Speech Reporting in Retold Narratives in Bengali

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1. Introduction

One of the fundamental issues in the study of speech reporting is the shift in orientation that takes place at the boundary of the reporter's words and the reported speaker's words in a direct speech report. The following example, given by Quirk (1986: 15), illustrates the phenomenon:

(1)   a.   The doctor said I need a holiday.
        b.   The doctor said, 'I need a holiday.'

In (1a), the word *I* refers to the person that utters the entire sentence (the reporter), while in (1b), there is a shift in orientation at the point where the report starts, since *I* in this sentence refers to the doctor whose words are being reported (the speaker). Uchida (1997) uses the term Primary Immediate Context to describe the reporter's spatio-temporal egocentre, while the (fictional or real) speaker's centre projects a Secondary Immediate Context. The use of indirect speech, as in (1a), entails that all deictic items in the sentence can be interpreted within the Primary Immediate Context, while the use of direct speech, as in (1b), entails that the reported part of the sentence is to be interpreted within the Secondary Immediate Context. In texts, the shifts in orientation can be quite complex, because often utterances by two or more speakers will be reported, each of them creating their own Secondary Immediate Context, and these speakers can also do some reporting themselves (thus creating more deeply embedded Secondary Contexts).

This kind of complexity naturally invites questions about its acquisition by language learners. Some work has been done on second language learners' acquisition and use of reported discourse (see for example Yarmohammadi 1973, Goodell 1983, and Baynham 1991), but there is very little work on the acquisition of speech reporting by first language learners. In two studies on this topic using similar research designs, Goodell and Sachs (1992) and Hickmann (1993) investigated the production of reported discourse by English-speaking children, finding a clear developmental progression in the ability to mark and manipulate direct and

indirect reports in retold narratives. However, in the absence of comparative data it is not clear whether this progression is specific to English or can lay claim to some cross-linguistic validity. The present paper aims to broaden the empirical database on this subject by investigating the occurrence of speech reports of various types in retold narratives in Bengali, both by children and by adults, using similar methods of data collection as Goodell and Sachs (1992) and Hickmann (1993).

Since speech reporting in Bengali is not hugely different from English in the types that exist and the way these are used (see van der Wurff 1996, 1999 for description and analysis), it is possible to make meaningful comparisons between the two languages, and in what follows, attention will be drawn to points of similarity and difference in the empirical data from the two languages, and possible reasons for them. In this way, it is hoped that the data presented here may ultimately contribute to a greater awareness and understanding of cross-linguistic variation in the acquisition of speech reporting.

The structure of this paper is as follows: section 2 contains a description of the methods of data collection and analysis; section 3 deals with the frequency of report types found; section 4 examines the types of reporting clauses used, and the nature of the first element of the reported clause; section 5 offers a summing-up of the main results.

2. Methods of data collection and analysis

The material for the present study consists of retold narratives, as in Goodell and Sachs (1992) and Hickmann (1983). Data were collected in Bangladesh; the subjects were all native speakers of Bengali. Three groups of fifteen subjects each were tested: children aged 4 or 5, children aged between 8 and 10, and adults. They were asked first to listen to a short narrative on tape while looking at pictures of the protagonists spread out on the table in front of them, and then to retell the story to a person who had not been in the room while the narrative was being played. The retold narrative was recorded on a cassette recorder. This was done for altogether five narratives, all taken from Hickmann (1993) but translated into Bengali by a bilingual speaker and carefully edited to achieve maximal naturalness for Bengali listeners.

The stories played to the subjects consisted of bare dialogues between two protagonists (two animals, whose utterances were spoken by two native speakers of Bengali), introduced by a single sentence describing the scene.[1] One of the narratives is given in English in (2); the Bengali version used follows the English very closely.

(2)   One day an owl saw a sheep sitting somewhere, lost in thought.

—Hello friend sheep, what are you doing there?
—I am just sitting and thinking. I have seen a horse and a cow having a terrible fight. The horse gave the cow such a terrifying kick that the cow landed flat on the ground. They are still fighting. I was trying to figure out how I could stop them.
—Fighting so badly – what was it all about?
—You'll laugh when you hear it. Who is most important among the animals, that is what they are fighting about. The cow says, 'I'm most important, because I give milk'. But the horse says, 'I am most important, because people like it so much to ride on my back'. You tell me, owl, which of them is right?
—Well, sheep, we are all equal. No animal is more or less important than others.
—You are very wise, owl. It's absolutely true. Let's go and also tell them.
—Yes, sheep, let's go. Let's stop their quarrel.

