

# Reported speech: Optionality and constraints in choosing how to report an utterance

John Campbell-Larsen

## Abstract

Reported speech (RS) is a very common feature of mundane spoken interaction and as such, it is fitting that language learners be taught how to do reporting. However, reporting speech is a complex and challenging task for learners. On the one hand, there are grammatical and lexical/semantic rules governing the expression of reports. On the other hand, there are multiple areas of redundancy and optionality, with reporters having a number of different resources available to achieve the same communicative goals. This paper will describe some of these aspects of RS, contrasting the obligatory and optional features of reports.

## Reported speech: A complex system

Reported speech (RS) has generated a very extensive literature. Although reported speech appears as a regular feature in scope and sequence sections of ESL/EFL textbooks, the topic is probably not given the prominence it deserves. A widely quoted observation by Bakhtin (1981) makes the case for the centrality of reported speech in language use.

The transmission and assessment of the speech of others, the discourse of another, is one of the most widespread and fundamental topics of human speech. In all areas of life and ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people's words, which are transmitted with highly varied degrees of accuracy [...] in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about. (pp. 337-338)

The theme is taken up with regard to language teaching by McCarthy (1998), who asserts,

It is hard to imagine a day of our lives when we do not at some point support our discourse with direct or indirect reference to someone else's words. It is equally hard to imagine, therefore, any second language pedagogy claiming real adequacy that did not give it a place in the syllabus. (p.150)

One of the problems is that although reported speech might find a place in a syllabus balanced alongside other grammatical/functional items such as causatives or polite requests, the complexity of reported speech means that the topic is probably under-taught and even mistaught. The multi-component nature of reports and the grammatical constraints contrasted with the degrees of optionality available to the reporter can be challenging for both learners and their teachers alike. In unpublished research carried out by the author, a survey of EFL/ESL textbooks found that reported speech, if it featured at all, was generally taught as a grammatical target of transforming direct reported speech (DRS) into indirect reported speech (IRS) focusing on backshifting of tenses and deictic shifts. Textbook exercises usually involve transformations giving a clear 'right' and 'wrong' answer. This has the advantage for teachers of being easy to teach and easy to test. The following is typical in the presentation of a direct report, an

instruction to change the verb tense and an example answer. (Saslow and Ascher, 2011, p. 55)

B: Grammar Practice. Change each statement from direct speech to indirect speech, changing the verb tense in the indirect speech statement.

1. The TV reporter said, "The landslide is one of the worst in history."

*The TV reporter said the landslide was one of the worst in history.*

2. He also said, "It caused the destruction of half the houses in the town."

(Four more example DRS reports follow.)

Most textbooks do not attend to distinctions between the reporting verbs *say*, *speak*, *talk* and *tell*. In fact, the semantic and grammatical distinctions of these verbs belong to that class of language that is often unavailable to introspection by native speakers and proficient L2 speakers alike. That is, a teacher may be able to identify an infelicitous utterance such as 'I say him my summer holiday plan', or 'I told that I went to Hawaii', but be hard pushed to account for why it is ungrammatical. In addition to ignoring the precise meanings and usages of the common reporting verbs, textbooks usually present RS as being carried out by using the simple past tense of the reporting verb, that is, using the forms *said*, *told*, *spoke* and *talked*. In fact, other tenses are possible, such as the past progressive (*I was saying ...*) and the conversational historical present (*And he comes in he says ...*). Similarly, the new quotatives (*be like* and *go*, see Buchstaller, 2014) are either ignored, or mentioned only in passing and noted as highly informal, even though they are extremely common in spoken discourse and very likely to be

encountered by any language learner entering into mundane English conversation with native or proficient L2 English speakers. There follows a brief overview of some of the dimensions of reported speech highlighting the notion that the canonical ‘backshifting tense’ exercise found in learner textbooks is a sparse treatment of the subject. For further discussion, see Campbell-Larsen (2018).

