1. Introduction

A popular thing to do is saying what other people said in some other situation. When telling a story, for example, people often adorn it with reported speech. There are basically two structures that allow a speaker to report formerly uttered words: direct and indirect speech. Both structures serve a speaker to integrate former discourse into the present conversation. This paper is based on two assumptions: 1) there exists a one to one relation between structure and meaning, that is, no two structures have the same communicative effect and 2) there is a mutually supporting relation between a structure and its context (Contini-Morava, 1995: 3-8). The distribution of direct and indirect speech is, thus, not haphazard, but either strategy is favoured according to their context and the communicative effect the speaker pursues. I hope to demonstrate this with quantitative and qualitative analyses of the occurrences of reported speech in transcribed conversations recorded in Mexico City.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Formal differences

Probably, the most fundamental, and according to Li (1986: 30-32) universal, difference between direct and indirect speech is the point of view adopted by the reporter. Using direct speech, the reporter adopts the point of view of the original speaker, whereas using indirect speech he/she speaks from his/her own point of view and a pronominal change occurs as illustrated in the next example:

(1) a. John says: “I love dogs”
   b. John says that he loves dogs
In (1a), the direct strategy, the reporter identifies himself with the original speaker, John. In (1b), the indirect strategy, on the other hand, the reporter maintains the distance between himself and John referring to him with the third person singular pronoun he.

The second difference between direct and indirect speech is their distribution in daily conversations. According to this investigation and others (Coulmas 1986; Li 1986), indirect speech is the marked strategy of the two, that is, it is used less frequently than direct speech. Li (1986:40) gives the following explanation:

[...] indirect speech is a more complex communicative strategy than direct speech. Direct speech involves reproducing or mimicking the speech of the reported speaker, whereas indirect speech involves rephrasing or paraphrasing the speech of the reported speaker. Clearly, mimicking is a simpler undertaking than paraphrasing.

It could be that direct speech is the easiest strategy of the two. But then, if that were the only reason, there would be no reason for the existence of indirect speech unless it evokes a different functional communicative effect.

2.2 Reported speech or reporter's speech?

Coulmas (1986:2-3) considers the interpretation of the original words by the current speaker as the decisive factor governing the use of direct and indirect speech:

Direct speech, in a manner of speaking, is not the reporter’s speech, but remains the reported speaker’s speech whose role is played by the reporter. [...] In indirect speech, the reporter is free to introduce information about the reported speech event from his point of view and on the basis of his knowledge about the world, as he does not purport to give the actual words that were uttered by the original speaker(s) or that his report is restricted to what was actually said.

According to Coulmas, it is the evaluation of the original words by the speaker that governs the choice between direct and indirect speech. Either he/she opts for a de dicto (literal) interpretation, allowing both direct and indirect speech, or a de re interpretation, allowing the indirect strategy only. The result is, thus, ambiguous and intractable. Using direct speech, the speaker might pretend to have evaluated the original utterance literally, but, generally, this evaluation cannot be verified.

Tannen (1989:119), on the other hand, who limits her discussion to direct speech, states:
In cases where dialogue was actually spoken, what we know about human memory impels us to doubt that the exact wording could be recalled. Moreover, even if the words had been uttered as “reported,” their repetition in another context changes their nature and meaning and make them a creation of the current speaker.

This would mean that both direct and indirect speech are creations of the current speaker. Using either strategy, the speaker pretends to repeat (literally or not) formerly uttered words and refers to another communicative setting. The only visible difference is in the deictic centre the speaker adheres to. The speaker can choose to take the current communicative setting as the deictic centre, or he/she can take the past communicative setting as the deictic centre, resulting in the use of indirect and direct speech respectively. The question is, why and when the speaker opts for the one or the other strategy.

