Truth and Intentionality:
An Ethnographic Critique

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Questions of intentionality and truth are constant worries in the daily work of constructing hypotheses about the intellectual focus and social behavior of the people ethnographers study. The very process of doing ethnography often implies asking ourselves and others questions regarding possible motivations, beliefs, explanations, and consequences of actions. It is around notions of truth and intentionality, and their relation to responsibility, that we are likely to "feel different" from the people we live with and study. And it is through the discussion of these dimensions that we come to define the uniqueness of others' ways of being-in-the-world. When we look for traces of these interpretive processes in anthropological writings, however, we find little information or discussion. Ethnographies rarely give us the amount of detail needed to assess exactly *how* truth was defined, agency represented, intentions taken into consideration, or responsibilities assessed. At best, we are given summaries of some of these processes, but—as lamented by dialogical anthropologists (cf. Tedlock 1983) and cognitive anthropologists (cf. Sperber 1985)—the inferential processes remain hidden, and the data on which generalizations are based are not available for scrutiny. At the same time, such analytical concepts as truth, interpretation, and intentionality are hardly discussed in the ethnographic literature. The relationship between people, their thoughts, and their actions is a major topic of ethnographic description, but anthropologists tend to avoid philosophical discussions about such relationships. Confronted with what they consider too abstract and culturally deprived characterizations of human thought and human action, most ethnographers tend to stay away from debates about philosophy of mind or philosophy of language. Thus, for instance, the enthusiasm with which many anthropologists greeted the publication of Austin's (1962) work on speech as social action faded in the face of subsequent failure by contemporary philosophers of language to engage in the analysis of socioculturally situated speech exchanges and by the anthropologists' reluctance to extend their discussions to philosophical debates in the humanities or in the cognitive sciences. The more recent interest among cultural and linguistic anthropologists in Vygotsky's (1978) work on the social origins of cognitive processes

and in Bakhtin's (1981) insights into dialogic genres is doomed to have the same fate, unless we take up the challenge to address explicitly some of the theoretical and methodological issues raised by these theorists, as well as by other scholars interested in mind, language, and culture—not as disconnected realms of investigation, but as interconnected, mutually defining creations of willful historical subjects whose individual actions are routinely interpreted and assessed vis-á-vis community standards and expectations.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I attempt to begin rethinking here two very basic and essential notions in the study of human actions and their interpretation: truth and intentionality. Before engaging in such a critique, we must recognize that the rethinking of notions like truth and intentionality might not have come about without some other rethinkings in anthropology. In the last decade, the very practice of ethnography, the building block of the entire discipline, has been deconstructed. Articles, monographs, and collections on the process of observing, participating, taking field notes, writing them up, and then using them blossomed in this climate (cf. Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; DeVita 1990; Rabinow 1977; Sanjek 1990), while the practitioners tried to recover from an overdose of negative criticism that made some feel defensive and others simply alienated from their own discipline. We have witnessed an analytical revolution: the observers have tried to switch roles and play observed, the very process of analyzing others has become the object of inquiry, and the goals of the enterprise — an objective comparison of different ways of being "human"—have come under attack (R. Rosaldo 1989). Whether or not one agrees with the meta-statements and epistemological reflections brought about or inspired by this new wave of critical anthropology, at this point it is hard for anyone just to go back and do it the old way.

It is in the middle of such a crisis of anthropological thinking that linguists in anthropology departments have abandoned their own intellectual ghettos and moved beyond the stereotypes of themselves as teachers of phonemic analysis, collectors of lengthy native texts, or guardians of the still poorly understood Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. In the last two or three decades, the linguist's subjects have graduated from "informants" to talking social actors whose conversations/actions can be recorded in the same way in which their postures can be photographed. Although these techniques and the analytical procedures that accompany them do not make participants' verbal contributions fully transparent or objective, they certainly make them more open and available to further investigation. More important, by systematically recording native discourse, we find participants busy, not so much explaining themselves to the outsider-ethnographer, but—to borrow Moerman's (1988) apt metaphor—*talking their culture:* that is, making it happen for and with one another, through verbal interaction. Through one contribution after another, anthropological linguists have shown that a theory of culture can be expressed not only in the symbolic oppositions found in ritual performances or in the meta-statements about what counts and what doesn't count, or what is appro-

priate and what is not appropriate, but also in the words and turns exchanged among people while teasing, arguing, instructing, gossiping, joking, or telling—rather, co-telling—narratives of personal significance (Brenneis 1984; Briggs 1986; Haviland 1986, 1991).

It is in the context of these activities, among others, that notions of truth and intentionality have resurfaced. Thus, we need to reassess what is meant in saying that human actors are "intentional subjects" (Silverstein 1976) and that actors normally operate by assuming that others say the truth (Grice 1975).

Investigating the nature of implicit models of truth and intentionality shows that they are important and recurrent concepts and that their use and relevance vary across contexts and media. From the empirical investigation of their sociocultural construction, truth and intentionality emerge as interactive properties of complex systems that include, or must interface with, socioeconomic as well as cultural (e.g., ethical) dimensions of human action. Because of such properties, their study necessitates the insights gained from ethnographically based cross-cultural analyses of human interaction and interpretive processes, in addition to the tools of philosophy and linguistics.

I will start my discussion by first showing that the notions of truth and intentionality are closely related in the Western philosophical tradition and that, in fact, they are in some cases interchangeable. The relatedness between these two concepts has much to do with the acceptance of the Cartesian dualism between mind and reality.

Truth and Intentionality: The Classic View

Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus.

—Aristotle

Aristotle used to say that the essential nature of truth is a correspondence between human judgment and things (or events).

As pointed out by Brentano (1966[1889]), Aristotle's definition of truth is not only found in the medieval doctrine that "veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus" (which can be roughly translated as "truth is the correspondence between an object
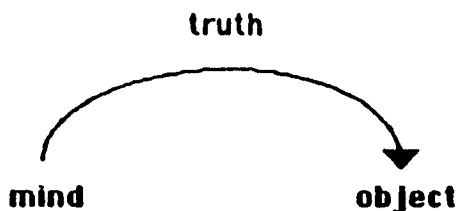

Figure 1. Medieval view of "truth."

and a state of mind"), but also in the Cartesian logic of Port Royal (1660) and in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason:*

> The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of knowledge with its object, is assumed as granted.... If truth consists in the agreement of knowledge with its object, that object must thereby be distinguished from other objects; for knowledge is false if it does not agree with the object to which it is related, even though it contains something which may be valid of other objects.[Kant 1965(1787): 97]

Figure 1 schematically represents this view of truth.

If we substitute the notion of judgment or mind (intellectus) with that of language or proposition, we find that the classic view of truth is the basis of the notion of interpretation in modern logic (although truth is a property of beliefs for the latter and more specifically a correspondence between propositions and something in the world).

In the logical tradition based on the work of the early Wittgenstein (1922), Carnap (1947), and others, to know the meaning of a proposition meant to know the conditions under which that proposition would be true (Wittgenstein 1922: 4.024). The same view, in a slightly different language, is found in contemporary "possible worlds" semantics. Thus, for instance, for Stalnaker, "A proposition is a function from possible worlds into truth-values"(1984:2). In this tradition, to understand a proposition means to be able to match the states of affairs represented by an utterance with their respective truth values in specific "worlds" or domains of discourse. Some propositions—representing what Leibniz called "necessary truth," Kant "analytic truth," and Carnap "logical truth"—are always true (and their negations always false). Other propositions—what Kant called "synthetic judgments"—are contingent on the actual state of the posited world. In this tradition, there are two sets of entities: (1) states of affairs (or worlds) and (2) their representations. For this approach to function, the two entities must be different and separable. For synthetic judgments, at least, the world of experience-reality must be independently identifiable.

