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On the social practice of indirect reports (further advances in the theory of pragmemes)[§]

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Abstract

This paper deals with the social practice of indirect reports and treats them as cases of language games. It proposes a number of principles like the following:

Paraphrasis/Form Principle

The that-clause embedded in the verb ‘say’ is a paraphrasis of what Y said, and meets the following constraints: should Y hear what X said he (Y) had said, he would not take issue with it, as to content, but would approve of it as a fair paraphrasis of his original utterance. Furthermore, he would not object to vocalizing the assertion made out of the words following the complementizer ‘that’ on account of its form/style.

Furthermore, it connects such principles with Relevance Theory considerations.

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Deus illuminatio mea

1. Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the pragmatics of indirect reports. It aims to show how semantics and pragmatics can be harmonised in the context of the issue of indirect reports. Semantics involves recursive rules applying to a formal syntax, operates on expressions at a level of ‘logical form’, and is thus distinguished from pragmatics, through which such logical forms are developed into richer propositions. In many (perhaps almost all) cases, a given surface sentence can generate a variety of logical forms. But in a speech context, these will be ordered so that some are preferred to others and some are ruled out entirely. Pragmatic principles are mainly responsible for this. If this assumption is right, then semantics and pragmatics are part of a harmonious picture.

In connection with indirect reports, I argue that we need to invoke pragmatic considerations that will complement semantic considerations, semantics and pragmatics working in tandem. Very often, in fact, substituting an NP into an

[§] I would like to give my warmest thanks to Jacob L. Mey, who devoted a lot of time to reading my work and suggesting ideas for revision. I am moved by his generosity, as well as by his ability to spur young people’s minds. I am also grateful to Ken Turner, Franco Lo Piparo, and three referees for encouragement, suggestions and comments. The wealth of comments they provided helped me turn the manuscript into a more respectable article. All remaining errors are my own.

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indirect report results in different speech acts being erroneously reported. I do not expect to discover the exceptionless principles governing indirect reporting. Such principles are hard to find. However, what I propose is that such principles are tied to the function of utterances in discourse, and, thus, should be sensitive to the speaker's orientation to the communicative situation.

I propose that the principles governing indirect reports should be ultimately connected with the principle of Relevance as formulated by Sperber and Wilson (1986), and choose Relevance Theory as a framework that gives unity to my various considerations (the question whether the principles follow from Relevance Theory's assumptions or simply give independent support to it will remain open for the time being).

In this paper, I also wish to draw the implications of the theory of pragmemes, which I have advanced in other articles (Capone, 2005a,b) following ideas broached by Mey (2001), and to apply them to areas of inquiry which certainly need being revisited with modern and efficient analytical tools, such as the detailed study of the interplay between speech acts and context.

2. Pragmemes and indirect reports

This paper owes much to Mey's theory of pragmemes (Mey, 2001). For Mey, all utterances are situated and their intended meanings must be recovered starting from the situation of utterance. It should be possible, in theory and in practice, to recover (or discover) the speaker's intended meanings on the basis of the (rich) contextual clues which s/he utilises in getting her message across. This is what Mey says about pragmemes as "generalized pragmatic acts":

The theory of pragmatic acts does not explain human language use starting from the words uttered by a single, idealized speaker. Instead, it focuses on the interactional situation in which both speakers and hearers realize their aims. The explanatory movement is from the outside in, one could say, rather than from the inside out: instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation where the words fit, is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said. In this line of thought, the emphasis is not on conditions and rules for an individual speech act, but on characterizing a general situational prototype capable of being executed in the situation; such a generalized pragmatic act I will call a pragmeme. (Mey, 2001:221; emphasis in original).

I suppose that a great deal can be said about this excerpt. For the time being, I will simply say it reminds me of a film in which the frightened heroine was trying to shout and say something, but was prevented from doing that so her voice never came out. How can we know what she was desperately trying to say, but did not say? The recovery of her intentions, in this case, as in many other similar cases, proceeds from the outside and the movement is from the outside in. We can reconstruct what is going on in her mind only if, and because, we can understand what kind of situation she is in.

The considerations above are relevant to my remarks on indirect reports for the following reasons.

The situation of utterance plays a major role in shaping the obligations of the reporter and the degree of accuracy with which the original speech act is reported. Sometimes it determines a more fine-grained report, sometimes a less fine-grained one.

There are contexts in which the hearer is able to separate the reporting speaker's and the reported speaker's voices. While in a default context, I propose a default principle saying that the words used in an indirect report should not lead us too far away from the original statement, I am ready to assert that we also need to investigate those contexts in which the hearer uses some practical means for distinguishing one voice from another, having at his/her disposal contextual clues and large chunks of world knowledge. For example, if a hearer knows that a certain item of vocabulary belongs to the reporting speaker's linguistic habits, but NOT to the reported speaker's, and s/he knows that the speaker may want to use such a piece of world knowledge to leave implicit part of the message, then s/he will be able to apportion a certain word (the usage of a certain word and the responsibilities involved) to the reporting speaker.

Societal considerations are involved in indirect reports because indirect reports are language games in which in reporting that P, the speaker offers two voices: the current speaker's own, and that of the original speaker. The reporter does not take responsibility for the latter's embedded voice.

Societal considerations are involved in the fact that certain transformations are precluded in indirect reports, in case such transformations have effects on the speech act reported (threatening to alter it in a drastic way). It is not just words or events that are reported, but speech acts. Since speech acts require appropriate contexts, it is important that the indirect report should present the appropriate context for the speech act narrated, by using words that do not distort that original speech act. As can be easily understood, Mey's idea that speech acts are situated explains the fact that one is

not (completely) free to replace one word with another in indirect reports, as, after all, words serve to shape the speech act. The indirect report should provide sufficient contextual clues for the recovery of the original speech act.

That societal information goes into utterance interpretation is now being accepted by leading theorists within pragmatics. There is, in fact, pioneering work by Jaszczolt (2005) saying that the final result of semantic and pragmatic interpretation should take into account socio-cultural defaults. The present paper sets out to corroborate Jaszczolt's important, albeit general, considerations.

