



# The Pragmatics of Free Indirect Discourse: a questionnaire study

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## Perspective & Perspective-shifting

### Speaker Commitment by Default

All things being equal, content is preferentially evaluated with respect to the public beliefs of the speaker (Smith, 2003; Giorgi, 2010; Harris & Potts, 2010; a.o.).

1. **Gricean:** violation of Quality – say only what you know is true
2. **Equilibrium:** Overturning speaker default is a risky strategy – deviate only if communicative intention is clear. (Harris & Potts, 2010)

### Violating the default

- (1) I am increasingly worried about my roommate. She seems to be growing paranoid.
  - A. She told me that we need to watch out for the mailman, a possible government spy. (Embedded: 86% Non-speaker)
  - B. She refused to talk with the mailman, a possible government spy. (Unembedded: 68% Non-speaker)

### Pragmatic Perspective Shift

Pragmatic factors, at least in part, reliably determine how the commitments associated with propositional and attitudinal content are evaluated.

### Source of Commitment

1. Information about the epistemic and emotive stances of the discourse agents (DAs) helps determine which perspective is at issue.
2. A related factor may be which DAs have access to information that justifies what is asserted; disprefer as potential source a DA who cannot justify asserted content.

## Free Indirect Discourse

**FID** A third person style of reporting in which the source of an attitude is ascribed to another, non-speaker DA (Banfield, 1982; Schlenker, 2004; Sharvit, 2008).

- (2) a. It was getting humid outside, remarked Mary. (FID)
  - b. But, was it going to rain? (Continuation)

### FID Perspective Shift

- I. FID reports are evaluated from the point of the view of the attitude holder, violating Speaker-default.
- Other attitude reports optionally violate Speaker-default.
- II. If the DA is in a position to justify uttering the continuation, then it is congruent to posit a situation in which the DA, not the speaker, is the source of that content.

## Questionnaire Design

**Question** Does Tense affect how FID reports are interpreted differently than other attitude reports?

### Materials & Method

- 20 items & 48 UMmass undergraduate subjects
- Two factors: **Report** (FID v. SID) and **Tense** (Past v. Present).
- Second sentence always had perfect progressive aspect
- Forced-choice questionnaire with two response variables: Interpretation and Decision time on question until response.

### Example Item

- (3) **Sentence 1: Report**
  - A. There might be a storm today, said Mary. (FID context)
  - B. Mary said that there might be a storm today. (SID context)
- (4) **Sentence 2: Continuation**  
Clouds had/have been brewing all morning. (Past/Present)
- (5) **Interpretation question:**  
How did you interpret the second sentence? Who said the second sentence?
  - a. It was Mary. (Continuation-reading)
  - b. It was someone else. (Narrator-reading)

### Interpretation & Inference



### Predictions

More continuation-readings in FID-Present than other conditions:

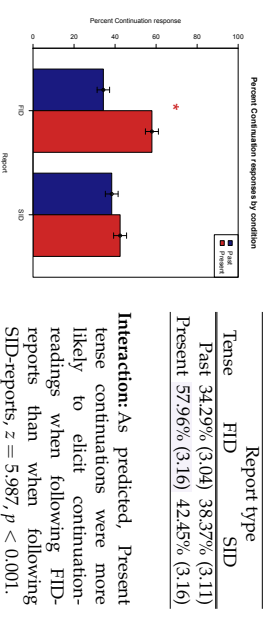
1. If FID mandates a shift, then subjects should be more willing to violate Speaker-default if DA has access to information (Present tense).
2. If SID does not require shift, then cues for overturning the Speaker-default are less clear, and the strategy is more risky.

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## Results

**Central question:** Does Tense affect the proportion of Continuation-readings FID and SID reports differently?

**Answer:** Yes! More Continuation-readings for the FID-Present condition than other conditions.



**Interaction:** As predicted, Present tense continuations were more likely to elicit continuation-readings when following FID-reports than when following SID-reports,  $z = 5.987, p < 0.001$ .

**Question:** Is there evidence that shifting perspective is costly?

- Answer:** Tentative yes! Data from decision time on interpretation question suggest that:
- While continuation-readings elicited longer decision times on question in general,  $t = 1.937, p = 0.05, E.S. = 403.3ms$ ,
  - Subjects took **less** time on question for FID-Present items,  $t = -2.326, p < 0.05, E.S. = 442.8ms$ , than other conditions.

**Suggestion:** Deviating from the Speaker-default may incur an initial cost, but this cost need not be sustained when maintaining a non-speaker perspective, once established.