The same Cartesian dualism between language (or mind) and reality is found in approaches, such as speech act theory, that have tried to go beyond truth-functional semantics (cf. Austin 1961, 1962; Searle 1969, 1983). The relation between the utterance and the world varies from one kind of speech act to another—just as Husserl's intentional acts vary—but the dualism between mind (this time a "speaking mind") and the world remains constant across all speech acts. Thus, for Searle (1976), assertions are speech acts in which the words must match the world (words-to-world direction of fit), and directives are speech acts in which the world must match the words (world-to-words direction of fit). The same logic pervades Searle's (1983) theory of intentionality, with the difference that, in this case, words are replaced by mental states. It is the interchangeability of mind and language, on the one hand, and truth and intentionality, on the other hand, that allows for the same reasoning to be readopted on each new occasion. Searle's theory of intention-

ality is, thus, not really an extension of his speech-act theory, given that the latter was itself an extension of earlier (classic) notions of truth. As shown in Figure 2, this more recent definition of intentionality is simply a different version of the classic view of truth, namely, a relation between mind *(intellectus)* and object *(res)* (cf. Figure 1).

There is, however, a difference between intentionality and truth as criteria for describing meaning. Intentionality implies a vast, perhaps infinite, set of relations between the mind and the object or situation, whereas truth, at least in the classic view, admits only two states: itself and its negation.

When we look at actual social interactions, such a binary view of truth may be useful as an approximation or starting hypothesis, and in some cases as a bare summary of some final resolution or judgment. It cannot, however, linearly account for people's actual interpretation of what is (or was) going on. Truth, at least in those cases in which we find people busy at defining it or searching for it, is typically a social matter, something that people must reckon with together. This is so not simply because conventions and public criteria are needed for the assessment of truth, but because truth itself becomes an instrument, a mediating concept living in particular practices, through which important social work gets done.

This, at least, is the kind of "truth" that ethnographers are more likely to find in their mingling with others, in their professional accounts and recounts of what happened last night or a hundred years ago, when our subjects' great-grandfathers (or someone of their generation) ruled the country, or the village. The truth discussed in public arenas, for instance, is debatable not only because there are parties representing and pushing for different versions of it, but also because it is through the confrontation of the different versions that a collectively acceptable reality is sought—one where divisions and differences will not be resolved forever, but can momentarily rest until the next social drama (in Turner's [1974] sense) breaks out. As Lindstrom (1992) has argued in his work about debates in Tanna (Vanuatu), truth is not just a goal in such public confrontation. It is a criterion through which power is both defined and claimed.
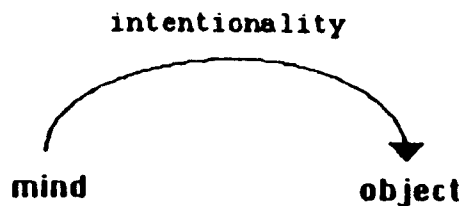

Figure 2. Contemporary view (e.g., Searle 1983) of "intentionality."

Two Classic Models of Interpretation

The classic view of truth and intentionality is connected to what I see as two general models of interpretation in Western philosophical thought: (1) the reconstructivist model and (2) the truth-functional model.

In the reconstructivist model, the interpretive process largely consists of reconstructing the mind-reality relation. In this perspective, language is something that can be used to gain access to the hidden reality of the mind (given the instrumental function of linguistic signs). Whether or not language also can have an effect on the speaker's ability to conceive the world in a certain way or to act upon it is left to particular practitioners to speculate. The theory simply says that the mind speaks through language and that language is also the best medium for representing mental states. Social actors understand each other's wants, beliefs, feelings, recollections, and so on through a set of conversational maxims (cf. Grice 1975), which instruct them on how to package information in utterances and on how to process what others say.

Message forms are in fact more or less imperfect instruments (for the speaker) and paths (for the interpreters) toward the goals set up by a language-independent intellect. It is always the individual mind (i.e., thoughts) that originates messages.

This view relies on language as a representational medium, very much like Wittgenstein's (1922) idea of the correspondence between parts of a proposition and parts of an event. To match a proposition with someone's mental state or representation of reality, we must believe that there is such a thing as a mental representation of any proposition and that relations can be drawn between subparts of such a representation and subparts of a proposition. Wittgenstein's way of building this argument in the *Tractatus* was to use the metaphor of thoughts as pictures.[1]

In the truth-functional model, interpretation consists of the assessment of the conditions under which there is a correspondence between representation (e.g., propositions) and the world (an object or event). This view, which is characteristic of the logical tradition associated with meaning as a function of truth-values, is at times tinted with behaviorism because of its tendency to focus on the words/world match rather than on subjective states of mind.[2]

As explicated in existential philosophy, and foremost by Heidegger's work on the being of everyday experience, or *Dasein* (Heidegger 1962, 1988 [1982]), what is particularly missing in both of these perspectives is a real sense of how minds and bodies participate in real-world experience, or simply a way of capturing what Husserl had already identified as the "life-world" *(Lebenswelt)*, what we now call the "context of everyday experience." As pointed out by Dreyfus (1991), the criticism of Cartesian dualism and its phenomenological extensions started by Heidegger's work in the 1920s has been echoed by contemporary praxis-oriented theorists who advocate units of analysis different from the individual subject of much analytical philosophy and cognitive psychology. Bourdieu's (1977) notion

of "habitus" and Giddens' (1984) use of "regionalization" and "locale" are good examples of these new approaches (cf. also Moore 1986).

What is lacking in the mind/reality dualism (and this includes practice theory as well) is the continuous ability that humans display to utilize and reassess a variety of natural and cultural resources around them not only to produce descriptions or induce actions, but also to sustain a complexity of perspectives that are much more typical of everyday cognition than we are led to believe in the linear models assumed in the classic view.

The contrast here is between a basic folk psychology that sees human behavior and hence social action as produced by mental beliefs and attitudes (Greenwood 1991) and a more experiential, interactional, and ultimately ambiguous notion of humanity (in the sense of "being-human")—a notion which is not reducible to individual states of mind and/or propositions about them.

In the rest of this article, I will address some of these problems, with particular emphasis on those that arise when we widen the context of inquiry and start thinking in terms of the larger human practices in which acts of intentionality and judgments of truth-value are embedded. My review of these problems is by no means exhaustive of the issues implied in past and current theories of truth and intentionality, and should thus be taken as my own, still approximate attempt to clarify, or in some cases simply bring together, a number of objections and proposals that have been made in the last decade or so within various fields concerned with what might be thought of as "interpretation-in practice." Linguistic anthropology is one such field, although not necessarily the only or most important one. As a way of organizing what is certainly a rather intricate set of issues, I will concentrate on four dimensions of the interpretive process that, in my opinion, are either ignored or underestimated in the reconstructivist and in the truth-functional models:

1. the medium (or code) through which symbolic acts (including representations) are performed;
2. the audience or co-participants in the interaction which produces symbolic acts;
3. the cultural context (including local theories) that gives meaning to the symbolic acts by locating them within larger or related activities and conceptions;
4. the actions constituted through symbolic mediation.

