

Why reported speech matters for the communication theory : some side notes on Emilia Calaresua (2004)

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Review Article

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WHY REPORTED SPEECH MATTERS FOR THE COMMUNICATION THEORY: SOME SIDE NOTES ON EMILIA CALARESU (2004)

The review of the last book written by Emilia Calaresu *Testuali parole. La dimensione pragmatica e testuale del discorso riportato* (2004) represents a good opportunity to examine some important issues related to the study of reported speech, such as the relationship between the first (original) and the second (reported) speech and between the two main syntactic forms of reported speech - direct and indirect - and the problem of performative utterances. But discussing these points also leads up to a wider analysis concerning more general issues, such as the metalinguistic value of reported speech and its role within a communication theory, considering both the interpersonal and the media discourse aspects.

Keywords: reported speech, spoken language, performativity, credibility.

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The reported speech, and, more inclusively, the representation and the reproduction of discourse, are phenomena of the discourse, and of communication in general, very important in each speaker life. Almost our whole knowledge, included most of our prejudices, forms itself through the rewording of other people's words we listen or read in different context, formal and informal, written and spoken.

In these words of clear bachtinian taste (Bachtin 1975), that it is not trivial to quote in a work just based on the possibility that human discourse, and language in general, have to quote and report other people's discourses, Calaresu opens the conclusions of her last book, gathering the causes of the importance and of the value that studies on reported speech have: the circulation of discourses in time and space is the main condition for a series of human activities, from knowledge to socialization.

Differently from other Countries in which those kind of studies have consolidated tradition – in French cultural areas, see for instance in particular the Ci-Dit or Les Polyphonistes Scandinaves research group websites – Italian studies on reported speech are not so many, even if, in the last few years, there has been a considerable increase of interest, due, above all, to the widening of the analytical perspective in a pragmatic-communicative sense (Mizzau 1999; Brusco-Cacchione 2003).

It was Bice Mortara Garavelli who started working in Italy in this research field in 1985 with *La parola d'altri (Other people's words)*, book with a predominant textual set-up that immediately became a *classic* of this kind of research.

Emilia Calaresu, first with *Il discorso riportato. Una prospettiva testuale* (2000) and then with the new *Testuali parole. La dimensione pragmatica e testuale del discorso riportato* (2004), proposes again the textual set-up of Mortara Garavelli, emphasizing in the same time more and more (as clear even from the titles) the pragmatic component and widening the analysis to spoken texts.

The reported speech analysis is carried out mostly with the support of the DIRIP corpus - *Discorsi Riportati in Italiano Parlato (Reported Speeches in Spoken Italian)* – collected by the author herself for the first of her main books. The corpus, composed by 40 spoken discourses accounting 3 original discourses (two tv clips and a telephonic dialogue), allows to compare the “first” discourse and the “second” discourse – the reported one – and to observe and describe all the changes the discourse undergoes passing through one speaker to another.

It is clear, from this set-up, the relevance the author gives to the special kind of relationship there is between the original discourse and the reported one, subject to which is in fact dedicated a whole book section. In particular, the author focuses her attention to two main semantic topics:

1. the “primeness” of direct speech in comparison with the original discourse;
2. the fidelity of direct discourse in comparison with indirect speech.

Primeness of direct speech means an intrinsic equivalence – even the real coincidence – of direct speech with the original discourse, of which direct speech can be considered a kind of photography. From such premises it proceeds a sort of an ontologically superior statute of direct speech, as it should be the real, authentic, faithful form to the spoken speech.

As a further consequence, indirect speech should be a derived form – in a certain sense inferior, as of second degree – in comparison to the direct one. Once the problem has set-up in these terms, the derivability of the indirect speech from the direct one is ratified by a standard apparatus of grammatical rules leading, step by step, the transformation of the direct speech into the indirect one.

Even though there are many studies that have righted those incorrect descriptions, demonstrating their fallacy, it is meaningful how these descriptions keep staying deep-rooted and still live on as acritically acknowledged postulates. In particular, this prejudice survives most of all at school, where this kind of explanations are still the common practice for many elementary and higher school manuals, with obvious negative didactic consequences.

In this respect, Calaresu reverses the problem terms and clarifies that, actually, direct speech, as any other form of reported speech, is always potentially unfaithful, since it *represents* an object, it is not the object itself and it does not coincide with it. So for the author there can exist three main types of potential unfaithfulnesses of direct speech (as of any other form of reported speech):

1. formal unfaithfulness, that is the less or more elaborated paraphrase of a really happened (i. e. spoken) speech;
2. pragmatic unfaithfulness, got from the situational changing in the new context in which the reporting act happens;
3. existential unfaithfulness, corresponding to a reported speech of an original speech never happened (i. e. fictitious).

