## ANALYTICAL ESSAY

# How to Pay Attention to the Words We Use: The Reflexive Review as a Method for Linguistic Reflexivity

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Despite the imperative to pay attention to the words we use as a routine dimension of research, the methodological and pedagogical tools illustrating how to work on our own use of language are largely missing within and beyond international relations (IR). To address this gap, we develop a method—the "Reflexive Review"—which adds a linguistic and reflexive dimension to the common practice of a literature review. This method is accessible for researchers who are neither linguistic specialists nor working on language and can be integrated within a standalone research project. First, we review the existing traditions used in IR to investigate language— quantitative text analysis, conceptual analysis, discourse analysis, deconstruction, and problematization—and assess their interest and limits regarding linguistic reflexivity. Second, we introduce four methodological steps for conducting the Reflexive Review, by reviewing literature to: (1) build a list of "priority words" that may need reflexive attention; (2) look for metalinguistic statements to synthesize how the literature has explicitly discussed these words; (3) identify patterns of word use, as collectively shared meanings that coexist and that we should become aware of; and (4) compare the identified uses of language with our own. Third, we demonstrate the Reflexive Review in practice based on a word commonly used in IR: "local." We identify four patterns of the word use of "local" in IR literature as: a class of actors, a level of analysis, community, and experiences of the everyday. In sum, we demonstrate how a Reflexive Review enables us to implement reflexivity in practice and make more conscious linguistic choices, to support more nuanced, ethical, and rigorous analysis and empirical work.

A pesar del imperativo de prestar atención a las palabras que utilizamos como una parte rutinaria de la investigación, las herramientas metodológicas y pedagógicas que ilustran cómo trabajar en nuestro propio uso del lenguaje están ausentes en gran medida dentro y fuera de las Relaciones Internacionales (RR. II.). Para remediar esta situación, desarrollamos un método, la "revisión reflexiva," que añade una dimensión lingüística y reflexiva a la práctica habitual de la revisión bibliográfica. Este método es accesible para los investigadores que no son especialistas lingüísticos ni trabajan en el lenguaje, y puede integrarse dentro de un proyecto de investigación independiente. Primero, revisamos las tradiciones existentes utilizadas en las RR. II. para investigar el lenguaje (análisis cuantitativo del texto, análisis conceptual, análisis del discurso, deconstrucción y problematización) y evaluamos su interés y límites con respecto a la reflexividad

lingüística. En segundo lugar, presentamos cuatro pasos metodológicos para realizar una revisión reflexiva, mediante la revisión de la bibliografía para: 1) construir una lista de "palabras prioritarias" que pueden necesitar atención reflexiva; 2) buscar declaraciones metalingüísticas para sintetizar cómo la bibliografía ha discutido explícitamente estas palabras; 3) identificar patrones de uso de las palabras, como significados compartidos de forma colectiva que coexisten y de los que deberíamos ser conscientes; y 4) comparar los usos del lenguaje que se identifican con el nuestro. En tercer lugar, demostramos la revisión reflexiva en la práctica con base en una palabra de uso habitual en las RR. II.: "local." Identificamos cuatro patrones de uso de la palabra "local" en la bibliografía de las RR. II.: una clase de actores, un nivel de análisis, la comunidad y las experiencias cotidianas. En resumen, demostramos cómo una revisión reflexiva nos permite implementar la reflexividad en la práctica y tomar decisiones lingüísticas más conscientes, para respaldar un trabajo empírico y un análisis más matizado, ético y riguroso.

Malgré l'injonction courante de prêter attention aux mots que nous utilisons dans le cadre de nos pratiques de recherche, les outils méthodologiques et pédagogiques démontrant comment engager une pratique réflexive vis-à-vis de notre usage de la langue font largement défaut en Relations Internationales (RI) et en sciences sociales en général. Pour combler cette lacune, nous développons une méthode—« la revue réflexive de littérature »—qui ajoute une dimension linguistique et réflexive à la pratique courante de revue de littérature. Cette méthode est accessible aux chercheurs qui ne travaillent pas sur le langage et sans expertise linguistique, et peut être intégrée à un projet de recherche traditionnel. Nous examinons en premier lieu les traditions méthodologiques couramment utilisées en RI pour étudier le langage—analyse textuelle quantitative, analyse conceptuelle, analyse de discours, déconstruction et problématisation—et évaluons les mérites et limites de ces approches pour la réflexivité linguistique. Nous formalisons ensuite quatre étapes méthodologiques pour mettre en œuvre la revue réflexive de littérature: 1) établir une liste de « mots prioritaires » qui nécessitent notre attention réflexive, 2) rechercher les énoncés métalinguistiques pour synthétiser la manière dont la littérature a explicitement abordé ces mots, 3) identifier les schémas de signification collective correspondant aux différents usages des mots, et auxquelles nous devrions prêter attention, et 4) comparer les différents schémas de signification identifiés avec nos propres usages des « mots prioritaires ». Dans un troisième temps, nous illustrons cette méthode avec un mot couramment utilisé en RI, « local », pour lequel nous identifions quatre schémas de signification en RI: en tant que catégorie d'acteurs, niveau d'analyse, communauté et expériences du quotidien. En somme, nous démontrons comment une revue réflexive de littérature nous permet de déployer une réflexivité pratique et d'intégrer une dimension réflexive à nos choix linguistiques afin de produire une analyse et un travail empirique plus nuancés, éthiques et rigoureux.

**Keywords:**  reflexivity, language, local
**Palabras clave:**  reflexividad, lenguaje, local
**Mots clés:**  réflexivité, langage, local

## Introduction

Despite the imperative to pay attention to the words we use as a routine dimension of research, practical approaches illustrating *how* are largely missing. This relative absence is even more striking since this question addresses both positivist

concerns of rigor and transparency at every stage of research and post-positivist concerns about how (academic) language organizes our perception and produces sociopolitical effects. As a result, scholars and students interested in becoming more reflexive about their use of language find themselves at a loss. This article aims to address this gap by developing a method—the Reflexive Review—to help us become more linguistically reflexive by increasing awareness of how our use of language affects knowledge production.

To develop this method, we build a bridge between literature on language that has developed methods to study *other people's* language (but not *our own*) and literature focusing on reflexivity, traditionally concentrating on the situatedness and position of the researcher rather than their use of language. These two stimulating agendas have largely developed in parallel within, and beyond, International Relations (IR). We show how bringing them together addresses the need for linguistic reflexivity expressed by the literature and represents a promising starting point to develop practical methods for linguistic reflexivity accessible to a broad audience.

Since the "linguistic turn" in the 1960s, those working on the role of language in society have developed rich theoretical frameworks and dedicated methods. Accordingly, IR scholars have demonstrated that "tak[ing] language seriously" (Cienki and Yanow 2013) is critical for the understanding of world politics (Skonieczny 2015; Linos and Pegram 2016; Caraccioli et al. 2021). Worldwide, for example, the dominant use of English language—one option among many—constrains how conflict resolution is understood (Cohen 2001). More specifically, works have demonstrated that how the discipline of IR speaks about the world contributes to the shaping of this world. For example, Huysmans (2006) highlights the "normative dilemma" faced by scholarship working on immigration. Indeed, when "speaking and writing" about immigration in relation to security, we risk legitimizing xenophobic policies. However, not addressing this relation could undermine the relevance and rigor of such research. The idea that academic language plays a role in the (re)production of the sociopolitical order is supported by a wide spectrum of theoretical frameworks, including realism, constructivism, post-structuralism, feminism, and postcolonialism (Beer and Hariman 1996; Hansen 2006; Grovogui 2007; Epstein 2013). Literature, therefore, has successfully put on the agenda that academic language has effects that cannot be ignored. Yet, without clear guidelines helping us to match what we do as researchers with such theoretical frameworks, we open ourselves to a potential mismatch between theory and practice and risk reproducing what we aim to challenge (Holden 2002).

