

Preface

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**Reanimated Voices: Speech reporting in a historical-
pragmatic perspective**

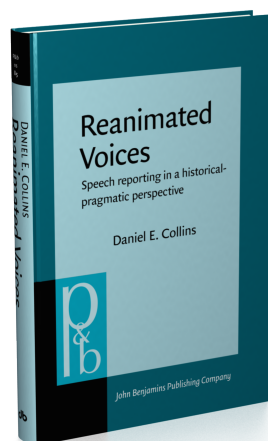
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Preface

Recent scholarship in historical pragmatics has shown that analytic methods devised to explain usage in modern languages can also shed light on diachronic developments and earlier language states.¹ In this study, I hope to contribute to this burgeoning field by demonstrating how a long-standing method of historical-comparative linguistics can be adapted for pragmatology and used to account for *synchronic* patterns of lexical and syntactic variation in a corpus of premodern writings. Applying the method of residual forms, I examine the distribution of speech-reporting strategies in a text-kind in which they are privileged — trial transcripts written in the chancery variety of Old Russian during the early Muscovite period (ca. 1410–1505). My chief goal is to discover the factors that motivated medieval writers to choose a particular form of reported speech — understood as any means of representing spoken or written discourse, not just indirect speech — in a specific context. (Reported thought is not discussed because it is not attested in my corpus.) Function-to-form matching is possible here because the communicative purposes of the different contextualizations can be inferred either from internal evidence or from the socially institutionalized function(s) of the text-kind. The results of my investigation thus validate a genre-based method for studying patterns of syntactic and lexical usage.

The title of this book, *Reanimated Voices*, alludes to three activities that may be seen as the overarching themes of this study of speech reporting. The first and most evident is the activity of reporters, who, for purposes of their own, choose to evoke distal speech events for their audience to imagine. The second is the activity of that audience — the interpreters who, in order to understand the reporters' communicative intention, must construct (or reconstruct) a mental image of distal speech events, and who thus become collaborators and co-authors in the act of reporting. The third (and the most

remote from everyday experience) is the activity of the historical pragmatician studying reported speech, an eavesdropper in time who must find a way to reconstruct the language behavior of long-silenced reporters and interpreters, to reanimate their voices for purposes that they never intended or envisioned. One of the goals of this work is to show that this reconstructive endeavor is methodologically feasible.

Reported speech has received a great deal of attention in recent typological and functional (pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and anthropological-linguistic) scholarship.² One of the reasons why it is of significance for pragmatics is that the differences between its formal varieties cannot be understood in any meaningful sense without reference to pragmatic (contextual) factors. The various forms of reported speech are not synonyms but rather instruments appropriate for different kinds of tasks; the choice of a given strategy is determined by the larger structure of the discourse and by the communicative intentions of the speaker or writer.³ In this study I provide further evidence for the context-sensitivity of reported speech, which up to now has been argued primarily for modern languages; at the same time, I show how the choice of strategy is oriented to the intended interpreter in the reporting situation. Speakers and writers choose the form that they perceive as potentially most effective for what they want to communicate and, concomitantly, for how they intend to organize their texts. Their perceptions are socially grounded — based on their experiential knowledge of how a specific kind of audience goes about interpreting the discourse in particular contextualizations and in particular genres.

The functionalist current of research on reported speech was brilliantly anticipated in Bakhtin's pioneering study (published under the name of his friend Vološinov) of the "basic and constant tendencies in the *active reception of other speakers' speech*" (1929/1986: 116–17).⁴ In this long-neglected, now much-cited work, Bakhtin/Vološinov shifted the focus from the syntax to what in current linguistic terminology would be called the pragmatics of reported speech; he emphasized the decisive role that the reporter's intention ("the teleology of the authorial context") plays in the choice of "stabilized constructional patterns" (ibid.: 116, 122). Bakhtin/Vološinov was truly a voice crying in the wilderness; he remains, with good reason, a fundamental source for many function-oriented works on reported speech, including this one.

