

Commitment Attribution and Anaphoric Dependencies in Free Indirect Discourse

In the following examples underlined sentences represent so-called free indirect discourse (FID):

- (1) Today she was in here to think, no tears would be shed. She promised that to herself.
- (2) Thus she spent all day and the next morning, again took the blanket and the pillow and the little volume of Stevenson, and went into the garden. So will she now live, in the garden under the Akazen, no matter what happened in the world.
- (3) I was struck by the willingness of almost everybody in the room, the senators as eagerly as the witnesses, to exchange their civil liberties for an illusory state of perfect security. They seemed to think that democracy was just a fancy word for corporate capitalism [...] Why humor people, especially poor people, by listening to their idiotic theories of social justice?

Example (1) is a paradigmatic case of FID as it is studied by formal semantic theories: it combines features of both indirect and direct discourse in that personal pronouns and tenses express the perspective of the reporter (narrator), while all other material (temporal adverbials etc.) express the perspective of the reportee (protagonist). Example (2) – which is a translation from Russian preserving the tenses of the original (see Fludernik 1993 on FID in Russian) – is different insofar as only the personal pronoun, but not the tense, belongs to the narrator's perspective. In (3), finally, there are no tenses and pronouns that should be interpreted with respect to the narrator's context, but the sentence is naturally read as FID nonetheless.

Formal semantic theories of FID developed in recent years (cf. Schlenker 2004, Sharvit 2008, Eckardt 2014, Maier 2015) differ greatly not only in the details of their formal treatment, but also in the intuitions about and aspects of FID which they take as central. In effect, while largely successful in explaining what they take to be its main features, they suffer from different but complementary problems – and in trying to solve them face the risk of becoming extraordinarily complex. The objective of this paper is to develop a new way of looking at FID which combines some of the insights of existing theories while offering a simpler account of its properties.

The approach I suggest relies more strongly on pragmatic considerations, but offers also a novel account of the underlying semantics. It is based on intuitive ideas about the literary function of FID and the reader's interpretation of it. With respect to the latter, an important aspect of a reader's interpretation of FID must consist in *recovering* the original utterance or thought through “replacing” (if necessary) the pronouns and tenses actually used in the text by those that *would have been* used by the protagonist. I propose a theory of FID consisting of two components: an account of the pragmatics of discourse interpretation in terms of commitment attribution, which makes place for commitments to be attributed to non-speaker agents, and a semantics for pronouns and tenses in FID which treats them as anaphorically dependent on the putative pronouns and tenses in the “recovered” original utterance (or thought) of the protagonist. The semantic component is entirely subordinated to the pragmatic one and in fact optional: in instances such as (3), the target sentence is interpreted in a standard way semantically, but pragmatically its content is construed as a commitment of the protagonist rather than the narrator.

1. COMMITMENT ATTRIBUTION

To account theoretically for the interpretation of FID-sentences as representing protagonist's rather than narrator's utterances, I propose a model of discourse update which keeps track, besides the common ground, of individual commitments of discourse participants (cf. Farkas and Bruce 2010). Following Morency et al. 2008, I focus on *commitment attribution* as an element of hearer's interpretation, rather than commitment as a speaker category. Importantly, in this sense, commitments can be attributed to other agents besides the speaker, e.g. in indirect reports. This idea can be combined with the "scorekeeping" account of Lewis 1979 to yield an abstract model of hearers' interpretation in discourse. In this sense, commitment attribution is the hearer's way of tracking a speaker's conversational moves. In the case at hand, the reader keeps score by attributing commitments separately to the narrator and to the protagonist(s). In an example like (3) nothing else is needed to obtain the intended reading of FID. In examples like (1)-(2) the putative original utterance represented by the given sentence needs to be recovered first.

2. ANAPHORIC TREATMENT OF PRONOUNS AND TENSES IN FID

Hunter 2014 argues against a traditional distinction between extra-linguistic context dependency (indexicals, demonstratives) and discursive context dependency (anaphora), and proposes a unified account of both based on a generalized DRT-style treatment of anaphora. On this account, structured discourse contexts contain antecedents for expressions that refer to entities in the extra-linguistic context. The distinction between two kinds of context-sensitivity is preserved in different resolution strategies for indexical and anaphoric (uses of) expressions.

I propose to extend this account to the use of pronouns and tenses in FID and to treat them as anaphorically dependent on antecedents in the putative original utterance of the protagonist – pronouns and tenses that *would have been* used in the original utterance. This requires an interpretation for FID-sentences which takes the structured context to contain the extra-linguistic parameters (speaker, time etc.) of the original utterance, which provide the antecedents for FID pronouns and tenses. Such an interpretation conforms to the pragmatic mechanism described above in section 1: the resolution of anaphoric dependencies of narrator-oriented elements makes it possible to "recover" the form of the original utterance, which can then be interpreted in a standard way, but as the protagonist's, not the narrator's speech or thought.

As a background for this approach to FID, consider the following example of simple ID:

(4) [John:] I am sick.

(5) John said that he was sick.

One way of understanding the role of the pronoun and tense in the report is to treat them as anaphorically dependent on antecedents in the reported utterance: *he* in (5) picks out the referent of *I* in (4), past tense refers to the time to which present tense referred originally. Note that in non-SOT languages such as Russian, the present tense will be used in the report. It can be taken to be a simple fact of the respective grammars that the anaphoric dependent in an indirect report, of which the present tense is the antecedent in the original, is the past tense in English and present tense in Russian. This easily extends to FID, accounting for the difference between (2) and (1). Another advantage of this approach is that it deals easily with the use of pronouns with non-matching gender features, and potentially also with the use of proper names to refer to the addressee. (See Maier 2015 for the most recent discussion of both problems.)

REFERENCES: **Eckardt** 2014, *The Semantics of Free Indirect Discourse*; **Farkas and Bruce** 2010, "On Reacting to Assertions and Polar Questions", *Journal of Semantics*, 27; **Fludernik** 1993, *The Fictions of Language and the Language of Fiction*; **Hunter** 2014, "Structured Contexts and Anaphoric Dependencies", *Philos Studies* 168; **Lewis** 1979 "Scorekeeping in a Language Game", *Journal of Philos Logic*, 8; **Maier** 2015, "Quotation and Unquotation in Free Indirect Discourse", *Mind&Language* 30; **Morency et al.** 2008, "Explicitness, implicitness and commitment attribution: A cognitive pragmatic approach", *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 22; **Schlenker** 2004, "Context of Thought and Context of Utterance", *Mind&Language*, 19; **Sharvit** 2008, "The Puzzle of Free Indirect Discourse", *Ling and Phil* 31.