

Eva Eddy

Speech and thought presentation in non-native and native speakers of English: A comparative-contrastive study of Indirect Speech versus Free Indirect Speech

Abstract

The contribution deals with speech and thought presentation in non-native and native speakers of English, using Leech and Short's (2007) model. By means of a study carried out among Slovak and Finnish learners of English, and comparing the results with those collected from native speakers of English, the author compares the respondents' preferences with regard to Indirect Speech (IS) versus Free Indirect Speech (FIS). The research showed that, in a majority of cases, the group of non-native speakers found IS more natural and accurate with respect to the original statement than FIS, while the native speakers were more inclined to opt for FIS.

Keywords: Speech and thought presentation. Indirect speech. Free indirect speech. Non-native speakers. Native speakers. English.

1. Introduction

Listening to people talk, provided they have something interesting to say, can be a fascinating activity. When one is absorbed in other people's speech, they might try to empathise and put themselves in the speaker's shoes. I believe that most people, unless with that actual end in mind, do not talk to delude the listener but rather say what they trust to be true. Personally, when later sharing with someone else what I had heard before, I would like to believe I do my best to report the message in a way that reflects the original idea in the most accurate manner possible.

This, naturally, depends on the length of the period that passed between the time I heard the original utterance and the time when I report it to another person (this might be a few minutes, a few hours or perhaps even a few days) as well as what the message was (did the original speaker state a fact that is generally accepted, did they try to express how they felt, or even claimed something that, clearly, was not the case). I have always wondered whether people around me also trust that others truthfully share their feelings and whether it is reflected in the way they use non-direct speech²⁶; in other words, whether they use Free Indirect Speech (FIS) and report the original speaker's statement in a way that shows (and I realise this may be subconscious) they believe the original speaker was telling the truth, or do

²⁶ I have purposefully avoided the term 'indirect speech' in an attempt to express a concept *opposite* to direct speech in as general a way as possible, which includes both indirect and free indirect speech.

they prefer to use a reporting verb (as part of IS) which suggests (again, quite possibly on a subconscious level) that although the speaker may have said so, it might not be true. I realise this area is also widely studied in the corpus of literary works (Leech and Short, 2007; Semino, 2004; Beck, 2012) as well as with regard to political ideologies embedded in discourse (Van Dijk, 1989, 1998, 2006; Fox, 2004); however, my interest in the present research study is focused on the general population and how they use language in everyday life without a deliberate intention to impose an ideology. Nevertheless, there is an underlying ideology even in utterances by these language users in their choosing of specific words to present what other people meant and expressed.

2. Speech and thought presentation

Anything people choose to say (whether they realise it or not) represents a style, which is why the concept of reporting is an integral part of stylistics. Jeffries and McIntyre (2010, p. 72) claim that “[...] style is made up of a series of choices among options provided by the language”. Such choices can have an effect on several levels. Following Halliday’s (1971) concept of ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of the language, they can influence how the world is represented by the language user; how language is used for mediation; and how linguistic items influence the way the discourse works. The present study focuses on what choices language users make and what potential such choices have with regard to preserving or deviating from the original message. I do not believe that, in everyday discourse, language users communicate with the specific aim of promoting an ideology. However, according to Jeffries (2010, p. 6), “[a]ll texts are ideological” (her italics). I believe this also applies to single utterances and the way language users choose to report them. This is supported by Jeffries’ (2010, p. 7) claim that “all text producers have the *potential* to produce hidden ideologies” (her italics) and that “there is no possibility for any discourse to be free of ideas and, therefore, ideology”. The question would have to be posed whether such a statement involves a conscious attempt to pose an ideology (the reporter²⁷ makes an effort to persuade or manipulate) or an unconscious act on the part of the speaker occurs; this is, however, not the focus of the present research paper.

²⁷ In this paper, the word *reporter* will be used instead of *narrator*. In spite of the fact that Leech and Short (1981, 2007) and Jeffries (2010) use the latter, it evokes a literary environment. Due to the nature of the data, the term *reporter* is used throughout this research study.