The problems addressed here are reminiscent of the issue of mixed quotation, raised by Cappelen and Lepore (2007). For these authors, the most typical reasons for preferring mixed to direct or indirect quotation are that the reported utterance is too long to quote, but the reporter wants to ensure accuracy on certain key passages; certain passages were particularly well put; perhaps the words used by the original speaker were potentially offensive to an audience and the speaker wants to distance himself from them; the expression being 'mixed-quoted' is ungrammatical or contains a solecism for which the speaker does not feel responsible, etc.

The authors opt for a semantic theory of mixed quotation, on the basis of data drawn from the written language. In my review of the book (Capone, 2009), I insisted that by focusing on the written dimension of language, where devices for signaling mixed quotation are quite explicit and of a grammatical nature, Cappelen and Lepore are led astray, as the task of distinguishing quoted from not quoted items is basically a pragmatic one. Fundamentally, in the same way in which mixed quotation poses the pragmatic task of recovering which item belongs to which voice, in indirect reports more generally there is the problem of telling voices apart. Cappelen and Lepore's problem and my problem intersect, even if, unlike them, I propose to resort to the theory of pragmemes in order to show how, in practice, the two voices are to be distinguished.

If we consider indirect reports as language games, we can see them in a different light from the way philosophers look at them. Indirect reports require a reporter, a piece of language behaviour to report, and a situation that motivates the reporting and ends up constraining the form of the report. We shall look at indirect reports in the way suggested by Mey, as situated activities, in which the purpose, the participants and the societal rules play major roles in interpretation. As Mey says,

Speech acts, in order to be effective, have to be situated. That is to say, they both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realized. Thus, a situated speech act comes close to what has been called a speech event in ethnographic and anthropological studies (Bauman and Sherzer, 1974): speech as centered on an institutionalized social activity of a certain kind, such as teaching, visiting a doctor's office, participating in a tea-ceremony, and so on. In all such activities, speech is, in a way, prescribed: only certain utterances can be expected and will thus be acceptable; conversely, the participants in the situation, by their acceptance of their own and others' utterances, establish and reaffirm the social situation in which the utterances are uttered and in which they find themselves as utterers (Mey, 2001:219).

From this, we can infer the following:

Indirect speech acts are situated activities. The way the speech act is produced must conform to the rules that pertain to that situation of use. Conforming to the practice of indirect reports means being competent members of a community of individuals, equipped with communicative competence. This competence has evolved through a mixture of exposure to communicative events and the interplay of cognitive principles.

Indirect reports show a double level of embedding. There is the original act, that was embedded in the situation in which it was uttered; there is the indirect report, which is sensitive to the situation in which it is uttered. Some of the constraints posed by the former context may be overridden by the new constraints of the latter context (for example an utterance which was inappropriate, misplaced in the former context may be appropriate in the latter context), but in general it can be said that the former context and the interpretations licensed in it will constrain the latter context, UNLESS there are reasons for deviating from such a practice.

3. A unifying framework: Relevance Theory

I want to sketch, without going into great detail, the unifying assumptions of this paper. Many of my considerations given in terms of principles in this paper can be connected with the basic assumptions of Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Wilson and Sperber (2004). Relevance Theory develops an alternative to the code model of communication, mainly an inferential model in which a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a

certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided. According to the authors, the decoded linguistic meaning is just one of the inputs to a non-demonstrative process which yields an interpretation of the speaker's meaning: The pragmatic process of interpretation is constrained by the following principle (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986, 158ff).

Cognitive principle of relevance

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

According to RT, an input (whether linguistic or not) is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information to yield conclusions that matter to him. A positive cognitive effect is a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world.

The authors also posit the following principle, concerning

Relevance of an input to an individual

- (a) Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time;
- (b) Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

Pragmatic processing is constrained by the following.

Presumption of optimal relevance

- (a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort;
- (b) It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

According to the authors, the hearer/interpreter should follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects; test interpretative hypotheses in order of accessibility; and stop when her expectations of relevance are satisfied.

Many authors have written on Relevance Theory, most notably Carston (2002), Bezuidenhout (1997), Rouchota (1992), Powell (2001), and Capone (2008; the latter article argues from a more philosophical perspective, which is what I am primarily interested in here). The main idea that emerges from these writings is that pragmatics provides full propositions on the basis of the fragmentary ones provided by semantics. The present paper will mainly address the issue of indirect reports; I will argue that here, semantics and pragmatics work in tandem.

4. Indirect reports as language games

Wittgenstein writes:

Here the term "language game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life (Wittgenstein, 1953:11).

Wittgenstein continues by making a list of language games, and includes among them the game of 'reporting an event'. It is a natural extension of Wittgenstein's ideas to say that making an indirect report is a language game – although we must explain why making an indirect report is a more specific language game than is making a report.

Considering indirect reports as language games allows us to put them in a different light from the one which is usually cast on them by scholars in the philosophy of language. Indirect reports require a reporter, a piece of language behaviour to report, a situation that motivates the reporting (one that includes a goal) and that ends up constraining the form of the report (especially of the NPs in the that-clause). The reporter usually does the reporting for the benefit of the hearer (however, it is not difficult to imagine cases where perlocutionary acts are involved such as frightening the hearer or scaring him from carrying out an action). All of this presupposes an asymmetry of knowledge between the reporter and the hearer. The speaker would not do the reporting if the hearer were informed of the reported speech (but

of course there is the marginal chance that an indirect report has the perlocutionary effect of making the hearer notice that a speaker is a liar – in this case the hearer knows the fact reported, but the indirect report is proffered all the same, so as to focus on the issue of the lie). The reporter qualifies himself and the speaker of the event reported as samesayers (to use Davidson's (1968) words) with respect to the content of the report (the that-clause in "He said that P"). 'Samesaying' does not imply that the same words are used in the report and in the speech to be reported: it just means that the report and the speech to be reported have some broad content in common. As Burge says: "To use indirect discourse, one must master the practice of samesaying. One must be able to use utterances that are relevantly synonymous with the utterances of the original speaker" (Burge, 1986:192).

