

Direct and Indirect Speech: A Preliminary Questionnaire

*René van den Berg**

This questionnaire is meant to help you as a translator (either national or expatriate) in analysing a particular area of the language you are working in, namely direct and indirect speech. It assumes you have collected a number of narrative texts which contain direct and indirect speech, and that you are working on translation. The orientation of this questionnaire is primarily linguistic and as such it could lead to an article on this topic or to a section or chapter in a monograph. However, the main motivation for this questionnaire comes from translation. If you can take time to find the answers to the questions below, it will help you considerably in producing natural style in translation. Hence I have included short notes on 'relevance for translation' (RFT for short) after some questions. I have divided the questionnaire into three parts. Part A deals with direct versus indirect speech, part B with the quote margin, and part C with vocatives.

Part A. Direct versus indirect speech

1. Does the language make a difference between direct speech (DS) and indirect speech (IS)? An English example would be:

- (a) *He said: "I cannot do it here."*
- (b) *He said that he could not do it there.*

Notice the difference in pronouns, tense, adverbs, and the optional presence of the complementizer *that*. Describe carefully the structural differences between the two. Common differences between DS and IS are pronoun references, tense, adverbs of place and time, and introducing particles ("complementizers").

* René van den Berg has worked in Indonesia for a number of years. His Ph.D. in Linguistics is from Leiden University. This is a revised version of an article written in 1992. Thanks to Marge Crofts for encouraging me to pursue this topic in the first place, to Keith Slater for encouraging publication, and to Cindi Farr for helpful comments.

Some languages have special *logophoric* pronouns used in IS to refer back to the speaker, as illustrated in the following pair:

- (c) *John said that he-LOGOPHORIC (= John) would do it*
 (d) *John said that he-NON-LOGOPHORIC (= someone else) would do it.*

Some languages do not have IS.

2. If the language has both DS and IS, try to determine the distribution of DS versus IS. Which is more common or more frequent in texts? Can you discover the function of each one? DS is usually associated with ‘vividness’ or ‘proving a point’. There is more emotional involvement in DS through the use of first and second person pronouns, interjections, vocatives, and (when spoken or read aloud) intonation. In DS, speaker attitude (who is on which side) is also easier to express. IS may signal backgrounded speech, or it may be used for initial speeches, or for less salient participants. The use of DS may correlate with reaching the ‘peak’ in a narrative. Some of these rules might be universal.

RFT: If the language never uses IS, all IS should be changed to DS. If both occur, it might still be necessary to make changes from IS to DS (or vice versa), depending on function and naturalness patterns.

3. Again, assuming that the language has both DS and IS, can you shift from IS to DS halfway during a speech?

RFT: This happens quite commonly in the NT (e.g. Mark 6:7–10). If this feature does not occur in the RL, you should probably change it all to DS.

4. Does the language make use of DS to signal non-speech events such as purpose, reason, and warning? In some languages the purpose clause in a sentence such as *I will go so that he will stay*, is coded in DS as follows: *I will go “That he stay” I-saying.*

RFT: If this is the case, major restructuring will have to take place (see [Larson 1981](#) for examples in Aguaruna).

5. Does the language have forms in between DS and IS? English and French have a so-called ‘free indirect speech’ or ‘style libre,’ but this phenomenon is possibly limited to such ‘literary’ languages. Compare the following quote, in which the pronouns and tense are those of IS, but both adverbs of time and place as in DS.

She did not know what to do. Go to him at this time of night? He would be very surprised. But tomorrow was possibly too late, and besides, he lived very near, only a few blocks from here. What a dreadful choice to make!

Notice that the basic shape is IS, but the use of *tomorrow* and *here* shows it to be ‘free indirect speech.’

RFT: probably none.

6. Do you have examples of DS within DS? An example would be: *He ordered her: “Go and tell your parents: ‘I am sorry.’”* Some languages have special ways of marking such embedded DS with particles. Describe fully.

RFT: DS within DS is fairly common in the gospels. See e.g. Mark 7:11–12 and 11:2–3. The NT even has examples of a doubly embedded speeches, as e.g. in Acts 28:25–27.

7. Can verbs of speech be used without the actual content of what was said? Examples: *They told the news to everyone. People glorified God. He rebuked them sternly. We were warned about the danger. He preached the brotherhood of all mankind.*

RFT: This is quite common in the NT. A famous example is Mark 1:4 ‘preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’. If this is rare or impossible in the target language, some or all may have to be changed to DS.