The easiest way to understand the speaker’s motive might be by imagining a bridge. When a speaker reports, there are two communicative settings: the current and a past one. If the speaker reports indirectly, he/she takes the current communicative setting as the deictic centre and subordinates the original words to this deictic centre, he/she builds a (verbal) bridge between now and then; there is a strong connection between both communicative settings. If the speaker, on the other hand, reports directly, the deictic centre of the proposition does not lie with the speaker and the listener, but there where the words were originally uttered. The listener has become a witness of the original scene the speaker describes, the connection between both communicative settings has been broken, and both speaker and listener have crossed the bridge. Thus, the hypothesis I propose for the distribution of direct and indirect speech is that when the speaker uses the indirect strategy, he/she introduces the listener into another communicative setting where the speaker has established the new deictic centre.

Fragment (2) will illustrate this principle. It contains a near minimal pair. The informant reports her husband, Juan, twice. First indirectly, and then she reports basically the same words directly.

(2)  **Me dijo Juan que** vio a mi mamá en el cielo. Figúrate que se murió mi mamá tres días antes de su hijo. Y que estábamos rezando por la noche los... rosarios, y cuando salíamos, que... habíamos terminado de los rosarios, me dice en el corridor... me puso la mano en el hombro, y **me dice:** “Licha, está tu mamá lindísima gloriosa, en el cielo.” (Centro de Lingüística 1971:143)
'Juan said to me that' he had seen my mother in heaven. Imagine that my mother died three days before her son. And at night we were telling our... beads, and when we left, that... we had stopped telling the beads, he says to me in the corridor... he put his hand on my shoulder, and he says to me: ‘Licha, your blessed mother, is in heaven.’

In (2) we can see a certain development. First the speaker introduces a new topic, reporting her husband indirectly (Me dijo Juan que... ‘Juan said to me’). The deictic centre is the current communicative setting. Then she gives a description of the scene in which these words were uttered, introducing her interlocutor further into this other communicative setting. Finally, she concludes by reporting her husband’s words a second time but now directly, having shifted the deictic centre ‘across the bridge’ (me dice: ‘...’ ‘he says to me’).

3. Corpus

To test the hypothesis formulated under 2.2, occurrences of reported speech in transcribed conversations were extracted and analysed. The data are confined to interviews with women from Mexico City. In this paper three kinds of reported speech will be considered: 1) the occurrences of indirect speech accompanied by the verb to say (He said that...), 2) the occurrences of direct speech accompanied by the verb to say (He said: ‘...’), and 3) the occurrences of direct speech without any verb of saying (‘...’). Table 1 shows the distribution of the three kinds of reported speech distinguished.

Table 1. Distribution of direct and indirect speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indirect Speech (IS)</th>
<th>Direct Speech (DS)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ say</td>
<td>+ say (DS1)</td>
<td>- say (DS2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90/15%</td>
<td>381/64%</td>
<td>126/21%</td>
<td>597/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90/15%</td>
<td>507/85%</td>
<td>597/100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution shown in table 1 confirms the general expectation of Li (1986) and Coulmas (1989) that indirect speech is the marked strategy (15%) and direct speech the unmarked strategy (total: 85%).
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Table 1 distinguishes between two direct strategies: the direct strategy with and without a report verb (DS1 and DS2 respectively). DS2 is the marked form and the most opposite to indirect speech. Here, the deictic centre has shifted completely to the other side of the bridge. Using DS1, the speaker starts with the report verb at level 1 (current communicative setting) making the transition to level 2 of the proposition.

4. Analysis

In the rest of this paper the data will be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Whereas the quantitative analyses are expected to confirm the general expectation as postulated in the hypothesis, the qualitative analyses are expected to account for data in their specific context, considering their relation to the context at both the micro- and macrolevel.

4.1 Tense of the verb of saying

In this section, the tense of the report verb will be considered. A speaker can choose to put the report verb either in the past or in the present tense. Since all kinds of reported speech considered here refer to reporting formerly uttered words, the use of the past tense would theoretically seem the most appropriate, but real language shows that speakers not necessarily follow theory. The cause may lie with the different deictic centers the speaker can set for the proposition and for the report verb.

For indirect speech the deictic center of the proposition (after the conjunction) lies at level 1, the current communicative setting. The proposition of DS1, necessarily, has its deictic centre at level 2. The report verb can lie at either level. Although the deictic center, as far as the (implicit) pronoun is concerned, lies at level 1 (dijo ‘he said’). The choice between past and present tense allows the speaker to set the deictic centre either at level 1 or at level 2.

