

Syntactic variation in direct and indirect speech constructions

Bertus van Rooy (North-West University) & Haidee Kruger (Macquarie University / North-West University)

The order of the reporting clause and reported clause is a major parameter of syntactic variation for speech reporting, in parallel ways for both direct and indirect speech. The reporting clause can precede the reported clause, as in (1a), or the reported clause can precede the reporting clause, as in (2a), for direct speech, with corresponding examples for indirect speech in (1b) and (2b).

- (1a) Maar my pa het gesê, nee my liewe kind jy gaan oorsee gaan... (PCSA)
- (1b) Troost argumenteer dat populêre definisies oor waaroor etiek gaan te wyd is. (TK, academic)
- (2a) “Ek moet protégés hê om my goeie werk voort te sit,” skerts hy. (TK, newspaper)
- (2b) Die naaste wat sy aan tradisionele kos kom, is bobotie, spesiaal vir die buitelandse toeriste, sê Carol. (TK, newspaper)

A less frequent variant is where the reporting clause is used as a parenthetic insert within the reported clause, as illustrated by (3a) for direct and (3b) for indirect speech.

- (3a) “Kind,” sê ma, “jy lyk nie so lekker nie. Wat makeer?” “Ja,” sê pa, “jy lyk soos ’n middeljarige pastoriemoeder.” (TK, magazine)
- (3b) Die werfbobbejaan, het hy hulle meegedeel, is nie ’n gewone bobbejaan nie. (TK, fiction)

In the case of direct speech, the three options are not distributed evenly in different registers (see Figure 1). For indirect speech, the option with the word order Reporting Clause – Reported Clause is the dominant variant across all registers (see Figure 2).

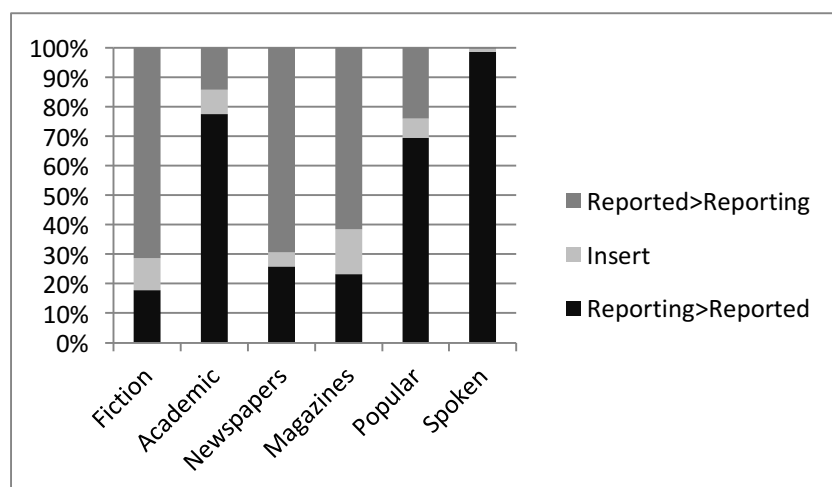


Figure 1. Syntactic variants across registers in direct speech

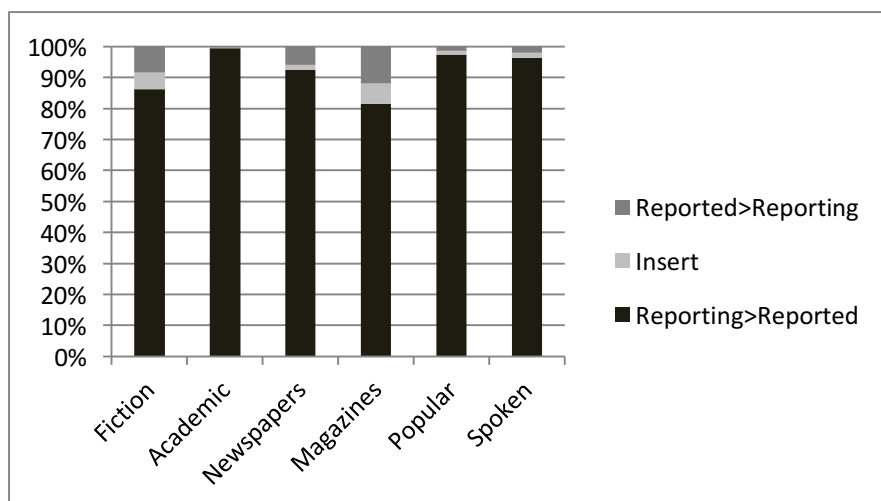


Figure 2. Syntactic variants across registers in indirect speech

The register distribution is informative about the potential function of the syntactic variation observed in Afrikaans. Indirect speech, as well as direct speech in spoken language, makes very extensive use of the default order of Reporting Clause – Reported Clause, while the other two variants are exceptional. Much more diversity is observed for direct speech in written language, which suggests that the other two variants are innovations that have their origin in the representation of direct speech in the written medium. In journalism, both newspapers and magazines, the variant Reported Clause – Reporting Clause is the preferred option for direct speech. In reportage, clearly, the words being reported are usually more significant than the sources, which are simply required to serve as guarantee that the journalist reports on actual events. In fiction, where a similar situation obtains, the dramatic effect of putting the words being spoken in dialogue first and just guiding the reader through the turn-taking to interpret the words, also dictates a preference for the inverted order. In fiction, furthermore, many instances are observed where the direct speech of different characters is reported with no reporting clause indicating who the speaker is.

Register, however, is not the only factor that conditions syntactic variation in direct and indirect speech. Following existing research in construction grammar demonstrating that choices between related syntactic variants are lexically conditioned (Coleman et al. 2016; Van Rooy & Kruger 2016), we consider the possibility that the choice between different syntactic options for direct and indirect speech is also lexically conditioned, and that there is, moreover, an interaction between lexical effects and register.

In this paper, we present the results of a multiple distinctive collexeme analysis (see Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004), to establish preferences of particular verbs for particular syntactic variants. We also aim to establish statistical relations between lemmas, registers and the type of speech reporting (direct and indirect speech) as predictors of the choice between the three syntactic variants, using a combination of logistic regression and decision tree modelling. Expanding on the quantitative analysis, we present a qualitative analysis of

extracts from texts to establish the extent of syntactic variation, and offer a functional account of the factors that give rise to the syntactic variation. We draw on theoretical concepts from construction grammar and systemic functional grammar in the course of our presentation.

References

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