In parallel to questions of language, reflexivity has become a growing object of interest in the discipline (Amoureux and Steele 2016). In IR, reflexivity is commonly understood as a practice of "auto-objectivation" of the self in the context of knowledge production, following the Bourdieusian conceptualization of reflexivity (Eagleton-Pierce 2011; Hamati-Ataya 2012; Knafo 2016)—a definition with which we align. If objectivation refers to the process through which social scientists transform a phenomenon of the social world into an object of sociological study (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), auto-objectivation aims to include ourself as a researcher in our object of inquiry to acknowledge better how we affect knowledge production. As such, reflexivity gives rise to a "double knowledge"—using the self as a resource to produce more analytically refined and ethical knowledge about the world and using the world as a mirroring object of inquiry to improve the researcher's understanding of the self (Alejandro 2018, 190, 202). Doing so, reflexivity "prompts us to make explicit some of the world views which we and others bring to our research endeavour" and "leads us to recognize alternative ways of viewing 'reality'" (Eakin et al. 1996, 158).

Yet, the specific purpose of reflexivity varies according to researchers' ontological interests and epistemological frameworks. As a result, reflexivity has been diversely apprehended as "the practice of making conscious and explicit our

practices, beliefs and dispositions" (Alejandro 2021b, 3), "a practice of ethics for politics" (Amoureux 2015), a "corrective measure" for or a means of "unsettling the subject" in regard to their positionality and situatedness (Nencel 2014), or a way to facilitate the identification of biases and increase transparency toward our research practices (Nicolson 2008; Mackieson, Shlonsky, and Connolly 2019). Put simply, reflexivity enables scholars both to "do a good job" by helping them become more aware of the determinisms underpinning their research design choices and to account for the role of social sciences "in shaping social reality and hierarchies" (Leander 2002, 602–604).

Despite similar theoretical premises, these two stimulating research programs on language and reflexivity have largely coexisted without engaging in dialogue with each other. While there is abundant literature about theories of language and methods to study language, there is a lack of methods to study *our own use of language*. Similarly, abundant literature about reflexivity as meta-reflection contrasts with the "general lack of sufficient detail given over to the 'how' in relation to this process" (Maxwell et al. 2020, see also Martín de Almagro 2016; Soedirgo and Glas 2020). To address the lack of practical guidance for reflexive work, scholars have developed "reflexive research methods" (Bryant and Livholts 2007), including approaches such as "dialogical storytelling" (Carter et al. 2014), "perspective taking" (Finefter-Rosenbluh 2017), and "social identity map" (Jacobson and Mustafa 2019). These recent developments have shown how one can go successfully beyond meta-reflection on reflexivity and develop methods to learn and teach reflexivity alongside other research practices. However, these works have largely focused on unpacking processes to help us become more aware of *who* speaks and *from where* we speak rather than *how* we speak, write, or use language.

Audrey Alejandro's recent work has begun to address this gap by developing methods to guide reflexive work in relation to language. For example, she developed a new method of reflexive discourse analysis (RDA) and formalized an existing practice for linguistic reflexivity to problematize categories (Alejandro 2021a, 2021b). However, these two approaches either require familiarity with theories of discourse and/or methods of discourse analysis (DA) or are geared toward critical qualitative research traditions. This article builds upon these initiatives but seeks to reach a broader audience by addressing students with diverse epistemological and methodological backgrounds (Lupovici 2013; Parisi et al. 2013).

We are inspired by collective initiatives that problematize academic language about specific topics across levels of linguistic expertise and disciplines (Peres, Teresa, and Juliane 2021) and feminist works geared at making feminist reflexivity accessible to a broad nonfeminist audience (Ackerly and True 2008). While incorporating "gender analysis in ongoing research agenda is not practically feasible for most scholars [. . .] all scholars can take steps to ensure that their work is not silent on gender and that it doesn't inadvertently mask the relevance of gender" (Towns 2019). We believe the same to be true for reflexive linguistic work. Following this direction, we develop a method for linguistic reflexivity that has a low start-up cost: the Reflexive Review.[1] The Reflexive Review is a method that can be adopted by scholars and students with different epistemological and methodological goals regarding reflexivity (whether to account for blinders and biases, or the unintentional sociopolitical effects of language), equipped with different skillsets (either familiar with linguistic work or not) and that could be implemented in any research project (even those not focusing on language).

As a foundation for this new method, we use a research practice commonly adopted across social science: the literature review. We focus on words as a

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[1] We define methods as sets of practices that disclose the underpinnings behind the research choices we make and offer overall structure, coherence, and guidance regarding how we produce knowledge. We distinguish between method and methodology by defining methodology as an approach that aligns our theoretical, epistemic, and ontological assumptions.

linguistic unit familiar to scholars. We repurpose the complementary and diverse tools of studying language in IR, from content analysis to DA. Finally, we illustrate the method by conducting the Reflexive Review on a word largely used across IR subfields and theoretical frameworks: "local."

Namely, the Reflexive Review aims to review linguistic dimensions of literature during the process of the literature review to help us become more reflexively aware of our own use of language. The Reflexive Review comprises four steps:

1. We build a list of "priority words" relevant to one's research project to identify the words that need reflexive attention.
2. We look for metalinguistic statements to synthesize how the literature has explicitly discussed these words.
3. We identify patterns of word use, by which we mean collectively shared meanings that coexist and of which we should become aware.
4. We compare—informally or formally—identified patterns of word use with our own use of language.

This method provides structure for reflexive linguistic work; it unpacks steps, introduces guidance for each of these steps, and offers different options according to different levels of expertise. By adding a reflexive dimension to the literature review, the Reflexive Review guides researchers to identify how the literature we engage with commonly defines and uses words relevant to a research project. Crucially, it provides a framework for becoming more aware of how common words inadvertently organize our perception and/or have unintentional sociopolitical effects. Such a process helps scholars build linguistic reflexivity as a research practice into the design and conduct of their project from the outset. It also enables us to make more conscious linguistic choices and to commit to more rigorous and ethical analysis and theorization.

The article proceeds, first, by reviewing the existing traditions used in IR to investigate language (quantitative text analysis, conceptual analysis, DA, problematization, and deconstruction). We assess each for their potential and limits regarding linguistic reflexivity. Second, we introduce the rationale and methodological guidelines for the Reflexive Review. Third, we illustrate the Reflexive Review in practice by focusing on "local" and provide a transparent roadmap for those seeking to apply this method on other words. We chose the word "local" because it is commonly used in IR, yet barely defined (see p. 16). We identify four main uses of the word "local" in the IR literature—as a class of actors, as a level of analysis, as community, and as experiences of the everyday—and highlight the analytical strengths and potential blinders of each use for research.

In turn, this article contributes to several conversations in IR and beyond. First, it addresses the demands for methodological tools for researchers to implement reflexivity in practice beyond philosophical and meta-definitions of reflexivity. Second, it legitimizes a space for transparent and cumulative dialogue about how and why "language work" went well, when it did. Third, it develops practical tools to turn language from an ontological object of interest to a methodologically reflexive one. Here, language is apprehended as a site of practice through which researchers can transform their perception, and the world as social agents, because our profession is about producing and communicating knowledge through language. Fourth, it expands the literature on methods for literature reviews by introducing practical guidelines to leverage how literature can be reviewed for reflexive purposes. Fifth, to our knowledge, this article presents the first mapping of the uses of "local," a common word used by many scholars and practitioners of world politics. Finally, it builds bridges between different methodological and epistemological

traditions, at a time when IR is questioning its parochialism. Specifically, we outline a practicable approach to reflexivity that sees reflexivity as an important and feasible objective within the scope of a standalone project. While we understand that such bridge-building initiatives cannot be consensual, we believe that they represent heuristic initiatives to speak across communities that are too often siloed.