I will first discuss some of the limitations of the reconstructivist model of interpretation and then continue with a brief examination of some of the communicative and interactional dimensions usually ignored in the truth-functional model.

Problems with the Reconstructivist Model

There is no question that human activities are characterized by being goal oriented, and as such, they require the actors' ability to focus upon real or imaginary objects as they plan or try to act upon such objects. This is the original meaning of intentionality as introduced via Brentano and Husserl in 20th-century philosophy

and psychology. Knowledge implies objects of knowledge; to believe means to believe something; to perceive also means to perceive something; to want implies the existence of an object of want, and so on. Despite disagreement among different philosophical traditions as to the ontological status of the Subject (the one who perceives, knows, wants, and so on) and of the Object (the perceived, known, wanted, . . .), it is generally accepted that human beings are Subjects of intentional acts and that such intentional acts are the basis of human knowledge, human understanding, and, hence, human action *(praxis)* in the world. Historically, the recognition of intentional states or human intentionality has been important in establishing the relation between human actors and the world as quite different from the relation between things and events in the natural world (cf. Husserl 1970|1913|; Stalnaker 1984).

Our ability to think, imagine, believe, want, need, like, dislike, pretend, analyze, and so on, is instrumental for our capacity to propose new (complex) sets of relationships between ourselves and the environment (both natural and social). Depending on the tradition of study, however, this process has been discussed in rather different and sometimes limited terms. Regardless of the discipline—logical semantics, linguistics, psychology, or artificial intelligence—the behavioral and social sciences evidence a continuous attempt at isolating intentional acts or intentional states from the larger contexts and activities within which acts of intentionality are realized. This applies not only to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, but also to *praxis*-oriented thinkers. Not even Marx, it seems, could escape Western individualism in his romantic celebration of the human actor's ability to foresee and execute a goal:

> What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. [Marx 1967: 178]

It is hard to find here the Marxist notion of practice as both subjective and historical. Marx's rebellion against vulgar materialism strangely aligns him in this passage with those who explain human *praxis*, including interpretive processes, in terms of individual conscious acts (cf. Dumont 1977 for a critique of Marx's view of the individual). For cognitive psychology, the next step is often inevitable: the reduction of the sociocultural context in terms of those features that can be represented in the subject's mind and through individual cognitive categories. In this tradition, which characterizes most of so-called cognitive models of human action, the predominant starting point is the Western notion of person as unit of analysis. Grounded in the Western rationalist tradition, interpretation is understood as a process that focuses on an individual's mind as the meaning-making organism and on an individual's acts as the reflections or consequences of his or her states of mind (cf. Bilmes 1986 and Heritage 1990-91 for a criticism of this tradition from an ethnomethodological and conversation analytical viewpoint). It is in this context

that we must evaluate the fundamental role played by individuals' intentions in contemporary philosophical and psychological theories of communication. In speech act theory, for instance, to understand the meaning of someone's words means to understand his or her intentions as expressed through conventional signs (e.g., a common language) (Grice 1957; Searle 1969, 1983). For Dennett (1987), the assumption of intentionality in a system is the only way of making predictions and explaining that system's behavior in rational terms. Such a view is appealing for its apparent simplicity, but it runs into serious problems as soon as we leave the logic of Western folk psychology and take on a cross-cultural perspective.

The reconstructionist view of interpretation is but a corollary of the Western universalist perspective criticized by Dumont (1964, 1970, 1977). In the dominant Western ideology—deeply rooted in Descartes's dualism—the individual actor is the main agent of social institutions and the point of reference for a universal ethics. We can guess what is in another's mind because it is assumed that our beliefs, wants, and feelings, as well as notions (and practices) of good and evil, are the same as those of others. Putting aside for the moment the biological or sociobiological claims lurking in this assumption, we are left with the empirical question of whether such concepts are universal within non-universalist social systems (e.g., India's caste system), which ascribe to each individual his or her own specific place, duties, and rights, only as a member of a particular group. In such a system, according to Dumont, one cannot speak of universal duties and rights but only of specific ones, relative to a particular caste or state; ethics are relative, and interpretive practices are not as much dominated by the individual's needs, wants, and freedom of action. What we find in these situations is a special attention paid to the sociohistorical limitations and constraints that shape the meanings of actors' actions and hence, in a sense, fashion their subjective intentionality. One way of understanding the role of such constraints is to consider how individual intentionality is affected by the limits inherent in any system of representation, including natural languages.

Code-Related Limits

A basic question that must be faced by any theory of intentionality is the role of the individual vis-à-vis his or her community (or tradition) in intentional acts. Although it is perhaps easy to imagine or accept simple intentional acts (e.g., the intending of specific physical, or even imaginary, objects, such as seeing a sunset, feeling a warm wind, wishing a bigger portion of food), it is difficult to assess the extent to which an individual can have complex intentional states that are independent of their semiotic representation, whether verbal or otherwise. This is, in a sense, the old question of the "language of thought": can we engage in complex reasoning without language (or without *a* language)?

Structural linguistics has often emphasized how any semiotic code, including natural languages, imposes a system of choices—a finding that was at the basis of the structuralist program. Linguistic anthropologists in the first half of this century extended this view to claim that the very use of a code implies the acceptance of

the classificatory and conceptual system that gives meaning to each of its elements (cf. Sapir 1933; Whorf 1956). This implicit "contract" between users and code would take away control from the users and give it to tradition/culture, typically, but not necessarily, in the interest of a particular social order. There are, after all, alternative choices, acts of resistance to hegemonic codes, as demonstrated by sociolinguists' discovery of covert rules or preferences (cf. Trudgill 1974). The basic thesis here is that symbols, like tools—and hence both symbolic and material culture—can empower their users but at the same time place constraints on both forms of behaviors and forms of interpretation. This seemed obvious to the student of language and culture, Edward Sapir, as well as to the students of language and ideology, Vološinov and Bakhtin. Given the "web of meanings" (Geertz 1973) within which any of our words or actions must be interpreted, the concepts of "free will" or "free knowledge" are (at the very least) suspicious. In this vein, Sapir wrote:[3]

> It is strange how frequently one has the illusion of free knowledge, in the light of which one may manipulate conduct at will, only to discover in the test that one is being impelled by strict loyalty to forms of behavior that one can feel with the utmost nicety and can state only in the vaguest and most approximate fashion. [Sapir 1963 (1927): 549]

Similar considerations were made about the speaker's subjective intentions within historical materialistic views of the communicative process. It was suggested that intentions can be recognized (by the addressee[s] first and by the analyst later) only to the extent to which they conform to the expected or expectable intentions in the ongoing or reconstructed context. Thus, Vološinov wrote:

> The individual motives and intentions of a speaker can take meaningful effects only within limits imposed by current grammatical possibilities on the one hand, and within the limits of the conditions of socioverbal intercourse that predominate in his group on the other. . . . No matter what intentions the speaker means to carry out, no matter what errors he may commit, no matter how he analyzes forms or mixes them or combines them, he will not create a new pattern in language and he will not create a new tendency in socioverbal intercourse. His subjective intentions will bear a creative character only to the extent that there is something in them that coincides with tendencies in the socioverbal intercourse of speakers that are in process of formation, of generation; and these tendencies are dependent upon socioeconomic factors. [Vološinov 1973:143]