### Direct versus indirect speech

This aspect of RS is the most accessible and most commonly found treatment of RS in the EFL/ESL materials literature. In these cases, the reporter has the option of repeating the reported utterance verbatim or, the reporter can report the utterance from the point of view of the current speaker, i.e. him or herself. Consider the following:

- (1) Original utterance by speaker A: I like spicy food.
- (2) Report by speaker B using direct reported speech (DRS). A said, ‘I like spicy food.’
- (3) Report by speaker B using indirect reported speech (IRS). A said that he liked spicy food.

Notice that in (2) the reporter repeats the exact words that were used by A in (1), while in (3) the reported utterance is modified. After the complementizer *that*, the report represents the original speaker from the point of view of the reporter (*I* becomes *he*) and the verbal predicate of the original utterance (*like spicy food*) is backshifted to *liked spicy food*. That is, the original utterance is represented as removed in person from the current reporter’s voice and removed in time from the

present to the prior time in which the original utterance was made. Such transformations are a common treatment of RS in learner materials, although Swan (1980, section 534) notes that backshifting is not obligatory, especially if we are reporting propositions that have general or universal truth value at both the time of utterance and time of report. The following constructed examples show this.

(4) A: Paris is the capital of France.

(5) B: A said that Paris is the capital of France.

Although canonical as a reported speech target in learner materials, the backshifting transformation of the predicate verb of the original utterance is not actually obligatory can be dispensed with according to the preferences of the reporter.

### Reporting verbs

Although English has a large variety of verbs with which reports can be made (See Wierzbicka, 1987), reports are most commonly made with the verbs *say*, *speak*, *talk* and *tell*. (See Dirven et al. 1982) The differences between these verbs are generally not readily accessible to the intuition of native speakers or proficient L2 English learners, in part because they are extremely polysemous, in part because there are some areas of overlapping meaning, and also because of various nuances of usage and grammar. In textbooks and learner materials, the differences and similarities of these verbs are usually not attended to. A brief outline of the meanings and functions of these words is given below.

#### Reporting Verb *say*

Original utterance. (Speaker is S and listener is L.)

(6) S: I'm going to go to Hawaii.

This utterance can be reported felicitously in a number of different ways, dependent on the reporter's intent and knowledge.

(7) S said, 'I'm going to go to Hawaii' to L.

(8) S said to L that he was going to go to Hawaii.

(9) S said that he was going to go to Hawaii.

From these examples we can see that the verb *say* is used when the reporter wants to convey the propositional content of S's utterance. Example (7) is in the DRS format and makes a claim that these words were the words actually uttered by S. (Although see Tannen, 1986 for a discussion on the fidelity of reports to original utterances and the concept of 'reconstructed dialogue.')

Examples (8) and (9) are both in the IRS format, which makes the claim that the propositional content of the reported utterance and the original utterance are the same, but makes no claim to accurately represent the lexical content or grammatical form of the original utterance. For example, speaker S could have uttered the words 'So, I'm off to Honolulu next week.' in the original statement, but the reports in (8) and (9) are still accurate in reporting the propositional content of the original utterance. A further point to note with the verb *say* is that although (8) and (9) contain the same reported content, the inclusion or omission of the addressee of the original utterance (L) is a matter for the reporter to decide and both structures (*S said that ...* and *S said to L that ...*) are grammatically correct and seem to be governed by pragmatic concerns. Note also that the listener can

be included after the report proper as in (7). Other meanings of *say* include instances like ‘He said it very quickly’ to describe manner of delivery, ‘Say something’ as an imperative to speak, and ‘It says, “No entry”’ to report written content. Substituting other speech act verbs in these instances may or may not be felicitous.

#### Reporting verbs *speak* and *talk*

Taking once again (6) as the original utterance, the reporter can make the report using these two verbs.

(10) S spoke to L about his vacation plans.

(11) S spoke about his vacation plans.

(12) S talked to L about his vacation plans.

(13) S talked about his vacation plans.

In these cases, the reporter offers a coarse-grained account of the original utterance, referring to its topic rather than any propositional content. There does not seem to be any big difference in the usage of *speak* and *talk* in these examples, although a corpus search may reveal underlying patterns and distributions. As with the verb *say*, the inclusion of the original addressee (L) in the report is optional and is governed by pragmatic concerns rather than syntactic rules. It should also be noted that the addressee, if included, can be prefaced with either *to* or *with*. Intuitively, the use of *with* seems to indicate or highlight the interactive nature of the original talk, that is, the participants engaged in a sequence of turns. Alternatively, referring to the listener(s) with *to* could suggest a more one-way participation framework as in:

- (14) At the symposium Professor Clark spoke to us about the English sonnet.