In two of the narratives, including the one given in (2), a protagonist reports some speech uttered by other speakers (as when the sheep in (2) says, *The cow says, 'I'm most important, because I give milk'*); these instances took the form of direct speech in the versions played to the subjects.

In analysing the material collected in this way, four categories of reporting were distinguished, following Hickmann (1983). A first category is direct speech (DS) accompanied by some phrase meaning 'X said/asked etc.' (a reporting clause or frame). An example from the data is (3).[2]

(3)   tarpOre   Ekta pENca eSe   bollo je
             after-that an   owl   come-PART said that
             ki   bhabcho   bhai   bheRa?
             what you-are-thinking brother sheep
             'Then an owl came along and said, "What are you thinking, friend sheep?"'

Note that the verbum dicendi introducing the stretch of direct speech in (4) is followed by a complementiser (*je* 'that'), yielding the pattern *He said that X*, where X is a direct report. This option exists in many languages (see Janssen and van der Wurff 1996: 2) but is quite marginal in English, where the complementiser is normally followed by an indirect report (but see Schuelke 1958 for some examples with a direct report following *He said that...*).

A second reporting category is that of direct speech without a frame; an example is (4), where neither the first nor the second turn is introduced.

(4)   na bhai   na bheRa bhai   poSu   SObai SOman.
             no brother no sheep brother animals all   equal
             tumi Ekta buddhi   korechile   bhai.
             you a   wisdom have-done brother
             'No, friend, no friend sheep, all animals are equal.'
             'You have given a wise judgement, friend.'

A third reporting type is indirect speech (IS) with a frame, as in (5).

(5)   goru bolteche je   poSuder   moddhe SObceye
             cow is-saying that animals-GEN among   most
             Sei guruttopurno.
             he important
             'The cow is saying that he is most important among all animals.'

A final reporting strategy shows conversion of an utterance made by a protagonist in a story into a factual description of the corresponding activity. In (6), for example, an action is described which is based on the utterances in the last two lines of (2), but no reference to the speech act is included.

(6)   to   ora giye   ederke bujhiye
             then they go-PART them   understand-CAUSE-PART
             bole   miTmaT kore   dilo.
             say-PART reconciled do-PART gave
             'Then they went and explained it to them, and reconciled them.'

Apart from the choice of reporting type, the nature of the reporting frames was also analysed, as was the nature of the element immediately following it, i.e. the first element of the clause that the real or imaginary speaker is supposed to have uttered. It is these boundary elements that serve as clues to the listener in establishing whether an utterance is to be interpreted in the Primary Immediate Context or a Secondary Immediate Context (and if there are several speakers, which speaker's Secondary Context that must be).

3. Types of reporting used

A first finding was that none of the Bengali-speaking children aged 4 or 5 produced any type of reporting at all, i.e. they were unable to retell any of the narratives. They mostly started off by identifying the protagonists, often repeating this information several times, but after that could not continue. This is surprising since some problems in recalling the utterances might be anticipated for these young subjects, but not complete inability to retell anything at all. Using basically the same type of material and methods, both Goodell and Sachs (1992) and Hickmann (1993) did obtain data from English-speaking four-year olds.

The reason for this difference may lie in the way the Bengali subjects viewed the entire event: they appared tò think of the task as a school exam, requiring what school exams in Bangladesh do, which is literal reproduction of material studied. This was evident from most subjects' intense concentration while listening to the stories, from frequent requests to play the stories a second or third time, from the fact that some subjects kept softly mouthing words and sentences while waiting for their recording to start, while others sometimes stopped in the middle of their retelling to whisper a few phrases from further on in the narrative, and then continued where they had broken off. All of these looked like signs of an attempt at memorisation of the exact words used in the narratives, and it is likely that this exceeded the cognitive capacities of the youngest children, who would then lose the thread of the story altogether. Note that these pre-schoolers would be well aware of the need for literal rote-learning for school exams: in the evening and early in the morning, the air in Bangladeshi towns and villages is filled with the voices of school children intoning material from books that they are trying to get by heart. As an elder sister appointed to supervise her younger brothers' studies says in a story in a Bangladeshi children's magazine: *kire, cup kore acchiS je, pORar SOmOy kebol phaNkir tale thakiS, na?* 'What's that, why are you silent? You are taking it easy when you have to study, are you?' (*choToder kagoj* 2/10, May 1997, p.5). Studying makes noise in Bangladesh, and nobody can miss the point of what's being done.

