

Thoughts on the Semantic Relationship between Direct Speech and Reporting Clause with Regards to FSP

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the issue of direct speech from the viewpoint of Functional Sentence Perspective. It focuses on the semantic relationship between direct speech and its reporting clause, and it particularly draws attention to the communicative role of the speaker. The study is based on the analysis of a fiction text. Its aim is to show that the communicative importance of the speaker within reporting clause is higher than it might have been expected.

1. Introduction

Numerous fields and levels of language have been studied from the viewpoint of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) since this linguistic theory was defined by Jan Firbas. But there still remain various specific issues that deserve attention and further investigation. Among them has also appeared the problem of reporting the language of others, namely direct speech.

The theory of FSP studies language at the very moment of communication. It deals with language at its most relevant instant, i.e. the moment when language fulfils its primary function – that is, getting a message across to the listener. Basically, FSP means the distribution of elements with certain degrees of communicative dynamism (CD) within a basic distributional field (e.g. a sentence). By CD we mean the relative extent to which each of the elements contributes to the development of the communication (Firbas, 1975, 49). The elements are either ones towards which the communication is perspectived (**rheme**), or conversely, ones from which the communication is perspectived (**theme**). The Firbasian concept also introduces another communicative unit – **transition**, which are elements that form sort of a dividing line between the thematic and rhematic parts of a distributional field. Jan Firbas identified four factors which influence the degree of CD of each of the sentence elements - context, linearity, semantics and intonation. The first three of these – linearity, context and semantics – play an important role in written discourse, whereas in spoken discourse we meet all of them including prosodic features, which in this case act as the most important factor.

The findings presented in this paper are based on the analysis of a text excerpt from the Czech novel *Krakatit* by Karel Čapek. The text was analysed with respect to dynamic semantic functions and compared with the analysis of its English translation by Lawrence Hyde. In the course of my research I became particularly interested in the relationship of the individual elements of the direct reports (see below) because this particular issue turned out not to have only one straightforward perspective.

2. Direct speech (DS) and reporting clause (RC)

Before proceeding to the main concern of this study, which is the distribution of dynamic semantic functions within the unit consisting of direct speech and its reporting clause, it is necessary to gain a complex picture of the issue – to understand the problems of the structural relationship between DS and RC as well as the theory of dynamic semantic functions as such.

2.1 Terminology

At this point, I feel it useful to introduce the terminology I have chosen for the present paper so that the terms used here will not cause any misunderstanding. This is especially necessary in the case of syntactical terms for the individual elements of the direct report (see below), as different terms are used in various grammars and thus might be confusing for the reader. Let me explain the individual terms using example (1):

“I have decided to support alternative energy,” said the prime minister. (1)

In agreement with the terminology used by Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), I decided to use the usual term **reporting clause (RC)** for the part including the speaker and the reporting verb (*said the prime minister*), and the term **direct speech (DS)** for the utterance (“*I have decided to support alternative energy*”). Various grammars, e.g. by Carter and Mc Carthy (2006), use the term ‘reported speech’ for the utterances. However, the same term is also used for the equivalent part of the indirect report and thus I have chosen simply to use the term ‘direct speech’ in order not to mislead the reader to an opinion that the same rules that are presented in this paper might be applied also for indirect speech. The whole communicative unit (“*I have decided to.....*”, *said the prime minister.*) will be referred to here as the **direct report**, the term used by Carter and Mc Carthy (2006).

Furthermore, I decided to refer to the person who utters the direct speech as the **speaker**. I am aware of the fact that the same term is used in FSP to refer to the author of the whole communicative unit, i.e. the direct report in this paper, but no other term has been found more suitable for my purpose. Thus the term ‘speaker’ should be distinguished here from the person who utters the whole direct report and who will be termed in the present paper **the narrator**.

2.2 Syntactic functions and their representatives

The syntactic relationship between DS and RC is rather a complex issue, as has been pointed out by Greenbaum and Quirk: “The structural relationship between the reporting clause and direct speech is problematic. In some cases direct speech seems to be a direct object (1), but in the other examples, the reporting clause seems subordinate (2)” (298).