Every single time a person reports what they had heard before, they make a choice which affects the way the listener views the original message (naturally, there is a variability in how those who hear the message will receive it); in other words, it determines what they understand was said and, possibly, what the original speaker meant by it. By opting for one way or another, the reporter has the power to, potentially, decide whether what they heard is to be considered true or whether they would rather not be responsible for deciding whether the original speaker actually meant what they said and leave this decision to the listener.

To make clear what options the reporter has to hand, I will use Leech and Short's (2007) model of speech and thought presentation. In their understanding, the main distinction lies in the difference between direct and indirect speech. When one uses Direct speech (DS), this is a faithful account of what was said. Indirect speech (IS), on the other hand, expresses what was said in the reporter's choice of words. Jeffries (2010, p. 132) claims, referring to the models proposed by Leech – Short (2007) and Semino – Short (2004), that a number of different kinds of speech presentation are possible:

- (1) Direct speech (DS): *She said "I disagree wholeheartedly"*.
- (2) Indirect speech (IS): *She said that she disagreed*.
- (3) Free indirect speech (FIS): *She disagreed wholeheartedly*.
- (4) Narrator's report of speech (NRS): *She spoke*.
- (5) Narrator's report of speech act (NRSA): *She disagreed*.

Jeffries (2010) also claims that the above model (as well as other tools from the designed set for critical discourse analysis) “can be used [...] to establish what a text is *doing*” (her italics). I, moreover, believe that it can be of help when trying to establish how and why a text was created. This will be further explained and explored in the research characteristics and results below.

In the present study, IS and its use are compared and contrasted with that of FIS. Therefore, I would like to describe these two concepts in slightly more detail. Adapting Semino's (2004, p. 235) understanding of IS and FIS to non-literary contexts, when using Indirect speech (IS), the reporter has opted for a presentation of an utterance by means of a reporting clause (e.g. ‘she said’) followed by a reported clause. Semino also claims the language used in the reported clause, such as pronouns, tense, deixis, lexis, etc., is selected as seen from the perspective of the reporter. To use an example that was presented to the respondents involved in the present study, one could report in the following way: *Lucy said she was really excited about their trip to Paris*. Free indirect speech (FIS), on the other hand,

is a presentation of an utterance without the use of a reporting clause (e.g. 'he said'). The language that is used, such as lexis, deixis, or grammatical structures, partly reflects the position of the reporter (especially the tense and pronouns) and partly that of the original speaker. For instance: *Lucy was/is really excited about their trip to Paris*. When using IS, tense shift is usually applied; however, according to Leech and Short (2007), historical present can be found in narration. The present study involved same-day reporting (see Subchapter 3 below for more detail) suggesting the state of the matter has not yet changed; thus, present tense was used instead of a past form.

The study was designed on the basis of the above model in order to determine whether two non-native groups of different nationalities prefer the use of IS or FIS when reporting various types of utterances and to compare their views with those of native speakers. The way the research was carried out is described in the following subchapter.

3. Data and methodology

As I teach Slovak university students of English as a foreign language and I also had the opportunity to approach Finnish university students of a similar major, I thought it would be interesting to find out whether there are any similarities or differences in the ways these two groups view the above concept. As there is a general belief Scandinavians acquire a large amount of their English from other resources than formal instruction, my expectation was their results would approximate those of native speakers to a higher degree in comparison to the data provided by Slovak speakers who learn the majority of their skills in English as a foreign language at school. At the time of the research, the subjects had been taking formal instruction in English for a minimum of 10 years and had a good understanding of and skill in the use of direct and indirect speech. Each group comprised 35 students. I also approached the same number of adult native English speakers to see how their preferences compared to those of non-native speakers. Depending on availability, the respondents were either approached in person or electronically.

The subjects were presented with a dialogue between two people (a couple) who they were (for the purposes of the research) to consider friends, and who they heard discussing a work-related situation affecting their holiday plans. Having read the dialogue in its entirety, the respondents were then presented with two ways of reporting (IS and FIS) selected parts of the dialogue. They were asked to imagine they were reporting what they had heard later that

same day to someone who also knows the two original speakers and, keeping this in mind, choose the way they believed was more natural for them as well as accurate with respect to the original message. The information about same-day reporting was crucial in deciding to use present tense rather than a past form in FIS, while maintaining back-shifting in IS. While using natural language, the dialogue was constructed artificially for the purposes of the research in question and included various types of utterances on the part of the dialogue participants (stating a fact, expressing a feeling, expressing a wish, describing one's abilities) in order to study whether the subjects would choose a different way of reporting. Table 1 below shows the utterances that were included in the dialogue presented.