In this case, the recipients of the presentation could be a non-turn-taking audience and Professor Clark is the sole speaker. Notice that the verbs *talk* and *speak* can be nominalized to indicate a speech or presentation that takes place in a speaker/ audience participation framework, with slightly different nuances.

- (15) Professor Clark gave an interesting talk/speech on the English sonnet.

Deciding what the topic of an utterance was and deciding how to encode this in the report is another extremely fuzzy area for reporters. The original utterance in (6) could be reported in any of the following ways.

- (16) S spoke about his vacation plans  
(17) S was talking about the summer holidays  
(18) S was telling L about his upcoming trip to Hawaii  
(19) S was telling L about where he is going for his holidays this year  
(20) S was saying something to L about going on holiday

Notice in (20) how the verb *say* can also be used to give a relatively coarse-grained account of the general topic of S's original utterance. Note that, for example, (16) does not indicate where S is going, or even if he/she is actually going anywhere. This list (16) — (20) is not exhaustive and highlights the extreme variability that obtains when reporters seek to report the topic of an utterance.

Reporting verb *tell*



Using (6) once again as the original utterance, the reporter can also use the verb *tell* to create a report. In this case the reporter has two options.

(21) S told L that he was going to go to Hawaii.

(22) S told L about his vacation plans.

In (21) the reporter provides the current listener with an account of the propositional content of the original utterance, again making no claims of it being a verbatim report. In (22) the reporter gives a lower-grained account of the original utterance, mentioning the topic of this original utterance, but not expounding in any way on the content. Although the verb *tell* can fulfil either the content or topic reporting function, it differs from *say*, *speak* and *talk* in that the inclusion of the listener is obligatory. Sentences such as (23) and (24) would probably be considered ill-formed.

(23) \*S told that he was going to go to Hawaii.

(24) \*S told about his vacation plans.

This point is confusing for language learners, because in other uses, the verb *tell* does not require the inclusion of the listener in the direct object slot.

(25) S told a story/ a joke/ a lie/ the truth.

It seems that the verb *tell* has an underlying telic meaning. That is, the various usages all have a recognizable endpoint and are categorized as *Accomplishments* in Vendler's (1957) categorization of verbal aspect. In the case of (21) and (22) the telic event is the sending of the message by S and the receipt of that message by L. Omission of L violates the accomplishment aspect in that

the arrival of the message at its endpoint, the listener, is not encoded. Similarly, in the usages in example (25) there is a telic aspect. In this case the endpoint is not the recipient of the sent message, but the endpoint of a recognizable speech act. If S did not reach the punchline of his joke sequence, then he cannot be said to have told the joke. If the story did not reach a hearable and mutually agreed on endpoint, then similarly, S did not in fact tell a story. Levinson (1983, p. 324) notes the interactional import of stories, jokes and the like having recognizable endings. The same telic orientation applies to the telling of a lie or the truth; the reported utterance must have some propositional content that either does or does not match truth conditional requirements for it to be the truth or a lie.

This brief overview of the uses of the most common reporting verbs illustrates that in any given reporting scenario, the reporter has a variety of options to choose from in deciding how to proceed with the report. The report can be fine-grained and orient to the propositional content of the original utterance, or it can be coarse-grained and refer more generally to the topic of the original utterance. There are two verbs (*say* and *tell*) available to encode content and there are three verbs (*speak*, *talk* and *tell*) available to encode topic. Similarly, the reporter has the option of including or not including the original addressee in the report, although the inclusion or omission is optional in the use of the verbs *say*, *speak* and *talk* and obligatory when the verb *tell* is used in certain (but not all) senses.

In addition to this variability in choosing what aspects of the original utterance to report, the reporter may also engage in a more extended report that encodes the four main constituents of a report in the following order.

Speaker > Listener > Topic > Content

Returning once again to the original utterance in (6), the extended report could look like this.

