Linguistic know-how and the orders of language

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A B S T R A C T

This paper proposes an account of linguistic knowledge in terms of knowing-how, starting from Love's seminal distinction between first-order linguistic activity and second-order (or metalinguistic) practices. Metalinguistic practices are argued to be constitutive of linguistic knowledge. Skilful linguistic behaviour is subject to correction based on criterial support provided through metalinguistic practices. Linguistic know-how is knowing-how to provide and to recognise criterial support for first-order linguistic activity. I conclude that participation in first-order linguistic activity requires a critical reflective attitude, which implies that all first-order linguistic activity has a second-order dimension.

0. Introduction

Humans exhibit linguistic behaviour: we speak, listen, write, and read.[1] Philosophers and linguists typically assume that this behaviour has to be explained with reference to *linguistic knowledge*. This knowledge is traditionally considered to be theoretical knowledge of *a language*, which in turn is understood as a complex system of rules and principles (Barber, 2003). On what Matthews (2003: 189) calls the *received view*, linguistic knowledge consists of 'an explicit internal representation of these rules and principles.' However, proponents of a radical embodied approach to cognition have recently mounted a thorough attack on the idea that cognitive processes, which include those in linguistic communication, should be explained in terms of internal representations.[2] If there are indeed no internal representations, the received view of linguistic knowledge cannot be correct. However, as of yet, no alternative account of linguistic knowledge has been proposed by these philosophers.

Integrational linguists[3] have similarly argued that linguistic behaviour should not be explained in terms of knowledge of *a language*. Instead, the integrationist 'starts from the premise that communication proceeds by means of signs which are created at and for the moment of communicational exchange' (Wolf and Love, 1993: 313). This implies that every episode of linguistic communication is unique and cannot be explained in terms of (knowledge of) decontextualised rules and principles. However, in explaining linguistic behaviour as context-sensitive language-*making*, the integrationist does not turn a blind eye to our experience[4] of recurrent linguistic units and the stability of their usage. Here Love's (1990) seminal distinction between

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[1] Spoken and written language are different phenomena, that constitute different cognitive domains (Kravchenko, 2009). A more detailed investigation into the cognitive dynamics of speech and writing would require a separate treatment of these domains. For the purposes of this paper however this is not relevant.

[2] See Hutto and Myin (2013) for the most thorough attack on representationalism and Chemero (2009) for a positive account of what a non-representational cognitive science could look like. These accounts can be traced to Enactivism as proposed by Varela et al. (1991) and Ecological Psychology as proposed by Gibson (1979).

[3] Although sometimes distinguished (e.g. Harris, 1998: 1), I shall use integrationism and integrational linguistics interchangeably.

[4] I use experience in the sense of perceptual experience, which can be explained in non-representational terms (e.g. Degenaar and Myin, 2014). By linguistic experience I mean perceptual experience of language.

first-order linguistic activity and second-order constructs comes into play: because we can reflect on first-order linguistic activity and perceive it to be repeatable,[5] we can produce second-order constructs (e.g., word, sentence, noun, verb, hashtag, meaning, understanding, Dutch, English, &c) by means of which we engage in second-order practices (spelling, glossing, defining, writing grammars, explaining the meaning of a word, teaching philosophical writing, &c). A few words about terminology: I consider *second-order practices* to be those linguistic practices that feature *second-order constructs*, which I take to be words that can be used to talk about first-order linguistic activity. Because these practices and constructs are *about* language, I also refer to them as *metalinguistic practices* and *metalinguistic constructs*. I follow Love (1990: 99ff) in using the mass noun language to refer to first-order linguistic activity. This differs from its use as a count-noun – that is, used in conjunction with an article or in its plural form: a language is a second-order construct. These second-order constructs, according to the integrationist, are not merely descriptive, but play a normative role in shaping the production and understanding of language which in turn can explain the experience of linguistic units and stability of first-order practices (Harris, 1998). However, in thus redefining the science of linguistics (Davis and Taylor 1990), integrational linguists have paid little attention to what constitutes linguistic knowledge (Taylor, 2011).

In this paper I propose an account of linguistic knowledge. As opposed to the received view, which conceives of linguistic knowledge as theoretical knowledge of a language, I propose an account of linguistic knowledge in terms of Rylean know-how. Based on Taylor's (1990) notion of *criterial relations*, I argue that the normative character of second-order practices is crucial for understanding linguistic know-how. In doing so I also argue against the possibility of making a clean distinction between 'pure' first-order linguistic activity and linguistic activity informed by second-order practices, thereby providing an argument for Pablé and Hutton's (2015: 29) claim that 'first and second-order practices are inextricably intertwined'.

This paper is laid out as follows. First, I briefly introduce the integrationist approach to language (Section 1) and Love's distinction (Section 2). Following this, I distinguish two possible views of Love's distinction: the *optional extension view* and the *constitutive view,* and argue for the latter (Section 3). I then propose an account of linguistic knowledge in terms of Rylean knowing-how, paying special attention to how the skilful exercise of this know-how is subject to correction based on criteria. I rely on Taylor's notion of *criterial relations* to show the necessity of second-order practices for linguistic knowledge (Section 4). In the concluding section I argue that, if my account of linguistic knowledge is correct, first- and second-order practices cannot be cleanly distinguished.

1. The integrationist account of language

According to Harris, the founding father of integrationism, all Western theorizing about language is under the spell of the *language myth*[6]*:* 'a sedimented form of thinking that has gone unchallenged for so long that it has hardened into a kind of intellectual concrete' (Harris, 2001: 1). To fall prey to the language myth is to assume: (i) the existence of *languages*, understood as synchronic systems of fixed codes linking words to private meanings (*the determinacy thesis*); and (ii) that the sharing of these fixed codes is necessary for linguistic communication, which is then thought to consist in the transference of private meanings from one person to the other by encoding and decoding private meanings into words (*the telementation thesis*) (Harris, 1998: 32). In this paper, I do not rehearse the arguments that integrationists have levelled against the language myth, but instead start from the assumption that the integrationists are correct in rejecting the language myth.

