

ON
REPORTED
SPEECH

Arnold M. Zwicky The Ohio State University

In this brief communication I address myself to the relationship between sentences and reports of sentences, primarily reports using the verb *say*, but also some employing *tell* and *let someone know*. In my exposition I shall distinguish the (original) "speaker," who gives a "speech," and the person who describes the content of this speech—the "reporter," who supplies a "report." Consider, for example, speech (1), where the speaker is Harry, and the reports of (1) in (2):

- (1) My only brother, Frank, who is a genius at chess, will be staying with me for a week.
- (2) a. Harry said that his brother is going to stay at his place for seven days.
b. Harry said that someone will visit him for a while.
c. Harry said that his brother is very good at some game.
d. Harry said that his only brother is named Frank.

Those who are competent in English have the ability to judge sentences with main verb *say* as satisfactory or unsatisfactory reports of a given speech. The same ability is manifested when those who are competent in English make judgments about the acceptability of examples like those in (3):

- (3) a. Harry said, "My only brother, who is a genius at chess, will be staying with me for a week," but he didn't say that anyone would visit him.
b. Harry said, "My only brother, who is a genius at chess, will be staying with me for a week"—that is, he said that someone would visit him.

The sentences in (2) are satisfactory reports of speech (1), but the sentences in (4) are not:

- (4) a. Harry said that there will be no space for me to stay at his house.
b. Harry said that he was thinking of someone named Frank.
c. Harry said that he has only one brother.

To distinguish satisfactory reports, like those in (2), from unsatisfactory reports, like those in (4), it seems necessary to distinguish various aspects of sentences (see the discussion in Fillmore 1969b).

First, the "meaning" of a sentence, what is asserted, requested, demanded, and so forth.

Second, the "presuppositions" of the sentence, the conditions on the correct use of the sentence.¹

¹ I realize that this characterization of the notion of presupposition is unsatisfactory in a number of respects, and that it is in fact doubtful that there is any usefulness in the term *presupposition* construed very broadly. Some of the papers accompanying this one make these points quite clearly. But for present purposes it is sufficient to distinguish presuppositions, in some rather loose sense, from certain other aspects of sentences.

Third, the “messages” that might be conveyed by the sentence—what the speaker might mean by the sentence, or what the hearer might take the sentence to mean. Such messages are at times totally unrelated to the meaning of the sentence (as when (5) is to be understood as code for (6)), even precisely contradictory to the meaning (as when (7) is spoken with sarcastic intent).

- (5) Uncle dreadfully ill, dying fast.
- (6) Meet me in London tomorrow at noon.
- (7) What a beautiful dress!

Fourth, “inferences” to be drawn from the meaning of the sentence, or from the messages that might be conveyed by it, or from both. For instance, from (8) one can conclude that Fermat’s Last Theorem is false, although no one would want to claim that ‘Fermat’s Last Theorem is false’ is the “meaning” of (8).

- (8) There is a number such that 3,267, when raised to that power and added to 6,987 also raised to that power, gives 9,812 raised to that power.

Similarly, on hearing (9) one can reasonably suppose that some sort of assistance is in order.

- (9) I think I’m going to faint.

But (9) is nevertheless a declaration, not a request. Inferences may be strict, as in the case of (8), or only likely, as in the case of (9). Other types of inferences are drawn not from the content of utterances but from their form (roughly, not from what was said but from the way in which it was said), as when choice of vocabulary and aspects of phonology are used to classify speakers as to their geographical origin, age, status, and so forth.

In drawing a distinction between meanings, presuppositions, messages, and inferences, I do not claim to be very clear about the characteristic features of these aspects of utterances, in particular about the differences between presuppositions, messages, and inferences, although there does seem to be a fair number of clear cases of each.

Consider now (4)a and (4)b, both unsatisfactory reports of (1). (4)a conveys, not the meanings of (1), but rather a possible inference from (1), or a message that might be conveyed by (1). (4)b conveys, not the meaning of (1), but rather a presupposition of (1), roughly that the speaker has in mind someone with the proper name being used. From these examples, and many more of similar type, we can conclude that a satisfactory report conveys the

meanings of a speech, and not its presuppositions or its possible messages or possible inferences from it. This is a property of the verb *say*, not of verbs of report in general. Compare *let someone know*, which can convey any of the previously mentioned aspects of a speech; thus (10) is a satisfactory report of (1) which conveys a possible message of (1).