### Leveraging IR Methods to Investigate Language

IR's historical engagement with theory and epistemology has contrasted with the discipline's relative lack of interest in developing methods. Since the 2010s, work has aimed to address this gap by building bridges between social science's general principle of academic rigor and the more specific ambitions of the theoretical frameworks used in IR (Aradau and Huysmans 2014). Pedagogically, scholars also recognize that new generations need more methodological engagement as well as opportunities to decenter themselves from the world around them in which the politics they study are situated (Hagmann and Biersteker 2012).

This article joins IR scholarship's growing efforts to expand the scope of IR methodologies (Brigg and Bleiker 2010; Hansen 2017; Aydınlı 2019) and commitments toward methodological creativity (Choi, Selmeczi, and Strausz 2019). More specifically, it aligns with the literature focusing on methods that engage language both as an object of world politics and as an epistemological challenge. We define language as a building block of "social significance and the primary repository of meanings in any social setting" (Lemay-Hébert, Onuf, and Rakić 2013) and a conventional system of communication through words (between authors and readers, for example). Specifically, language encompasses implicit dimensions (such as connotations) that can be made conscious and explicit through dedicated methods. To address the practical needs for linguistic reflexivity outlined in the introduction, researchers at all levels need to be able to integrate the method within the design of a research project, and it should be methodologically transparent to generate cumulative methodological debate.

To develop such a method, we present four main approaches used by IR scholarship to study language. In practice, these can overlap; for analytical clarity, we distinguish approaches of quantitative text analysis, conceptual analysis, DA, and problematization and deconstruction. We order these approaches as traditions that emphasize, from least to most, the need to include ourselves as researchers in the analysis of the language we study.

#### *Quantitative Text Analysis*

In line with the development of text analysis across social sciences, IR scholars have used traditional methods of quantitative content analysis for over half a century, using human judgment to code language (Pashakhanlou 2017). Scholars have, for example, examined different corpora, such as United Nations speeches to study the emergence of different states' narratives (Brunn 1999; Hecht 2016). Recent advances in natural language processing have expanded IR scholars' capacity to study language by providing the technical means to process unprecedently large corpora, for example, to understand via word frequency how state actors behave in international fora (Baturo, Dasandi, and Mikhaylov 2017) and, semantically, how far states agree in the context of treaty negotiations (Bayram and Ta 2020). However, scholars using quantitative text analysis have rarely turned attention to their own use of language, and most of these methods require high levels of technical expertise to be implemented.

*Conceptual Analysis*

Across IR subfields, scholars have highlighted the need to pay attention to words in the form of concepts as units situated between theory and observations. As Guzzini (2001, 100) argues, concepts are laced with "theoretical and pre-theoretical assumptions" because concepts inform how we collect and approach data whether or not we have actively conceptualized them. Specifically, scholars have developed different approaches to conceptual analysis (Berenskoetter 2016) and worked on unpacking the diversity of meanings and practices associated with concepts (Lopez et al. 2018). One such approach to conceptual analysis is conceptual history, which examines a concept's historical uses (Neumann 2019), including the evolution of its usages and definitions (Roshchin 2011; Peltonen 2019). Applying conceptual history, scholars have highlighted the unexpected diversity of meanings and the tacit discursive moments of conceptual change, of concepts such as "global" (Bartelson 2000) and "international regime" (Steffek, Müller, and Behr 2021).

Analysis of concepts comes closest to methods that all researchers need at the early stages of research design. By flagging scholars' problematic uses of words, conceptual analysis has expanded our linguistic imagination in IR. For example, concepts under investigation become case studies for understanding the unanticipated effects a word can have on world politics. However, there is still scant guidance on how scholars can transform their own use of concepts to be more linguistically reflexive within the scope of a research project, rather than as a project on its own.

*Discourse Analysis*

Since the 1990s, methods under the umbrella of DA have gained popularity, leading some to announce the emergence of a "discursive turn" in IR (Salter and Mutlu 2013). Likewise, IR scholars have put forward a variety of analytical frameworks that help us understand the articulation of discourse and language. Variously, scholars define discourse as "meaning in use" (Wiener 2009), "both the content of ideas, and the process of interaction and collective interpretation" (Sharman 2008, 637), or "the space where human beings make sense of the material world, where they attach meaning to the world and where representations become manifest" (Holzscheiter 2014, 144). In a sense, discourse can be understood as a relational meaning-making practice based on language that articulates ideational and physical dimensions of social life and produces sociopolitical orders.

Rather than a strict rulebook, DA encompasses both a theoretical–ontological approach (the idea that discourse plays a role in society and world politics) and a flexible set of methods to investigate this idea empirically (Alejandro, Laurence, and Maertens Forthcoming). As an analytical–methodological framework, DA is useful for making sense of the implicit dimensions of language. In particular, DA enables researchers to assess empirically how sociopolitical orders, otherwise invisibly (re)produced, become framed as natural or normal (processes referred to as naturalization and normalization).

Within DA broadly understood, genealogy has been of particular interest to IR scholars (Vucetic 2011). Following the works of Foucault (1980), genealogy uncovers how discourses pervasive across institutions, genres, and social groups are legitimized and legitimize social norms and political orders. IR scholars have used genealogy to expand our understanding of world politics, for instance, by studying how a governance regime such as anti-whaling has been legitimized (Epstein 2008) or sectors such as diplomacy have been constituted and endowed with power (Der Derian 1987). However, methods within the DA umbrella rely on scholars being trained in this theoretical and methodological tradition (see Meiches 2019 for an example of the extent of expertise needed). This requirement has high start-up costs for most researchers who, instead, need practical tools for being more

reflexive about their own use of language in designing research in the scope of a project that is not necessarily about language.

### Problematization and Deconstruction

IR scholars' engagement with problematization and deconstruction has not focused solely on language and, so far, has been methodologically limited. However, as problematization and deconstruction can directly address scholars' need for processes adapted to linguistic reflexivity, they are important literatures to include.

Central to problematization and deconstruction is the concept of naturalization. Here, a specific linguistic form (i.e., a category) or discursive formation (i.e., a way of speaking about the world) becomes so pervasive for a specific social group in a specific period that this group loses its capacity to decenter itself cognitively from it. In turn, members of this group perceive these naturalized linguistic elements as reality rather than as linguistic forms mediating their perception of reality. Through this process, naturalization contributes to producing a sociodiscursive world in which people assume the only possible sociopolitical options are those naturalized by the language they use. Naturalization, therefore, plays a key role in making power invisible and reproducing sociopolitical orders through language. It also represents an epistemological challenge for researchers who aim to produce innovative knowledge rather than inadvertently reproduce naturalized prejudices and ways of seeing.

Problematization and deconstruction have been developed to address this challenge and help us to *denaturalize* our naturalized linguistic habits. These approaches were introduced in IR in the 1980s "to distance" and "make strange" how linguistic habits are socially constructed (Der Derian and Shapiro 1989) and thus hold important potential for linguistic reflexivity.

IR scholars have engaged with problematization, first, through the Foucauldian tradition of "history of problematizations," which investigates how societies have problematized previously naturalized social issues and phenomena to "see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed" (Foucault 1998, in IR see Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008). Closer to our interests regarding linguistic reflexivity, researchers engage in problematization to identify unthought problems within taken-for-granted knowledge or discourse (Hellmann and Valbjørn 2017). Alejandro (2018, 105–36; 2021c), for example, problematizes the naturalized discourse regarding the "Western dominance in IR" by empirically challenging assumptions within this discourse. In particular, she demonstrates how binaries such as "national" versus "international" prevent us from understanding the current conditions of how IR is produced, and legitimize the globalization of an Anglocentric hierarchical publication system.

More specific than problematization, deconstruction is a practice of relational thinking developed by Derrida, who refused to define deconstruction since its main objective is to disrupt the simplifying definitional power of language. As Caputo and Derrida (1997, 32) wrote in the ironically titled *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation With Jacques Derrida*: "whenever deconstruction finds a nutshell—a secure axiom or a pithy maxim—the very idea is to crack it open and disturb this tranquility." Introducing deconstruction into IR has led to insightful contributions regarding knowledge and critical thinking (Arfi 2013; Dillon 2013). However, for problematization and deconstruction, there has been limited methodological development or demonstration of how to implement these processes in practice, let alone how to reflexively use these methods to analyze our own use of language within a research project.