What I want to emphasise is the integrationist conclusion that the positing of a language turns any explanation of linguistic behaviour on its head. For 'what requires explanation is misrepresented from the outset by a priori theoretical fiat' (Love, 1990: 75). The language that an orthodox linguist assumes and then employs as an *explicans,* is treated as an *explicandum* by the integrationist (Harris, 2003: 50, 1998: 55).[7] This integrationist insight is articulated by Harris (1998: 5) when he states that 'the right theoretical priority is exactly the reverse: *languages presuppose communication.*'

Whilst opposing the idea that a language can explain linguistic behaviour, the integrationist thus does not turn a blind eye to our experience of linguistic units (words, sentences, common expressions, &c) and the stability of their usage. In doing so, the integrationist walks a fine line between the Scylla of eliminativism and the **Charybdis** of naïve realism (Cowley, 2011a) or linguistic immanence (Taylor, 2010). The immanent realist position results from taking the lay perception of language at face value (Harris, 1998: 53). Linguistic communicators obviously perceive language as consisting of recurring units and the integrationist is not in the business of convincing anyone that this perception is illusionary or that the accompanying metalinguistic practices are mistaken. That is, the integrationist is not an eliminativist with regards to lay people's metalinguistic practices, but aims to prevent these practices from giving rise to metalinguistic illusions in *theorising* about language (Taylor, 1992; Harris, 1996: 148). Accordingly, instead of explaining linguistic behaviour in terms of objectively existing underlying invariants, the integrationist turns to the experience of language to explain the emergence of apparent invariants.

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[5] To perceive first-order linguistic activity to be repeatable is to 'embrace the possibility of "saying the same thing"' (Love, 1990: 99).

[6] The integrationist unmasking of the language myth resulted in fundamentally *Redefining Linguistics* (Davis and Taylor, 1990) and *Rethinking Linguistics* (Davis and Taylor, 2003). Integrationists assert that the object of study of orthodox linguistics is created by a particular, culturally determined point of view that necessarily arises out of immersion in Western metalinguistic practices (Love, 1995: 337, 2007). Orthodox linguistics, then, is dismissed as an extension of lay metalinguistic practices (Davis, 2003: 3) resulting from the language theorist taking everyday metalinguistic questions as intellectual challenges (Taylor, 1992; Harris, 1996: 149). For the purposes of this paper however, I will not delve into the questions regarding the scientific status or proper object of linguistics.

[7] According to Love (1990: 107), this means that languages must be naturalised, a project that sits well with the radical embodied project of naturalising all forms of cognition (e.g. Hutto and Myin, 2013).

This tension with regards to the ontological status of languages in particular and metalinguistic constructs in general is diagnosed by Love (1990) as follows: we – humans exhibiting linguistic behaviour – experience linguistic activity as if it consists of repeatable linguistic units, that is, as if it consists of tokens, or instantiations, of more abstract types.[8] At the same time, Love states that these linguistic units are radically indeterminate because *saying the same thing* – that is, repeating a linguistic unit – depends on 'the kind of sameness required' (Ibid.: 100). For instance, saying *Schnee ist Weiss, snow is white,* and *sneeuw is wit* amounts to saying the same thing for some purposes, whereas, in other contexts, we can legitimately claim that different pronunciations of the 'same' word do not constitute saying the same thing.[9] What counts as a repetition thus cannot be determined in a decontextualised way, but 'is something for speakers themselves to decide in particular contexts' (Ibid.: 98). So, on the one hand we experience language as consisting of linguistic units, whilst we know at the same time that these units are radically indeterminate from an objective point of view (Ibid.: 106).

However, this way of describing the experience of linguistic units – as instantiations of abstract types – runs the danger of overintellectualising our experience of first-order linguistic activity. As Harris (2003: 57) points out, *re*cognising the 'same' linguistic unit is like recognising the same face or the same shape.[10] I shall therefore refer to these experienced linguistic units as (linguistic) repeatables – also to stress the action required to accomplish repetition.[11] Moreover, the radical indeterminacy of these repeatables from an objective point of view does not entail that linguistic communicators can always *decide* whether or not something is repeated, in particular because they cannot decide how to experience linguistic activity. I return to this point in Section 4.3 when I discuss novelty in linguistic activity.

We should therefore not understand repeatables in terms of (experienced) identity relations, but as the '*perception* of relatedness, similarity, and recyclability' (Toolan, 1996: 267, emphasis added). In contrast to identity relations or type–token relations, the notion of repeatability presupposes a temporal order. For when an earlier utterance is identical to a later utterance, the later utterance is also identical to the earlier utterance – or, alternatively, both are tokens of the same type. If a later utterance is a repetition of an earlier one, however, the earlier utterance is not a repetition of the later one. By definition, you can only repeat what has already happened. This entails that the repeatability under consideration here is itself time-bound (Harris, 1998) and therefore cannot be determined in a decontextualised way.

As Toolan (1996: 238) reminds us, what we are concerned with is 'the ontological level at which repetition exists'. For whereas we are undoubtedly capable of repeating 'bits of language' we hear someone else speak or we see in writing, the brute fact of this repeatability does not conjure into existence decontextualised linguistic objects that provide objective standards of correctness for determining when repeatables are *really* repeated. Whether a repetition is taken to be a repetition by participants is therefore always a contextual matter. For the integrationists, to insist on one true analysis, 'which "really" reflects the structure of "the language used" is a metalinguistic illusion' (Harris, 1996: 160).

2. Love's distinction

In understanding repetition in terms of underlying abstractions, the utterance – which is a spatio-temporally extended and context-determined event brought forth by a linguistic communicator – gets reified by treating it as an instantiation of underlying linguistic objects (words, sentences, &c). To understand the origins of this metalinguistic illusion, Love (1990: 101) introduces a seminal distinction:

> A language[12] is a second-order construct arising from an idea about first-order utterances: namely, that they are repeatable. Such a construct may be institutionalized and treated as the language of a community. But it remains a construct based on an idea: at no point does it become a first-order reality for individuals. (Although in a society which teaches its institutionalized construct to its members it may be expected to have a large effect on their first-order behaviour, and may perhaps give rise to linguistic theories which project the construct on to them as the basis for their first-order behaviour.)

