

# Grammar and Native Speaker Awareness

*Volker Heeschen*  
*Max-Planck-Gesellschaft*

## 1 The Everyday Character of Metalanguage

Writing a grammar of a language of which one is not a native speaker involves more than presenting the data following the established rules of the art. First, it involves the writer's own metalinguistic knowledge. This knowledge will, however, prove itself less in the abstractions of grammar than in acts of understanding and translation of utterances and texts. Second, then, it involves the researcher's knowledge of the actual language which is the outcome of interactions with native speakers. Finally, the grammar may reflect native speakers' natural metalinguistic awareness, that is to say the skills of the informants in explaining grammatical features and ways of using their language. In this contribution I will focus on this latter part of the process and on the everyday character of metalanguage. After exploring metalanguage in a number of areas, I will suggest that syntax seen from the view point of the native speaker presents itself as an interaction between abstract structures and semantic clarifications.

In addition, this contribution is a way of honouring all those named and unnamed informants who have helped linguists go beyond mere grammar to present intricacies of style and use. Following Bloomfield (1927), who characterized and evaluated the competence of his Menomini informant, a number of modern writers acknowledge the role played by native grammarians. Haiman (1980:xi) always remembers "Kamani for his thought experiments: given a minimally contrasting pair of sentences, he would construct elaborate background stories which would be appropriate for only one of these sentences." Foley (1991:34) relied on "a single very fine informant," who had "an exceptional knowledge of his language and culture." Dixon (1992:83) claims that "all human beings have an appreciation of their native language..." which "extends to phonetic, phonological, and grammatical as well as to lexical matters." During my own fieldwork among the Eipo and Yale speakers, who live in the eastern highlands of Irian Jaya, I did some research on the natural metalinguistic skills of the native speakers. I made more than fifty interviews, recording the sessions with the main informants (cf. Heeschen 1984, 1990).

Before presenting the data let me illustrate the everyday character of metalinguistic skills. A child well over three makes semantic evaluations: "Don't say 'because'! That's no answer."

The child compares syllables: "Sigrid, that's a nice name. Sisi, si, si. grit, gret, that's like greet, Gretel, Gretel." Upon hearing the lexical item 'armpit' in a conversation, the child points to it and defines it: "Shoulder part bottom part." The child translates while playing mother and child: "The child, it is now speaking in the vernacular, it now says 'pittabaki' for wasp's nest." The child extends the usage of a lexical item pointing to cows and saying: "Those are pigs." At the age of four the child silently practises the structure "the ..., the ..." leaving out the adjectives: "The ... one goes, the ... one arrives." Later the child elaborates the structure: "The quicker you sew, the sooner it gets entangled. The more you run, the higher you jump." Finally the child answers questions of teachers or linguists: "What is a word?" The child: "Chocolate, cup." "Is 'he' a word?" The child: "No, that's not a word." But pointing to its mother the child says: "She, she, 'he' is a word for man."

In this material we find all the ingredients of original metalinguistics:

1. People deal carefully with language, they set up rules of verbal behaviour.
2. People analyse language; they extract syllables and unbound morphemes from words and utterances. They enjoy the sound of certain words.
3. People invent and manipulate words. It is very easy for them to name new things. Groups of Eipo co-initiates invent new words for certain objects or find new meanings for old words.
4. People consciously violate rules, they invent, manipulate and set up new rules.
5. It can evidently be very laborious to learn syntax. I recall the great differences between adult speakers of Eipo and Yale regarding the complexity of sentences. Listeners take notice of this; they still know after years that this or that expression was invented by or is even "owned" by a certain orator.
6. Questions such as whether "he" is a word are pointless to the native speaker. Native speakers talk, they do not judge. For them, language is a matter of communicative success. Musa Dibul from the hamlet of Nohomas in the Yale area worked for half a year at his father-in-law's in Angguruk. When he returned he said that now he was beginning to speak the Angguruk language: He could ask for the way, for sweet potatoes, where he would be allowed to cut wood, and so on.

When Weinrich (1976) spoke of the "Alltäglichkeit der Metasprache" (the everyday character of the metalanguage), he was referring to these types of behaviour: the segmentation of linguistic units, creativeness and play, corrections by others and by the speaker, conscious learning and mastery, the capability of passing an explicit judgement about language and about whether someone has mastered a particular language, and the ability to find paraphrases. In sections 2 and 3 I will discuss metalinguistic awareness of the Eipo and Yalenang speakers.

