# A Review of Research on Direct Reported Speech

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**Abstract**

Being an interest in different fields, Direct Reported Speech (DRS) is mainly studied in linguistics and sociology as a complex phenomenon in texts and conversations. This paper makes a review of research on DRS according to different research orientations in the fields of syntactic, semantic, phonetic, pragmatic, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and Conversation Analytic studies, providing an interdisciplinary perspective for understanding DRS and future studies on it.

**Keywords:** Direct Reported Speech, reported speech, literature review

## 1. Introduction

Direct Reported Speech (DRS) has been an interest for researchers in multidisciplinary fields of studies mainly for its delimitation, function and its use in communication. The term *Direct Reported Speech* is equivalent to *direct speech* (or direct quotation/discourse) in the sense of literalization (Haberland, 1986: 220) as one of the major types of reported speech, referring to the "rendition/reproduction/replay/reenactment" of what someone has originally said or wrote in the past (Banfield, 1973; Goffman, 1981: 151; Coulmas, 1986: 2; Haberland, 1986: 220; Holt, 1996). This term is somewhat widely adopted in studies using spoken data particularly in respect that reporting/quoting is an act of demonstration in nature for pragmatic purposes (Clark & Gerrig, 1990) other than a linguistic resource.

A philosophical foundation for these studies is Voloshinov's definition of reported speech, which is "an utterance belonging to someone else" (1973: 116). Basing on this common ground,

research on DRS can be divided into three sections: the syntactical, semantic and phonetic studies that describe its design features in written and spoken discourses, giving precedent definitions of it; the pragmatic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic studies that aim to exploit its practical functions in communicative contexts, while facing the issue of its authenticity; and the Conversation Analytic studies that concentrate on social actions rather than language itself, recounting DRS in sequences of different actions, trying to figure out the relation between its position and effects in conversations. A review of these researches will be presented in the following sections.

## 2. Syntactic, Semantic and Phonetic Studies

Usually in the name of Direct Speech or Direct Discourse, DRS is studied as a specific type of grammatical structure and rhetorical device in these fields. Researchers focus on the classification between DRS and other reported speech in terms of their forms, meanings and phonological patterns.

## 2.1 Syntactic and Semantic Studies

The grammatical structures of DRS are initially described in syntax and literature studies of narrative texts. Under grammatical rules, sentence construction, tense and deixis are main features for defining DRS (Banfield, 1973). With Immediate Constituent Analysis, the quoted sentence is a substituent part as well as the semantic and functional centre of the whole sentence (Partee, 1973). Semantically, DRS is more than a form of speech in that it enables the hearer to see what and how the words are said due to its characteristic of imagination (Wierzbicka, 1974). With an elaboration of syntactic features of reported speech in a functional analytic view, Li (1986) suggested that DRS frequently appears at the peak of oral narratives, allowing the speaker to play the original speaker's role. Coulmas (ibid.) summarized the classifications of reported speech from former syntactic studies and agrees that it is the speaker's perspective that makes DRS unique from other types of reported speech. In reported dialogues with multiple DRS, grammatical features such as word order and tense can form a regular quotation formula (Longacre, 1994) for telling apart different characters in storylines. Pípalová (2012) also pointed out that graphic framings like punctuation markers are clear enough for identifying DRS in texts comparing with spoken forms whose boundaries are more ambiguous. As discussions of grammar and frames of DRS become firmed over decades, researchers turn to a multi-linguistic preference by describing its formats in languages other than English. It is believed that DRS is universal across languages (Wierzbicka, 1974; Li, 1986) as a unique linguistic phenomenon with its own rules of construction (Spronck & Nikitina, 2019). This is supported by researches of DRS (along with other reported speech) in a wide range of different language families from the majority of Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan to those of ethnic groups (for collections of these works, see Coulmas, 1986; Janssen & van der Wurff, 1996; Güldemann & von Roncador, 2002). Such studies lead to a hypothesis from linguistic typological perspective that Reported Speech is of great significance to the origin of grammar (Spronck & Casartelli, 2021). These studies provide a fundamental idea that DRS is different from IRS and thus should be treated as a different subject for further studies.