The practice of indirect reports rests on the following rule:

The reporter X will report what was said by Y (Y being usually distinct from X, but sometimes identical with X) by using a predicate such as 'say' that makes reference to a verbal event of some kind (an utterance), by applying it to Y (the participant whose speech is being reported) and by letting the direct object of the predicate 'say' express the content of Y's utterance (at some prior time) by way of paraphrase, that is by letting the that-clause refer to the same situation or event \underline{e} that the utterance \underline{u} reported was actually used (by Y) to refer to, without necessarily using the modes of presentation (of objects and participants) which were actually used by Y in \underline{u} , and in fact allowing context to play a pervasive role in making reference to objects, activities, situations, and participants therein. Whenever doubts arise about the interpretation of a constituent of what was said or about authorship, the speaker should quote that part of the utterance, ensuring that the hearer grasps that what follows 'that' (with the quotation marks excised) is the content of what was said, while the quoted part 'samesays' (or better 'same-tokens') the expression actually used.

Such a rule accommodates the problems noted by Davidson concerning reports of utterances in languages other than the reporter's. The rule relies on the premise that two expressions are pragmatically equivalent if they express the same content (Jaszczolt, 2003) and is reminiscent of Soames's (1989) position, as it has been criticised by Cappelen and Lepore (1997). Of course, the basic rule is incomplete, and I shall attempt to produce better versions of it while considering crucial examples. A first step towards completing the considerations above is to introduce a rule of use, sensitive to the pragmatic "requirement that the reporter be maximally faithful to the words of the agent unless there is a reason to deviate" (Soames, 1988:123) (see also analogous considerations for belief reports in Salmon's work, 1986; see also Saul, 1998 for a critique).

A second step is to realize that contextual considerations (e.g. the formality/informality of the situation) can increase the need for either a more fine-grained report or a more coarse-grained one. In other words, a speaker has to fine-tune an indirect report in order to adjust it to the situation of use.

Making an indirect report is a language game that is more specific than making an assertion. In asserting P, a speaker merely offers his own voice (unless irony is involved; see Giora (2003) for an original and important view); by contrast, in reporting that P, the speaker offers two voices: the speaker's own and that of the speaker in the original speech event (see also Vološinov, 1973). The reporter does not take responsibility for the embedded voice (except in so far as it is being attributed to one speaker or another). Reported speech is usually elicited (Speaker: What did John say?) or prompted by the desire to offer the hearer an essential clue to a solution of a problem viz. some piece of information that is contained in (or is a consequence of) the speech reported.¹ Reporting speech is a language game because it involves some principles; it is a principle-based activity. Furthermore, the language game of reporting (someone's) speech is sensitive to contextual factors and the context of speech determines whether a report should be more or less fine-grained.

The problem, as I see it, is that reporting speech is a language-game of its own (viz. that of indirect reporting) that is severely constrained by the fact that it displays two voices, the reporter's and the original speaker's; moreover there is a tension between them, such that the interests and the point of view of the reporter cannot prevail over those of the original speaker. Furthermore, the specificity of the language game 'reporting (one's) speech' consists in the tension between the two voices and in the fact that none of them prevails over the other. The specificity of the language game 'reporting speech' also consists in the fact that the report partially answers the question "would I accept the report (the way in which the report has been put), were I the original speaker whose speech is being reported?". This (salutary) question serves to eliminate possible distortions of what was said. Indirect speech reports represent what Bakhtin calls 'discourse of the third type', that is discourse which does not just express the speaker's voice or that of a third person, but multiple voices (Robinson, 2003:107; Bakhtin, 1984:187).

¹ I admit to being influenced by Devitt's (1996) pragmatic approach to belief reports, which I here freely extend to indirect reports.

The situation of utterance plays a major role in shaping the obligations of the reporter and the degree of accuracy with which the original speech is reported. Sometimes it demands a more fine-grained report, sometimes a less fine-grained one.

Somewhat extending the principle I proposed above, by incorporating the notion of the specificity of the language game we are dealing with, the following principle seems appropriate to establish:

Paraphrase principle²

The that-clause embedded in the verb ‘say’ is a paraphrase of what Y said if it meets the following constraint: Should Y hear what X said Y had said, Y would not take issue with it, but would approve of it as a fair paraphrase of the original utterance.

This is somewhat reminiscent of Burge’s position:

The point of indirect discourse might be fairly taken to be to introduce and produce a given utterance that gives the content of the original speaker’s utterance (Burge, 1986:196).

Now it should be clear why the language game of ‘indirect reporting’ is more specific than that of ‘assertion’. In factual assertions, only the speaker and the hearer are involved; the speaker takes responsibility for what he takes to be the case in the actual world. In the case of indirect reports, we have got a speaker⁰, a hearer, and a speaker⁰⁰ (the original speaker); both speaker⁰ and speaker⁰⁰ take responsibility for the content of the that-clause in case all goes well, that is to say, in case the indirect reporting is felicitous.

There is another aspect to take into account in our argument that indirect reports are specific language games. Matters of form also go into an evaluation of whether the reporter made a correct report. In fact, as Dummett (2003:110) says, one may assent to a statement without being prepared to make that statement (since it may be objectionable in other ways, e.g. by being insulting).

Thus we also need a Paraphrase/Form principle for indirect reports:

Paraphrase/form principle

The that-clause embedded in the verb ‘say’ is a paraphrase of what Y said, and meets the following constraints: Should Y hear what X said Y had said, Y would not take issue with it as to content, but would approve of it as a fair paraphrase of the original utterance. Furthermore, Y would not object to the vocal expression of the assertion, based on the words following the complementizer ‘that’ on account of its form/style.