As a reformulation of linguistic determinism, these statements are suspicious and perhaps misleading (cf. Chomsky 1973; Cole and Scribner 1974; Hill 1988a). Syntactic, lexical, and morphological choices, per se, have been shown not to affect people's perception of the world. However, if we redefine "code" to be a dynamic set of discourse patterns, which includes but goes beyond what is usually meant by "grammar," we might start agreeing with Bakhtin and Vološinov that the code may indeed be an important factor in shaping intentions and/or possible meanings. Here

"code" must be seen as constituting specific interactions or sociocognitive activities. It is in this vein that language has been seen as an important socializing factor (cf. Ochs 1988; Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin 1990). A mother's or an older sibling's explicit interpretation of a child's attempt to communicate is but an instruction on what is a "possible message" in that context and on how that message fits within an "actual world" of social relations, kinship, and the like. Furthermore, worldwide recurrent use of verbal routines with young children (e.g., "say x" or "tell so-and-so that x," et cetera [cf. the various contributions in Schieffelin and Ochs 1986]) indicates specific areas where culturally valued messages and relationships are communicated and shaped through language use. Chomsky's insistence on the "creative uses" of language by the child is compelling when compared with Skinner's limited view of verbal behavior (Chomsky 1959), but becomes misleading when interpreted as a scientific objectification of a "born free" child who can go around producing any kind of grammatically well-formed utterances and conveying any kind of meaning he or she wishes to communicate (cf. Hymes 1972). Rather than thinking in terms of specific linguistic forms causing speakers to see the world in a certain way (namely, the "classic" Whorfian view), we should be thinking in terms of linguistic routines that inform the activities in which people are involved.

Borrowing a powerful term from Gibson's (1986) ecological approach to perception, it might be useful to think of semiotic codes as *systems of affordances*. For Gibson, any medium (e.g., air, water) interacts with an organism in such a way as to favor certain kinds of behaviors and disfavor others. Thus, for instance, air allows breathing for humans but not for fish; the soil affords walking by a heavy animal; and water affords swimming. The functions that the environment (or medium) allows for a given organism are called "affordances." In a similar vein, we could say that certain linguistic patterns, or their absence, may favor a particular set of actions and their related views. An example is provided by an exchange in Samoa that Duranti and Ochs (1986) call "the *mālō*-exchange." Such a verbal exchange supports (i.e., affords) the local Samoan view of an accomplishment as a cooperative endeavor in which the role of a sympathetic Other (called "*tapua'i*") must be recognized. Such an exchange is quite different from the way in which compliments are exchanged within English-speaking communities (Pomerantz 1978). What is striking about the Samoan *mālō*-exchange is that it defines the relationship between those who have "done" something and those who simply "recognize" their doing (through a *mālō!*) not only as complementary, but also as essential for the accomplishment to exist socially: the supporters say "*mālō!*" to the workers, and the workers say "*mālō fo'i!*" (congratulations also) back to the supporters. Each party recognizes the other party's "work," as expressed by the sharing of labor compensation between workers (or performers) and their supporters (*tapua'i*). The *mālō*-exchange, however, constitutes a cooperative notion of task accomplishment—as well as a notion of person and its social relations—only within a particular socioeconomic context. That is, the *mālō*-exchange maintains

the meaning illustrated above for the speakers to the extent that it is supported by a socioeconomic system in which goods and labor are exchanged on the basis of kin relations or on the basis of locally connected collective bodies (e.g., territorial-administrative units). With the intrusion of a capitalist-oriented cash economy and different (e.g., more anonymous) kinds of personal relationships, the same word, *mālō*, may signal a different type of relationship among participants. Thus, in contemporary Samoa, *mālō* is also being used as a greeting almost like the American-English "hi!" Furthermore, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (personal communication) has reported that in American Samoa, which is more influenced by Western economy and cultural values than Western Samoa, where I lived, a first *mālō* is often followed by a *fa'afetai* (thanks), which makes the exchange much more similar to compliments in our society. In all of these cases, the individual actor's motives or intentions in using certain expressions are largely irrelevant. What *mālō* really means nowadays in Samoan society is something that is largely outside of the control of the individual. Thus, for instance, one could not introduce special sincerity or warmth in a *mālō*-exchange.

Another way in which the code in its broader sense overrides subjective motivations is on those occasions in which a highly ritualized speech may reduce the role or relevance of individual intentions. This is the case in ritualized speech, including divination (cf. Du Bois 1987) and political oratory (Du Bois 1986), where the frequent use of stock phrases, common metaphors, and proverbs places the emphasis on a depersonalized stance of the speaker, who, as it were, renounces his or her own will and hides intentionality by using the words of the ancestors or those of "tradition" (Bloch 1975; Duranti 1992). Even in those cases in which the speaker seems to be speaking in the first person, there is a systematic ambiguity as to the social identity of the speaker; it is at this point that distinctions must be made between speaker, sender, addressor, and even "voice" (cf. Bakhtin 1981; Duranti 1985,1986; Firth 1975; Haviland 1991; Hymes 1972; Vološinov 1973).

The definitions and restrictions offered by the code in traditional oratory should not necessarily be seen as *forcing* the speaker to say what he or she does not mean; in fact, they can act as "liberating" devices. They allow the speaker to separate his or her social persona—or at least one of the personae—from the meaning and consequences of what is being said. They can stop him or her from the danger of communicating intentions that he or she could not or should not have expressed. This is also the role of traditional narratives, where certain themes (e.g., incest) may be brought out within the rubric "entertainment" instead of "sin" (Allen Johnson, personal communication).

Another important dimension for consideration here is the "discourse of intentionality" itself. In contemporary cognitive science, there is often an implicit identification of intentionality with consciously held goals. As pointed out by Giddens (1979), this identification is not even recognized in ordinary English usage, where "meaning or intending" to do something is considered different from doing something "purposefully." We must investigate the relationship between the

notion of intentionality and other, related notions. Within ethnomethodologically oriented studies, for instance, actors' moves are not judged in terms of their reconstructed intentional states but in terms of claims of "accountability" (Bilmes 1986; Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984; Moerman 1988). Intentionality and agency are closely connected in our common-sense notion of causation (e.g., *The man broke the glass*). But from the point of view of the claim made by the speaker, a statement involving causation (and canonical transitive clauses) may be better characterized as invoking responsibility for the referent of the subject in the sentence rather than intentionality (Duranti 1990a; Foster 1979).

In the study of legal rhetoric, it is now commonplace to emphasize the constitutive role of the language of the law through which rules are not simply invoked but emerge in the process of rationalizing certain kinds of decisions (cf. Brenneis 1988 for a discussion of the relevant literature). Any cursory examination of courts' rulings in matters of intentions, motives, and goals also shows that certain linguistic distinctions are constantly redrawn to fit the needs of a given class or of the State (cf. Kenny 1978). Part of the job performed by the courts, then, is that of semantic control over frequently used legal terms. Much of the struggle within juridico-political contexts is an overt struggle over the criteria through which individual intentions matter (Duranti 1988, McKellin 1990).

