

Voloshinov's thesis: towards a positive collaborative research programme on reported speech

The ability to reflect on the words and thoughts of others is one of the most fundamental properties of the human experience. Inevitably, this means that the study of the many different manifestations of this ability straddles all academic disciplines examining human behaviour and cognition.

For the analysis of reported speech, understood as the inclusive set of dedicated linguistic elements and structures languages may deploy for talking about the words of others (Spronck & Nikitina 2019), the inherent interdisciplinarity of metalinguistics has a clear implication: given the fractured nature of academic disciplines, no individual approach will have the final word on the phenomenon and, consequently, cross-disciplinary collaboration can only fruitfully exist *if accounts clearly state their scope and limitations*. Once these are acknowledged, however, most progress in interdisciplinary research on reported speech can be achieved, I would suggest, if each approach and discipline first and foremost discusses aspects of reported speech they are best suited to explore.

I begin this talk by arguing that this has rarely been the practice in reported speech research: most accounts choose to address features that *defy* traditional expectations within specific disciplines. Consequently, reported speech is almost exclusively studied as a *problem* (Spronck 2019) and while this is a valid approach for intra-disciplinary research, I argue that it is not helpful for achieving a *cross-disciplinary* understanding of reported speech. The latter is best served by accounts that are *motivated* rather than challenged by a specific research question.

For functionalist structural and typological linguistics I believe that such a research question was first formulated in Vološinov (1973), who argues that reported speech is relevant for the study of language, since it shows *how the dialogic nature of language can manifest in language structure*. While this claim is often misread for its emphasis on dialogue and intersubjectivity, this is not its actual point. The revolutionary aspect of it lies in the second part: because the inherent intersubjectivity of language escapes the analysis of structuralists most of the time, reported speech actually allows it to be studied by relatively traditional linguistic means. I will refer to this claim as 'Voloshinov's thesis'.

After sketching the context and illustrating Voloshinov's thesis I demonstrate how it leads to an integrated approach to reported speech that allows us to address the relation between communication and morphosyntax and may even present a starting point for uncovering the intersubjective origins of grammar (Spronck & Casartelli 2021).

I conclude by echoing the importance of advancing a cross-disciplinary understanding of quotation and reported speech, in the spirit of the conference, and propose a solutions-oriented collaborative research programme that focuses on what the individual disciplines can bring to the table, rather than where they fall short.

References

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