Now, it should be clear that the way I have formulated this principle is that of a generalization or a rule. It would be good, however, if this were not an isolated rule, but could be reduced to a more general cognitive principle (or could be connected with such a principle). The Form/Paraphrase Principle could be explained by resorting to Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) theory of Relevance. According to Relevance Theory, an assumption is more relevant if it has greater cognitive effects or if it involves smaller processing efforts. An indirect report in which it is the reported speaker’s voice and not the reporting speaker’s voice that prevails is a case in which the hearer of the report is put to smaller processing costs. Thus it follows that that the indirect report will merely serve to give voice to the reported speaker (unless otherwise indicated by contextual clues).

Of course, if the discourse is rich enough and offers contextual assumptions that help separate the reported speaker’s voice from the reporting speaker’s voice, the greater processing costs involved in the report will be offset by greater contextual effect.

A line of objection could be the following:

Depending on the context, I needn’t be beholden to the original speaker’s ‘approval’ of my paraphrase as fair, nor need I avoid manners of speech which the original speaker would shy away from. In such contexts, if John said of a person X that X will be coming to the party, my report to that effect is true whether I refer to person X politely, as John would approve of, or impolitely, as (let us imagine) my hearer would approve of. John may, upon hearing my report, demur: “Well, I don’t know why you’d call X a jerk but, yes, I did say he was coming to the party”. The Paraphrase

² This position is somewhat reminiscent of Seymour’s (1994) treatment of indirect reports, in which reference to a translation of the reported sentence is explicitly incorporated in the semantics of indirect reports.

Principle (in combination with my other remarks above) are intended to rule out contexts of indirect reporting that seem to allow this type of taking licence with the original speaker's words.

There are two points to be noted regarding this objection. The hypothetical reply above, uttered by someone whose speech was reported by a mixture of the reported speaker's voice and of the reporting speaker's voice, at least signals a complaint; and a complaint is something which one voices when a trouble has been noted. Furthermore, one has to ask whether the reported speaker who said "Well, I don't know why you'd call X a jerk but, yes, I did say he was coming to the party" would also be inclined to say "You reported what I say all right"; but it is not at all clear that the reported speaker indeed would be so inclined.

The second point to be noted is that the objection starts with 'Depending on the context' – and indeed there are contexts in which the hearer is able to separate out the reporting speaker's from that of the reported speaker; in such contexts the Paraphrase/Form Principle will be blocked from operating. The versatility of principles like these seems to attest to the fact that we are dealing with procedures determined by language use, which are therefore sensitive to language use. We are dealing with the social practice of indirect reports, which rests on usage and on regularities of usage. If a context is such that a hearer can separate the reported speaker's voice from the reporting speaker's, the Paraphrase/Form Principle is no longer operative. It works only in those contexts in which it is not easy to keep the voices apart.³

5. The logic and structure of indirect reports

I want to outline briefly the logic of indirect reports. Indirect speech reports are micro-narrations: in particular, they narrate certain events (deemed to be of interest to the hearer) that occurred at some time prior to the speech report and that amounted to saying something with appropriate intention (in the sense of Habermas, 2001, as teleological entities; see also Peirce, 1958:414). Assertive speech acts are events reportable in indirect speech reports. In the case of indirect speech reports, there are two speech acts: the original assertion (subsequently reported) and the micro-narration of the original assertion (an assertion in its own right). It is reasonable to assume that the original assertion was connected/related to a certain situation (a complex of cognitive states, goals, desires) and had a bearing on the formation of certain decisions on the part of some of the participants to the speech event (maximizing the cognitive effects, to use Sperber and Wilson's terminology, 1995; see also Wilson, 2000; Capone, 2001). The indirect report, analogously, relates to some (new) situation (a complex of cognitive states, goals, desires, etc.) and since, following Wilson (2000) and Kamp (1990:70), the report leads to an inference concerning the beliefs of the original speaker, it is tantamount to a belief attribution which (again following Kamp, 1990:30), ends up having a bearing on the formation of decisions on the part of some of the participants in the speech event. In particular, if the hearer is informed of a certain situation that has a bearing on taking a decision, then he or she will be willing to make that decision, based on this piece of information.

The way an indirect speech report can bear on a certain decision to be made by the hearer is that it proposes what another person said (asserted) as a source of knowledge. If the original speaker qualifies as a reliable informer, then

³ A very interesting objection has been levelled against the Paraphrase/Form Principle by an anonymous referee:

Suppose that I mistakenly think that Sam is a woman. I utter 'Sam is a philosopher'. You report my utterance by uttering 'X said that he is a philosopher' (my own addition: 'he' being used in combination with a demonstrative gesture). I would take issue with 'he is a philosopher' (or otherwise object to its form), because I think that 'he' is not the right grammatical gender for Sam. So, either one cannot replace 'Sam' with 'he', or else the author's Paraphrase/Form Principle – according to which the 'that'- clause in the report of my utterance must be such that, "should [I] hear what [you] said [I] had said, [I] would not take issue with it and would not "object" to it on account of its form/style" – is false.

The example is indeed rather tricky. However one can hope to deal with it as follows. Surely, if there was no way to settle the issue of Sam's sex, the Paraphrase/Form Principle would entail a serious problem. However, there are ways to surmount the problem, provided that there are publically available and objective criteria for establishing a person's sex (usually by exterior physical appearance). Suppose X utters 'Sam is a philosopher' and I report 'X said that he is a philosopher'; surely X can object to my report because he is (falsely) convinced that Sam is a woman and until he is persuaded to the contrary, he will object to my report. This is not to say that X is entitled to object to my report; but we must clarify the notion of being so entitled. All we need is a principle of use to the effect that the report is felicitous, provided the reported speaker is not entitled to object to it. The example is also tricky because it makes use of the English language, where some names are ambiguous as to gender. But in many languages of the world there are no such ambiguities, and, thus, the reviewer's story would not work there.