The continuing influence of Bakhtin/Vološinov's classic study gives particular urgency to the investigation of reported speech in premodern

languages and Old Russian in particular — paradoxically, because of a shortcoming; for in his discussion of that subject Bakhtin/Vološinov departs markedly from the context-sensitive methods that he uses elsewhere in his work. On the basis of a limited reading of medieval texts (primarily chronicles and *The Song of Prince Igor's Campaign*), he declares that reported speech was essentially monolithic in Old Russian, with direct speech predominant and indirect speech virtually nonexistent. He sees this as a reflection of a larger cultural tendency towards “authoritarian dogmatism”, which he also finds in medieval French: “If, at some given stage in its development, a language habitually perceives another’s utterance as a compact, indivisible, fixed, impenetrable whole, then that language will command no other pattern than that of primitive, inert direct discourse...” (ibid.: 128; see also 119–20, 123).

Bakhtin/Vološinov’s assessment of reported speech in medieval Russian is based on false premises; it ignores the selectiveness intrinsic to every form of reporting — even direct speech. Moreover, it is empirically wrong; it ignores several well-attested patterns of nondirect speech, including varieties no longer available in the modern language. In reality there was a great variety of reporting strategies, with pronounced differences in how they were distributed both among and within diverse text-kinds. Bakhtin/Vološinov’s conclusion could have been reached only by extrapolating from the modern language; indeed, the words “primitive, inert” (“primitivnoj, inertnoj”, Vološinov 1929/1993: 138) betray an *a priori*, anti-uniformitarian assumption, also seen in other historical studies of Russian, that reported speech must be evolving toward greater diversity and expressiveness — i.e., that it must be more developed (however that is to be measured) in the modern language than in premodern texts (see D. Collins 1996 for discussion). In fact, Bakhtin/Vološinov did not take the necessary step of looking for “the teleology of the authorial context” in his medieval sources; he neglected to consider their individual traits and the kinds of contexts that tend to occur in them, all the while conjecturing large-scale tendencies that essentially obviated individual intentions. Similar methodological errors may be found in most other studies of Old Russian reported speech (even those not influenced by Bakhtin/Vološinov’s work).

To be methodologically valid, a functionalist/pragmatic approach to reported speech (or any other complex of syntactic and lexical alternatives) in premodern texts must examine the usage in several synchronic slices

thoroughly before advancing hypotheses about large-scale diachronic developments. This, in turn, requires painstaking attention to particular contexts (linguistic, textual, and social/institutional), unbiased by the modern state of affairs or by premature panchronic generalizations. As in the New Philology, one must “recontextualize the texts as acts of communication” (Fleischman 1990: 37).

However, the need to consider authorial intentions and communicative purposes in premodern texts encounters a substantial methodological difficulty. With only the written texts as observables, can one really recover all or any of the factors that motivated variation? Can one interpret patterns of speech behavior that cannot be observed directly (or introspected) but must be inferred from very partial context clues? These barriers are endemic to historical pragmatics, as a ramification of the general “Data Problem” (see Jacobs and Jucker 1995). I offer one solution to difficulties of this kind in the method of analysis demonstrated in this study.

My investigation has three main goals, corresponding to three consecutive stages in my analysis. First, I set out to establish the norms of distribution for the various reporting strategies in a corpus of utilitarian texts; in particular, I try to determine which patterns were preferred in specific recurring contextualizations with known or inferable functions. This distinguishes my investigation from many other studies of reported speech, which concentrate on belletristic texts that do not feature recurring contextualizations of this kind. Second, I undertake to identify the pragmatic factors that, given the formal properties of the reporting strategies, could have justified these conventional preferences as the most effective means of accomplishing the communicative goals of the texts, which were, at least in part, socially institutionalized. Third, where there are departures from the conventions for a given context, I try to detect atypical features that could have motivated the scribes to choose unconventional strategies, again as a way of promoting optimal communication. All three of these goals serve a broader purpose — to explore how contextualization conditions reflect collectively and individually purposive use of speech-reporting strategies.

The methodology and results of my study will, I hope, have relevance both for the discipline of historical pragmatics and for further functionalist research on reported speech. The investigation also serves to bring Slavic data, which have not been readily accessible to broader scholarship, to historical pragmatics, a field that up to now has focused mainly on Western

European languages. I hope, conversely, that it will begin a new direction of research in Slavistics by demonstrating the need for and advantages of function-oriented approaches to medieval Slavic texts, which have been little studied within the pragmatic framework.

