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Reporting, capturing and voicing speech amongst the Araweté[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses instances in which another person's speech is made one's own. Starting with the presentation of reported speech practices in daily conversations, then moving to semi-ritual retellings, speech play and the capture of another's voice by force, it finally brings examples of voicing nonhumans in ritual discourse. Drawing on studies of reported speech, voicing and capture in Amazonia and elsewhere, it suggests a possible connection between these different modalities of using another's speech. Reporting, taking and voicing speech, here, are related acts, but with a decreasing distance between animator and author. Finally, the paper argues that Amerindian understandings of the voice are a step in understanding the meaning of reference in the Amerindian linguistic natures.

1. Introduction

The idea that words and things are related through reference has been the subject of much debate and scrutiny in western philosophy of language at least since Frege, who proposed that to understand a term in a language we must distinguish between two different dimensions: sense and denotation. In Frege's example, the planet *Venus* is called both "morning star" and "evening star" due to its brightness throughout day and night, and even though both expressions have the same reference (i.e. Venus), Frege introduced the idea of *sense* to replicate the linguistic difference between the expressions "morning star" and "evening star". Both expressions denote *Venus*, but our sense of them are different, they carry different meanings to us.

The consequences of this idea have shaped the philosophy of language for more than a century (McGinn, 2015), but several disciplines, not only philosophy, have systematically addressed the notion of reference and considerable attention has been paid to pointing out how referential meaning is a crucial aspect of a "western" way of thinking about language, one which might get in the way of understanding "non-western" ideas of language (Bauman and Briggs 2003). At the same time, a self-referential critic of referential meaning has sought to explain how in "western" contexts themselves meaning exceeds reference – gestural, non-verbal, and indexical meaning, for example. In other words, if reference might not apply to "non-western" contexts it does not seem to apply to "western" ones either.

And yet, in this Special Issue, prompted by studies in language ideologies and studies in Amerindian perspectivism, the critique against referential meaning remains. One reason might be that reference seems to be so tightly linked with the idea of

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a unified nature that any venture into animism, perspectivism and multinaturalism ultimately bears upon the words used to convey meaning and thus on the possible referents to which they are referring. As recent scholarship on the subject shows, questions around translation and translatability (Lloyd, 2014; Vilaça 2016), equivocation (Viveiros de Castro 2004), nature (Descola, 2014), and semiotics (Kohn, 2013; Keane, 2014) frequently debate whether there is a unifying world providing meaning or whether a critique of reference necessarily brings about a multiplicity or multitude of worlds.

In this paper, I will not try to answer these questions. My intention is to take a lateral step and look at a different but connected issue, the use of another person's voice and speech to convey words through one's own mouth. The result is frequently an ambiguous speech in which not only the meaning of a sentence is questioned but also whose intention is behind a sentence and who is actually speaking. By bringing examples of reported speech, ritual discourse and verbal play from fieldwork with the Araweté of Eastern Amazonia (Brazil), I want to foreground the concepts of ambiguity and reciprocity as tools to think about different modalities of reporting another's speech in Amazonia.

2. Reporting

Morning conversations amongst the Araweté start a little after the first sips of coffee by an open fire.[2] The first person to wake up in the morning will check if the fire from the previous night is still going or will make it again if the embers have died out. One by one, others will wake and join the pioneer through the usually chilly morning in the village. Men and children usually sit right next to the fire with their backs towards it while women are a bit further away on their mats. Someone might tell a dream, but it's not the usual thing to do.

Eventually, someone who doesn't live in the surroundings, who is not part of the extended family that shares the morning fire, will show up from her own family fire and sit down for coffee. One must always point to the coffee thermos when someone arrives and say, "That, there, is coffee" (*e'e catxé rowĩ*). Unless there is an activity that needs continuing such as hunting for a festival or building a canoe, morning group conversations deal with everybody's plan for the day. Another's intention might become everyones's own and soon reports come in.

> "Someone said his uncle saw peccary footprints near the airfield"
>
> "I think I'm going upstream to check on my corn field"
>
> "My wife and I are going to look (for) tortoises"

Eventually, one of the reports becomes more interesting.

> "Someone told me that Kunĩnadɨno said 'I'm going to hunt near the island'. They said we should follow him"
>
> "Oh, ok. Let us all follow him today, then. Go and ask your grandfather if he is coming too"
>
> …
>
> "What did he (say)?"
>
> "'I'll go' said my grandfather said my grandmother said my uncle"
>
> "Ok. Settled. We will all go".

Reporting another's speech amongst the Araweté typically comes as direct quotation and quite frequently as a chain of citations in which a person's report is embedded within another's. Embedded citations thus include not only the content of utterances but also the relational links – my grandfather, my uncle, etc – that constitute such chain of citations.[3]

In studies of reported speech, a common assumption is that a citation is a "phonological string" (Anand and Nevins, 2004, 3) that has no effect whatsoever on the behaviour of the sentence in which it is inserted. The premise of formal semantics, for example, is that embedded clauses are opaque: a "quoted sentence is not syntactically or semantically a part of the sentence that contains it" (Davidson in Partee 1973, 418) and the reference of indexicals comes from the context of utterance and does not rely or affect the context in which they are being reported or evaluated (Kaplan, 1979). The underlying idea is that verbatim citations are the basic and universal form of reported speech and thus any reported discourse within a sentence is a collection of sounds that has no grammatical effect on the sentence. Recently, Ludwig et al. (2012, 61) argued that while many authors have worked on the semantics of reported speech, "all are based primarily on properties of English

[2] The Araweté are 500 maize cultivators and hunters who live in Eastern Amazonia in seven villages in the Brazilian State of Pará. They have been in contact with Brazilian government representatives since the late 1970s and most of them currently speak Portuguese even though they only communicate with each other in Araweté, a Tupi-Guarani language. Solano (2009: 402-4) describes the Araweté as a nominative-accusative language that uses morphological strategies of both suffixation and prefixation to agglutinate, that relies heavily in co-referentiality, and whose predicates are nominal in nature. Unfortunately, linguists working with the Araweté language (Vieira and Leite 1998; Solano, 2009) have not analyzed nor mentioned reported speech, notwithstanding its ubiquitous use in daily conversation and in specialized language such as songs. I use this opportunity to present an initial linguistic analysis of reported speech in the Araweté language.

[3] Loosely following Goodwin (2007), I use the following definitions throughout this article: animator (or animator) is the person that voices the citation; author is the person who is being cited, the author of the quote.

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