First-order linguistic activity is understood as the 'making and interpreting of linguistic signs, which in turn is a real-time, contextually determined process of investing behaviour or the products of behaviour (vocal, gestural or other) with semiotic significance' (Love, 2004: 530). This is an expression of the integrationist idea that as time-bound agents, we cannot step outside the 'time-track of communication', and, therefore, linguistic signs 'cannot exist except in some temporally

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[8] Interestingly, we do not have this reificatory tendency with other aspects of human behaviour. Harris (1998: 83) likens 'saying the same thing' to 'scoring the same goal in football'. It is obvious that the latter is impossible. No matter how closely the second goal approximates the first, it will be a new goal. Similarly, Harris argues, no matter how closely an utterance resembles a previous one, something new will be said.

[9] Cf. Love (2003, 2004) for many more examples that problematise the immanent realist position.

[10] One might object that these recognitional capacities require mental representations, and that therefore this approach to linguistic knowledge in this paper turns out to be representational after all. Hutto (2006), however, gives a non-representational account of recognitional abilities. Degenaar and Myin (2014) argue that even in the case of absent or abstract features representations need not be invoked.

[11] Note that there are two things what we should be careful not to conflate: on the one hand, we have an individual's experience of linguistic activity as it unfolds. To *describe* this experience, we need not invoke abstractions, for what we experience is not an abstraction but a familiar concrete event, although these concrete events can be described by lay people in terms of linguistic units such as words and languages. On the other hand, we have the language theorist's *explanation* of this fact of experience, which can – and in the case of orthodox linguistics, does – invoke *abstracta*.

[12] Love (1990: 100) conceives of a language 'as an individual's system of repeatable abstractions underlying language-use'. Of course, the abstracta themselves are not repeated but repeatedly *tokened*.

circumscribed context' (Harris, 1998: 81). Instead of selecting ready-mades from a (mental) depository of signs, we *make and re-make* linguistic signs. Competent linguistic communicators directly perceive this first-order linguistic activity as consisting of repeatables, i.e., as affording repetition – akin to how we directly *re*cognise a familiar face. I shall refer to this experienced stability (as opposed to material stability (Harvey, 2015)) as *metalinguistic experience*.[13] What metalinguistic experience amounts to is accentuated when one is confronted by unfamiliar first-order linguistic activity. One simply cannot determine what would count as repeating an utterance in a language one is not conversant with.

In this way, integrationists emphasise the process-like nature, creativity and context-boundedness of first-order linguistic activity. This creativity, however, is not limitless. For our linguistic abilities include that of giving metalinguistic accounts of our communicational behaviour (Pablé and Hutton, 2015). We can describe the flow of linguistic activity in terms of second-order constructs (words, sentences, understanding, meaning, &c) because of our metalinguistic experience of first-order linguistic activity as consisting of repeatables. These second-order constructs in turn can shape or inform first-order linguistic activity in as much as they are used prescriptively. They are therefore not merely descriptive, but carry normative force (I return to this in the section on linguistic knowledge). In our Western society, for instance, with its historically unprecedented grade of literacy, these second-order constructs are codified in dictionaries and grammar books and used as pedagogical tools (Love, 1995), leading to explicit norms of linguistic correctness.[14]

Love (2007) takes second-order constructs to be *constructs* because they do not refer to objectively given first-order objects. The second-order constructs are therefore simply those a community agrees on. There can be no decontextual authority (Pablé and Hutton, 2015), no higher court of appeal (Harris, 1998: 145), and, specifically, no scientific discovery, which objectively grounds second-order constructs. Note that this does not imply that anything goes. As described above, second-order constructs surely have normative force, but only when enforced. Think for instance of the recent rise of using 'they' as a singular pronoun. Purists might dislike this novel use and condemn it as incorrect. However, as more and more people start using 'they' in this way, it might effectively become a singular pronoun. The absence of a decontextual authority means that there can be no definite answer to the question whether 'they' actually *is* a singular pronoun.

3. Second-order practices: optional or constitutive?

From the discussion so far, multiple views of second-order practices are possible. In this section I distinguish between (i) second-order practices as an *optional extension* of first-order linguistic activity, and (ii) second-order practices as *constituting* first-order linguistic activity. Call these the *optional extension view* and the *constitutive view*. I shall argue for the constitutive view. Note that it is not my intention to attribute these views to any particular author (I rely on quotes from Love (1990) for both views) but, rather, to distinguish between them for conceptual clarification, thereby setting the stage for the section on linguistic knowledge. After discussing linguistic knowledge, I shall address the question whether we can – from the constitutive view – still make a sharp distinction between second-order practices and first-order linguistic activity.

3.1. The optional extension view

Love (1990: 99) observes that the priority of language over languages – that is, the priority of first-order linguistic activity over the idea of a language as consisting of repeatables – depends on 'a simple point of logic'. He argues that, both as regards the nascency of language as well as regards a child being initiated into language, there must be a primordial act of understanding. This primordial act of understanding first-order linguistic activity must precede metalinguistic experience of that activity. That is, there must be a primordial utterance which was understood by someone in spite of not 'being able to relate it to antecedently given abstract units' (Ibid.: 107).

Love then claims that the capacity for reflecting on experience (not on linguistic activity) by abstracting from it is presupposed by any language use. For instance, to be able to talk about cats, 'distinct individual organisms have to be seen as tokens of a type "cat"' (Ibid. 97).[15] As the capacity for reflecting on experience was thus necessarily present at the nascency of language, and linguistic activity itself is experienced, Love concludes that 'the birth of language as an object of contemplation follows hard on the heels of the birth of language itself' (Ibid.).

On the optional extension view, first-order linguistic activity therefore has both temporal and logical priority over metalinguistic experience, and therefore, over metalinguistic practices that depend on metalinguistic experience. This in turn entails that there was a period of pure first-order linguistic activity. Thus, so Love claims, '*perceiving* utterances as manifestations of underlying "sames" is not a necessary condition of any use of language whatever' (Ibid.: 100, emphasis added).

