

IS REANIMATION OF VOICES POSSIBLE? PRAGMATICS OF
REPORTED SPEECH IN SELECTED MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

In its title, the paper alludes to the monograph on mediaeval Russian reported speech by Daniel E. Collins (2001), a successful attempt at reanimating the voices silenced in the written record from the past by means of a historical-pragmatic analysis. The aims of the paper are the following: to test some aspects of this approach against Middle English data on the one hand, and to provide a pragmatic analysis of reported speech in selected Middle English texts from the Helsinki Corpus on the other.

For the purpose of the present analysis, Collins's model will have to undergo a major revision, as its original aim was to investigate a corpus of utilitarian texts (trial transcripts). The questions to be answered are: whether a historical-pragmatic analysis is at all feasible in non-utilitarian texts and if so, what kind of selection criteria have to be employed in order to identify most suitable data.

The romance genre will be analysed in the present paper. Investigation of reported speech does indeed turn out to be rewarding within the selected genre, as its usage in romances exceeds 50% in some of the samples included in the Helsinki Corpus.

The discussion of pragmatic aspects of reported speech proceeds along the lines of recent advances in historical dialogue analysis (Jucker, Fritz and Lebsanft 1999) and reported speech analysis (Coulmas 1986; Janssen and van der Wurff 1999).

“Given the fictional status of our sources, we must reckon with the possibility that what we are retrieving are renderings that may deviate strongly from what once constituted actual practice”
Bax (2001: 36).

1. Introduction

Reported speech invariably involves an introduction of an additional perspective or voice into the ongoing discourse. Regardless of the form and complexity, the result of this introduction is a communicative act which is polyphonic in nature

and, in order to be comprehensive and communicatively efficient, it requires setting clear boundaries between the constitutive voices (Clark and Gerrig 1990; compare Güldemann and von Roncador 2002a). In this way, the concept of voice becomes central to any report of speech and that inevitably brings spoken language into play. After all the natural property of voices is that they primarily function in the spoken medium. For this reason the limitations and conditions determined by the unavailability of this medium for linguistic history are the central theme of this paper.

Reanimation of voices from the past stages of the language has for the last decade become the focus of a new sub-discipline of historical linguistics, historical pragmatics. Posing questions about the spoken usage, this new area of studies has since its earliest attempts refused to acknowledge that speech of the past is unavailable to a modern researcher if preserved in the written medium exclusively. So far, historical pragmatic research has convincingly proven that the great majority of historical texts display at least some potential as to providing evidence on aspects of spoken language (e.g., Bax 1999, 2001; Schrott 1999, 2000; Onodera 1995, 2000; cf. Jucker 1998: 6).

2. A model for reanimating voices

A fairly recent comprehensive attempt at reanimation of the voices from the past is a monograph on mediaeval Russian reported speech (Collins 2001). This study belongs to the line of historical pragmatic research focusing on utilitarian speech-based (sermons, trial transcripts, witness depositions etc.) rather than on literary texts. The faithfulness of the former to real speech has been questioned and verified in a range of contributions (e.g. Culpeper and Semino 2000; Doty and Hiltunen 2002; Archer 2002) but the early statement (Rissanen and Kytö 1983; Rissanen 1986), i.e., that the texts recording or attempting to record speech are closer to spoken language than those which do not, still enjoys almost universal support. As far as Collins (2001) is concerned, an additional argument for the use of speech-based non-literary material in a historical pragmatic study is the institutionalized context of utilitarian genres¹ (i.e. a trial transcript). The insights gained from the conventionalized situation of the courtroom such as motivations, aims, intentions of speakers as well as functions of their utterances are valid for tracing pragmatic strategies of reported speech. In-

¹ Compare Moore (2003: 399–402) on a different justification of the suitability of slander depositions for the study of reported speech (“switching” in discourse as indicative of the relationship between spoken and written discourse, text and reported speech, code-switching and discourse organization). See also her stance on literary material: “Court records, on the other hand, presumably have no aesthetic purpose, and so serve as a better source in some ways for understanding the presentation of reported speech ... than Visser’s literary examples” (2003: 401).

deed, the investigation into reported speech of courtroom discourse proves to be a fruitful enterprise as the growing number of contributions has lately shown (e.g. Culpeper and Kytö 1999; Archer 2002, 2003; Moore 2003; Hiltunen 2004).

3. Literary data in historical pragmatics

The issue I would like to address is whether a pragmatic analysis of reported speech in historical material has to be confined to speech-based utilitarian texts such as court records, or is it also to be accomplished in literary texts. In order to support the claim for feasibility of the latter sort of investigation I will first discuss selected arguments from historical pragmatic research which utilize literary texts. Secondly, my aim is an extension of my previous pragmatic analysis of selected Middle English romances on the basis of the samples from the Helsinki Corpus.