As a result of all this, the data that follow represent only children aged 8 to 10 and adults. The frequency with which these two groups of subjects used the four reporting types distinguished above is shown in (7).[3]

(7)   Reporting types in retold narratives in Bengali

	children aged 8-10 (490 speech turns)	adults (570 speech turns)
DS with frame	65%	55%
DS without frame	21%	26%
IS with frame	NA	0%
description	13%	19%

The number of speech turns in (7) stands for the number of switches from speaker to speaker (or narrator). The passage in (4), for example, has two speech turns (consisting of the sequences *na... SOman*, and *tumi... bhai*) as has the sentence in (5) (*goru... je* and *poSuder... guruttopurno*). The retelling task was difficult for some children, but this did not greatly affect the number of turns that they managed to represent. Their problems mainly showed up in the much smaller amount of narrative detail and elaboration that they included and also in some repetition and self-correction in referring to the appropriate speaker, as shown by examples like (8), where the subject initially appears to be hesitating about who says 'I'.

(8)   bheRa ghOra na goru goru bOle ami.
           sheep horse no cow cow says I
           'The sheep — the horse — no, the cow, the cow says, "I".'

The data in (7) clearly show that in their retellings, both children and adults favoured the use of direct speech, choosing the framed option in circa 60% and the unframed option in roughly 25% of all cases. Descriptions were used for about 15%. Only two instances of indirect speech were found, both used by adults; we saw one of the two examples in (5).

Hickmann (1993) does not give percentages for her subjects' use of the reporting types, but from her description the following picture emerges:

(9)   Reporting types in retold narratives in English (based on Hickmann 1993)

4 years	description and/or unframed direct speech
7-10 years	description and/or framed direct speech
adults	description and/or framed (in)direct speech

The two language groups are similar in using both description and framed direct speech in their retellings, but a difference is that the Bengali subjects, both the 8-10 year olds and the adults, used a fair amount of unframed direct speech, which in English is more characteristic of four-year olds. Another difference is that indirect

speech, sometimes used by the English adults, is virtually absent in the Bengali data. In the study by Goodell and Sachs (1992), subjects were given some examples of how they could retell the narrative before they embarked on doing so themselves. These examples took the form of indirect discourse, and this seems to have had a considerable effect on the choice of reporting types, since Goodell and Sachs (1992: 414) give data showing that subjects used indirect reports in half or more of all cases.

The absence of indirect speech and the high proportion of unframed quotations in the Bengali material may again be due to the way the subjects viewed the whole exercise. If they were aiming for literal reproduction, then direct speech, with or — even better — without frame, would be called for, and that is what they used for over 80% of all turns. Interestingly, the two examples of indirect discourse both come at the point in (2) when the sheep is reporting what the horse and cow said, i.e. at a point where the choice for direct speech would necessitate a shift inside a Secondary Immediate Context to a more deeply embedded Secondary Context. For two speakers, the desire to spare listeners this kind of complexity seems to have overridden the perceived need for literal reproduction of the material.

To summarise, it appears that the nature of the text being produced is an important determinant of the frequency of different reporting types. The Bengali and English speakers were not really doing the same thing when they were retelling the stories, since the Bengali speakers were aiming for literal repetition. In terms of the model of Clark and Gerrig (1990), they were operating in the context of a convention strongly favouring depiction rather than description. This readily explains the greater reliance on direct reporting as well as several other features of the Bengali data. When texts are more clearly of the same type, we might expect closer matching of frequencies, and that is indeed what has been found for speech reporting in news articles in British and Bengali popular and quality newspapers (see van der Wurff 1999).

4. Types of boundary elements used

Data on the verbs used in the reporting frames by the Bengali subjects are given in (10). There was slighty more variety in the choice of reporting verbs by adults than children, in that the adults occasionally used the verb *jiggis kOra* 'to ask', which was only used twice by the younger subjects. At the same time, the adults showed even heavier use than children of the prime Bengali reporting verb *bOla* 'to say' (93%); its colloquial synonym *kOwa* was used in 16% of all cases by children but adults hardly ever used it (1%), probably because they felt it was too colloquial to be recorded for posterity.