## 2 Native Speakers' Metalinguistic Skills

The Eipo and the Yalenang have metalinguistic skills in many areas. Accent and tone can be identified and characterised in general. Buk isolates the stems in the verbs *'buklamle* 'he mixes, he weaves' and *'bukmal* 'he sits' and differentiates them in (1) using the tone which has remained from the accent.

- 1) *ton are bú, ton are bù.*  
 one THEME *bú* one THEME *bù*  
 'The one is *bú*, the other is *bù*.'

Bingde and Kwengkweg comment on accent and intonation in the verbs *'lub'mik* 'they filled (the mouth)' and *'lub'mik* 'they rubbed (the pig fat) into their skin' in (2).

- 2) *'lub'mik are lumun, are nemalyab, lub'mik are aren*  
*'lub,mik* THEME strung THEME careful *lub'mik* THEME giving  
*yupe are wik yupe.*  
 speech THEME great speech

I am not giving a free translation in this case, because it would be identical with the morpheme glosses for the descriptive phrases which are preferable in this case. With the expressions 'strung' and 'careful' the informants accurately characterize the almost balanced accents on the two syllables of equal weight in *'lub'mik* 'they filled (the mouth)'. In *'lub'mik* 'they rubbed (the pig fat) into their skin', the accent is clearly on the second syllable; this is the reason why they say it is 'great' or 'giving speech', that is, as loud and clear as if somebody intended to distribute something on the village ground or make a speech during a dancing/exchange feast. Later the accentuated syllables are described as *im bisik yupe*, that is 'speech which rises up to the sky'; then in a generalised way the syllables are characterised as *mikib* 'strong', accordingly the unaccentuated syllables are characterised as *metang* 'weak'. The Yalenang characterise syllables with high tone as *edebdob* 'raised'; syllables with a low tone are characterised as *soo-ak-ne* 'what is directed earthwards, what is deep'.

The Eipo and the Yalenang are also able to isolate single morphemes in speech and intonation and to name these classes. Buk pauses between stem and suffixes in *mabman* 'I sleep, stay, rest' in (3).

- 3) *'máb-má-n*  
 sleep-ASP-1s.PR

After the syllables have been isolated, the relation between stem and suffixes can also be characterized. Concerning *gekebman* 'I hear' Kwengkweg comments:

- 4) *gekeb are mikib, man are metang*  
*gekeb* THEME strong *man* THEME weak  
 ‘*gekeb* is strong, *man* is weak.’

The commentary to *tubmal* ‘he cuts down’ and *toamuk* ‘he had cut down’ is:

- 5) *to are neika, mousetam are elebleb, deyok. are neika,*  
*to* THEME same tail.side THEME different trunk THEME same  
*kisoktam are neika, yantam are elebleb.*  
 headside THEME same footside THEME different  
 ‘The stem *to* is the same, the suffixes are different. The stem is the same. At the beginning it is the same, at the end different.’

Except for *deyok*, which is generally ‘trunk (of a tree), main part, cause’, the terms used in (5) characterise the construction of a song. The side of the head is the first part of a line constructed along the principle of parallelismus membrorum, the side of the tail and of the foot are the second members of such a line. Later the more general *nong* ‘body, edible part of a fruit, main part’ is used instead of *deyok*. One informant also uses *sirye* ‘end’ to refer to the suffix, and several times the informants also use *kelasirye* ‘lastborn’ for suffixes and particles, for instance for the co-ordinating conjunction *-ne* in *aleng-ne, yin-ne* ‘netbag and bow’.

The Yalenang called the stem syllable *udukak-ne* ‘that which is at the basis; that which is the cause for something’ and the suffixes *sidikak ne* ‘that which is the rest, which remains’. Suffixes were also referred to by *kae-ak* ‘at the edge’.

The informants also extend the ‘weak/strong’ terminology in (4) to the relation between single verbs and compounds; the former are called ‘weak’, the latter ‘strong’. The single verb was also called *bumang* ‘short’.

I would like to point out that the terms were coined spontaneously; they were indeed coined in talks focusing on linguistic matters, but they were first used, when we examined accent and tone, that is when my attention was turned to the sound and not to morphemes or meanings.