Peter said: “The situation is difficult.” (1)

“The radio is too loud,” complained Elizabeth. (2)

“Sometimes, we can view the reporting clause as subordinate, functioning as an adverbial. Thus, like most adverbials it can be positioned variously and can – at least sometimes – be omitted. Both syntactically and semantically, it resembles the most important type of comment clause” (1023). Compare (3) and (4):

“This war,” they assumed, “might turn out to be the worst war conflict ever.” (3)

This war, it is assumed, might turn out to be the worst war conflict ever. (4)

2.2.1 DS as object

In certain cases (1) direct speech may be looked upon as the direct object. This is supported by the fact that we can ask a *what*-question and receive direct speech as an answer (Quirk et al 1022):

A: What did Peter actually say? B: “The situation is difficult.” (5)

The length of the DS may vary. It might comprise one word, a sentence, or it might even extend over several sentences. Often the direct speech might also stand on its own, i.e., it is

not preceded or followed by a RC (Quirk et al 1021). This happens when the author of the respective DS has been mentioned recently in the text and thus his or her identity is obvious from the context.

DS might occur before (6) or after (7) the RC. Moreover, in fictional written texts it is often freely divided into two parts with the RC taking the medial position (8) (Quirk et al 1022).

“I am too tired,” said Thomas. (6)

Peter suddenly said, “I won’t go with you. Sorry.” (7)

“What if,” exclaimed suddenly John, “we just skip this senseless argument?” (8)

2.2.2 RC and its members

RC refers to the speaker (i) and the act of communication (ii). As such it can consist of two basic sentence elements – subject and reporting verb. However, it may also often include additional elements such as the person spoken to (iii), the manner of speaking (iv), or the circumstances of the utterance (v) (Quirk et al 1020):

“Sorry, I didn’t mean it,” she (i) answered (ii) him (iii) quietly (iv) while looking outside the window (v). (9)

The speaker forms the subject of the RC and may be expressed by personal noun (10), pronoun (11), or any other noun that provides the reader with the precise identification of the speaker (12).

“I am not sure whether it is a good idea or not,” said Peter. (10)

“It is not exactly a brilliant idea,” he remarked. (11)

“Are you OK?” asked the man in black. (12)

Subjects of RCs in English may take one of two possible positions. Either the subject occupies the initial position within the reporting clause (13), or subject-verb inversion may occur, i.e., the subject is placed after the reporting verb (14). Inversion does not usually take place if the subject is expressed by a pronoun (Quirk et al 1022):

“I do not agree,” he answered sharply. (13)

“I cannot help it,” said Peter. (14)

Verbs in the RC do not express only the act of speaking (15) but also an unspoken mental activity, i.e. an act of thinking (16).

“I keep it to myself,” murmured Peter quietly. (15)

“Let him look,” thought Prokop uneasily. (16)

In cases where the RC is in medial or final position with respect to the DS, a subject-verb inversion may occur. The inversion is possible if the verb is in the simple present or simple past tense. The inversion usually takes place if the subject is not a pronoun (Quirk et al 1022).

President said: “Every citizen has the responsibility for development of our country.” (17)

“Every citizen,” said president, “has the responsibility for development of our country.” (18)

Apart from its two basic elements, i.e., subject and verb, a RC may also include other information such as the person spoken to (object), the circumstances of the speech act

(adverbial of time, manner etc.), or the manner of speaking (adverbial of manner). The circumstances of the speech act can be expressed by a simple word (19) as well as an infinitive (20) or a finite clause (21) (Quirk et al 1020):

- “No, I haven’t been there,” he exclaimed *again*. (19)
 “This place is wonderful,” said Sarah *looking outside the window*. (20)
 “Let’s tidy up the mess,” father said *as soon as the guests had left*. (21)

Basically, all the other functions follow the verb or the subject (in case of subject-verb inversion) and usually keep their positions as within statements.