According to Rissanen, literary data may serve the purpose of spoken language analysis as they contain *imagined speech* with a “number of features with which an author hopes to create an illusion of spoken idiom” (1986: 99). Bax (1999) in turn is able to show that some literary genres (a Middle Dutch romance) are indeed mimetic of authentic language use. Applying historical explanations to the analysis of ritual precombat exchange between mediaeval knights, the author proves that their dialogue “fully answered particular realistic needs” (1999: 53).² In a slightly different vein, Bax looks at the literary material in the study of a 17th century Dutch farce³ (2001). Reiterating his earlier concepts (1981, 1991) he claims that what the researcher may see in literary texts is “*simulated* spoken interaction” (emphasis original; Bax 2001: 37) obscure to a modern reader who is unable to come up with an adequate understanding of its covert meaning aspects. These aspects, through a sort of “translation”⁴ may nevertheless be uncovered on condition that their communicative functions within their temporal and social contexts are taken into consideration. As Bax has it: “Much of what happens to be distinctly ‘functional’ about historical texts is a matter of interpretation and reconstruction – ‘translation’ as it were” (2001: 34). The additional factors complicating this “translation” in the case of literary genres are the production-reception issues and the uncertainty as to whether one

² Cf. Labov’s study of insults in present day Black American English (1972).

³ Compare Pakkala-Wekström (2004: 153) on the relationship between actual communication and fictional dialogue in plays (quoting V. Herman. 1995. *Dramatic discourse*. London and New York: Routledge).

⁴ Compare a similar notion in Collins, i.e. “capacity for a truly empathetic reading” (2001: 18). He further makes a rather cautious remark as to this capacity: “While conclusive verification may ultimately be impossible, the validity of an analysis can be appraised, at the very least, for its plausibility on culture-specific and typological grounds”.

is dealing with real speech/life practice or literary motives. The latter problem is connected to the issue of authenticity or factual status of speech events preserved in the utilitarian genres, which is lacking from literary texts.

A sound argument against the alleged authenticity of communicative events of utilitarian in comparison to literary genres is put forward by Schrott (2000). As she rightly emphasizes, the relation of all texts to everyday spoken language is invariably determined by individual generic models and that in turn undermines the concept of authenticity (2000: 294). Rather than sustain the validity of the notion of *imagined* or *simulated* spoken language, the author believes that representations not reproductions are provided by literary sources, and she sees speech acts which she analyses as models of human interaction in a given community (2000: 266). Indeed, bearing in mind the filtering processes involved in the transition from the oral to the written medium, which are particularly valid for the orally composed literature, one is never too cautious in assessing the multilayered relation of texts to the reality of the language.

A position similar to Schrott (2000) is taken by Fritz (1995) in a paper that may be considered an introduction to historical dialogue analysis. Dialogues are the core of linguistic interaction being the most common genre of everyday communication. One can nevertheless not deny that recorded in written form, dressed in literary conventions, left speakerless (cf. Fleischman 2002) dialogues of the past are no longer more than the representations of dialogues and “products of intentional action”⁵ (1995: 472), as Fritz has it. Moreover, their interpretation is even further blurred by the lack of competence of readers/researchers to become active participants of verbal interaction of the past. With these limitations in mind, not unlike Schrott (2000) above, Fritz does not find reasons for favouring either kind of material be it literary or non-literary, speech-based or non-speech-based genres in research into dialogue forms, although he points to a certain explanatory force of the institutionalization process for the evolution of utilitarian dialogue forms (1995: 486). Lebsanft also strongly supports the equal relevance of various sources for the study of dialogue forms seeing both utilitarian and literary data not as imitations of speech but “as a representation of how, in the opinion of the writers, medieval speakers tried to arrange and construct their discourse” (1999: 272).

An empirical justification for the use of literary sources in historical pragmatic studies is contributed by Culpeper and Kytö (1999), in a study of hedges in Early Modern English dialogues of two non-literary (trials and depositions) and two literary (drama and prose fiction) genres. The dialogues in the latter

⁵ Compare Lebsanft's view: “Instead of obtaining a faithful picture of how people “really” talked to one another, we can get a description of how people *intended to interact* orally” (emphasis original; 1999: 272).

texts are treated as *constructed* and *imaginary* while the former provide what, in the opinion of the authors, is *recorded* material. Closer to the real speech event than literary data, supposedly recorded dialogues with their underlying authenticity should hypothetically be more faithful reflexes of spoken language. Thus utilitarian texts in question should contain more orality⁶ features, such as hedges, than fictional constructed data. Surprisingly, the results of a statistical analysis show the opposite pattern. As the authors explain, the relatively low frequency of hedges in trials and depositions may be put down to the formality of courtroom situation as well as to the numerous filtering processes involved in the recording procedure (1999: 302).