In contrast to the stem the suffixes are first regarded as *nong dem* ‘without the main thing, without meaning’ or as *yupe-uk* (Yale: *yubu-ok*) ‘only language, only sound’. But judgements are spontaneously accessible to all informants or very easily to elicit. Changes at the end of the stem and grammaticalized compounds are partly paraphrased in a stereotyped way. Aspects, tenses and tense-person-number suffixes are paraphrased unhesitatingly and expanded by adverbs.

For example, Bingde and Kwengkweg comment on the difference between *bukmal* ‘he sits’ and *bukdongobmal* ‘he sits down, he begins to sit’ in Eipo in (6).

- 6) *nong are neika, mousctam are elebleb deyok are*  
 body THEME same tail.side THEME different trunk THEME  
*neika. bukdongobmal are tekman ane, are bukdongobmal*  
 different *bukdongobmal* THEME standing here THEME *bukdongobmal*  
*winyalamak. bukmal are tekine gum, tekine gum dare,*  
 they.say *bukmal* THEME rising not rising not THEME  
*ur fi talye yanganman anc, bukmal dare winyalamak.*  
 accordingly very in.vain coming here *bukmal* THEME they.say  
 ‘The stem is the same, the suffixes are different. *bukdongobmal*, that is when  
 one stands, from the standing, then they say: “He sits down.” With *bukmal*  
 there is no rising, one comes quite in vain, they say: “He is sitting there  
 (without moving).”’

In one case the continuous action is called *eren yupe* ‘unripe speech’, that is, the talking about an action without a beginning or without an end. The subjunctive forms are characterised as *kanye tenin yupe* ‘talk about thinking’.

Compounds with *-lob-* mean that the action expressed by the first base is being performed in a negligent, incomplete manner often accompanied by a shade of pointed heedlessness. The Eipo informants explain *buklob-* ‘sit negligently’ in (7), contrasting it with *bukman* ‘I am sitting’ in (8) and with *bulamse* ‘I used to sit’ in (9).

- 7) *buklobmal are tencbuka, cl adckal atonun. adekal yupe*  
*buklobmal* THEME thought.about he angry like angry speech  
*are buklobmal, na lik tenen yupe buklobmal.*  
 THEME *buklobmal* I not.liking thinking speech he.sits.down.negligently  
 “*buklobmal*,” that is done intentionally, as if he is angry. “*buklobmal*,” that is  
 spoken in anger, “he sits down negligently or thoughtlessly (beside me),” that  
 is said, when he does not like me.’
- 8) *bukman are arub.*  
*bukman* THEME today  
 “*bukman*” is for now.’
- 9) *bulamse are fi wik bun dare bulamse*  
*bulamse* THEME very much sitting THEME I.used.to.sit.  
 “*bulamse*,” that means sitting around a lot, that is, I used to sit (stayed or  
 remained there a long time).’

Without being asked the Eipo enumerate forms. When giving explanations about something else, they like to ramble into commenting on the different suffixes. At the end of

explanations about a text accidentally containing the dual form *balamdik* 'both of them went', the informant goes on without transition:

- 10) *ninye winilye-nang dare balamupe winyalamak*  
 man three.people THEME we.went they.say.  
 'When there are three people, we say: "We went."'

One of the informants is asked to give explanations about the sentence *betengde birye el mape kwem dina feterebmuk* 'Betengde explained the myths of creation to the boys'. Without transition he says (certainly referring to the actual situation, in which Betengde often told stories):

- 11) *tonok sum dare feterebmuk, like betinye feterelamuk.*  
 single day THEME *feterebmuk* time two *feterelamuk*  
 'Of one single day we say "*feterebmuk*" (he told). When one tells two times we say: "*feterelamuk*" (he used to tell).'

In the sphere of morphology, then, we find analysis into morphemes (directed by syllables, accent and intonation), canonical paraphrases, corrections and self-corrections, as well as a metalinguistic vocabulary.

In the sphere of syntax the informants are able to analyse when they succeed in constructing a fitting example. Syntactic analysis generally involves many corrections and self corrections. Kwengkweg more than once also applies the categories 'strong' and 'weak' to syntactic constructions. The most cogent example is the commentary on the particles *are* and *dare*, which, according to my opinion, are both used as means of thematising. The former, *are*, is used within a sentence which had either already been given a theme or is to be given one. Thus, *are* is combined with the signal 'same subject'. The latter, *dare*, on the other hand, is a means of thematising in connection with linkage; thus it implies a stronger contrast and signals 'new subject'. Asked about *are* and *dare* Kwengkweg first isolates the particles and tries to give equivalents in (12)

- 12) *are are, are na asik, dare are... na-de na an si na*  
*are* THEME here my hamlet *dare* THEME I-however I you name I  
*gum bikman tenen dare winyalamak.*  
 not I.know thinking *dare* they.say  
 "'*are*," that is, that is my hamlet here, "*dare*," that is (pause for thought). They say "*dare*" (but, although etc ), when they think that I do not know your name.'

