

Features of Indirect Speech in German: A Theoretical and Syntactic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the phenomenon of reported speech in German linguistics, focusing particularly on the grammatical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of indirect speech. By comparing theoretical approaches developed by scholars working in German linguistics and related fields, the study explores the relationship between direct speech (direkte Rede), indirect speech (indirekte Rede), and free indirect discourse (erlebte Rede). Particular attention is paid to the role of the subjunctive moods (Konjunktiv I and Konjunktiv II), deictic shifts, syntactic integration, reporting clauses, and conjunctions. The article also considers the question of whether constructions containing direct speech should be analysed as compound sentences or as independent, integrated syntactic constructions. The study employs descriptive, comparative, and syntactic-pragmatic methods to examine representative German examples in relation to established theoretical approaches. The analysis demonstrates that reported speech cannot be explained solely as a syntactic transformation of an original utterance. Rather, it involves the reconstruction of linguistic content within a new communicative context, with grammatical choices reflecting the relationship between the original speaker, the reporting speaker, and the reported proposition. The findings highlight the importance of distinguishing the general phenomenon of reported speech from its individual grammatical and discourse-related forms.

Keywords: Reported speech, direct speech, indirect speech, free indirect discourse, reporting clause, authorial speech, Konjunktiv I, Konjunktiv II, deixis, compound sentence, syntactic construction.

INTRODUCTION

In German linguistics, indirect speech is studied within the broader phenomenon of reported speech (Redewiedergabe). Accordingly, the present article first considers how reported speech has been investigated and interpreted in German linguistic scholarship. It should be noted that reported speech has been examined, interpreted, and classified from both theoretical and practical perspectives within various schools and research traditions in German linguistics. This subject has been studied continuously for many years, not only in Germany but also in other countries, including Russia and Uzbekistan. Consequently, the relevant literature is extensive, and only selected contributions can be discussed within the scope of this article. Reported speech is one of the principal objects of investigation in German grammar, text linguistics,

pragmatics, and narratology. It enables speakers and writers to reformulate another person's utterances or thoughts within a new communicative situation and thus serves as an important link between language, communication, and text structure. Different forms of reported speech allow authors or speakers to distance themselves from the content being conveyed to varying degrees, evaluate it, or present it as faithfully and naturally as possible. For this reason, reported speech is particularly significant in academic, journalistic, official, and literary texts.

The distinction between direct speech (direkte Rede) and indirect speech (indirekte Rede) has traditionally served as a starting point for the analysis of reported speech. However, contemporary research recognises that speech

representation encompasses a wider range of structures and communicative strategies. These include free indirect discourse (*erlebte Rede*), the representation of thoughts, and constructions that combine features of quotation with the grammatical and pragmatic characteristics of the reporting context. A further issue concerns the syntactic status of constructions containing direct speech. In particular, it is necessary to consider whether such constructions should be analysed as compound sentences or as independent, integrated syntactic constructions. This question requires a distinction between the grammatical structure of the reporting clause, the quoted utterance, and the relationship established between them. The aim of this article is to analyse the principal theoretical approaches to indirect speech in German and to identify its characteristic grammatical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features. The study addresses the following research questions: How is reported speech conceptualised in German linguistic research? What distinguishes direct speech, indirect speech, and free indirect discourse? What roles do Konjunktiv I, Konjunktiv II, and deictic shifts play in the grammatical organisation of indirect speech? How are reporting clauses and reported clauses syntactically related? Under what conditions can reported clauses occur without the conjunction *dass*, and how should such constructions be analysed?

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on descriptive, comparative, and syntactic-pragmatic analysis. The principal materials consist of representative German examples of direct and indirect speech, grammatical constructions involving the subjunctive moods, and theoretical discussions of reported speech in German linguistics. The theoretical framework draws on the works cited in the bibliography, particularly Coulmas (1986), Fabricius-Hansen (2002), Günthner (2000), Thieroff (1992), Breslauer (1996), and Pütz (1989). Research in Uzbek linguistics is also considered where it contributes to the classification and interpretation of reported speech. The descriptive method is used to identify the principal grammatical characteristics of indirect speech, including the use of reporting predicates, subordinate clauses, conjunctions, and subjunctive forms. The comparative method is applied to direct and indirect speech constructions to identify changes in personal reference, verbal mood, temporal interpretation, word order, and expressions of time and space.