(10)   Reporting verbs used in retold narratives in Bengali

	8-10 year olds	adults
bOla 'say'	84%	93%
kOwa 'say'	16%	1%
jiggiS kOra 'ask'	0%	6%
mone kOra 'think'	NA	0%

The Bengali children and adults differed from the English subjects of Goodell and Sachs (1992), who showed much greater lexical variety in their choice of reporting verbs, as can be seen in (11).

(11)   Reporting verbs used in retold narratives in English (based on
            Goodell and Sachs 1992)

	8-year olds	adults
say	65%	40%
tell	18%	12%
ask	8%	18%
explain/remark/promise/beg etc.	9%	30%

Apart from the limited number of reporting verbs that they used, Bengali children and adults also agreed in consistently putting the reporting frame in front of the reported words, and never the other way round (i.e. they only produced sequences like *He said, 'Yes.'*, and not *'Yes,' he said*), even though both options exist in Bengali. Where adults and children differed was in the nature of some other elements appearing in the frames. These elements are temporal adverbials, phrases referring to the addressee, and complementisers.

Two frame types were used only by children: one with the temporal adverb *tarpOr* 'after that', and the other with the word *ki* 'what' following the reporting verb:

(12)   Frames only used by children

tarpOr (X) bole/koy	'after that (X) says...'
(X) bole/koy ki	'(X) says what...'

The word *tarpOr*, composed of the pronoun *ta* (with genitival *-r*) and the post-position *pOr* 'after', is among the most basic words of Bengali, and it is not surprising to see that children often used it; an example is given in (13). Adults, however, did not use it at all. Similarly, adults never used the word *ki* 'what' as part of a frame, while children often did; an example is (14).

(13)   tarpOr   peNca bollo je   colo.
         after-that owl   said   that come-IMP
         'After that, the owl said, "Come!"'

(14)   bollo ki   ey to   amar bhul   hoe gelo.
         said   what oh then my   mistake been has
         'He said WHAT, "Oh, then I have made a mistake."'

In (14), it appears as if *ki* is being used as a complementiser. The historical origins of this construction may lie in the use of frames like *Se bollo ki?* (lit.: 'He said what?') with rhetorical function, as in English sentences such as *And what did he say?/And what do you think he said? "I'll give back your money next month!"* Bleaching of this rhetorical value might result in reanalysis of frame-final *ki* from interrogative pronoun to complementiser. Signs of this would be an extension of its use to non-rhetorical contexts (two children indeed used this type of frame for **all** their speech reports), a reduction in intonational prominence and a shorter pause between *ki* and the following quotation (both clearly audible in many recordings). However, the genesis of the construction, whether through reanalysis or otherwise, seems to lie somewhere in the past because it is recognised by adult speakers as a stereotype frame for use in children's stories. Its occurrence in the material collected may be a sign of further spread, but more research would be needed to establish this.

Two frame types, shown in (15), were rarely used by children: a frame with the adverb *tOkhon* 'then', another basic word, which many adults used in a way similar to children's *tarpOr*, and a frame specifying the addressee. Examples are given in (16) and (17), both produced by adults.

(15)   Frames seldom used by children

         tOkhon (X) bole 'then (X) says'
         frame with specification of addressee

(16)   tOkhon bolche hEn ami tomar khObor nicchi.
         then   he-says yes I   your   news   am-taking
         'Then he says, "Yes, I am keeping in touch with you."'

(17)   tOkhon peNca bheRake   jiggis   korlo je
         then   owl   sheep-DAT question did   that
         bhai   tumi boSe boSe ki   bhabcho?
         brother you sitting sitting what are-thinking
         'Then the owl asked the sheep, "Friend, what are you thinking, sitting there?"'

There was one frame that appeared to be for adults only. It consisted of the complementiser *je* 'that' forming a complete frame on its own, without any verbum dicendi being present. An example is given in (18), where it is the monkey's turn that is introduced in this way.

(18)   to   Ndur bhai   jiggis   korlo
            then mouse brother question did
            tumi kEno skule   gele na?
            you   why   school-LOC went not
            je   amar ekti boi   o   ekti pensil chilo.
            that my   a   book and a   pencil was
            'Then friend mouse asked, "Why didn't you go to school?"
            (The monkey said,) "I had a book and a pencil."'