After constructing a series of examples, he concludes:

- 13) *are are metek, mikib, wik mikib are dare. yupe elebleb.*  
*are* THEME small strong very strong THEME *dare* speech different  
 ‘*are*, that is small or weak, but *dare*, that is strong, very strong. The words are different.’

There is a similar pair of particles in the Yale language: *aka* and *daka*. The particle *aka*, however, is less a means of thematising than a means of stressing the successiveness of single parts of an action while at the same time signaling ‘same subject’. The particle *daka*, on the other hand, is used for linkage and implies a change of subject. Asked about the difference an informant answered:

- 14) *sidikak neik yubu, damaksib-na 'aedo ledob. yalam daka*  
 end same speech problem-Q single spoken you.have.come THEME  
*delamnam. na-di kwaneng mo beiamna, ik nhon dunun*  
 we.two.are.eating I-POS sweet.potato alone I.have.put time one I.shall.eat  
*aka nimi, yok nimi dadsenun aka beiamna-ba, an*  
 in.order.to man other man I.shall.give.you in.order.to I.have.put.DS you  
*na-di nimi yalam-ba, an ab, nan ab delamnam.*  
 I-POS man you.have.come-DS you and I and we.two.shall.eat  
*na-di yok nimi beiamsen. yalam danena,*  
 I-POS other man I.have.put.for.you you.have.come then  
*delamnunam.*  
 we.two.shall.eat.

‘The rest is the same, with regard to the contents, the problem, they are different. You have come, nonetheless the two of us will eat something. I have put my sweet potatoes to the side, I have put them back so that I can eat them later on, so that I can give them to my people, but since you have come to my people the two of us will eat something. I have put them aside for other people, my people. (Pause for thought) You have come, then the two of us will eat something.’

*damaksib*, used in the first sentence in (14), is another metalinguistic term. It means ‘what lies close, problem, concern’. The problem as expressed by the informant, then, is to explain the difference in *consecutio temporum* between the second and the last sentence (highlighted in bold in (14)). The *consecutio temporum* in the second sentence stresses the contrast, the meeting of two different actions. The following sentences explain the unlucky “meeting” and the contrast suggested by *daka*. The last sentence again dissolves the contrast, probably with regard to the situation of the partners in the dialogue who are in daily, friendly intercourse with each other.

### 3 Condensed Structures and Clarifications

As in the case of metalinguistic awareness in morphology, isolation of constructions is more a prerequisite in the analysis of syntax than is naming. Constructions can be isolated in at least three ways. First, a prototype can be constructed. This prototype is nearly always taken from the sphere of coming and going. Second, a series of examples can be given which leads to a growing contrast and then to a prototype. Third, the informants can be confronted with a condensed sentence, a sentence, as it were, reduced to the mere structure. They then define and clarify the sentence by means of semantics, they tint the naked structure with the colour of life.

Condensed structures are verb forms like those given in (6-11); they are clarified by canonical paraphrases consisting of pronominal deixis and adverbials. Under condensed structures I also include sentences like 'he came, and he (or the other one) went', which, translated into some of the Papuan languages, are likely to reveal the switch-reference system. The Mek languages indicate 'same subject' and 'different subject' by a set of conjunctions together with the intricacies of the *consecutio temporum*. Within this system a problem arises if the subject of the first clause forms only a part of the subject of the second clause, including situations in which the subject of the second clause is added to the subject of the first clause. The Mek languages try to evade the strict connection the switch-reference seems to exact by using less binding conjunctions. The Eipo speakers prefer those indicating coincidence as illustrated in (15), while the Yale speakers prefer conjunctions generally indicating 'linkage' as illustrated in (16).

- 15) *yanmape-ine, binamne.*  
we.came-while I.shall.go

'We all arrived, but I alone will depart again.'

- 16) *yaok danena bidek.*

he.came then they.two.went

'He arrived, and both of them (he and someone else) departed.'