- “Sorry, I didn’t mean it,” she answered him quietly while looking outside the window.
 S V O Ad(Manner) Ad(Time) (22)

2.3 Dynamic Semantic Functions (DSF)

The Brno theory of functional sentence perspective elaborated by Jan Firbas identifies what is called dynamic semantic functions of the individual sentence elements. These are the semantic functions that the elements perform in a particular context at the very moment of communication. In other words, the elements not only become the elements **towards** which the communication is perspectived (rheme), or conversely, the elements **from** which the communication is perspectived (theme) but their function may further vary according to the context of the given discourse. In his *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication* Firbas proposes two possible perspectives of the communication which influence the individual dynamic semantic functions within the particular distributional field (e.g. a sentence). Either the unit may be oriented towards the phenomenon expressed by the subject, or it may be perspectived towards the quality ascribed to the phenomenon expressed by the subject (5-6).

Firbas established two scales that reflect the two above patterns. One of them reflects the presentation of a phenomenon on the scene and is called the Presentation Scale. The other reflects the ascribing of a quality to a quality bearer and is called the Quality Scale.

2.3.1 The Presentation Scale

The Presentation scale usually consists of three dynamic semantic functions expressed by individual elements of a distributional field: Setting (Set), Presentation of Phenomenon on the Scene (Pr) and Phenomenon presented on the Scene (Ph):

SETTING – PRESENTATION – PHENOMENON

The Setting, or we may also say the scene, forms the background, which is usually known to us and upon which the Phenomenon is presented, e.g. the temporal or local conditions of its appearance/existence. As such it forms the theme of the distributional field. It is often contextually dependent and it is often (not always) expressed by adverbials of time or place.

Presentation of the phenomenon is expressed by the verb. There are verbs that convey the meaning of appearance or existence of the phenomenon on the scene explicitly e.g. *appear, exist, come, come up, come to sight* etc. or some other verbs which DSFs must be decided by taking into account the contextual environment in which the sentence is presented. The verb forms the transition of the distributional field because it is more important in the flow of communication than the information conveyed by the Setting, on the other hand, it “only” serves to introduce the most important information conveyed by another communicative unit, i. e., the phenomenon presented.

The Phenomenon is mostly expressed by a subject. If the subject is context-independent, it usually becomes a successful competitor of the verb and as such it forms the rheme, i.e., the element towards which the communication is perspectived.

In the Czech language, which employs flexible word order, a Phenomenon is usually realized at the end of a sentence. English, by contrast, has a fixed number of positions in which a subject may occur because it mostly follows the grammatically fixed S-V-O sequence.

A sentence reflecting the Presentation Scale with the distribution of its individual dynamic semantic functions might be as follows:

- A strange man entered the room. (23)
 Ph Pr Set

- Do místnosti vstoupil podivný muž. (24)
 Set Pr Ph

2.3.2 The Quality Scale

The other of the two perspectives towards which a sentence is oriented is that of ascribing a quality to the phenomenon expressed by the subject. The basic DSFs appearing on the Quality Scale are the Quality Bearer (QB) and the Quality (Q). If there are elements which further develop the communication by specifying the ascribed quality, they function as the Specification (Sp).

QUALITY BEARER – QUALITY – SPECIFICATION

The significance of the Quality Bearer for the development of communication is usually lowered by its contextual dependency, and it represents a thematic unit of the respective distributional field.

The Quality is usually represented by the verb. The verb only fulfils the function of the most important information (rheme) if there are no other elements which would push the communication even further than the Quality. Otherwise it becomes transition.

The Specification is formed by elements carrying amplifying pieces of information, and it is usually expressed by context-independent objects or context-independent adverbials.

A particular distributional field within which the Quality Scale is realized may also contain background information of low communicative importance, e.g. temporal/local circumstances (Setting). On the other hand, the distributional field might further include information that develops the communication beyond the Specification (Further Specification).