In the Bengali material (and not only there), a frame acts as a boundary device that marks the orientation needed to interpret the reported clause that it accompanies. It is probably no coincidence that the frames in the material consistently precede the reported clauses, since such advance marking of orientation is obviously helpful, especially in speech, to ensure smooth processing. In view of this, it may also be interesting to examine the nature of the first element of the reported clause itself, i.e. the first few words attributed to the speaker being quoted, since these might conceivably also play a role in guiding the interpretation. The following elements were found to occur frequently at the front of reported clauses:

(19)   Frequent opening elements in reported clauses in Bengali

            • address forms
            • imperatives
            • interjections
            • the negator *na* 'no'
            • the affirmator *hEN* 'yes'
            • interrogative words (e.g. *ki* 'what', *kEno* 'why')
            • first and second person pronouns

Examples can be seen in (3), (4), (8), (14), (16), (17), and (18). In fact, of all the examples given so far, only (5) lacks an element of this type, and this reflects the general trend in the data well. What the elements in (19) have in common is that they are strongly interactive; it is therefore not entirely surprising that they are so frequent in the reported stories, which are quite interactive in character. But there may be more to it.

Except for the pronouns, the elements in (19) are all so-called unrepeatable or

unreportable entities (see Bolkestein 1990 and Yamaguchi 1994). That is, they cannot be used in indirect speech without creating a distinct feeling that there is an intrusion of direct speech (as in *He said that, yes, he was going to give back the money*). In English, such a mixture would not be acceptable in many written text types, though it is found in some speech styles. However, the example in (20), where the two *he*'s are intended to be coreferential, shows that a prolonged string of unrepeatable elements, which all need to be interpreted in a Secondary Immediate Context, makes it very difficult to return to an indirect reading, i.e. an interpretation within the Primary Immediate Context.

(20)   He$_i$ said that oh well, son, look, yes, then he$_i$ had made a mistake.

Of course, the elements in question are fine in direct speech, so their occurrence in many of the Bengali examples may seem unremarkable. However, their very presence contributes to marking an utterance as being direct and not indirect speech, and thus signals to the listener that a Secondary Immediate Context needs to be activated. The same thing holds for the first and second person pronouns in (19): someone (re)telling a story may refer to him/herself or to the listener by using such a pronoun but is perhaps more likely to use it to refer to one of the protagonists, especially when the pronoun follows a reporting clause. For example, in a story about a monkey and a mouse, a sentence like *The monkey said I/you had a book and pencil* will be easily interpretable as requiring a shift to a Secondary Context after the word *said*, by virtue of the first/second person pronoun.

5. Conclusions

A general conclusion that can be drawn from the material dealt with here is that it should not be assumed too quickly that text types in two or more languages are the same just because the external circumstances of their production are the same. As shown above, elicited retold narratives in Bengali differ in at least one important respect from English elicited retold narratives, since the Bengali retellers assume that they have to strive for literal repetition of what they have heard. This is the reason why the Bengali four-year olds could not produce retold narratives of this type, and why older children and adults employed direct reporting as their favourite strategy, in many cases without an introductory frame.

   Apart from this point of wider import, several more specific conclusions can be drawn about reporting in retold Bengali narratives. Thus, it was found that there is little variety in the reporting verbs used (a phenomenon also found in many other languages); that adults and children show a surprising dichotomy in their use of the

simple words *tarpOr* 'after that' and *tOkhon* 'then' in reporting frames; that children but not adults sometimes employ the word *ki* 'what' as if it were a complementiser, a use which may have its roots in reanalysis of what once was a pragmatically marked reporting frame; that adults sometimes use the complementiser *je* 'that' as a complete frame; and that unrepeatable expressions may play a role in marking the status of a clause as direct or indirect discourse, a point which may well have some cross-linguistic validity. Finally, it can be said that, notwithstanding the differences noted, speakers of Bengali aged 8-10 are on the whole quite similar to adults in the ways they mark and use speech reports.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Hickmann (1993) also collected data under different conditions. These have not been replicated in the present study.
2. In transliterating Bengali words and sentences, the system of Ray, Hai and Ray (1966) has been adopted. This means that the symbols E and O stand for (half-)open vowels, the symbols T, D, and R stand for retroflex sounds, S is a prepalatal sibilant, and N stands for a velar nasal (and for nasalisation of a preceding vowel). In the glosses, the following abbreviations are used: CAUSE = causative, DAT = dative, GEN = genitive, IMP = imperative, LOC = locative, PART = active past participle.
3. A zero percentage means that one or two instances were found; NA means that an option is not attested in the data.

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