The optional extension view is based on a notion of understanding on which it makes sense to ascribe understanding of first-order linguistic activity to a person who cannot ascertain this themself – for declaring that one understood something relies on the use of the metalinguistic construct *understanding*. On this view, it is the act of understanding that makes

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[13] This is akin to what Cowley (2011b) calls 'taking a language stance', which amounts to 'treating speech as if it consisted of verbal patterns'.

[14] Harris (1996: Ch. 2 & Ch. 3) traces Western second-order constructs to the pedagogical needs of the ancient Greek grammarians' main task, viz. to offer an education in writing and literature.

[15] Here we once more run the danger of overintellectualisation. Nothing seems to be lost if we would say that distinct individuals have to be recognised as cats, rather than that they have to be seen as tokens of a type cat.

metalinguistic experience possible: 'once one has understood an utterance for the first time, one will entertain the possibility of repeating it' (Ibid.: 100).

In the rest of this section I argue against this notion of understanding, thereby reaching the conclusion that metalinguistic experience and practices are not an optional extension of first-order activity, but are instead constitutive of it.

3.2. The constitutive view

The logical and temporal priority of first-order linguistic activity over metalinguistic experience and metalinguistic practices follows from the fact that a primordial act of understanding is presupposed by metalinguistic practices. But what would this act of primordial understanding amount to? Love (1990: 107) gives the following suggestion:

> It means, perhaps, that A's vocal noise elicited from B behaviour that suggested to both A and B that associations (images, memories, etc.) somehow evoked in B by A's noise were similar to those associations of the noise for A.

But how similar would the associations of A and B have to be to constitute understanding? The only way this suggestion could provide a criterion for understanding is for there to be an objective measure of the similarity of A's and B's associations as well as a cut-off point above which we could speak of understanding. But then understanding would be a telementational notion: understanding would be achieved when B's associations are sufficiently similar to the ones A originally 'had in mind'.

The first step towards a non-telementational interpretation of understanding is therefore to notice that in our normal usage of the term, we do not use any mental criteria for understanding. Taylor (1990: 130) gives the example of asking someone to open the window. In normal circumstances, if the person we ask indeed opens the window, we conclude that they understood our request; no further knowledge of their mental state is required for this judgement (cf. Love, 2004: 532).[16] We manifestly do not treat understanding as 'an unobservable, private, mental event' (Taylor, 1986: 179).

An alternative integrationist interpretation of understanding is available. Toolan (1996: 262–263) proposes that understanding – rather than being dichotomous in the sense of 'an abrupt or sudden illumination' – is 'a gradual, incremental grasping of things and their uses, or "things in use"'. Toolan's alternative has important implications for Love's distinction. If understanding consists in the grasping of things in use, then understanding requires these things to be experienced by the participants. This in turn entails that, rather than following hard on the heels of the birth of language, metalinguistic experience of vocal noises[17] – that is, coming to treat them as 'repeatables' – is a requirement for first-order linguistic activity.

This re-evaluation of metalinguistic experience as a necessary condition for the genesis of language does not require assuming additional capacities, for Love already assumed the necessity of reflecting on experience for anything that we would call language. The constitutive view thus controverts the optional extension view merely in negating the temporal priority of first-order linguistic activity over metalinguistic experience. On the constitutive view, metalinguistic experience is constitutive of any behaviour that we would call linguistic, where I understand constitutive to mean that metalinguistic experience plays a crucial role in producing any behaviour that we would call linguistic. Only when a person starts to *re*cognise vocal noises, that is, experiences them as repeatables, and starts using them in stable ways, can we call their behaviour *linguistic*.

But even if metalinguistic experience is constitutive of first-order linguistic activity, we might still suppose that explicit metalinguistic practices need not be. This would be feasible if there can be a period, either in sociocultural or ontogenetic development, in which first-order linguistic activity is accompanied by metalinguistic experience without there being explicit metalinguistic practices.

It is exactly this possibility that is investigated and rejected by means of a thought-experiment by Taylor (2000). He asks us to envision humans that engage in first-order linguistic activity without there being any metalinguistic practices. Such a linguistic community would not employ metalinguistic constructs such as *word, sentence, noun, verb, mean, talk, speak, promise, answer, suggest, describe, refer*, and therefore would not be able to talk about language at all, as we often do, when we for instance say things such as *what did you say?, do you understand?, please stop talking!*, and *what's the answer to this question?* As Taylor (2000: 489) argues, much depends in this thought-experiment on 'what we are willing to call "language"'. Even if the humans were capable of using some sort of regularised signalling behaviour to influence each other's behaviour, it would surely be much different from what we would normally call language.[18] For this alleged behaviour would lack even the most basic properties that we attribute to language. For instance, Taylor describes, there would be no possibility of standardisation and error. Without the metalinguistic resources to call some behaviours 'correct' and others 'incorrect', there could not be criteria for correct linguistic behaviour.[19]

A similar line of reasoning holds for the notion of understanding. In discussing the two views of second-order practices so far, we tacitly assumed understanding to be a purely descriptive term. That is, we took the response of opening the window,

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[16] Of course, we seldom make this explicit judgement. Moreover, this judgement is defeasible. Take the contrived example of a person who always opens the window, regardless of what is said.

[17] I follow Love in talking about vocal noises. The same argument applies to forms of linguistic communication that do not rely on vocalisations, such as gestural languages.

[18] Taylor (2000: 493) discusses the example of vervet monkeys' alarm calls. Although these calls surely have a communicative function, it is unclear what purpose it would serve to attribute metalinguistic properties such as truth or reference to these calls, when the monkeys themselves are obviously unable to conceive of the calls in these terms.

[19] Nor, incidentally, could a distinction be made between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour.

after a request to do so was made, to demonstrate understanding in a straight-forward way. However, in the absence of a metalinguistic notion of understanding, 'it is not clear how a hearer's response to something said could have counted as a case of understanding or of not-understanding' (Taylor, 2000: 490). That is not to deny that we – who know how to wield the concept of understanding – could attribute understanding to the imagined metalinguistically impaired people. But in doing so, Taylor claims, we would fall prey to the *ethnocentric fallacy* in assuming 'that the reflexive linguistic distinctions which our culture applies in evaluating and characterizing communicational behaviour must also be applied – and if not explicitly, then implicitly – by the members of every culture' (Ibid.).