## 2.2 Phonetic Studies and Multimodal Studies

While describing grammatical features of DRS in written discourse, many researchers have given insights of the ways it can be presented in oral speech (Tannen, 1986; Xu, 1996; Zhang, 2000). With audio data available, there came up the opportunity of analyzing words, voices and even multimodal features of spoken DRS in detail. Jasen et al. (2001) used audio editing tools and corpus-based annotation to give a quantitative analysis on pitch range and pauses of DRS, concluding that DRS has a greater pitch range than IRS and is more likely to occur after intonational breaks. With a similar approach, Oliveira & Cunha (2004) checked the boundary of DRS in conversations, confirming that prosodic features such as pitch reset and intensity are essential for hearers to identify it in talks. A detailed analysis on a range of prosodic devices shows that DRS markings are not as definite as that in written discourses. Participants depend on prosody and contextual environments rather than verbal indicators when perceiving a DRS in conversations (Klewitz & Couper-Kuhlen, 1999), and they can use prosody to animate the original speaker while implanting their own evaluation in their reporting (Günthner, 1999). Later with multimodal analysis, DRS in face-to-face interactions is thought to be related to reenactment considering its demonstrative nature (Sidnell, 2006). Further by looking into the form of DRS in face-to-face interviews, Good (2015) proposed to substitute *reported speech* by *reported action* in multimodal studies in that DRS is accompanying the phenomenon of reenactment in face-to-face interactions.

## 3. Pragmatic, Psycholinguistic and Sociolinguistic Studies

The main issues discussed in these areas are the authenticity and functions of DRS in speech forms. The concept of DRS or reporting is no more restricted within words and sentences, but a speech act if conveying other's utterances in communication in these fields.

### 3.1 Pragmatic Studies and Mixed Studies

Pragmatic studies mostly work on the functions and contextual features of DRS with some theoretical hypothesis on its nature. A crucial contribution is the Demonstration Theory by Clark & Gerrig (1990). In this theory, DRS is considered as an act of demonstration which does not actually perform what is said on the

surface. When using DRS, speakers play another person's role in the current conversation and determine what to depict from their direct experience for different functions. Other inspiring findings are pseudoquotations (Dubois, 1989), zero quotatives (Mathis & Yule, 1994) and self-quotations (Maynard, 1996) in spoken discourse. These cases take the form of DRS by changing voices and deixis, yet challenge its syntactic rules and the general conception of "the speech of others" (Bakhtin, 1981: 337) in some ways. Mayes (1990) analyzed the properties and the reliability of DRS in interview talks, making a clarification that most DRS in conversations are invented rather than quoted. Her conclusion resonates with Tannen's notion of *reported dialogue* (1986) against *reported speech* since it is actually current speaker's own production, not another person's. This leads to a question of how such an utterance created by the speaker is attributed to others. By revealing different layers of context, Buttny (1998) explains how reported speech, especially DRS of multiple voices, is framed in conversation. Speakers introduce DRS from an original context into a new one at certain points in storytelling so that it can fit in and make sense in the current context for interactional purpose. This kind of context is designed for recipients to understand the quotation as well as its action (Heinemann & Wagner, 2015). From a functional and quantitative perspective on the other hand, Vincent & Perrin (1999) found DRS is particularly preferred over IRS in oral speech for narrative functions, and speakers choose between DRS and IRS depending on what function they need. As Xin (2010) indicates that reported speech needs to be studied for its communicative functions and effects in contextualized discourses, many studies have analyzed the uses of DRS in various settings. For instance, it can help establish speaker's topics (Yule & Mathis, 1992), provide evidence from authoritative sources (Myers, 1999; Juhila & Jokinen, 2014), emphasize personal opinions in group discussions (Myers, 1999), and tactically build up self images or other's portraits in political debates (Kuo, 2001) and social work conversations (Juhila & Jokinen, 2014). Some studies on DRS use mixed methods with pragmatic theories. Through a corpus-based method, Concannon et al. (2015) analyzed the stance markers in reported speech, finding that DRS has more explicit stance markers than IRS

and is more likely to be agreed. Lamerichs & Te Molder (2009) used discursive psychology (a branch of discourse analysis) to analyze "be like" initiated self-quotations in gossip conversations among teenagers. They find this type of self-quotation in DRS form is a method of stating robust claims in storytelling. Stirling (2010) discussed the reference and mapping mechanism of DRS combining a cognitive linguistic perspective and Labov's analysis on structures of narrations, concluding that the deictic center of DRS is the past context where it is originally uttered.