As has been shown above, historical pragmatics has indeed found ways to overcome the ubiquitous “bad data” problem⁷ (Labov 1994; cf. Fries 1998: 85; Nevalainen 1999; Kytö and Walker 2003) as well as to effectively describe aspects of spoken language of the past relying on literary material. Since, however, sources do not exhibit equal potential as to describing speech of the past, it seems in order to carry out a systematic data selection. In the present research, three Middle English romances are investigated on the evidence that this genre bears affinity to the language of immediacy (Koch 1999) as has been shown by Taavitsainen (1993). As I have further determined in my previous research, this genre seems suitable for reported speech analysis as the reported speech percentages in the total word count exceed 50% (Table 1).

Table 1. Reported speech percentages in the total word count

<i>Beues of Hamtoun</i>	53.65
<i>King Horn</i>	59.60
<i>Havelok</i>	51.92

4. Aspects of reported speech analysis in Middle English romances

The first and foremost issue in reported speech analysis is to provide a categorisation of various reports. Here, reported speech is seen as a continuum of categories (Leech and Short 1981) ranging from those controlled by the narrator or reporter: narrative reports of speech acts (NRSA), indirect speech (IS), through free indirect speech (FIS) where this control diminishes to direct speech (DS)

⁶ Compare Moore (2003: 400), a polemic: “[Culpeper and Kytö] took as their texts the entire deposition, which blends together different styles of discourse. Considering separately the passages of reported speech from the body of the depositions might produce different results” (2003: 400).

⁷ I have discussed the “bad data” problem elsewhere: Włodarczyk-Golka (2004b).

and free direct speech (FDS) which are largely independent of authorial/narratorial discourse (Figure 1):

NRSA IS FIS DS FDS

Figure 1. The continuum of reported speech categories (based on Short – Semino – Culpeper 1996: 114)

Linguistic features of speech reports are an outcome of choices made by reporting speakers striving to fulfill their own speech plans (Collins 2001; Sternberg 1982: 109⁸). Therefore an analysis of these features may provide some information as to the intention of the reporters⁹ whose main function within the communicative act of reporting is mediation or interference, i.e. their part is creative and intentional. It is assumed that distinct categories of reported speech and linguistic properties of reports (e.g. formal indexing, choice of a tag, the position of a tag against the report) may reveal certain functional patterns or pragmatic strategies of speakers.

Table 2. Distribution of reported speech categories

BEVIS		HORN		HAVELOK	
TOTAL TOKENS	132	TOTAL TOKENS	132	TOTAL TOKENS	123
DS	50.75%	DS	52.27%	DS	43.09%
IS	6.07%	IS	16.67%	IS	2.44%
NRSA	35.61%	NRSA	23.48%	NRSA	34.96%
IT	4.54%	IT	7.58%	IT	16.26%
DT	3.03%	DT	–	DT	3.25%

Table 2 presents the percentages of different categories of speech reports on different levels of embedding in the discourse (i.e. reports within narration or dialogue), the smallest unit being a structure with a single predicate. The statistical data reveal certain similarities of the three texts, which allows posing some further questions as to the generic conventions determining the occurrence of reported speech strategies. First of all, the predominance of direct speech, the

⁸ “This perspectival montage indeed renders the inset a complex, but nothing like a democratic coalition, of voices and viewpoints. As a necessary result of the subordination of part to the whole, the local perspective of the quotee always subserves the global perspective of the quoter, who adapts it to his own goals and needs” (Sternberg 1982: 109).

⁹ Taking into consideration the fact that literary works are under discussion here, it is necessary to distinguish the author’s speech wills visible on the level of global discourse organization from possible intentions of character’s on a different level of discourse.

prototypical strategy, is common to all texts and will therefore be the focus of discussion. One further aspect of RS analysed below will be the position of the tag against the report.

5. Prototypical strategy: Direct speech

As I have proposed elsewhere, direct speech as the dominant reporting strategy may be viewed as one of the conventions of the genre (Włodarczyk-Golka 2004a). This conjecture may further be supported by the findings of Clark and Gerrig (1990: 793) who see direct quotations as a means of creating direct experience (compare Wierzbicka 1974 on the theatrical aspect of direct speech; Lakoff 1984 and Tannen 1986: 311 who see it as an involvement-creating device). This direct experience is linked to two phenomena: ineffability connected with the need to minimize communication effort and secondly, engrossment (“[o]n the addressee’s side, to become engrossed in the event is to experience it vividly”, Clark and Gerrig 1990: 794).