To conclude this section, metalinguistic practices constitute our practice of *understanding* (and, *mutatis mutandis*, *meaning, talking, promising, describing,* &c). Without these metalinguistic practices we would not be able to disagree as to whether someone understood someone else, which entails that the distinction would have no force in our first-order activities. It is therefore not only metalinguistic experience of linguistic activity as being repeatable, but the metalinguistic practices themselves that constitute first-order linguistic activity. Although people that lacked metalinguistic practices might develop some kind of signalling system, it would not be recognisable to us as linguistic. Reflexivity – understood as linguistic activity turning back on itself through metalinguistic practices – is therefore a necessary property of anything we would *call* language.[20] What at first sight might be conceived of as pure first-order linguistic communication – talking *about* something, promising, telling the truth, claiming, describing, referring to something, &c – is thus shown to be constituted by second-order practices. In the next section, I show how this conclusion feeds into an account of linguistic knowledge.

4. Linguistic knowledge

Taylor (2011) claims that there is a surprising absence of discussion in the integrationist literature on language acquisition and linguistic knowledge. This question is especially pertinent to integrationists and proponents of a radical embodied approach to cognition, as we have seen in the introduction, because they cannot adopt the received view of linguistic knowledge.

Taylor and Shanker (2003) distinguish between *what* the child acquires, and *how* the child acquires this. In this penultimate section, I focus on the *what*-question – understood as the question 'what constitutes linguistic knowledge?' I particular, I argue that linguistic knowledge should be conceived of as practical knowledge – or knowing-how – rather than theoretical knowledge – or knowing-that. I first introduce the distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that, after which I show how linguistic know-how is dependent on metalinguistic practices as congruent with the constitutive view. In particular I argue that Taylor's (1990) notion of *criterial relations* is crucial to understanding linguistic knowledge.

4.1. Knowing how and knowing that

Ryle (1946) argued for a distinction between knowing-that – theoretical knowledge, conceived of as considering propositions – and knowing-how – practical knowledge or a direct exercise of intelligence in practical performance. In exercising know-how, Ryle maintains, intelligent performance is not the outcome of occult episodes of considering propositions, but is a manifest property of activities. That is, the activities themselves are conducted intelligently or stupidly (Ryle, 1949: 27). Ryle's master argument against intellectualists that give priority to theoretical knowledge is that because the entertaining of propositions is itself an activity, conceiving of know-how in terms of prior theoretical knowledge leads to a regress. For if intelligent performance requires a temporal prior reflection on how to act, conducted by means of considering propositions, this reflection on how to act itself can only be intelligent if preceded by another instance of reflection: a reflection on how best to reflect on how to act (Ibid.: 31).[21]

Hanna (2006) builds on Ryle's account of knowing-how. She starts from Dummett's (1978) observation that the response *I don't know; I've never tried*, is *prima facie* acceptable when asked if one can swim, whereas it would not be when asked if one can speak Spanish. Dummett intended this example to demonstrate that *qua* rational activity, speaking Spanish cannot be a skill. However, so continues Hanna, this is to misconstrue what is meant by practical knowledge. For the term 'swim' in the example has two possible interpretations: first, merely being able to hold one's head above water, and, second, the skill of swimming as required to pass swimming classes, such as performing the breaststroke. Whereas one can genuinely be ignorant whether one would be able to stay afloat, performing the breaststroke is an acquired skill that admits of criteria; when we interpret swimming in the latter way, the nescient response is unjustified.

Accordingly, if we conceive of the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge as a distinction between the kind of 'thrashing about'[22] one undertakes in trying to stay afloat on the one hand, and obvious rule-following activities such

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[20] This necessity of reflective practices first argued for by Taylor (1990, 1992) became an important part of integrationism, as evidenced for instance by its inclusion in Harris' *Introduction to integrationial linguistics* (1998: 25ff).

[21] Stanley and Williamson (2001) argued that this Rylean argument is mistaken, and that know-how always requires knowing that. See Simpson (2010: 632ff) and Noë (2005) for rebuttals.

[22] I borrow this term from Fodor (2008: 13), who explicitly opposes the Rylean conclusion of the priority of practical knowledge over theoretical knowledge. Note that Fodor's (1975: 58) rejection of the primacy of theoretical knowledge leads to the absurd conclusion that we cannot acquire a first language. Interestingly, this conclusion is based on an account of language learning that cannot but view this process as a *metalinguistic* endeavour of hypothesis formation and confirmation, where the metalanguage is mentalese.

as playing chess on the other hand, then surely linguistic communication is more like the latter. However, setting up the debate in these terms excludes a third category, that of skills.[23] For in contrast to merely staying afloat, performing the breaststroke is subject to evaluation and correction, and it is the possibility of correction that allows us to say that an action is performed skilfully. I therefore define skills as those activities we perform that are subject to correction by others.[24]

This correction in turn is possible because there is a *conventional* way in which the activity is performed. In line with the reflection on experience Love identified as necessary for the genesis of language, a particular swimming behaviour is conceived of as an instance of performing the breaststroke, and the perceived (dis)similarities with other instances of performing the breaststroke provide criteria for evaluating and correcting behaviour.

When we say that there is a conventional way of performing the breaststroke, we need not assume that there is *a* convention that guides performance. Instead, this is merely to point towards the fact that when we perform the breaststroke, we are subject to correction by others only if they conceive of it as an attempt to perform the breaststroke.[25] When we think of a convention as an entity, we can come under the impression that it is the cause, or among the causes of, people behaving similarly. Instead, I propose, we should conceive of conventions as a *coming together* (*com-venire*), that is, as the emergence of relatively stable patterns of behaviour. Following Millikan (1998), I shall refer to these stable patterns as *natural conventions*. Millikan (1998: 162) understands natural conventions as 'patterns that are "reproduced"', where 'the fact that these patterns proliferate is due partly to weight of precedent, rather than due, for example, to their intrinsically superior capacity to perform certain functions'. I therefore take *conventional regularities* to be those regularities that proliferate in part due to precedent.

