Simulating prosody in free indirect speech: A reading study

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1   Direct and indirect speech

Quotation allows us to represent others' speech and thought directly, by reproducing it more or less verbatim. In Clark and Gerrig's (1990) terminology, quotation is demonstration. In (1a), we demonstrate what Mary said, just as in (1b) we demonstrate what she did, by mimicking her original (speech) act.

(1)   a.   Mary said, "What's going on here?"
        b.   And then she was like *[looks puzzled, raises shoulders]*

The construction in (1a) is also called a direct speech report and usually contrasted with indirect speech reports like (2):

(2)   Mary asked what was going on.

In an indirect report the speaker does not mimic Mary's original speech act, but merely describes what was said in her own words. More precisely, in indirect speech the reporter conveys only the proposition expressed by the reported utterance, while direct speech allows the reporter to convey various aspects of the form of the original utterance (including indexicals,

idioms, and expressives), and even gestures, prosody, hesitations, false starts, errors, dialect, speech impediments etc.

(3)   And then the old guy was like, "Uhh...well, y'know, ...so uhh ... *[shakes head]*"

By virtue of its demonstrational character, direct speech thus allows a more vivid representation of others' speech acts than indirect speech (Tannen, 1989). Wade and Clark (1993) show experimentally that this vividness affects the choice between direct and indirect speech in language production: speakers tend to choose direct speech reporting when instructed to entertain. More recently, Yao and Scheepers (2011) showed that it also affects how reports are read: when asked to read a short narrative passage aloud, readers adjust their reading rate to that of the reported speaker – as implied by the story – but only in direct speech. In this paper we want to explore if the reading rate modulation methodology can be used to decide a current debate in the semantics of free indirect speech: is it best analyzed as a species of direct, or indirect speech?

2   Free indirect speech

In this paper we look at a third style of reporting that is in many ways in between direct and indirect speech. Typical examples involve reports of the inner thoughts of fictional characters by omniscient narrators in classic 19th or 20th century novels:

(4)   Tomorrow was Monday, Monday, the beginning of another school week!   (Lawrence, *Women in Love*, cf. Banfield 1982:98)

In (4), it's not the narrator who expresses his excitement about the next day, rather it's a report of what the protagonist is thinking. But we see neither quotation marks nor a subordinating frame (e.g. *she thought/exclaimed*). Moreover, the narrative past tense *was* indicates indirect speech, while the indexical *tomorrow* and the expressive exclamation indicate direct speech.

In this paper we focus on reported speech rather than thought. Although there is no consensus on definition or terminology, we refer to examples like (5) as free indirect speech. For convenience we mark the passages that constitute free indirect speech in italics.

(5)   a.   *They were welcome to the Marshalsea*, he would tell them. *Yes, he was the Father of the place. So the world was kind enough to call him; and so he was, if more than twenty years of residence gave him a claim to the title.*

            (Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, cf. Fludernik 1995:83)

    b.   *The way to Regent's Park Tube station – could they tell her the way to Regent's Park Tube station –* Maisie Johnson wanted to know. *She was only up from Edinburgh two days ago.*

            (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, cf. Fludernik 1995:225)

    c.   Most of the great flame-throwers were there and naturally, handling Big John de Conquer and his works. How he had done everything big on earth, *then went up tuh heben without dying atall. Went up there picking a guitar and got all de angels doing the ring-shout round and round de throne…* that brought them back to Tea Cake. *How come he couldn't hit that box a lick or two?*

            (Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, cf. Maier 2014:143)

These examples illustrate the main characteristics that linguists and literary scholars associate with free indirect speech:

(6)   a.   lack of (overt) quotation marks.

    b.   pronouns and tenses adjusted to the narrator's viewpoint, as witness for instance in (5b) the use of *she* to refer to the reported speaker herself and *they* to refer to her addressees.

    c.   independent main clause syntax, as witness the subject–auxiliary inversion in questions in (5b), and the clause-initial *Yes,* in (5a).

    d.   optional parenthetical frame, like *he would tell them* in (5a).

    e.   non-pronominal indexicals (*two days ago* in (5b)), modals (*could*), interrogative force, expressives, particles, honorifics,

   etc. interpreted from the perspective of the protagonist.

 f. hesitations, dysfluencies, dialect, colloquialisms, etc. ascribed to the reported speaker rather than the narrator, as evidenced by the dialect switch in (5c).

In all but the first two respects free indirect speech patterns with direct speech. Hence, Maier (2015) proposes a formal semantic analysis of free indirect speech in terms of quotation. In this account, free indirect speech is essentially direct speech, but with systematically unquoted pronouns and tenses.

However, since in languages like Amharic indexicals are known to shift also in regular indirect speech (Schlenker, 2011) – as do some expressives and particles (Eckardt, 2014) – a reduction to indirect speech is a *prima facie* viable option as well. This approach is pursued by Sharvit (2008) and Eckardt (2014). On their view, free indirect speech is semantically like indirect speech, but syntactically free, and with obligatory context shifting.

