

Ger Reesink

Quotations form a recursive discourse

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since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;
e.e.cummings

1 Introduction

The literature on reported speech and thought contains various confusing grammatical labels, such as “semi-direct” or “semi-indirect” speech, or claims that a language lacks indirect speech. Such labels seem to be motivated by language-specific tweaking of various deictic signals, and may not be helpful as a comparative typological concept. It is the merit of Spronck and Nikitina’s (S&N) target article to argue for reported speech as “a coherent, cross-linguistically regular phenomenon that displays features that cannot be derived from any other construction type”. I would like to offer some nuance to their claim without adding to the prolific terminology.

One of the defining features of *homo sapiens* is that we are able to reflect on our own or conspecifics’ consciousness. Our cognition is based on primary emotions, which we share with many other species, that are instrumental for our survival as individual organisms (Damasio 1999, 2010). This universal conceptual level allows us to differentiate ‘self’ versus ‘other’ and it is on this bedrock of emotions and cognition that our species has been able to develop language and languages, with the key properties as defined in Hockett (1958: 574). And language allows us to not only express our own thoughts, feelings, intentions, etc., but also to represent those of others, that is, through reported speech constructions, as defined by the claim (3) and refined definition (31) in S&N’s paper.

I would like to qualify their claim that “reported speech constitutes a syntactic class in its own right”. Instead of taking the whole of reported speech as one syntactic class, it seems better to distinguish two major constructional

sub-domains: direct speech (Section 2) can be characterized systematically as mono-perspectival, while indirect speech (Section 3) has to be characterized as bi-perspectival conceptually. I will illustrate these two categories from just one language, Usan (Trans-New Guinea), while stressing that direct and indirect quotations come in many different language-specific forms to signal the two perspectives.

In my conclusion I claim that universally, cross-linguistically, there is a basic distinction between how a discourse can be recursively injected into another discourse: mono-perspectival direct quote constructions and bi-perspectival indirect quotations.

2 Canonical direct quote

While allowing for the fact that a direct report of an original discourse (of whatever length) hardly ever takes the form of a verbatim representation, as S&N observe, such a quotation includes the three meaning components of S&N's definition in their (31). It is constructed as a separate, *demonstrated* discourse with its original deictic properties which the current speaker presents as a true event. The way such a recursive discourse is signaled is very much language-specific or even speaker-dependent: with introductory or closing formulae, extra-linguistic or prosodic cues such as facial expression, gestures, change of timbre, pitch, pause.

Direct quotes are ubiquitous in narratives, as exemplified in an excerpt from an Usan myth in (1). Two sisters were calling out for their father, when they saw that a wild pig could be hunted. A spirit disguised himself as their father and lured them to his house in order to have sex with them. They were able to escape, and when they came home, they told their real father that a bad man would be coming. So their father prepared a trap for him. The next morning the spirit man went looking for the girls and arrived at their father's house. The story continues as follows. [From the myth *Wimiquar qamar*, told by Daur at Sangrusangru, June 23, 1981. The actual quotes are **bold** in brackets.]

- (1) (a) *Munon boru is-ub igo-ai.*
 man_i bad descend-SS stay-3SG_i.FARPAST
 'The bad man_i was going down.'

- (b) {...} is-is-is-i mor is-a wog-ub
 [pause] descend-RED-RED-until inside descend-2/3SG_i.DS cease-SS
ne qam-ar:
 and say-3SG_j.FARPAST
 ‘he_i went down and down until he_i entered the house and he_j (the girls’ father) said.’
- (c) [**Ne yar-an ne?**] *qam-ar.*
 2SG_i come-2SG_i-PRES and say-3SG_j.FP
 ‘You_i (have) come, huh?’ he_j said.’
- (d) *Ne wo qam-ar:* [**Ye yor-oum.**]
 and 3SG_i say-3SG_i.FAR.PAST 1SG_i come-1SG_i-PRES
qam-ar.
 say-3SG_i.FAR.PAST
 ‘And he_i said: “I_i (have) come,” he_j said.’
- (e) [**Yamangar wau ombur eng qataben**
 woman child two the on.the.way
boru-bur-urei qiyo?
 bad-become-3PL.NEAR.PAST or
 ‘Have the two girls perhaps become bad (= become unwell, hurt) on their way?’
- (f) **Mai mor e-t yur-urei qamb ne**
 how inside here-at come-3PL.NEAR.PAST say.SS_i and
 ‘What, have they come home here (already), saying (= thinking) and’
- (g) **Ne ne-ge-ib qamb yor-oum]**
 2SG_j 2SG_j-see-FUT.SG.SS_i say.SS_i come-1SG_i.PRES
qam-ar
 say-3SG_i.FAR.PAST
 ‘I_i (have) come to see you, he_j said.’ [“(Because) I thought they may have suffered an accident on their way, perhaps they have come home, I have come to see you,” he said.]