According to Millikan, the explicit rules we can formulate to describe these natural conventions are just that: descriptions. The natural conventions by themselves therefore carry no prescriptive force. It is only when the behaviour of others is corrected based on an awareness of these conventional regularities, that they acquire prescriptive force, though always by proxy of the corrector (cf. Wittgenstein, 1983: VI §42).[26] So we have to say that the conventional regularities need not only be regularities, but also conceived of as being regularities and therefore repeatable in order for them to be counted as skilful behaviour. Note that none of this implies that the kind of rules under consideration here have to be effable for the rule-followers. In terms of the previous section, metalinguistic awareness of 'things' in use does not imply accompanying meta-linguistic practices.

Before we turn our attention to the role criterial relations play in linguistic knowledge, I want to say a few words about explicitly formulated rules. Linguistic prescription based on explicit rules occurs abundantly in highly literate societies – based *inter alia* on codification in dictionaries and grammar books. In this process of codification, natural conventions are reified into what Millikan calls *stipulated conventions*, which refers to explicitly stated rules.[27] This does not threaten an account of linguistic knowledge in terms of know-how. First of all, this process of reification depends on practical linguistic knowledge. Moreover, the reified rules are not occult (mental) entities, but are formulated in natural language and therefore publicly available. As such, an explicitly stated rule is not an explanatory hypothesis but a guide for conduct and a standard of correctness (Hacker, 2014). Finally, similar to natural conventions, explicitly stated rules carry prescriptive force only in so far there are used to correct the behaviour of others, or, derivatively, of oneself.

4.2. Criterial relations

Besides conceiving of an utterance as repeatable, and the perception of (dis)similarities between repetitions, we still have to explain how language users can correct one another based on the appropriateness of a particular linguistic act in context. In the rest of this section, I argue that Taylor's idea of *criterial relations* provides insight in the constitution of natural conventions regarding the use of linguistic repeatables. Central to this notion is that we conceive of metalinguistic practices as normative practices in which the experienced stability of language is forged (Taylor, 1990).

According to Taylor (1990: 136), a criterial relation holds between assertions. He introduces the notion as follows: 'Part of knowing the meaning of the word *understand* is ordinarily taken to include knowing that the assertion of "he gave a correct explanation of E" provides criterial support for the justifiable assertion of "he understands E".' Understanding what a word

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[23] According to the Pablé and Hutton (2015: 68) 'Knowledge is a matter of an individual's integrational –or communicational – proficiency, which "… comprises the whole range of knowledge, abilities and experience that [he/she] can bring to bear on the communication situation in question." […] (Harris, 2009: 70)'. A comparison between what I define here as skills and communicational proficiency lies outside the scope of this paper.

[24] In (radical) embodied approaches to cognition, the notion of skill is often used in a much broader sense. Crucial here is whether there are sources of normativity that are non-social in nature. Chemero (2009: 145), for instance, sees affordances as relations between abilities and features of the environment, while maintaining 'that there is something inherently normative about abilities'. Enactivists such as Di Paolo (2005) explain non-social normativity in terms of the self-production of organisms. See Heras-Escribano et al. (2013) and Heras-Escribano and De Pinedo (2015) for a Wittgensteinian critique of these notions of normativity. For the purposes of this paper, I do not address the question whether non-social forms of normativity exist, and therefore limit my discussion to social forms of normativity.

[25] Note that in consonance with earlier discussion, this experience of something as being repeatable need not imply that it is named by participants. In general, an inability to formulate explicit rules does not negate skilfulness (cf. Noë, 2012: 118ff).

[26] Note that this observation does not negate the fact that *once* someone mastered a particular practice, they can correct themself based on observed natural conventions. A discussion on this self-corrective process is, however, outside the scope of this paper.

[27] Prescription on the basis of explicit rules of course need not be based on previous conventional regularities – think for instance of a person coming up with the rules of a new game.

means – understood as grasping a repeatable in use – is thus constituted by knowing how to provide criterial support for its application and recognising when criterial support is provided.[28] These criterial relations can thus be conceived of as norms or rules (natural as opposed to stipulated conventions) specifying correct use of the word. However, whether or not an assertion provides criterial support for another is not determined in a decontextualised fashion. Criterial relations can only provide standards of correctness when recognised by linguistic communicators. This means that what criterial relations apply is always a contextually determined matter (Ibid.: 144). Crucially, a community must place a weight on the maintenance of the criterial relation, and it will usually do so if this maintenance is conducive to furthering its purposes.

A particular enlightening example of these criterial relations is given by Taylor (2000, 2010; cf. Shanker and Taylor, 2001) in discussing the practice of naming.[29] He starts from the observation that many parents hold that one of the first words their child learns is their own name. But, when the child is able to make vocal noises that are similar to the ones others make when they use the child's name, and the child responds to hearing its name by directing its attention to the speaker that used it, these behaviours do not show that the child conceives of that repeatable as its name. Many animals can be conditioned to respond to and produce particular vocalisations, and this fact does not show an understanding of the practice of naming. That is, a 'child's name does not enter her verbal repertoire – either productively or receptively – as a name' (Taylor, 2012: 9). For besides being able to produce a vocalisation that admits of relevant similarities to her name, the child has to be 'reflexively encultured' by knowing how to provide criterial support for utterances like *x is my name* (Taylor, 2000: 496). Recognising that another person saying *I'm Roy* when you first meet them provides criterial support for saying *His name is Roy* is to go beyond the simple response to and production of a vocal noise. Whilst this example may seem trivial, it manifestly relies on the metalinguistic practice wherein the metalinguistic construct *name* is used. Note also, that in line with the discussion about understanding, in a culture in which the metalinguistic construct *name* is absent people would not have names – at least not what we understand by names.