Audience Co-Participation

A number of both theoretical and empirically based contributions to the hermeneutics of texts have been reiterating the basic point that any act of speaking and its interpretation are partly constructed by the audience's response (Duranti and Brenneis 1986; Gadamer 1976; Goodwin 1981). This is related to the retrospective, typically post hoc, nature of any act of interpretation (cf. Wittgenstein 1953). Without others to carry on our messages, to complete them, expand them, revise them, we would not be able to communicate; ultimately, we would not be able to know what we are talking about. Current debates within the humanities and social sciences on the need to have usually repressed voices heard make sense within this perspective. The related proliferation of alternative, sometimes internally segregated fields—namely, feminist anthropology, cultural studies, ethnic perspectives—are precisely attempts at getting the way clear for certain groups to be able to "hear themselves," through their own ears, given that so much of what women and ethnic minorities say or write can be "taken away" from them simply by subjecting it to the mainstream, male, white, middle-class, dominating audience.

That the audience counts is of course a commonplace to those who have studied the details of everyday encounters. As demonstrated by conversation analysts (cf. Schegloff 1986), even the most simple routine (e.g., starting a telephone conversation) is based on a joint activity, which has some constraints but cannot be completely predicted, and thus must rely on both parties to cooperate toward a formulation that "works." Any of our words, phrases, and utterances, not to speak of larger units, contain several possible "next moves." The addressee is

coauthor not only when he or she joins in and helps us figure out what we "really" mean (e.g., when the addressee is a teacher, a therapist, or any kind of socially recognized "expert"), but also when he or she is not even visible or present. This is the "Internalized Other" of Mead's constructivist psychology (cf. Mead 1934; Mehan 1981), which can, in turn, surface as the "voices" expressed through direct, indirect, or quasi-direct speech (Bakhtin 1981; Vološinov 1973). The work of the linguist and discourse analyst in these cases is to look at the techniques used by speakers to index multiple, alternative audiences. Such devices as code-switching as well as prosodic features of utterances (cf. Blom and Gumperz 1972; Gumperz 1982, 1992) can convey important information about the primary audience of a given message (cf. Brenneis 1978). But what these different devices do should not be explained simply in terms of intended meaning. Some of them are rather like nets that are thrown out in the interactional sea to catch the fish that happens to be slow or unfortunate. What has been described as typical of African-American verbal dueling, where an utterance is not an insult until the recipient interprets it as such (cf. Kochman 1983; Labov 1972, Mitchell-Kernan 1972), may very well be the ideological recognition through the institution of a particular verbal genre— namely, "sounding"—of a practice that may explain a much wider range of interactions than we might be willing to accept (Morgan 1989). What we need is a model of communication that takes the emergent, interactive nature of the process into consideration while it captures at the same time the local, culture- (or even context-) specific techniques used to diffuse possible motives or open them to negotiation. In its negative definition, verbal communication could be seen as a series of constraints on the uncertainty of possible interpretations of the Subject's motives. When the audience is cooperative, one scarcely realizes the work that is being done to maintain the direction of talk within predictable boundaries. When the audience is less cooperative (e.g., legal and political arenas), uncertainty and ambiguity might have to be foregrounded, as is the case with verbal indirection (cf. Brenneis 1986).

Culture-Specific Constraints on Theories of Mind and Interpretation

The view of interpretation as a guessing game whereby one tries to find out what the speaker really thinks or wants is strongly grounded in the Western notion of person and the economic metaphors that govern our theories of communication (cf. Geertz 1983; Holquist 1983; M. Rosaldo 1982; Rossi-Landi 1973; Shore 1982). The belief that one can know what someone else is thinking or have access to his mental processes is not shared across cultures (cf. Duranti 1988; M. Rosaldo 1982; Rosen 1985; Schieffelin 1986). As mentioned earlier, the ability of reading other people's minds as the generalized method for correct interpretation is connected to the Western assumption of a universal ethics. Empirically speaking, interpretive strategies differ cross-culturally (or cross-contextually) and are closely tied to institutions. The meanings embedded in a family conversation need not be considered in a business meeting among colleagues. Cross-culturally, there seems to be

a difference between cultures that tend to focus on the subjective state of mind of the speaker (namely, the illocutionary force of utterances) and those that are more concerned with the consequences of one's talk (perlocutionary force) (cf. Duranti 1988).

Originally, Austin (1961) thought of the difference between the two types of acts as a question of conventionality, with the former but not the latter meeting the conventionality criterion. Thus, if I say that I can't take you to the movies and you decide that I don't like you, one should not speak of the "don't like you" message as part of what I "meant"; in other words, it is not part of the illocutionary force of my words. One of the problems with this view is that it does not take into consideration those cases in which certain consequences, not directly encoded in the message, are equally recognized by a culture—here meant as a network of interacting subjects—as potentially predictable and hence, in a sense, conventional. It also assumes that the relevant conventions in any given interaction are an a priori specifiable set. But this is not the case, given (1) the distributed nature of knowledge, whether of ritual or mundane behavior, and (2) the negotiated nature of human interaction, whereby rules and conventions are continuously reassessed and redrafted. Finally, it does not offer any solution for what Bogen (1987) has called the "problem of heterogeneity," that is, the problem of utterances that have different but equally acceptable interpretations according to the audience and conventions we take into consideration.

These issues also tie intentionality to responsibility. A good portion of legal and political debates center actually on issues of responsibility, and as such, they constitute a group's attempt at defining the factors relevant to making a given interpretation legitimate (cf. Gluckman 1972). This is a typical arena for power struggles and for exerting social control. Much of the work that is being done by those with power centers on the criteria for the decisions rather than on the specific "facts." If a group succeeds at making the criteria acceptable, the details of a crime or even the identity of the offender may be seen as a relatively unimportant matter. This possibility is both recognized and actualized in Samoan political arenas, where an orator may get in trouble for the actions of a chief (or a higher ranking official) if the orator did not act to prevent the chief from the wrongdoing or did not try to remedy the misconduct. It is not accidental, then, that the Samoan word for "meaning" *(uiga)* is the same as that for "deed, action." The local practice of interpretation is one in which the interpreters look at the actions and ignore the actor's intentions (Duranti 1988). As Shore (1982) pointed out in his discussion of Samoan ethos, it is consequences that matter more than motivations.

Multiplicity of Goals

Any utterance has potential or actual multiple goals. This multiplicity corresponds to a general underspecification of number and types of speech acts for any given utterance. This is particularly the case when we take time into consideration. In Gibson's (1986) terms, language affords reinterpretation or recontextualization.

Words are not linked once and for all to one specific situation. Thus, the very assignment of speech acts, the matching of certain locutions with their meanings, is but one contextually defined choice or section among a range of possibilities that cannot be specified completely in advance. This process of selection is itself embedded in systems of social relations and obligations. To take something as a compliment has consequences—and different ones for different people in different contexts. To engage in assigning intentionality means to engage in the economy of power relations in a given community. The fact that the analysts seem immune to the effects or consequences of their interpretations has to do with the common physical, geographical, and institutional distance between researchers and their subjects. When the subjects are able to read and react to the anthropologists' descriptions, the metaphor of "neutral" or "objective" accounts becomes harder to maintain. In particular, it is difficult for anthropologists to predict certain uses or abuses of their work. In some cases, the sharing of information among well-meaning colleagues or between researchers and the funding institutions may prove damaging to the subjects. These ethical and political issues of fieldwork are part and parcel of the general property of multiplicity of goals and interpretations inherent in any semiotic activity.