The point is that the terms of the question are deeply different. In the real use of the speakers, it is not the direct speech fidelity degree to be relevant, but the function that a certain form can perform, *in primis* the one of dramatizing discourse, making it more vivid, lifelike and pragmatically effective. After examining the problem of the relationship between the presumed original speech and the reported one, Calaresu turns to analyze the distinctive features of the object.

Going back once again to Mortara Garavelli, Calaresu repropose the distinction between real speakers and discursive roles, and a reported speech definition based on *deictic centres* (corresponding to the discourse setting, made by the information about persons, places and time).

Regarding the first point, it is important to clearly check out the subject of the enunciation, the locutor (i.e. the speaker), who says (or could say) "I", and how the discourse is orientated (regarding the deictic centre). The locutor is different from the syntactic subject and from the illocutive act agent, who is responsible of the truth of what is said.

The different orientation of the discourse respecting the deictic centre/s is one of the main criteria to distinguish the different reported speech forms. While in fact in direct forms there are as many deictic centres as many enunciative plans and locutors, in indirect forms there is always only one deictic centre and only one locutor. On the basis of these coordinates the author can also define the so called *free forms*: the free direct speech and the free indirect speech, peculiar, according Calaresu (but this point of view is not accepted by many scholars), both of written and spoken language.

For the author there is also another very important methodological issue regarding the problem of a correct definition. This issue is related both with the most correct use of the terms and the best way to segment the text in order not to focalize only incomplete aspects of the phenomenon, missing out relevant features as, for example, introductive elements.

So the author proposes to speak more in general of *discourse reproduction and representation* (as hyperonymous term of all kind of reported speech), including the quoting discourse, the metacommunicative frame (e.g. *verba dicendi*), and the reported speech itself, giving to all these components the same attention in order to better catch their specificities. All the facts laying in this definition have as common feature that of «evocating or reproducing an enunciative plan different from the one of the current actual enunciation» (p.111). For this to happen two main

conditions are necessary: the *multiplanarity* or *internal plan multiplication* (with the sub-condition of *non-performativity*) and the condition of *representativity*.

The first condition, in a certain sense constitutive of reported speech, highlights the need of an actual enunciative plan displacement. That is the reason why, giving her technical definition of reported speech, the author emphasizes the need to verify if the locutor has actually inserted, in the new speech, the product of another enunciative act. So, according to this definition, while speech sources can be the same (we often quote ourselves) enunciative acts do have to be different.

On the basis of the second condition – representativity – it is essential that the object or speech topic is in some way really represented, and not only evoked. So, cases like: – *We quarrelled* – are not accepted. For cases like: – *We quarrelled about the journey* – Calaresu feels the need to make up the further definition of *Summary reproduction of speech topic* to highlight either the evoking aspect of the reference and the fact that only the thema – not the rhema – is actually reported this way.

The sub-condition of non-performativity lies in the exclusion of reported speech occurrences when they include a verb of saying in the first person of the present tense, e. g. when the verb is used performatively: the action the verb refers to is performed, in these cases, exactly in the same time the verb itself is uttered (a classic example of bring about something by saying that). These are so pseudo-reported speech cases, because there is not the enunciative plan displacement – warranting the first condition of metareferentiality -. In an utterance like: *I say this is true* on the same enunciative plan of the present tense both the saying act and its content happen in the same time – “that this is true” is said while the utterance is pronounced, and the two actions coincide–.

The ambiguities and the difficulties related to the non-performativity rule – related to the need of warranting the essential enunciative plan displacement – lead to reflect on the difficulties of matching formal features – as the occurrence of a saying verb in the first person of the present tense – with the functional ones: reflecting on problems related to non performativity rule involves also the form-function relationship problem.

The question of non-performativity is central because it can widen or restrict significantly the research field.

Actually, the problem can seem to be solved, but it is not, since it is the textual perspective itself adopted by the author to require in fact a particular attention even to performative sentences.

If textual perspective means an analysis that goes beyond the grammatical and syntactical notion of phrase, acknowledging its inadequacy - since reported speech is often fulfilled in larger units - it is deeply contradictory removing *a priori* a sentence type without considering, in its specific fulfilling conditions, its relationship with the previous and the following co-text, of which it could be a less or more direct resumption, and, so, a real reported speech.

But that is not all.

It is the same methodological innovation of introducing a spoken conversation corpus to suggest the inadequacy of fixing too strong aprioristic restrictions to the analysis. Within the adopted sequential perspective, already wished by Mortara Garavelli (1985), it seems more suitable to analyze each single utterance just referring it to the intra-textual and inter-sequential runs the utterance itself creates and keeps up with the whole surroundings rather than making a prior selection of good cases.

For instance, – *I say it is not right* – can be the resumption of utterances as – *According to my opinion, this is wrong* – or – *It does not seem right to me* etc...