I am aware that further discussion of these points could be very interesting and stimulating, but for the sake of time and space I will have to refrain from it here.

what he said can be counted on for the formation of appropriate beliefs that have a bearing on the formation of current decisions relating to the current complex of cognitive states, goals, desires. Alternatively, what the original speaker said can be subjected to further inquiry and can be contrasted with conflicting pieces of knowledge.

So far, I have presupposed (rather generously) that there is (normally, although not always) an inferential transition from what a speaker A says to what s/he believes. The way I see the difference between a factual assertion and an indirect report is that the factual assertion is merely a response to the interests of the hearer at *t* (the time of utterance); instead, an indirect report embodies a sensitivity to two situations, *s* and *s*⁰. *s* is the situation in which a factual assertion (in any case the original speech act reported) was uttered in response to the interests of recipients *R*. *s*⁰ exhibits a sensitivity to both recipients (call them *R* and *R*⁰). It goes without saying that if modes of presentation reflect the interests of the hearers (as well as of the speakers), then an intersection of the interests of *R* and *R*⁰ should be taken into account in the choice of mode of presentation (as Sperber, 1996 has it, communication normally slightly transforms the message). As should now be obvious, my methodological approach in this paper is to accept that since users and their language are at the core of all things pragmatic, the world of users is the very condition for doing pragmatics (Mey, 2001:29; Haberland and Mey, 1977; Haberland and Mey, 2002).

6. Restrictions on transformations

Suppose that a certain referent, say *A*, features in both the original speech act and in the reporting (indirect) speech act. Suppose that in the original speech act, *A* is presented through a mode of presentation *M*, whereas in the indirect reporting speech act, it is presented through a mode of presentation *M*⁰; suppose furthermore that *M* and *M*⁰ happen to be distinct. Surely, the context has to determine the level of detail associated with the mode of presentation and whether a more fine-grained linguistic expression is to be preferred to a more coarse-grained expression. Yet, the latitude of the choice can be restricted a priori. Consider the following example (taken from Higginbotham's lecture notes, 2004/2005):

- (1) Galileo said that the earth moves.
- (2) Galileo said that the planet in which Arnold Schwarzenegger is a governor moves.

Higginbotham says that (2) is “ridiculous” (even if it is obtained by substituting a coreferential expression for ‘the earth’). He does not explain, though, why he considers examples such as (2) (obtained through substitution of identicals from (1)) ridiculous – presumably his explanation is that it was unlikely for Galileo to have any thoughts about Schwarzenegger and thus to use a mode of presentation making reference to such thoughts. However, I believe the explanation cannot be that verbs such as ‘said’ block Leibniz's Law (specifying the identity of indiscernibles, hence allowing free substitution of such entities), because indirect speech reports (unless they are extremely pedantic) do involve some latitude in choosing a mode of presentation for a referent that is presented via a mode of presentation that is different from the one used in the original speech act.

There is a reason why we are barred from shifting freely from (1) to (2), a reason that does not derive from the blocking of Leibniz's law (by which a statement will result in a coextensive statement if an NP in the former is replaced with a coextensive NP in the latter; see also Jaszczolt, 1999); the reason has to do with the use of verbs of propositional attitudes. Suppose that we have some latitude in shifting freely from one mode of presentation to another in paraphrasing a sentence (subject to the constraints formalized above), thus allowing for Leibniz's law to be applied. Although we are allowed freedom in choosing modes of presentation of the same referent, we are barred from choosing a mode of presentation which, once inserted in the given proposition, would amount to our accepting that the original speaker said something implausible. Surely Galileo could not have said that the planet in which Arnold Schwarzenegger is a governor moves, because Arnold Schwarzenegger was not living in Galileo's times.

In this particular example, however, a semantic account could be confronted with a pragmatic one. Suppose we say that the contrast between (1) and (2) may be handled in terms of scope phenomena.⁴ Presumably, such an account assumes that ‘say’ is, with respect to its quantificational structure, similar to ‘believe’, hence allows the existential quantifier to take a wide scope. Semantic theory allows two logical interpretations of (2): one true and one false. Yet, as I maintain, we almost always interpret (2) in the second sense. In the case of (2), the two logical accounts are:

⁴ I would like to thank a referee for this important suggestion.

- (2a) There was an *x*, *x* is the planet where Arnold Schwarzenegger is a governor: Galileo said that it moves
 (2b) Galileo said that: There was an *x*, *x* is the planet where Arnold Schwarzenegger is governor and *x* moves.

The pragmatic point is that in normal circumstances, an utterance of (2) is to be interpreted as (2b), rather than as (2a). (2a), though no doubt rare, is not altogether impossible: think, for instance, of a conversation in which the participants know that (1) is true, but do not know that Schwarzenegger is governor. Even so, (2) would probably be odd, and it is pragmatics that establishes this. Of course the problem, for pragmatics, is to specify why logical form (2b) gets chosen.

Suppose we stick to the notion expressed so far that an indirect report can represent one or more voices. (2a) is clearly a case where two voices must be taken into consideration: the reporting speaker's and the reported speaker's. (2b) is clearly a case where there is only one voice to be considered: the reported speaker's. If we adopt Sperber and Wilson's (1986) suggestion that an assumption (an input) is more relevant if either (a) it has greater positive cognitive effects or (b) it involves smaller processing efforts, we can easily understand why (2b) gets standardly chosen. In fact, (2b) involves smaller processing efforts, as the hearer only has to allocate the reported speaker's voice, without any need to separate this voice from the reporting speaker's.

There are many examples similar to Higginbotham's that need to be accounted for. In fact, while in a few cases replacement of an NP with another co-referring one is barred, in general, unless problems arise, such substitutions are possible in indirect reports, especially when they aid understanding on the part of the hearer. So the real problem, for the semanticist, is not so much to say that substitutions are not possible in indirect reports, but to specify those cases in which substitutions are blocked and to explain why.