According to Maier (2014), the final characteristic in the list above, which he calls language shifting, is the Achilles heel of the free-indirect-as-indirect account. The quotational account predicts language shifting free indirect speech, just like in direct speech, while an analysis in terms of context shift can never do justice to it without sneaking in a quotational device.

Closely related to language and dialect shifting is another key feature of quotational demonstration, one that we can only ever find very rough typographical approximations of in written text: prosody. As discussed in section 1, quotation allows us to depict certain aspects of the original prosody, so if free indirect speech is like direct speech, we'd expect the same. That is, we predict that the prosody of spoken free indirect speech may be used to depict the prosody of the reported speech act. There is anecdotal support for this prediction in the literature. For instance, Clark and Gerrig (1990) write:

> In many novels the narration moves easily in and out of free indirect quotation. If free indirect quotations such as these are demonstrations, they should also be able to depict intonation, emotion, dialect, and register. In commercial recordings of novels and short stories, we have heard professional readers add these aspects.

In the same vein, Klewitz and Couper-Kuhlen (1999, p. 25) write about an example from a corpus of spontaneous spoken discourse:

> The injection of expressive prosody and paralinguistics presented as characteristic for this figure into Alina's report is an example of the narrative device called 'free indirect speech', often believed to occur only in written discourse. Yet this example and many others like it demonstrate that free indirect speech is as much a phenomenon of spoken as of written discourse, provided prosody is taken into account.

We devised an experiment to test whether free indirect discourse indeed patterns with direct speech rather than indirect speech with respect to prosody. More specifically, we tried to extend Yao and Scheepers's (2011) finding that speakers of direct speech mimic the speech rate of the quoted speaker, to free indirect speech.

3 Reading rate adjustment in free indirect speech

Following the design of Yao and Scheepers (2011) we compared reading rates of indirect and free indirect reports set in narrative contexts describing either a fast speaker (say, someone nervous or excited) or a slow speaker (say, someone sleepy or sick). The quotation theory of free indirect speech, coupled with Yao and Scheepers's results, predicts that in free indirect speech readers will adjust their speech rate to that of the quoted protagonist more than in indirect speech.

3.1 Method

Twenty-four native Dutch speakers, mostly students recruited from the University of Groningen Artificial Intelligence department (mean age: 22; range 19-26; 11 women), with no reported reading impairments, participated for a €5,- reward. A typical session lasted about 15 minutes.

We created sixteen short stories in Dutch as reading materials. The stories contained either an indirect speech or a free indirect speech report, preceded by a context that described the reported speaker either as

speaking slowly or as speaking fast. That is, we have a 2x2 design with variables Context (fast, slow) and Report (indirect, free indirect). The critical reported speech fragments within each item were identical between the fast- and slow-speaking contexts, and nearly identical between the indirect and free indirect speech conditions (Dutch word-order adjustment in indirect speech makes complete identity impossible). The stories ended with at least one additional sentence, following the report sentences.

Since good, unambiguous free indirect speech items are quite difficult to construct, especially given the constraint that they be as similar as possible to their regular indirect counterparts, we could not reuse Yao and Scheepers's stimuli and had to create new ones. Below is an example of the 4 variants of a single story with critical report fragments underlined (all materials available at `http://goo.gl/J3kzQX`):

(7) **fast context:** David had talent. Zijn zanglerares had hem opgegeven voor een talentenjacht en hij had zojuist de finale bereikt. Ze waren beiden op van de spanning en zijn lerares probeerde hem vlak voor zijn laatste optreden nog snel wat op te peppen.
David had talent. His singing teacher had signed him up for a talent show and he had just reached the finals. They were both very nervous and his teacher tried to fire him up just before his final performance.

fast/indirect: Terwijl hij al opkwam schreeuwde ze nog door het gejuich van de menigte <u>dat hij gewoon de juiste toonhoogte moest houden en dat hij moest zorgen dat zijn stem minder trilde.</u>
While he was already going on stage she yelled through the cheers of the crowd that he just had to stay in tune and that he had to make his voice tremble less.

fast/free-indirect: Terwijl hij al opkwam schreeuwde ze hem nog snel door het gejuich van de menigte toe. <u>Hij moest gewoon de juiste toonhoogte houden, zei ze, en zorgen dat zijn stem minder trilde.</u>
While he was already going on stage she quickly yelled at him through the cheers of the crowd. He just had to stay in tune, she said, and make his voice tremble less.