The distinction drawn within speech act theory between illocutionary force (as produced by the intentions of the speaker) and perlocutionary force (as made evident by the consequences of the act, its impact on the addressee) is only a first step in trying to deal with some of these phenomena. Once we introduce time in the analysis, we realize that what gets called "perlocutionary" might only be what is not acceptable to a given party at a particular historical moment but what might later become part of the accepted and hence "intended" meaning. Not only is it difficult in many situations to say what a particular act is, but it is also possible that the ambiguity or vagueness of an act's pragmatic force may be routinely exploited by speakers, both consciously and unconsciously (see above). Usually speakers do not preface their assertions with performative verbs of the type found in such phrases as "I promise you," "I blame you," "I accuse you," and so on. This means that other aspects of the context must be called upon to make decisions about the truth value of such assertions as "You promised me!" or "You were accusing me!" But the necessary contextual factors are not a discrete number. Each party may pull out the ones that can be used to his or her advantage.

Knowledge and expectations by the addressee(s) as well as the nature of the encounter are crucial features in determining the kind of act that is being performed. Take for instance the difference between an accusation and a complaint. At first, the former seems to imply not only a violation of a social code, but also the expectation of some legally or otherwise induced consequences (for instance, a payment), whereas the latter does not seem to have the same implications. Concentrating on the speaker's attitude or the responsibilities by the party about whom the accusation or complaint is being made provides, however, a very limited view of the factors that play a part in the distinction. Many other elements are potentially

at work. The social identity of the speaker and his or her rights, for example, are also very important. The question as to whether a given utterance is a complaint or an accusation cannot be resolved once and for all at the time of speaking: part of the reason for speaking such an utterance might be precisely the testing of the very conditions that would make it into an accusation (as opposed to a complaint). This is what routinely happens in political contexts. It is thus the dual nature of speech, and the duality of social structure in general (Giddens 1979), that deprives academic speculations about speech act types of much of their value. Bringing in cultural expectations and contextual constraints helps give a first reading of the ongoing interpretation at time x, but only if we remember to tie such interpretation to the issue of responsibility, by both the participants (first level) and the observers (second level).

Problems with the Truth-Functional Model

The very foundations of logical semantics in its modern sense—that is, starting at least from Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1970 [1913]) and all the way through Carnap and Montague—are based on the distinction between the apodictic properties of relations between expressions, given some hypothetical truth-values, and the actual states of affairs represented by those expressions. It was very important for the early Husserl to define "pure logic" as the "Ur"-Science that does not have to deal with the "experiential content" of the life-world—in this, Husserl follows Kant (see below). The notion of meaning as the conditions under which a given expression can be said to be true does not change the original emphasis of modern logic on abstract, universal properties of logical relations (negation, implication, et cetera) and the fundamental lack of interest in the actual states of affairs represented by the propositions whose truth-values and logical relations are being evaluated. This distinction is represented in Carnap's work with the terms *logically true/false* and *factually true/false*. This tradition is inherently *universalistic* in its search for context-independent properties of propositions (and relations among them).

Again, this exclusive interest in the "formal" properties of meaningful propositions can be traced back to Kant, who wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason:*

> Now a general criterion of truth must be such as would be valid in each and every instance of knowledge, however their objects may vary. It is obvious however that such a criterion [being general] cannot take account of the [varying] content of knowledge (relation to its [specific] object). But since truth concerns just this very content, it is quite impossible, and indeed absurd, to ask for a general test of the truth of such content. A sufficient and at the same time general criterion of truth cannot possibly be given ... But, on the other hand, as regards knowledge in respect to its mere form (leaving aside all content), it is evident that logic, in so far as it expounds the universal and necessary rules of the understanding, must in these rules furnish criteria of truth. Whatever contradicts these rules is false. [Kant 1965 (1787):97–98]

It is this almost exclusive concern with the formal properties of the relation between language (whether formal or natural) and reality that has been criticized as insufficient for representing the complexity of meanings that characterizes daily uses of natural languages and other symbolic systems in social life. Certainly, logical theorems and proofs give us one of the "technologies" through which truth and hence forms of interpretation become possible, but we know now that actual interactions will reveal more subtle domains of signification, for which we need access to more dynamic notions and models.[4]

There are many cases in the linguistic and philosophical literature of aspects of meaning that cannot be accounted for or reduced to truth-functional semantics (cf. Barwise and Perry 1983; Bechtel 1988; Fodor 1977; Levinson 1983; Lyons 1977). Rather than trying to provide a summary of such arguments, I will here concentrate on those cases in which the contrast between truth and other dimensions of the interpretive process may be particularly relevant for cross-cultural analysis.

Truth and Medium

The truth-functional view of interpretation is very much based on linguistic signs as the paramount semiotic medium and on the referential/denotative function of language as the paramount function of speaking (or writing). When we move to other media, we realize that the same standards cannot be applied. This is immediately obvious in the visual arts. In what sense is an impressionist painting "true"? True of what? More generally, when we enter the realm of artistic representation or artistic performance, the ability of a given piece to look or sound "true" depends not simply on its ability to match reality, but on what we might call "a stylistics of effective distortion." This is shared by cubist art, Polynesian carvings, and story-telling. The narrator who is too preoccupied with fidelity of representation runs the risk of losing an audience. On the other hand, we should not be tempted to give too much emphasis to what Jakobson (1960) called the "poetic function" of speech per se. Often in quite transparent fashion, what are being presented as local notions of beauty or artistic performance are themselves imbued with a set of assumptions about the social order. In these cases, contingent facts are either ignored or made to "fit" the model—and certain "truths" publicly and overtly suppressed—not simply because they violate aesthetic standards, but also because they are a threat to the system (cf. Duranti 1992). As suggested by Bloch (1975) some time ago, the use of formalized language in political oratory may indeed be a strategy to reaffirm the status quo.

On the other hand, societies, contexts, and individuals vary in the extent to which they will surrender to a genre and its metaphors. The use of metacommunicative devices is one resource for reframing the ongoing interaction and its impact vis-à-vis a tradition. In some cases, the code conventions (e.g., genre) may have to be changed before confronting the audience with "truths" of a different kind from those typically celebrated in ceremonial speeches (cf. Duranti 1992). Within Polynesia, for example, a major difference between *fono* in contemporary Samoa

and contemporary Tonga is that, whereas the Samoan *fono* is an arena for discussion and confrontation of opinions (Duranti 1981a, 1981b, 1990b), the Tongan *fono* is a context where decisions previously made are publicly announced and no dissent is voiced (E. Olson and S. Philips, personal communication). When we look carefully at the discourse patterns within the Samoan *fono* we find that the discussion part of the meeting is bracketed from the rest by conventional announcements of the type "let us chat now" *(kākou kalakalagoa)*, which index the partial abandonment of the verbal etiquette associated with ceremonial speech making. What in one society is constituted by one type of event may in another society be only one activity within a larger and more complex event.

The fact that certain properties of the medium, code, or genre may favor or disfavor the expression of certain truths or messages (feelings, social conflicts) is routinely experienced when we compare communication between parties across media. In contemporary Western technological culture, for instance, the introduction of electronic mail has produced a new form of communication that defies definition as either regular mail or non-real time "face-to-face-like" communication. One of the striking properties of the medium-genre "electronic message" is the facility with which new users are able to express through it personal feelings and sometimes strong opinions that would have been inappropriate or unusual in other, more traditional media genres (such as face-to-face conversation or a written letter). If we look at this from the point of view of "telling" or "seeing the truth," we must admit the possibility of a medium being more "transparent" than others. In Gibson's terms, we would say that electronic mail affords different message contents.