The general assumption of the authors (Clark and Gerrig 1990) is that direct speech is a “demonstration of what a person did in saying something” (1990: 769).¹⁰ Just as demonstrations, quotations are seen as non-serious actions (Goffman 1974) that have to be essentially separated from serious actions for the sense-making process not to become critically interrupted.¹¹ That this separation is linguistically crucial¹² not only in the case of direct mode has been rightly pointed out by Güldemann and Roncador (2002a) in one of the latest monographs on reported speech: “Many languages employ specialized quotative constructions for signaling the presence of reported discourse or setting off from the co-text” (2002a: ix). Clear demarcation of all reported discourse is particularly important for medieval writings which lack graphic cues for different levels of discourse¹³ and which, moreover, are designed for reading aloud¹⁴ (i.e. oral transmission, cf. del Lungo Camiciotti 2000: 152).

As far as direct speech is concerned, it is, by virtue of its formal properties, always foregrounded as is noticed by Collins (2001: 115). Similarly, del Lungo Camiciotti in the study of orality in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, emphasizes

¹⁰ Compare Holt (2000).

¹¹ Cf. the *decoupling principle* (Clark and Gerrig 1990: 768-769).

¹² Cf. Boeder (2002: 37): “Georgian and Svan share some formal features of speech reporting that are quite common in the languages of Near East and of Europe: reported speech tends to be preceded by a conjunction both with direct and indirect speech”.

¹³ Compare Moore (2003: 409) who notices that even the presence of punctuation in later utilitarian texts does not clearly disambiguate the levels of the discourse for its conventions may be obscure to the modern reader or it may not be used consistently.

¹⁴ Cf. Vincent and Perrin claiming that there is “a clear preference for direct style in oral discourse” (1999: 306).

“the textual organizing function ... of marking structural and thematic salience” (2000: 154) of direct reports. Furthermore, she sees a specific kind of direct speech, dialogue, as conventional for the religious genre under discussion as well as “an involvement device rooted in late medieval religious culture which focused on stimuli for meditation which actively involved the reader/listener” (2000: 156).

To sum up, the dominance of direct speech in romances analysed in this paper not only serves to create the impression of a direct perceptual experience but standing out from narration forces the reader/hearer to appreciate the boundaries of different discourse levels. Thus the onset of direct reporting cannot pass unnoticed by the audience and its inherent abruptness may facilitate the receivers’ creative participation in the communicative event.

6. Position of the tag against the report: Functions of intercalation

In the majority of reports, tags are preposed although intercalation (putting the reporting verb in a syntactically medial position) is not infrequent while postposed tags and untagged reports are few and far between. Table 3 shows the distribution of the unprototypical tag positions:

Table 3. Percentages of the unprototypical tag positions

	BEVIS	HAVELOK	HORN
VD intercalated DS	33.33%	8.4%	17.51%
VD intercalated IS	0.66%	–	–
Postposed	2%	4.2%	–

In the studied material, intercalation occurs in direct speech and in many cases in the adjoining turns within dialogue. Putting tags in a syntactically interruptive medial position rather than preposing them creates the impression of a dynamic verbal exchange whose pace is not unnecessarily slowed down by the initial reporting verb (Collins 2001). The cohesive function of intercalation pointed out by Collins (2001: 238) is corroborated in this analysis: in as many as 31.25 % of all cases, intercalation occurs in dialogic turns which are untagged rapid responses to previous turns, though the distribution of this phenomenon is not equal in the texts under study (see Table 4 for the distribution of this function in individual texts).

Table 4. Intercalation as a cohesive device in rapid verbal exchanges (individual texts)

BEVIS	HAVELOK	HORN
30.90%	60.00%	15.39%

This analysis cannot, however, substantiate some further findings of Collins (2001: 240-241) and others (e.g., cf. Short – Semino – Culpeper 1996: 117), like the disclaimer and distancing functions of intercalations that could not be established in the material under study. Some functions central to Collins’ analysis, like for instance “conveying heteroglossic information” (Collins 2001: 239) in layered reports were found to be marginal or even negligible (2.08%). Still, a closer look at intercalation in romances shows a surprisingly consistent pattern: with few exceptions, it occurs consistently in dialogic turns in the first line and in 58.33% of cases it follows a vocative form of a noun, usually a personal name, the choice of reporting verbs is limited to *seggen* (54.17%) and *cweþen* (43.75%) with the negligible 2.08% of other verbs. The following is a typical example:

1)

DS VOCATIVE ‘Felawe,’ a TAG *seide*, ‘par amur:
Whar mai ich finde þemperur?
Dow me *tel!*’

(M2 NI ROM *Bevis*: 6 (editor’s punctuation)).