- (10) Harry let me know that there would be no space for me to stay at his house.

And (11), which conveys one of the presuppositions of (1), is also a satisfactory report of (1).

- (11) Harry let me know that he has a brother.

In my speech *tell* is ambiguous as between a sense like that of *say* and a sense like that of *let someone know*, so that (12) is a satisfactory report of (1), but only in the 'let someone know' sense of *tell*.

- (12) Harry told me that there would be no space for me to stay at his house.

It is a satisfactory report of (13), spoken by Harry, but only in the 'say' sense of *tell*.

- (13) There will be no space for you to stay with me.

Now I return to the verb *say*, which I have thus far argued to report the meanings of speeches but not various other aspects of them. More precisely, *say* reports only the assertions in speeches. Speech (1) does not "assert" the existence of Harry's brother, nor does it "assert" that Harry has no brothers besides the one mentioned (hence (4)c is an unsatisfactory report of (1)). On the other hand, (1) does assert that this brother of Harry's is a genius at chess, and that he will be staying with Harry for a week, and that his name is Frank. Similarly, (14), spoken by Harry, asserts that a friend of Harry's is good at chess and that he will be staying with Harry for a week.²

- (14) A friend of mine who is good at chess will be staying with me for a week.

² Restrictive relative clauses within definite NP's are not assertive, and restrictive relative clauses within indefinite NP's are frequently not assertive. It seems quite clear to me, however, that (14) has at least one reading involving two assertions, although I have at the moment no characterization of the class of assertive relative clauses.

In consequence, (15) is a satisfactory report of (14):

- (15) Harry said that the guy who will be staying with him is good at chess.

Note next that a report need not, of course, convey all of the assertions in a speech, nor need it convey all of the content in any particular assertion.³ These observations are exemplified by the reports in (2) above. Thus, (2)a omits the assertion that Harry's brother's name is Frank, and the assertion that Frank is a genius at chess, and also the information that Frank is Harry's *only* brother.

- (2) a. Harry said that his brother is going to stay at his place for seven days.

(2)b omits the same things, and in addition provides no description of Harry's visitor, no indication of the length of the visit, and no specification that the visitor will actually be staying at Harry's house.

- (2) b. Harry said that someone will visit him for a while.

Finally, recall the familiar observation (as in McCawley, 1968e) that identifications in reported speech may be reports of the speaker's identifications or may be independent identifications supplied by the reporter. Thus, (16) is a satisfactory report of (1), given the reporter's judgment that Harry's brother Frank is a famous Fascist.

- (16) Harry said that a famous Fascist will visit him.

Similarly, the reporter may substitute synonyms for terms of the original speech, as in the following satisfactory report of (1):

- (2) a. Harry said that his brother is going to stay at his place for seven days.

where *for seven days* replaces the *for a week* of the original speech (1), and where *stay at his place* replaces the *stay with me* of (1).

A rough approximation to a statement of the relationship between speeches and reports is then:

³ In these respects the notion of report under discussion here differs from a characterization of a satisfactory job of (newspaper) reporting. A newspaper report is expected to be complete with respect to "significant" items of information, in some special sense of *significant*.

- (17) A report is a subset of the set of assertions of the speech, with possible replacements of identifications or lexical items in the speech by identifications or lexical items supplied by the reporter.

If anything like (17) is the correct statement, we can draw several conclusions about the representations of sentences at the level at which the relationship between speeches and reports is to be expressed. First, that declarative sentences at this level are sets of representations of assertions. Second, that some of these assertions are overt existentials (recall the fact that a sentence like (18) is a satisfactory report of Harry's speech (19)).

- (18) Harry said that someone was coming.
(19) John is coming.

Third, that identifications are represented independently of the remaining content of the assertions. Fourth, that the choice of particular lexical items either has not yet been made at this level, or is (somehow) represented independently of the remaining content of the assertions. Fifth, that the presuppositions of the assertions are represented independently of the meanings of the assertions.