Discourse markers in free indirect style and interpreting

Diane Blakemore [a,*], Fabrizio Gallai [b]

[a] *University of Salford, United Kingdom*
[b] *University of Bath, United Kingdom*

Abstract

This paper contributes to the discussion of how free indirect style (FIS) and interpreter's renditions are accommodated in a relevance theoretic approach to communication. Within relevance theory, it has been argued that FIS and interpreting are cases of attributive use: FIS representations and interpreters' renditions are representations of the author's/interpreter's thoughts about attributed thoughts. We ask whether this approach can accommodate FIS representations and interpreters' renditions which contain perspective dependent discourse markers, and in particular whether it captures the role played by these expressions in encouraging the reader/hearer to think that s/he has direct access to the thoughts of fictional characters/original speakers. We apply Blakemore's (2010) account of discourse markers in FIS to data from interpreter mediated police interviews where renditions include discourse markers added by the interpreter to develop an alternative relevance theoretic account. This allows us to reconcile the hearer's impression that the interpreter's voice is suppressed with research in interpreting studies which shows that interpreters are in reality both visible and active co-participants in these exchanges.
© 2013 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Attributive use; Discourse marker; Free indirect style; Interpreting; Point of view; Voice

1. Introduction

According to the inferential model of linguistic communication developed first by Grice (1989) and then by Sperber and Wilson (1986/95), verbal communication involves producing a linguistic 'clue' from which the audience can derive a representation of the thought or thoughts the communicator wishes to communicate. Since this clue is an utterance with linguistic properties, the process of deriving a representation of the speaker's thoughts will involve a certain amount of linguistic decoding. However, as Grice and Sperber & Wilson have demonstrated, the linguistic properties of an utterance do not fully determine the speaker's meaning, and the hearer is expected to use this evidence in conjunction with contextual assumptions in non-demonstrative inferences which yield an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning. For Grice, these inferences are guided by expectations which derive from maxims which speakers are expected to obey, but are sometimes deliberately violated (for example, in order to trigger the sort of implicature which Grice believes to characterize figurative meanings). However, for Sperber and Wilson, the act of communicating raises precise expectations of relevance (encapsulated in the definition of *optimal relevance*) which on their own guide the hearer towards the intended meaning.[1]

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 1612954948.

E-mail addresses: d.blakemore@salford.ac.uk (D. Blakemore), F.Gallai@bath.ac.uk (F. Gallai).

[1] For outlines of Gricean and relevance theoretic approaches to pragmatics, see Wilson (2004), Wilson and Sperber (2012b), *Introduction*. According to Sperber and Wilson, every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance, where an utterance is optimally relevant if and only if it:

(a)   is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it;
(b)   is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

Because the gap between the linguistically encoded meaning of the utterance and the intended interpretation is filled by pragmatic inference, there can be no guarantee that the interpretation that the hearer recovers is an exact copy of the speaker's thoughts. It can only be an *interpretation* of them – that is, a representation which is assumed to resemble the communicator's thoughts to some extent. Thus in this framework, communicative success cannot depend on the duplication of thoughts, but consists in what Sperber and Wilson (1986/95) describe as the enlargement of the mutual cognitive environments of speaker and audience.[2]

The aim of this paper is to ask how this picture of communication fares in situations in which the hearer derives the intended meaning not on the basis of the evidence provided by the person (S_1) whose thoughts are being communicated, but on the basis of evidence provided by another person (S_2). As we shall see in section 2.2, this is the sort of case that arises in free indirect thought representations in fiction. But it is also the sort of case which arises when the evidence produced is an utterance from a language (L_1) not understood by the intended audience and is translated by an interpreter (S_2) into a language (L_2) which is understood by that audience. The examples which form the focus of our paper are from dialogue interpreting, where the audience may have access to other non-verbal behaviours produced by S_1 to accompany his utterances. However, the focus is on the role of linguistic evidence in the interaction, and the discussion might equally apply to cases in which the audience has no access to physical evidence of S_1 or his original act of communication at all (as, for example, in renditions heard through headphones or on the radio).

According to Gutt (2000) translation and interpreting can be accommodated in the relevance theoretic model of communication described if they are treated as cases of *attributive use* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/95), a notion which they have argued is also central to the explanation of indirect and free indirect representations of speech and thought and irony. Thus according to Sperber and Wilson, every utterance is an interpretation of the speaker's thought, but that thought might be *either* entertained as a *description* of a(n) (actual or desirable) state of affairs *or* as an *interpretation* of a thought attributed to someone else (or oneself at another time). Thus according to Wilson and Sperber (2012a:129) all of the following are either explicitly or tacitly attributive (the examples are theirs):

(1) John phoned his wife and told her that *the train was about to leave*.
(2) He was hoping that *they would have a quiet evening alone*.
(3) An announcement came over the loudspeaker. *All the trains were delayed*.
(4) The passengers were angry. *Would they ever get home*?

While (1–2) provide linguistic evidence that the italicized clause is an indirect report of an attributed utterance/ thought, (3–4) are tacit representations of attributed utterances/thoughts. As Wilson and Sperber point out, (4) has properties which characterize free indirect discourse (lack of subordination, shifted tense and reference), a phenomenon which we consider in section 2.2. However, the point here is that all of these are analyzed by Wilson and Sperber as utterances which are interpretations of thoughts which themselves are about attributed thoughts, and their relevance lies in the information they provide about the content of the attributed thought. Other attributive utterances achieve relevance in virtue of what they communicate about the speaker's attitude towards the attributed thought. For example, consider Wilson and Sperber's examples in (6) and (7) which are possible responses to the utterance in (5):

(5) JACK: I've finished my paper.
(6) SUE (HAPPILY): You've finished your paper! Let's celebrate.
(7) SUE (DISMISSIVELY): You've finished your paper. How often have I heard you say that?

These are examples of what Sperber and Wilson call echoic use, a notion which is central to their analysis of irony (see Wilson, 2006; Wilson and Sperber, 2012a). The type of attributive use which Gutt has in mind in his relevance theoretic account of translation and interpreting is the one illustrated in (1–4) where the speaker's intention is to inform the audience about the content of an attributed thought. Thus he argues that translation and interpreting are acts of communication between the translator/interpreter and (*de facto*) audience which achieve relevance in virtue of being a faithful interpretation of an utterance expressed in another language: the rendered text is an interpretation of the translator's/interpreter's thoughts which are themselves an interpretation of the thoughts of the original speaker. And the translator/interpreter, like any communicator, is constrained by the communicative principle