Furthermore, this pattern (X + tag (*seggen* or *cweþen*), the first line) occurs even more frequently with a variable first element which may also be an interjection (11.46%, example 2), an imperative form of the verb (9.38 %, example 3), or a question word (4.17%, example 4). Other patterns (example 5) occur only in 14.58 % of cases.

2)

INTERJEC ‘Allas,’ TAG *queþ* Beues, ‘þat ilche stounde!

(M2 NI ROM *Bevis*: 83 (editor’s punctuation)).

3)

IMPERAT “Go nu,” TAG *quap* heo, “sone,
And send him after none
Whane þe kyng arise,
On a squieres wise.

(M2 NI ROM *Horn*: 16 (editor’s punctuation)).

- 4) QUESTION WORD 'Whanne,' TAG *queþ* Beues, 'schel þis be don?'
(M2 NI ROM *Bevis*: 102 (editor's punctuation)).
- 5) OTHER 'Ðat ne wile Ich neueremo',
TAG *Quoth* erl Godrich, 'for Ich shal slo
De, and hire forhenge heye!
(M2 NI ROM *Havelok*: 74 (editor's punctuation)).

Table 5: General and individual distribution of variation in the major intercalation pattern

FUNCTION	GENERAL	BEVIS	HAVELOK	HORN
REPETITION: vocative	58.33%	45.45%	53.33%	88.46%
REPETITION: interjection	11.6%	18.18%	6.67%	–
REPETITION: imperative	9.38%	12.73%	–	7.69%
REPETITION: question word	4.17%	7.27%	–	–
REPETITION: other	14.58%	7.27%	40%	3.85%
LAYERED REPORTS: heteroglossic info	2.08%	3.64%	–	–

The repetitive nature of this usage points to its particular status in the genre in question. Tannen (1989: 50) emphasizes the cohesive function of repetition which in the present study may be seen as a way of strengthening the basic cohesive function of intercalation. As the author further claims, repetition may fulfill other functions as well.¹⁵ Interestingly, when repetition is combined with variation, as in the material investigated here, the discourse becomes "semantically less dense" (Tannen 1989: 49). Moreover, a conventionalized discourse strategy, repetition may even be seen as "a verbal analogue of the pleasure associated with the familiar physical surroundings" (Tannen 1989: 52). Also, as Bauman (1993: 190) puts it, parallelism in oral literature functions as a *key* to performance (to use Goffman's 1974 term).

The above-mentioned functions of intercalation and repetition, which are closely related in the texts under study, are all speaker-based (Collins 2001: 296-

¹⁵ "By facilitating production, comprehension, connection and interaction ... repetition serves an over-arching purpose of creating interpersonal involvement" (Tannen 1989: 50). Compare also Wårvik (2003: 26) who sees repetition as an interactive feature and a device of contextual involvement in oral genres.

297), and at the same time compliant with the needs of the reader/hearer. In the specific case of romances under investigation (oral transmission, the lack of consistent punctuation), this tagging strategy, in my opinion, is also an important basic demarcation device whose efficiency is unquestionable due to its interruptive nature. The repetitiveness and consistency of its pattern even further fortify this function of intercalation. One cannot ignore the fact that the interruptive nature and the role of marking boundaries between different voices or levels of discourse do not exactly agree with the fact that intercalation and repetition are also cohesion-promoting. Indeed, in the material under study, the former function is dominant, taken its significance for the reader/hearer and bearing in mind the issues connected with grasping oral literature or its written, punctuation-free counterpart.

6. Summary

The focus of attention in this study has been the theoretical status of literary sources and their relevance for a historical pragmatic investigation into reported speech. Having shown possible theoretical limitations and possibilities of such research, I have proceeded with a preliminary analysis of selected pragmatic aspects of reported speech in three Middle English romances. The statistically discerned prototypical reporting strategy, direct speech and one of the unprototypical tag positions – intercalation – have revealed a common function of the two aspects of reported speech, namely that they serve to demarcate different voices in speech reports as well as to set boundaries between different levels of discourse. Far from being conclusive, this paper has been a step towards the reanimation of the voices from the past echoed in a range of linguistic aspects of reported speech.

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