This example shows that the story as told by Daur has the overall absolute tense marking of FAR PAST; it is projected in the distant past from the day of the recording, June 23, 1981. Within the direct quotes attributed to the characters of the story, however, the tense markings are the same as at the “actual” time of utterance, thus relative to the matrix clause. The spirit comes to the house of the girls, and the father asks him ‘You (have) come huh?’ and his answer is likewise in the present tense ‘I (have) come’. The person deixis reflects the actual situation at that time in the past.

Within the direct quote attributed to the spirit, various other functions of reported speech and thought (see below, Section 3, and Reesink 1993) can be observed: the spirit reports his thoughts (e)-(f), which give the reason for his coming. These are governed by the same-subject medial verb form for ‘say’ *qamb*. The contents of his thoughts refer to events that must have taken place at the day of his utterance, hence marked for near past. The thoughts he had about the whereabouts of the two girls follow in a coordinated construction, explicitly marked by *ne* ‘and’, by the purpose of his coming in (1)g.

3 Canonical indirect quote

As S&N observe, indirect quotes can come in many forms both intra- and cross-linguistically. In Usan all indirect quotes are commanded by the same-subject medial form of the verb ‘to say’, as in (1e-f). As claimed in Reesink (1993: 223), “Usan has only two functions for *qamb* ‘to say’. The first is the general function to refer to the act of speaking or telling. This allows all possible forms of the verb paradigm. The second function is what we could call a grammaticalized one, which allows only the medial same subject form *qamb*. This one covers all instances that refer to “inner speech”, which invariably requires indirect “quotations”. Example (2) below presents a rather intricate web of semantically recursive quoted speech constructions taken from a discussion on how to solve a debt to a community from which one of the Usan men had married a woman.

One older man complained that he was not well informed about the marriage of one of his relatives to a woman from another ethnolinguistic group. He did not quite understand what the other party had claimed as compensation for their woman. Had they asked for money as a bride price or did they want to follow the Usan custom of ‘sister-exchange’? Or did they want both? Then the young man explained how the marriage had taken place and that now the members of the community should discuss how to recompense. So, the old man acknowledged the explanation by an intricate stacking of reported speech and thought constructions, which in this case involves fully inflected forms of ‘say’ as well.

Although a few stretches, which are underlined in (2), have the form of ‘direct speech’, they are part of the ‘indirect quote’ as marked by the matrix quoting verb *qamb* ‘say.SS’. I will index the verb forms of ‘say’ (which involve some vowel changes) in the glosses and in the free translation, so the reader can keep track of the quotes. The long sentence contains a few instances of ‘indirect speech’ that express the speaker’s thought. Usan does not have a lexical item

that expresses ‘want’ (Reesink 2008); the speaker of the matrix clause can express her/his own wish, as in (1)g, or someone else’s, as in (2) **B** by an indirect quote commanded by the verb *qamb* ‘say.SS’.

