

## Perspectival prominence: Unlocking perspective shift in indirect discourse

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In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the interplay between prominence and perspectivization in discourse. Several works have provided compelling empirical evidence that discourse prominence directly impacts the choice of perspectival centre for free indirect discourse (FID) (cf. Hinterwimmer & Meuser 2019). I present the results of two experimental studies which illustrate discourse prominence's role in unlocking perspective shift in indirect discourse (ID), a type of speech/thought report that has been argued in the past to fundamentally not allow shifted readings of deictic expressions (cf., *inter alia*, Schlenker 2004, Sanders 1994).

Three types of speech/thought representation are generally distinguished from each other in the literature. In direct discourse (DD), all indexicals are fully interpreted from the reported context. There is an overall consensus in the literature that the opposite is the case for ID: Perspective shift is unavailable and thus, all indexicals are interpreted from the context of the current speaker, the default perspectival centre. Finally, FID is often regarded as a hybrid of DD and ID (cf. Sanders 1994, Schlenker 2004): While personal indexicals and tense forms are bound to the speaker's context, spatio-temporal indexicals are interpreted from the reported context. As FID is not embedded via a propositional attitude verb, its interpretation as a speech/thought report has to be inferred from its content, the overall context and various perspectival cues. Hinterwimmer (2019) has argued that FID can only be anchored to the discourse referent who has been established as maximally prominent, which has since been corroborated via several empirical studies published in, *inter alia*, Hinterwimmer & Meuser (2019).

I propose that the same holds true for ID: Shiftable expressions such as spatio-temporal indexicals are interpreted from the perspective of the discourse referent who is established as maximally prominent. A prerequisite is that the speech/thought report is embedded in a narrative context, due to narration's inherent potential for multiperspectivity (see Zeman 2020). I conducted two experimental studies to test this hypothesis. Experiment 1 consisted of an acceptability rating study testing the acceptability of German ID clauses containing temporal indexicals in discourse contexts that are only coherent if interpreted from the perspective of the matrix subject. 32 test items were created in four conditions (see the translated example in (1)). In each item, the matrix subject was established as maximally prominent; conditions differed with regard to the type of speech/thought report in the final clause and whether it contained a temporal indexical or an anaphoric adverbial. Participant's (n=40) task was to rate the acceptability of the speech/thought report on a Likert scale from 1-7. Contrary to what should be the expected outcome according to the literature, ID clauses featuring a shifted temporal indexical received an overall high mean rating of 5.43, which did not deviate significantly from the other conditions' mean ratings (5.67, 5.26 and 5.52), thus showcasing that shifted readings were deemed acceptable in ID.

Experiment 2 consisted of a continuous scale-choice study in the vein of previous studies on FID presented in, *inter alia*, Saure et al. (2023), which investigated the interaction of narrator and protagonist prominence. As these studies confirmed that homodiegetic first-person narrators affect the interpretation of FID due to their increased prominence, Experiment 2 similarly contrasted texts featuring heterodiegetic third-person narrators with ones featuring homodiegetic first-person narrators. Moreover, the experimental study additionally contrasted these narrative contexts with conversational contexts, in order to also gather empirical evidence for the hypothesis that narration is truly unique in its potential for multiperspectivity. 24 items were created in three conditions (see the translated example in (2)); items in all conditions ended with an ID clause featuring a temporal indexical. Participants (n=42) had to decide whether the indexical reflected the time of the speaker/narrator or the time of the protagonist, who was maximally prominent in condition A. The results revealed a striking difference between narrative and conversational contexts: While the former displayed an overall preference for the protagonist as perspectival center of ID, the latter showed a strong preference for the speaker instead. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between conditions A and B as well, as the latter showed a significantly stronger tendency to select the narrator as perspectival centre, which mirrors the results of previous studies on FID and can be attributed to the first-person narrator's high prominence.

Altogether, the results of the two experimental studies further underline the relevance of discourse prominence – as well as that of a narrative context – for perspectivization in discourse and provide strong evidence that this applies not only to FID, but also to ID. In turn, the results also reveal ID's true potential for perspective shift, which is much closer in nature to that of FID than has previously been assumed.