- (26) S was talking to L about his summer vacation and he was saying that he's going to go to Hawaii.

The reporter is here orienting the current addressee to the participation framework of the original utterance, that is, who was the speaker and who was the recipient of the original utterance, followed by an account of the topic and then an account of the propositional content of that utterance. The pattern can be observed in the following authentic data drawn from the British national Corpus. (Davies, 2004)

- (27) Val was on about it last summer. They was talking about it then. But she said that they had been so many months or when everybody else had a pay rise they only had a little bit. And the extra that they should have had is going to pay for these uniforms.
- (28) For a start when she was talking about fish and chips she said well we'll pop along in the car and get them from Moor Road
- (29) ...his sleep pattern going again. Jack was talking about it. Said Guy's been playing up a bit lately hasn't he
- (30) Anyhow, he, he bakes bread and he was talking about it the other day and I said oh that's lovely homemade bread.
- (31) I was talking to this bloke in Rackhams and I, I said do you still have your...

- (32) Well I was talking to him about it, I said I reckon you've spent the, you've spent quite a bit now so you might as well just go another get final (unclear). Three years! Three year course!

As is to be expected with authentic data, the idealized unfolding of the report sequence in (26) does not quite find the same clear expression in spontaneous mundane speech, but the overall pattern can be observed as speakers in (27) — (32) variously attend to reporting speakers and listeners, topic and/or content in their reports. This kind of extended report sequence is manifested in various ways by reporters and again highlights the wide range of options that are open to reporters and the ways that different verbs can be deployed to create a cumulatively coherent report that goes beyond the minimal report structure often found in learner materials. The fact that more or less the same information can be transmitted by different means is illustrated in the following, again using (6) as the source utterance.

- (33) S was telling L about his summer plans and said that he was going to go to Hawaii.
- (34) S was speaking to L about his summer plans and he told her that he was going to go to Hawaii.
- (35) S was speaking to L about his summer plans and he was saying that he was going to go to Hawaii.

One further manifestation of this complex report structure is the multiple repetition of the report verb, usually 'said' in a string that provides a long lead up to the actual DRS report and thereby prepares the recipient of the report for the

transition from here-and-now speaking to report content. The following examples from the BNC illustrate the pattern.

(36) I said to him I said she's got sixteen to tea I (unclear) invited thee and...

(37) I, I, I went in today I said, this morning, I said to John I said (pause) I said thanks for erm (pause) now you see Steven

(38) and I said (pause) I said to Bob I said well, you know (pause) said well hadn't you better...

In these cases, it will be observed that the first iteration of the reporting verb *said* elucidates the speaker and listener roles in the original utterance context. The verb is then redeployed, and this time, with the speaker and listener roles having been established, the verb introduces the report proper. As noted by Campbell-Larsen (2019), the widespread recurrence of this recycling of the verb *say* indicates that it is not a case of mere disfluency, but is an indicator that reporters go to some pains to establish the speaker and listener roles and thus forewarn the current listener(s) that a DRS report is upcoming, thereby orienting the current listener(s) to the upcoming change between here-and-now speech and reported speech, that boundary being seen as an important one for an understanding of the unfolding turn.

Connected to this elaborate set up of a report is the use of discourse markers, commonly *oh* and *well*, in the slot immediately following the reporting verb and before the onset of what may be seen as the report proper. This phenomenon was noted by Schourup (2016) who details the high frequency of *well*, *oh* and the combinatory *Oh well* (and other particles) in quote initial position. Schourup notes that the limits of working memory do not permit such accurate recall of these

kinds of markers. Norrick (2016, p.104) indicates that in a report that includes an instance of the chunk *y'know* it would be highly unlikely that the reporter would recall the insertion of the chunk in its tag function and thus 'Someone listening to Kyle's performance would hence assign the 'y'know' to the teller rather than the original speaker.' (Norrick, 2016, p. 105.) A further indication that discourse markers in the original utterance do not regularly find their way into reports is the research carried out by Lindsay and McConnell (1995) which finds that transcribers systematically omit discourse markers (and performance phenomena such as hesitations and restarts) from their transcripts. In light of these observations the appearance of discourse markers in reports such as in (38) above points to a strategic use of discourse markers by reporters. It is possible that the familiarity of markers such as *oh*, *well* and *you know* in turn-initial slot in here-and-now interactions primes their use in reports to show that although the current speaker's turn is ongoing, the onset of the reported turn can be highlighted with a typical turn-initial discourse marker. For language learners, remembering to use discourse markers in their regular, here- and-now utterances can be a challenge (See Hasselgreen, 2005). Remembering to insert them in report-initial position is a further level of complexity, and it is unusual to find discourse markers in DRS reports by language learners.

