

Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology 5

Alessandro Capone
Ferenc Kiefer
Franco Lo Piparo *Editors*

Indirect Reports and Pragmatics

Interdisciplinary Studies

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Springer

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Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology

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Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy and Psychology deals with theoretical pragmatics and pragmatics from a philosophical point of view. The connection between philosophy and pragmatics is double. On the one hand, philosophy contributes to creating a framework to be called the 'pragmatics of language' capable of dealing with interpretation phenomena that complement purely semantic processes; on the other hand, pragmatics is capable of coping with major philosophical problems, e.g. skepticism and Gettier's problem. All volumes in the collection reserve a central place for the philosophical ideas in pragmatics, such as contributions to epistemology in which pragmatics plays a key role. The collection: Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy and Psychology publishes: – pragmatics applied to philosophical problems and in the area of pragmalinguistics – pragmatics applied to the understanding of propositional attitudes, including knowledge, belief, in dissolving paradoxes and puzzles relating to epistemology. – pragmatics applied to psychology, especially on the topic of intentions and mind-reading – philosophical treatments of dialogue analysis The collection is not interested in proposals on conversation analysis or discourse analysis, unless a connection with philosophical issues is made obvious.

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Acknowledgments

*This book is dedicated by Alessandro Capone
to his unforgettable teachers Yan Huang
and the late James Higginbotham*

Alessandro Capone

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Alessandro Capone

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Introduction

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The issue of indirect reports is of considerable theoretical interest, for various reasons. It is of interest to linguists and socio-linguists because it sheds light on linguistic social praxis; it is also of interest to philosophers, because clearly the issue of belief reports and the issue of reports of 'de se' attitudes can be embedded in the issue of indirect reports (see the papers by Capone, Jaszcolt and Cumming & Sharvit in this book). Since philosophy deals (among other things) with the transmission of knowledge, the chapter on indirect reports is clearly one which has to do with the transmission of knowledge (mediated by what another, possibly reliable person, said) and, therefore, has a philosophical core (the issue of opacity being of utmost interest to philosophers).

This book is interdisciplinary: it includes sociolinguists, conversation analysts, formal linguists and also philosophers of language. We are persuaded that interdisciplinarity is a strong point of this book and of research in general – just to remind readers of the genial scholars who applied interdisciplinarity (in linguistics and sociology), we have Chomsky and Goffman (among others). We have also decided – in order to press the interdisciplinary character of this research project – to allow the two sections of the book (The social praxis of indirect reports and indirect reports in the philosophy of language) to interact through a number of connected points.

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Reporting a speech event (an utterance by a speaker, normally) is always a complicated task – we are tempted to say a ‘polyphonic task’ as the voices of the original speaker and the reporter interconnect opening the possibility that one voice comments on the other. The Hearer’s task is therefore quite difficult, as s/he has to separate the two voices and know which portion of the text belongs to one voice or to the other. It is highly possible that pragmatics intervenes in securing an interpretation of indirect reports and in separating roles in this complex and intriguing language game in which voices are superimposed almost inextricably. An indirect report (according to Capone 2012) is essentially a ‘language game’. In that paper Capone stressed polyphony as the essential characteristic of the game. Here, taking up those concepts, we want to emphasize that indirect reports have a dialogic structure (to put things in the words used by Weigand (2015), who is persuaded that language essentially has a dialogic format). Minimally they imply a dialogue between the original speaker and the reporter, but also between the reporter and the Hearer of the report. The reporter, qua Hearer, of course, had an advantage, because he is perceptually conscious of the context (and the physical surroundings) in which the interaction took place and which guided the interpretation of the utterances allowing the hearer to assign referents to pronominals (for example). The Hearer of the indirect report (to be distinguished from the reporter) clearly has a disadvantage, as s/he is not able to have access to the original context of the reported utterance. Thus, NPs have to be prepared for fruition by the Hearer of the report and they must be packaged in such a way that the Hearer of the report need not search for the original context in order to have access to the referents of the NPs used. Reports, in other words, to use an innocent metaphor, look like pre-packaged goods: they require transformations that will facilitate or allow fruition by the Hearer.

In this book there is a lot of emphasis on transformations and on issues such as opacity and transparency. This is more or less the philosophical story on indirect reports. However, in this book there is also a lot of emphasis on indirect reporting as a social practice, that involves constraints on what can be done, on what transformations can be tolerated, and on what contexts must be like to facilitate this social practice (or social practices?).

An interesting point of departure for the book would probably have to be the (rather complicated) relationship between direct and indirect reports. Although this issue was made thematic in one of Capone’s chapters, most papers discuss or touch on this complicated issue. Some new data are offered in this book, starting from Davis’ chapter, which we predict will be very influential in the years to come.