Truth and Affect

The question of how we can possibly know what others are thinking or feeling (the question of "Other Minds") has occupied philosophers for a long time (cf. Buford 1970). It is with respect to the expression of emotions and affect that truth-values seem to be especially weak in their descriptive-interpretive functions. How can we possibly know under which conditions a person is really feeling sad or happy or angry? If the issue of internalist versus externalist accounts resurfaces in these discussions, it is in these discussions as well that cross-cultural and cross-contextual differences can be expected.

One dimension invoked often in the anthropological literature is the way in which the expression of emotions indexes not so much, or not simply, "states of mind," but social relationships and the cultural values attached to them (cf. Lutz and White 1986). Truth is, in these cases of emotion-talk, either irrelevant or just *one* of the elements against which an appropriate interpretation must be posited. It is in these contexts that speakers are likely to feel either constrained or relieved by the limitations imposed by the code they are using. Again, cross-cultural and cross-contextual differences abound. The extent to which people are expected to be "original" in their expression of sorrow is highly variable. The conventionality

of giving others the job of conveying our emotional responses to a given event (birth, death, marriage, et cetera), whether through ritual wailing, traditional oratory or the exchange of material goods, forces us to rethink the very object of the intentional act. If the goal (or one of the main goals) of the performed acts is to reaffirm social alliances, for instance, rather than to mourn the dead or to be joyful about the newborn or the newlyweds, the sincerity of the performer is irrelevant, especially when the performer is just the messenger.

These cases can be dismissed by assuming a standard, unmarked personal commitment to truth to be characteristic of everyday interaction and conversation. Such a standard would be momentarily lifted on special occasions, including public speech making. This is in fact Bloch's (1975) position. On the other hand, in both public and private arenas, emotional outbursts and confrontations are often about questions of truth. In political debates as well as in arguments within more domestic contexts (such as the family), there is a considerable discursive activity dedicated to finding or providing evidence for a given event or position. In these contexts, the distinction between truth and authority or truth and responsibility becomes more and more difficult to draw. As recently pointed out by John Haviland (1987, 1989), it is not by accident then that the same linguistic devices used for the expression of *evidence* vis-à-vis a given assertion are also used to provide *moral* assessment: "Evidentials," he writes, "encode not only what a speaker knows or how he knows it; but also what an addressee can be taken to know, or *should* know, or apparently (perhaps culpably) *fails* to know" (Haviland 1987).

This point links the discussion of truth with an earlier point I made about intentions: in both cases, we are forced to expand the communication model assumed in the classic treatment of intentionality and truth. We cannot simply talk, as the classical model does, about Speaker, Message, and Referent. The potential or actual role played by the audience in constructing a sequence of interaction (cf. Goodwin and Goodwin 1987, 1992) is essential for explaining the multifunction-ality of such linguistic devices as evidentials, dubitative forms, hedges, affect particles, and so on. What speakers seem to be doing in these cases is to *exploit* truth rather than to use it as the ultimate criterion for interpretation. When we look at verbal interactions that deal with controversial issues (whether in gossip or in court), we realize that affect is built in the message precisely by the manipulation of the relative epistemic status of what is being said (cf. Besnier 1990, in press; Haviland 1977; Ochs and Schieffelin 1989). Speakers may hint at possible (embar-rassing, threatening, unexpected) truths. They may describe a world or a situation that is only half-true or characters that are only half-real. The audience is often expected to do the rest of the job by either accepting or denouncing the potential descriptions of the world more or less vaguely suggested—but not necessarily asserted—by the speaker. The goal in everyday interaction is not simply to move the audience, as suggested by traditional rhetoric, but to move *with* the audience, that is, to make the audience at least partly responsible for what is being asserted or implied. Sometimes the speaker's political or moral success is judged not so

much on one's ability to make the audience see the truth, as on one's skills in making truth irrelevant.

Another dimension closely related to affect is the relative position or attitude displayed or hinted at by a social actor in performing a given act (whether verbal or otherwise)—what some authors call "stance" (cf. Biber 1988; Biber and Finegan 1989). Reported speech—in combination with other grammatical devices, such as tense/aspect, impersonal forms, voice quality, and so on—is a mechanism commonly used for embedding someone's voice (even one's own) within the talk of another (cf. Besnier in press; Hill 1985; Vološinov 1973). The way in which a given speech act is attributed to someone else is part of the politics of everyday speaking, and it is in this realm that the framing of information is shown to be closely associated with the assignment of responsibility. Languages are particularly rich in the sets of devices that they offer for expressing different shades of responsibility (Weber 1986).

Truth and Metacommunication

When participants tell one another or infer what is "really" going on, they must be able to separate between different levels of communication.

In modern symbolic logic, this ability is talked about in terms of the distinction between an "object language" and a "meta-language" (Tarski 1956: 167)—that is, a language used to talk about another language. This distinction is crucial for assigning truth-values. Bateson's work on metacommunication and interpretive frames (Bateson 1972) recontextualized this distinction—in particular Russell and Whitehead's theory of logical types and their solution of the liar paradox—and made it relevant to communication theory in general. Bateson pointed out that the ability to communicate at different levels is necessary to engage in such complex activities as play or criticism. Not only do we communicate messages to one another, but we also communicate how to take or interpret those messages. In some cases, these different levels can be used with damaging results. Thus, according to Bateson, the conflicting messages provided by a mother who says "I love you" to her child and then moves away when the child gets close to her may even favor, in some cases, the development of schizophrenia.

Inspired by Bateson's work—and also by Goffman's (1974, 1981) repeated attempts to deal with these issues—contemporary anthropological linguists have been studying the uses and functions of metacommunicative devices in everyday interaction, in general, and in socialization contexts, in particular (cf. Briggs 1986; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). One of the recurrent points in this body of literature is the distinction between a basic, propositional, or even "literal" meaning and a set of "additional" devices used to refine or modify it. Gumperz's (1982, 1992) notion of "contextualization cue" covers a large class of linguistic resources used by speakers for communicating the appropriate interpretation of a given speech act; among such resources are intonation, emphasis, tempo, rhythm, lexical choices, and so on. One of the things to which this work alerts us is the ability of speakers

both to give and take back a message or some aspects of it. The study of contextualization cues also illustrates the hidden mechanisms through which participants are judged competent in a given social encounter. Thus, Gumperz's work on "crosstalk" makes some strong hypotheses on sources of misunderstanding, between participants with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

A question that still remains to be answered is "how do we know, in any given case, what is used to contextualize what?" In other words, how do we decide what constitutes the "meta-level"? Are there linguistic (and non-linguistic) mechanisms that always index the framing of talk (e.g., prosodic feature, markers of reported speech)? Or is it the case instead that anything can be a contextualization cue for anything else? How can we decide exactly and exhaustively where, in a given text, the participants are telling one another that what they are doing is serious or that it is playful? The various parts of the message are not always ready-made for the participants (or for the observer) to be picked up separately. Precisely because we need to rely on the conventionality of certain choices, we must also realize that the acceptance of a given act or part of an act as the framing (ground) for another (figure) is itself an act that may be questioned or rejected (Goodwin and Duranti 1992). We should be asking ourselves whether, for instance, we should be influenced by orthographic conventions in privileging certain aspects of language (e.g., the production of strings of recognizable sounds) as primary and certain other aspects typically nonsegmental (e.g., prosody) or nonverbal (e.g., body postures) as secondary. Eventually, we might have to face the issue of power implicit in these analytic choices. To frame something as the foreground and something else as the background may indeed be an act of authority.