Table 1: Direct speech statements and their non-direct speech representations as presented to the respondents

FACTS		
Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Free Indirect Speech
Peter: Paris will still be as beautiful next month.	Peter said Paris would still be as beautiful the following month.	Peter thinks Paris will still be as beautiful the following month.
Lucy: She is still rather ill.	Lucy said her grandma was still rather ill.	Lucy's grandma is still rather ill.
Lucy: It's definitely worth a try.	Lucy said it was definitely worth a try.	Lucy believes it is definitely worth a try.
FEELINGS		
Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Free Indirect Speech
Lucy: I'm really excited about our trip to Paris next week.	Lucy said she was really excited about their trip to Paris.	Lucy is really excited about their trip to Paris.
Peter: I'm rather disappointed with how my boss treats me.	Peter said he was rather disappointed with how his boss treated him.	Peter is rather disappointed with how his boss treats him.
Lucy: Oh, no, now I'm really upset.	Lucy said she was really upset.	Lucy is really upset.
ABILITIES		
Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Free Indirect Speech
Peter: And I'm good at my job.	Peter said he was good at his job.	Peter is good at his job.
Lucy: I'm great at looking after people and cheering them up.	Lucy said she was great at looking after people and cheering them up.	Lucy is great at looking after people and cheering them up.
WISHES		

Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Free Indirect Speech
Peter: Well, I wish we could go.	Peter said he wished they could go.	Peter wishes they could go.
Lucy: I wish you worked somewhere else.	Lucy said she wished Peter worked somewhere else.	Lucy wishes Peter worked somewhere else.
Lucy: I really want to go.	Lucy said she really wanted to go.	Lucy really wants to go.

The respondents were asked to tick either IS or FIS (based on their preferences regarding each utterance). The data they provided in this way were collected and, using simple calculations, statistics were prepared, showing the percentages found in the respondents' preferences with regard to IS and FIS in each utterance. First, each group was assessed separately; then the data were compared and contrasted with those found in the other two groups. In spite of the fact that no hypothesis was posed (as no data comparing similar groups of respondents were available), my personal expectation resulted from my subjective view that presenting someone's feelings in a non-literary environment by means of FIS is less accurate than IS, as no one can know how the original speaker actually felt. Therefore, I assumed the respondents would opt for IS using reporting verbs in these instances. On the other hand, I believe that when stating a fact, the use of a reporting verb would unnecessarily distance the subject of the clause from what is being reported; thus, I believed FIS would be a more natural way of reporting utterances of this type. I also expected there might be a difference in perceiving the presenting of someone else's feelings and abilities on the one hand and wishes and facts on the other.

4. Analysis and discussion

When evaluating the collected data, it became clear that what the reporter is trying to express matters in the respondents' choice of IS versus FIS. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 below show how what respondents opted for differed when, respectively, stating facts, expressing feelings, wishes or talking about their abilities. In the tables, highlighted are those percentages which show prevalence over the other option. The last row of each table shows the average preference, calculated from all utterances of the same type.

Table 2: Stating facts: IS versus FIS

FACTS						
Direct Speech	SLOVAKS		FINNS		THE ENGLISH	
	IS	FIS	IS	FIS	IS	FIS
I've been working there for over a year.	54.3%	45.7%	60%	40%	42.9%	57.1%
Paris will still be as beautiful next month.	71.4%	28.6%	82.9%	17.1%	42.9%	57.1%
She is still rather ill.	80%	20%	71.4%	28.6%	14.3%	85.7%
Average	68.6%	31.4%	71.4%	28.6%	33.4%	66.6%

When stating facts (cf. Table 2), both groups of non-native speakers found IS more natural and accurate with respect to the original than FIS. The average scores for all utterances being 68.6% and 71.4% respectively show that most non-native respondents would rather use a reporting verb in contrast to the group of native speakers the majority of whom (66.6%) opted for FIS. This shows a discrepancy in how the non-native speakers and native speakers involved in the research perceive reporting such utterances where facts are involved. I believe schooling may have had an effect on the choice in non-native speakers – seeing an option provided with a reporting verb, they automatically showed preference for what they extensively practised in lessons of English grammar.