In conclusion, it can be seen that reporters often go to quite extensive lengths to preface the report and that a report may occur in some situations after an elaborate run up, detailing speaker and listener roles, highlighting the topic of the utterance, repeating the reporting verb over several iterations and inserting discourse markers immediately prior to the uttering of the reported content. None of this is grammatically obligatory and pragmatic considerations probably determine where a report will fall on the scale from the simplest kind of report such as:

(39) John was talking about his vacation plans.

to a much more elaborate and finely constructed report as in:

- (40) So John was talking to us about his vacation plans and he said to us he said, ‘Well, I’m off to Hawaii.’

The resources available to reporters are much more extensive than a casual survey of EFL/ESL textbooks would suggest.

### Tense variation

In learner materials, RS is often presented as utilizing a reporting verb in the simple past tense. That is, reports are usually given using the reporting verbs in the forms *said*, *spoke*, *talked* and *told*. This seems to presuppose that reports only deal with past utterances. However, as noted by Campbell-Larsen (2018, pp. 42-43), reports can also be about what reporters think *will* be said at some future time, by themselves or of some other person. Leaving aside the topic of future reports, it was noted by McCarthy (1998) that the past continuous form of the reporting verb is a common occurrence in corpus data dealing with spoken language and the conversational genre. McCarthy notes that ‘almost all grammars, language learning textbooks and research articles dealing with speech reporting seem blissfully to ignore the phenomenon.’ (p. 159). In the corpus data cited by McCarthy, it seems that the past continuous tense of the reporting verb in conversation is deployed as a topic opener or in support of some point being made in the discourse ‘where the demands of veracity and the faithful reproduction of words spoken is of secondary importance.’ (p.161). Although the reasons for using the past continuous tense may be complex and highly context dependent, it is clear that this tense is a resource for reporters and should form part of learn-

ers' repertoire of reporting strictures.

A similar case applies with reports that introduce the reported content with the reporting verb appearing in the present tense, as in the following:

(41) (Wolfson, 1982, pp. 25-26)

when I went to see it, the guy says to me, says, 'We got a bid for thirty-three—thirty-four, says, 'If you bid thirty-five,' he says, 'You'll get it.'

This form is often referred to as the 'historical present' and Ruhleman (2012) states that the form 'is virtually nonexistent in writing but widespread in casual talk.' The precise reasons for the use of the historical present are complex and nuanced (See for example Johnstone, 1987, Tannen, 1986, Wolfson, 1982.) As with the past continuous form, the use of the historical present in reports is a facet of reporting that is often absent from learner materials despite being commonly found in conversational discourse.

## Deixis

Levinson (1983) notes the centrality of deixis in language use.

The single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structures of languages themselves, is through the phenomenon of deixis. The term is borrowed from the Greek word for pointing and indicating and has as prototypical or exemplars the use of demonstratives, first and second person pronouns, tense, specific time and place adverbs like *now* and *here*, and a variety of other grammatical features tied



directly to the circumstances of utterance. (p.54)

As Levinson notes, the use of words like *me, you, here, there, today or yesterday* are to be understood when placed in the canonical setting of the speaker who is speaking, at this time and in this place to this addressee. A sentence like the following is readily interpretable in terms of its deictic references.

(42) John: I'm going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with my friend.

In this case it is the speaker, John, who is changing location from this place of utterance (or perhaps some other, intermediate, place) to Tokyo. The change of location will take place on the day following the day on which the utterance is made. The speaker will travel with another person, this person standing in the relationship of friend to the speaker, John. Interactants in real time usually have little trouble in figuring out the time, place and person referents in a sentence like (42).