The syntactic-pragmatic method is used to examine the relationship between reporting clauses and reported clauses and to explain how grammatical choices interact with communicative perspective. Particular attention is given to the distinction between the syntactic integration of a reported clause and the pragmatic function of presenting information as originating from another speaker.

The analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative. It does not claim to establish statistical frequencies or corpus-based distributions. Instead, it examines selected examples to clarify the principal theoretical and grammatical characteristics of indirect speech.

RESULTS

In German linguistics, *Redewiedergabe* generally refers to the representation of another person's speech, thoughts, or written statements in a different communicative context. Initially, this phenomenon was described primarily through the opposition between direct speech (*direkte Rede*) and indirect speech (*indirekte Rede*). Subsequently, the scope of research expanded to include additional forms of speech and thought representation and their semantic-pragmatic characteristics. Florian Coulmas regards reported speech as a universal phenomenon of human language. According to his approach, every natural language possesses means of representing another speaker's utterance, although the grammatical forms employed may differ from one language to another. Reported speech should therefore be understood not only as a syntactic phenomenon but also as a pragmatic and discourse-related one.

Coulmas's theoretical approach can be summarised as follows: reported speech is a widespread linguistic phenomenon because languages provide resources for representing utterances produced by other speakers. This perspective highlights the importance of reported speech in everyday communication, where people frequently need to convey information about another person's words, opinions, or intentions (Coulmas, 1986, pp. 10–11). One of the central concepts associated with the analysis of reported speech is deixis. Deictic expressions are interpreted relative to the participants, time, and circumstances of a communicative event. Consider the following example:

Direct speech: Er sagte: „Ich komme morgen.“

Indirect speech: Er sagte, dass er am nächsten Tag komme.

In this example, *ich* changes to *er*, while *morgen* changes to *am nächsten Tag*. The changes reflect the relationship between the original utterance and the reporting context. The deictic centre is reconstructed from the perspective of the reporting situation. However, such changes are context-dependent rather than obligatory. If the temporal reference remains valid, the original temporal expression may be retained. Consequently, the analysis of indirect speech must take account of the communicative context in which the reported utterance is interpreted. Reported speech also performs several communicative functions:

- a. Providing information: Der Minister sagte, dass ...
- b. Indicating the source of information: Nach Angaben des Ministers ...
- c. Attributing a claim to another speaker: Er behauptete, ...
- d. Expressing an evaluative stance: Er behauptete angeblich, ...

These examples illustrate that reported speech can convey information while simultaneously indicating its source and the reporting speaker's relationship to the reported proposition. The precise interpretation depends on the lexical meaning of the reporting expression and the wider discourse context. Deixis is relevant to the analysis of personal reference, temporal expressions, spatial relations, and the relationship between the original speaker and the reporting speaker. The discussion of deixis in the source literature also raises the question of whether changes in one deictic category correlate with changes in other categories. The categories discussed in this connection include epistemic distance, tense forms, spatial reference, temporal adverbs, speech-act participants, social distance, relativity, and speaker indexicality. Speaker indexicality may be associated with features such as intonation, volume, speech rate, and pauses. Such paralinguistic features can provide information about the speaker's communicative behaviour rather than merely conveying the propositional content of an utterance. These categories are relevant to the broader investigation of how utterances are represented in new contexts. Nevertheless, the precise classification of the categories and their hierarchical relationships must be supported by the relevant original publication. In particular, the attribution of a specific eight-category deictic hierarchy to Plank requires verification against the

cited source before it can be accepted as an established finding.

From a syntactic-pragmatic perspective, the relationship between deixis and syntactic integration is important because reported speech involves both the representation of linguistic content and the reconstruction of its contextual interpretation. A change in personal reference may occur without a corresponding change in every temporal or spatial expression. The categories must therefore be analysed individually and in relation to the communicative context. Fortmann, Engelberg, and Rapp's work on the representation of speech and thought in narrative structures provides a basis for distinguishing related but non-identical phenomena. Three concepts are particularly important: Quotation or quotation framing (Anführung); The representation of speech and thought (Rede- und Gedankenwiedergabe); The use of quotation marks as a form of written punctuation. These phenomena are closely related, but they should not be treated as equivalent. Quotation marks are graphic conventions, whereas the representation of speech and thought is a broader linguistic and communicative phenomenon. A quotation may be marked graphically, but the absence of quotation marks does not necessarily mean that reported content is absent.