Table 3: Expressing feelings: IS versus FIS

FEELINGS						
Direct Speech	SLOVAKS		FINNS		THE ENGLISH	
	IS	FIS	IS	FIS	IS	FIS
I'm really excited about our trip to Paris.	45.7%	54.3%	85.7%	14.3%	14.3%	85.7%
I'm disappointed with how my boss treats me.	57.1%	42.9%	68.6%	31.4%	57.1%	42.9%
Oh, no, now I'm really upset.	45.7%	54.3%	42.9%	57.1%	14.3%	85.7%
It's definitely worth a try.	37.1%	62.9%	48.6%	51.4%	42.9%	57.1%
Average	46.4%	53.6%	61.4%	38.6%	32.1%	67.9%

Expressing feelings, as can be seen in Table 3, showed slightly different results. First of all, not all utterances received the same non-direct speech treatment. It is rather interesting that, only when expressing disappointment, both Slovak and English speakers chose IS in contrast to expressing excitement or upset. The Finnish speakers, on the other hand, selected IS and FIS in two utterances each. On average, Slovaks showed a higher preference (albeit only slightly – 53.6%) for FIS, a larger number of the Finnish speakers (61.4%) opted for IS, while a significant majority (67.9%) of the English seemed to believe FIS represented a more natural and accurate way of reporting how someone felt at the time of speaking. Naturally, this is not conclusive and there may have been a great number of other factors that made each respondent decide the way they did.

Table 4: Expressing wishes: IS versus FIS

WISHES						
Direct Speech	SLOVAKS		FINNS		THE ENGLISH	
	IS	FIS	IS	FIS	IS	FIS
Well, I wish we could go.	54.3%	45.7%	65.7%	34.3%	42.9%	57.1%
I wish you worked somewhere else.	62.9%	37.1%	65.7%	34.3%	71.4%	28.6%
I really want to go.	45.7%	54.3%	51.4%	48.6%	14.3%	85.7%
Average	54.3%	45.7%	60.9%	39.1%	42.9%	57.1%

The results observed were rather consistent when expressing wishes, at least in the two groups of non-native speakers (cf. Table 4). First of all, all utterances received a similar non-direct speech treatment with the majority of preferences recorded in IS (a preference of 54.3% in Slovak speakers and even higher – 60.9% – in Finnish speakers). What is rather interesting, though, is the fact that the majority of the English only opted for IS when reporting the original speaker’s wish about something that did not directly concern them, while selecting FIS to report the other two utterances. Once again, this may have been caused by other factors and is, without further research, inconclusive. When comparing all three observed groups, it can be seen that the majority of non-native speakers approached (again, similarly to their general preference when stating facts) chose IS while native speakers found FIS more natural and accurate with respect to the original message.

Table 5: Talking about one's abilities: IS versus FIS

ABILITIES						
Direct Speech	SLOVAKS		FINNS		THE ENGLISH	
	IS	FIS	IS	FIS	IS	FIS
And I'm good at my job.	82.9%	17.1%	88.6%	11.4%	57.1%	42.9%
I'm great at looking after people.	77.1%	22.9%	82.9%	17.1%	57.1%	42.9%
Average	80%	20%	85.7%	14.3%	57.1%	42.9%

It is clear from Table 5 that the respondents involved in the present study opted for IS when talking about one's abilities. Interestingly enough, non-native speakers preferred IS to FIS in an even higher number of cases (80% and 87.5% respectively) than native speakers (57.1%). Personally, I find this general tendency rather surprising as I believe talking about one's own abilities is a matter of subjective view, let alone when reporting what other people believe is true about their abilities. If I was to report what I heard someone say about their abilities, I would make sure it was clear that it is merely something they believe and it is not my place to judge to what extent what they claimed actually applies.