It cannot be left out the metalinguistic value of reported speech, representing an element of deep union, as Leech (1983) points out, between performative utterances and all the other kind of reported speech. A metalinguistic utterance, reflecting on itself, creates in point of fact an enunciative plan displacement, even if they are coinciding from a temporal point of view. This is probably a different scission from the *canonical* one, as it is generated in the act itself expressed by the performative verb that makes a kind of “doubling” effect, in which the second part of the utterance – *that this is true* – is, so to speak, *objectified* by the linguistic act – *I say it, I declare it* – but in any case *it is a scission*, an internal plan displacement, and so cannot be excluded from the analysis.

The third and last part of the book deals with the analysis of the forms in which reported speech is fulfilled and of the different functions that different forms can perform.

The presence or the absence of the (meta)textual frame, as the pre, intra or post reported speech position, satisfies, for example, clear functional criteria, mainly of pragmatism and rhetorical kind. Furthermore, the large possibility of matching between different forms and functions designs a complex network of possibilities of expression, pragmatically highly differentiated, that the speaker normally uses in his spontaneous speech choosing between several options.

The *map* of reported speech includes also the relationship that direct and indirect forms have with different text typologies. For example, direct forms occur more frequently in narrative texts, while they are very rare in argumentative and expositive texts. Moreover, they tend to occur in non-initial parts of the text, and they are often chosen to exemplify conflicting situations.

Another very important function of direct forms is that of outdistancing from the speaker point of view and of evaluating, in the same time, what the other speaker - the one is quoted - has said.

The issues presented so far concern interpersonal communication, but what happens if reported discourse is addressed to many people, as in media discourse?

Speaking about the potential unfaithfulness of direct speech, Calaresu highlights the dramatizing function of direct forms. This is the reason why direct speech is so common in the press texts in which, nevertheless, the dramatizing pragmatic function and the pretended *verbatim* authenticity of the form match each other in a potentially explosive way, even creating misunderstandings, as it often happens especially in Italian press.

The possibility of misunderstanding lies in the plurality of roles that stay behind the seemingly monolithic figure of the speaker: in reported speech, within a single speaker there are three production roles which Goffman (1981) calls *animator* or *spokesperson* (who actually produces the talk), the *author* (who selects the ideas to be expressed) and the *principal* (whose position is established by the words spoken). Now, Goffman noted that «when one uses the term “speaker”, one often implies that the individual who animates is formulating his own text and staking out his own position through it: animator, author and principal are one» (ibid.: 185).

This is the default situation, but it is not always this way. So, misunderstanding, in daily conversation as in media discourse, can rise out of a lack of clarity about who is really speaking: whose words are there?

While in ordinary conversation we always have the possibility to *repair* misunderstandings, e.g. asking who said what and why, when we are part of the audience of a media discourse the same chance is denied. Furthermore, in this case, the role-overlapping can derive more from a manipulating intention than from a simple situation of confusion. The *principal* – a political party, an economical organization - can so hide himself behind a famous *animator*, and, in so doing, spread messages that otherwise cannot be directly stated. This can be done through the classical forms of reported speech, especially in the direct form, but even, and

more insidiously, through seemingly not reported, neutral, unframed words, as if one is uttering a message for the first time, while he is repeating what the *principal* told him before. For example, a famous geologist can tell us that there is no danger for our city, while there actually is, because a Minister told him to say so to lower people panic appealing to the animator credibility.

Credibility is so a key term in analyzing reported speech functioning: one can choose to attribute some words to a person, who is credible for some reasons, in order to appear himself credible.

This *ipse dixit* works as a rhetoric instrument both for normal conversation and for media discourse, in order to persuade as many people as it is possible that a particular point of view is the right one. But credibility is not an intrinsic feature of a person who is credible in any situation: it is rather an attributed variable, influenced by certain trait-like behaviours (such as communication competency, assertiveness or interaction involvement) built up even through a proper use of reported speech. So, it is both a goal achieved by reported speech and a precondition of reported speech itself.

All of these phenomena are possible because reported speech is a powerful device to organize and convey, in a more or less direct way, different points of view. This is a very delicate mechanism, because it concerns cognitive aspects - since the exchange of point of view is a means to understand the world - social aspects - since the shift from cooperation to conflict can be risen by a misunderstanding about a quoted speech - and propaganda aspects - manipulating public opinion through special words "put in the mouth" of someone particularly truthful.

Concluding, from this research, both form and function based, transpires a wide, rich and complex picture, composed by a large number of different solutions, often rhetorically sophisticate, that traditional analyses, based on a merely syntactical setting-up (and vitiated *ab origine* by the primeness of direct speech fallacy) overshadowed almost completely.

On the contrary, as clearly this study by Calaresu demonstrates, the textual and pragmatical point of view allows to discover how much the everyday speech of each of us is important, because it is one of the main tools for comprehension and transmission of knowledge.

Anyway, once the pragmatic researching perspective has been validated, as Calaresu does with this book, it becomes difficult to deny the reported speech value as key-phenomenon of discourse construction.

Obviously, as the problem of performativity quite clearly² shows, there are still many points at issue, as there are still many further analyses and application fields to consider.

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