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Collectively, these approaches have put the study of language on the IR agenda. They also offer strategies that can be useful for linguistic reflexivity. Quantitative

text analysis enables researchers to reduce textual content and identify linguistic patterns across broad bodies of text. Conceptual analysis offers an easy entry point to paying attention to the word as a unit of analysis, a unit familiar to academics without linguistic backgrounds. DA enables researchers to produce a fine-grained assessment of meaning-making processes and the potential sociopolitical effects of language. Problematization and deconstruction put at the forefront the need to actively engage in practical attempts to denaturalize linguistic habits that we have come to take for granted.

However, these approaches have not led to publications from which scholars can directly draw guidelines to implement linguistic reflexivity in their research or teaching. As these approaches have not been developed for the specific purpose of linguistic reflexivity, they do not demonstrate how to focus on one's own use of language within a research project. Indeed, they have largely focused on the use of language by other agents, such as policymakers, rather than the language of the very researchers conducting research. These approaches also rely on using methodologies that are often perceived as difficult or time-intensive for scholars not specialized in the study of language. Finally, these approaches have traditionally led to research projects on their own rather than provided flexible tools one can integrate into otherwise traditional research designs.

In all, methods to study language hold potential for linguistic reflexivity but are not yet ready to use for this purpose. In this article, we show that if adapted and repurposed, such methods can represent complementary strategies for linguistic reflexivity. As such, we have used them as a foundation for developing our method of the Reflexive Review. As problematization and deconstruction, the Reflexive Review aims to decenter ourselves from our routine use of language. Following conceptual analysis, our method focuses on words as the unit of analysis so the method can be broadly accessible by nonlinguistic specialists. As content analysis, it focuses on patterns of language use across large bodies of texts. For those familiar with DA or interested in learning more about it, it includes options to integrate DA tools to deepen the analysis of implicit dimensions of language.

### Introducing a Linguistically Reflexive Review of Literature

Aligning with previous initiatives in IR (Rosenau 2003), we take a pragmatic stance on reflexivity: full transparency toward our own research practices might be impossible, but a commitment to transparency and explicitness is likely to improve the quality of one's work, regardless of one's epistemological stance.

This section presents the Reflexive Review as an approachable method for linguistic reflexivity based on a practice familiar to social scientists—the literature review. Namely, we push the potential of a literature review further than its traditional missions by repurposing it as an exercise for linguistic reflexivity, building on methods of text analysis used in IR and specifically mobilizing tools developed by content and discourse analysis.

First, we present the analytical framework behind this method and empirically unpack the relevance of "local" as an illustrative case study. We then delve into the methodological literature on literature reviews and discuss how we aim to repurpose this research practice to serve linguistic reflexivity. We conclude this section by suggesting guidelines for practically implementing the Reflexive Review.

#### *Word Definitions, Shared Understandings, and Patterns of Use*

It is a good research practice to define the keywords we use in our writing. Making explicit how we use words enables us to address their fuzziness, vagueness, and ambiguity. While the meanings of words are collectively shared rather than personal, meanings are neither stable nor neatly bounded: they are constantly negotiated, and different meanings of a word coexist. As a result, our target audiences—the

readers—might not attach a priori the same meaning to these words as we do. Defining the words we use fosters transparency in our communication. This practice also enables us to clarify *for ourselves* how we use a word. Indeed, while language socialization is an active process that spans from language acquisition in early childhood to learning specialized language (Duranti, Ochs, and Schieffelin 2011), it is largely implicit (suggested though not directly stated). Only a minority of words and meanings are acquired metalinguistically via explicitly talking about language (e.g., when we ask someone to define a word we have never heard before). As a result, it requires effort to make conscious what is meant by the words we use.

Accordingly, most words we use in academic research are never defined and slip through the net of conscious disambiguation. This is, for instance, the case of "local," a relatively common term in IR. For example, 17.6 percent of the articles under the category "International Relations" on JSTOR comprise the word "local" (49,050 out of 278,795).[2] However, it is barely defined. Indeed, out of the 404 articles that include the word "local" in their title in the JSTOR database, only one offers a definition (Wallis 2012).[3] Explicit definitions of the term "local" are also absent in specialized dictionaries of IR and political science (Zink 1983; Evans and Newnham 1998; Brown, McLean, and McMillan 2018).

Beyond definitions aimed at IR specialists, English dictionaries produce definitions for a general audience. Here, definitions of the adjective "local" encompass different meanings such as: "characterized by or relating to position in space: having a definite spatial form or location" (Merriam-Webster 2020a), "from or connected with a particular area" (Cambridge Dictionary 2020), or "existing in or belonging to the area where you live, or to the area that you are talking about" (Collins Dictionary 2020). While these definitions vary, they do not capture the diversity of ways IR scholars use the term "local" in their professional fields. For example, how do the uses of the adjective "local" found in the literature—e.g., "local settlements," "local people," or "local farming"—fit within these definitions? Does the existence of "local" farming mean that there is another type of farming that exists without a spatialized form, according to the dictionary definitions?

The understanding of specialized uses of language—as happens in academic fields—relies on what is commonly referred to as "linguistic conventions" (Gotti 2003). The meaning of a word is conventional to the extent that members of social groups are socialized to "associate the word with that meaning in the production and comprehension of language" (Devitt 2021). The idea of language conventions invites us to focus on two dimensions that are important for being linguistically reflexive about word uses. First, conventions consist of "reproduced" patterns of meaning (Millikan 1998, 162). Second, "these patterns proliferate [..] partly to weight of precedent, rather than due, for example, to their intrinsically superior capacity to perform certain functions" (Millikan 1998, 162).

Similarly, the different uses and connotations of a word such as "local" in IR rely on shared understandings of its meaning in context. Shared understanding means

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[2]JSTOR is a database containing digitized back issues of academic journals from fifty-seven countries. It comprises 104 journals categorized under the category "International Relations" with issues 1834–2020, including journals often described as dominant in the English discipline such as *International Organization, International Studies Quarterly*, and *Review of International Studies*, subfield journals such as *Journal of Peace Research*, and journals in non-English languages (e.g., Catalan, Portuguese, French, German, and Turkish). Thus, the corpus represents what many IR scholars produce and consume article-wise. However, the database is biased in favor of European languages and articles, where books might reveal different writing practices regarding word definitions. The search was conducted by entering the Boolean search "(local) AND disc: (interrela-discipline)" on the JSTOR advanced search interface and concluded on September 3, 2020.

[3]An article's title often contains keywords that are more likely to be defined in the article's body than words used in passing. We, therefore, constructed a subcorpus within the JSTOR category "International Relations" comprised of the articles that have "local" in their title via the Boolean search (ti: (local)) AND disc: (interrela-discipline). Each article was then downloaded with occurrences of "local" located via CTRL + F. Results comprise articles in English, French, Spanish, and Catalan (languages that share the same spelling of "local"). Our knowledge of these languages enabled us to manually look for the presence/absence of definitions in the surrounding of these occurrences.

that those in a situation of communication expect other participants to agree on how a word is used. Shared understandings are both a condition of communication (we cannot define all the words we use while speaking) and a means to naturalize beliefs, prejudices, and opinions (as assumptions and biases are naturalized within this taken-for-granted shared knowledge). Within shared understandings lie what is accepted as already known and what is taken-for-granted and, therefore, not questioned. Through the mere fact of talking, we legitimize and reproduce shared understandings related to our use of language—a process of which we are only partially conscious—without assessing the implications of these taken-for-granted dimensions.