Truth and Action

Within philosophy, Austin (1961, 1962) pointed out that the truth-functional view of interpretation can be used for a limited set of utterances, namely, those whose function is to make assertions, to describe a given event or state of affairs (this set of utterances or speech acts is variously called "statements," "representatives," "assertives," "constatives"). But there are utterances, such as commands, promises, requests, declarations, apologies, and so forth, for which truth seems the wrong dimension for their interpretation. If someone gives a command—"I order you to stop!"—it cannot be evaluated in terms of truth, as shown by the fact that one cannot reply, "That's false" (or "That's true") (cf. Levinson 1983). The same is the case for requests ("Give me a quarter") or declarations ("You're fired!"). For this reason, Austin proposed to replace truth-conditions with "felicity conditions," and the notions of "statement" and "saying" with the notions of "act" and "doing." Words do not simply describe the world, they also change it or (in phenomenological terms) constitute it. Does this mean that truth ceases to be important or relevant for a theory of interpretation? Not necessarily. Rather, what we learn from looking at actual language use is that truth is often embedded in, or functional with respect to, other dimensions of human understanding and human

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praxis. After all, arguments—whether public or familial—are often centered on issues of truth (cf. Duranti 1990b; Haviland 1989; Hill in press; Lindstrom 1992). But the truth of social action has a different flavor from the truth of logical connectives. In social life, truth cannot be taken as a given, either as a static property of objects or events or as a property of their relations. Rather, it must be thought of as a process, which requires action to be realized. This is a view that seemed natural to pragmatists such as William James, who wrote that "truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its veridity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-fication." (1963 [1910]:89)

A similar conception is also common in sociocultural anthropology. The process whereby members of a given society produce acceptable versions of reality is embedded in local theories of what constitutes an acceptable account and who is entitled to tell the facts and assess their value and consequences (cf. Lindstrom 1992). As Foucault (1973, 1980, 1989) reminded us, the definition of truth— whether in the laboratory or in the courts—is part of the local technology of power, and as such, is part of the battlefield where the social system is tested. If words are deeds, their combination in meaningful ensembles is but an attempt to both portray and shape the world. It is not by accident that the Austinian view of words as deeds was pre-announced in the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (see the discussion of language as action in *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* [1935]). Ethnographers are constantly faced with the problem of finding a reality that matches the linguistic descriptions members of a given culture provide (whether willingly or inadvertently). This discovery process often forces us to look beyond the obvious. Thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) are the ethnographer's attempts to reconstruct truths that can make sense in several worlds at the same time (or in the same world at different times).

Conclusions

In this article, I have tried to show that two of the most fundamental notions of human understanding as defined in the Western philosophical tradition, namely, intentionality and truth, are not only closely connected to one another, but they are also constructed on a range of assumptions about key communicative and interactional dimensions that are largely left unanalyzed. Such dimensions include the interface among different elements of the communicative exchange (namely, audience, medium, and code), the concept of person and the role of the individual vis-à-vis community/tradition/audience, local theories of interpretation as extensions of local theories of cooperative activities and local practices of signification and interpretation, and, finally, the local economy of language use within the available resources for the representation of knowledge and power. When we apply a minimum of intellectual scrutiny to such concepts, we realize that they cannot be dealt with in the ways chosen by the "classic theorists." In particular, I have raised a number of questions regarding the adequacy of current and not-so-current uses of intentionality and truth as exclusive, or at least fundamental, interpretive criteria.

My discussion has been arbitrarily organized around four dimensions or elements of interpretive processes, namely (1) the medium (or code) through which representations are constituted; (2) the co-participants (e.g., audience) in the performance/interaction; (3) the cultural context; and (4) the actions constituted through representation. I suggested that the very notion of "code" needs to be reconsidered as to allow for the recurrent complexity documented in recent studies of language use and language socialization. The specific properties of the code (or medium) meant as a dynamic set of discourse patterns and strategies *afford* (in Gibson's sense) particular intentional states and matchings between encoded messages and possible (socioeconomic) worlds. Different media or different genres of speaking may also be imbued with different truths or different ways of accessing information about the world. A question that would be interesting to pursue is the extent to which different media/codes/genres carry within them, in a fossilized form, as it were, certain collective or private intentions and truths. In future models, the long dominant almost exclusive interest in the speaker's point of view must be replaced with a thorough understanding of the coordinated role played by the addressee or audience in any kind of communicative act. One of the devices through which contingent cultural interpretations are made possible is through the embedding of certain activities within larger ones and through the interpenetration (Cicourel 1992; Leach 1972) or intertextuality (Kristeva 1986) of speech genres and speech activities (namely, the ability of one symbolic form or message to index another form or message in a different spatio-temporal domain). The very distinction between foreground and background information, for instance, is a potential weapon in acts of social struggle whereby a given version of reality is complemented or threatened by another.

Finally, the multiplicity of goals typical of any semiotic act, when matched with co-occurring codes and embedded in larger activities, argues for a different status of intentionality and truth across sociocultural domains (e.g., domestic, political, ritual, et cetera). If any act of representation is a social act, the assignment of intentionality and the assessment of the truth-value of a given expression are themselves processes that need to be understood for their social as well as their cognitive properties. Ethnographers seem to be in a special position for providing major contributions in this area. At the same time, their observations must be empirically grounded by means of a careful analysis of discourse patterns as produced by social actors in the course of everyday interaction.

Notes

Bogen, who, through a careful reading of an earlier draft, tried to improve my understanding of logical theory.

1. Here are some relevant quotes from Wittgenstein (1922):

"2.14 What constitutes a picture is that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way."

"2.161 There must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all."

"2.223 In order to tell whether a picture is true or false we must compare it with reality."

"3 A logical picture of facts is a thought."

2. These two views, the reconstructivist and the truth-functional, intersect or overlap (depending on the author in question) with two other conceptions of meaning which we could call the *internalist* and the *externalist*. For the reconstructivists, meaning tends to be thought of as internal (that is, "in the head"), whereas for the truth-functional folks, meaning is usually seen as external, in people's behavior or in the environment (It is not by accident that one of the logicians' favored examples was "snow is white" and not "I feel sad"). There are, of course, scholars who do not fit in either camp (e.g., Austin, the later Wittgenstein, Putnam, and others), but the internalist versus externalist debate is still relevant within philosophical and cognitive silence circles.

3. I should point out here that this is only *one* side of Sapir's thought on such matters, as discussed by Hill (1988b).

4. It is worthwhile to notice here that at least two major philosophical figures of the 20th century who were responsible for the adoption of modern logic in semantic theories—namely, Edmund Husserl and Ludwig Wittgenstein—underwent major personal, intellectual, and historical "crises" after which they reconsidered, and in some cases radically altered, some of their earlier convictions on the use and advantages of logic (or mathematics) for the representation of human experience.

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