This distinction is important when analysing German constructions because their grammatical structure, punctuation, and discourse function do not always correspond in a one-to-one relationship. A rigorous description must therefore distinguish the formal marking of quotation from the syntactic and pragmatic organisation of reported speech. Three principal forms are relevant to the present analysis. Direct speech (direkte Rede): Peter sagte: „Ich komme morgen“.

Direct speech presents an utterance as a quotation of the original speaker's words. In written German, it is commonly marked by quotation marks. Indirect speech (indirekte Rede): Peter sagte, dass er morgen komme. Indirect speech represents the content of an utterance within a reporting construction. It may involve changes in personal reference, verbal mood, temporal interpretation, and clause structure: Free indirect discourse (erlebte Rede) – Morgen würde er endlich abreisen. Hoffentlich ging alles gut. Free indirect discourse is particularly significant in literary narratives. It can represent a character's thoughts or perspective without an explicit reporting clause. The narrator's discourse and the character's point of view may overlap, allowing the narrative to convey subjective

experience without introducing it through a construction such as Er dachte, dass Free indirect discourse should not be treated as identical to ordinary indirect speech. The former may lack an explicit reporting predicate and can combine narrative presentation with features of a character's perspective. Its classification therefore requires attention to narrative context as well as grammatical Form.

Indirect speech can be classified according to its communicative function. The principal categories include indirect statements (indirekte Aussage), indirect questions (indirekte Frage), and indirect requests or commands (indirekte Bitte, indirekte Aufforderung). Indirect statement – Direct speech: Peter sagte: „Ich komme heute um 19 Uhr“. Indirect speech: Peter sagte, dass er heute um 19 Uhr komme. The subordinate clause introduced by dass represents the content of the original statement. The verb komme is in the Konjunktiv I Form.

In indirect questions, interrogative elements such as wann and ob introduce the reported clause. The finite verb normally occurs at the end of the subordinate clause. The first indirect version employs Konjunktiv I of sollen, while the second uses an infinitival construction with zu. The choice depends on the reporting predicate and the syntactic structure of the construction. These examples demonstrate that the grammatical form of reported speech is influenced by the communicative function of the original utterance and by the lexical properties of the reporting predicate. In contemporary German, indirect speech can occur without the conjunction dass. This pattern is particularly common in formal written language, including journalistic prose. For example: Der Minister erklärte, die Reform werde im nächsten Jahr umgesetzt. The reported clause die Reform

werde im nächsten Jahr umgesetzt follows the reporting clause without an introductory conjunction. The finite verb werde appears in second position, rather than in the final position characteristic of a dass-subordinate clause. Compare the following constructions:

Der Minister erklärte, dass die Reform im nächsten Jahr umgesetzt werde.

Der Minister erklärte, die Reform werde im nächsten Jahr umgesetzt.

Both constructions can represent reported content, but they differ syntactically. The first contains a subordinate clause introduced by dass, while the second employs a reported clause without an introductory conjunction and with verb-second word order. The omission of dass should not be confused with the absence of a reporting relationship. The reporting predicate erklärte continues to establish the relationship between the speaker and the reported proposition. Furthermore, the absence of dass does not necessarily imply that the subjunctive must be present in every context. The interpretation of a reported clause depends on the grammatical construction, the reporting predicate, and the wider discourse context.

The relationship between tense and mood is an important aspect of German indirect speech. In particular, the interpretation of subjunctive forms cannot be determined solely by comparing their formal tense with the tense of the reporting clause. Consider the following examples, which illustrate different combinations of reporting predicates and reported clauses:

Reporting clause	Reported clause
Hans sagt,	er schreibe einen Brief
Hans sagte,	er schriebe einen Brief
Hans wird sagen,	er werde einen Brief schreiben
Hans würde sagen,	er habe einen Brief geschrieben
Hans hat gesagt,	er hätte einen Brief geschrieben
Hans hatte gesagt,	er habe einen Brief geschrieben gehabt
Hans hat gesagt gehabt,	er hätte einen Brief geschrieben gehabt
Hans hatte gesagt gehabt	er würde einen Brief schreiben