The reproduction of taken-for-granted dimensions of the words we use raises two challenges regarding the production of academic knowledge. The first challenge concerns the efficacy and rigor of academic communication regarding the formulation of knowledge via speech. To what extent do we mutually understand what we mean? Do collective understandings of the words we use reflect the description or analysis that we aim to communicate? The second challenge is ethical and sociopolitical. Within shared understandings rests what we accept to be true, normal, or obvious, but which may also be false or discriminatory not only toward others but ourselves. By not questioning the assumptions carried within our use of language, we potentially participate in reproducing sociopolitical orders that such a use helps to naturalize and that we continuously socialize each other into.

To address this challenge, we suggest identifying patterns of word uses. By patterns of word uses, we mean the shared understandings that are collectively adopted and coexist about each word. Specifically, we advise identifying these patterns within bodies of text that would anyway comprise the literature review of a specific project.

### *The Untapped Reflexive Potential of the Literature Review*

Literature reviews aim to synthesize and appraise the existing bodies of research within specific topics.[4] Two reasons explain our choice to develop a method for linguistic reflexivity out of this research practice.

First, because of the nature of the relation between the researchers and the literature they review, the reviewed literature holds an untapped potential for linguistic reflexivity. Indeed, this literature includes the body of work we build upon, and that has contributed to socializing us into our current use of words (therefore we want to clarify these uses to ourselves). Moreover, the literature we review represents a sample of the audience to whom we speak (therefore we want to make sure we understand what words mean for others).

Second, the literature review is "an essential feature of any academic project" (Webster and Watson 2002, xiii) and the object of abundant methodological literature with suggested step-by-step processes (Hart 2005; Machi and McEnvoy 2012). Recently, a growing body of literature has expanded the scope and objectives of literature reviews. For example, Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) problematize the myth that "the literature review has [only] one goal" by shedding light on the underexplored potential uses of this research practice, including "the objective of *analyzing*." As a result, scholars have introduced methods of text and discourse analysis to support and strengthen this analytical goal, including qualitative text coding (Onwuegbuzie, Frels, and Hwang 2016) and DA (Onwuegbuzie and Frels 2014).

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[4]Different traditions of reviewing literature are currently in use, the most common being iteratively reviewing a body of text to synthesize the literature's main trends and critical junctures until reaching a sense of "saturation" (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014). In contrast, systematic literature reviews, a tradition developed in natural sciences, aim to cover "all available research relevant to a particular research question or topic area or phenomenon of interest" (Kitchenham 2004). As the reflexive review happens alongside the traditional process of literature review, we encourage aligning this choice for both—e.g., iterative or systematic.

We build upon and go beyond these initiatives by using tools produced by methods of text analysis to add a linguistically reflexive dimension to the literature review.

<center>*Guidelines for Implementing the Reflexive Review in Practice*</center>

To enable linguistic reflexivity to be bounded and practicable rather than a never-ending process, we formalize the method into a four-step approach.

*Step One: Build a List of "Priority Words" Relevant for One's Research Project*
It is important to prioritize carefully the words about which we need/want to be linguistically reflexive. To build this list of "priority words" within the scope of a specific research project, we suggest considering the following:

- Keywords of your analytical/theoretical framework (e.g., concepts),
- Words that:
  - Are often used and never defined,
  - Are the building blocks of your research question and argument,
  - Are explicitly identified as problematic by the literature,
  - Seem to be used in different ways without it being acknowledged,
  - Cause you trouble at any stage of the research but that you resist giving up (e.g., you may struggle with not using this word despite feeling that the word neither "fits" your case nor works as a category for measurement),
- Binary pairs that the literature commonly opposes, including where these oppositions might end up being problematic depending on the context.

Identifying our priority words is not straightforward, and we may identify more words of interest as we review further literature.

*Step Two: Look for Metalinguistic Statements*
Reviewing metalinguistic statements within the literature means investigating how the literature has explicitly discussed these words. We consider this step achieved when we can answer the following questions:

- Are there explicit definitions of these words in the literature? What are they?
- Has the literature produced empirically grounded analysis about these words (e.g., using methods of text and discourse analysis)? What are the results?
- Have scholars produced reflexive statements regarding these words? (e.g., do they share how these words prevented them from adequately describing a phenomenon, or were associated with prejudices they became aware of?)
- Does the literature describe these words as problematic? If so, how and why?

*Step Three: Identify Patterns of Word Uses*
Following the framework introduced about how different meanings of words coexist (pp. 9–11), step three of the Reflexive Review prompts researchers to identify collectively shared meanings of words by synthesizing patterns of use of these words found in the literature. We suggest two strategies that scholars can adopt, with dif-

ferent levels of ambition, depending on one's methodological experience of text analysis and working with language.

The first strategy is inspired by summative content analysis. Summative content analysis is an approachable method that helps structure and makes transparent the otherwise largely intuitive act of interpreting the meaning of words in their context of use. It focuses "on discovering underlying meanings of the words" as "researchers try to explore word usage or discover the range of meanings that a word can have in normal use" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1284–85). Namely, summative content analysis consists of searching a text for occurrences of a word and then analyzing the sentences surrounding this word. Since the objective of the Reflexive Review is to identify word uses in context, we suggest looking intentionally for what linguists call "context clues." For instance, these comprise:

1. Synonyms; for example, in the sentence "a controversial piece of legislation called 'Fair Practices in Automotive Product Act (HR 5133)', otherwise known as the local (domestic) content legislation" (Kabashima and Sato 1986, 295), "domestic" is used as a synonym to "local."
2. Oppositions; for example, the words "local" and "external" are framed as inherently different in this sentence: "local knowledge and 'external' expertise can sometimes be usefully combined" (Nadarajah and Mulligan 2011, 315).
3. Explanations; for example, while the sentence "Local ownership in the sense of popular participation and representation in decision making" (Saul 2011, 166) does not define "local" per se, it provides information about what the author means by "local ownership."

The second strategy encompasses and deepens the first by introducing DA as a complementary approach to summative content analysis. While content analysis enables us to study large corpora, DA approaches help us unpack the linguistic mechanisms at play and their potential sociopolitical effects and ethical challenges. They, therefore, complement each other well by providing breadth and depth to the analysis, which explains why these methods are often combined (Herrera and Bear 2004). Accordingly, we encourage researchers already familiar with the study of language, or interested in taking their engagement with linguistic reflexivity further, to go beyond the first strategy and familiarize themselves with DA literature so they can adopt the second strategy.

There are plenty of useful analytical tools within DA for the Reflexive Review, and we discuss here just two examples: "collocation" and "truism" (see Gee 2011 for an introduction to DA tools). *Collocation* focuses on how "certain words tend to regularly occur next to or close to each other" (Baker and Ellece 2011, 18). By studying the "associations and connotations" of words via collocations, we can also explore their ideological effects by illuminating the "assumptions which they embody" (Stubbs 1996, 172). In the corpus of reviewed literature, the word "local" is often collocated with words such as "government" or "communities," which raises the question of the assumptions conveyed by these collocations: how is the government usually perceived when it is not framed as "local"? What does the framing as "local" add to our representation of communities? Whose interests and values do these framings serve?

"*Truisms*" refers to the linguistic mechanism where the collocation of the words together is redundant meaning-wise.[5] Analyzing "local perspective," a phrase commonly used in the corpus, exposes a truism: "perspective" represents "the ap-

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[5] In text analysis, "truism" has a stricter sense than its otherwise vague usage, namely "a proposition that states nothing beyond what is implied by any of its terms'" (OUP 2020).

pearance to the eye of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions" (Merriam-Webster 2020b); a perspective is by definition always localized. Therefore, what is implied by the juxtaposition of these words carries a surplus of meaning that exceeds their explicit definition and raises several questions: does the existence of particularly "local" perspectives paradoxically imply the existence of universal perspectives? Who is traditionally considered as endowed with a "local" perspective, and who is not?[6]

Whether researchers adopt just summative content analysis or incorporate DA, the objective of step three is to group, categorize, or typologize the different patterns of word use found in the literature. We encourage researchers to collect examples for each pattern of use, as well as identify analytical strengths and potential blinders and biases for each one, to facilitate step four.

