RE-CONTEXTUALIZING REPORTED SPEECH: SOME REMARKS ON LITERARY PRAGMATICS*

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1. INTRODUCTION: ABSENCE OF DIALOGIC DATA

Apart from a few recent exceptions, students of reported speech have long neglected the existence of examples such as the one that follows, perhaps since the days of Latin grammar:

(1) GARRISON: This was a military-style ambush from start to finish. This was a coup d’etat with Lyndon Johnson waiting in the wings.

BROUSSARD: Oh, okay! So now you’re sayin’ Lyndon Johnson was involved? Huh? The President of the United States?

(1)

(Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, JFK)

The underlined part can be characterized as an indirect speech form: It has a reporting clause (“you’re sayin’”) and it has a subordinate clause that indirectly represents what has just been said (“Lyndon Johnson was involved”). Some, however, might object to this characterization, since it does not report an utterance or thought of someone else to the hearer. Rather, it repeats indirectly the immediately preceding utterance of the hearer, thereby indicating that a discrepancy in opinion exists between the speaker and the hearer (i.e., Broussard disagrees with Garrison’s conspiracy theory on the assassination of JFK). Then, how should we treat speech representations such as (1)?

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1 I have used pieces of fictional dialogue in (1) and (2), but, of course, the same phenomena are observable in naturally occurring conversation.
Are they essentially different from the traditionally acknowledged reported speech, although both
share the same formal characteristics?

This article aims to present a new perspective that includes usual instances of reported speech
and dialogic uses of speech representation in the same picture. This attempt is especially impor-
tant when one thinks of what Jacob Mey calls literary pragmatics (Mey, 2000, 2001). His literary
pragmatics explores the language of written fictional narratives, whereas pragmatics proper deals
with dialogic data. Naturally, we need a point of view to encompass the distance between dialogue
and literary narrative. And the issue of reported speech gives us a good opportunity to think about
this distance.

2. ENCOMPASSING THE DISTANCE: DIALOGIC REPETITION AND
NARRATIVE REPORTING

2.1. Communicative failure and dialogic repetition

(1) demonstrates a dialogic use of indirect discourse. In a dialogic situation, direct discourse is
also used, although less frequently than indirect discourse, for a similar purpose.

(2) ANNIE: The only question is, Will it change my wife?
ALVY: (a) Will it change your wife?
ANNIE: (b) Will it change my life?
ALVY: (c) Yeah, but you said, “Will it change my wife!”
ANNIE: No, I don’t. (Laughing) (d) I said, “Will it change my life.” Alvy.
ALVY: You said, “Will it change …” Wife. Will it change …
ANNIE: (Yelling out, angry) Life. I said, “life.”
ALVY: (To the audience) (e) She said, “Will it change my wife.”

(W. Allen, Annie Hall)

(2c) and (2d) both represent dialogic uses of direct discourse. The two speakers do not
report an utterance. They quote what they think they have just heard or said in order to pro-
duce some evidence for their argument: (2c) definitely claims that Annie has made a slip of
the tongue, and (2d) insists otherwise. Here again, communication is not on the right track.
Alvy’s innocent indication of Annie’s slip of the tongue (2a), nurtured by their stubbornness,
has grown into a quarrel. In this kind of situation, direct speech forms are occasionally used
in order to demonstrate in a seemingly objective manner what has just been said by conversa-
tional participants.