## Conclusions

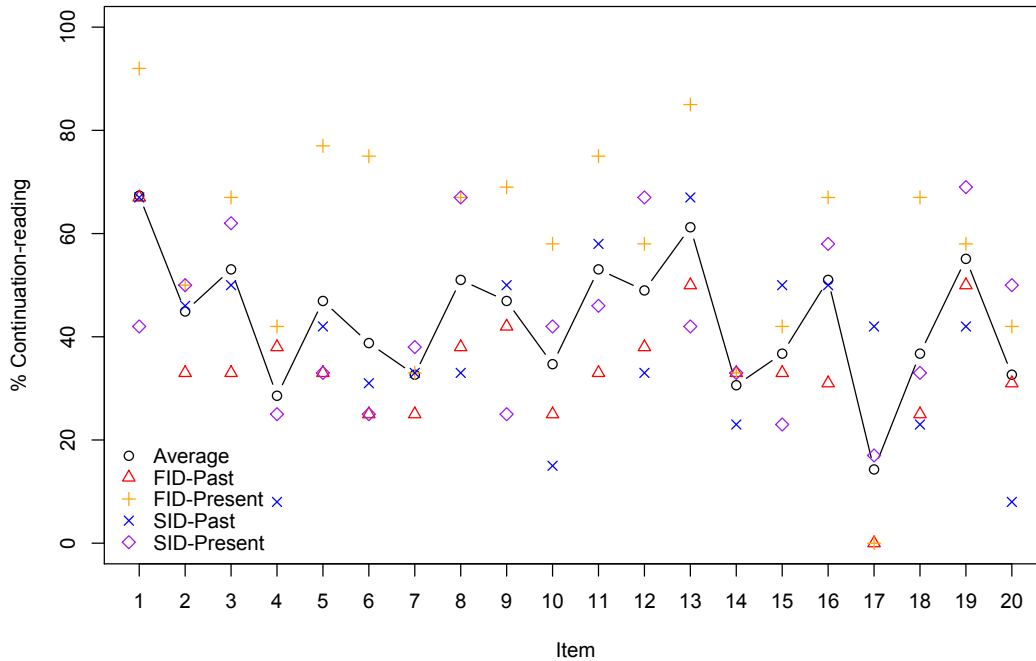
### Summary

1. After a FID report, the tense of the following sentence influences how commitment to that sentence is interpreted:
  - (a) More continuation-readings when a Present tense sentence follows FID reports than other conditions.
  - (b) But decisions on this condition were reached significantly faster.
2. Risks associated with violating the Speaker-default may be mitigated when other perspectives are clearly established.

### Future work

1. Forced-choice continuation study for replication
2. Manipulation of predicate type in continuation
3. Other factors contributing to perspective?

Average % Continuation-reading, with deviation by condition



Experimental Items (only FID conditions shown)

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| <p>(1) There might be a storm today, said Mary.<br/>Clouds had   have been brewing all morning.</p> <p>(2) Snow would come soon, thought Jim.<br/>It had   has been getting colder by the minute.</p> <p>(3) The town must get rain soon, said the villager.<br/>It had   has been dry for months on end.</p> <p>(4) My career is over, cried the politician.<br/>The media had   has been reporting a new scandal every day.</p> <p>(5) The company is in great peril, gasped the CEO.<br/>The shareholders had   have been discussing a hostile takeover.</p> <p>(6) The offense needs to work harder, shouted the coach.<br/>The team hadn't   hasn't won a game all season.</p> <p>(7) It's going to explode, cried the chemist.<br/>The chemical compound had   has rapidly been growing unstable.</p> <p>(8) Something appears to be bothering the animals, said the zookeeper.<br/>The monkeys had   has been shaking the cage all afternoon.</p> <p>(9) The city is under siege, exclaimed the judge.<br/>Violent crime had   has recently been on the rise.</p> <p>(10) A mutiny might break out at any moment, growled the first mate.<br/>The ship's crew hadn't   hasn't eaten a good meal in weeks.</p> <p>(11) It's cold in the workshop, admitted the carpenter.<br/>The heat had   has been broken for several weeks.</p> | <p>(12) The books are covered in dust, exclaimed the librarian.<br/>Nobody had   has checked them out in decades.</p> <p>(13) Conditions in the field hospital are atrocious, sighed the doctor.<br/>Rebels had   has been stealing the medicine from the supply room.</p> <p>(14) Everyone has been so kind, added the bride.<br/>The wedding guests had   has been giving toasts all night.</p> <p>(15) The church is very blessed, acknowledged the priest.<br/>The congregation had   has been regularly donating to the parish for years.</p> <p>(16) The new play is great success, bragged the actor.<br/>Opening night had   has been sold out months in advance.</p> <p>(17) The union is ready to go on strike, whispered the assembly worker.<br/>The factory owners had   has been mistreating its workers for a long time.</p> <p>(18) The swamp must have once supported a vibrant ecosystem, concluded the biologist.<br/>New fossils had   has been uncovered every few days.</p> <p>(19) Times are tough for small farms, grumbled the farmer.<br/>Bigger farms had   has been driving out competition everywhere.</p> <p>(20) The National Guard will work with the local police, announced the governor.<br/>Riots had   has been breaking out all over the city.</p> |
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