Indirect reports are, indirectly, a way of gaining knowledge through an intermediary (an intermediary knower). If we trust what the reporter said, then we can utilize what the original speaker said and if we trust the original speaker (or believe him trustworthy), we can use that piece of information for the purpose of action (in order to act or to prevent ourselves from acting, in case knowledge makes negative predictions on the consequences of our actions). However, important and useful though an utterance by an original speaker might be, there may be barriers to the fruition of that knowledge by the hearer of the indirect report. If the utterance is reported by using NPs with whom the hearer is not familiar, there is the risk that the

hearer will not acquire information but misinformation. Hence the indirect report is a laboratory where information is transformed, making use of whatever information the reporter has about the Hearer. (The indirect report seems to be highly influenced by what the speaker knows about the hearer and seems to connect with whatever files (of knowledge) relate to the hearer). Such transformations have to take into account what the Hearer knows and what she does not know. The reporter has to go beyond egocentricity but must project herself into the shoes of the Hearer, using bits of information coming from previous interactions with the Hearer. Thus if she knows that a certain NP would not convey any information to the Hearer, she would have to change the NP and use a co-referential NP such that it would aid the Hearer have access to the referent. However, there are surely limits to such transformations (Capone 2010a, b), as the original speaker will applaud innocent transformations but not transformations whose ultimate purpose is to put the original speaker in a bad light. (In other words transformations will be tolerated and welcome provided that they do not transform the original speaker's words into a different (more menacing) speech act)).

The testing-bed for a theory of indirect reporting will surely be a theory of non-serious speech (or speech acts) – there is surely the expectation that indirect reports should report the speaker's intentions (albeit not all intentions, but only those that are congruent with the social path of intentionality (that is to say intentions that are licitly conveyed through the speech act in that they are promoted by social intentionality)) and NOT merely the locutionary act. In some contexts, reporting the locutionary act may be (highly and deliberately) misleading, because one gives the impression that a literal intention was transmitted by an utterance, when, instead, the utterance was animated by (and exploited cues and clues to project) a non-literal intention. It may be of considerable use to examine the social practice of indirect reports with reference to a number of contexts, as there are contexts where literal meanings are promoted and contexts, where instead, given the deliberate dissemination of cues and clues, a non-literal interpretation is promoted (thus, it would be snide to report a literal interpretation when this, in fact, was only one step in the direction of a non-literal interpretation). We probably need a Principle of Prudence, inhibiting non-serious speech in contexts where it is possible that the speaker will be reported verbatim despite many indications to the contrary. This will surely be a chapter of societal linguistics, à la Mey (2001). We cannot be more detailed in this Introduction, apart from saying that one direction to explore is the social path of interpretation and, in particular, socio-pragmatics. A number of papers in this volume go into this direction, even if further progress is needed.

Indirect reporting, according to Wieland (2016), involves the following abilities:

- An ability to understand and represent the locutionary content of the speech being reported;
- An ability to understand and represent the illocutionary content of the speech being reported;
- An ability to represent the way in which the original utterance was produced.

An ability to have a theory of mind for both the speaker being reported and for their audience;

An ability to organize the above functions in a kind of narrative structure.

We certainly think that Wieland's description of these abilities is a good way of summing up the content of this book at the general level, although we need to add that indirect reporting is essentially a polyphonic game and we cannot understand it well, unless we concentrate on how different voices can co-exist in the same utterance and interpenetrate one another. Sometimes the relationship between voices is one of commentary, one of judgment, one of distancing or, on the contrary, complicity. Thus, to sum things up, indirect reports are complex actions.

One of the linguistic phenomena closely related to indirect speech is what has been called Quotative Inversion. Quotative Inversion occurs in English when a quote, i.e. a passage of reported direct speech, immediately precedes or encloses a reporting clause and it affects the order of subject and main verb within the reporting clause. Pragmatic accounts of Quotative Inversion are often grounded in particular assumptions about the narrative force of such constructions. Clearly, they have also to do with topic and focus hence with information structure. They are also related to foregrounding and back grounding, i.e. to fundamental discourse organizing principles.

Quotative Inversion may bring to the fore the differences, if any, between the reporting clause in sentence-initial position and sentence-final position (Kiefer 2016). Though any manner of speaking verb can be used to introduce a report, the choice of verbs is not arbitrary. In sentence-final position verbs can be used as reporting verbs which are not lexically (semantically) manner of speaking verbs but which acquire such an interpretation via pragmatically conditioned metaphorical transfer. This transfer may be considered to be an extension of what Recanati calls pragmatic modulation (Recanati 2010).

Before closing this introduction, we would like to express a regret. Despite the fact that many of the contributors come from different nationalities, this is clearly not a book on cross-linguistic analysis of indirect reports. It would be nice if, in a second volume, we could advance towards a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analysis of indirect reports. Such a book would offer further materials allowing us to systematize our societal considerations by putting them to the test and modifying them, if needed.

Nevertheless, we hope that this book will allow the authors to interact and use the information which has been made available to them while the book was in progress. We assume that some interaction has already occurred, because we made all the papers available to the authors (of this volume) as soon they were written. This looked like a genuinely cooperative process. We hope to see the results of this collaborative project in the future and we hope that a new book will come out of this – possibly with some other authors. Our research looks like infinite process and at present we are only able to see the tip of the iceberg. We should not be discouraged, nevertheless.