Because in indirect speech the report verb is followed by a proposition at level 1, it is to be expected that the speaker sets the tense of the report verb at the same level: the past tense. For direct speech it is to be expected that the speaker will do the same thing, that is, shifting the deictic center from level 1, expressed by the pronoun, to level 2 of the proposition by using the present tense. In table 2 the results of the analysis of the tense of the report verb of indirect and DS1 are shown (for an example of the expected distribution, see fragment 2).
Table 2. Distribution of present and past tense of the report verb in direct and indirect speech ($X^2$: 23.8; $p<0.001$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N / %</th>
<th>Indirect Speech</th>
<th>Direct Speech (DS1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present tense (he says)</td>
<td>28/11%</td>
<td>227/89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense (he said)</td>
<td>62/29%</td>
<td>154/71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be inferred from table 2 that the predicted correlation between indirect speech and the report verb in the past tense (29% vs. 11% of present tenses) and direct speech and the present tense (89% vs. 71% of past tenses) exists. Still, there are counterexamples to be found. Fragment (3) is an example of a near minimal pair. In this fragment we see two occurrences of indirect speech, reporting a similar utterance; the first is introduced by a past tense, the second part is introduced by a present tense. In this fragment the informant tells that her brother had met her son, Angel, whom she has not seen for some ten years.

(3) A) me dijo [el hijo] que había venido porque allá estaban registrados sus hijos, los papeles de sus hijos”. Los que tuvo allá, que fueron tres, que tuvo allá en el rancho... B) Dice [el hermano] que había venido a sacar acá los registros de sus hijos porque los necesitaba. Y de allí para acá -fíjese- ya no he tenido razón. Pero creo que es por la mujer, que le ha evitado. (Centro de Lingüística 1976:178)

‘He says [the brother]: “He didn’t ask about you, he just greeted me, he spoke to me -he says- and A) he said [son] to me that he had come because his children were registered here”. The ones he had there, there were three, the ones he had there at the ranch... B) He says [brother] that he had come here to get the registers of his children because he needed them. And since then -imagine- I haven’t heard of him. But I think it is because of his wife, that made him avoid it.’

In (3) three deictic centres, can be distinguished: 1) the (present) conversation between the informant and the inquirer (printed in italics), 2) the (past) conversation between the informant and her brother and 3) the (past past) conversation between the brother and the son of the informant, at which she was not present. The indirect reported utterance A in which Dice [el hermano]: “[...] me dijo [el hijo] que [...]” ‘[the brother] says: “[...] he said [son] to me that [...]’”, with the report verb in the past tense, belongs to level 3 with the deictic centre at level 2. The subject of B (Dice [el hermano] que... ‘He says [brother] that’) is somewhat
less straightforward to determine. Theoretically the subject of the report verb could be either the brother or the son of the informant. However, considering the temporal structure of the fragment, it is highly improbable that the son would be the intended subject. More likely is that the reported utterance belongs to level 2, with the deictic centre at level 1. Thus, the informant uses the present tense to refer to the words uttered at level 2 (the conversation between her and her brother), as she does with the direct report at the beginning of the fragment. Instead, the past tense is used to refer to the words uttered at level 3 (the conversation between her brother and her son). Hence, what at first sight seems to be an exception is actually an example of coherent levelling of different communicative settings.

4.2 The report verb and its subject

A second factor investigated is the presence of an explicit subject of the report verb. In Spanish it is not obligatory to mention the subject, unless its referent is not clear in the context. If the hypothesis is correct that indirect report is used to introduce the interlocutor to a new communicative setting and that direct report is used to elaborate on it, it is to be expected that the distribution of report verbs with explicit subjects correlates with indirect reports, and that report verbs without explicit subjects correlate with direct reports (for an example, cf. (2)). In table 3 the results of the analysis are shown.