- (1) Last autumn, Bernd wanted to do a thorough house cleaning due to his dust allergy. But he kept putting off cleaning, so that one morning he woke up with a clogged nose.
- ID + deictic adverbial:** Bernd thought to himself that he should have started cleaning yesterday.
  - DD + deictic adverbial:** “Damn, I should have started cleaning yesterday”, thought Bernd.
  - FID + deictic adverbial:** Damn, he should have started cleaning yesterday!
  - ID + non-deictic adverbial:** Bernd thought to himself that he should have started cleaning the day before.

(2) a. **Cond. A/B:** **Tuesday, July 20, 2004 – Sonja’s/My great vacation**

On Saturday, Sonja/I was out and about with her/my best friend Fritz/Sonja. Since she/I really liked Fritz/Sonja, she/I had wanted to go on vacation with him/her for some time. But just as they/we were driving onto the highway towards Spain, smoke suddenly started coming from the engine. **Sonja said that she absolutely had to take the car to the workshop today.**

b. **Cond. C:**

*Tuesday, July 20, 2004 – Two colleagues, Fritz and Otto, are sitting in the cafeteria together and chatting.*

**Fritz:** By the way, you know my best friend, Sonja – I was out and about with her on Saturday.

**Otto:** Right, you were supposed to go on vacation together, weren’t you?

**Fritz:** Exactly, but just as we were driving onto the highway towards Spain, smoke suddenly started coming from the engine. **Sonja said that she absolutely had to take the car to the workshop today.**

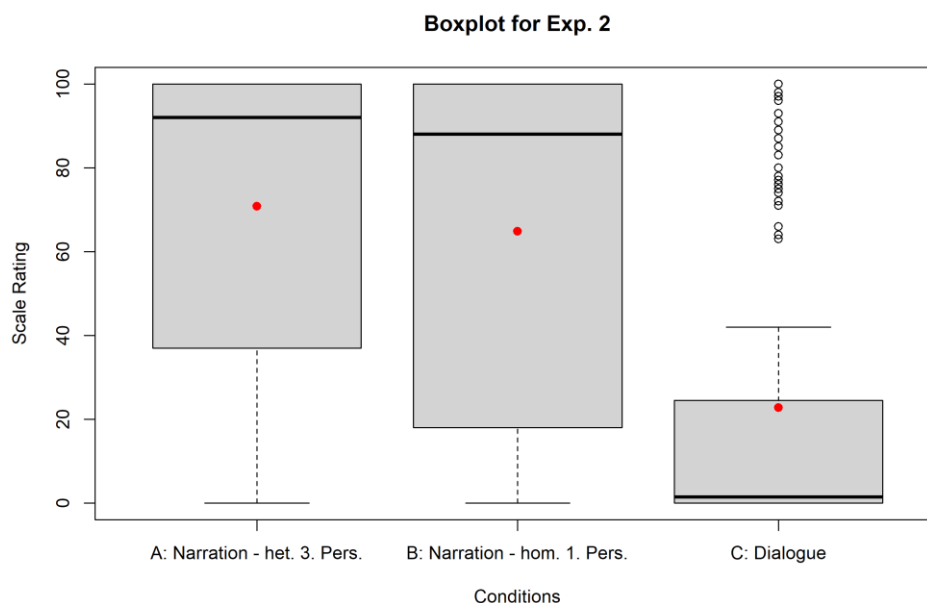


Figure 1: Mean continuous scale choice ratings (model estimate) on a scale between 0 and 100. A rating between 0 and 49 indicates a tendency to interpret temporal indexicals from the perspective of the speaker/narrator, while a rating between 51 and 100 indicates a tendency to interpret temporal indexicals from the perspective of the protagonist.

**References:**

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[4] Saure, C., S. Hinterwimmer & A. P. Jordan-Bertinelli (2023). An Experimental Investigation of the Interaction of Narrators’ and Protagonists’ Perspectival Prominence in Narrative Texts. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 42(2), 341–372.

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