Table 6: Summary: IS versus FIS

SUMMARY						
Direct Speech	SLOVAKS		FINNS		THE ENGLISH	
	IS	FIS	IS	FIS	IS	FIS
Feelings	46.4%	53.6%	61.4%	38.6%	32.1%	67.9%
Wishes	54.3%	45.7%	60.9%	39.1%	42.9%	57.1%
Abilities	80%	20%	85.7%	14.3%	57.1%	42.9%
Total	62.3%	37.7%	69.9%	30.1%	41.4%	58.6%

Table 6 shows that the majority of non-native respondents involved in the study found IS more natural and accurate with respect to the original statement than FIS, on average scoring 62.3% and 69.9% respectively. Most native speakers approached for the purposes of

the present study, however, opted for FIS. The only area where they showed preference towards IS was talking about one's abilities.

5. Conclusion

Without further research, it is impossible to state with any level of certainty what motivated the respondents to opt for the ways of reporting they did. It can only be assumed that, since a majority of non-native speakers opted for IS, while a majority of native speakers selected FIS as a more natural and accurate choice, this might be connected to school-learned reporting in the Slovaks and Finns involved in the study, in contrast to a more free way of providing an account of events in naturally occurring everyday situations opted for by the English approached.

Another, more detailed, study would also be required to determine what the respondents' intention was (if any) when opting for IS or FIS. It seems to me, however, that what native speakers did (quite possibly subconsciously) was chose to present a majority of utterances they reported in a way that made them sound they trusted that the original message was true or, at least, the original speaker believed that what they were saying was true. On the other hand, the non-native speakers absolved themselves of the responsibility of making such a decision and, effectively, made it clear (again, very probably subconsciously) that they were merely reporting what they had heard rather than taking the original speaker's idea and making it sound (by the omission of the reporting clause) like it is their own.

As mentioned in the Introduction, my addressing the group of Finnish speakers was a matter of opportunity, accompanied with the effort to find out whether their acquisition of English from other resources than formal instruction would result in more proximate results to those obtained from native speakers in contrast to the data provided by Slovak speakers who learn the majority of their skills in English as a foreign language at school. It, however, seems that either the situation is changing and Slovaks now make use of technological advancements as much as their Finnish peers (or, possibly, even more so), or (which is probably more likely) there is much more to reporting in a way that is natural to native speakers of English than merely listening to and imitating what one has heard and several other factors were at play to which attention was not paid in the present study. In addition, the fact that only a small number of speakers were approached as representatives of each group may have played a role in the results obtained. Moreover, all Slovak and Finnish learners involved in the research

came from the same respective universities; therefore, the outcomes cannot be applied to the general population where different data could have been collected.

All in all, the area of speech and thought presentation provides a broad landscape for research and the present study merely made an attempt to provide an insight in how two groups of non-native speakers, in comparison to a group of native speakers, approach reporting.

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Appendix: The model dialogue as it was presented to the respondents

Lucy: I'm really excited about our trip to Paris next week.

Peter: Well, I wish we could go, but don't get your hopes up just yet. We might not be able to go for another month.

Lucy: How come?

Peter: Well, to be honest, I'm rather disappointed with how my boss treats me.

Lucy: What's happened?

Peter: I asked him for two days off. Since I've been working there for over a year, I was hoping it would not be a problem. And I'm good at my job so I thought he would realize I could just stay later a few days and catch up with my workload if necessary. But he insisted I don't miss a workday.

Lucy: Oh, no, now I'm really upset. I wish you worked somewhere else. We will figure something out though, right? I really want to go.

Peter: Sure we will. Don't worry. Paris will still be as beautiful next month. Maybe you could visit your grandma next week instead. How is she doing, by the way?

Lucy: She is still rather ill. I think I will go and stay with her for a few days. I'm great at looking after people and cheering them up.

Peter: Did she tell you that?

Lucy: No, you did. You said I was a born carer and I had a great way with people.

Peter: That's true. Maybe you could come to work with me and talk to my boss. How does that sound?

Lucy: Sure, why not? It's definitely worth a try.