One such case is the following. Suppose John utters: "A fortnight is a two week period". Assuming that in transformations from direct to indirect speech, NP substitutions are licit, one could then report the following: "John said that a fortnight is a fortnight". This is a tautology which did not appear in the original speech act. An easy way out of this problem is to say that if no tautology appeared in the original speech act, it must not appear in the reported speech act either, because it will give the hearer the impression that the tautology also occurred in the original speech act (which is not the case).

But this is the easy way out. The real problem is whether uttering "John said that a fortnight is a fortnight" does capture the original speech act. There is no reason to believe that it does. The original speech act, in fact, is motivated by the goal of explaining a word by having recourse to another, easier understood expression. The reported speech act, on the other hand, does not explain anything: it merely establishes an identity between a word and itself. Since the illocutionary force of the original speech act (of explanation) is lost, due to a transformation that replaced a term with a co-referential one, it is fair to say that such substitutions are not legitimate when going from direct speech to indirect speech reports. This presumably follows from a general semantic principle, worked out by Aston:

A meaning of a sentence fits it to play a distinctive role in communication just because that meaning consists in the sentence's being usable to perform illocutionary acts of a certain type (Aston, 2000:282).

We are now in a position to explain what is odd about substitutions of terms with the same sense within indirect reports. Platts (1997) is puzzled by the fact that, contrary to what might be expected (based on Frege's explanation of why substitution fails in intensional contexts: in such contexts, NPs refer to their senses), when it comes to indirect reports, one obtains strange results by substituting an NP with another NP having the same sense (where not only coreference, but identity of sense are at stake). Consider what happens when we replace 'oculist' with 'eye-doctor' in the sentence: "John said that an oculist is an eye-doctor". The resulting report "John said that an eye-doctor is an eye-doctor" may be rejected as false (or at least inaccurate) by John, since his original speech act did not contain the repetition which resulted from the substitution. For Platts, a way out of the puzzle would be to deny that 'oculist' and 'eye-doctor' have the same sense (but this would amount to denying that the words are synonymous). Another way out is by saying, as I have done for the previous example, that substitutions of co-referring or synonymous expressions are prohibited when they severely distort the nature of the original speech act. In the case we are discussing, the original speech act is an explanation, in which a more difficult term is explained via a less difficult one. If we replace the more difficult word with a synonymous, less difficult one, we lose the pragmatic force of the utterance, which was meant to be an explanation.

We can also couch this explanation in the framework of Relevance Theory. If a transformation results in a different speech act being registered, then it is clear that what forbids the transformation is the RT assumption that greater

processing efforts (as involved here) will result in a less relevant proposition. A transformation that obscures the original speech act will result in a blend of two voices, whereas an interpretation that merely promotes one voice keeps processing efforts lower.

7. Indirect reports, indexicals, and speech acts

It makes sense at this point to dwell on the interaction between indirect speech reports and indexicals. Among modes of presentation, the indexical has a special status. When a person says “I”, she is presenting herself not only as the person who is speaking, but also as the experiencer of a special state of perception: the “I” mode presents the subject of a special type of experience, one that is privy to a person who has privileged (direct) access to the speaker’s thoughts and being (see also Zeevat, 1997:163). There is a substantial difference between saying:

(3) I am happy

and

(4) Alessandro is happy.

(3), through the “I” mode of presentation, makes it clear that the state of perception “happy” (attributed to the subject) is experienced directly by the person who speaks or thinks. By contrast, (4) attributes a state to a subject by implying that such an attribution is based on an external mode of inference:

e.g.

Alessandro is dancing at a party

Alessandro dances only when he is happy

[

Alessandro is happy.

It would be misleading to utter the third person statement (4) in case the person who speaks (or thinks) is speaking of himself: (4) implies that the attribution is based on an external mode of inference, whereas an internal mode of inference (direct perception) is implied in first person attributions.

Levinson (2004) notices that it will not do, in many cases, to replace the indexical pronominal “I” with a third person paraphrase (e.g. “Stephen Levinson”). The contexts he has in mind are mainly those of identity statements such as:

(5) I am Stephen Levinson.

It is obvious that, by replacing the indexical pronominal “I” with a third person paraphrase, one obtains a (relatively) uninformative sentence:

(6) Stephen Levinson is Stephen Levinson.

Now, while Levinson’s point is to show that the indexical mode of presentation has a special status, his example also throws light on the mechanism of indirect speech reports. In fact, it goes without saying that it will not do to report the utterance (5) by saying:

(7) He said that Stephen Levinson is Stephen Levinson.

Obviously, ‘He said that I am Stephen Levinson’ and ‘He said that Stephen Levinson is Stephen Levinson’ do not have the same meaning (semantic import): whereas in the first sentence, we find a pronominal, in the same syntactic position in the second sentence a full name occurs.⁵ Even if the two sentences in context may end up having the same

⁵ I thank a referee for this not uninteresting observation.

truth-conditions, intuitively we know that they count as different assertions. So it appears that a semantic account, amplified by filling in the indexical elements, does not suffice to distinguish between the two resulting statements. We need to know the purpose of the speech act.

In fact, the indirect speech report should also inform the hearer of the type of speech act performed by the original speaker when saying what he said. (7) is not a good indirect report because, by replacing the indexical mode of presentation with a third person paraphrase, the speaker has managed to obscure the original relationship between the indexical mode of presentation and the actual speech act: the speaker was introducing himself by an identity statement. In introductions, the indexical mode of presentation is crucial, because it renders the identity statement informative. By replacing the indexical mode of presentation with a third person paraphrase, the identity statement is *ipso facto* made uninformative, as seen in (8):

(8) Stephen Levinson is Stephen Levinson.

While this is still an identity statement, it is not an introductory speech act. The introductory speech act needs to establish an identity between the indexical mode of presentation and another mode of presentation. This is the “change [it has to] bring about in the existing state of affairs”, to put it with Mey’s (1993:111–112) words. Pragmatic equivalence (or the lack of it) is the reason that substitution of an NP is sometimes allowed, sometimes not; this is in perfect accord with Jaszczolt’s (2003) remark that equivalence of meaning is not just a matter of semantic type, but also of pragmatics: sometimes, according to Jaszczolt, two completely different sentences may be pragmatically equivalent, as amply documented by her examples, based on contrasts between languages.