To understand what it is to have a name thus includes participating in reflexive practices like telling others your name when you meet them for the first time, responding appropriately to questions like 'who is the one called Roy?', understanding that you can name your stuffed animals, &c. This shows that merely engaging in the right kind of first-order linguistic activity – where 'right kind' is determinable from the perspective of other participants – is not enough: the child has to become conversant with the appropriate second-order practices in order to understand what it means to have a name. In other words: the *prima facie* first-order practice of naming is constituted by second-order practices of reflecting on naming, in the sense that second-order practices play a crucial role in first-order practices.

It is crucial to note that, in attuning to the criterial relations that constitute the practice of naming, there is no non-arbitrary point where the child can be said to have completely mastered the practice. Even adult speakers are – in line with Putnam's (1975) idea of the *division of linguistic labour* – unaware of all metalinguistic practices that constitute the first-order practice of naming. Even in the everyday phenomenon of personal names we can imagine people who are unaware that one can change one's name, adopt a *nom de plume*, call loved ones by a pet name, &c. Moreover, the criterial relations that constitute a particular practice are ever-changing, which makes any envisaged complete understanding a practical impossibility. A useful metaphor is provided by Ryle (1945/2009), who compares being at home in language as knowing your way around a familiar village. Both are acquired through one's daily walks and are 'knowledge by wont and not knowledge by rules' (Ibid.: 211). And in both cases, complete knowledge is impossible. This entails that there is no stable state that a person can achieve such that it can be counted as having fully mastered a particular linguistic practice.

Whilst linguistic knowledge, understood as knowing-how to give and recognise criterial support, is necessary for the participation in first-order linguistic communication, linguistic knowledge cannot be reduced to rigid application of criterial relations. Crucial here is the observation that what criterial relations apply is context dependent and subject to continuous change. Moreover, although criterial relations are often made explicit in metalinguistic practices, this need not be the case. Finally, criterial relations do not hold only between assertions, as non-verbal behaviour can provide criterial support (e.g., a person's nodding whilst you are talking to her provides criterial support for her understanding you).

4.3. Linguistic knowledge and novelty

An interesting phenomenon that shows the limitations of explanations of linguistic behaviour in terms of criterial relations is that of novelty in linguistic activities. This deviance in the application of criterial relations can of course be affected through explicit metalinguistic discourse. Take the case of Humpty-Dumpty, who claims that 'When *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean.' This leads to the situation in which Alice does not understand his utterance *There's glory for you*, which does not surprise Humpty Dumpty: 'Of course you don't – till I tell you'. Only by explicitly telling her that he means *There's a knock-down argument for you* by *There's glory for you* – that is, by relying on explicit metalinguistic discourse – can Alice understand him. However, more interesting for our current purposes is people getting away with what Humpty Dumpty attempts to do *without* thereby relying on explicit metalinguistic discourse.

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[28] Once again, in line with Section 3.1, I understand constitutive to mean that knowing-how to provide and recognise criterial support plays a crucial role in any behaviour we would attribute understanding to.

[29] These practices are of course culture-specific. Think for instance of cultures where your name changes once you reach adulthood, cultures in which a value is placed on avoiding the names of recently deceased, &c.

Davidson (1986)[30] shows this possibility when discussing understanding of utterances in context. The phenomenon that interests Davidson is the fact that successful communication is rarely frustrated by novelty in linguistic activity, such as demonstrated by malapropisms, incomplete or garbled utterances, unfamiliar words, neologisms, slips of the tongue, &c. In these cases novelty is produced – knowingly or not – either through converting familiar words or constructions 'to a new use by an ingenious or ignorant speaker' (Ibid.: 259), or, through sheer invention. From this, Davidson concludes that our ability to understand one another cannot be explained in terms of what we bring to the table, since this cannot account for the specificity of the occasion (Simpson, 2010: 639); instead, we converge on a mutual understanding[31] in a particular context. In other words: 'a speaker may provide us with information relevant to interpreting an utterance in the course of making the utterance' (Davidson, 1986: 260).

This conclusion reached by Davidson thus shows how first-order utterances *themselves* get to do some of the work that we might originally have thought to be reserved for explicit metalinguistic discourse. By being understood and accepted[32] by all participants *any* first-order utterance can have second-order effects which can be transient (in the case of slips of the tongue) or longer lasting (as in the coinage of a neologism). That is, every first-order linguistic act has the potential to change the criteria by which we conceive of that very act, which means that understanding should be conceived of as a context-dependent convergence on a mutual understanding, that is, not as the transference of some-thing from one person to another.

Note also that novelty in linguistic activity is – like second-order practices – not an optional extension. This is true of course from a sociocultural perspective, since language had to originate from somewhere, but also from an ontogenetic point of view. For understanding is most apparent in a person's ability to use a word in a novel context and in novel phrases. That is, merely being able to repeat verbatim shows no understanding at all. It is only when someone can say something 'in their own words' or apply a concept to a novel situation that we are convinced that they understood something.

4.4. Implications for linguistic knowledge

The idea of a context-dependent convergence on a mutual understanding has three important implications for linguistic knowledge. *First*, as criterial relations are contextual, and language admits of novelty, there can be no rules for arriving at a mutual understanding. Understanding happens in the unfolding of an episode of communication, and cannot be explained solely by what each participant brings to the table. Like perception in radical embodied approaches, understanding is something that we do, but, crucially, something we do together.[33] The absence of rules for arriving at a mutual understanding is further corroborated by the fact that understanding is often dependent on knowledge that is not traditionally understood to be linguistic. In recognising the prevalence of novelty, Davidson (1986: 265) thus concludes that 'we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally'. This conclusion opposes the received view mentioned in the introduction on which linguistic knowledge is clearly delineated from other kinds of knowledge, because it is theoretical knowledge of *a language*. Note further that this conclusion is in agreement with the integrationist insight that it is impossible to distinguish in an absolute sense those aspects of a communicational episode that are linguistic from those that are not. It is therefore in principle impossible to delineate sharply linguistic knowledge from non-linguistic knowledge.

Take knowledge of English spelling, a *prima facie* paradigm example of linguistic knowledge. Knowing-how to spell English words, however, means knowing that there is a difference between American English and British English, and that, depending on the context, either *behavior* or *behaviour* is correct. Knowing how to spell correctly thus includes knowing when to use which form, and this in turn relies on knowledge that is not *prima facie* linguistic.

