

Some problems in the typology of reported speech: a canonical approach

The typology of reported speech traditionally distinguishes two types: direct and indirect speech:

with direct speech reports ... the perspective of the original speaker is maintained; with indirect speech reports ... the perspective shifts towards that of the reporting speaker and his speech situation (De Roeck 1994:332)

This simple, classical opposition suffers a number of problems as one confronts the full range of cross-linguistic variation in how languages represent quotation. A common solution to these problems has been to add a third category, variously known as ‘semi-indirect’ or ‘semi-direct’ speech (as well as other terms like *discours indirecte libre*, *Erlebte Rede* etc. particularly in literary studies). These mix the two primary polar categories in a range of interesting (and highly heterogeneous) ways – but in turn create the problem of determining where the boundaries fall between this third category and either of the other two. A final problem is that much indirect speech does not so much shift simply to that of the reporting speaker and his speech situation, but rather incorporates complex representations melding the viewpoints of original and reporting speaker.

This paper proposes a new approach to the typology of reported speech, comprising a triangle of canonical points: (a) direct speech, in which the perspective of the original speaker is completely maintained, (b) indirect speech, in which the perspective is entirely assimilated to that of the reporting speaker (c) biperspectival speech, in which the twin perspectives of original and reporting speaker are simultaneously coded at every relevant point. (An instantiation of biperspectival speech at the level of one morpheme is a logophoric pronoun, which encodes a first person value for the original speaker and a third person value for the reporting speaker; at the level of a construction a good example is a complex tense like the pluperfect in ‘*John said he had handed in*’ where one temporal reference point is the reporting speech act and the other the original speech act).

Of these three canonical points, only that of direct speech receives regular, actual exemplification cross-linguistically. The other two are idealised, in the sense that once one puts most claimed examples of indirect speech under the microscope, for example, one finds elements that do not represent the perspective simply of the reporting speaker, and also elements (like complex tenses) that are more coherently viewed as biperspectival. The very wide range of phenomena that get described as ‘semi-indirect’/‘semi-direct’ speech occupy a range of intermediate points in the triangular space defined by these three canonical apices.

The improved typology of reported speech that results from this analysis demonstrates the value of canonical definitions even where no language instantiates them fully.

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For oral presentation, preferably within special workshop on Canonical Typology