- (2) *Io, e-ng mai qur-t yamangar nob ombur qomor-une*
 yes this-GIV what/how seed-at woman with two say₁-1PL.DS
in-dar-un-or
 1PL-give.PL-UF-3PL
qamb qam-amirei qamb birisi me iimbig
 say₂.SS say₃-3PL.FP say₄.SS cause.clear.SS not understand.SS
qur-aum e-ng
 say₅-1SG.PRES this-GIV

‘Yes, given that, well, given that I say₅ (that) I did not clearly understand saying₄ (=thinking that) they had said₃ saying₂ (=wanting) we say₁ both with regard to money and a woman and they should give us [Well, when I said₅ I didn’t quite understand thinking₄ they had said₃ wanting₂ they had told₁ us to give them both money (a brideprice) and a woman (according to the sister exchange practice of the Usan)]

magar-sig mom qanam mus-ub qamar-a
 7th.born.male-old completely base make.well-SS say₆-2/3SG.DS
iimbig-oum.
 understand-1SG.PRES

‘Magarsig has made it perfectly clear and I understand.’

It may be helpful to clarify the intricate indirect speech constructions in (2), by extracting the building blocks:

A. we will say [*qomorune*₁] with money and with woman both and they shall give us. This construction has all the deictic features of direct speech, in the indirect speech report ‘we’ refers to the other ethnolinguistic group, and ‘they’ refers to the Usan community and it is marked as a purposive by the following speech verb *qamb*:

B. in order that [= *qamb*₂] **A.** This has the form of a coordinating same subject medial verb. It is followed by another fully inflected final verb:

C. they said [*qamamirei*₃] **B** and **A.**

And this in turn forms the quote of the next SS form *qamb*, which expresses what the speaker of the matrix clause thinks:

D. thinking [= *qamb*₄] C, B and A, I just said [= *quraum*₅] I did not clearly understand.

E. But now that Magarsig has clearly spoken [*qamara*₆] the real meaning, I understand.

The best English equivalent of (2) then reads:

Yes, given (what you just said), how (shall I say it), I thought they had said that they wanted us to give them both money and a woman, that's why I didn't understand it. (But now that) Magarsig explained it, I understand.

Thus, we find a few morphosyntactic features in the indirect speech constructions that resemble syntactic coordination, or even structures that are found in canonical direct speech, which has led some linguists to claim that indirect speech does not occur in some Papuan languages. But these examples illustrate S&N's claim "that as a sub-clausal, clausal or even multi-clausal element R shows behaviour that is distinct from, e.g. regular subordinated or coordinated clauses and may contain pronouns and other construction types that are specific to R." As shown in (2), in indirect speech constructions the relation between M and R is more tightly integrated than in the direct speech construction in (1).

4 Conclusion

Broadly speaking, then, I endorse S&N's claim that "reported speech is an inherently conversational phenomenon that forms a dedicated syntactic (i.e. constructional) domain" by reiterating my observations regarding etic and emic viewpoints used in descriptions and typological comparisons. Reported speech and thought constructions "form a conceptual frame, in the sense of CADRES CONCEPTUAL ARBITRAIRES (Lazard 2005, 2006), which are best informed by the experience of individual languages as diverse as possible" (Reesink 2008: 888). This means there is a basic distinction between canonical 'Direct speech' and 'Indirect speech' constructions (Evans 2013), with the former being characterized as representing a discourse separate from the speaker's ongoing discourse, requiring all the deictic specifications of an "original, mono-perspectival discourse". The latter, requiring a bi-perspectival construction, can come in many language-specific disguises, which at the linguistic level may be coordinating, subordinating, or even identical to a direct speech construction, as shown in (2).

Thus, the examples (1) and (2) above illustrate S&N's claim

we observed that the syntactic relation between the two elements in reported speech, which we labelled M and R, could not be simply reduced to a specific type of coordination or subordination. We suggest that this is one of the strongest arguments for defining reported speech at the level of the sentential construction, as our definition proposes, rather than at that of its individual constituent parts.

The variety of constructions expressing canonical direct or indirect reports of speech and thought is then the appropriate domain for typological comparison.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person
DS	different subject following
FAR.PAST/FP	Past tense for day before day of speaking and earlier
FUT	future tense
GIV	given
NEAR.PAST	Past tense marking events earlier on the day of speaking
PL	plural
PRES	present tense, with perfective sense
SG	singular
SS	same subject following
RED	reduplication
UF	uncertain future, subjunctive

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