Hence a plausible generalization for the case of indirect speech reports is that:

A mode of presentation cannot be replaced with a third person paraphrase if such a change will inevitably obscure the kind of speech act performed in uttering the original sentence.

Again, I would like to connect my considerations with Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) Principle of Relevance. If an indirect report effects a transformation that has a bearing on the resulting speech act, it will put the hearer to greater processing costs. Suppose we can freely transform from ‘He said he is Stephen Levinson’ to ‘He said Stephen Levinson is Stephen Levinson’; here, we move from an indirect report from which we can deduce the speech act performed by the original speaker to an indirect report where the hearer must use greater inferential powers to infer the nature of the original speech act. The hearer has clearly to embark on greater processing costs and the input is thus not ideally relevant.

8. Choice of mode of presentation and the hearer

Some may feel that the choice of a certain lexeme (instead of a competing one) in an indirect speech report is not a matter of having respect for what the original speaker actually said, but rather of ensuring that the hearer will be able to identify the referent. If the purpose of an indirect speech report is to inform a hearer H of what a speaker S said in a prior speech act, so that H can utilize the knowledge imparted by what S said (assuming that what he said transmitted S’s knowledge), then it goes without saying that it would be better to choose an NP (or mode of presentation) recognizable by the hearer, as otherwise the purpose of the indirect speech act would not be fulfilled. Jürgen Habermas is quite right in saying that

By describing behaviour as an intentional action, we take the perspective of the actor himself; but this agent’s point of view signifies a two-tiered intentional relation to something in the world, namely the relation to the cognitive representation of reality that is valid for the agent and to the subjective attitude that the agent takes towards this representation of reality (Habermas, 2001:113).

The fact that indirect reports may use modes of presentation that are different from those used in the original speech acts, shows that Habermas’ two levels of intentionality are at work in indirect reports.⁶ The Russellian proposition of the *that*-clause (the cognitive representation of reality that Habermas alludes to), and the intention to use a mode of

⁶ It is clear from the discussion that Habermas aims to reconcile Brentano’s notion of intentionality (thoughts are intentional in that they are directed towards objects and contents) with a teleological notion of intentionality.

presentation that is more familiar to the hearer so that the hearer can utilize the knowledge imparted by the *that*-clause to carry out whatever action he deems necessary. The “subjective attitude” Habermas speaks of is the intention to act in a certain way, or the propositional attitude of desiring to act in a certain way.

Indirect reports, from what we have seen, are often associated with perlocutionary purposes; thus, it is correct to say that “minds are partial causes of events in the world and in other minds” (Zeevat, 1997:156). If the purpose of the indirect report is to provide a hearer with access to what the original speaker has said (so that the hearer can gain some knowledge of the situation), then it is uncontroversial that the choice of an NP (or other discourse items) must be such that it can guide the hearer towards identifying the referent. However, there are constraints on such a choice. The NP chosen must not distort what the original speaker said in such a way that, faced with the indirect speech report, the original speaker is likely to say that he does not recognize his intention in that report.

9. Indirect reports and expressives

As an influential contemporary sociolinguist has expressed it, we can sometimes be faced with a text or an utterance “whose ambiguous linguistic form makes it ‘double-voiced’ . . . with an ambivalence of voice” (Fairclough, 1992:108). The practice of indirect reports involves being able to separate out what is attributable to the original sayer and what is attributable to the current speaker, even if both appear in a *that*-clause. So a useful principle is the following:

Do not take everything that appears in the *that*-clause of an indirect report as belonging to the voice of the original speaker whose speech act is being reported.

A complementary principle is the following:

Separate the elements of the *that*-clause that contribute to the voice of the original speaker from those that embody the voice of the reporter; do this by exploiting the contextual clues that are available for this purpose.

An important example illustrating the role contextual clues play in separating the two voices is drawn from Potts’s (2005) discussion of conventional implicatures and in particular of expressive acts (the author takes expressive acts to be a special class of adjectives that never contribute to the content at issue):

- 9) Edna is at her friend Chuck’s house. Chuck tells her that he thinks all his red vases are ugly. He approves only of his blue ones. He tells Edna that she can take one of his red vases. Edna thinks the red vases are lovely, selects one and returns home to tell her housemate:
 ‘Chuck said I could have one of his lovely vases!’ (Potts, 2005:18).

Pott says:

We easily recognize that Edna is contributing the adjective (lovely); the utterance expresses two propositions: (i) that Chuck said Edna could have one of his vases; (ii) Edna thinks Chuck’s vases are lovely (Potts, 2005:18).

It is not entirely clear to me that Potts is right here. In the absence of appropriate information, Edna’s housemate cannot be expected to understand that ‘lovely’ refers to Edna’s, not to Chuck’s, voice. In the actual situation, the housemate has got no contextual clues for separating Edna’s voice from Chuck’s in the *that*-clause attributed to Chuck. While Edna and the readers (who have access to the whole story) are able to separate out Edna’s and Chuck’s voices, Edna’s housemate presumably can do so only after Edna has narrated the whole story, as we have heard it above. One obvious way to go is to refrain from attributing to Chuck elements of the *that*-clause whenever it is clear from the context that they do not reflect (but rather contradict) Chuck’s opinion. In this case, the context is used to filter out from the *that*-clause those elements (of meaning) that do not reflect the opinion of the original utterer. Without full contextual knowledge, it is impossible to separate the original speaker’s voice from that of the reporter, as some underdetermination of meaning inevitable will be at play.