Second, criterial relations hold not only between assertions. In producing linguistic behaviour, we rely on a host of resources in making ourselves understood. Criterial relations therefore hold not only between utterances, but also between *prima facie* non-linguistic actions and utterances. In the example we looked at earlier, opening the window at request showed an understanding of that request. The fact that the addressee starts acting without requests for elucidation thus provides criterial support – in this particular context – for her having understood it. In realising that the distinction between linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge is not clear-cut, we thus also have to acknowledge that criterial relations hold not only between utterances, but between any aspect of our behaviour and utterances.

Finally, in highlighting the context-dependency of converging on a mutual understanding, what it is that we understand cannot be the utterance itself – for there is no such thing as the utterance itself without theoretically misbegotten decontextualisation. Instead, what we understand is a person trying to get a point across by means of language. So, instead of understanding *language,* we understand *others* (Simpson, 2010). This further underlines the blurring of the distinction between linguistic knowledge and knowing our way around in the world generally.

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[30] Goldstein (2004) also notices the similarities between integrationist thought and the Davidson (1986) that wrote 'A nice derangement of epitaphs'. However, Goldstein does not part with traditional ways of conceiving of language (Harris, 2004). Of particular interest to integrationists should be Davidson's (1986: 265) confutation of the language myth in his conclusion that 'there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed', which he defines as 'a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases'.

[31] Davidson couches his discussion in terms of a convergence on a passing theory. However, by theory Davidson means what would amount to a satisfactory description of what a linguistic communicator can do, without implying that they actually know the theory in any sense of the word (Davidson, 1986: 256).

[32] Of course, novelty can be understood but not accepted, e.g., when corrected. Crucially, however, correcting another person relies on understanding to a degree what they wanted to say. If you simply do not understand at all what another person says you cannot correct what they said.

[33] Even in the *prima facie* example of solitary understanding, such as understanding a text one is reading, one can only be certain one has understood it when one agrees with others in discussing the text.

Summarising this section, I argued that linguistic behaviour is grounded in skilful use of linguistic repeatables; this behaviour is skilful because it is subject to correction. This correction is based in the (dis)similarities perceived between occurrent and previous utterances based on metalinguistic experience, as well as criterial relations to which people attune through metalinguistic practices. What criterial relations apply is not decontextually determined. In any linguistic episode, criterial relations can be changed and constituted without the need for explicit metalinguistic discourse. This shows a blurring of the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge, as well as a wider application of the notion of criterial relations. In the concluding section I revisit Love's distinction from the perspective of this account of linguistic knowledge.

5. Love's distinction revisited

In this paper I proposed an account of linguistic knowledge in terms of knowing-how, which firmly places linguistic knowledge within the reach of theories that propose a radically embodied account of cognition. In this final section, I revisit Love's distinction from the perspective of the account of linguistic knowledge developed in this paper.

I start with the relatively trivial observation made by Wittgenstein (1953: §97) that metalinguistic constructs, such as *language*, cannot be but 'humble' words like any other. This entails that all second-order practices are necessarily also first-order practices. In other words, although arising out of reflexivity, metalinguistic practices are not outside language in the way that a tennis commentator is outside the match he talks about (Harris, 1998: 25). As opposed to tennis, 'language, being language, is on its own. It is interpretatively terminal.' (Love, 2003: 88, 2007).

As mentioned in the introduction, Pablé and Hutton (2015) claim that 'first and second-order practices are inextricably intertwined'. We are now in a position to elucidate this claim. It is crucial to realise that the ability to participate in metalinguistic practices does not leave the first-order activities untouched. Think for instance of learning English grammar. To be competent in English grammar is not merely to take a metalinguistic perspective on first-order linguistic activity or linguistic inscriptions every once in a while; one's own first-order linguistic activity has to be in accordance with English grammar to count as being competent. To say that metalinguistic practices are normative with regards to first-order linguistic activity is to take account of the shaping force that they have – subject of course to participants' recognition of the pertinence of the particular metalinguistic practice.[34]

This point is also made by Noë[35] (2012: 3), who describes the relation between first-order linguistic activity and second-order practices as follows: 'The first-order practice contains within it the second-order practice. For thinking about language and language-use is one of the basic and unavoidable things we use language to do. There is no such thing as the naïve, un-reflective, theoretically unbiased user of language.' The impossibility of an unreflective user of language is also the conclusion reached in this paper: to be able to participate in linguistic practices at all, one has to be able to participate in metalinguistic practices. If we conceive of linguistic knowledge as including knowing-how to provide and recognise criterial support, this means that a competent linguistic communicator has to talk and write in such a way that she can provide this criterial support.

This in turn requires an ongoing reflective attitude towards one's own and others' first-order linguistic activity. Being able to participate in metalinguistic practices is therefore not properly described merely as being able to switch rapidly between unreflective first-order linguistic activity and detached metalinguistic reflection on that activity. To be a competent language user is perforce to be a competent critic of language (Noë, 2012), and one can only be critical when one recognises when one needs to be. Claiming that metalinguistic practices are constitutive of linguistic knowledge, in the end, boils down to claiming that to be a competent linguistic communicator, one has to have a reflective – or metalinguistic – attitude towards what one is doing *whilst* being engaged in linguistic activities. It is to perceive directly when a person uses a word incorrectly, to see the spelling error as one reads the text, to understand that someone unfamiliar introduces themself when they utter a name, to notice when you don't understand what is being said, &c. To be a competent linguistic communicator one has to be sensitive to the criterial relations that originate from metalinguistic practices in the course of first-order linguistic activity. All first-order linguistic activity thus has a second-order dimension to it, in the sense that it is directly perceived in terms of the metalinguistic practices that constitute it.

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[34] To be competent in English grammar does not entail, for instance, that one's linguistic behaviour is *always* in accordance with it. Everybody that has transcribed spoken language verbatim knows that spoken language often does not consist of well-formed sentences.
[35] Noë (2009: 198) acknowledges the influence of Roy Harris on his own thinking about language.

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