Part B. Quote margins

8. By quote margins is meant the words or phrases indicating that what follows is a quote, as e.g. *He spoke, saying: “...”* Another terms for this is ‘speech orienter’. It is helpful to divide a quote margin into three semantic components:

- a) the speaker
- b) the verb of speaking
- c) the addressee (the one being spoken to).

a) For the speaker, find out which means the language uses to refer to him/her: zero, pronominal affix/bound pronoun, full pronoun, or full noun phrase. Can they all occur in that slot? If a NP occurs, does it have modifiers; if so, up till how many? Do you find, for instance, examples of NPs with relative clauses, of the type “*Then the men who had just been ordered to come, replied, saying: “At your service, Sir”*”? This question is actually part of the larger issue of participant reference, a separate topic in the field of discourse studies.

b) For the verbs of speaking, make as complete a list as possible of all verbs that occur in that position. Find out exactly their semantic components (this will also be helpful for dictionary work). English verbs belonging to this category are, for instance, *speak, say, tell, answer, reply, query, rebuke, praise, warn, criticize, inquire*, etc. Do you have verbs showing emotion and affection in this slot, such as: “*My beloved,*” *she sighed*, “*this is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.*” “*Get off!*” *he thundered?*

RFT: Since Greek (and Hebrew even more so) are fairly ‘poor’ in this respect and only use very few verbs of speech, many English translations employ other verbs of speech, such as ‘ask’ and ‘answer’. At the same time, this might be the place where speaker attitude can be expressed (e.g. ‘warn’ instead of just ‘say’).

c) For the addressee, find out when and how often these occur, with which verbs and how they are referred to (zero, bound or free pronoun, NP, until what length).

9. Internal order of quote margin. What is the unmarked order of a, b, and c in 6 if all three elements occur? Are there alternative, marked orders? Can you account for those? Under what circumstances can one or more elements be left out?

10. Does the language use quote introducing words or particles such as ‘saying’, ‘like this’, or ‘his word’, e.g. *He spoke like this*, “...”? If so, describe fully where they occur, whether or not they are obligatory and how frequently they occur. Can such words occur on their own without speaker/verb-of-speech/addressee? In many languages quote introducers are derived from the root ‘to say/speak’ or ‘word’.

11. Does the verb of speech also occur in nominalised form, as in e.g. “*We don’t know*” was their *reply*. If this is the case, are there any restrictions? For instance, such nominalisations may only occur with certain verbs and never with an explicit addressee.

12. External order of quote margin. Does the margin normally occur before or after the quote? Can you find any rules governing this choice? Do you find simultaneous pre- and post-margins? Some languages have internal margins, as in e.g. “*Look,*” *he said*, “*this is going to be a difficult but rewarding topic.*” If the language has internal margins, notice carefully what can precede the margin, since this is usually limited (e.g. only vocatives, imperatives, exclamations, connectors, or anything up to three words).

RFT: In Greek the speech margin almost always occurs before the speech. Literal translations will tend to follow this word order, but a natural translation will try to employ all the patterns of the target language.

13. Is it possible to leave out the quote margin altogether? This is regularly the case in rapid dialogue in English when it is clear who the two participants are. Does this also occur in natural text? After how many exchanges? Some languages use a dramatic dialogue style in known folk tales, in which there is hardly any quote margin because all the characters are presumed to be known.

RFT: Dialogue without speech margin is very rare in Greek. John 21:1c (‘Are you the Prophet?’) is one of the few examples of a speech without a margin in the NT.

Part C. Vocatives

14. Vocatives are words used in calling someone or getting their attention (*Bill, please sit down*). Give a list of all natural vocatives in texts. Are they marked as vocatives in a special way, e.g. a different case ending, unusual intonation, preceded by a special vocative particle (like English *O*)? Often only names and kinship terms can fill this slot.

15. Find out when it is and is not appropriate to use vocatives and which ones to use for whom.

RFT: The use of ‘woman’ in John 2:4 in a literal translation may come across as rather rude in English. In the gospels it may be necessary to add vocatives to show speaker attitude, especially politeness. An example is Mark 6:24 ‘*What shall I ask for, mother?*’

16. Where do vocatives occur in relation to the rest of the quote? At the beginning, end, middle of the clause? Any patterns or rules that you can find?

17. Find out whether vocatives can be modified by e.g. adjectives, appositions, or relative clauses, as e.g. *You naughty child, come here!* or: *You who would like to leave, step forward.*

RFT: Modified vocatives are common in the gospels (e.g. Mark 1:24 *Jesus of Nazareth*; Mark 10:17 *Good teacher*). In some languages this is so unnatural that the attribute has to be put into a separate descriptive clause. There are some extremely long vocatives in James which may require restructuring (e.g. James 4:13).

For further reading

- Dooley, Robert A. 1989. "Suggestions for the field linguist regarding quotations." *NOL* 44:34–50.
- Dooley, Robert A., and Stephen H. Levinsohn. 2001. *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts*. Dallas: SIL. [Specifically chapter 14 "The Reporting of Conversation".]
- Larson, Mildred. 1981. "Quotations, a translation problem." *NOT* 82:2–15.
- Levinsohn, Stephen H. 2000. *Discourse features of New Testament Greek*. 2nd edition. Dallas: SIL. [Specifically Part V (chapters 13–16) "The Reporting of Conversation".]
- Wiesemann, Ursula. 1984. "How should Jesus be quoted?" *NOT* 101:27–39. ■