*3.2 Psycholinguistic Studies*

Plenty of pragmatic studies provide hypothetical ideas that reported speech is more than a type of "speech" in daily conversations. With supports from studies in sign language (Hodge & Cormier, 2019), speakers seem to take advantage of its relatively verbatim feature over the indirect style despite the problem of its authenticity. Psycholinguists provide experimental evidences for this issue regarding report of talks as a complex behavior that involves mental process of memory and remembering (Bartlett, 1995: 98). It is proved that DRS tends to be less authentic than expected. Lehrer (1989) evaluated the accuracy of quotation from textual information, finding that speakers recall meanings better than words despite their assertiveness of maintaining verbatim. Wade & Clark (1993) took the need of accuracy and entertainment as variables in their experiments, confirming that DRS is frequently used for adding amusement to narration with a relative drop of accuracy from original content, whereas both speaker and hearer are convinced of its validity. By taking dialogues and monologues as variables, Bavelas et al. (2014) found DRS occurs more in dialogues than in one-speaker monologues, which indicates the importance of its role in interactive conversations.

*3.3 Sociolinguistic Studies*

Sociolinguistic studies take the interaction mechanism and social identity into consideration while analyzing the role of DRS in conversations. A fundamental idea is Goffman's notion of "change in footing", which refers to the change of speaker's stance or alignment when shifting from their own words to what others have said in the course of talking (1981: 128, 151). Basing on this concept, Leudar &

Antaki (1996) noticed that some social psychological researchers record talks in forms of reported speech yet neglect their own participation in the designed contexts. They propose that researchers should look into the 'dialogicality' and the participant's footing in discourse studies. Another widely accepted idea is what Labov believes that speakers are doing a kind of "embedded evaluation" when quoting themselves or others in narration (1972: 372-373). It is adopted by a microsociolinguistic study of DRS used among Scottish English speakers, along with other findings of its functions as adding credibility and liveliness to narration (Macaulay, 1987). The effect of liveliness is considered as owing to the accessibility of hearer's involvement basing on an observation of teenager girls' talks in which DRS is frequently used (Romaine & Lange, 1991). In trouble's telling of family matters, speakers construct their agentive and epistemic roles as well as their social identities through DRS (Schiffrin, 1996). Similarly in public debates, speakers use DRS for social positioning of citizenship and supporting their claims (Holšánová, 2006). To sociolinguists, speaker's status and power relations are important for studying reported speech in interactions (Schely-Newman, 2015). They use natural conversations as materials with restricted contexts for sociological purposes, providing some enlightenment for further studies.

## 4. Conversation Analytic Studies

With a sociological origin, Conversation Analysts see DRS as a practice to perform several social actions in talk-in-interactions.

Upon its framing, Holt (1996) first discussed the design features and functions of DRS in mundane conversations. She provides a preliminary conclusion that it is an economical device for providing information with evidence, inviting recipient's participation in a topic, and that turn initial particles can be indications of a DRS with speaker's stance. By differentiating DRS from IRS, Holt (2000) then pointed out that DRS is treated differently by participants as a rather complex issue that can reproduce both actions and words. Prosody is also remarked as essential for participants to distinguish DRS when verbal clues are insufficient, allowing them to evaluate the coherence of ongoing talks (Couper-Kuhlen, 1998). By going through DRS in Russian conversations, Bolden (2004) classified various occasions that may occur after

the quotative frames and reported contents, with a conclusion that DRS boundaries are relative to social interactions. Using video recordings, Golato (2000) inspected a grammatical format of quotative that occurs exclusively at story climax in German conversations functioning as a punchline where the plain telling turns into an enactment.

In mundane conversations, DRS can be easily found within sequences of storytelling (Holt, 1996, 2000; Clift, 2012) in which speakers make narrations of their experiences of the past. It can occur at the climax of complaining or amusing stories as the focus of telling (Drew, 1998; Holt, 2000). DRS frequently occurs in talks of conflictive topics like racial issues (Buttny, 1997) and peer disputes (Svahn, 2016) as a powerful device for indirectly judging someone else's non-normative behavior in a past interaction. Looking into the relation between reported speech and the characters in storytelling, Griswold (2016) regards DRS as a technique to put a third party onto the central stage of the story. Besides, the source of quotation and the position it is located in complaint stories displays speaker's own state in the reported events (Heinrichsmeier, 2021). Niemelä (2005) discussed the relationship between stance and the voicing of DRS. She pointed out that DRS embodies affective stance within its voicing, and that DRS can perform different types of stance-taking according to its sequential position in storytelling. Later with a notion of reporting space (2010), she further analyzed the multimodal resources speakers use for reenacting a past event in certain segment of storytelling, and discussed their relationship with stance-taking. In trouble-telling sequences, DRS emerges where speakers report decisions of the past with various forms as a practice of social interaction rather than a grammaticalized phenomenon (Golato, 2002). Berger & Doehler (2015) discussed DRS and epistemic entitlement in storytelling, claiming that DRS can present the speaker as a legitimate source of information as well as evaluation. Holt (1999) found a particular case of DRS in an institutional talk not only giving information and evidence, but also implicating stance and inviting recipient's assessment, which can lead the talk to a mundane trajectory rather than an institutional one. Under a highly institutional setting in court, witnesses use DRS at a fixed sequential position when answering interrogations in legal