However, when we come to a situation of reported speech, the situation becomes more complex. In the case of direct reported speech, (DRS) especially if an overt claim is made to a verbatim report, the deictic references take a back seat.

(43) A: John said, and these were his exact words, he said, 'I'm going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with my friend.'

The time and place of the utterance in (43) is largely immaterial to producing the ostensibly verbatim report, but note the claim by the reporter that this report is verbatim. If the place of (42) coincides with either the place where (43) was uttered, or some other place, even if the place of the report is Tokyo, the report

still meets truth conditions. Similarly, if the utterance in (42) was made on, say, a Tuesday and the report of that utterance was made later that same Tuesday, or on some subsequent day, the contents of the verbatim report are still accurate. In DRS the time deixis is anchored on the point in time when the original utterance was made.

When it comes to person deixis there are some subtleties. In the verbatim report (43) ‘my friend’ remains unchanged from the original utterance, even if the person referred to is speaker A from (43), (i.e. the friend referred to is person A) or speaker A’s addressee in the report context. However, if the speaker in (43) were actually John, i.e. if A were referring to his own speech, or the addressee in (43) were John (it is possible for reporters to quote an utterance back to the person who uttered it), then the person deictic reference prior to the report proper would have to be altered:

(44) I said, and these were my exact words, I said ‘I’m going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with my friend.’

(45) You said, and these were your exact words, you said, ‘I’m going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with my friend.’

This is in line with the notion that speakers generally do not refer to themselves in the first person and that their addressees are generally referred to with the second person pronoun in ongoing discourse. It seems to be that case that in DRS, especially ostensible verbatim speech, person deictics in the report orientation (pre-report) phase are altered according to report context, if persons referred to in the report are co-referential with any current participant.

Next, we turn to indirect reports, and the situation becomes much more complex. If we take the original utterance in (42) and then render it into an IRS for-

mat, the result may look something like this:

(46) John said that he was going to go to Tokyo the next day with his friend.

Notice that because the report is of a previously made utterance, the original tense (future with 'be going to') has been backshifted to 'was going to'. Likewise, the deictic time expression 'tomorrow' in the original utterance has been altered to 'the next day' and the person deictic references have changed to show 'he' as the speaker and 'his friend' as this original speaker's traveling companion. In other words, person deictics in the report are oriented to the current reporter's relationship with John (i.e. John is 'he') and John's relationship to the traveling companion ('my' friend becomes 'his' friend). The place deixis is encoded in the use of the word 'go'; in the original context, John's speaking location was not Tokyo, but some other place. The location of the utterance made in (46) is likewise not Tokyo (otherwise the verb 'come' would be appropriate). Although both (42) and (41) could have been uttered in the same location (say Osaka) it is also feasible that the locations are different, such as in the case that John's utterance (42) took place in Osaka and the report of that utterance took place in Kyoto. This is not reflected in the report. The only dimension of location that is attended to is whether the IRS report is, or is not, being made in the place mentioned as a goal by the original speaker. If this were the case, then the IRS report would reflect it thus:

(47) John said that he was going to come here/ come to Tokyo the next day  
with his friend.

As mentioned above, the backshifting of tenses is not obligatory in IRS. If the original utterance was made on a Tuesday and later that same Tuesday the report

of that utterance was made, then (48) would not be infelicitous.

(48) John said that he is going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with his friend.

The trip to Tokyo was future-wards in John's original context and it is still future-wards in the context of the report. The trip will be understood to be planned for Wednesday. The same applies for reporting utterances that were originally in the past tense.

(49) John: I went to Tokyo yesterday with my friend.

In the case of (49) If John's utterance was originally made on a Tuesday, the trip to Tokyo is understood to have taken place on Monday. A report of this utterance made on Tuesday could be rendered as,

(50) John said that he went to Tokyo yesterday with his friend.

A report made on any day following Tuesday could be rendered as orienting to the day of the trip as being the day prior to the day of John's original utterance, with backshifting of the time deixis and tense as in,

(51) John said that he had gone to Tokyo with his friend the day before.