Table 3. Distribution of reported speech with and without the presence of the subject of the report verb ($\chi^2$: 13.6; $p < 0.001$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N / %</th>
<th>Indirect Speech</th>
<th>Direct Speech (DS1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ Subject</td>
<td>40/30%</td>
<td>95/70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Subject</td>
<td>50/15%</td>
<td>286/85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the expected correlation between the presence of the subject and indirect speech: 30% (vs. 15% of absent subjects). It must be taken into account, though, that indirect speech is not the only device a speaker has to introduce a new character or communicative setting. A lot, if not most, of the introducing is done by simply providing information in the surrounding context. On the other hand, reporting directly does not mean either that the subject may be omitted as the following fragment will show. In (4) the informant tells about her problems with her husband and the landlord who wants him out of the house because of his violent behaviour.
(4) Se emborrachó [esposo], y me rompió todo los vidrios de la... de la casa. Y entonces, este... el dueño se dio cuenta [...]. Y dice: "Pero mire: su esposo, orita qu'está tomado, mire ya todo lo que hizo. Entonces, como yo soy el que las... tengo que vender, y bien, así... enteritas, sin que les falte nada, ahora yo voy a ser el que voy a pagar para que vengan a compone- nela, a poner vidrios; y entonces, me hace el favor de que... pues... se vaya." Y entonces yo le dije a mi esposo: "Pues ahorita vas a ir a buscar alguna casa para que nos vamos ir a vivir, porque yo no me voy a quedar en la calle con mis niños." (Centro de Lingüística 1976:68)

In the first example of reported speech in (4), the informant reports the landlord directly without specifying him as the subject of the report verb. The former context has introduced him sufficiently well and no explicit subject is required. In the second example of direct speech, the informant does mention the subject explicitly (yo le dije a mi esposo ‘I said to my husband’). The informant in this fragment changes from one communicative setting, talking with the landlord, to another, in which she speaks with her husband. Mentioning the subject (and interlocutor, a mi esposo ‘to my husband’) makes it easier for the interlocutor to follow these kinds of changes in communicative settings in a story. Apart from the explicit subject, the tense of the report verb has changed, from present to past, establishing, a higher correlation with level 1 (the current communicative setting) as well. The topic of discussion, however, has not changed which justifies a direct report.

4.3 Aspect at the level of the proposition

So far we have been looking at the relation between form and meaning, mostly at discourse level. Confining the attention to the level of the proposition, the tense of the verbs, other than the report verb, will be analysed in this section. The analysis will be based on this principle of deictic value, distinguishing two classes of tense: 1) tense with a high deictic value, including the presente (simple
present),\textsuperscript{5} \textit{presente perfecto} (present perfect) and the \textit{pretérito definido}\textsuperscript{6} and 2) tense with a relatively low deictic value, including the \textit{imperfecto} and the \textit{pluscuamperfecto} (past perfect).

Now, using the direct speech strategy the speaker wants to involve the interlocutor, and drawing his/her attention using tenses with high deictic value supports this strategy. Using the indirect strategy, on the other hand, the speaker does not aim at getting extra attention from the hearer, but merely announces a shift to another level: Thus, since the direct strategy implies more involvement, it is probable that verb tenses with high deictic value are relatively more used. Table 4 shows the result of this analysis.

Table 4. Distribution of high vs. low deictic verb tenses in the proposition of indirect and direct speech ($X^2$: 331,4; $p < 0,001$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indirect Speech</th>
<th>Direct Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ deictic tenses</td>
<td>61/7%</td>
<td>754/93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- deictic tenses</td>
<td>78/76%</td>
<td>25/24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that there is a high correlation between the use of high deictic verb tenses and direct speech 93% (vs. 24% of the low deictic verb tenses) and the use of low deictic verb tenses in the propositions of indirect speech 76% (vs. 7% of the high deictic verb tenses). Reporting indirectly, the deictic centre the speaker adheres to lies at level 1, the current communicative setting. The proposition reported is, thus, projected in the past without pretending to have present value. A direct report, on the other hand, has its deictic centre on the other side of the bridge, that is, at level 2, allowing a current temporal focus. However, again counterexamples are to be found, as shows fragment (5). The informant works as a volunteer in a hospital and needs tribunes for a performance that will be given for the children’s ward.