In cases of ambiguity—and there are many of them—the subjects can be specified more fully. Just as deictic expressions can be made more specific at any moment, so that 'up there' becomes 'up there in the tree' in the next utterance, or just as verbal forms like *bukmal* 'he sits' can be specified as 'he sits now', this system of 'deixis between the clauses' can at any time be specified more exactly. For example, sentences (15) and (16) can be reproduced by someone else as (17) and (18), respectively.

- 17) *nun anirye ambosum yanmape-ine, bereklye-ora, na tonok binamne.*  
we all yesterday we.came-while dawning-then I alone I.will.go

'We all of us arrived yesterday, but tomorrow I shall depart again by myself.'



- 18) *yaok danena, yaokne boneko ab bidek.*  
 he.came then he.came man.this and they.two.went  
 'He arrived and with this one who arrived that one departed.'

Another condensed structure in Eipo is given in (19). Both sentences are roughly synonymous as indicated by the one free translation.

- 19) a. *baytam bile-buk, yanamle*  
 forest he.gone-DS he.will.come  
 b. *baytam bile-ba, yanamle*  
 forest he.gone-DS he.will.come  
 'While this one has gone into the forest, that one will come.'

The construction in (19b) does not preserve simultaneity which would establish the maximal contrast. When informants give their opinions about the sentences, they reestablish the contrast. One begins by criticising the form *bile-ba* in (20).

- 20) *bile-ba are si.tang metek malye*  
*bile-ba* THEME tongue small bad  
 "'*bile-ba*," that is a bit bad on the tongue, that does not sound well.'

He then constructs a sense by which both actions are connected: The second person tells a third party that the first will have gone into the forest. The other informants clarify the sentences in (21).

- 21) ... *are ninye, ninye ton na atonun, yuknang baytam bile-buk,*  
 THEME man man one I same others forest he.gone-DS  
*yanamle.*  
 he.will.come  
 '...he, that is a man, one like myself, he will come, but the others, the other one will have gone into the forest.'

Then the sentence is made still more precise in (22)

- 22) *el a-bu kmal, bukmalye-ine, bile-ba, yuknye*  
 he here-he.is.sitting he.sitting-while he.having.gone-DS another.one  
*yanamle.*  
 he.will.come.  
 'He, he is sitting here, just like myself, and while he is sitting here, he will have gone, when the other one will come.'

Reference to the situation spoken about and to possible participants in a real event are the means of clarification. After the participants have been determined, the prototype characterized by the (approximate) simultaneity of two actions is constructed in (23)

- 23) *ton aik bukmaale-ba, yuknye yanamle*  
 one hut he.sitting-DS another he.will.come

'The one is sitting in the hut (and will still be present), the other will come.'

Finally the deictic reference to the conversational situation is established in (24). In (24), however, the informants leave the prototype by giving up the third person singular. In addition it is clearly stated that a third, other person *el* 'he' will come.

- 24) *nun betinye bukmane-ba, el yanamle.*  
 we two sitting-DS he he.will.come

'The two of us are sitting here, he will come.'

I held these conversations in 1981. The informants were then between 16 and 20 years old. In 1989 I repeated parts of the interviews with the same informants. Unfortunately I changed 'go' into 'come', so that there is no complete identity in the clauses I presented to the informants. A typical answer of 1989, i.e. at the time when the informants were between 24 and 28 years old, is given in (25).

- 25) *are yuknang atonun arye winyabting. el walebyan atonun arye,*  
 THEME another like by they.would.say he Walebyan like by  
*an-de, el atonun arye "lake lebnamab-do, el yuk motokwe*  
 you-but he like by open we.shall.speak-QU he other area  
*ulamuk-cuk, yanmuk-cuk, el yale-buk-do"*  
 he.was.meanwhile.only he.came-meanwhile.only he he.coming-DS-QU  
*tenen dibre ulamuk ine, wine binmal winyabto.*

thinking seeing he.was while now he.goes he.would.say

'This (is brought about) by somebody else, this they would say (this one would say). One would say: This one, one like Walebyan, he goes now, he looked around thinking, "Shall we again speak to (deal with) each other, will you, will the other one, who was in his area, who came, will he have come."'

In (25) the verbal form with *-buk* is subordinated to *tenen* and a question particle is added to it. Between the subject *el atonun arye* and the predicate *binmal*, there is another predicate consisting of serialisation plus the conjunction *-ine*, and in between the subject and this serialised predicate the reference to the one "who comes" appears. Past and present are linked together. The prototype is no longer recognizable in the wide sweep of the sentence. Neverthe-

less, metalinguistic awareness is revealed in the "one would say" to which the statement is subordinated, and in the comparison. The use of a syntactic method is no longer a question of the correctness of simple sentences, but of the correct stylistic use in a series of clauses. In 1989 the informants conspicuously often use the conditional and the subjunctive, a fact by which the talk about language becomes a quoting of utterances that are grammatically as well as stylistically correct.