> **slow context:** David had talent. Volgende maand had hij zijn eerste grote optreden. Ter voorbereiding nam hij zangles bij een ervaren, oude zangeres. Vol zelfvertrouwen zong hij haar wat voor, maar al na een paar noten zag hij dat ze langzaam haar hoofd schudde.
> *David had talend. Next month was his first big performance. To prepare he took singing lessons from an experienced, old singer. Full of self-confidence he sang something to her, but after just a few bars he say her nodding her head slowly.*
>
> **slow/indirect:** Ze zuchtte diep en zei dat hij gewoon de juiste toonhoogte moest houden en dat hij moest zorgen dat zijn stem minder trilde.
> *She sighed deeply and said that he just had to stay in tune and that he had to make his voice tremble less.*
>
> **slow/free-indirect:** Ze zuchtte diep. Hij moest gewoon de juiste toonhoogte houden, zei ze, en zorgen dat zijn stem minder trilde.
> *She sighed deeply. He just had to stay in tune, she said, and make his voice tremble less.*

Four stimulus-lists with counterbalanced item–condition combinations were constructed. Every participant received a different random order.

The experiment was conducted in a sound attenuated room. Participants were instructed to imagine they were auditioning with an audiobook publisher to narrate novels. They were told to silently read the stories once before reading them aloud, and to start the item over if they made a mistake.

The recordings were analyzed by identifying for each item the temporal onsets and offsets of the critical report parts with the software Audacity. Oral reading rates (in numbers of syllables per second) for the critical parts were calculated.

3.2   Results

To determine significant effects we analyzed responses using using linear mixed-effect models, starting with the maximal model, including random

Table 1: Means (standard deviation) in syllables per second

| | Report | |
Context	indirect	free indirect
slow	0.19 (0.05)	0.19 (0.04)
fast	0.18 (0.04)	0.19 (0.04)

slopes. Context and Report were fixed effects and Participant and Item were treated as random effects. Variation between items was small so this factor could be removed. Neither of the fixed effects, nor their interaction, approaches significance. See the model given in Table 2.

3.3 Discussion

We did not find the expected significant difference between indirect and free indirect speech. Since Yao and Scheepers did find a significant difference between direct and indirect speech, this counts against the free-indirect-speech-as-quotation analysis proposed by Maier (2015) (and suggested by Clark & Gerrig, 1990).

Note however that our design differs from Yao and Scheepers's in some crucial respects: we had no direct speech condition, and a differ-

Table 2: Model = syllables per second ~ Report + Context (1 + | Participant)

predictor	estimate	SE	t-value
Intercept (free indirect + fast)	0.19	0.0062	30.1
Report (indirect)	-0.0047	0.0050	-0.95
Context (slow)	-0.00065	0.0050	-0.13
Report * Context	0.0094	0.0070	1.35

ent language, age range, stimuli, and instructions. Hence, to draw any hard conclusions, the logical next step would be to add a direct speech condition for our stimuli and run a follow-up experiment.

For instance, comparing direct and free indirect speech in a similar 2x2 design, with the same stories, would already provide valuable additional information. There's two salient possible outcomes: (i) direct and free indirect do differ significantly, replicating Yao and Scheepers's finding that direct speech does allow reading rate simulation, while establishing that free indirect speech does not. In this case we might conclude that the design works (with our stimuli and for our population) and that free indirect speech does indeed pattern more with indirect than with direct speech, as predicted by Sharvit (2008) and Eckardt (2014). The other possibility, (ii), is that we again find no significant difference. Since we would then have no difference between direct and free indirect nor between indirect and free indirect, we would need to do an additional 2x2 comparison of direct and indirect to see if Yao and Scheepers's results for English can be replicated in Dutch, with our population.

Based on listening to our audio files we expect that, with our current population, we will probably not find significant differences between direct and free indirect, nor even between direct and indirect. In our recordings most participants read everything in a rather flat monotone – including the expressive language and even some direct speech fragments that occurred in the contexts. We suspect this may be due to the specific population (A.I. students, young adults – probably not used to reading aloud), or unclear/awkward instructions (pretend audiobook audition). Hence, additional adjustments may be necessary, including creating a full 3x2 design with all three reporting modes, finding a different population (parents, actors, students of linguistics or literature – who would be more likely to recognize free indirect speech), and revising the instructions.

4   Conclusion

Direct speech is more vivid and expressive than indirect speech because it involves the demonstration of a speech act rather than just a description of what was said. Free indirect speech is a third mode of reported speech

that seems to pattern with direct speech in many respects, including, anecdotally, prosody. Based on (i) Yao and Scheepers's (2011) finding that readers adjust their reading rate to the contextually implied speech rate of the reported speaker in direct speech, and (ii) the quotational theory of free indirect speech, we hypothesized that free indirect speech should differ from indirect speech in showing reading rate adjustment. However, in an experiment comparing reading rate adjustment in free indirect and in indirect speech we found no significant differences. This could indicate that free indirect speech is not after all just a species of quotation, like direct speech. However, given the differences between Yao and Scheepers's task and ours, further testing is required to prove this.

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