(5) Habíamos pedido ... habíamos hecho un escrito al Departamento Central para que nos prestaran tribunas, pero no nos las prestaron por ser en sábado. \textbf{Nos dijeron que}, si hubiera sido entre semana, sí, pero que en sábado ellos las \textit{tienen} ocupadas en distintos... sábado y domingo las \textit{tienen} ocupadas en todos los jardines, en todos lados. (Centro de Lingüística 1971:91)

'We had inquired ... we had written to the Central Department in order that they would lend us tribunes, but they didn’t lend them to us because it was for a Saturday. \textbf{They said to us that} if it had been on weekdays,
yes, but that on Saturday, they had them occupied in different... Saturday and Sunday they have them occupied in all the gardens, everywhere.'

Fragment (5) shows how even within an indirect report, an informant might opt for a present tense. In this particular case we actually see, first the expected backgrounding tense tenían (imperfecto tener: to have), which turns, within the same sentence, into a foregrounding tense tienen (presente tener: to have). Here a shift in temporal focus can be seen. First the informant takes the present communicative setting as a focus, reporting what was said at the time, with a backgrounding focus, the words were uttered then, and had their value at the time. By switching, though, from an imperfecto to a simple present tense the words acquire present value and the temporal focus has changed to the moment at which the words were uttered. However, it might be questioned if this second part is still subordinated to the report verb or that the focus really has changed and the second part after the pause, ‘...’, is, in fact, direct conversation with the interviewer at level 1, moreover, because there is quite a distance between the report verb and the second part of the proposition.

5. Conclusion

In the introduction two assumptions were mentioned on which the analysis is based: 1) there exists a one to one relation between structure and meaning, that is, no two structures have the same communicative effect and 2) there is a mutually supporting relation between a structure and its context (Contini-Morava, 1995:3-8). The conclusion of this paper is that indirect and direct speech, indeed, each have a distinctive functional communicative effect. Their distribution is not random, but depends on the message the speaker wants to convey. It was postulated that indirect speech is the strategy used to introduce the listener to a new communicative setting and direct speech is used to elaborate further on this communicative setting the listener has been introduced to. In section 3, some factors have been analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. It was shown that both at the discourse level and the level of the proposition either strategy is supported. The first factor analysed, the tense of the report verb, confirmed that a speaker pursues a coherent levelling of the different communicative settings he/she presents to his interlocutor in his discourse. The second factor analysed, the presence (vs. absence) of the subject of the report verb, showed a correlation with the introductory function of indirect speech. The third factor analysed, the use of high (vs. low) deictic verb tenses in the proposition, showed a correlation with its inner structure, i.e., direct speech, thus establishing a coherent levelling
between the deictic centre of the report verb and the proposition. Hence, it has been shown that either form of reported speech has its own distinctive function reflected in the distribution of the forms, which depends on the communicative goal the speaker wants to achieve. Which is, after all, organizing his discourse in a coherent way, to be understood by the listener.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Bob de Jonge for his helpfull comments and suggestions on earlier versions.

Notes

1. The interviews are thirty minute conversations between an inquirerer and an informant, telling about her life, family etc.. Seven of the interviewers were conducted with middle class women and eight of the interviews with working class women, aged between twenty and eighty years. The individual interviews all showed the same tendency regardless of age and/or social class. For further details see Centro de Lingüística (1971; 1976).

2. To keep the corpus homogeneous, only the report verb *to say* has been considered.

3. It must be taken into account that the analysed conversations have informal topics. This shows the informant’s confidence in the inquirerer (who sometimes seems to be acquaint­ed with the informant; the source does not give information about the inquirerers), which might well increase the number of direct speech.

4. Generally these verbs are in the third person singular, unless, of course, the speaker reports his own words.

5. We assume the present tense to be in general of higher deictic value than past tenses in view of the former’s suggested actuality.

6. In Spanish two simple past tenses can be distinguished, the *pretérito definido* and the *imperfecto*. According to De Jonge (MS) these simple past tenses differ in their deictic value in the way suggested in our classification.

7. Total numbers in this table are higher due to the fact that each proposition contains more than one verb.

References