Again, we may want to frame this discussion in Relevance Theoretical terms. If we accept that an assumption is less relevant in case it puts the hearer to undue processing efforts, then at the same time we are able to explain why, in case we lack contextual information about Chuck’s beliefs, Edna’s utterance ‘Chuck said I could have one of his lovely vases’, will be typically interpreted as expressing Chuck’s and not Edna’s voice. Having two voices in the same

utterance augments the processing costs, and there would be no contextual assumptions that enable a plausible way of distinguishing the two voices. Conversely, when there are contextual assumptions that allow us to distinguish the two voices, the extra processing costs will be offset by rich positive contextual effects.⁷

10. Final remarks

This paper has endeavoured to contribute to the theory of indirect reports by highlighting its societal aspects. It has done this by appealing to the notion of linguistic practices and by formulating a number of principles that are central to these practices. Yet, it would be good if we could find out some general rationale for the fact that sometimes co-referential expressions are inter-substitutable in that-clauses (of indirect reports), while sometimes they are not. I believe that a proper filter is to be found in speech act theory. If we agree that saying is not just a locutionary, but also an illocutionary act, then transformations of what a speaker originally said can be tolerated, provided that the illocutionary act originally made is preserved in the final indirect speech report. This is the way the filter works. Now we understand why an NP cannot be replaced with an NP that contains an epithet (e.g. “That bastard”), since, by so doing, the assertion will ipso facto be transformed into a speech act of insulting, which is a different from asserting.

There are those who will disagree with me on this, and may voice an objection such as the following:

If you utter ‘I voted for Obama’, and I am a McCain supporter, then when I am talking to my fellow McCain supporters I may report your utterance by saying ‘X said that X voted for that bastard’.⁸

However, there is in this counterexample a deictic element that, combined with the epithet, gives the hearer enough clues to tell apart what is said by the reported speaker and what is said by the reporting speaker. For this reason, the counterexample does not work. A better counterexample would be something like the following: ‘Obama said that he voted for McCain the bastard;’. Here there are no sufficient contextual clues to tell apart what Obama said from what the reporter said, and thus the indirect report is not felicitous.

However, allowing the above objection to be taken seriously, one could consider the supposed grounds for not accepting my account that some transformations strongly imply that the original speaker is responsible for the epithet. Among these grounds, one could mention that contexts in which the hearer of the indirect report knows that the reporter has a negative attitude toward the individual, and knows that the reported speaker does not, are not necessarily rare. In such contexts, there would be no tendency of the hearer to impute the epithet to the reported speaker.

The counterexample discussed above (the Obama/McCain example) would indeed suit this type of contexts, and I agree that in these cases, the hearer of the report will use whatever contextual clues are available to distinguish the reporter’s voice from the reported speaker’s. The problem is what happens when there are no such strong contextual clues. What is the default procedure in such contexts? I assume that the purpose of an indirect report is to give voice to a reported speaker; it is this purpose that prevails. The alternative I envisage to my own solution is to try to establish, from case to case, and not invoking any default procedure, whose voice is in question. Even so, a default procedure is probably what captures best the fact that indirect reports traditionally have served a well-defined function, viz., to report, at some level of precision, the voice of the reported speaker.

11. Conclusion

Pragmatic theory will be able to take a big step forward if we extend the discussion of indirect speech reports from its legitimate position within the philosophy of language, towards involving a societal perspective. In this connection,

⁷ A referee has remarked that it is the semantical assumptions that allow us to interpret (9) in a way which makes what Edna says true, in case we know that Chuck thinks the vases are ugly but Edna does not. Presumably the referee thinks we could analyse (9) semantically as characterised by a scope ambiguity and as being associated with two logical forms:

(9a) There are two lovely vases such that Chuck said I could have one of them.

(9b) Chuck said that there are two lovely vases and I could have one of them.

As in the previous case of ambiguous logical forms, pragmatics will intervene in promoting one, rather than the other logical form. As I said earlier, the principle of relevance will generate expectations that are precise and predictable enough to guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning. Since (9a) involves greater processing efforts, (9b) will be selected instead, unless there is a rich context in which contextual assumptions will enable one to separate the two voices (the reported speaker’s and the reporting speaker’s), thereby promoting (9a) as a reasonable interpretation.

⁸ This use is called ‘pseudo de re’.

it is instructive to investigate the societal principles having a bearing on the transformations involved in the transition from direct speech to indirect speech reports, in particular, those pertaining to modes of presentation. The use of some, rather than other, modes of presentation is a matter of being situated in a certain context. It follows that contextual information severely limits what transformations will be allowed when it comes to modes of presentation. Such an account become even more plausible if it is framed in the context of Relevance Theory, in particular if one can show how the constraints on the interpretation of indirect reports follow from the principle of relevance. This is what I have tried to do in the present article.

I will end my paper by voicing a thorny objection to myself. Do I really believe that my societal considerations can be reconciled with Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance? While there may be more than one answer to this question, my personal take on the matter answer is that, even if Relevance Theory bases itself on cognitive principles, it could be used to justify social practices. There is no reason why social practices should not conform to cognitive principles that have been able to explain much of language behaviour so far. Language behaviour is, ipso facto, a social practice. On the one hand, social practices can be sensitive to cognitive principles and be influenced by them; on the other hand, since social life has a life of its own, habits and practices which become consolidated are propagated and transmitted to further generations as unmotivated practices. Sperber (1996) has shown that the principle of relevance plays a major role in creating cultural practices. Cultural practices which conform to this principle have greater chances of survival and will be more likely to be transmitted from one generation to the next. In the case of linguistic practices, I propose that on the one hand, the principle of relevance will play a role in promoting one cultural practice rather than another; on the other hand, it will play a role in the preservation and transmission of the practice, as other competing practices will be ruled out due to cognitive considerations. This is what makes certain practices better candidates for propagation than others.

There is one further sense in which the practices I have considered in this article as being determined by the principle of relevance, are social. The fact that the principle of relevance creates expectations that are precise and predictable enough to guide the hearer toward the expected meaning guarantees that what is cognitively convenient also becomes socially convenient, as one will be certain that an interpretative pattern or a social practice that is more economical will be more likely to be adopted by society. Thus, there is every reason to believe that society will orient towards those practices that are more in line with the principle of relevance.

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