*Step Four: Using the Reflexive Review for Reflexivity*

Once we have identified different patterns, we compare these patterns with our own use of language. This comparison can be informal, as we go through the different uses of a word and the examples we collected and check with ourselves which resonate with our interpretation of the word and which do not. The comparison can also be more formalized, by analyzing texts we produced (either published manuscripts, drafts, academic assignments, or documents produced on purpose) as part of step three and alongside the literature we review.

The Reflexive Review elucidates the often-unacknowledged multiplicity of a word's uses. The comparative process of step four can, therefore, help us decenter ourselves from both the patterns of use that we have been taking for granted and the shared understandings naturalized for us. This acknowledgment can lead to different actions. For example, we might be interested in alternative uses of a word revealed by the Reflexive Review and choose to adopt them. We may also decide not to use the word altogether or take deliberate initiatives to change the way a particular word is used.

As touched upon in the introduction, a reflexive intervention like the Reflexive Review leads to a double knowledge (Alejandro 2018, 190, 202). On the one hand, disentangling different uses of words offers new and potentially more nuanced options outside our imagination to aid better conceptualization, empirical observation, and theorization. As such, linguistic reflexivity holds the potential to produce innovative knowledge about our object of inquiry. On the other hand, the Reflexive Review helps us use the world—and uses of language within this world—as a mirroring object to improve our understanding of the researcher's self. Specifically, it helps us integrate ourselves into our object of inquiry as new subjects whose use of language we can focus on. Beyond our use of language, it also enables us to highlight what might seem inconsequential at first but is, in fact, reified as a taken-for-granted truth (Monk 2018, 9). Indeed, the Reflexive Review can support other types of reflexive work beyond the linguistic focus of this article. For example, researchers may be interested in investigating their "social location" discipline-wide and societally. In contrast with reflexive approaches that aim to "expose the inner states of the human mind" (Ish-Shalom 2011), the Reflexive Review focuses on social dispositions that are shared and manifested into analyzable practices. By shedding light on the academic communities with whom we share semantic ties, the Reflexive Review may reveal previously obscured positionings or clarify assumptions that stem from how we identify.

Finally, by taking the literature review as a starting point, the Reflexive Review represents a recursive tool for both individual and collective reflexivity. Beyond adding to the cumulative work of how a word is defined (see p. 9), sharing the results of a

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[6]The concept of *implicature* helps further unpack this tension, by helping us focus on what is "implied in a statement" but "not formally expressed" (Baker and Ellece 2011).

Reflexive Review can enable our epistemic communities to conduct step four of the Reflexive Review on their own. As with other types of reflexive work, current norms leave how much is shared with the readers at the researchers' discretion, depending on the objective of the publication and what information might support the argument and demonstration. Since this article aims at introducing and demonstrating this method, we have formalized what steps two and three of the Reflexive Review look like, if reported, by presenting four main patterns of use of the word "local" found in the IR literature (p. 17 onward).

*Being Reflexive about the Reflexive Review*

Linguistic reflexivity requires recognizing the self as a sociological agent, socialized into linguistic frameworks like other social agents (e.g., policymakers, diplomats, civil society). It is, in a sense, a methodological approach for an academic utopia based on language, a commitment toward mastering the invisible dynamics that we contribute to institutionalizing via our speaking and writing roles as teachers and researchers. As such, it is not only an epistemological and methodological commitment but also a political act situated in relations of power. Just as making language invisible is not politically neutral, so is making language visible. Choosing which word to reflexively review, when, and in relation to which projects is not only a methodological choice but also a sociopolitical move that we need to be cognizant of and reflexive about.

While it is not a "step" to implement, being reflexive about the process of Reflexive Review represents a key part of the method. After discussing some challenges of being reflexive about the review, we highlight a few important points for researchers to keep in mind while conducting the method.

Like any method, the Reflexive Review has its limits. For instance, the Reflexive Review suffers the same pitfalls as the traditional process of literature review on which it is based. As the example of "local" illustrates, the results we reached through iterative review are one of many ways we could have organized the literature. Any methodological decision always comprises a trade-off, and it is not possible to review literature from a space outside our socialization (or outside what is already published). Therefore, it is important to be attentive to the social and political factors supporting the choices we make to conduct a review. For example, these comprise the naming and categorizing of the different theoretical and epistemological traditions that underpin both the traditional literature review and the Reflexive Review that we attach to it, as well as our positioning regarding these processes (e.g., how we experience ourselves in relation to the different groups identified). Bourdieu summarizes this challenge as a "double bind": the tools we use to emancipate ourselves from the deterministic aspects of our socialization are themselves products of this socialization.

Another challenge is the "recursive paradox" highlighted by Alejandro (2018, 168–95) in her previous work. Researchers might be more likely to be unreflexive while promoting reflexivity precisely because identifying oneself as promoting reflexivity might lead us to believe that we are already reflexive and no further work needs to be done. As for other practices associated with reflexivity, such as auto-ethnography, implementing such methods does not de facto make us reflexive.

Without promising a perfect solution to this tension, looking for reflexive clues can help us self-assess whether we are going in the right direction. For example, has the reflexive work engaged so far challenged our assumptions, or has it merely reinforced our existing positions? Has it legitimized options to us that were so far outside of our imagination? Has it brought to our attention linguistic practices we did not know we were taking part in and that we wished we did not? One is likely to experience these questions if the Reflexive Review "works." If, on the contrary, the reflexive Review makes us feel more right and righteous than ever, we might not be heading in the right direction!

Finally, the quest for linguistic reflexivity, like the quest for other types of reflexivity, never ends. It would be naïve to consider that one has achieved full transparency regarding one's use of language after one—or many—Reflexive Reviews.[7]

### Implementing the Reflexive Review on "Local"

We now illustrate the second and third steps of the Reflexive Review, taking the word "local" as an example.[8] We identified "local" as a priority word for our Reflexive Review (step one) since it is a common but barely defined word in IR that has represented "epistemological obstacles" (Bachelard 1938) in the conduct of several of our research projects (see, e.g., Alejandro 2021b regarding the case of the environmental impact of Chinese investment on the fishery sector in Senegal). Following the guidelines introduced in the previous section, we first looked for metalinguistic statements about "local" and highlighted how "local" is explicitly identified as problematic (step two). Second, we identified patterns of use of "local" in the IR literature (step three).

#### *Looking for Metalinguistic Statements*

To delve into explicit engagements with "local" and guide our review of the literature, we use the guiding questions introduced in the previous section.

*Are There Explicit Definitions of "Local" in the Literature? What Are They?*
As our search in the specialist dictionaries and IR corpus shows, definitions of "local" in the literature are extremely rare (Gamez 2021). The closest to a definition we found comes from Wallis (2012, 736–37):

> While anthropologists tend to describe such practices as "customary" or "traditional", the term "local" is used in recognition that these practices are not immutable relics of "pre-contact" past, but have instead been transformed as a result of colonisation, globalisation, and intervention.

Alternatively, Rosenau (2003, 115) does not offer an explicit definition of "local" but suggests that "the local is where people are born and [. . .] grow up."

*Has the Literature Produced Empirically Grounded Analysis about "Local"?*
We did not find any empirically grounded text or DA projects focusing on "local."

*Have Scholars Produced Reflexive Statements Regarding "Local"?*
We neither found any reflexive demonstration of how scholars have struggled with their use of the word "local" nor engagement in its deconstruction. However, we note that Schneckener (2016, 15) and Mac Ginty (2016) remarked on their failed attempt to overcome the binaries of "local" versus "international"/"global," feeling constrained by what they perceived as a lack of alternative language.

*Does the Literature Mention That "Local" is Problematic? If So, Why So?*
Scholars critique how "local" is "reified" and "pre-given" (Randazzo 2016; Hameiri and Jones 2017). For example, Hirblinger and Simons (2015) align with our conclusions by highlighting how "local" has become a "floating signifier" rather than a "well-defined" term.

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[7] See the work of Butler (2005) regarding positionality and the self.