In this case, it would be understood that the trip to Tokyo occurred on the day prior to John's utterance being made, whenever that day happened to be, and indeed the actual day could be left unstated. Alternatively, the deixis can be dispensed with, and a reference could be made to the named weekday of the trip, even if this was not included in the original utterance.

(52) John said that he went to Tokyo on Monday with his friend.

In the case of (52), it would generally be understood that the trip to Tokyo was taken on the Monday that fell before the day of the report, that is, it would be seen to refer to 'last Monday' from the standpoint of the current reporting time, i.e. the report could be made on any day in a sequence from Tuesday to Sunday and the reference to 'Monday' would be consistent

Returning to the reporting of an utterance about the future, let us examine once again the utterance made by John in (42), repeated here for convenience:

(53) John: I'm going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with my friend.

The general tendency for learner materials is to focus on backshifting of the tense sequence. That is, the utterance in (53) would undergo transformation to produce,

(54) John said that he was going to go to Tokyo the next day with his friend.

The backshifting of 'am going to' to 'was going to' introduces an ambiguity here. In the English tense/aspect system, the use of 'was going to', sometimes referred to a 'future in the past' can be used to talk about planned actions that did not actually take place as in,

(55) I was going to call you last night, but I forgot.

In this case the action of calling a person was planned as a future action but was not actually carried out. This use of 'was going to' explicitly encodes unrealized plans. So, in the case of (54), it is not immediately clear whether John actually went

to Tokyo or not. It would be feasible to expand the context of the report as follows,

- (56) I met John on Tuesday and he said that he was going to go to Tokyo the next day with his friend, but I saw him on campus the day after he said it, Wednesday, so I guess he changed his mind.

The backshifting of the tense in the case of (54) could be deployed to indicate either a cancelled plan, or as a tense shift in line with RS practices and with no connotations that the plan was unfulfilled. Of course, all future actions, expressed with *be going to* are in the category of irrealis, but the fact that *was going to* can definitely encode a non-carried out plan is a further complication to reporters.

What is clear from all of this is that there are complex, nuanced and variable relationships between the time and place of the original utterance and the time and place of the report being made. On the one hand, the original utterance and the report can be perceived of having the same time deixis. An utterance made about a trip planned for ‘tomorrow’, if it is reported later on the same day, essentially treats the ‘nowness’ of both the original utterance and the report as one and the same. ‘Tomorrow’ is still a valid and appropriate deictic reference for both as the original utterance and the report both share the same temporal relation to the subsequent day; it is ‘tomorrow’ for both. However, if the report takes place on a different day from the day of the original utterance, then the reference ‘tomorrow’ will be correct in the case of DRS and will not be correct in the case of IRS. In actuality, further pragmatic deictic work may have to be done in support of the report to make its temporal orientation accessible, as in the following.

- (57) A: So, I was talking to John this morning and he was saying that he is

going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with his friend.

- (58) A: I was talking to John on Tuesday and he was saying that he was going to go Tokyo tomorrow, meaning Wednesday, with his friend.

In the case of (58) the reporter engages in a form of -self-initiated self-repair (See Schegloff et al., 1977). These kinds of repair insertions are not unheard of in reports as speakers orient their listeners to the appropriate time, place and person deictics. Consider the potential ambiguity that could arise from a plain report.

- (59) A: Jim told Peter that he loved his wife.

In this case, Jim could be asserting his affection for his own spouse or declaring an illicit feeling for Peter's wife. The kind of self-initiated self-repair that was seen in (58) would probably be appropriate here.

- (60) A: Jim told Peter that he loved his wife, meaning his own, that is, Jim's wife.

It is clear from these examples that time, place and person deixis in reported speech is a highly nuanced and context dependent issue. In normal speech the speaker can assume that the addressee is able to construe the here-ness, now-ness and you- and me-ness of the unfolding utterance. In reports, the here and now and person references of the original utterance may or may not coincide with the time, place and person deictic references of the reporting situation. The person deictic references are also subject to variation. Consider again (42), reproduced here as (61):

(61) John: I'm going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with my friend.

