

The Deep Structure of Indirect Discourse*

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1. Otto Jespersen and other traditional grammarians have described indirect discourse as being a transform of direct discourse. Jespersen² says that in converting direct discourse into indirect discourse person, tense, and mood are shifted and the form of questions, commands, and requests is changed. So for example the sentence (1-a) becomes in indirect discourse (1-b) by shifting the person (I changes to he) and shifting the tense or mood (will changes to would).

(1-a) John said, "I will go."

(1-b) John said that he would go.

2. In the framework of generative-transformational grammar, the obvious way to take over this traditional account is to say that there are optional transformations which shift person, tense, etc. We start off with sentences in direct discourse, and, if these transformations apply, we get a sentence in indirect discourse. In this treatment a sentence with direct discourse and the corresponding sentence with indirect discourse would come from the same deep structure. Now two sentences that are derived from the same deep structure should be paraphrases; but corresponding sentences with direct and indirect discourse are not in general paraphrases. For example, (1-b) could be true in circumstances in which (1-a) was not true. John's actual

words could have been "I shall depart," and (1-b) would still be a fair report of what John said. The direct discourse sentence purports to give John's actual words, but the indirect discourse sentence is true just so long as what John said "boils down" to saying that he would go.

3. So already a major problem arises in trying to relate direct and indirect discourse in the terms of generative grammar. Let me set the major problem aside for a moment to examine some more narrow evidence for and against the proposition that indirect discourse is derived from direct discourse.

4. Sentences (4-a), (4-b), and (4-c) illustrate an argument for getting indirect discourse from direct discourse. Not everyone will find (4-a) unacceptable, but I predict that at least some people will.

(4-a) *Mary is pregnant, but John said, "No she isn't."
The reason I think (4-a) is bad is as follows. For the conjunction but to be appropriate, John's words No she isn't must be interpreted as meaning 'No, Mary isn't pregnant,' where pregnant has been deleted, and Mary has been pronominalized. But for this deletion and pronominalization to take place, Mary and pregnant must have been mentioned in the conversation being reported on--before John spoke. In (4-a) there is no indication that Mary and pregnant were mentioned before John spoke; rather they are mentioned at the time John's speech is being reported. Contrast this with the acceptable (4-b) where Mary and pregnant are mentioned in the conversation being reported.

(4-b) Harry said, "Mary is pregnant," but John said,
"No she isn't."

In (4-b) the pronominalization and deletion can take place. (4-a) and (4-b) show that there is a contrast between direct discourse and what is not in direct discourse with regard to anaphoric relationships. I will call the constraint, which rules out (4-a), the 'pregnant-constraint.'

(4-c) shows that indirect discourse acts like direct discourse in this regard. I.e., the pregnant-constraint doesn't make (4-c) unacceptable..

(4-c) Harry said that Mary was pregnant, but John said,
"No she isn't."

The acceptability of (4-c) can be accounted for if indirect discourse is derived from direct discourse; i.e., if (4-c) is derived from (4-b). The pregnant-constraint will be stated at the level of deep structure, before (4-b) is changed to (4-c).

5. Sentences (5-a), (5-b), and (5-c), on the other hand, illustrate an argument that indirect discourse is not derived from direct discourse. The i subscripts in (5-a), (5-b), and (5-c) indicate that someone and he are to refer to the same person. (5-a) shows that ordinarily the indefinite someone can be the coreferential antecedent of he.

(5-a) John thought that someone_i would leave, but he_i
didn't.

But an indefinite in direct discourse cannot be the coreferential antecedent of a pronoun outside the direct discourse. I will call

(6-c) After Mary said that someone_i was in the room,

he_i said, "No one is in the room."

We can predict that the first in the room cannot be the antecedent of the in the room in the direct quote, because of the pregnant-constraint. The unacceptability of (6-d) confirms this prediction.

(6-d) *After Mary said that someone_i was in the room,

he_i said, "No one is."

In (6-d) in the room has been deleted from the direct quote, the antecedent being the preceding in the room. But this anaphoric relationship is ruled out unless the antecedent is also in a direct quote in deep structure. In (6-d) in the room is not in a deep structure direct quote, hence (6-d) is unacceptable.