[8] While not explicitly engaging the methodological process that such linguistic work entails, other researchers have illustrated what the results of such initiative might look like for other words such as "hierarchy" (Mattern and Zarakol 2016) or "time" (Hom 2020).

Literature also highlights the problematic connotations attached to "local" and how these dimensions are instrumentalized (e.g., Obradovic-Wochnik 2020). Especially in peacebuilding research, scholars critique how the use of "local" becomes a way to "define what right and good peacebuilding entails" (Hirblinger and Simons 2015, 433), in contrast to "international" and "liberal" understandings and approaches to peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2008; Richmond 2009).

Finally, scholars underscore the problematic character of the binary pairs that include "local" (Smirl 2016; Behr 2018; Read 2018; Mathieu 2019). They show how these binaries reify oppositions, for example, between a personal "local" versus a political "international" (Sabaratnam 2011; Nadarajah and Rampton 2015, 51; McLeod and O'Reilly 2019) or a traditional "local" versus a modern "international" (Basaran and Olsson 2018; Martín de Almagro and Ryan 2019). Building on these initiatives, some scholars argue for the need to overcome these binaries by accounting for the co-constitutive logic of "local" and "international" (Mac Ginty 2016, 200) or "local" and "global" (Taylor 2005; Johnson 2016). For example, Anderl (2016) illustrates how development workers' solidarity sits between, rather than within, the dichotomy of "local" and "global." Going further, Smith (2018) urges critical and feminist scholars to account for the orientalizing and homogenizing narratives that infuse the "local" versus "international" binary.

<div align="center">***</div>

Overall, the literature has increasingly emphasized the problematic character of "local." However, this literature lacks explicit definitions, empirical work, and thorough reflexive engagement regarding the uses of this word in IR. Having identified these absences is precisely when step three of the Reflexive Review is needed.

### *Identifying Patterns of Word Uses*

To implement step three of the method, we adopt the second strategy by combining summative content analysis and DA. We iteratively reviewed articles mentioning "local" in the literature classified as "International Relations" in the JSTOR database until reaching saturation (see corpus rationale, see notes 2–3 on p.10) and included other works in IR that use "local" based on feedback we received. We identified four patterns of use of "local" in this literature: as a class of actors, as a level of analysis, as community, and as experiences of the everyday. We discuss each in turn below, highlighting the analytical strengths and potential blinders for each use for research in IR and beyond. The patterns of use we identify are not mutually exclusive, and the authors we cite might in other works very well mobilize other meanings associated with "local."[9] However, we disaggregate these into main patterns of use with examples to shed light on their differences since recognizing the multiplicity and imprecision of uses is a fruitful part of this exercise and the endeavor of fostering linguistic reflexivity.

### *The "Local" As a Class of Actors*

The first use of "local" we identified reflects a growing acknowledgment in IR of the diversity of actors involved in the production of world politics beyond the nation state. This use challenges the state as the sole unit of analysis within the international system and, therefore, contributes to addressing issues of methodological nationalism (Chernilo 2010). Beyond methodological concerns, "local" can point to ontological standpoints such as the social and physical grounding of groups, institutions, or actions (Keck and Sikkink 1998). For example, "local politics" refers to the politics of subnational units, such as municipalities or regions, in opposition to nation states and international organizations (McGahern 2016).

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[9] See for example Behrent (2013) on the different uses of the word "technology" by Foucault throughout his career.

When referring to "local" as a class of actors, authors sometimes challenge the traditional active/passive narrative that denies the international agency of actors commonly identified as "local" and frames them as merely intervened by "international" actors. Examples include authors working on communities (Wallmeier 2017), social movements (Basu 2010), international institutions (Onuf 2002), peacebuilding (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Krampe 2021), and using "constitutive localization" as a framework analyzing how norms can be constructed locally rather than only externally imposed (Rüland 2014).

While "local" as a class of actors brought innovative elements for the study of world politics, the routine linguistic distinction of some actors as "local" and others as "international" risks essentializing these actors as if they have innate and pre-given characteristics, such as introducing actors' assumed behavior into the analysis. The routine use of "local" to qualify certain types of actor can, therefore, result in an empirical blinder: we often see that the collocation of "local" and "international" to groups of actors does not match their actual localness or internationality (Alejandro 2021b, 8–9). For example, literature might routinely qualify rebel leaders as "local actors" and the staff of international organizations as "international actors"; however, empirically, the supposed "local" actors could well be more internationalized than the supposed "international" ones. A comparative analysis of the trajectory and everyday interactions of these actors could, indeed, highlight that rebel leaders might have received foreign education, lived in several countries, and have developed transnational networks that they currently use for their engagement. Meanwhile, the "international" staff might operate in the same city where they were born and educated (let us say London). Such a double standard also comes with (Eurocentric and other) prejudices: "international" is more easily used to qualify "white"/"Western" actors, while it is harder for "non-Western"/"non-white" actors to prove their capacity to be "international" agents in the eye of the researcher (Julian, Bliesemann de Guevara, and Redhead 2019).

### The "Local" As a Space, Scale, and Level

Another common use represents "local" as a "space," "scale," or "level" (Schreurs 2008; Compagnon 2014). This use challenges the unidimensional focus on interstate relations as the sole site of relevance for the study of international politics.

Research using "local" as a scale builds upon and introduces nuance to more traditional multilevel analyses that position the national level in relation to supranational and subnational levels. These works represent "local" as a space that can be potentially affected by phenomena operating at other levels, such as the "local" social and economic impact of cross-border relations (Koch 1974). They also investigate opposite dynamics—how subnational spatial variations can affect international phenomena (Rosenau 1997)—following the idea that "all international politics is local" (Gleditsch 2002).

The "local" as space, scale, and level might be the most common use of "local" in IR. Nonetheless, it raises some concerns by contributing to the involuntary reification of scale and levels of analysis. Indeed, it is easy to slip from addressing scales and levels as a useful analytical framework to conceiving them as ontologically different spaces governed by different organizing principles (such as anarchy vis-à-vis "international" spaces versus socially contingent interactions, constraints, and incentives vis-à-vis "local" spaces). Doing so not only polarizes such "spaces" as inherently different but also naturalizes "local" and "international" as separable ontological and spatial realities (Hirblinger and Simons 2015). This reification and inherent separation can represent blinders for analyzing situations and cases where otherwise "local" and "international" dimensions of world politics spatially blend—such as borders or microstates—for which the conceptualization of a local–international might be more appropriate. Drawing on literature engaging with the concept of "glocalization" that demonstrates the blurring of "local" and "global" (Robertson 1994), conceptualizing the interstice between "local" and "international" might

indeed represent a heuristic alternative to understanding a broader range of phenomena.

### The "Local" As Community

This use of "local" may be the most difficult to synthesize. Uses of "local" as community focus on human encounters and sociality to emphasize relationality happening in world politics beyond interstate relations. This use also tends to reflect scholarship's opposition to the binary reification of inside versus outside the state (Walker 1993)—sometimes characterized as "the great divide" (Held and McGrew 2007). Interestingly, uses of "local" as community sometimes simultaneously challenge this binary division while repolarizing these social spaces, thereby dividing and endowing them with opposite social values.

On the one hand, "local" as community is often used by theories—such as world society and globalization—that challenge the division between "domestic" and "international" as two spaces that should be studied separately, for example, in the study of flows of capital (e.g., Caporaso 1997). "Local" as community aligns with the idea of international politics as a "social whole" (Kessler 2009; Albert and Buzan 2013). This understanding highlights how social relations can be in flux; circulate across, within, and around administrative units; and can be "zoomed in" on analytically for a better understanding of the social dimension of world politics.

On the other hand, "local" as community can acquire a meaning stronger than sociality to emphasize the dehumanizing and impersonal nature of globalized life and international politics. "Local" as community is mobilized to shed light on the technocratic dimensions of international interventions (Leaf 1997) and resistance toward international governance (Visoka 2011), including ways of life and ideologies related to localism (Navarro and Pérez Yruela 2000).