These combinations are presented as examples of the relationship between the reporting clause and the reported clause. However, they are not all interchangeable in meaning or equally natural in contemporary German. Some are highly marked, context-dependent, or associated with particular temporal and modal interpretations. They should not be interpreted as evidence that every reporting clause can combine freely with every reported-clause form. The use of Konjunktiv I and Konjunktiv II must be examined with regard to the grammatical form, the intended temporal interpretation, and the discourse context. The two subjunctive forms may refer to comparable temporal situations in reported speech, but this does not mean that they are functionally identical in all contexts.

DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that indirect speech in German is best understood as a grammatical and communicative construction involving the interaction of syntax, mood, deixis, and discourse context. Coulmas's approach is relevant because it emphasises that reported speech is not simply a reproduction of an original utterance. When a speaker reports another person's words, the content is incorporated into a new communicative situation. Personal reference, temporal expressions, and other deictic elements may consequently be adjusted to reflect the relationship between the original utterance and the reporting context. The grammatical distinction between Konjunktiv I and Konjunktiv II is particularly important in German. Konjunktiv I is frequently used to mark reported content in formal written German. Konjunktiv II may be used when the Konjunktiv I form is identical to the indicative or when other modal meanings are relevant. The choice of mood therefore cannot be explained exclusively by reference to chronological tense. The analysis also confirms that indirect speech is not restricted to clauses introduced by *dass*. German permits reported clauses without an introductory conjunction, as illustrated by the construction *Der Minister erklärte, die Reform werde im nächsten Jahr umgesetzt*. Such constructions retain a reporting relationship while exhibiting a different syntactic pattern from subordinate clauses introduced by *dass*.

The role of the reporting predicate is equally significant. Verbs such as *sagen*, *fragen*, and *auffordern* contribute to the interpretation of the reported content and are associated with different syntactic constructions. Accordingly,

indirect statements, indirect questions, and indirect commands cannot be analysed as interchangeable structures. A further distinction must be maintained between indirect speech and free indirect discourse. The latter is particularly important in literary narratives because it enables the presentation of a character's thoughts without an explicit reporting clause. Its interpretation depends on the relationship between the narrator's discourse and the character's perspective. The theoretical discussion also raises a methodological issue concerning the syntactic status of direct-speech constructions. A construction containing a reporting clause and a direct quotation should not automatically be classified as a compound sentence without considering the relationship between the two components. Direct quotation, indirect speech, and free indirect discourse represent different forms of speech representation and require separate syntactic and pragmatic analysis. The available examples support a qualitative analysis of these distinctions. However, because the study does not employ a systematically sampled linguistic corpus, the findings should be understood as theoretical and descriptive rather than as quantitative evidence of the frequency of particular constructions.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the principal theoretical approaches to indirect speech in German and analysed its grammatical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics. The findings indicate that reported speech occupies an important position in German linguistics because it provides the means to represent another person's words or thoughts within a new communicative context. The distinction between direct speech, indirect speech, and free indirect discourse is essential for understanding how linguistic content is presented and interpreted. The analysis has identified several principal features of indirect speech. These include the use of reporting predicates, the grammatical distinction between Konjunktiv I and Konjunktiv II, changes in personal and temporal deixis, and the syntactic relationship between reporting clauses and reported clauses. The omission of *dass* in certain constructions further demonstrates that indirect speech cannot be reduced to a single subordinate-clause pattern.

The study also shows that the grammatical form of a reported clause does not determine its interpretation independently of context. The choice of mood, the temporal reference, and the relationship between the original speaker and the reporting speaker must be

considered together. As a result, reported speech should be analysed as a multidimensional linguistic phenomenon rather than merely as a syntactic transformation of direct speech. Its interpretation requires an integrated approach that combines grammatical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-related analysis. In conclusion, reporting another person's speech involves the selection and reconstruction of linguistic content. The reporting speaker determines which aspects of the original utterance are retained, omitted, reformulated, or presented from a different perspective. Reported speech is therefore not necessarily an exact reproduction of the original utterance, but a context-dependent representation shaped by grammatical choices and communicative intentions.

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