition (Hutchins 1995), has begun to receive attention in some areas of socio-cultural linguistics, often under the label of *joint activity* or *co-construction*. Finally, agency may be ascribed through the perceptions and representations of others or assigned through ideologies and social structures. As we have emphasised throughout this chapter, it is not a matter of choosing one of these aspects of identity over others, but of considering how some or all of them may potentially work with and against one another in discourse.

The interactional view that we take here has the added benefit of undoing the false dichotomy between structure and agency that has long plagued social theory (see the discussion in Ahearn 2001). On the one hand, it is only through discursive interaction that large-scale social structures come into being; on the other hand, even the most mundane of everyday conversations are impinged upon by ideological and material constructs that produce relations of power. Thus both structure and agency are intertwined as components of micro as well as macro articulations of identity.

7. Conclusion

Different research traditions within socio-cultural linguistics have particular strengths in analysing the varied dimensions of identity outlined in this chapter. The method of analysis selected by the researcher makes salient which aspect of identity comes into view, and such 'partial accounts' contribute to the broader understanding of identity that

we advocate here. Although these lines of research have often remained separate from one another, the combination of their diverse theoretical and methodological strengths – including the microanalysis of conversation, the macroanalysis of ideological processes, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of linguistic structures, and the ethnographic focus on local cultural practices and social groupings – calls attention to the fact that identity in all its complexity can never be contained within a single analysis. For this reason, it is necessary to conceive of socio-cultural linguistics broadly and inclusively.

The five principles proposed here – Emergence, Positionality, Indexicality, Relationality and Partialness – represent the varied ways in which different kinds of scholars currently approach the question of identity. Even researchers whose primary goals lie elsewhere can contribute to this project by providing sophisticated conceptualisations of how human dynamics unfold in discourse, along with rigorous analytic tools for discovering how such processes work. While identity has been a widely circulating notion in socio-cultural linguistic research for some time, few scholars have explicitly theorised the concept. The present article offers one way of understanding this body of work by anchoring identity in interaction. By positing, in keeping with recent scholarship, that identity is emergent in discourse and does not precede it, we are able to locate identity as an intersubjectively achieved social and cultural phenomenon. This discursive approach further allows us to incorporate within identity not only the broad sociological categories most commonly associated with the concept, but also more local positionings, both ethnographic and interactional. The linguistic resources that indexically produce identity at all these levels are therefore necessarily broad and flexible, including labels, implicatures, stances, styles and entire languages and varieties. Because these tools are put to use in interaction, the process of identity construction does not reside within the individual but in intersubjective relations of sameness and difference, realness and fakeness, power and disempowerment. Finally, by theorising agency as a phenomenon broader than simply individualistic and deliberate action, we are able to call attention to the myriad ways that identity comes into being, from habitual practice to interactional negotiation to representations and ideologies.

It is no overstatement to assert that the age of identity is upon us, not only in socio-cultural linguistics but also in the human and social sciences more generally. Scholars of language use are particularly well equipped to provide an empirically viable account of the complexities of identity as a social, cultural and – most fundamentally – interactional phenomenon. The recognition of the loose coalition of approaches that we call socio-cultural linguistics is a necessary step in advancing this goal, for it is only by understanding our diverse theories and methods as complementary, not competing, that we can meaningfully interpret this crucial dimension of contemporary social life.

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to think more deeply about the interactional grounding of identity. We also thank the editors for encouraging us to include our work in this volume. Naturally, we alone are responsible for any remaining weaknesses.

Notes

1. This chapter is an abbreviated and slightly revised version of Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Although due to space limitations we are unable to include data examples and comprehensive references, it is important to note that the theoretical framework we present here rests on the foundation of a wide range of empirical studies, the insights of which it builds upon.
2. The term *sociolinguistics* sometimes carries this referential range, but for many scholars it has a narrower reference. *Socio-cultural linguistics* has the virtue of being less encumbered with a particular history of use.
3. We take the term *distinction* from Pierre Bourdieu (1984), whose own conceptualisation of it is concerned with the production of social-class difference by members of the bourgeoisie. We broaden its reference to include any process of social differentiation.

3

Locating Language in Identity

Barbara Johnstone

1. Introduction

How do linguistic forms and patterns come to be associated with identities? What is it ab the social practice we call language that enables linguistic forms to point to 'social meanir like identity without necessarily referring to them? This chapter explores these question describe how links between forms and social meanings are made, often fleetingly, in inter tion and how such links can sometimes stabilise and coalesce into styles of discourse as ciated with identities. In the process, I discuss four key concepts: *indexicality*, *reflexiv metapragmatics* and *enregisterment*. I first show how the concept of indexicality helps acco for the way in which linguistic forms and social meanings are related (section 2). In sect 3, I discuss reflexivity and metapragmatics, the general and more specific mechanisms t allow indexical relationships to be created. Section 4 sketches how indexical links betw form and social meaning can stabilise, becoming reusable and accreting into sets of li sometimes called styles. For this, I draw on the concept of enregisterment.

My exposition of these concepts follows current thought in sociolinguistics and l guistic anthropology, and readers of this chapter should come to be able to use the ter the way many students of language and identity use them. However, I end the chapt in section 5, with a critique of this way of thinking about meaning, suggesting that if take the ideas of indexicality, reflexivity, metapragmatics and enregisterment seriously should be drawn to a way of thinking about language that does not distinguish 'social' 'pragmatic' meaning from meaning of any other sort.

2. Meaning and indexicality

For most of its history, linguistics has focused on denotation, or the relationship betwe linguistic signs and things in the world. From the point of view of denotation, it has typ cally been thought that the meaning of a sentence can be recovered by parsing its stru ture and looking up its words in a mental dictionary. This level of meaning is thought n to vary across contexts; a sentence means the same thing, on this abstract level, no matt who utters it, in what situation.