SETTING - QUALITY BEARER – QUALITY – SPECIFICATION – FURTHER SPECIFICATION

A sentence reflecting the Quality Scale with the distribution of its individual dynamic semantic functions might be as follows:

- Our dog barked at our neighbour yesterday (25)
 QB Q Sp Set

- Náš pes včera štěkal na souseda. (26)
 QB Set Q Sp
 (example taken from Svoboda, 1989)

2.3.3 The Combined Scale

Due to the specific intentions of the author of the utterance, the two above perspectives might co-exist in one distributional field. This eventual combination is called the Combined Scale. If implemented in full, it can be pictured as follows:

Set → Pr → Ph → QB → Q → Sp → FSp

Now there came another man, walking towards him with his hat drawn down over his eyes
 Set Set Pr Ph/QB Q Sp FSp (27)

2.4 Direct report and the semantic scales

2.4.1 Direct Report and the Presentation Scale

Under certain conditions, it is possible to look upon the direct report as reflecting the Presentation Scale. This point of view is based on the idea that the message of the utterance is the phenomenon which appears on the general scene.

The notice said, “No smoking,”
 Sc Pr Ph (28)

The example (28) clearly shows that though formally this distributional field evidently reflects a direct report, the role of the speaker is taken over by an element which could be understood as a locative element. This confirms its possible function of the Scene. As Dušková says: “The possibility of construing the same semantic element as subject or adverbial can serve as a means of FSP” (182).

This interpretation of the (28) might be supported by the example from the analysed text, which basically expresses the same notion:

... kde stálo na skleněné tabulce: Plinius.
 Set Pr Set Ph (29)¹

But generally, the Scene would have to be considered here in a broader context than just the temporal and local setting of the Phenomenon. It might be said that certain elements in the reporting clause which serve to introduce the particular phenomenon, i.e. the direct speech, function as the scene on which the phenomenon appears. This includes “the speaker” or any other element in the RC which is of less importance in the development of the communication than the reporting verb. The reporting verb carries the transitional characteristics and serves to present the DS to the reader. Therefore the verb might be considered as the Presentation of the message. Finally, the respective direct speech is information which either brings some new findings of the speaker, his or her thoughts, or confirms or refutes the ideas mentioned in the previous text. It might be looked upon as the compact rhematic phenomenon which is introduced on the general scene within the act of speaking. From this point of view, the direct speech might function as the Phenomenon presented on the scene and assists in constituting the Presentation Scale:

“Kraakatit,” muttered Prokop.
 Ph Pr Set (30)

However, I am well aware of the fact that generally this concept would work contra the basic Firbasian perception of the semantic scales, in which the communication: “...perspectives (i) either towards the phenomenon presented by the subject, or (ii) towards the quality ascribed the the phenomenon expressed by the subject or beyond this quality...”

(*Functional Sentence Perspective*, 66) Yet, it is not the only case, where this basic definition could not be applied.²

2.4.2 Direct Report and the Quality Scale

With the information offered in 2.3.2 we might also look upon the semantic relationship between the direct speech and the reporting clause as that of ascribing a quality of speaking to the subject and specifying it by the direct speech:

He added: “A frightful thing, you know.”
 QB Q Sp (31)

The subject of the reporting clause, i.e., the speaker, might be regarded as the Quality Bearer because he or she bears the quality of speaking, mumbling, shouting etc. The act of speaking cannot be considered as the most important information in the direct report as it is further modified by what is being said, i.e. the message expressed by the direct speech. As such it pushes the communication furthest and carries the highest degree of CD within the respective distributional field. Thence, from the viewpoint of dynamic semantic functions, the direct speech functions as the Specification of the reporting verb.

“Kraakatit,” muttered Prokop.
 Sp Q QB (32)

2.4.3 Direct Report and the Combined Scale

In the two possible points of view concerning the semantic relationship between direct speech and the reporting clause presented above (in 2.4.1 and 2.4.2), the direct speech was considered as the most important element of the respective distributional fields. The perspective of the direct report was clear and unequivocal – towards the direct speech. In this respect, it does not show any signs of perspective mergence and thus cannot be looked upon as a reflection of the Combined Scale as presented by Jan Firbas.

3. Reporting Clause and the Role of Speaker

In certain cases (28) it seems more than obvious that the respective distributional fields may be looked upon as reflecting the Presentation Scale. On the other hand, I believe that this is not applicable generally. If the DS were seen as the Phenomenon and the speaker as the Scene (30), the Scene as a dynamic semantic function would have to be understood as a very broad concept. This might significantly blur the dynamic semantic functions as proposed by Jan Firbas. Therefore, I generally incline to view the direct report as reflecting the Quality Scale.