7. Notice that this solution does not make the false prediction that corresponding sentences in direct and indirect discourse are always paraphrases. A sentence with indirect discourse has in general two interpretations, one of which is the same as that of the corresponding direct discourse sentence.

8. The sentences in (8-b) through (8-d) below are other cases like (6-d), where two constraints conflict. A sentence with indirect discourse has simultaneously forced on it two incompatible interpretations--an interpretation as being from deep structure indirect discourse and an interpretation as being from deep structure direct discourse.

As Joseph Emonds points out in his dissertation Constraints on Transformations (Indiana University Linguistics Circle, mimeo, Summer, 1969), parenthetical expressions like it seems to me do not

ordinarily occur within embedded sentences. They do, of course, occur within direct discourse--as in the sentence (8-a).

(8-a) Mary said, "Alice, it seems to me, likes someone."

And, contrary to the general rule, parenthetical expressions occur in embedded sentences that represent indirect discourse. So:

(8-b) Mary said that Alice, it seemed to her, liked someone.

Then it is reasonable to expect that indirect discourse, when it contains a parenthetical expression, must be from direct discourse. Example (8-c) confirms this.

(8-c) Mary said that Alice (*it seemed to her) liked someone_i, but Alice really didn't like him_i at all.

When coreferential anaphora blocks a direct discourse interpretation of indirect discourse, a parenthetical expression cannot be added to the indirect discourse.

In sentence (8-d), the failure of tense-shifting to apply to the relative clause disallows a direct discourse interpretation. So pregnant cannot delete the understood pregnant of the direct quote:

(8-d) John said that the woman who {^{was}
*is} sitting there was pregnant, but Harry said, "No, she isn't."

Likewise in (8-e) the failure of tense-shifting forces an interpretation as deep structure indirect discourse, while the parenthetical he thought requires a direct discourse interpretation. So adding he thought makes the sentence unacceptable.

(8-e) John said that the woman who is sitting there
would (*he thought) agree to leave.

9. Now I know from some unsystematic checking-around that a lot of you will not agree with my placement of asterisks in these examples. Not only do the sentences take some thinking about, but they also permit well-considered disagreement. But suppose for a moment that the proposal in (6-a) is correct. Then the acceptability of sentence (9-a) is interesting.

--(9-a) Mary was pregnant, and John said that she was--but
Harry said, "No she isn't."

There are three occurrences of Mary and three occurrences of pregnant in (9-a); two of each are implicit. If the sentence were filled out more, it would read:

(9-b) Mary was pregnant, and John said that Mary was
pregnant--but Harry said: "No, Mary isn't
pregnant."

Let me refer to the three occurrences of pregnant as pregnant₁, pregnant₂, and pregnant₃. Pregnant₃ is deleted from the direct quote, the antecedent for the deletion being pregnant₂. The antecedent cannot be pregnant₁ (the pregnant that actually occurs), because of the pregnant-constraint. The indirect discourse in the second clause of (9-a) must be from direct discourse--again because of the pregnant-constraint. But now the pregnant-constraint prevents deleting pregnant₂ with pregnant₁ as antecedent. But the fact is that the second pregnant can be deleted.

The only way around this problem that I can see is to allow deletion

to occur both before and after the conversion of direct discourse into indirect discourse. This implies first, that pregnant₂ is really present in the deep structure of (9-a) (otherwise it could not act as an antecedent); and second, it implies that the anaphoric relationship between pregnant₁ and pregnant₂ cannot be stated in the deep structure of (9-a), but is established at a lower level by the process of deletion.

Likewise the anaphoric relation between Mary and the first she in (9-a) must be established after underlying direct discourse is changed into indirect discourse.

Footnotes

¹This paper was read at the December 1969 meeting of the Linguistic Society of America. Another paper on indirect discourse was read at that meeting by Mary Gallagher. Professor Gallagher's paper, "Accounting for indirect discourse," has now appeared in *Papers in Linguistics* 2.1.83-89. Her arguments and my conclusion may seem to be in conflict, but a careful reading will show that in fact they are not.

²Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 292 ff.