In any IRS report, it is possible that the time and place deictic references can be altered or left unaltered, depending on the communicative intent and the relationship of the reporting world to the original utterance world. Likewise, the person reference is subject to some constraints. If the traveling companion is neither the speaker nor the addressee of the reporting context, the deictic term would have to undergo change.

(62) A: John said that he is/was going to come/go to Tokyo tomorrow/on Wednesday/ the day after with his friend.

In (62) the amount of variability in expressing time and place references is reflected in the options that exist for the tense (*is* or *was* going to), the choice of *come* or *go* and the options for referring to when the trip will take place. The person reference remains the same, i.e. the traveling companion is located deictically to John. However, if traveling companion is in fact, speaker A, that is the person making the report, the deictic references shift from John-centered to ego-centered.

(63) A: John said that he was going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with me.

or, alternatively

(64) A: John said that he and I/ we were going to go to Tokyo tomorrow.

(Note the ambiguity that arises with English conflation of inclusive and exclusive referents in the English pronoun *we*. This *we* could be John and speaker A, John and speaker A and A's current addressee, or John, speaker A and some other cur-



rently non-present person or persons, but not A's current addressee.)

On the other hand, if the traveling companion were co-referential with A's current addressee, then the report would have to reflect this.

(65) A: John said that he was going to go to Tokyo tomorrow with you.

or

(66) A: John said that you and he/ the two of you were going to Tokyo tomorrow.

We can see here that the traveling companion's identity will always be deictically based on John (i.e. his friend) unless that person (the traveling companion) is either the speaker or addressee in the reporting context. Tomorrow may or may not be the same referent in the original utterance and the report of that utterance. 'Here' and 'there' can be construed in several different ways. 'He is coming here' could refer to a country and could be true if the reporter, speaking in Osaka is referring to the upcoming visit of a movie star to Tokyo. This construal finds Osaka and Tokyo to be both 'here' as in 'here, Japan'. In other situations, Osaka would be 'here' and Tokyo would be 'there'. In person references, John's friend is always 'his friend', that is, taking the deictic reference John as the anchor point, and the only variation that can take place is if this person is co-referential with the I or the you of the current interaction. Person references present a rather strict hierarchy in reports with the person deictics of the current interactants predominating. Times and places may subject to a number of different construals, and can be expressed vaguely or omitted, but person to person relationships seem to be more fixed in reports.

## Conclusion

The centrality of reported speech in daily, mundane interaction has been noted repeatedly by many authors. Given this centrality, it is necessary that language learners be taught how to report speech in their discourse. The problem arises when we go beyond the basic differentiation between DRS and IRS and the common operation of backshifting tenses that is the staple of reported speech in many learner materials. Reporters have at their disposal a number of linguistic resources that they can deploy in order to meet the varying and locally relevant demands of interaction and informing. There seems to be a certain amount of redundancy in some of the options. The verbs *say* and *tell* can both report content, as in (7), (8), (9) and (21) above, while the verbs *speak*, *talk* and *tell* can report topic as in (10), (11), (12), (13) and (22) above. The ways in which these verbs can be used in combination with each other to orient to the speaker>listener>topic>content schema is varied. It seems partially dependent on the communicative nature of the task at hand, and partly open to the preference of the reporter, with multiple pathways being open to the reporter to create schemas with the same overall culmination of key elements as in (33) — (35). On one hand the reporter has freedom in selecting whether to give a report in IRS or DRS, and how coarse- or fine-grained a report to give. There is also freedom in the choice of verbs to deploy. These freedoms combine with certain grammatical and semantic constraints such as *tell* needing a direct object listener, *speak* referring to topic, manner of delivery or language ability (but not content). Similarly, how precisely to encode and express a topic in a report with *speak*, *talk* or *tell L about* something is not something that has clear rules. In the area of tense, the reporter can opt for simple past, past continuous or conversational historic present, with none of the tenses being actually ‘wrong’. A similar vagueness that sometimes applies and

sometimes doesn't apply to deictic expressions is a cause for uncertainty when students are trying to acquire the full palette of English reporting structures. It is this combination of choice and constraint that makes speech reporting a complex and fractal-edged part of the English language and a challenge for students and teachers alike.

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