testimonies to implicate their personal opinions while explicitness is restricted on that occasion (Galatolo, 2007). In a study of nurses' handover talks, Bangerter et al. (2011) pointed out that DRS can indicate membership category and professionality specifically in the nursing context. With a combination of interactional linguistics and Conversation Analysis, Guardiola & Bertrand (2013) concluded that DRS produced by the listener in face of a storytelling shows his/her affiliation. Moreover, Clift (2006, 2007) and Couper-Kuhlen (2007) found non-narrative DRS in the sequential environment of assessing and accounting. They found DRS can manifest and justifying assessments (Couper-Kuhlen, 2007: 100). Since DRS has a quality of competitiveness (Clift, 2012), recipient's DRS toward a first assessment displays epistemic authority over it (Clift, 2007: 149). These studies provide a Conversation Analytic perspective of understanding what actions can be performed by DRS for future studies.

The Conversation Analytic studies concentrates on the inner actions performed by DRS, taking its structural elements as external evidences to see how they reflect the speaker's actions and how they influence the recipient's understandings on a social scale. By showing that actions of DRS are not determined by its linguistic structure but are guided by social norms, this study provides an interactional perspective for understanding the relation between the linguistic form of DRS and social actions performed through it.

### 5. Comments on Previous Studies

Concluded from previous studies, there are two main problems worth noting. A key problem is the ambiguity of delimitation. In different branches of linguistic studies, DRS can be found under the names of direct quotation, direct narration, direct discourse, sometimes 'quotation/quotative' or 'reported speech' for short. Unlike those syntactically defined with formal structures in grammar, DRS in oral speech is not always clear-cut from other types of reported speech in existing studies. Pseudoquotations, self-quotes and enactments are regarded as special types of DRS, yet they contradict the nature of reported speech for they are either words from oneself instead of others or unlikely to be spoken. In this sense, they take effect differently from DRS. It is necessary to distinguish DRS from other forms of quotations

and make a clear definition of it in the first place.

Another problem is the bias of contexts. DRS is mostly studied for its functions in narrations (Golato, 2000) owing to its frequent occurrence in storytelling. It was not until Conversation Analysts dissected the sequence organization of conversation that researchers take non-narrative cases into consideration. Reconsidering DRS as a practice to perform social actions other than a quoting device to build up stories, a few cases of DRS outside storytelling sequences have been located (Clift, 2007: 120). However, non-narrative DRS still lack in number and elaboration. Even narrative DRS are not fully exploited since it can happen at different positions doing different actions in a storytelling sequence. With a Conversation Analytic approach, DRS in both contexts are discernible and analyzable, if only given enough amounts of cases.

### 6. Conclusion

Reviewed from previous studies, DRS is proved to be distinctive from Direct Speech not only in terms of composition but also of its roles in communication. Cases of pseudoquotations, zero-quotatives and self-quotations found in spoken data mark a vital difference between DRS in verbal speech and Direct Speech in grammar. The majority of studies center on narrative contexts where most cases are found. DRS allows the speaker to play multiple roles in his/her narration, thus enlivens the story and create hearer's involvement. By presenting information from another source, it provides evidence to support speaker's claim. In certain contexts where personal claims are unsuitable, speakers tactically use DRS to imply their stance and evaluations. It is also believed to be a powerful strategy for establishing one's social image in certain contexts that requires formality and professionality. Though many researchers have put doubt on its fidelity, both speakers and hearers tend to treat it as authentic. This may indicate a reason why DRS is used at particular points in mundane conversations.

With a profound understanding of DRS, its relationship with social actions and a quantity of naturally-occurred data, future studies may explore non-narrative DRS and bring up practical strategies of DRS applicable in the contexts of institutional services, computational data processing, second language teaching and

medical treatments of language disorder (Zhang & Min, 2019), etc.

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