In both suggestions above (2.4.1 and 2.4.2), the speaker was considered to be a purely thematic element. One crucial factor of the direct report has so far been omitted, and that is the actual importance of the identification of the speaker, without which the dialogue would become unintelligible. Therefore, let me introduce here another point of view on the DSF of the subject of the reporting clause, i.e., the person speaking.

3.1 Dynamic semantic function of the speaker

3.1.1 Presence of the RC and the identification of the speaker

Most of the analysed distributional fields of the direct reports contained both its parts, i.e. the direct speech and the reporting clause. The only cases where RCs do not follow or precede the units of DS are those where the speaker is easily retrievable from the preceding context.

[The man seized him by the arm.] “Wait, first of all you must sit down. Do you understand?” (33)

The absence of the RC proved to be dependent on various factors. The speaker has either been mentioned in the previous sentence, so it is unmistakably him or her who utters the direct speech (33). Also, the isolated DS might be an answer to a question – a response that is undoubtedly pronounced by a speaker whose name has been mentioned before, which makes it apparent who is replying (34). Or, the speaker may state his or her name (or perhaps the names of the addressed people) as part of the direct speech (35):

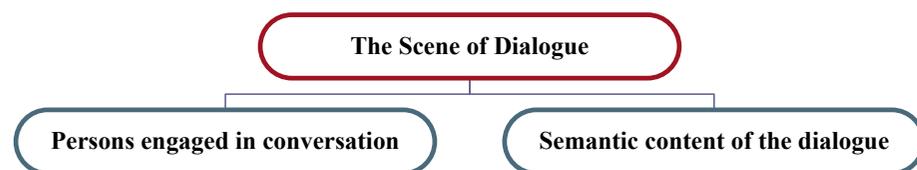
[“So you’ve still got a father,” said Prokop after a moment with sudden gentleness.]
 “Well, yes. A doctor in Tynice.” (34)

“Don’t you know me? I’m Thomas. Thomas from the Polytechnic. Don’t you know, now?” (35)

As can be seen from the above examples, the reporting clauses were omitted only due to one reason - the speakers’ names or any other specifications of their identity were mentioned elsewhere. It means that the presence of the RCs was not essential for the reader only because he/she could easily distinguish the person speaking and therefore understand the dialogues without any doubt.

3.1.2 Sub-scene of dialogue

In the analysed direct reports containing the reporting clauses, the vast majority of the RCs contained context-dependent subjects. This leads us to the opinion that the subjects do not need to be repeatedly introduced on the general scene because they are known to the reader from the preceding context. On the other hand, without the presence of the subjects, the dialogues would become incomprehensible. From this point of view the speaker needs to be introduced in the text again and again. It might be said that there exists a sub-scene upon which the speakers repeatedly occur. This is the scene of the particular dialogue and it is formed by:



The significance of the scene of dialogue for the reader consists in the fact that the reader needs to distinguish between the persons engaged in conversation. The semantic content of the direct speech also needs to be understood in context with its author because it often carries references to the particular speaker. If the speaker were not present, these references would lose their semantic core.

speaker
 ↑↓
 “**I**m like a thread,” said Prokop, surprised. (36)

Simply said, if the author were not present in (36), the reader would not be able to decipher to whom *I* refers, and so the given feeling *be like a thread* would lose its importance in the development of the conversation because the reader would not be able to connect the respective feeling with the relevant person engaged in the conversation.

3.1.3 Gamut of functions

With respect to the reasons offered in the preceding section, it is evident that the subject of the RC is more important than simply being a thematic bearer of a quality of saying, muttering, mumbling etc. Its function in the respective distributional field is more significant for the successful proceeding of the communication than that of the Quality Bearer. Therefore I believe that the precise identification of the speaker, his or her name, or other unequivocal characteristics, is to be taken partly as the Phenomenon that appears again and again but with the same importance on the scene of the dialogue. Moreover, the DS might be looked upon as a means used by the author to remind the reader of the speakers’ existence on the general scene. On the other hand, it is not possible to omit the obvious communicative importance of the DS within the respective distributional field. The issue proves to be highly complicated, as there is not a simple one-way perspective of the direct report. The semantic content of the DS is important for the general scene of the narrative and hence it might be said that it constitutes the rheme of the direct report (37). On the other hand, the RC has its significance on the sub-scene of a dialogue, because it is a means which serves to introduce its subject, i.e., the speaker, on the scene. In other words, the inner distribution of DSFs within the RC part of the direct report is then oriented towards the speaker as the Phenomenon (38). From this viewpoint, the direct speech and the reporting clause might function as semantically independent of each other, following different progressions:

“Kratatit,” muttered Prokop. (37)
 Sp Q QB

“Kratatit,” Thomas (implied)
 (semantic content of the dialogue) (the other person engaged in conversation)
 { Set } muttered Prokop. (38)
 Pr Ph

It is clear that the direct speech and the reporting clause exist on partially different scenes. Still, with respect to the reader who perceives the narrative as a whole, the respective units should be taken as a complex distributional field with two slightly different perspectives, one towards the uttered message and one towards the identification of the speaker. I believe that the actual semantic content of the direct speech remains the most important information of the direct report.

Hopefully, the above information has proved that it is not possible to look upon direct speech in an unequivocal way concerning the distribution of DSFs. Due to this, it seems rather difficult to imply the Firbasian concept of the semantic scales in case of the direct reports unless we speak of a special kind of combined scale, or rather two overlapping scales within one distributional field.

3.2 Other dynamic semantic functions in the RC

The other elements of the RC apart from the subject and reporting verb (2.2.2) do not seem to have one definite solution from the FSP point of view. Some of them express background information such as the person spoken to or temporal or local circumstances of the speech act, and show little significance for the further development of the communication. Thus they act as the thematic elements, which form the scene and function as the Setting:

“And so, you’re still on explosives?” he asked him after a moment. (39)
 Sp QB/Ph Q Set Set

On the other hand, in the course of my research other elements appeared which seem to play an important role in pushing the communication forward. They serve to inform, for example, about the physical state of the speaker or his relationship to the addressee, which might be new information and may have significance for the further development and understanding of the text:

“Thomas,” repeated Prokop, utterly indifferent to what the name might signify. (40)
 Sp Q QB/Ph Sp FSp

In (40) it is necessary to understand that the ‘utterly indifferent to what the name might signify’ is signaling the present physical state of Prokop, which plays the most important role within the whole text. Whether the communicative value of these elements is high enough for them to act as rhemes, i.e. the Specifications of Further Specifications, or whether the information conveyed in these elements is only “supporting” information and as such act as diatheme of the distributional field is to be proved by further research.

4. Conclusion

As seen from the above text, the analysis of the direct speech and its reporting clause does not seem to offer a single and unequivocal solution – not only from the syntactic point of view but also from the viewpoint of FSP.

Concerning the syntactic part of the problem, the direct speech might be in some cases taken as the direct object. In other cases it is the reporting clause that seems to be subordinate, and it resembles a comment clause.

From the viewpoint of FSP, it is relatively difficult to establish the individual dynamic semantic functions of the respective elements and to place them on one of the three types of Firbasian semantic scales. There are types of direct report that seem to follow the Presentation Scale (2.4.1). Generally, however, the distribution of DSFs within the direct report reflects the Quality Scale (2.4.2)

The present paper draws attention to the communicative importance of the speaker. The speaker plays a crucial role on the scene of the particular dialogue, because without the knowledge of the speaker, the dialogue would become incomprehensible. This paper has attempted to present the problem of two partially independent and partially interlinking scenes upon which the direct reports appear. I hope the paper will contribute to the elaboration of the theory of Firbasian semantic scales, or, at least, draw attention to further aspects of language that deserve to be studied from the FSP point of view.

Notes

¹ All examples adduced from this point further (examples 29-40) are taken from English translation of Karel Čapek’s *Krakatit* called *An Atomic Phantasy*.

² Not only is existence of such cases proved by the analysis of more than 1200 distributional fields, which was conducted for the purpose of my diploma thesis, but for more such examples, see Dušková (1999)

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