I believe that the interaction between condensed structures and semantic clarifications is tight and psychologically real. Some forms and some syntactic means only make sense to native speakers if they can be translated by the native speakers into utterances and paraphrases which establish a minimum of context and which refer to concrete examples. Condensed structures like "he came, and he (or the other one) went" only make sense to native speakers as part of the grammar if the means of clarification are taken into account. They do not exist independently. This is what the linguist must learn: seemingly rigorous rules of grammar fade into matters of style and individual use. According to Weinrich (1976), the means of explaining, situating, and directing constitute the reflexivity which is inherent in each utterance; grammatical means come into being by constant metalinguistic monitoring.

In my terms, Weinrich regards all "situating means of language" as metalanguage. By "situating means of language" I mean directive signals of syntax, means of evaluation of an utterance, temporal and local deixis, as well as deixis between the clauses. If these things are all part of metalanguage, the only things that would remain part of language, that is, as part of language as an object, would be the lexemes, which are situated and by this process linked together by the metalanguage. According to Weinrich, in normal conversations there is no great difference in lexemes between the participants, but often there are situations in which it is necessary to explain, to situate, and to direct.

Weinrich's statements are certainly unorthodox because, as the author himself remarks, they lead to the assumption that Saussure's *langue* consists of a series of meaningful, disconnected signs. These statements, however, are not far from those made by Birdsong (1989). Birdsong examines the different forms of metalinguistic awareness. One can certainly contrast simple procedures of correction with more elevated judgments about grammaticality independent of discourse and context. But between these forms of metalinguistic awareness there is a whole spectrum of skills which cannot as a whole be lumped together under the "everyday character of the metalanguage." Nor should they be reserved to the sessions of a linguist with his informants and to their introspections and intuitions. Although "intuition" is said to be the ideal way to arrive at "competence," the contrast between linguistic and metalinguistic disappears when one drops it as a theoretical construction, and instead examines the skills which can in different degrees more or less necessarily accompany, direct, and reflexively accompany utterances. And not only does the contrast between linguistic and

metalinguistic disapper, the contrast between the simple forms of metalinguistic awareness which are manifestations of performance, and the judgements which indicate competence also disappear. Birdsong (1989:47) writes:

“...the terms ‘linguistic’ and ‘metalinguistic’ hardly do justice to the epistemological facts of language use, language ability, and language learning. The distinctions suggested by these terms are not discrete or polar, but continuous. Indeed...all ‘linguistic’ and ‘metalinguistic’ activities can be described in terms of variations along the dimensions of analyzed linguistic knowledge and control functions relative to that knowledge.”

Large parts of the syntax open up if the critics turn to what I here call the deixis between clauses. If the aim of the linguist can be understood as the attempt to transfer the “Zeigfeld der Sprache” (sign) into a “Symbolfeld” (symbol), native linguistic awareness proceeds just the other way. On the whole one can say that linguistic awareness is heightened, when the informants succeed in translating the “Symbolfeld” into the “Zeigfeld.” Syntax is turned into concrete constellations between participants, times and scenes. These constellations correspond to prototypes in the structure of the language. The awareness kindles at the “difference” between the prototype and the utterance from which the prototype has to be taken. This “difference” becomes evident in the fluctuation of the attention between the prototype as a condensed structure by which contrasts are formed, and the forms of clarification as well as the embellished stories and examples in which the contrast is either distributed to several devices or is even lessened and only gradually extant.

#### 4 Conclusion

The researcher who wishes to discover original, natural and undirected metalinguistic awareness has to examine language as it is: as speech, uninfluenced by secondary symbolic systems like picture, writing and toys. Only the items that can be isolated are approachable to the speaker, and this presupposes the possibility to isolate the spoken units of speech.

