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This article offers a carefully crafted set of analytic distinctions whose first payoff is a powerful demonstration of the compound nature of agency.[1] In the same way, some decades ago, linguists established that "subject" in grammatical analysis is not an essential entity but is characterized by a cluster of properties. Empirical evidence from languages unlike English in grammatical type proved the point by showing that the elements of "subject" could be separated and distributed across different parts of a clause (Li 1976). Analogously, Kockelman's theoretical decomposition of agency now invites empirical support from the ethnographic record of the possibility of cultural difference in structural distribution of the logically separable elements of agency (cf., e.g., Danziger 2006).

A compelling theme for me is the degree and type of agency that speakers may have in the semiotic processes of articulating linguistic utterances. Kockelman says that a signer (speaker, etc.) has relatively less control over indexical signs than over symbolic signs, but this is not to be read as an overestimation of the degree to which our symbolic expressivity is "unbounded." In typically multimodal interaction our greater creative freedom is often in the predominantly *iconic-indexical* resources of co-speech hand gesture (Kendon 2004; Goldin-Meadow 2003; McNeill 2005) and other types of illustrative device such as diagrams. And conventional symbolic systems such as language can constrain expressive agency in ways that indexical signs do not. The infinite expressivity attributed to language is classically credited to the operations of syntax upon the lexicon, not to the lexicon itself. Within a community, the meanings of words are extraordinarily inert because they are required to remain tolerably convergent. When we speak of the degrees to which I may be able to determine (*a*) what I want to talk about, (*b*) what I want to say about it, and (*c*) what I want to conclude from that, we are speaking at the level of the linguistic utterance (e.g., a proposition), but at the level of (type) form-meaning mappings in individual morpholexical items I do not have much control over what I want a word to mean. True, as Kockelman points out, I can invent a whole new word, but listeners won't understand it unless I embed it amongst familiar words in familiar grammatical structures. As cultural innovator, I see so far only because I am standing on the shoulders of historico-cultural giants (or, better, I am a midget on a vast pyramid of other midgets [Richerson and Boyd 2005, 50]).

Another potential cause of diminished semiotic agency is

1. If the presentation of Kockelman's neo-Peircean framework is too elliptical for ready comprehension by "nonintimates" (Parmentier 1994), I recommend putting in the effort to delve into the logic of this powerful framework (for which, see Kockelman 2005, 2006*a*, 2006*c*).

the relation between states of mind and forms of representation. Tomlin (1997) reports an experimental manipulation of speakers' visual attention by which he was able to fully control whether his subjects would produce a grammatically active description of a scene ("*The red fish* ate the blue one") or a passive one ("The blue fish got eaten by the red one"). A speaker's formulation of an utterance may also be constrained by the anticipated state of mind of a listener. In planning what to say (and, especially, how to say it) a speaker cannot afford to ignore any unseen pragmatic effects of markedness (Havranek 1964 [1932]). I had better stick to the "normal way of saying it" unless I want to invite a special interpretation (Grice 1975; Levinson 2000; Enfield and Stivers 2007). As Wittgenstein (1953, §1.60) put it: "Suppose that, instead of saying 'Bring me the broom', you said 'Bring me the broomstick and the brush which is fitted on to it.'!—Isn't the answer: 'Do you want the broom? Why do you put it so oddly?'" Avoiding such turbulence significantly diminishes our expressive options.

As students of meaning and semiotic action, we should not underestimate the degree to which we are constrained by the semiotic systems at our disposal. Speakers are subjected to a range of deterministic (read: agency-diminishing) forces, running from conventions of code to norms of usage to our own cognitive states to the anticipated responses of others. We are coerced from all sides. In Goffman's words: "Not, then, men and their moments. Rather, moments and their men" (1967, 3). And intriguingly, as Kockelman points out, we regiment our own behavior (read: diminish our own agency), regarding social facts as "exerting over the individual an external constraint" (Durkheim 1982 [1895, 59]). Humans are naturally disposed to treat institutional facts as brute facts (Searle 1969, 51) through "the treatment of certain human actions *as if* they were an integral part of physical determinism" (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 221). This counterpoints the agency-attributing anthropomorphizing of nature, the hallmark of religion and other reflexes of human social intelligence.

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According to Kockelman's first footnote, "the point of this review is to provide *an analytic typology* [my emphasis] of various key moves in the theorization of agency." Its success therefore hinges on whether the typology highlights useful relations and differences between different ways of deploying signs. No doubt assessments will differ. I find Kockelman's mapping of the landscape unhelpful. He distinguishes two types of agency, residential ("the degree to which one may control the expression of a sign") and representational (the ability to determine what we talk about and how we talk about it). Representational agency ("closest to 'knowledge'