This use of "local" is embedded in prolific literature across social science. However, within this use of "local" as community lies the risk of idealizing "local" settings such as the village, neighborhood, or community as the paragon of anti-globalist, indigenous, and anti-technocratic emancipatory resistance. In turn, this idealization can potentially obscure both how social agents might use transnational resources to support such emancipatory values, and the violence and oppression (including vis-à-vis these values) that can stem from these so-called local settings.

### The "Local" As Experiences of the Everyday

Finally, scholars' use of "local" also reflects IR's growing interest in "the everyday." This use highlights how the "international" dwells and is experienced in the mundane aspects of everyday life (Basaran and Olsson 2018) and sheds light on the "vernacular" dimensions of world politics (Bubandt 2005). It accompanies the "practice turn" in IR (Adler-Nissen 2016), supports initiatives analyzing the microdimensions of world politics (Solomon and Steele 2017), and aligns with those capturing the lived experience and "local" everyday forms of knowledge (Julian, Bliesemann de Guevara, and Redhead 2019; Knott Forthcoming).

Supporting the critique of "methodological elitism" (Stanley and Jackson 2016), the "local" as everyday challenges the idea that world politics only happens in "remarkable" ways within "high politics," among elites and international organizations (Montison 2010), and challenges the interpretation of the everyday as "seemingly pre-political" (Enloe 2011). Instead, experiences, practices, emotions, and subjectivities are legitimized as constitutive objects of word politics. Works in this line have problematized taken-for-granted understandings of the "international" in a large range of case studies, focusing, for example, on "local" performances of power regarding EU integration (Adler-Nissen 2016) or representation of migration in British soaps (Innes 2017).

Recognizing the potential analytical blinders that can be inherited by using "local" as everyday, some have noted the romanticization of the everyday and "local" as an unequivocal solution to top–down or elite bias within IR (Guillaume 2011).

Another potential issue deals with excluding high politics from the scope of what can be framed as everyday "local." For example, while diplomacy traditionally exemplifies "high politics," the emotions and experiences of social agents working and engaging in the routine practices and bureaucracy of consulates and embassies are no less "everyday-local" than lay citizens watching foreign TV shows. Indeed, works have shown the relevance of this line of inquiry by investigating the "practical life-worlds" of "agents of international politics" (Neumann 2005), border guards (Côté-Boucher, Infantino, and Salter 2014), and "international interveners" (Autesserre 2014). Still, these works fall short of problematizing the essentialization of "local" versus "international" actors mentioned above.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

As illustrated with the case of "local," conducting the Reflexive Review supports linguistic reflexivity by enabling us to realize how common words we use might inadvertently organize our perception and represent blinders for research. Observing and struggling with the problematic imprecisions of uses of "local" in the cases of our research drew us to write this article and develop this method, having realized an absence of empirical or reflexive work about "local." In this context, engaging step three of the Reflexive Review not only answers the needs of the researcher conducting the Reflexive Review but also contributes to the emerging collective problematization of such a word.

Just like a traditional literature review, others might have organized the Reflexive Review of the literature regarding "local" differently. For example, according to their training or subfield, some may have put to the forefront patterns of use that we considered secondary—for instance, how "local" is constructed as a periphery (Krane 1986), in opposition to "sovereign" (Joenniemi 2014) or "external" (Basini and Ryan 2016).

We have formalized the results of steps two and three in this article for pedagogical purposes to illustrate such a process and demonstrate how the method could benefit researchers beyond linguistic specialists. When conducting the Reflexive Review, one may not need to develop such a formalized synthesis with structured paragraphs and fully fledged references. The core work of the review is to identify metalinguistic engagements, and disentangle and make explicit the (potentially) multiple patterns of use of a word. In many cases, draft notes and a good synthetic table would go a long way in enabling researchers to be more reflexive about their language use. Similarly, communicating what linguistic realizations and choices result from a Reflexive Review can enable readers to continue the process of reflexive engagement. Did reading the results of our Reflexive Review for themselves about "local" help you become more aware of some uses of the word you were partaking in without knowing about it and the potential blinders associated with these uses? If so, what are you going to do about it?

## Conclusion

This article aimed to expand the literature focusing on methods for reflexivity by developing the Reflexive Review as a method supporting researchers' linguistic reflexivity. This method adds a linguistic dimension to the traditional research practice of the literature review by guiding scholars to review the literature's main uses of words alongside reviewing its main ideas and arguments.

More broadly, this article contributes to the vast field of research and human activity that is reflexivity. Overall, reflexivity can be understood as a feature of modern society that holds the potential to be both emancipatory (Comtian interpretation) or oppressive by further internalizing disciplining ways of being via morals, self-help literature, or biodata technology (Nietzschean interpretation). For those who aim

to implement reflexivity in practice, we suggest approaching reflexivity via Weber's social action framework. As "rational-purposeful action," reflexivity is engaged as a rational procedure to achieve an assessable objective. As a "value-rational action," reflexivity is not a means to an end but the end itself. The path and vocation of reflexivity is the objective, or, rather, the objective is the journey.

In this article, our approach aligns with reflexivity as "rational-purposeful action." The aim of the Reflexive Review is to produce a finite piece of work with a specific objective—becoming more aware of the way we use specific words—rather than committing to an infinite cycle of reflexive deconstruction. Doing so, we challenge the notion that being reflexive is a binary between being fully reflexive and not being reflexive. However, we do not suggest there should be only one approach to reflexivity. Our decision to position the article within methodological, rather than epistemological or theoretical traditions, is pragmatic and strategic rather than exclusionary. We identified addressing this methodological gap and providing tools for reflexivity vis-à-vis a specific objective as the main needs of the audiences we address.

By fostering a space to discuss methods for linguistic reflexivity, we hope to put linguistic inertia on the methodological and reflexive agenda. The Reflexive Review is only one method for linguistic reflexivity in a collective journey. In particular, we hope it will inspire other approaches, for example, those focusing on dimensions of language that the Reflexive Review only indirectly tackles (e.g., how to account for the existence of different connotations associated with different languages and the politics of languages in a globalized field such as IR).

This article complements, rather than opposes, approaches to reflexivity with different ambitions. If this article makes a stand against something, it is against three pitfalls related to reflexivity. First is the idea that reflexivity is not worth pursuing because reflexive progress is impossible. Second, thinking that identifying oneself as committed to reflexivity without any actionable practices is enough. Third, thinking that doing a process like Reflexive Review is an endpoint of reflexivity.

Specifically, the article develops a method that we consider feasible in terms of skillset and epistemological priors. However, the conditions of feasibility of reflexivity go beyond these methodological and epistemological dimensions. As many readers might experience, for example, the neoliberal academy does not provide researchers with much time. And, reflexivity is a time-consuming activity. Other approaches to reflexivity might be more radical than the Reflexive Review. However, the more demanding such approaches are, the less likely they are to be adopted by a broad audience in the current academic context. Our position aligns with a different strategy whose ambitions lie in the likelihood of such a method drawing in, and supporting, a wide pool of adherents. This position is not admitting defeat. Instead, our ambition is to open the door for more scholars to be incentivized, able, and required to engage in reflexivity. Widening the scope of scholars engaging with reflexive practices requires a method that is more likely to be adopted.

For now, the Reflexive Review represents a concrete step to support a methodologically informed reflexive practice that improves the rigor of research compared to resting on statements of intentions or doing nothing at all. In this article, we point toward the difference between saying a word like "local" is problematic and producing transparent work that enhances one's reflexivity about the uses of this word. As such, the Reflexive Review sheds light on the analytical blinders and ethical issues within our use of language, and the multiplicity of word uses that we might otherwise have taken for granted. Conducting a Reflexive Review allows us to be more conscious about how we produce and communicate research through language to support empirical innovation and social change. We hope that this article will be received as a warm invitation for others to share the practices they have developed toward linguistic reflexivity and take further—in a more explicit collaborative and pedagogical way—this fascinating conversation.

## Acknowledgments

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