There is no general linguistic awareness. There are tasks which every speaker can tackle to some degree of satisfaction, and there are tasks which are dealt with in very different manners. Bingde, an Eipo, focused on contents; he was the great teller of myths. It is typical, perhaps, that he dealt with language only tangentially and, if asked to explain the difference between pairs of sentences, summarized the contents and judged the sentences according to their propositional substance. Walebyan, another Eipo, and Silas, a Yaleng, were masters of analysis and of the short, concise example. Kwengkweg, an Eipo, said that the only thing he was interested in was language; all the linguistic ‘top-class-performances’ come from him. Musa, a Yaleng,

might have been his equal, except for the fact that he was also greatly interested in the interpretation of myths. In spite of this, the metalinguistic terms of the Yale language were mainly coined by him. Buk, an Eipo, and Lewi, a Yalengang, combined some of the excellences of Kwengkweng's and Bingde's; the conciseness and the interest directed exclusively towards language, however, was lost in the eloquence of their examples.

Linguistic awareness is not only specific to the task and individually different, it is also transient. It can only become a permanent quality, if it is based on metalinguistic terms by means of which the speaker can classify and make the grammatical phenomena the lasting object of attention. It is surprising how quickly such a metalinguistic vocabulary can arise. When one looks back to the terms 'strong' and 'weak', which were spontaneously coined by the Eipo and which seem to be insignificant, one should think of the fact that the famous 19th century German linguists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm used the same terms in order to classify the types of conjugation of the Germanic languages: the things that lie entangled and hidden in the interlinear version and the free translation must no longer appear strange.

The natural metalinguistic awareness reaches from sound analysis to morphology (although in the Mek languages this only includes verbal morphology). The verbal morphology belongs to the situating elements of language. It is possible to immediately check the judgements at reality. Corrections, self-corrections, and judgements are spontaneous, and the morphemes partly find canonical paraphrases. In this field metalinguistic awareness among the Eipo and the Yalengang strangely correlates with what we know from such different societies as ours and that of the Blackfoot Indians. At the same time, the awareness of the morphemes might correlate with languages in which the syntax coincides with, or at least is closer to, morphology. Teeter (1973) called this phenomenon "grammatical concreteness." We must ask ourselves whether the ability to manipulate, and that is a kind of awareness, is related to the agglutinative linguistic structure.

The preliminary evidence for the claim that speakers really work at their language is their awareness of morphology and their awareness of syntactic structures that shows itself when speakers expand condensed structures and distribute them to several, less binding structures in order to explain the purpose and the justification of the condensed structure with the lucidity granted by the expanded and clarified speech. What is known from the history of language, namely that syntactic means develop from words and morphemes and vice versa under certain circumstances is proven as psychologically real with some of the speakers of Mek languages. It becomes evident in forms of correction, of style and in the dialectic relation between a general condensed form and expanded speech which at every moment is capable of deictic and semantic clarification. The abolishing of the difference between "Zeigfeld" and "Symbolfeld," between what is meant and what is expressed, is the general, but nevertheless specific task of thinking about language; general, because this difference may form the history of languages and

the speech of the individual speakers; specific, because it should not be confused with a general competence or with the priority of language over speech or usage.

## References

- Birdsong, David. 1989. *Metalinguistic performance and interlinguistic competence*. Berlin: Springer.
- Bloomfield, Leonard. 1927. Literate and illiterate speech. *American Speech* 10:432-439.
- Dixon, R.M.W. 1992. Naive linguistic explanation. *Language in Society* 21:83-91.
- Foley, William A. 1991. *The Yimas language of New Guinea*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Haiman, John. 1980. *Hua: A Papuan language of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Heeschen, Volker. 1984. Intuitionen. Grammatische Gespräche in nichtakkulturierten Sprachgemeinschaften. *Linguistische Berichte* 94:27-44.
- Heeschen, Volker. 1990. Die ersten Stunden: Am Ursprung der Sprachwissenschaft. In *History and historiography of linguistics. Papers from the Fourth International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS IV)*. Trier. 24-28 August 1987, vol. I, ed. Hans-Josef Niederehe and Konrad Koerner, pp. 33-47. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Teeter, Karl V. 1973. Algonquian. In *Linguistics in North America*, ed. Thomas Sebeok, 1142-63. Current Trends in Linguistics, vol. 10. The Hague: Mouton.
- Weinrich, Harald. 1976. Von der Alltäglichkeit der Metasprache. In *Sprache in Texten*, ed. Harald Weinrich, 90-112. Stuttgart: Klett.

Presented 17 September 1992

Forschungsstelle für Humanethologie  
Max-Planck-Gesellschaft  
Von-der-Tann-Str. 3-5  
82346 Andechs  
GERMANY